

The internet and higher education opportunities across the Western Australian Criminal Justice System

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Abstract

The overarching aim of the pilot project described in this paper is to facilitate effective and equitable learning engagement for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds (LSES) who are engaged with the criminal justice system in Western Australia. In recognition of the complex barriers to higher education experienced particularly by incarcerated residents, this explorative project seeks to identify best practice models that better facilitate the residents' educational needs.

The paper initially engages with the process of identifying barriers to higher education at both the Department of Corrective Services (DCS) and University levels and goes on to develop two possible models that are designed to ease the prevailing cumbersome processes that incarcerated students presently face when enrolling and attempting to participate in tertiary study. These two models are designed to, (Model 1) in the first instance, be compatible with current DCS education and security policy and ultimately (Model 2) argue for policy change that would allow resident students strictly controlled access *only* to each student's identified course materials.

Introduction

The Internet ranks as one of the great inventions. With increasing access to the internet and the low cost of computers, the Internet has become an integral part of our daily lives. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), over 2.7 billion people were using the Internet in 2013. In the developed world the penetration rate is over 70% (Chang and Grabosky, 2014:321).

This paper is written at a time in Western Australia when a university campus and various sites within the penal estate, together with the Department of Corrective Services (DCS), seek to find the 'current best fit' and 'ideal' practices that bring about greater educational opportunities into their collective spaces. In an ideal world we

would see both the university and the prison system engaging imprisoned students in a fair and socially just space where access to education is equitable regardless of where students reside. However, information technology currently underpins models of teaching and learning in all higher education establishments and this factor alone severely disadvantages prison residents who are engaged in or wish to be engaged in tertiary studies, as they are currently excluded from direct access to courses via internet. Since the notion of equity is at the heart of this federally funded project, the research team sets out to find ways in which to overcome this disadvantage. To this end, the authors lay out a plan for the present as well as one for the foreseeable future, taking steps to allay fears for community safety. Thus, the authors, senior research fellows and a research assistant from Curtin University, are engaged in a pilot project that seeks to facilitate effective and equitable learning engagement and retention for students held in custody within the criminal justice system in Western Australia. The project team intends to develop and pilot enhanced processes and systems that will effectively overcome the myriad of barriers currently impacting negatively on the ability of incarcerated students to enrol in and complete higher education in a more equitable manner.

This federally funded project aims to:

- Identify barriers that prison residents experience in accessing and completing higher education courses.
- Investigate and develop a suitable model for student admission, administration, teaching/learning support that is inclusive of and equitable for students in the justice system.

- Investigate and develop a suitable model for effective educational guidance, engagement, support and retention of imprisoned higher education students.
- Pilot a combined Curtin University/Prison Campus model for inclusive and equitable access to and participation in Curtin courses for students in partner prisons and reintegration centres.

Curtin University is currently engaged in this project with seven custodial facilities; five are state run facilities and two are privately run. From the outset the authors want to make it clear that the university's role is to offer all courses to students in an equitable and non-judgemental manner, regardless if the student is participating full or part-time, on-line or on campus. Curtin's product is higher education. The university often seeks to advise students through career counselling but must stop at prohibiting enrolment in any given course so long as the criteria for application and enrolment have been met. It is not Curtin's role to stop enrolment due to a specific criminal offence, debt burden or perceived suitability of selected study topic. However, the Department of Corrective Services (WA) routinely screens all prison residents' applications for enrolment in tertiary education. In explanation of this; an example could be that a student in custody has been convicted of armed robbery with violence and, whilst serving a 12-year sentence, may want to engage in higher education and so seeks to enrol in a teaching degree course. Whilst this course would provide a degree in education and may be beneficial in many ways, it is unlikely to provide employment opportunities directly related to the course because a conviction of the aforementioned nature would preclude the ability to gain National Police Clearance or Working With Children certification. Although it is not the university's role to refuse enrolment under these circumstances, the Department of

Corrective Services (DCS) would not give permission for enrolment in that specific degree course because of the obstacles to employment in education and because the study entails doing practicum outside of the prison. In short, DCS has control of what may be studied and by whom.

Authors' background

The two senior authors both have extensive experience in the area of imprisonment, having backgrounds in prisoner advocacy, penal reform and restorative justice. Their prison related research and publications have included: An exploration of the incidence and impact of sexual assault in West Australian prisons; an exploration of the impact of imprisonment on women's familial and social connectedness; the impact of the criminal justice system on the self, from arrest through to imprisonment and release; issues related to the release of long-term prisoners into the community. In addition, both authors have held voluntary positions as Independent Prison Visitors with the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (WA), having roaming rights in their allocated custodial facilities. They have also delivered pre-release programs within prisons and continue to work in the area of prisoner advocacy.

