



Raising the Bars:

Early Findings from the Prison to Community Project

A Report of the Rutgers University Center for Women and Work and Sloan Center on Innovative Training and Workforce Development

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Overview

Imagine you are an incarcerated man or woman about to be released from prison. You have no money saved for when you get out. To make ends meet you must find a job. But you barely graduated from high school and never had the chance to go to college. Most of the jobs that pay enough to support your family are out of reach because they require additional education and computer skills that you do not have. Could you have exited prison better prepared?

“*Computer-Based Learning from Prison to Community*”—called *P2C* hereafter in this report—represents a unique and innovative type of correctional education aimed at increasing incarcerated women’s skill level and chances of employment on release. The hallmark of *P2C* is a computer-based learning process that begins in the prison environment and follows inmates into the community. This pilot project, designed as a large multi-partner collaboration in New Jersey, officially began on July 1, 2007 and is scheduled to run for several more years.

The program is based on New Jersey’s natural ‘trajectory of release’ for incarcerated women. It begins with the incarcerated women or “*achievers*” taking courses via a special prison-dedicated *Business Access* learning system at the Edna Mahan Facility for Women in Clinton, N.J.; it next follows the women to the Bo Robinson Assessment Center in Trenton, where they have a computer based learning (CBL) lab to continue training; and remains available to women as they move to the Kintock Halfway House in downtown Newark. At the Kintock Halfway House the women both begin employment (through work release programs) and make connections with Essex County College and the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development’s One-Stop Career System. At the latter stage women are provided with a connection to the one-stop career system and the opportunity to continue their education and training through online courses on a home computer (with Internet access), given to them on successful completion of the first phase of the program.

Partners in this pilot project include: The Nicholson Foundation; New Jersey State Parole Board; the New Jersey Department of Corrections; the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development; Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women; Bo Robinson Assessment Center; the Kintock Group; Essex County Community College; WRITE-NJ; Business Access; and the Center for Women and Work, Rutgers University.

What does the research literature tell us?

Designed as a process evaluation,¹ the *P2C* project has an in-depth research component which builds on available scholarly literature involving correctional education and the education and

¹ Process evaluation as used here is evaluation that focuses on monitoring the implementation process as well as program outcomes. It offers periodic feedback on ‘what works and what isn’t working’ to program implementers as a project evolves. The methodologies used to gather information in our model consist of: frequent site-visits,

training literature generally. Most incarcerated men and women enter prison with educational deficiencies. Education in prison has the potential to significantly contribute to their knowledge base and to a more successful transition back into society upon release. Successful correctional education represents a continuum of programs consistently made available throughout a prison sentence to incarcerated men and women. Most current programs either address the development of basic life skills or provide vocational training and/or college training.² Most of these programs tend to be traditional classroom-based programs, creating limits on scalability, classroom size, flexibility, affordability and access to continuing education post-incarceration.

Technology provides the potential to better deliver and streamline correctional education, but its use in corrections has not been well documented. We do know that during the 1970's a new form of correctional education began to emerge in vocational education training --namely computer-assisted instruction (CAI) and computer-based learning (CBL) programs. CAI has also been used traditionally in literacy education and in programs for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Education Development.³

There are many advantages to using these types of computer-based modalities in prison. These include reaching a greater number of students, providing inmate privacy and individualizing curricula, promoting schedule flexibility, maximizing cost effectiveness in training, and alleviating understaffing.⁴ Askov and Turner (1990) identify further benefits such as the improvement of computer literacy, which may advance the prospects of inmate employment upon release.⁵ It is well-known that an inmate without computer experience lacks a pivotal skill for today's labor market.

Research has shown that implementing computer-assisted instruction and computer-based learning techniques can make a difference in expanding access to overall computer literacy, increasing rates of program completion, enhancing individual educational goals and improving post-incarceration employment outcomes.⁶ In recent years CAI and CBL providers have invested in the development of technology in correctional education settings. Many prisons are equipped with technologies ranging from computer programs to satellite educational instruction.

attendance at partner meetings and conference calls; conducting face-to-face interviews with a selection of participants; focus groups with teachers; a computer-based survey of all women participating in the program; in-depth interviews with the program operators, vendors, teachers and staff. In addition we review and analyze written field notes, notes from monthly meetings, recorded observations at events and training sessions, and email correspondence among partners

² Crayton, A. and Neusteter, S.R. (2008). *The Current State of Correctional Education*. Paper presented at the Reentry Roundtable on Education (March 31 and April 1, 2008) at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York.

