

NIC's Frontline Learning Center Extends e-Learning to Correctional Line Staff

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The way people learn is changing. Traditional classroom education is being replaced or supplemented by mobile and online learning in K-12 classrooms, universities, and government.ⁱ A shift is occurring, in which the traditional model of multiple days of training focusing on a group of topics is being replaced by short educational activities where the student spends minutes learning about one topic. For example, the Khan Academy, a non-profit education organization, offers 3,600 3- to 15-minute videos and 233 practice exercises with the mission of helping you “learn what you want, when you want, at your own pace.”ⁱⁱ The Khan Academy website (<http://khanacademy.org>) gets 3.5 million unique visitors each month.ⁱⁱⁱ

The training delivery methods provided by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) also are changing. NIC began offering online classroom registration, Virtual Instructor Led Training, and self-paced e-courses several years ago to first-line supervisors, managers, and executives via the NIC Learning Center (<http://nic.learn.com>). Since then, NIC has also created the PREA Learning Center (<http://nic.learn.com/PREA>) to support the 2003 Prison Rape Elimination Act and has made it available to all staff working in a corrections setting.

More recently, jail administrators and other correctional executives requested that NIC provide online learning opportunities to line staff. Based on these requests, NIC launched the Frontline Learning Center (<http://nic.learn.com/frontline>) on January 24, 2012.

There is no cost to use the Frontline Learning Center for eligible corrections professionals. The Frontline Learning Center is available to correctional officers, detention officers, probation and parole officers, re-entry specialists, correctional health professionals, and other correctional line staff. To date, 2,372 correctional line staff have signed up for an account, with 51% identifying themselves as working in a jail facility.

Frontline Features

Frontline currently offers more than 90 e-courses on a variety of topics, including corrections, communication, personal development, leadership, and team skills. Most of the courses are between 30 minutes and 2 hours in length.

Upon account approval—which generally occurs within 1 business day—a welcome email and Quick Start Guide are sent to the student. Together they provide an overview of how to navigate and use the Frontline Learning Center. The Quick Start Guide also can be downloaded directly from the website.

The system provides automated password recovery. Live technical support is also available to students who need assistance navigating a course or ensuring their computer runs optimally while they are using the Learning Center.

Students can pause and resume training at their leisure, which is important for those who work in a correctional environment. According to Lisa Hodde, Data/Research Analyst from the Sarasota County (Florida) Sheriff's Office, "The ability to pause training and resume at a later time is very important due to being able to work on requests or answer an e-mail that comes up while I am working on the training. I am able to take a break from the training and not miss anything."

Upon the completion of a course, a certificate is automatically generated and sent to the student via email. (See Figure 1.) Certificates are often used as a record of training completion or to plan for future promotional opportunities. For example, a correctional officer in a jail in Alabama is building a portfolio of certificates and plans to list the completed courses on his resume. Each course title and corresponding certificate is also available in the student's training history page, which can be accessed online at any time.

Figure 1. NIC e-Learning Completion Certificate



Popular Courses

Some of Frontline's most popular courses relate to inmate management, understanding and using data, and the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).

- **Interpersonal Communication Skills with Correctional Offenders** is a three-course series that covers general communication skills, three techniques for asking questions, concepts in offender behavior management, and the four skill strategies used in the Cognitive-Based Communication Model.

- **Objective Jail Classification: Assessing Inmate Risk and Needs** trains staff on a key tool to help jails implement the Inmate Behavior Management strategy. (See more at <http://nicic.gov/InmateBehaviorManagement>). This e-course provides participants with concepts and procedures they can use as they implement a classification process based on objective criteria. Participants will also develop the skills for using specific instruments and tools involved in assessing an inmate's risk and needs.

According to Fran Zandi, Correctional Program Specialist in NIC's Jails Division, "Both supervisors and line staff should take this course. For supervisors, it will help support the decision to implement Objective Jail Classification (including staff and resources) and will also help them understand how the process works. For line staff, it is important they take this course as they are the ones doing the job. In most facilities, classification is completed by line staff, and without a basic understanding of the instruments they will not be able to classify the inmates properly."

