

ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGHER LEARNING

AN EVALUATION OF
MINNESOTA'S NEW HIGHER EDUCATION
IN PRISON PROGRAMS

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Center for Urban and
Regional Affairs | **cura**

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ABBREVIATION KEY

Department of Corrections — DOC

Faribault — FRB

Lino Lakes — LL

Shakopee — SHK

Stillwater — STW

Incarcerated Person — IP

Loss of Privileges — LOP

Restrictive Housing — RH

Segregation — SEG

Unassigned Idle Status — UI or UI Status

Individualized Education Program — IEP

Minnesota IT Services — MNIT

Minnesota State System — Minnesota State or MinnState

Scholars Serving Time Program — SST Program or SST

Transformation and Reentry through Education and Community — TREC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





This report is an assessment of new higher education partnerships within the state of Minnesota. The partnerships are the result of collaborations between the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) and four state higher education institutions—Metro State University; Minneapolis College; Minnesota State University, Mankato; and the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. This is an early-stage process evaluation, examining Year 1 programming.

The new higher education programs were offered to incarcerated individuals in four state-run correctional facilities. During Year 1, the four participating higher education institutions offered either a degree program or academic courses at a correctional facility. In fall 2021 (the start of Year 1) classes commenced across the correctional facilities in what the evaluation team refers to as “satellite campuses.” They are satellite campuses in relation to each college or university’s main campus.

The evaluation was specifically commissioned by former Assistant Commissioner Daniel Karpowitz. Leadership within the DOC Central Office Education Unit was interested in evaluating the partnerships in response to two central program objectives: making higher education access more inclusive among

incarcerated individuals and fostering environments that support students’ academic journey

Leadership within the DOC Central Office Education Unit was interested in evaluating the partnerships in response to two central program objectives:

-  Making higher education access more inclusive among incarcerated individuals
-  Fostering environments that support students’ academic journey



To address these objectives, the evaluation examines alterations in policies and/or procedures undertaken by not only the DOC Central Office Education Unit, but also the higher education institutions and the partnering facilities where programming was enacted; the approaches taken to develop the

educational programs; the experiences of participating program participants; the educational environments erected to support student learning; and the systems created to support program sustainability beyond the initial three-year grant cycle.

Design & Methods

This is a mixed-method evaluation with a strong qualitative focus, examining the experiences of the program’s various essential stakeholder groups. Steps were taken to frame the report’s design and incorporate data in appreciation that any evaluation is an examination of an ever-evolving entity(ies). A program evaluation is a snapshot in time meant to be instructive and support programmatic implementation. Therefore, though this is an evaluation of Year 1 programming, when the data collection process allowed the evaluation team to obtain relevant data from **Year 2**, that information was included.



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Qualitative Component

The qualitative data was the product of interviews, surveys, observations, and examinations of DOC and higher education partners’ program literature.

The evaluation team was informed that prior to this project the DOC had not engaged with an incarcerated person (IP)’s family members/friends for research or evaluation purposes. New processes and an evaluation instrument were created by the evaluation team to support this part of the project.

Quantitative Component

Student records obtained from the DOC and the four higher education partners were examined to gain a better understanding of the student population participating in the programs, specifically examining demographic and educational data. The main quantitative work presented in the evaluation are the graphs included in the five Program Profiles. The graphs present data associated with both the student populations and the corresponding correctional facility populations. One of the DOC Central Office’s main priorities for the new higher education partnerships is to expand educational access within the facilities offering the new programming. The graphs provide a breakdown of student and facility populations across various demographic markers. The intent is to determine if the student-bodies of the new higher education programs are representative of the larger prison population. Is educational access being expanded within correctional facilities? The question is answered in response to different demographic markers. The demographic markers utilized are: age, race, type of offense, average length of incarceration, and county of commit.



25% of Year 1 students participated in the evaluation (52 students)

PARTICIPANTS	NOS	DATA COLLECTION TOOLS	DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE
Program Students	52	Option 1: Interview/Survey Option 2: Interview/Survey/Observations	June–Dec 2022 February 2023
Instructors	19	Option 1: Survey/Interview Option 2: Survey/Interview/Observations	January–February 2022 June 2022
Facility Staff	13	Interview	April 2022/February 2023
DOC Central Office Administrators	1	Interview (series)	August 2022
Higher Ed Program Administrators	5	Interview (series)	August 2022–Feb 2023
Higher Ed Support Staff	2	Interview	Jan 2023/April 2023
Family Members/Friends of Students	17	Interview	June 2023/February–April 2024

Section 1: Program Profiles

The Program Profiles have three main aims. The profiles provide an assessment of a program in response to: metrics they agreed upon contractually or set for themselves, an introduction to key Year 1 programming features, and corresponding graphs illustrating whether a new higher education program student-body was representative of the larger correctional facility's general population.

Documentation shared by DOC Central Office Education Unit leadership and the higher education partners administering the satellite campuses was used to construct the large majority of the Section 1 Findings.