³ Batchelder, J.S. and Rachal, J.R. (2000). Efficacy of a computer-assisted instruction program in a prison setting: An experimental study. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50(2): 120-133.

⁴ Askov, E.N. and Turner, T.C. (1990) The Role of instructional technology in correctional education. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 41: 82-85.

⁵ Bowden, T.S. (2003). A Snapshot of prison libraries with a focus on technology. *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian*, 21(2): 1-12.

⁶ Batchelder and Rachal (2000); and Borden, C. and Richardson, P. (2008) *The Effective Use of Technology in Correctional Education*. Paper presented at the Reentry Roundtable on Education (March 31 and April 1, 2008) at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York.

An emerging form of technology education is distance learning similar to those implemented at universities. Examples of these programs include: a distance learning videoconferencing technology that links offenders to educational communities through Ohio's *Transitional Education Program*; Wisconsin's *College of the Air* which provides academic programming broadcasts to 44 prisons via the Transforming Lives Network Satellite; and post-secondary offerings from Eastern New Mexico University via the WebCT server secured by New Mexico's Corrections Department of Education server.⁷

Some argue that computer education within the correctional system is as important for the incarcerated as it is for traditional students across America.⁸ Individuals leaving prison will be competing for jobs in which knowledge of technology and computers is essential. By improving an inmate's computer skills, the system is providing that inmate with a significant boost that will help them reintegrate into the workforce. The Institute of the Education Sciences is currently conducting a study of the *College of the Air* to determine if the program has an effect on participant outcome measures.

Much more research is needed, however, if we are to understand the actual effects of computer-based education in the correctional setting. We need measurable data not only on computer-based learning and recidivism rates, but also on computer-based learning and improvements in the quality of employment and wages for individuals exiting prison into the workforce. We need better research on how incarcerated men and women "lag" behind other Americans in "the digital divide", and better measures of the real cost of any such IT disadvantage. The *Prison to Community* project undertaken here aims to contribute to this literature.

The Prison to Community Program: How P2C Works

The *P2C* seeks to bridge the digital divide for incarcerated women in New Jersey. Its goal is to prepare these women for 'real jobs in the real world.' It does this by providing on-site access to computers equipped with the latest software and a program of study that is systematic and comprehensive in teaching relevant and up-to-date skills. It is also unique in its promise of computer ownership for successful program participants upon their release from prison.

The pilot project is designed to allow participating inmates at all three correctional sites almost daily –access to a computer lab equipped with the *Business Access* learning system. While, for security reasons in the prison and in the assessment center, the program does not utilize the Internet, inmates are provided with a *simulated* internet platform, allowing them to become familiar with "the idea of an internet" and provide them with the ability to practice some Internet skills. [At the Kintock halfway house STEPS program, parolees are allowed access to the actual internet in a special lab.]

⁷ Borden and Richardson (2008)

⁸ Lintner, D., et al (2001). Computer education in prison. *Journal of Computing Sciences in Colleges*, 16(3): 64-66.

Participants take a wide variety of computer-based courses which empower them to obtain an array of academic, life, and workforce-readiness skills. Simply navigating through available coursework allows students to become familiar with basic computer skills and begin to troubleshoot technological problems for themselves. Available courses include basic and applied math, fundamentals of math, English and basic writing skills, and all major Microsoft Office applications (Access, Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook).⁹ These courses help to improve general literacy skills. There are also courses and online workshops on conflict resolution, effective decision-making, active listening, and communication skills. The curriculum includes courses on many occupational areas ranging from child care, hospitality, and human resource management to small business development. There are also opportunities to prepare for the Workforce Readiness Credential.¹⁰ Such a variety of coursework is fundamental to developing skills necessary for the current job market.

Since research demonstrates that intensive online learning can feel isolating for many people, a key ingredient of the *P2C* project is its use of a blended model that combines “high tech” with “high touch” learning. The *P2C* students develop their skills through intensive work on the computer and daily usage; they also work together with instructors in a “lab as classroom” setting where they work on course-relevant and workplace-readiness skills. Examples include doing computer-generated resumes, brochures, reports, presentations, calendars, and holding mock interviews for jobs.

