CIMARRON CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

LOCATION:

Oklahoma, USA

TOTAL SCHOOL ENROLLMENT:

45 inmates at a time

SUCCESS METRICS:

» Provides inmates with vocational training

» Validates inmate's resumes with industry-recognized certification

» Motivates participants to master skills then tutor peers

» Prepares participants for release with job-ready skills

Cimarron Correctional Facility Adds Microsoft Office Specialist Certification to Computer Business Applications Vocational Program

Success Story
www.certiport.com/mos

CoreCivic

Microsoft
Office Specialist

Inmates Benefit from Learning In-Demand Technology Skills

CHALLENGE

Cimarron Correctional Facility (CCF) is a men's medium security prison in Cushing, Oklahoma owned and operated by CoreCivic headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. CCF opened in 1997 and offers inmates a variety of evidence-based reentry and rehabilitation programs, including education, GED preparation and testing, post-secondary studies, life skills, vocational training, and work opportunities.

The vocational program established at CCF is called the Pontiac Business Institute and it includes a Computer Business Applications

program. Steve Holley has been a Computer Instructor there for 3 years. "Our program aims to give inmates skills they can use when they leave the system," says Holley. "We want to see them succeed so we are always looking for ways to help the inmates while being more efficient with the limited resources we have."

A few years ago, CCF wanted to improve the program by adding industry-recognized certification to help inmates validate in-demand technology skills. Since their computers remain off-line for security reasons, Holley set out to find a solution that would allow inmates to take

certification tests in an off-line setting.

SOLUTION

Holley began to research introductory-level technology certifications and became familiar with Certiport, a leader in performance-based certification exams since 1997. Certiport's Console 8 delivery platform included off-line testing and CCF became one of the first Certiport Authorized Testing Centers in CoreCivic's nationwide system of correctional centers. They started by offering Certiport's IC3 Digital Literacy Certification and Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification.

"We adopted MOS in particular because it develops tools and measures skills we all use – Microsoft Office programs," says Holley. "These computer tools and skills are useful in almost any job and we thought offering MOS certification in addition to the Computer Business Applications program would appeal to a lot of our inmates."

CCF inmates apply to participate in the Computer Business Applications program or the Microsoft certification program, and then they train at their own pace with the assistance of tutors and experienced peers. Approximately 45 inmates are allowed in the programs at a time and they use the small computer lab on a rotating schedule. They also have study guides they use in their cells and then go through MOS practice modules from GMetrix when they get time in the lab.

Fellow inmates who have graduated the Computer Business Applications program or passed the MOS exams are then designated as tutors to help those in the certification program learn the material. Once an individual has enough confidence in the practice sessions they take the MOS certification exam.

"Inmates have to pay for the MOS exams themselves or through a scholarship program we have established from a donor," says Holley. "They have to be self-motivated to both pay for the certification exam and study on their own, and we've found a lot of individuals willing to put in the time and participate in the program."

RESULTS

Interest in the MOS certification program and participation has grown steadily in the 18 months since CCF began offering the credentials. The computer lab is at maximum capacity with each participant spending two one-hour sessions per week in addition to the study time in their individual cells.

Approximately 30 inmates are involved in the certification program, with 16 of them earning MOS certification thus far and two becoming Microsoft Office Specialist Masters, a designation for individuals who earn four MOS certifications including the MOS Word Expert and MOS Excel Expert exams.

"Even with some challenges such as inmates being transferred to another facility or running out of personal funds for certification, our dropout rate is very low," says Holley. "Demand for the program is high and I find that once an inmate earns one certification, they are motivated to earn another one."

CCF motivates more individuals to join the program and earn MOS certification by both broadcasting the inmate's MOS achievements on their internal communications system and welcoming industry speakers to come in and talk about how useful the certifications will be when they exit Cimarron.

Danny Clements is one inmate who not only earned MOS certification, but became a MOS Master. "After reasoning that everything in today's society revolves around computers in some form I made the decision to enroll in the computer course at CCF," says Clements. He completed the course work and then stayed on as a tutor to keep his knowledge fresh, ultimately giving him enough training to take all of the certifications necessary to become an MOS Master.

"MOS certification has already helped me in my life by giving me the opportunity to help other inmates gain valuable life skills they will need to secure meaningful employment once released," says Clements.

CCF has now begun to offer Microsoft Technology Associate (MTA)certifications as a next step for inmates like Danny who are ready for the next level of technology training.

Another inmate, Wayne Thompson, has been incarcerated since he was 15 years old. "I decided to pursue MOS certification and become a MOS Master to prepare myself for entry into the job market," says Thompson. "I have an Associates degree and all of my work experience has shown the need for IT skills. I believe the more capable you are in this field, the more employable you will be."

ABOUT CERTIPORT

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