Background to research

Previous research has demonstrated that education is a major factor in reducing reoffending. For example, studies in the USA found that, 'on average, re-incarceration rates for participants in prison education programs were 46 per cent lower than for non-participants'

<http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/g=1/LearningReduceRecidivism.pdf>.

Also in the USA, Torre and Fine (2005:579) noted that 'women who participated in

college while in prison had a 7.7 per cent return-to-custody rate'. This was measured longitudinally over a three-year period and stands in stark contrast to a 29.9 per cent return-to-custody rate for women who did not participate in college. Also, within Australia, research indicates that education can play a key role in reducing reoffending and facilitating effective rehabilitation of prison residents, particularly for those from low socio-economic backgrounds, including Indigenous Australians who are grossly over-represented in the Western Australian prison system. Indeed, Indigenous West Australians constitute around 3.5 per cent of the general WA population yet they make up 40 per cent of the prison population. Many of these imprisoned men and women have below average levels of educational attainment. Certainly, the overall picture that emerges from many studies worldwide is that prisoners are largely an undereducated class compared to the general community and have measurably lower literacy and numeracy skills.

Having ascertained that education can be a powerful tool in effective rehabilitation, it is important to also note that, currently, many obstacles serve to inhibit effective learning engagement and retention for prison residents with a desire to study at a tertiary level. These obstacles include, but are not limited to: a reliance on hard copy course materials; inefficient flow of resources and assignments between the university and individual prisons; negative attitudes towards prison residents by a few staff members both within the prison system and the university; lack of access to technology, including information technology; lack of flexibility to adjust issues such as group assignments that cannot be completed by prison residents because of specifics related to imprisonment. Although Curtin has supported the education of prison residents through the School of Design and Art's JETA program, there has

been no consistent strategy across the university that facilitates inclusive access to other Curtin courses approved by the Department of Corrective services (WA).

Education in prisons

Whilst this paper examines the evidence of education programs provided to resident scholars within correctional institutions on post-release outcomes, the authors argue that cultural and jurisdictional variations are more difficult to identify across Australia's criminal justice systems. Although much has been written about the benefits of prisoner education, the literature generally fails to identify whether higher education within the prison estate currently meets the needs of a highly mobile and technologically focused society, especially with regard to information technology. A fundamental focus of this paper, then, is that information technology via access to the internet is central to equity in education, leading to meaningful occupation and a basic ability to function in contemporary western society. Certainly, Saylor and Gaes (1997, 2001:23), Harer (1995:8), Batiuk, Moke and Rountree (1997:167-180), and Steurer et al (2001:5) have all examined the relationship between correctional education and recidivism. Based on the findings, these studies conclude that inmates who completed higher levels of education encountered greater employment success on parole and thereby recidivated less frequently over an extended follow-up period than did their less highly educated counterparts. However there is potential for measurement improvements with regard to performance indicators on both employment and recidivism, especially measuring the latter. It should also be noted that many of the aforementioned studies fail to identify outcomes beyond the base measurement of completed course or program, or only attendance at the course.

Twentieth century educationalist, John Dewey (1916), emphasised that a good level of education provides the tools for moral thinking. Further to this, Harer (1995:8) suggests that education programs offered to prisoners promote a degree of normalisation, promoting pro-social attitudes that combat the anti-social norms often found within the penal state. In addition, outcome analyses of post-exits have most often focused on recidivism rather than real reoffending rates measured as re-arrest or re-conviction. However, a person may be returned to custody because of a technical breach of release orders such as losing their job placement, failing to attend a parole appointment or simply being unable to keep their accommodation. These factors often have little to do with the person's educational achievements but may well impact on their future engagement with higher education. Also, the authors have been unable to source any data that engages with the question of higher education in the prison system as a motivator for continuing education on campus upon release.

The Bard Prison Initiative is an up-to-date and topical example of the positive nature of higher education for imprisoned students. During the timespan of this pilot project headlines appeared across print, electronic and social media announcing that a group of incarcerated college students in a New York prison had beaten a Harvard debate team that had previously won three out of four American Parliamentary Debate Association Championships. The Bard Prison Initiative (BPI):

...creates an opportunity for incarcerated men and women to earn a Bard College degree while serving their sentences. The academic standards and workload are rigorous based on an unusual mix of attention to developmental skills and ambitious college study. The rate of post-release employment among the program's participants is high and recidivism is stunningly low. By challenging incarcerated men and women with a liberal education BPI works to redefine the relationship between educational opportunity and criminal justice (bpi.bard.edu 2015).