This program is largely voluntary. At all three program sites efforts were made to make the recruitment process open and optional. At the Edna Mahan prison inmates signed up for the program on sheets provided in their housing units. In the other two facilities, program information was spread through word of mouth, bulletin boards, and other public sites, as well as in response to direct inquiries from inmates. The number of participants enrolled at each site depended upon the number of available seats in each computer lab. Many inmates (59 percent) reported hearing about this opportunity from a staff member, teacher, or counselor at one of the facilities.

Who Are the Participants?

To date 352 women have participated in the computer-based learning program at one or more of the three sites. Of this group, 336 women have responded to a computer-based survey and highlights of those results are reported here. The bulk of the women in the program have participated at just one of the three sites; 68 women have participated at two different sites and

⁹ While the majority of women enrolled in this program report that they have used a computer prior to enrolling, only a few report having basic knowledge of Microsoft applications and other computer programs.

¹⁰ The Workforce Readiness Credential was created as a national standard confirming for employers that entry level workers have the skills to join the workforce. In order to obtain the credential, students must pass an assessment scoring such skills as: situational judgment, oral language, reading with understanding, and using math to solve problems.

nine women have followed the full “path” of the program, with enrollment at all three sites. Currently six women are active in the final in-home, community portion of the program.

The most recent analysis of the demographic data on the participants from all three correctional sites reveal the following mix of age, ethnicity, and education level. The women represent an ethnically diverse group, with 53 percent of the sample self-identifying as African American, 33 percent white; and nine percent Hispanic. The sample represents a slightly older population, with 39 percent of the women over 40 years of age; and 33 percent between the ages of 30 and 39 years old. This demographic data very closely mirrors that of the general population at the Edna Mahan correctional facility. The majority of women in the program, 75 percent, are mothers, and of that group 80 percent were custodial parents prior to incarceration. Twelve percent of these will owe legal child support when released from prison. Of the 253 women in the sample that have children, 228 are single parents.

The women in our sample reported coming from a great variety of places both in and out of New Jersey. The majority were from the following counties: 38 are from Atlantic County, 30 from Essex County, 21 from Camden County, 21 from Ocean County, 18 from Middlesex County, 18 from Monmouth County, 15 women from Hudson County, and 14 from Union County.¹¹ Upon release, the majority of women intend to return to Essex, Atlantic, or Camden counties.

Participants’ educational levels also represented great diversity. Thirty-three percent of the women had no high school degree, 35 percent of the women have a high school diploma or GED, and 23 percent have at least some college, with 11 women holding an associate’s degree, 8 holding a bachelor’s degree, and 14 women holding graduate or professional degrees. The majority of women, 60 percent, report having had some type of skills or job training prior to incarceration in addition to their formal schooling.

Women were also asked about the quality of their previous educational experiences. Forty percent stated that they “loved” being in the classroom, 23 percent “liked it quite a bit”, and 26 percent described it as being “o.k..” Only five percent of the women surveyed disliked being in the classroom. Given this interest in learning and positive previous experience in the classroom, it no surprise that an overwhelming 90 percent of the women report that they would like at some point to return to school upon their release.

Participants were also surveyed on their employment histories. Sixty-seven percent of women reported having held a full-time job prior to incarceration. Of these women 30 percent earned between \$201 and \$400 weekly, 18 percent reported earning between \$401 and \$600 weekly, and only 12 percent of the women earned more than \$600 weekly. When asked about their previous employment and training experience, only 34 percent reported having visited a One-Stop Career Center prior to their incarceration, but as noted above, fully 60 percent reported some type of skill training and job training in their immediate past.

¹¹ Many respondents did not answer the question: *Which county did you reside in before incarceration?*

In general this population comes to the *P2C* program with some experience and background using computers. In fact 88 percent have used a computer and/or have had prior experience with computers, while only 12 percent have never used a computer. Moreover, as a group, the women self-report a relative high degree of confidence with computers, as 49 percent of the women believe they possess an *average* knowledge on computers, and 24 percent of the sample indicated that they have *above average* knowledge of computers. We know that 60 percent of the women have taken a computer class prior to this program, and slightly over two-thirds of the women (64 percent) report they had a computer in their homes.

