



3. College Students in Prison and Jail

The greatest sea change in California has been inside the state's prisons. Face-to-face community college unique enrollment inside CDCR rose from zero in 2014 to 4,443 students in fall 2017 – for face-to-face enrollment, that is more than any other state and more than the total number of students enrolled in the federal Second Chance Pell Pilot Program across the nation.

These face-to-face community college courses are transferrable, degree-granting courses, allowing students to continue their education even if they are transferred to another institution, and even if they are released to an area of the state different from the one in which they are incarcerated. The courses are offered in both men's and women's prisons, in every type of yard at every level from minimum to maximum security. They are not limited to low-security students or students nearing release.

Community colleges teaching the face-to-face classes report waiting lists and growing demand in every prison. Notably, while face-to-face enrollment has increased, correspondence enrollment in the state's prisons has dropped from 8,400 to 7,377 over the past four semesters.

The state's jails have also expanded their offerings, with several of the 58 jail systems partnering with their local community colleges to offer GED completion, career technical courses, and, where feasible, full-credit transferrable college courses. If the students are not staying long in jail, the colleges are providing short courses or introduction to college courses, designed to ease the transition to on-campus enrollment and success.

Because our criminal justice system is racially inequitable, these increased offerings in prison and jail also mean that California's community colleges are able to serve more students of color than ever before. The colleges may not be able to change the state's disproportional rates of incarceration, but they can provide college opportunities to those who have been caught up in the system and, in so doing, they are working to close access, achievement, and completion gaps.

Much progress still needs to be made. Among other things, continued success will require resisting the urge to replace face-to-face courses with non-interactive distance education, since research shows that these students are unlikely to reap the benefits of higher education if it is not face-to-face. The high cost of textbooks also has the potential to undermine these growing community college-prison partnerships. But the state is moving in a positive direction and, with commitment, we can continue to succeed.

LEADERS IN THE FIELD

Bakersfield College

"I've seen it with my own eyes, and it works."



youtu.be/eDkq0mzBVu8

In 2015, Bakersfield College began teaching one course on one yard within one prison, with 21 students. By spring 2018, Bakersfield College offered 50 courses on 17 yards in ten different prisons and jails in the Central Valley, with almost 800 unique students. This makes Bakersfield College one of the largest providers of face-to-face college in prison in the country. The College provides in-person education counseling and planning on site, as well as assistance with enrollment, tuition waivers, and textbooks. A full-time Program Director oversees the classes, serves as the point of contact and solves the numerous daily hurdles. The Program has garnered strong support from the District Chancellor, College President, County Supervisors, the City's Mayor, prison staff, college staff and faculty, and the students themselves. Bakersfield College students inside CDCR consistently earn higher grades than their on-campus counterparts.

Cal State LA

"They're giving me an opportunity, and it's transcended over to you."



youtu.be/yqhmAMtife4

Cal State LA offers the only face-to-face BA completion program in the state prison system. The program is cohort-based and recruits from students inside CDCR who meet state transfer requirements. It operates in a high security prison – Lancaster – with many students serving lengthy sentences, including life. As with the community colleges, Cal State LA students are performing as well or better than their counterparts on campus, and faculty rave about the classes. The program has faced challenges different from the community colleges, in part because California's income-based tuition waiver is limited to incarcerated students enrolled at community colleges. Cal State LA is a Second Chance Pell Pilot site, and for now is able to cover tuition with a combination of Pell grants and private foundation funds. Given statewide student demand for more education, however, a more sustainable long-term solution is needed.

SUCCESS METRICS

At Solano Community College, success rates for African-American students in prison are 16% higher than success rates for African-American students on campus.

In 2017, incarcerated students in the Cal State LA Communications class earned a class GPA of 3.61, while their campus counterparts achieved a class GPA of 3.25 in the same class taught by the same faculty member.

In a Cerro Coso College class taught in prison, on campus and online by the same professor, in-prison class GPAs were approximately 10% higher than on campus and about 25% higher than online.