Prisoner education comes at an economic cost to each prison and it is often the case that education centres, rather than other areas within the prison, are the first to experience budget cuts that effectively reduce learning opportunities. As Devilly et al (2005:437-445) suggest, one creative use of prison residents who have already achieved a higher education is to have them work as peer educators in a similar vein to peer education schemes in other jurisdictions. From the authors' observations in Bali, India, UK and Belgium as well as inside some local West Australian prisons, it has been noted that peer education creates a collegiate environment that encourages information sharing and participatory engagement of core subjects and skills to aid learning. In several jurisdictions world-wide, for example, information technology is used to deliver course work with qualified peers assisting in the tutorial process, helping with time management, writing skills and group motivation.

Conversely, negative assumptions about education and previous negative experiences of school may have a profound impact on a prison resident's decision to resume educational pursuits. Pawson (2000:66) noted that prison residents are, by and large, less educated than the general population. Many of these prison residents may have memories of school that are based on experiences of bullying, social exclusion, mental health issues and physical and/or emotional difficulties as well as having lived during those years in overcrowded housing with nowhere conducive to a positive study experience. The authors note that this group has often struggled with education in the prison as it reflected the fear and colonisation of their previous negative experiences of schooling. Certainly, it has been noted that many prison residents opt for training programs rather than formal education. For example, in their paper, 'To train or not to train: The role of education and training in prison to work transitions',

Giles, Le, Allan et al (2004) suggest that, in Western Australia, most prisoners 'work in commercial or domestic jobs while in prison'. Furthermore, they found that approximately half of all prisoners 'study to complete basic adult education, schooling, short courses or full qualifications in vocational education and training (VET) or higher education – including postgraduate study'.

Interestingly, in their study of recidivism, Steurer, Smith and Tracey (200:5) found that prison residents who did not participate in education programs fared better in terms of post-release employment than program participants. However, they also found that program participants who found employment after release from prison earned higher wages than those who did not participate. This factor is central in contemporary Australia where, in general, higher education achievements create more opportunities for entering the workforce. Sadly, employment opportunities for people with convictions are often negatively impacted by an inability to gain clear National Police Clearance certification.

The question remains – how does this impact on the motivation to learn whilst being a prison resident? For example, Cook (1990:97) suggests that attendance at education courses inside prison, 'is mainly as a boredom release, not to gain anything specific'. Others also suggest that it avoids boredom (Batchelder and Pippert, 2002:269, *Social Exclusion Uni, Great Britain*), claiming that enrolment in prison education courses contribute 'to the ease with which a correctional facility is run'. In short, participation in prison-based education is an effective management tool for prison authorities. It is also worth noting that very little evidence on the impact of education is written by prison residents themselves and, for the most part, researchers

engaged their research participants through the use of questionnaires, thus limiting the responses to the most literate group of people.

Baum and Ma (2007:1) contend that education is able to assist individuals to make more informed decisions and to bring about better positive social outcomes. Importantly, the positive outcomes of education for prison residents also include the likelihood of intergenerational change and a move away from intergenerational offending patterns. Notably, research demonstrates that:

...children of imprisoned parents have a much greater likelihood of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. One American study found that children of imprisoned parents are themselves up to six times more likely to become incarcerated (Woodward 2003:vii).

This intergenerational aspect of higher education as a tool to reduce the likelihood of criminal behaviour in future generations is also central to this study. Crime reduction is something that all governments and communities desire and the authors suggest that education plays a significant role within the criminal justice system, reaching out as it does to families and communities. Ehrlich (1975:313-338), Grogger (1998:756-791) point to the positive impact of education on crime reduction, claiming that 'the existence of a causal crime reducing effect of education has potentially important implications for longer term efforts aimed at reducing crime'. Machin, Marie and Vujic (2011:463-484) go on to suggest that offender education should 'be viewed as a key policy lever that can be used in the drive to combat crime'.

In short, the authors believe that there is much to be said about the benefits of education, from basic literacy and numeracy programs through to higher degrees. There will, of course, always be detractors who speak about the need to focus on

victims' needs rather than those of offenders. However, it is argued here that the focus should not be based on an 'either-or' ethos which feeds into notions of the 'deserving' and the 'non-deserving'. Rather, the contention here is that better preparing prison residents for release into their communities as law-abiding citizens benefits victims and communities into the future. The long-term benefits for prison residents, victims and community have yet to be quantified in terms of personal, social, emotional and economic benefits. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that higher education means that prison residents gain additional skills to assist them to negotiate and communicate effectively in the community.