The picture changes somewhat when age and computer knowledge are taken into consideration. While computer use and computer knowledge is common in the sample as a whole, older participants described themselves as much less familiar and experienced with computers. Thirty-one percent of older women [40 years of age and above] reported having below average knowledge of computers compared to 10 percent of younger inmates, women between 20 and 29 years of age.

P2C Classroom Success to Date – A Look at Some Quantitative Data

The program's success in exposing participants to computer-based learning can be measured in a variety of ways, one important one being course completion. Following the completion of a module course, students are tested on their knowledge, and after passing that course they may receive a certificate. This certificate serves as tangible proof of their training, and comprehension of a module. To encourage 'follow-through' and build confidence during any of these modules, all tests can be re-taken until the desired grade is achieved. As we delineate below, using data provided to us by the vendor, Business Access, nearly all program participants successfully completed their courses and passed the required tests.

In total, at all three sites, the participants have begun 16,547 courses. Of those fully 15,008 have successfully been completed. Collectively the participants have spent some 16, 547 hours at the computer. At Edna Mahan, 175 women have participated in the program and have collectively completed 7, 288 courses and logged 7,159 hours at the computer. At the Bo Robinson Assessment Center, 205 participants have gone through the program and have collectively completed 7,103 courses and logged 5, 563 hours at the computer. At Kintock 62 participants have participated in the program and have collectively completed 294 courses and logged 2,196 hours on the computer. [At this stage it should be noted that Kintock participants are also engaged in intensive and demanding work release activities that take them away from the halfway house to full and part-time jobs for many hours of the day and/or night.] The majority of participants in this program are still incarcerated in one of the three sites. To date, six participants have been released into the community and are actively involved with the in-home portion of the program. This group has collectively completed some 1,060 hours online and 377 courses since their release. Some participants are more active than others in this final

phase of the program. All six participants are employed and posting work hours. One of the six has enrolled at Essex County College.

The P2C Program Impact on Participants: A Look at Some *Qualitative Data*

If going to computer class, and taking and passing courses are measures of *P2C*'s success to date, our qualitative data suggests further positive impacts. In focus groups and interviews we asked the women to share their thoughts about the computer-based learning program, their experiences on the computer and what they hoped to achieve from such computer-based learning. Outcomes to date fall into three categories: 1) a perceived increase by inmates in their hard and soft IT skills generally, as well as improvements in basic skills including math and science; 2) a sense by inmates that they are making better use of their time in prison and hence an increase in their self-esteem; 3) a greater sense of clarity and purpose in their personal educational and employment goals and aspirations.

-Increasing inmates hard and soft IT skills and improving basic skills

Overall, most participants saw the opportunity to use a well-equipped computer and engage in day to day computer-based learning to be a significant benefit of the program. All seemed aware of the unique "high tech" nature of *P2C* and its advantages over purely classroom-based computer and job skill programs.

Indeed, there were inmates who had never had the opportunity to work on a computer prior to enrollment in the program. During the initial classes, these women expressed fear about using computers and were anxious about touching the computer, using the mouse and typing on the keyboard. However, many of these women, especially older women, cited overcoming their fears of computer usage as an important triumph. As two women told us:

-This is my first computer class. It's a necessity because technology is bursting out and to have an awareness of computers is needed. The first time on the computer was scary and in the beginning I was so nervous. I thought I was messing up when the computer goes off or when I hit the wrong key. But I know more now, so I am less nervous.

-It's a great opportunity for older women like me who don't have much computer knowledge; it's beneficial to us.

Given the continual, fast-paced changes in IT upgrades and innovations, it is not surprising, however, that many inmates interviewed reported both being "behind" in IT changes that occurred during their incarceration, and eager to learn new programs and play "catch-up ball." For some women, such a high-tech offering simply gave them the opportunity to update their existing skills.

Others women reported being content to improve their basic skills as well as math and science. As three participants put it:

-This program has really brushed me up on math skills and reading and writing. It's taught me how to communicate with others in a business environment and it's helped me a lot with the basic skills I need when I go back home.

-I learned a lot that I did not know. This program has given me the opportunity to write a complete sentence and complete a paragraph. And I learned math an easier way too... I especially feel that I accomplished something when I get my certificates.

-I chose this because with any career these days, you need computer skills. It's helping me improve on everything.

-Helping inmates use their time in prison better and increase their self-esteem

Many participants reported they were benefiting from having a “new educational experience” and “doing something useful with my time here.” Such a sense of accomplishment can have a direct bearing on self-esteem. Inmates told us:

-I'm excited about class. I love sitting in front of the computer. I feel like I am doing something with my time and not wasting it.

