Introduction

The California State Prison Los Angeles County (CSP-LAC) in Lancaster, CA, has worked with California State University (CSU), Los Angeles since 2016 to offer inmates the opportunity to pursue a BA in Communication Studies through classes held inside the maximum-security men’s prison on the Progressive Programming Facility (PPF, Yard A). The CSU Los Angeles offers the only face-to-face BA program within the California State Prison system.

The first cohort of students is close to earning their degrees, but the CSU graduation requirement of a lab science has been a stumbling block, as the classroom facility has no lab space and lab courses are not typically taught as correspondence courses (the typical method by which students fill gaps in face-to-face programming). The Antelope Valley College (AVC), part of the California Community College system, is based in Lancaster, CA. AVC has offered classes inside CSP-LAC since 2016 (on both the PPF Yard A and the General Population Yard B). Students may earn an AA-T in Communications Studies. Students on the PPF Yard A who complete the AA-T may transfer to the Cal State LA program to continue their studies.

During summer 2019, I taught Introduction to Earth Science (including lab) to 22 inmates on Yard A. Roughly half of these students are part of the first CSU cohort while the rest are AVC students.

This is the first time a lab science has been taught inside the CSP-LAC facility, Bakersfield, Chaffey, and Imperial Valley Colleges have previously offered geoscience lab courses at other California State Prisons including the Kern Valley State Prison, California Institution for Men, Los Angeles County, and Continela State Prison (Corrections to College at LA).

ERSC 101 (transferable to the University of California and CSU system) is a full-semester course covering an overview of geology, oceanography, meteorology, and oceanography, and the Course Outline of Record specifies that "students will examine minerals, rocks, and the environment by laboratory exercises" to study a variety of hands-on activities exploring the Earth Sciences.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Cathy Hart (AVC Dean, Palmdale Center & Extended Learning), Ronald Underwood (CSP – LAC, VEP Coordinator College Programs, Faculty A & Classroom Photographer), Hughes (CSP – LAC & Cal State LA), AVC Prison Education Program, Cal State LA Prison Graduation Initiative, the AVC Books H.E.L.P. Program and Second Chance Pell Grants.

Special thanks to the men of ERS 101. Summer 2019, who were the most diligent and collegial cohort I have had the privilege to teach.

Student Success

Course materials were similar to the Spring 2019 ERS 101 course taught on Antelope Valley College’s main campus (with the exception of a major change to the earthquake unit to cover the nearby July 4-5, 2019 Ridgecrest earthquake sequence, and removal of field trips from the curriculum).

Comparison of Student Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison of Student Success Metric</th>
<th>Spring 2019 (AVC Main Campus)</th>
<th>Spring 2019 (CSP-LAC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # Students</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final grade: A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final grade: B</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final grade: C</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final grade: D</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final grade: F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage C or higher</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of Student Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison of Student Demographics (estimated)</th>
<th>Spring 2019 (AVC Main Campus)</th>
<th>Spring 2019 (CSP-LAC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Asian-American</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CSP-LAC students’ work was much higher quality on nearly every assignment, with most students completing 100% of assignments on time.

Possible factors contributing to student success: interest and engagement, prioritization of education, majority of students near completion of BS, and ‘print once’ rule for written assignments.

Logistics challenges

Materials:
- Approved by prison, Inventoried, & stored securely
- After course ended, approved for removal & inventoried again

Substitutions for glass, metal, electronics, etc.
- Solution: organization

Communication:
- No cell phones inside
- No flash drives may be brought inside
- Only one computer with (limited) internet
- Videos/animations must be loaded onto classroom computer
- Students have limited access to technology and are completely dependent on education program for classroom materials
- Solution: patience, flexibility, and planning ahead

Paramilitary environment:
- Dress code, wearing alarm, etc.
- Schedule changes due to guard staffing, count, etc.
- Students have little control over their own schedules
- Solution: patience, flexibility, and situational awareness

Other:
- No air-conditioning in some classrooms, in the Mojave Desert in the summer
- No dedicated lab classroom
- Solution: hydrate, and try to teach class in the spring/fall in future

References
- California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, California State Prison, Los Angeles County (LAC), 2019: https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/ (accessed September 2019).