Practical aspects: risk management in a technological world

As previously mentioned, the research team is engaged in a pilot project that seeks to facilitate effective higher learning engagement and retention for students held in custody within the criminal justice system in Western Australia. The project team has sought to develop enhanced processes and systems that will effectively overcome the myriad of barriers currently impacting negatively on the ability of incarcerated students to enrol in and complete higher education. Importantly, equity of opportunity for all persons who wish to engage in higher education is at the heart of this project. With this in mind, it is important to note that several major obstacles continue to impact on equitable access to higher education for prison residents. These obstacles exist both within the prison system and within the university.

In terms of the prison authorities ways of working, these obstacles are all related to the ways in which the fundamental paradigm underpinning the Western Australian prison system is managed. In short, priority is always given to 'the good order and

security of the prison'. Whilst it is difficult to argue with priorities such as 'good order and security', the researchers suggest that the current practice is based firmly on patterns of risk avoidance rather than the less prohibitive notion of risk management. Under these circumstances, the use of technology as a tool to deliver education instantly flags security concerns and to date, these concerns have ensured serious disadvantage for imprisoned students who currently have to rely on hard copy course materials. Add to this the cumbersome processes regulating workflow between the university and the prison, most often meaning that completed student assignments do not reach the university by due dates and marked work and course resources do not reach the imprisoned student in time. Also, in terms of the university's organisational approach, the obstacles appear to be related to a lack of understanding of security issues surrounding all aspects of imprisonment; lack of a coordinated approach to student workflow to and from the prisons; lack of a coordinated way in which to deliver course resources to each prison and, sadly, occasional discriminatory attitudes towards imprisoned students.

The contested space between security and technology in the prison system

The use of technology by prison residents, specifically information technology, is still a contested issue within the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services. Although it is widely recognised within DCS (WA) that in order to be able to function in any reasonable manner in the community at least a basic understanding of the internet is required, there is yet a reluctance to allow prison residents even limited internet use. In order to make a reasoned argument for secure, limited internet access for those residents with a desire to study at tertiary level, the authors have provided a potted history of the introduction of various forms of technology to West Australian

prisons; of the media fear campaigns, the public reaction and the ultimate acceptance of this as almost a 'non' issue.

The introduction of telephones for prisoner use

Fear of change is a normal phenomenon. Fear of change within prison systems is magnified tenfold, particularly where the introduction of technology is concerned. There is a long history of public and systemic resistance to such change/progress within prisons. Yet most of the fear associated with change and progress in the area of technology in prisons has, to date, been largely unfounded. For example, in the 1980s telephones that could be used by prisoners were installed in Fremantle prison. There was tremendous public outcry. It was feared that prisoners would try to contact and intimidate victims but access to calls was initially strictly limited and physically monitored. However, by the mid 1990s regular calls to family were permitted and phone calls were also used as a positive management tool. In other words, if a prisoner demonstrated good behaviour, he/she would be allowed the privilege of a call. Bad behaviour meant calls were curtailed. The Arunta system was then introduced, reducing officer surveillance time as it allowed prison residents direct access to up to eight phone numbers. The advantages of Arunta were that the controlled and monitored telephone system provided reports that included: user account details and collection of call costs from prison residents' accounts; restricted telephone numbers and established alarm numbers; a recorded message prior to phone contact to inform the call recipient that the call was from a prisoner; legal numbers and number mismatch; call activity with the ability to export to security analyst software packages; audit trail and financial transactions; record and monitor calls. Indeed, the new Total Recall (TR) systems being developed make prison telephone

systems not only safe to use but they also provide forensic capabilities and provide intelligence. They have lowered the cost of monitoring and at the same time have increased effective surveillance.

Televisions in cells

The introduction of television sets in prison cells also attracted public outcry. Prison cells were described in the media as ‘hotel room accommodation for prisoners’ and there was public fear surrounding the information that prison residents would be able to access through television. ‘Tough on Crime’ politics emerged as the norm in both the print and electronic media, failing to address the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs and the positive impact of re-entry programs on successful prisoner reintegration to community. However, in 2015 there is no longer any community fear with regard to telephone systems for prison residents or television sets in prison cells. Simply put, these are no longer issues because the system works effectively and both technological advances (of their time) have not caused any increased danger to the public.