-I look forward to going to class every day. I get disappointed when there is no class. It's nice to see what I am good at and what I am not good at. I enjoy learning and I enjoy the class. I want more education and I want to learn how to use the computer more.

-I personally enjoy the class. My class [time] falls on my down time [free time in prison] so I did not like it at first, but now it's really worth my time.

Indeed, one participant spoke about changing her perspective on life as this high-tech experience enabled her to fulfill some unexpected learning goals:

-Computer learning is awesome. It has given my mind a chance to develop new things in life and grow. This course gives my mind a chance to renew and restore things so I have a different reality check in life — because I never thought I would ever touch a computer. I have a chance to work on things I never thought I could have had the opportunity work on.

-Clarifying inmates' future educational aspirations and employment goals

Most released prisoners desperately want honest employment in up-to-date jobs to maintain themselves and their families.¹² Indeed, the *P2C* survey data indicate that inmates' educational goals and work aspirations when released from prison have had much to do with their enrolling in this program. As one woman, on her way back to the community, reported when asked how she felt the program could best help her upon release:

-It's given me the skills to use in the work place. It's given me the "do's and don'ts" of the workplace and the skills I need now to find work.

Those inmates still waiting for release report they enrolled because they too are looking to their future work life beyond prison. Most of the comments in response to 'why enroll' in this program reflected such thoughts as:

-I can see myself putting what I have learned [here] on my job application and saying to my employers that this is what I accomplished in prison instead of being down and depressed.

-It will help me get a better job at a desk, not a factory. It will help me get better benefits and be more professional and have a stable job.

-I really need this computer learning program to get connected. The odds are against me, I do have a criminal background so if I can get support that can help me that would be good. I want to complete this program so I can figure out which direction to go and have more information in how to fulfill my goals and what area or field I want to get into.

Since a number of the inmates are legally liable for child support during their incarceration and beyond, future financial security loomed large in their thoughts as well:

-I hope to learn more and have more skills --not only to get a job but also to remain in that job and keep that job. I believe the program will help me go further in the workplace. And once I get myself together, I can get my kids back.

For still others, the program has actually had a strong impact on their view of education generally: As a speaker at Kintock's One Year Celebration of the *P2C* put it:

¹² Our survey of *P2C* participants reflects a wide variety of desired jobs. Fifty-four inmates report interest in jobs that require office skills such as secretary, typist, or general work. Ten women are interested in non-traditional employment such as plumbing, carpentry, truck driving and electrical work. Fifteen women hope to seek work in such medical occupations as dental assistant, nurse's aide, and social service jobs involving drug, alcohol and mental rehabilitation. Thirteen women would like jobs in retail or service industries such as cleaning, food service and casino work. Five listed horticulture as their occupation of choice.

*-I got into prison by using drugs and selling drugs. I always wanted to go back to school but couldn't because of drugs. I got a new addiction now – I want to learn.
[L.S., September 25, 2008]*

One woman, a six year veteran of Edna Mahan with two years still to serve, spoke for many when she said simply:

- It helps me by giving me something to look forward to; it gives a lot of women here hope.

Meeting the Challenges of Implementing P2C: Important Lessons Learned

Setting up a high-tech educational program geared to women in an incarcerated setting is a challenge. Setting up such a program that moves across institutions with multiple state and local level stakeholders—all having different work cultures—is particularly challenging. Nonetheless, in less than a year, the **P2C** program has begun to meet many of these challenges and real lessons have been learned. These challenges fall into two categories –the lessons learned regarding the participant population, and lessons-learned in partnering with multiple stakeholders.

Participant Challenges -

-Getting “Buy-In” from Participants

Getting inmates to “buy-in” fully into the program was an initial challenge. The three correctional sites worked hard to break down any suspicions about something this “new” and different. The inmates needed strong encouragement and information on details. Keeping the word ‘on the street’ [in the dorms] positive about this program was crucial to recruitment due to its voluntary nature. How was such “buy-in” generally obtained? By being sure the participants understood the big picture of how a program like **P2C** relates directly to their lives, especially their future work lives.