The information included:

- Interagency agreements and contracts
- Program proposals
- Grant applications and continuation reports
- Presentations
- Program handbooks
- Departmental and organizational memos and strategic priorities
- DOC facility and student enrollment data (e.g., demographic information)
- Higher Education program data—student rosters, course offerings, and co-curriculars



REBEKAH ZEMANSKY/SHUTTERSTOCK

Section 2: Themes

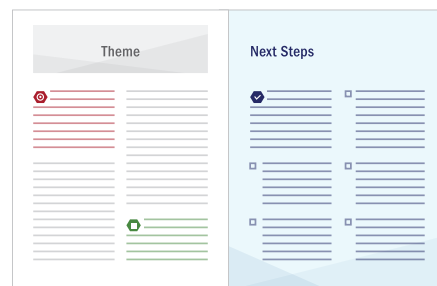
Section 2 is the product of new data collected through interviews, surveys, and observations as well as course syllabi shared by participating instructors. Through the themes, which cut across all four new partnerships, programmatic successes, opportunities for improvement, and barriers to program implementation are presented.

The themes presented in this section address: policy and procedural changes, foundational program resources, essential relationships, institutional connections and collaboration, points of synergy that undergird the initiatives, and family/friends' perceptions of programming.

RESEARCH THEMES

	Policy and Procedural Changes
	Connections and Collaborations
	Resources
	Relationships
	Points of Synergy
	Family and Friends' Perceptions of Programming

To support the reader's movement through Section 2, signposts exist in a few different forms. These organizational tools draw the reader's attention to key takeaways. Per theme—they consist of a *theme objective* opening the theme write-up, *theme summary* found toward the end of the write-up, and a conversation on next steps with the *theme check-in* that closes the theme. The latter foreshadows the report's Recommendations. This is a large report, examining the work of five entities. The evaluation team intends for the signposts to help the reader navigate the expansive document.



- THEME OBJECTIVE
- THEME SUMMARY
- THEME CHECK-IN

Key Findings

Section 1: Program Profiles

The entities under examination are DOC Central Office Education Unit; Metro State University; Minneapolis College; Minnesota State University, Mankato; and the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.



Each Program Profile broadly consists of three sections—Standards, Program Features, and Graphs. Standards presents the metrics the evaluation team utilized to assess the implementation of a satellite campus in Year 1. The team provides a “grade” for each program component (organized by metric) assessed. The scale ranges from 4 to 1—with 4 indicating that a program component was completed and 1 indicating that a program component was not completed. It is important to note, that even if a 1 is received, the successful enactment of a program component was not always in an entity’s complete control. Throughout the assessment, notes are provided by the evaluation team, elaborating upon the completion of a given program component.

The program components are organized under the following metrics:

- Guiding Principles
- Optimizing Institutional Partnerships
- Program Services
- Curriculum & Instruction
- Student Support Services
- Program Sustainability

Rating Scale

4 – Yes, Completed
3 – For the Most Part
2 – Somewhat
1 – No

The Program Features utilized to complete the comprehensive introduction to a satellite campus include:

- Mission Statement
- Strategic Priorities
- Extracurricular Opportunities
- Courses
- Student Enrollment
- Degree Profile
- Technology
- Program Sustainability
- Engagement with Main Campus
- Partner Collaborations

REPRESENTATIVE GRAPHS (EXAMPLES)