Information technology

The vast majority of prison residents in Western Australian prisons will be, at some point, released back into the community. In order to register with Centrelink to access payments, pay utility bills, find accommodation, establish a bank account and generally function effectively in contemporary Australian society, they will need to have at least a basic understanding of and an ability to use the internet. Long-term prison residents are particularly disadvantaged in this respect with many never having seen a smart phone and some not even having used an automatic teller machine. This

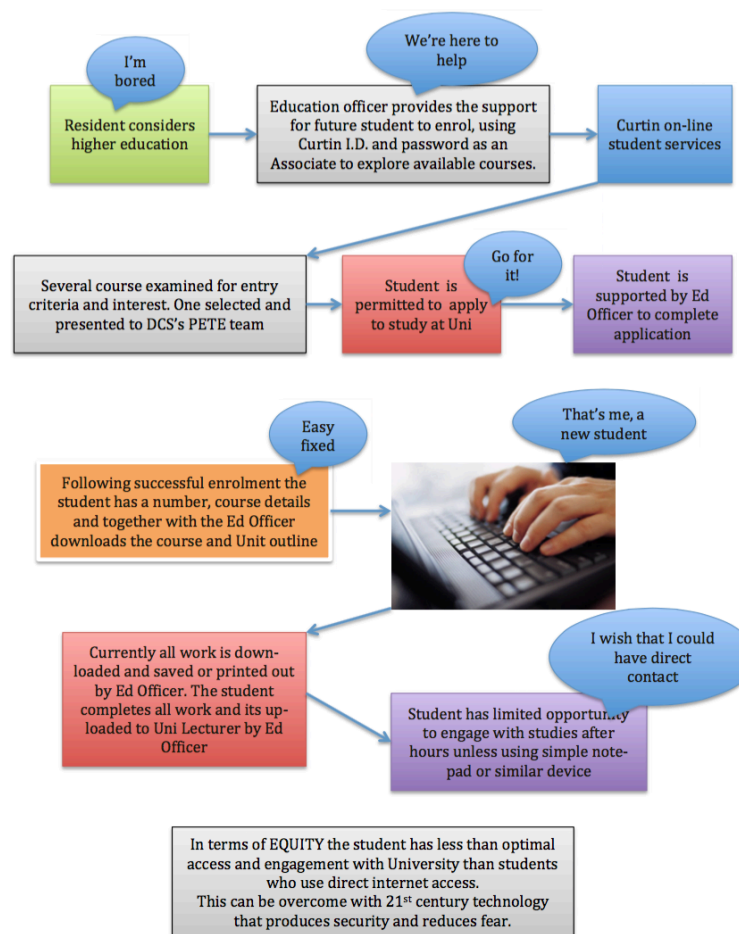
disadvantage is compounded for resident students, particularly for those studying at tertiary level since most courses have major online components and require online enrolment. Equity of access to education is an essential goal for universities. With this in mind, the pilot project seeks to find secure systems that will provide optimum opportunity for resident students through the use of safe, secured internet access. However, the authors acknowledge that this may have to be a step-by-step process.

At the time of writing, towards the end of the pilot, the research team has established indirect internet access to resident students by providing selected prison based education staff with associate lecturer status so that they can access all of Curtin University's courses. In this way they can download and upload coursework on behalf of their students. However, this is less than ideal but it is a positive first step. Over the past year prison based education has suffered two substantial funding cuts, resulting in staff cuts and consequential heavier workloads. Also, much of the computer related equipment in education centres is antiquated and there is a DCS (WA) moratorium on purchasing new computers. To alleviate this problem in some small way the project has provided new computers, servers, an interactive white board and several tablets to three low security facilities engaged with Curtin University in the pilot project. Strategically, it is more realistic that permission to trial secured direct internet access for students will be approved at minimum security facilities as these residents are nearing release into the community.

At one minimum security state run facility the interactive white board is currently used to download course materials and allow the residents to view educational videos and documentaries while under tutor supervision. This pre-release facility is also

ready to receive three new computers for the library area that will be utilised by students without direct access to the internet, also under supervision. At the other state-run low security facility three new computers plus a secured local server will be installed in the library and will be used with strict supervision/surveillance in place. Having the new computers based in the library areas of both of these facilities will allow resident students access to educational materials during down times when the education centre is closed over the Christmas break. This facility is also part of a DCS (WA) initiated pilot whereby the student residents are given non-internet accessible tablets that can be uploaded with course materials by education staff thus allowing students to study during down time in their cells when the education centre is closed. The third low security facility is privately run and, because of an 'innovation' clause in their contract, has more leeway in terms of how they run education centres. This facility has already taken receipt of a 'smart' television and four compatible tablets, currently being used by resident students enrolled in 'Uniready', one of Curtin's alternative pathways to university. These tablets are pre-loaded with course outlines and materials and TEDX talks. They do not have internet access and may be used by residents in their cells. This facility will also receive three new computers and a local server in the near future. Once again, all internet connectivity will be by way of supervision by education staff who hold associate lecturer status that is password protected. Importantly, all of the local area servers are to be kept in locked, secure cabinets. Also, all of the equipment has been provided through this HEPPP funded pilot project.