Our discussions with inmates, faculty, and staff suggest the best way of achieving such “buy-in” up-front is to explain to inmates fully and continually how such a continuous-learning computer-based program relates to both their transition through the system; their financial well-being when returning to their families and community; and their most personal educational and employment goals, hopes, and dreams.

The program operators also found it important to distribute, from the very beginning, brochures and materials to potential participants that fully described the program, including its logistics and long-term goals. It also proved imperative to train teachers on “the big picture” so that they were able to explain up front the long term advantages and perks accompanying participation in such a high-tech program. Teachers also reported the importance of linking the many resources of

computer-based learning to each inmate's Individual Educational Plan [IEP] and thereby tap personal hopes and dreams for life outside of prison.

-Strengthening the Blended-Model

Intensive computer-based learning tends to generate feelings of isolation, whoever the learner may be. Most of our incarcerated women in the beginning voiced a similar concern. Our survey data made clear that the great majority of *P2C* participants, though not all, wanted some kind of interaction in class to break the monotony of being on the computer full-time. This led the program operators to package the online curriculum with multiple interactive and social activities, some led by the teacher, others by the students. (See above section: "**P2C: How It Works** .] At Edna Mahan a "time-out" area has been designated for participants to have a space to take a *brain break* from work that may be frustrating and overwhelming. There also has been close attention paid to selecting the right teachers for this challenging mix of an incarcerated and fairly high-tech environment where the role of the teacher goes far beyond mere technical 'trouble-shooting.' As a result, the program has now achieved a much better "high tech/high-touch" balance.

-Meeting Inmates' Different Skill Levels

Our data indicate that across all sites participants bring different levels of skills into the program. As noted earlier, (Footnote 9), a good proportion of the learners have fairly high-level educational backgrounds and at least moderate levels of computer experience. Many also hold high employment and/or educational aspirations for their lives beyond prison. Others, however, are taxed with very low reading scores, poor educational preparation, and in too many cases, a distinct lack of motivation or hope for their future. There are also those women in the middle: they may be familiar with computers, may even have good reading skills but they are unmotivated or believe there is not much hope for them to find work outside prison. Other inmates are dreaming big, and willing to give the program their all, but remain at a disadvantage because of poor reading and literacy skills, and thereby easily get frustrated at the first challenging task they encounter on the computer.

P2C has addressed this issue in different ways. To meet the wide variety of skill levels and career aspirations of all the women, the program operators have enlarged and enriched the curriculum significantly. A GED curriculum has been added. Dictionaries, career information, personal budgeting software and other classroom supplies have been added as well. These classroom details have been essential to improving both classroom morale and achievement.

Structural Challenges -

One of the most challenging aspects of this project for all the partners is its complexity in terms of the number of sites served and the norms and special structures of the correctional environment. What was expected to be perhaps the toughest challenge in the correctional system—introducing a new high-tech learning technology without the internet—has proven to be quite doable. Technical issues, including on-site maintenance and resolution of technical problems, have by and large also gone well.

Since all the sites involved security, a number of security concerns were successfully confronted early on. Such items as how best to set up hardware and desks (i.e., teachers' desk must not have their back to the door); rules of instructor-student engagement (i.e. no touching of participants; refraining from sharing personal information, etc.) have had to be balanced against effective teaching and motivation.

Greater and more subtle challenges—most of which are well on their way to being met—include building effective and efficient collaboration between multiple stakeholders, all with widely varying work cultures and structures and geographical locations by strengthening communications and commitment of all partners; developing and fine-tuning the instructor role for high-tech training in prison; and integrating the project fully into the state's One-Stop Career System.

-Building Effective Collaboration and Commitment between Multiple Stakeholders

As noted earlier, the partners in *P2C* include a traditional prison, [Edna Mahan] and two non-governmental correctional facilities [Bo Robinson and Kintock], a private-sector vendor, [Business Access]; a collection of New Jersey One Stop Centers representing the state labor department, a community-based organization [Write-NJ] and an academic institution [Essex County College.] Each of these has widely varying goals, rules and work cultures. Since an important goal of the project is to implement a seamless transition pathway for the inmates from site to site, it is necessary to be very cognizant of the differences among the sites. Each of the correctional institutions house women for different amounts of time, for different purposes, and in different physical institutional settings. For example, Edna Mahan is essentially for long term incarceration. Bo Robinson is a purely a transitional assessment/treatment facility. And Kintock is a community-based half-way house. Edna Mahan allows women with various sentence lengths to participate in this program, but their inmates are subject to highly regimented physical movement shifts that affect the class duration and class schedules. Bo Robinson participants, seeing their way soon out of prison, are often highly motivated, but the *P2C* classes have to compete with intensive drug treatment or psychological treatment schedules. On the other hand,

Kintock participants, except for those in treatment, often go immediately into work release, which takes them physically out of the facility and often to work at various jobs with overnight hours, and this in turn cuts into their motivation or more likely physical stamina to concentrate on their *P2C* classes.