Figure 1. Participating DOC Facilities Comparison: Race

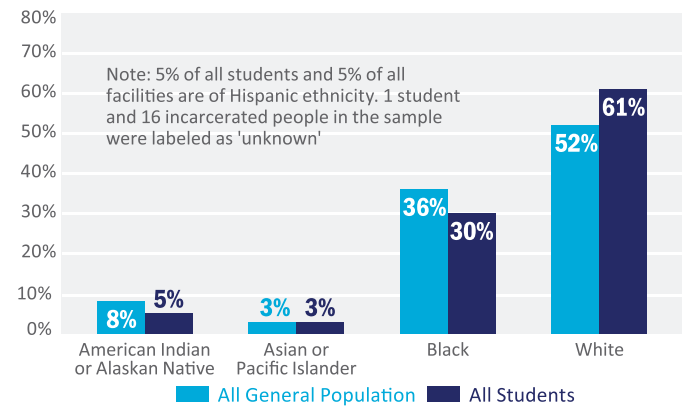


Figure 2. Participating DOC Facilities Comparison: Age

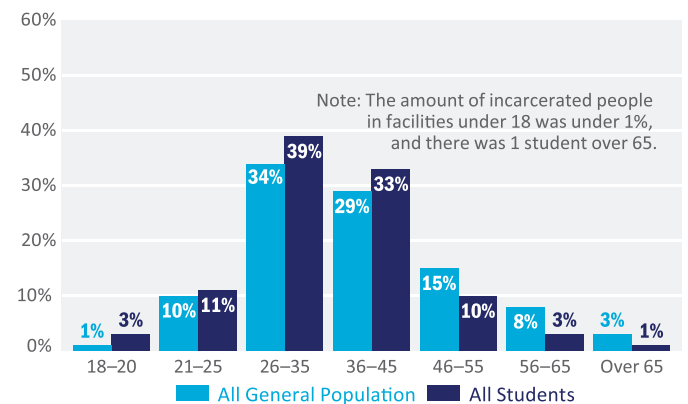


Figure 3. Faribault Comparison: Age

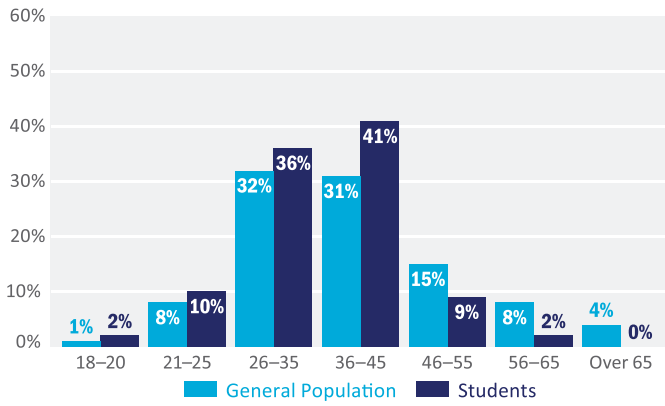


Figure 4. Faribault Comparison: Race

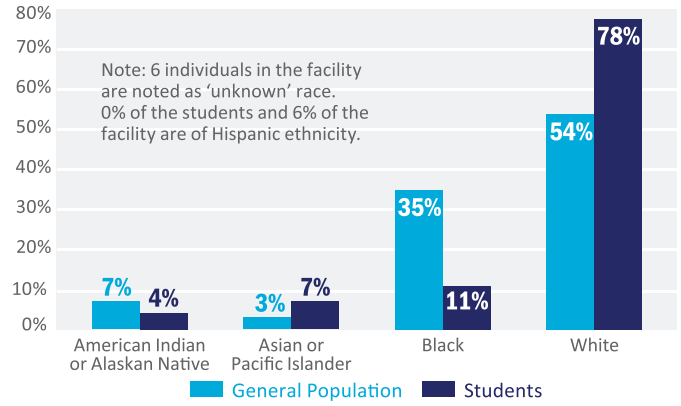


Figure 15. Shakopee Comparison: Age

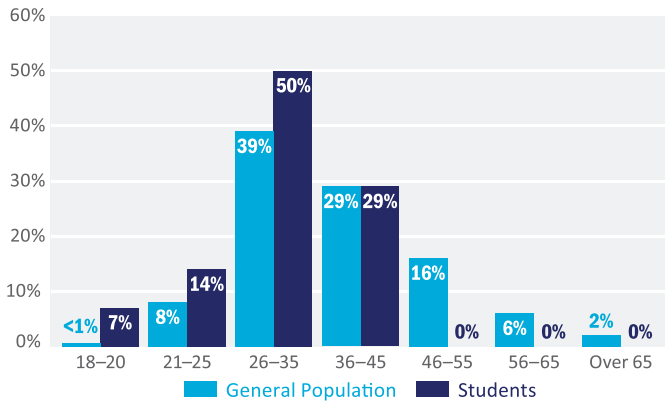


Figure 16. Shakopee Comparison: Race

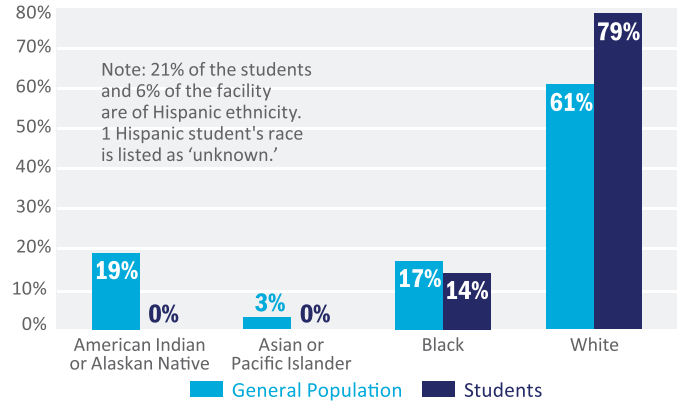


Figure 9. Lino Lakes Comparison: Age

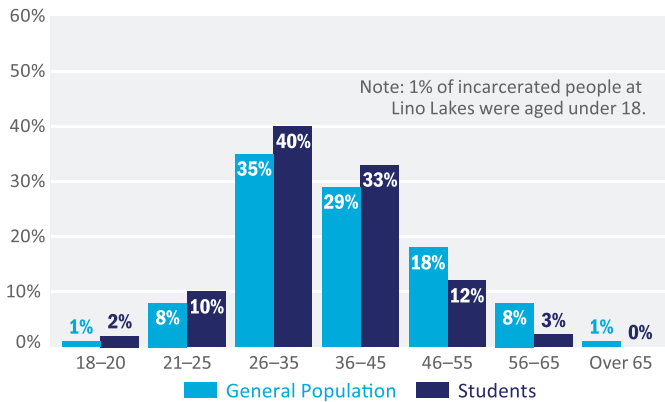


Figure 10. Lino Lakes Comparison: Race

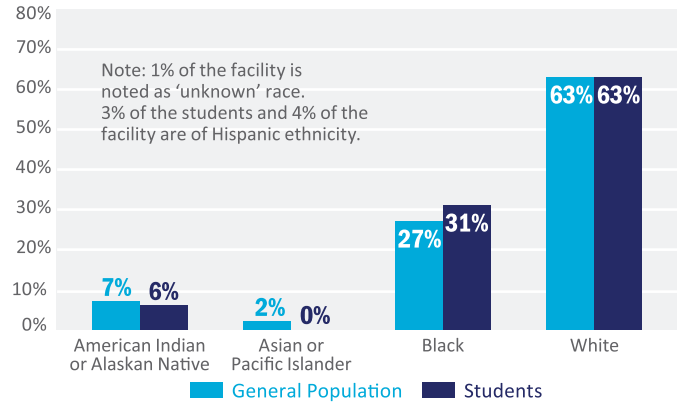


Figure 21. Stillwater Comparison: Age

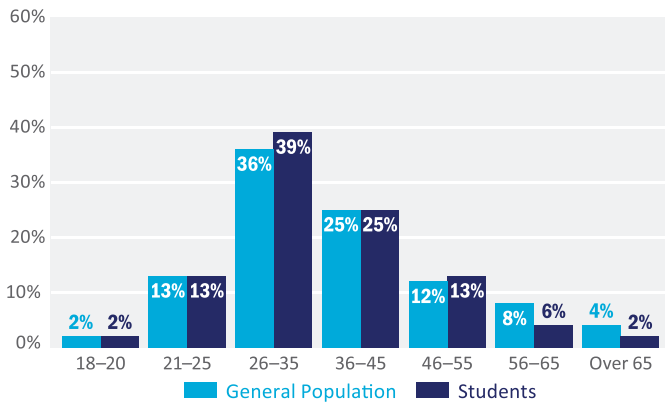
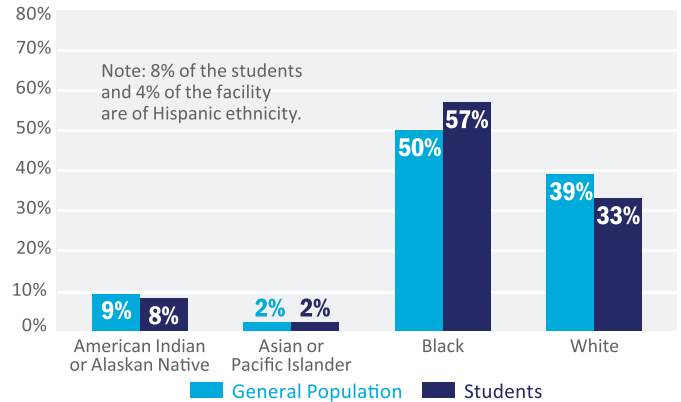


Figure 22. Stillwater Comparison: Race



Section 2: Universal Themes

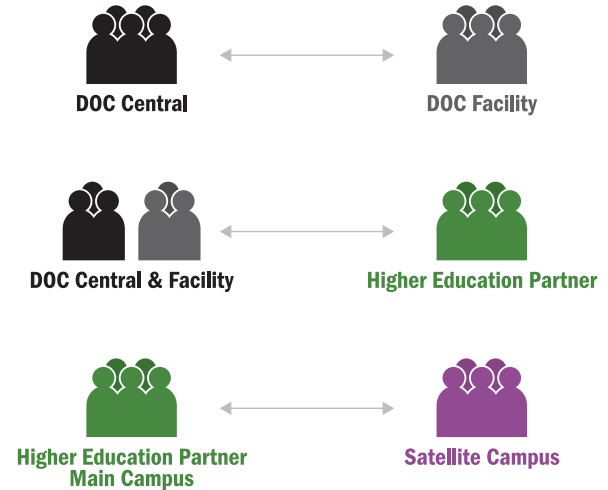
POLICY AND PROCEDURAL CHANGES

The central DOC policy and procedural changes that undergirded the new partnerships were rooted in two central ideas. First, the DOC Strategic Plan's shift toward a person-centered approach for institutional engagement. This approach framed strategic priorities and goals that impacted education. Secondly, the philosophical shift, where education was viewed as a right rather than a privilege. This shift came out of DOC Central Office Education Unit and the intention was for it to permeate down to the facility-level and into Education Units. The theme's main objective is to illustrate any major distinctions in policy and procedural changes as programming transitioned from **existing on paper to taking place in practice**. Where there were more glaring differences between the two (paper and practice), further examination is needed to make sure the partnerships are able to offer rigorous learning opportunities in correctional facilities.

Though DOC Central's policy and procedural changes were pinnacle to driving the new partnership's operations, essential changes also took place within participating facilities and higher education systems that greatly impacted implementation.