See diagram 1 below:

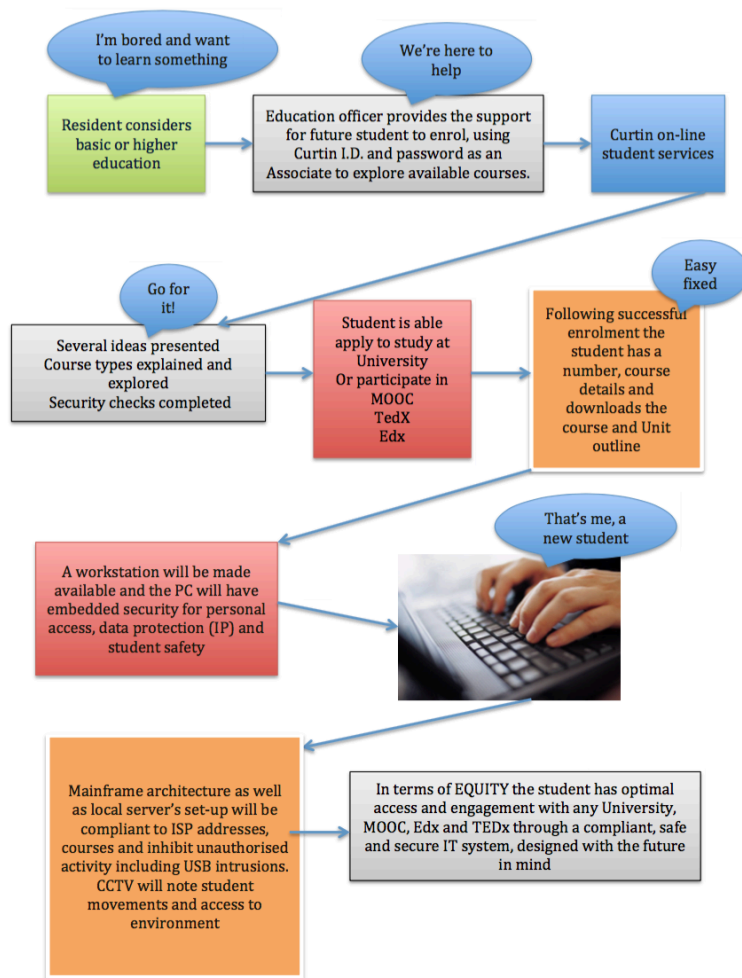


The ideal model

The authors contend that the ideal model of higher education delivery in prisons – the next step – is secured direct access to the university via the internet. In order to attain equitable access to higher education for imprisoned students it is necessary for these students to be able to access coursework materials directly through secured direct access via information technology. This, it is argued, would serve to minimise education costs by freeing up staff. Although this project focuses on tertiary learning, direct internet access is also now a necessary component for pre-release program delivery. Direct internet access for residents is the ideal final step towards equity. However, direct internet access for prison based students would require stringent

security systems at both individual student level and system/server level. This could be achieved by use of Virtual Private Network (VPN) with no split tunnelling, where the user can access the internet and their course materials. This ensures security monitoring and reporting of all student access in close to real time. After consulting at length with Curtin's information technology experts and an international expert on cybercrime, the research team is now at a stage where they can suggest a model that allows direct student access to education via internet that is safe and secured. The suggested model allows strictly controlled access *only* to the student's identified course, is low cost and very high level surveillance.