When you have so many powerful stakeholders in a project, geographically far a-field, and many competing bureaucratic goals and practices, improving communication and building commitment is essential. The sponsoring foundation in this project took that on as a task for themselves in the earliest weeks of the project. It continues to play a pivotal role in providing tools for basic communication and problem-solving among all the partnering groups. It convenes frequent meetings of the stakeholders, and calls special ‘problem-solving’ telephone conferences; there is also a central online bulletin board to post shared information and discuss group challenges. This focus on communication has done much to bring together partners with differing expectations, and our interviews show that from quite early on, a majority show solid commitment to *P2C*’s success.

-Developing the Role of the Instructor in High Tech Corrections Education

As indicated earlier, the role of the instructor as the ‘high touch’ provider in an online environment is essential. Challenges that *P2C* met early on were: developing the role and activities of the instructor for a ‘blended model’, and selecting the right instructors who were conversant with both computer-based learning and who were comfortable teaching in a prison classroom. Certainly, our data from participants demonstrates that they placed a high premium on the instructor’s role in their experience with the program.

Discussions with partners indicate that there are some common themes regarding instructors across all sites. Instructors should be comfortable working in an incarcerated setting. Instructors should be trained on the rules and regulations of the different sites, appropriate dress, and appropriate communication techniques with inmates. Instructors should know the computer-based learning program model extremely well and be familiar with all aspects of the online curriculum. They should have access to all online program updates and changes as well as continuous training on that system. Moreover, they should intimately understand the program goals. There should also be periodic meetings for instructors to share their experiences with one another and trade ideas of effective applied activities in class. Finally, they should be included in the larger meetings of all stakeholders.

-Integrating the Project into the One-Stop Career System

Central to the success of this project is the continuity of incarcerated women's finding jobs and continuing to learn and get education post-release. For this to occur, the women not only need access to the One-Stop system, but a clear path that allows them to navigate the system without getting "lost." Although a very small number of the participants have successfully connected with the state One-Stop system at this time via this project, some significant challenges have emerged.

Until recently, for the women (especially those residing outside of Essex County) there has been no system in place to assist them in connecting with their local One-Stop or to ensure that they have access to the in-home online learning program. Transfers have taken place on an ad hoc, individual basis with most connections to a One-Stop center executed either through the Foundation or through a *Business Access* contact. As the number of women exiting the program increase in the months ahead, and in order to fully institutionalize this program, a more efficient and effective system must be put in place.

One way of addressing this challenge is to strengthen communication and dissemination of information on this project with the state workforce development community. This should include information about the project, how it works and the specific role they can play in the post-release process.

In addition, the field coordinator has created an information handbook which can now travel with each inmate as they move from site to site and back into the community. This packet contains helpful facts about the program and contacts in the community, including contact information for each One-Stop center throughout the state, eligibility forms for different social services, and contact information for the field coordinator in case problems arise. The packet also has information that participants can take to the One-Stops which inform staff at One-Stop centers about the project and who to contact at *P2C* in case they have further questions. This packet was recently introduced and its effectiveness will be evaluated in the months ahead.

Another systemic improvement that will increase the absorption of participants into the One-Stop system is technology-based. Participants can be entered into the state's One Stop Operating System (AOSOS) and flagged so that when they are entering a One-Stop site, their Prison to Community path, track record with coursework and other important information are readily available. This AOSOS system implementation has been discussed from the start of the project, but has not yet been implemented.

Another challenge this project faces statewide is ensuring that Individual Training Accounts [ITA] provided by the government are available as needed.¹³ Without access to such monetary ITAs, participants will not have the resources to continue with this program upon release. To

¹³ Training funded by ITAs must be tied to skills that are in demand in the local job market

date we know that Essex County and the City of Newark have made commitments to set aside ITAs for participants in the program. This challenge remains for participants returning to other counties in the state.

