

UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON SURVEY: 2018 – 2019

TECHNOLOGY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON PROGRAMS

The *Understanding the Landscape of Higher Education in Prison Programs (Landscape Survey)* was launched in December 2020 as a confidential survey asking programs for detailed information about the program's funding, staff, students and other aspects of their program during the 2018-2019 academic year. The survey was completed by program leaders at 60 programs.¹ The data briefs for the *Landscape Survey* offer in-depth glimpses into the functioning of higher education in prison programs across the United States, but interpretation and extrapolation of the data should be approached carefully due to the limited sample size.

More information about the *Landscape Survey*, including descriptive information about the participating programs and recommendations for interpretation, is available at: <https://www.higheredinprison.org/publications/understanding-the-landscape-of-higher-education-in-prison-survey-2018-2019>.

This data brief includes information about the instructors of participating programs, including insight into the following questions:

- ▶ What technologies did programs use?
- ▶ What barriers to access of technology did programs face?
- ▶ What are some suggested takeaways for these data on technology and higher education in prison programs?

Additional data briefs from the survey can be found at: <https://www.higheredinprison.org/publications/understanding-the-landscape-of-higher-education-in-prison-survey-2018-2019>

What technologies did programs use?

A total of 31 participating programs provided information about the availability of technology for their programs and whether there was a cost associated with the use of that technology. This information is reported in Table 1. The most common technology access reported was either a computer lab or computers within the prison classroom (n = 22, 75.9% of 31 responding programs).² In most situations, the computer lab was not associated with a cost, but 22.6% of programs with computer access (n = 7) had to pay for the computers and students in 6.5% of those programs (n= 2) had to pay for the use of computers.

¹ The *Landscape Survey* was distributed to all 131 respondents of the *Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison* and had a response rate of 33.1%.

² Due to variances in responses to the survey, not all questions had the same response size. This report uses the capital "N" to refer to the total number of responses to a particular question and the lowercase "n" to refer to the number of respondents who indicated a particular response to that specific question.

Table 1. Technology Availability and Cost.

Type of Technology	Number of Programs (N = 31)	Percent of Programs	Was there a cost associated with access to this technology?		
			No Cost for student or program	Cost for Student	Cost for Program
Computer in the classroom or a computer lab	22	75.9%	22	2	7
Printers	14	48.3%	6	0	8
College or learning management system	6	20.7%	5	1	1
Email	3	10.3%	2	1	1
Internet	3	10.3%	1	1	3
Online instruction (synchronous)	3	10.3%	1	0	1
Tablets (personal)	3	10.3%	1	0	2
Computers in a student's cell or housing unit	2	6.9%	1	0	1
Intranet or a shared server	2	6.9%	0	0	2
Live video conferencing	2	6.9%	1	0	1
Online instruction (asynchronous)	2	6.9%	2	0	2
Broadcast instruction	1	3.4%	1	0	1
Instant messaging services	1	3.4%	1	0	0
Tablets (shared)	1	3.4%	1	0	0
Other*	5	17.2%	1	0	4

*Other includes: Graphing calculators, CD players, computer assisted design programming, and Smart boards.

What barriers to access of technology did programs face?

Participants from 26 programs described a variety of challenges that their programs faced related to expanding access to technology within their programs. The most commonly described challenge was the restriction on technology set by the Department of Corrections, which included limitations on access for both students and instructors (n = 14). Other challenges offered by participants included:

- ▶ Difficulties accessing the internet within the prison, which prevents the use of learning management systems or online course materials (n = 7);
- ▶ Security concerns arising from the use of computers or internet (n = 3);
- ▶ Access is limited to outdated technology (n = 3);

- ▶ Students have limited time in which to use computer labs or other technology (n = 3);
- ▶ Funding to buy new resources: computers and database access can be costly (n = 3);
- ▶ Coordination between the academic institution, the prison, and vendors to facilitate the adaptation of new technology (n = 2);
- ▶ Lack of expertise or ability from the department of corrections to install technology, which can involve running new electrical or ethernet lines (n = 2);
- ▶ Tablet companies restrict access to their platforms, and thus aren't available to all academic institutions to use (n = 1);
- ▶ The use of computers must be supervised (n = 1);
- ▶ Even when approved by the department of corrections, the adaptation of new technology is slow (n = 1); and
- ▶ Allowed computers or tablets are often stripped down and limited in capabilities (n = 1).

What are some suggested takeaways for these data on technology and higher education in prison programs?

Due to the small sample size, the data from this report should be cautiously interpreted and should not be generalized to the entire field of higher education in prison programs. Nevertheless, there are some general trends that can help inform the conversation surrounding higher education in prison and highlight the landscape of prison education during the 2018-2019 academic year.

Within this sample, most programs had access to at least some technology. The most common type of technology available to programs and their students were computers and printers, although data were not collected on the extent to which these equipment were modern or how accessible the technology is (e.g., only during class, always open or some other element of access). Most programs faced difficulty accessing additional technology in the prison, largely due to restrictions from the Department of Corrections.

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