See diagram 2 below:



There are four fundamental safeguards for cyber security used for educational purposes within the prison environment. The first safeguard, in some way, goes against the project's central notion of equity but, according to the cybercrime expert, is an essential safeguard. Namely, that there is one specific group of prison residents that should never have direct access to information technology – that is, those who have been convicted of computer/cybercrime related offences. Excluding this cohort is simply sound risk management as ‘...preventing the incident from occurring in the

first place is vastly superior to controlling damage after the fact' (Chang and Grabosky, 2014:332). That said, the remaining security safeguards are related to:

1. The individual user
2. Mainframe architecture/server
3. Other forms of surveillance – CCTV, Physical presence of staff in the vicinity

The individual user: Educational Individual Service Provider addresses as required for each student can be identified at the local level along with any other relevant resources needed for the student. Access outside of these domains would be prohibited by surveillance and monitoring software as well as the inclusion of web-based content filtering to reduce exposure to inappropriate sites by website categorisation and reputation. These safeguards include keystroke logging, thermal fingerprinting and facial recognition. Each student would be recognised and their individual pathway into courses would be pre-determined when the student successfully enrolls in their specified course. It would still mean that the education officers would provide the support and advice with regard to courses and pre-requisites as well as applications to enrol. Students would be unable to access any other sites. Any attempts to access other sites would automatically trigger an alarm and initiate immediate shutdown. In addition, university course coordinators could provide an approved list of sites students can access to undertake specific course-based research. This could include the Curtin library website which could be configured against the user's profile on the network.

Mainframe architecture/server: Safeguarding internet use with mainframe architecture is costly in terms of establishing a whole of systems approach that would

serve each facility. However, the cost is offset by not having the constant presence of education and intelligence officers monitoring each student while that student is using the internet for study. Increased control can be readily achieved by access to Curtin resources through the use of a Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) session. This method allows information to be stored within Curtin network locations, allowing documents to be backed up, more accessible and visible than storing on devices locally. VDI network sessions consume less network traffic than file transfers. An additional benefit would be controlling internet access and monitoring internet access through Curtin central infrastructure.

Government departments already use mainframe computers to manage high volumes of internet traffic on a secure and stable platform. Regardless of the prison location, the mainframe would have an interaction with local prison sites across the entire jurisdiction so that access and interconnectivity are achievable with maximum safety and security. Whilst the mainframe remains the most stable and secure platform, local servers utilise the same approach with regard to safeguards. In addition, and acknowledging that it takes a large local server to cover the needs of each prison department's educational facilities, this remains an efficient and practical way of providing secure access for data, users, surveillance operations whilst adding monitoring and surveillance to the intelligence toolbox. Local servers support the role of education security supervisors. Through significant and tested protection programs these local servers protect data between students, protect the institution's probity and ensure that USB ports can only be used under strict supervision with inbuilt passwords for security officers' use. Although the use of the network based storage infrastructure which is locked down to specific users, backed up and, importantly, able to be monitored by IT security personnel could also justify negating the need for

USB ports altogether. Approved software could also be deployed across a network rather than locally on a specific PC. Certainly, the research team contends that current educational resources allocated to the needs of student residents enrolled in higher education would be reduced over time as students use direct access to courses via secured internet connectivity. In turn the security industry, with its global reach and considerable technological resources previously used for students engaged in higher education activities could then be released for students who require a high level of support to gain basic education and vocational skills, including literacy and numeracy.

CCTV security and physical surveillance: As previously mentioned the two senior researchers managing this project each have twenty years experience doing research and working in various other capacities with prisoners and ex prisoners. They are acutely aware of the darker side of prison culture and realise that individual access to information technology for some prison residents might trigger other residents to try to compromise security by using standover tactics. The use of CCTV technology, the physical presence of education staff in the immediate vicinity as well as intermittent checks by security staff basically cancel out the ability of other prison residents to stand over residents who have direct information technology access for higher education.

In sum:

...there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to securing cyberspace. Governments will vary in their willingness and capacity to contribute to the solution. The information security industry... has an important role to play. Organizational and individual users must also bear some responsibility for managing their own resources and information (Chang and Grabosky 2014:335).

The practical aspects: How the model works at the university level

Curtin University promotes and facilitates the use of online learning for both internal and external students. This is facilitated through access to Curtin University's secure web portal, Online Access to Student Information Services, more commonly known as OASIS, and the online learning management system Blackboard. Access and regular use of OASIS is a condition of enrolment at Curtin University. Curtin electronically delivers all official course and university notifications through this portal and it is imperative that students have access to these notifications. It is a condition of enrolment to access OASIS at least once a week. The university recommends that students access OASIS two or three times per week. Access to OASIS and the reading of these notifications is monitored by the university to ensure compliance with enrolment terms.

Students who are unable to access OASIS on a weekly basis are eligible to apply for an eExemption. However, eExemptions are only approved where clear evidence of a genuine inability to access OASIS on at least a weekly basis is provided, such as in the case of an imprisoned student. Nevertheless it should be noted that failure to access the OASIS portal on a weekly basis will likely result in failure to meet the requirements of many of Curtin University's online units as many require the student to view iLectures on a weekly basis, undertake weekly readings and online assignments as well as contribute to online discussion with fellow students.