CONNECTIONS AND COLLABORATIONS

Central Engagement Took Place Between These Groups



Changes coming out of the DOC Central Office Education Unit centered on:

- Offender Assignment and Compensation Plan** ✓
- Education Access:**
 - Education holds disrupt the forced movement of an individual from one correctional facility into another. This type of movement disrupted access to a person's higher education program. However, holds did not always take place as anticipated, though the practice improved overtime. ✓
 - The TABE requirement was removed. TABE was a comprehensive assessment similar to the SAT or ACT, with a minimum score required for entry into a higher education program. ✓
- Restrictive Housing Policy (segregation and education):** Main issue: tablet (main educational tool) not allowed and/or a facility's segregation unit lacked internet access (waypoint or Wi-Fi). ✗
- Informal Sanction Policy** ✓
- Work Release Policy:** Consistency needed among the DOC actors associated with implementation, specifically regarding the educational resources students have access to. ✓

Major areas that surfaced in the data potentially impairing stakeholders' optimal engagement:

- Inconsistent Communication**
- Insufficient Implementation of New Policies and Procedures**
- Impact of Altered Roles and Responsibilities** (specifically for facility-level education staff)
- Limited Human Capacity** requiring key actors to wear multiple hats

RESOURCES—WORKING, FIXABLE, BROKEN

To support program execution (specifically students’ progression toward degree completion) *foundational resources* were needed. Though there may be an array of resources a higher education partner, student, or DOC personnel would like to have, the evaluation team asked participants to speak to core or essential resources needed for program operations. What was shared was broken up into two categories: human and physical resources.