- **Jail Data Analysis** provides the learner a general familiarization with statistics and how to use them. In addition, the learner will explore data analysis by working through a case study. Lisa Hodde gained new knowledge and skills from this course, saying, "I was able to apply the knowledge I obtained about measures of central tendency to help me with calculating average length of stay. Also, the information on how to analyze statistics helps me whenever I have a project to work on where I have to interpret the statistics on inmates that are currently housed in our jail."
- **Your Role: Responding to Sexual Abuse** teaches participants about the appropriate initial response to allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct in a correctional facility. Dee Halley, Correctional Program Specialist for NIC's Research and Information Division, believes this is a useful course for both supervisors and their staff. "The PREA course is designed for first responders—i.e., anyone who might see, hear, or get a report of some sexual abuse in an institutional setting. It is important for line staff (and any first-line employee) to take the course because anyone may see, hear, or receive a report of some type of sexual abuse. For example, a receptionist who does not interact with inmates may receive a third-party report from a family member or friend. It would be important for them to have some idea of what to do." Halley also stresses that "The course is not a 'one-time-only and you've met the requirement(s)' event. It should be used as a part of an overall agency training and education effort."

New Courses

NIC has recently added two new courses to the Frontline Learning Center catalog.

- **Overview of Motivational Interviewing**, a highly anticipated course, is now available. As the title suggests, this course covers the fundamental concepts of Motivational Interviewing, which is a client-centered and goal-directed approach to counseling. This approach has been used

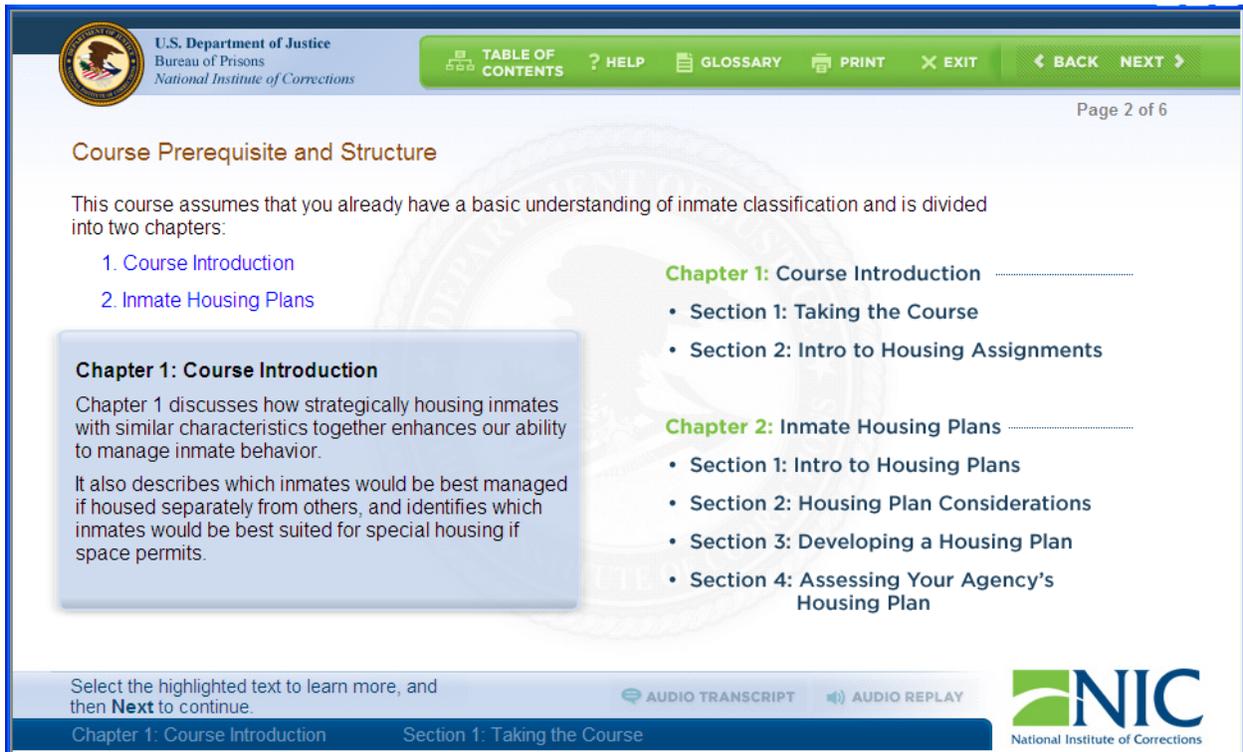
successfully by numerous correctional jurisdictions. The course provides 1 hour of training. Figure 2 presents the welcome screen for this course.