Secure Web portals

Secure web portals are specifically designed pages accessed via a login issued by the webpage owner that allows for information to be accessed in an organised and secure manner. Curtin University employs the use of a Secure Web Portal for both staff and students - OASIS. Upon successful enrolment of a student at Curtin University,

regardless of internal or online study status, students are issued with a unique student number. This student number can then be used to access OASIS, once the user has created a password. This web portal is available twenty four hours per day from any computer connected to the internet.

The use of a configured server in a prison will allow for the host university's secure web portal and its secure contents to be the group of accessible webpages. This group of accessible webpages within the secure web portal gives all students access to:

- Curtin Online Assistance 'Ask Curtin'
- StartUp information (enrolment, booklists, unit outlines)
- Student personal information and grades through 'eStudent'
- Unit evaluations
- Password management
- Timetable and enrolment planning
- Official communications from the university
- Access to Curtin's Online Learning Management System 'Blackboard Learn'
- Access to Curtin's Online Library of books, journal articles and videos

Any deviation from the secure web portal, such as external links to journal articles, will require case-by-case review by a prison education officer unless prior configuration of the server has occurred to allow access to specific webpages.

Online Learning Management Systems

Universities such as Curtin offering study external from physical campus, facilitate learning and course administration through the use of an online learning management system. Curtin currently uses the Blackboard system. Blackboard acts as a virtual

classroom, noticeboard and assignment portal for both internal and external students.

The system is the primary source of course content and interaction with fellow students and teaching staff. Blackboard at Curtin University allows student access to:

- Unit announcements from teaching staff
- Contact details for teaching staff
- Unit information (unit outline, booklists)
- Unit materials (readings, power points, documents from lectures and workshops and other reference material)

Summary

In contemporary Australian society, where the use of information technology is writ large in our lives, imprisoned students are now more disadvantaged than they have ever been in terms of education delivery. However, education, particularly higher education, has been found to be a major contributing factor in reducing reoffending rates. This Higher Education Participation Partnerships Program (HEPPP) funded project is fundamentally centred on providing equity of opportunity for prison residents and others engaged with the Western Australian criminal justice system who wish to study at a tertiary level. With this in mind, the research team has sought to find ways to, in the first instance, reduce the levels of disadvantage whilst working within the policy frame that currently exists within the Department of Corrective Services (WA). Ultimately though, the research team intends to argue for policy change that will allow for optimum equity of opportunity for resident students via the use of secure, direct internet access that is totally restricted to their study needs.

The project team, two senior research fellows and a research assistant, have engaged with seven custodial facilities, including low, medium and maximum security prisons. One facility holds women who are nearing release; three have exclusively male populations; and the two regional prisons house both men and women. At the starting point of this project resident students held within the WA prison system relied exclusively on hard copy materials to carry out their studies. Prison education staff had to enrol students, request study outlines, course materials and library requests as well as liaise with tutors at the university on behalf of their students. Undoubtedly, this was a less than ideal situation for everyone concerned – the students, prison education staff and university course coordinators and tutors. The process was cumbersome, time consuming for education staff and frustrating for students. Workflow of assignments and course materials between prisons and the university was almost always delayed and sometimes lost (personal conversations with education staff and resident students). In short, in a world of ever-increasing reliance on various forms of information technology, particularly within the realm of tertiary study, imprisoned students clearly experience serious disadvantage compared to their counterparts out in the community.

In order to alleviate at least some level of disadvantage, the research team entered into discussions with prison-based education staff, Curtin University professional and academic staff and the resident students in order to find out what was possible under prevailing DCS (WA) policy conditions, encompassing both education and security policies. During this time the research team also worked closely with Curtin University's information technology experts to gauge what might be possible at the university level. In addition the team also consulted with an international expert in

cybercrime from Monash University. In this way, the team developed two models: the first step - indirect access to study materials and university tutors via access to information technology through prison education staff. This was achieved by giving prison education staff associate lecturer status and, as a consequence, the education staff had internet access to all of Curtin University's courses and required resources. In this way, resident students are able to access course materials and information more readily. However, the responsibility for downloading all required course materials remains with prison-based education staff and does nothing to alleviate their ever-increasing workloads.

Undoubtedly, the research team's preferred or 'ideal' model is that of secured, direct access to the internet for imprisoned students. This internet access would be strictly confined to their study requirements. This model represents the most equitable opportunity for prison residents to engage in and complete higher education study, giving them in turn, upon release, the best chance of living law abiding and productive lives in the community.

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