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	WORKING	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	HARD PIVOT
HUMAN RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program tutors (available in 2 of 4 sites across Year 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library system (staffing, EBSCO approval process, communication, accountability) 	
PHYSICAL RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student housing at Shakopee (product of COVID regulations) Student housing at Faribault¹ (incorporated into program design) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom resources Bin usage/storage materials Tablet 	

EBSCO Approval Process

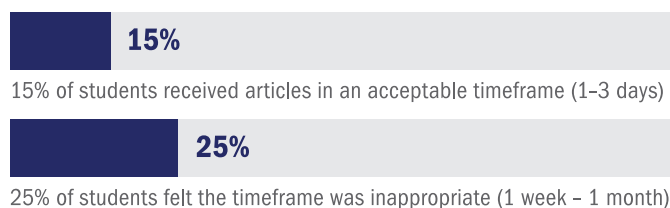
A premier program resource that needed modification was the EBSCO approval process. 40% of program participants specifically spoke to the approval process during interviews. One major concern was the timetable to receive requested articles. This was material needed to complete course assignments.

DOC staff who oversaw the approval process indicated that—*“EBSCO files are reviewed at minimum two to three times per week at each facility. On average, I would say requests are reviewed every other day, if not daily.”* (DOC Staff 1)



Twenty-five percent of students felt the timeframe was inappropriate. They stated that it took between one to two weeks to receive the requested material, with a few instances being a month to receive the requested content. In one case a student shared that the DOC staff member approving EBSCO articles simply stopped reviewing submissions without an explanation. Fifteen percent of students felt the approval timeframe was appropriate—receiving their articles the same day or within two to three days.

EBSCO Approval Process



HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERS			
	WORKING	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	HARD PIVOT
HUMAN RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library system participation (MSU, Mankato) Instructional design—Metro State University and Minneapolis College 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic supports—study and writing skills 	
PHYSICAL RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pathways to degree completion commonly clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pathway resources (next steps after graduation) Consistent prereqs/course sequencing 	

¹ Available to full-time students. Disciplinary infractions led to students being removed from the designated housing. For those who had access, Maple housing was desired and preferred.

STUDENTS			
	WORKING	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	HARD PIVOT
HUMAN RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual access to instructors (tablet) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socioemotional supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office hours
PHYSICAL RESOURCES		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study hall Tech supports Textbooks/donated books Co-curriculars 	


Office Hours

The resource that was broken, and required a hard pivot to support program execution, was office hours. Either virtual or face-to-face, office hours were missing—specifically the privacy they afforded to students to discuss academic strengths and needs. They are a place for students to be vulnerable without judgment.

Tech Supports: Internet Access/Bandwidth Strength

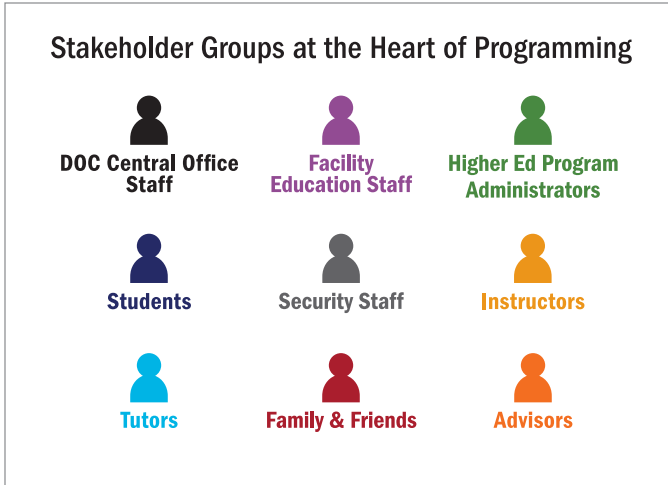
Internet access was necessary for many central functions on a student’s tablet. The device was students’ main educational tool. Internet access either came directly from a facility’s Wi-Fi or a purchased waypoint device. Internet access and bandwidth strength were concerns in three main areas: students’ living units, classroom spaces, and restrictive housing. Per facility, below are connectivity concerns within the target areas.

