



Classroom in Your Home Room

During the first day of a mandatory class on Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act for newly hired correctional and probation and parole officers, the snow fell while road crews struggled to keep even the major routes open. Offices, businesses, and schools around Pennsylvania closed. But the class went on without a hitch.

The Pennsylvania Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research (CJJT&R), sponsor of the class, had used the Community Corrections E-Learning Collaborative (CCELC) to revamp classroom instruction into online training. While a major snowstorm raged that wintry day in February of last year, many of the first students to take the revised class sat down at their home computers and prepared to learn.

Originally funded by NLECTC–Rocky Mountain, a program of the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice, CCELC is now independently operated by The Education Coalition, which has offered nationwide online e-learning opportunities to the corrections community since 2004. CJJT&R has tried to promote training courses to the corrections community, but with limited success. The center decided it was time to push the online learning experience a step farther.

"We needed a way to push the envelope and move Pennsylvania toward online learning," says Stephen Bishop, assistant director of training at CJJT&R. "We decided to take a piece out of our academy, put it online, and make it mandatory, in the hopes that the experience would make them more open to taking other courses on their own."

Although Bishop says it may be too soon to tell if students are indeed moving on and taking other courses, he adds that CJJT&R has received plenty of positive feedback on the class and that scores on the final exam have been extremely high. The online course uses multiple media such as video, slides, and graphics, and spreads what would have been a full day of classroom training into 90-minute segments each day for a week.

"Adult learning works best if spread over time; learners can apply the content while they're learning, and they come up with more and better questions," says CCELC's Dr. Carla Lane, who played a key role in the course development. CCELC provided national expertise in online course development, course conversion, and production of all course aspects, and trained and mentored the CJJT&R facilitators in online teaching. The center will maintain the course content on the Web and update and enhance it as needed. Lane hopes that the Pennsylvania experience will open the door for other States and agencies to request development of their own specialized training. Several States have made the national CCELC courses mandatory, but Pennsylvania was the first to request development of a course tailored to specific needs.

"The Juvenile Act is a piece of legislation that can be dry in a classroom, but it lent itself well to going online because it is a straightforward piece of content," says Bishop. "I'm not sure what the next step is yet. Change is hard for people to get on board with, but I hope it is the first of more to come."

Lane points out that putting routine training programs such as this one online can be a cost-effective alternative. "Agencies don't have to spend money for a hotel, for per diem, and there's no time lost out of the office. Putting basic courses online frees up funds to do advanced training face-to-face when it is needed." Bishop concurs, adding, "This is a great way to stretch those training dollars a little bit more."

Also, he adds, this particular course contains information new hires need to learn immediately to do their jobs. Face-to-face sessions on the Act were offered only twice a year, opening up the possibility that an individual could be on the job for as long as 5 months before receiving an opportunity to take the class. With online offerings available monthly, now no one is on the job for more than a few weeks without taking the Juvenile Act training. The online class also often helps individuals

improve their computer skills, which is an asset in other aspects of their jobs, Bishop says. The trainer/facilitators also have expanded their skills, with CCELC providing training in online instruction.

“It’s such a different way of doing things than traditional classroom teaching, but they’re coming along really well,” Lane says. “The great thing about online instruction is you can teach from anywhere. If you’re on travel, anytime you’re out of the office, you can still teach. It totally changes the dynamic of what you’re able to do. You really can be in two places at one time.”

For more information about online training possibilities, contact Stephen Bishop, assistant director of training, Center for Juvenile Justice Training & Research, 717-477-1294, e-mail SPBish@ship.edu; or Dr. Carla Lane, executive director, The Education Coalition/Community Corrections E-Learning Collaborative, 949-369-3867, e-mail CarlaLane@AOL.com. Websites for information are <http://www.jcjc.state.pa.us/jcjc/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=393676> and <http://www.tecweb.org/>.

CCELC: BEGINNINGS

E-learning has been used with much success in the private sector, higher education, and the military; however law enforcement and corrections have been slower to take advantage of its possibilities. In late 2003, the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC)–Rocky Mountain initiated an effort to develop and test an online learning collaborative, which became the self-sustaining Community Corrections E-Learning Collaborative (CCELC).

This Web-based professional development service for probation and parole officers makes courses available to officers anytime, anywhere. CCELC created a new, flexible model of training courses that reflects the needs of the field and can be adapted to local and State standards on request. The e-learning center helps officers improve their professional skills, reduces the direct and indirect costs associated with conventional face-to-face training, and offers greater flexibility in accessing training.

“One of the primary objectives of creating CCELC was to illustrate how agencies could collaborate and share resources that could be adapted to an e-learning platform and then made available to community corrections agencies nationwide,” says Joe Russo, deputy director of NLECTC–Rocky Mountain. “In this way, the overall costs associated with implementing an e-learning collaborative could be kept relatively low and the eventual training products become affordable for all.”

Program designers and subject-matter experts reviewed existing courses for good-quality lesson plans, PowerPoint presentations, video, graphics, Flash programs, written text, activities, assignments, and other resources. The online course content was written by subject-matter experts from jurisdictions across the country and personnel from The Education Coalition, which served as the producer, instructional designer, and technical consultant on the project.

Seven courses were developed as part of the CCELC project, including two orientation courses. The facilitator-specific course focuses on the basics of online facilitation, working with multiple intelligences and learning styles, fostering collaborative learning, facilitating online discussions, using the learning management system, and working in a mediated environment. The student orientation focuses on ensuring that students are familiar with the technology involved, the learning environment, the concept of facilitated learning, the syllabus, and other course requirements.

Other courses offered include the following:

- Officer Safety in the Community.
- Introduction to the Supervision of Sex Offenders.
- Motivational Interviewing.
- Individual and Group Cognitive Behavior Approaches.
- Family Dynamics and Domestic Violence.

Each course roughly equals the content delivered in a 2-day, face-to-face course. Students can participate at any time of day or night and are not required to all be online at one time for chatting, lecturing, or audio conferences. Each class section accommodates up to 20 students, and students and facilitators spent 60 to 90 minutes a day on a course during a 2-week period. Courses can be accessed from any computer that has an Internet connection. Thirty-five States are now using the courses.

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