Best Practices for Implementing a Prison to Community Project:

While only in operation a single year P2C is a pilot project rich with insights and lessons learned. The Center for Women and Work research on *P2C* to date suggests the following programmatic strategies for success:

1. ***Develop among all stakeholders a comprehensive understanding of how computer-based learning works.*** It is very important that all key players share the same understanding of the online learning program so that there is no disconnect between the conceptualization and the operations of the project. It is helpful to clearly set out the design and expectations of the project and provide materials for those working on the project to draw from during its implementation. The funders of this project have done admirably in providing tools for basic communication and problem-solving among all the partnering groups. Its project advisor has played a powerful and critically important coordination role—far beyond mere convener—by using monthly meetings, telephone conferences, and email correspondence to monitor program developments. This is important as previous research on on-line learning has demonstrated unequivocally that the most important criteria for good collaboration in building a successful program are effective communication and active and immediate problem solving.
2. ***Provide adequate and appropriate staffing for the project at each of the sites.*** An online learning program can be labor intensive in both the initial set-up and follow-up. A typical staffing model might consist of a *field coordinator*, who will interact and support participants, organize support groups, provide guidance and job coaching, serve as the central point person and help maintain continuity among correctional sites, and stay in touch with participants and parole as participants transition to the community; a *technical support person* who can resolve inevitable technological issues; and an *educational support person* who can address course content and work with teachers.
3. ***Evaluate programmatic and technical option carefully, including educational vendors and Internet service providers.*** There are many different vendors to choose from and in making this decision it is important to assess the target population's needs and desired outcomes for the project. Other pilot projects have chosen different variations of vendors including:
 - *Vendors providing computers, courses, technical support and orientation*
 - *Vendors providing only educational programming*
 - *Vendors providing both technical support and educational programming*

4. ***Ensure that equipment is familiar and flexible.*** The computer labs at each site in the program are identical in the hardware and software available. This likeness in the computers fosters a familiarity for participants, and allows ease in transitions from site to site. Upon reentry, participants begin to use laptop computers, which provide participants with greater flexibility in terms of where and when they can complete their coursework.
5. ***Provide a flexible and thereby “blended model” of learning.*** Research by the Center for Women and Work has shown that distance learning is most successful when coupled with face-to-face class time meetings and personal interaction. This simply means building into any intensive online curriculum as many interactive and social activities for the class as possible. These can be led by the instructors and sometimes even the students.
6. ***Develop a comprehensive assessment process of all potential applicants for the project.*** Computer-based learning is not for everyone—it requires time management, self-discipline and motivation. It is also helpful if participants have some computer literacy skills. As such it is important to develop a method for selecting participants who may be best served by this type of program.
7. ***Encourage “buy in” up-front by program participants.*** For any program to be successful, its participants have to believe that they can benefit from the experience. One of the best ways of achieving such “buy-in” is to explain to the participants from the beginning, fully and continually, how such a continuous-learning computer based program relates to 1) their transition and financial well-being when returning to the community and 2) their personal educational and employment goals and aspirations.
8. ***Develop an awareness of different participants’ learning styles vis-à-vis computer-based learning.*** Different participants bring different levels of skills into the program. Recognizing this, a good program is designed to fit the needs of each individual by offering variations in course levels and educational exercises. Participants are able to work at their own pace and they have a choice of learning topics. Some previous pilot programs have found that developing supplementary hard-copy materials and study guides is beneficial to some types of learners in computer-based learning.
9. ***Provide a process evaluation of the program.*** This project demonstrates the very useful role that an outside body can play in monitoring and evaluating the project. Such a function can keep the program on track, highlight problems and obstacles to be addressed by the stakeholders as they arise; and share information about best practices.
10. ***Always look and plan beyond incarceration!*** Too many learning programs in prisons fail to relate training to an inmate’s future job prospects in the community. The strength of this initiative is its ability to facilitate successful job prospects and community reentry

for released inmates using *flexible and on-going* computer-based learning to familiarize inmates before and after release about One-Stop resources and contacts; to continually increase education and credentials; and, of course, to link ex-offenders directly to One-Stops upon release.

11. ***Build in sustainability from the beginning.*** Work with partners to reduce costs and to make this an attractive fiscal training option so that it can be absorbed and paid for by existing government programs.