Internet Accessibility by Facility

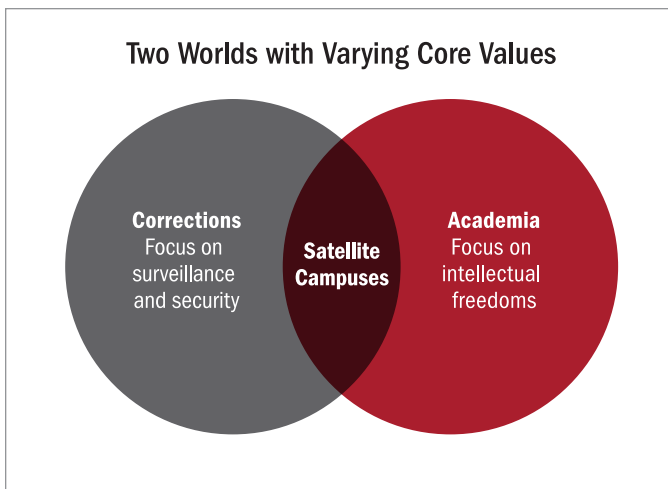
SHAKOPEE/MSU, MANKATO	LINO LAKES/MINNEAPOLIS COLLEGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Classroom Spaces ✔ Living Units Restrictive Housing ✔ Wi-Fi installed ✘ Tablet approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Classroom Spaces ✘ Living Units Inconsistent: depending upon unit ✘ Restrictive Housing Waypoint approved, but reportedly there was not a spare device
FARIBAULT/MSU, MANKATO	STILLWATER/METRO STATE & UMN, TWIN CITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Classroom Spaces Inconsistent: 1 waypoint, but 3 higher education classrooms Living Units ✔ Full-time students, original housing ✘ Part-time students Restrictive Housing ✔ Wi-Fi installed ✘ Tablet approval  <p>MN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Classroom Spaces Inconsistent: 1 waypoint, but 2 classrooms. Proximity to waypoint mattered. ✘ Living Units Depended upon location in a living unit <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px; background-color: #f0f0f0;"> <p>“We need more boosters, signal boosters in the units. In my unit, I’m in the back half of the unit, the booster is on the front half. To use my tablet I have to come all the way up to the bars and hold it out of the bars, you know, get it set up and then I’ll set it right there on the bars and watch it. So, it’s really making me work. I’m really working.” (Student 15)</p> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Restrictive Housing Year 1: no access. University staff shared that a waypoint was supposed to be installed in Year 2, March 2023.

RELATIONSHIPS—MORE THAN CONTRABAND

The data makes clear, particularly among DOC staff, a strong emphasis placed upon relationships between program students and instructors. Though DOC personnel zeroed-in on this one type of program relationship, the data made clear that an expanded understanding of the relationships at the programs' core was needed. The theme presents the centrality of relations among:



The evaluation team understands that the focus on student-instructor relations is the product of perceived impropriety between these groups. However, the data illustrated much more complexity and nuance within this relationship as well as foundational differences in how relationships in general were understood within the Department of Corrections and Higher Education. The latter greatly influenced how each group understood engagement with incarcerated individuals.



The partnerships unite two worlds with varying core values. As these worlds collide, approaches and ideals will, and did, bump heads.

In this theme, relations—internal as well as within and across stakeholder groups—are examined. They are organized around:

- * **The duality** program participants carry, as students and IPs

“And just the difference of being made to feel like a person through Minneapolis College and then kind of feeling like, and I hope it’s not, and I don’t think it is, but it feels like if it’s almost staff’s job to make us feel like you’re a number, regardless of what you’re doing. It’s just a constant reminder of, you’re a number here. So that was, it’s kind of disheartening, but it’s also the expectation. I understand it’s, it’s prison.” (Student 46)

- ★ **Programmatic Bright Spots**
- 🔧 **Growing Pains and Fundamental Conversations**
Areas where change may be (or is) needed to support program execution

Stepping back from the extreme emphasis placed upon student-instructor relations allows for an examination of the varied complex relations that undergird the partnerships as well as an opportunity to appreciate where successes are occurring and instances where clarity is needed enhance program execution.

POINTS OF SYNERGY

With multiple partnership stakeholders across the DOC and the higher education institutions, there were ‘points of synergy’ that cut across the various groups. This theme focuses on four crucial components to the higher education programs that were significant touch points across all stakeholder groups: culture, managing time and space, the participation of students’ with life sentences, and class quality.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS' PERCEPTIONS

Students' participation had a ripple effect. Students themselves represented the first ripple—they were the primary beneficiaries of their higher education experience. The next ripple was experienced by individuals whom students most readily shared their higher education experience with—friends and family. Friends and family shared insights on programming's impact on their loved one as well as themselves. They provided views on the ways their loved ones were commonly supported as students, ways their loved ones could be better or differently supported, expectations they had for various stakeholders associated with programming, and what they would like program participation to translate into for their loved one. 50% of participating students shared the names of friends and family members who the evaluation team could reach out to, as potential project participants.

"Even though he's behind bars he's showing leadership. When I say leadership, he's showing his kid—because kids look up to their father wherever they are. Or mother wherever they are. He is showing that you don't have to get stuck because you're in an environment or situation—you can still reach out and grow within. We got people on this side of town who are not even finishing their high school education—let alone trying to strive for a BA degree. They just out here doing a little of everything. He is trying to show—to me, his boys, and he's got some nephews in high school, that you can still get that degree. If I can get it, you can get it."
(Family/Friend 4)



75% of participants experienced an increase in general conversation as well as new things to talk about since their loved one started their college program (result of classes and assignments)



80% viewed their loved one as a role-model or source of pride for their child(ren) and younger relatives



81% of participants had increased hope for their loved one's life upon release



MARCOS MESA SAM WORDLEY, ANNASTILLS, REBEKAH ZEMANSKY/SHUTTERSTOCK; MN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Recommendations (abbreviated)