Figure 2. Screenshot from Motivational Interviewing e-Course



- **Assigning Inmates to Housing** is a new, 1-hour course designed for jail administrators, supervisors, managers, and line staff, especially those assigned to classification. It provides jail personnel with sufficient knowledge to develop housing plans that will help manage inmate behavior. This course will assist those working in a jail to strategically house inmates, allowing housing unit personnel to better manage their behavior. This course complements NIC's entire Inmate Behavior Management toolkit, including the popular e-course, Objective Jail Classification: Assessing Inmate Risk and Needs, mentioned above. Figure 3 shows how the Assigning Inmates to Housing online course is organized.

Figure 3. Screenshot from Assigning Inmates to Housing e-Course



Impact

To date, Frontline Learning Center participants have completed a combined 6,061 courses, for an average of 2.56 completions per participant account. A brief survey is available on the site that invites participants to leave general feedback and comments. One participant commented, “I really enjoyed these courses. They were informative, concise, and time-saving.” And, according to another participant, “Having these educational courses available to me will not only continue my education, but enhance my ability to do my job more effectively.”

Coming Soon

Several updates to the site will occur in FY '13. The current catalog of courses will be completely refreshed to include new and updated courses in categories such as computer skills, communication, safety and wellness, team building, and writing and grammar. Additionally, the site will be completely

re-designed with a new look and feel. Additional news and updates about these improvements will be posted on the site in the coming months.

Registration

All correctional agency first-line staff are welcome to take advantage of the training offered through NIC's Frontline Learning Center.

To create a free account, individual staff members can go to <http://nic.learn.com/frontline> and click the green "Register" button.

The Quick Start Guide, which explains the basics of using the Frontline Learning Center, is available online via the Frontline Learning Center homepage at <http://nic.learn.com/frontline>.

Document available at:

http://community.nicic.gov/blogs/national_jail_exchange/archive/2012/12/26/nic-s-frontline-learning-center-extends-e-learning-to-correctional-line-staff.aspx

The National Jail Exchange is an ongoing electronic journal focusing on providing information to jails practitioners and is sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). The contents of the articles, the points of view expressed by the authors, and comments posted in reaction to the articles do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the National Institute of Corrections.

To write an article or to learn more about the National Jail Exchange, visit the homepage for this journal at: <http://NICIC.gov/NationalJailExchange>.

ⁱ Some suggested articles on the rise of online learning include:

Noonoo, Stephen. (2011). Mobile technology changes the game. *T.H.E. Journal*, 11/09/11.
<http://thejournal.com/articles/2011/11/09/mobile-technology-changes-the-game.aspx>

McClatchy-Tribune. (2011). Michigan pushes e-learning options. *Education Week|Digital Directions* 5(1): 8.
<http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2011/10/19/01bits-michigan.h05.html>

Future of E-learning in Universities. (Webpage.) Brighton, U.K.: Kineo.
<http://www.kineo.com/e-learning-trends/future-of-e-learning-in-universities.html>

Layton, Lyndsey and Emma Brown. (2011). Virtual schools are multiplying, but some question their educational value. *Washington Post*, November 26, 2011.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/virtual-schools-are-multiplying-but-some-question-their-educational-value/2011/11/22/gIQANUzkzN_story.html

Federal Government Distance Learning Association. (Website.) <http://www.fgdla.us/>

ⁱⁱ The Khan Academy. (Website.) <http://www.khanacademy.org/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Lynley, Matt. (2011). 11 Khan Academy lessons that will change how you understand the universe—in three hours. *Business Insider*, November 8, 2011. <http://www.businessinsider.com/khan-academy-lessons-2011-11>