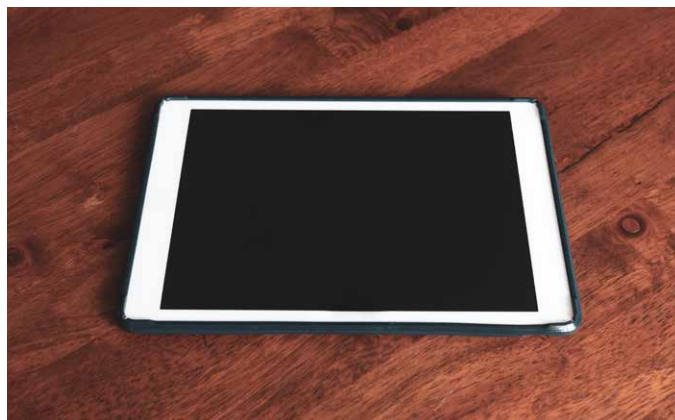
The report's Recommendations informally begin in the "Next Step: Check-in" section that closes each theme presented in Findings, Section 2. The check-ins ask pertinent questions regarding areas of strength and potential opportunities for improvement. The formal Recommendation section, presents the most essential topics featured in the check-ins as well as additional approaches that expand upon those topics. As programming is being assessed early on (specifically the transition from the new partnerships existing on paper to the partnerships operating in practice) the recommendations (and check-ins) can be utilized to determine if the topics raised have been resolved or if additional work is still needed to respond to them, as the programs are currently operating in Year 3.

The primary audience for the recommendations (as is the case with the overall report) is senior leadership in the DOC Central Office Education Unit. However, they are not the only audience. Higher education partners and facility staff will find recommendations that relate to their work or unit.

Policy and Procedural Changes

RESTRICTIVE HOUSING

Across the four facilities operating higher education programming, students' experiences in segregation differed. What is the process for an individual moving in, through, and out of segregation? It should be standardized and in compliance with DOC Central policy changes. What educational materials do students have access to while in segregation? How is unassigned idle status handled?



MUHAMMAD ZASHUTTERSTOCK

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

Though the DOC had a written policy regarding education in general, there was not a policy that codified program features and expectations for higher education programs. The relevancy of such a policy was made clear during this data collection and analysis process. Proposed policy features are presented in the larger report's Recommendations.



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Connections and Collaborations

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

Only one higher education program intentionally incorporated their main campus accessibility services into their satellite campus. However, across all sites, students spoke to various unmet academic needs that would be accommodated through a college accessibility unit. Under the Americans with Disability Act, college students should be given the opportunity to be assessed for accommodations, and if needed obtain the requisite services.

WRITING CENTERS

In an effort to expand students' intellectual communities and introduce foundational main campus resources into the satellite campuses, writing centers are needed. The need for writing support was regularly discussed in the data by instructors and students. Instructors commonly described great variation in their students' writing abilities, and a level of support that surpassed what they could accomplish within a course. The formation of writing centers came up by instructors and/or students in each higher education program. Though rare, there are instances of writing centers in college-in-prison programs. The report includes literature that can be explored on the topic.



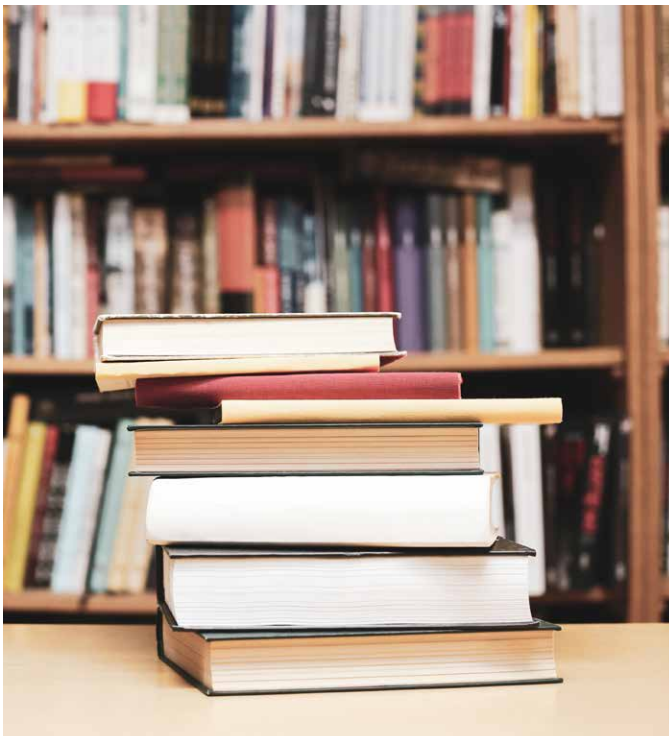
SONG ABOUT SUMMER/SHUTTERSTOCK

Resources

EBSCO APPROVAL PROCESS

All parties associated with the EBSCO system (DOC staff, program administrators, and students) saw ways that it could be improved. There were differences at times in how they understood the areas of concern, but increased transparency and communication among those making decisions and the recipients of those decisions was definitely needed. The following topics should be responded to, as they were either inconsistencies or missing features during Year 1 (and into Year 2):

- Across the four facilities is the timetable for the approval process standardized? The expected window, noted by the DOC staff overseeing the EBSCO approval process, was between one and three days. However, in practice students, and program administrators shared that this was not routinely the case.
- Are back-up DOC staff members in place to support the approval process when a primary reviewer is unavailable?
- Are there clear, standardized, parameters in place regarding the decision-making process for what gets approved (or denied), and why?



ONE PHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

WAYPOINTS OR WI-FI ACCESS/BANDWIDTH STRENGTH

Are there waypoints or Wi-Fi access, and appropriate bandwidth strength in the key areas that students frequent: their Education Unit, their living unit, and restrictive housing? The latter is necessary in case a student ends up in segregation. In response to DOC Central Office policy, restrictive housing should be able to accommodate their learning needs.



WMGERMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

OFFICE HOURS

Either virtual or face-to-face office hours are needed, specifically the privacy they afford students to discuss academic strengths and needs, in a context where they can be intellectually vulnerable without judgment. The ability to grow as a scholar requires opportunities to check-in with an individual engrossed in your course content and invested in your learning process—that is a course's instructor. Collaborative brainstorming must take place to determine how this essential academic feature can be successfully woven into each higher education program. Included in the report are the evaluation team's contributions to this long-standing conversation.



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Relationships

SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF CENTRAL GOALS AND PRIORITIES

It was clear that the stakeholder groups informing program operations did not have a shared understanding of partnership priorities and institutional changes made by the DOC to support programming. It is essential to establish a shared understanding among stakeholder groups—they shape implementation.

Survey the stakeholder groups presented in this report to determine their knowledge-base regarding the institutional shifts that undergird these new partnerships. The survey should be administered to senior leadership in the Central Office to unit staff within DOC facilities, and from higher education program administrators to graduate research assistants. Use the results to determine if an educational campaign, town hall events, formal/informal meetings are needed to solidify understanding.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS' ENGAGEMENT WITH HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

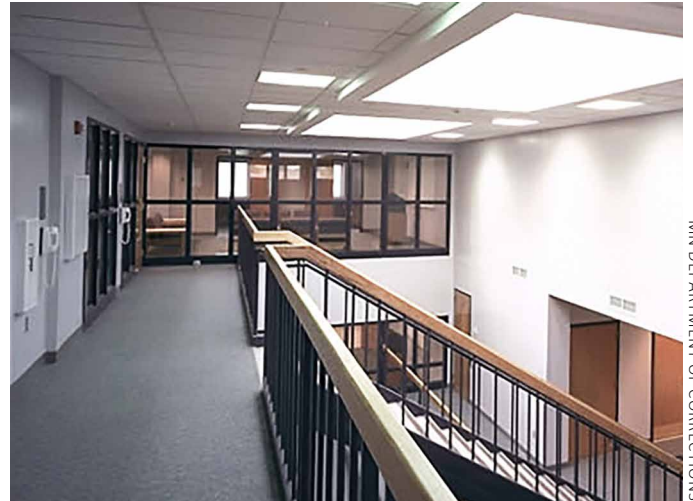
Ensure that security staff, specifically correctional officers, have an informed view of the new higher education partnerships. Interactions between correctional officers, students, Education Unit staff, and higher education personnel are a constant. These interactions greatly inform program implementation. For example, officers play a central role in student movement and the ability for classes to take place as they must monitor an Education Unit. All stakeholder groups in the evaluation, including security staff, viewed officers' perceptions of the new partnerships as mixed. Their views were the product of actual interactions, but also misinformation or missing information regarding program objectives. Approaches are offered in the report by various stakeholder groups and the evaluation team regarding officer engagement.

Sustainability

SPATIAL INVENTORY

The higher education programs operated within limited space in each participating facility. They utilized between one and three classrooms. The spaces afforded to higher education were genuinely appropriate for needs during Year 1, but would not support program growth in any of the four sites. A DOC investment in programmatic growth should include an examination of the current spaces allocated for higher education and the space necessary to help each program thrive into the future.

An investigation into the space available in an Education Unit would be helpful to make sure that physical resources (particularly at times when security staff are available) are being maximized to support current and future programming.



MN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

ALUMNI NETWORKS

What do present alumni opportunities entail? What do the alumni networks look like for those who are still incarcerated? What do the alumni networks look like for those who have been released? Students as well as family and friends were concerned about graduates' opportunities to stay connected to their higher education program, ways that programming could help with continued education, and employment.

In terms of employment, former DOC Central Office Education Unit leadership discussed connections between the new higher education partnerships and DOC re-entry support that had not been forged, but was needed. As of 2022 EMPLOY was reinstated and new programming aligned with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development supporting re-entry was launched.



MINNEAPOLIS COLLEGE

REVIEW THE REPORT GRAPHS

Reflect upon the role of over and under representation within the higher education programs—this idea can be examined across various demographic markers. Are opportunities being equitably afforded to incarcerated individuals? For example, when reflecting upon educational access, in terms of race, women who identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native made up 19% of Shakopee’s general population, but did not comprise any of the Year 1 higher education students. At the Faribault correctional facility, white men made up 54% of the general population, but 78% of the Year 1 student population. One approach is to expand outreach strategies to make sure the opportunity is presented widely within a correctional facility.

Another major issue to consider with the graphs are the figures denoting who within a facility has a high school diploma or GED. Across the four participating correctional facilities, during Year 1, between 18–30% of the general population did not have either a high school diploma or GED, making them ineligible to participate in higher education. In alignment with the imperative to expand higher education access, what efforts can the DOC make to decrease the percentage of individuals without a secondary credential—and therefore, increase the number of individuals eligible for college? For those interested in pursuing a college degree, multiple opportunities can be constructed to help students prepare for the rigors of a college program. They can include a correctional facility’s transitioning to post-secondary education programming or a bridge program offered by a higher education partner. However, first and foremost, DOC personnel should ensure that as many individuals as possible have the right to complete an admissions application.

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