



ALLIANCE

FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON

Community Call: Adapting Programming & Pedagogy in a Crisis

April 8, 2020

Overview

COVID-19 is forcing massive changes to teaching and learning (and modes of engagement) for faculty and students across the country, including within higher education in prison programs. Transitioning to online or other distance learning modes of engagement poses challenges in any context, but for higher education in prison programs this transition is even more challenging or potentially impossible. In addition, there are ethical and political factors to take into consideration for face-to-face programs that are now contemplating or moving to a remote learning model. This conversation is focused on adapting programming during the COVID-19 crisis and to hear from other higher education in prison programs across the country who will share their current experiences.

How has programming changed/adapted?

- On-site program coordinators are figuring out how to salvage/adapt programming
- Making and distributing packets for all classes and students, mailed those in and hoping they are received by students
- Moved all classes online for site that has had internet for a few years
- Sending in encouraging messages, novels for independent study with writing prompts
- Video lectures are being created (being streamed via intra-television, online or Jpay)
- Adjusting assessment measures, course objectives and outcomes
- Moving classes to pass/fail to more accurately represent the outside campus
- Professors are preparing lecture notes for each lecture to create additional scaffolding
- Transitioning to on-line learning
- Relying more heavily on learning management systems, which can facilitate asynchronous discussion via chat, students can send messages to instructors
- Relying heavily on student clerks and TAs to disseminate information to students who may not be as engaged with virtual and/or distance learning
- Printing is no longer allowed in the facility
- Engaging in more faculty meetings to continue to check-in on progress
- Continue to have access to an off-site office just outside the prison gate, so can go in and check messages and can send packets in every two weeks, get them back from students, send in new packets - making it a bit more interactive
- Faculty are recording lectures for classes that were originally in-person

What are the considerations being made by programs?

- How packets are created/what needs to be included to ensure that all different types of learners are accounted for
- Need to make sure they're maintaining quality despite completely different arrangements
- Need to address the anxiety that might be experienced by students being asked to work on their own
- Important to communicate to students that weights for assessments will remain the same for first part of the semester, trying to be very clear about what they need to do to finish the course and how assessment might change
- Facilitative instructional style has been tampered with under these circumstances - faculty encouraged to tinker with assessments and create new rubrics for assignments (example: not just multiple choice, but instead option to write letters using academic voice), faculty can provide options to students as to which modality they want to use for final assessment

How are messages being sent? JPAY, different platform? Are people being charged or not? Have people come to arrangements with facilities to reduce cost? How about lectures online? New technologies being used? Recorded or streamed?

- There is no way to send direct mail; some programs are now completely cut off from students
- Currently working with head of DOC to set up email (25 cents an email each way), and will need to pursue funding for that if it goes through
- Students that have tablets and can send and receive emails, but some programs do not have access to that system
- They are doing snail mail but unofficially
- Every site run differently - some academic coordinators are meeting in parking lot, diners, trying to salvage what they can and pass materials along
- Online sites using student portals for all courses now
- Students are also using message board functionality to talk to professors, third site correspondence which requires daily partnership with professors to make this happen
- Broadcast is being used in some facilities as long as the technology is available
- Some programs are now working with JPAY to get messages onto tablets, but need to work on acquisition of tablets to students without them to be issued as loaners during this time (this is not the preferred method and there is a cost involved for students; need more advocacy around the cost – zero cost – of communication).

How are programs addressing concerns about completing the semester, accreditation and grading?

- We are not, we fit within the HEA guidelines for percentages of students enrolled in correspondence courses.
- Reach out to accreditation bodies in order to have P/F penalties waived or relaxed, recommends showing lists of other places that are doing it as examples that it is possible (including own home institutions).

- Recommendation to follow the guidelines set by the university for Pass/Fail

How are programs starting to plan for Summer classes (opportunities, challenges, concerns)?

- We are trying to grapple with plans for summer — without access to tech, we are relying on mail and trying to figure out whether to start another course or focus programming on just maintaining some kind of learning community connection, and how to represent that to the DOC
- Starting with summer term where it's new faculty and there are no relationships between students and faculty
- Hard to imagine a scenario where they agree to start a semester to be fully correspondence and abandon face-to-face
- We currently offer CEUs which are calculated according to instructor contact hours, and it's not clear what that looks like if we start a new program session via correspondence rather than in-person
- It is not our current intention to offer a summer program IF we have to continue using only facilities mail to deliver packets.

How are programs addressing the balance of previous modes of engagement and the adjustments that are being made?

- During a prior disruption, as with this one, it felt better to go to correspondence rather than pause in order to keep students on track for degrees
- Program is enjoying expansion of modalities; this has been an opportunity to further empower students as they are now able to pace themselves, and the instruction is not entirely centered on the professor.
- Some of the work from students under this model has been stronger with asynchronous instruction/content.
- Using packets and a self-paced model is allowing programs to customize the learning experience of each student in the program
- Measuring academic rigor is not what this is about, but the experience of classroom and co-learning is what is most powerful for success after release, etc.

What are the concerns that programs have about the shifting modes of engagement?

- While expansion of modalities is great, that is only true when we're not cut off from everything else we rely on as a means to support and communicate with students
- Students are giving-up because they have lost space to work with other students
- Student do not have the accommodations they need for learning from their cells (loud, interrupted, hard to focus).
- Worth considering offering online to students who want it moving forward, but students who wanted face-to-face may not be able to succeed in a different modality
- Students are reacting in all different ways (dropping out, excelling, struggling, etc.)

Additional comments related to face-to-face and distance, remote, and/or correspondence teaching and learning.

As someone who earned degrees while serving an extended sentence and moved through the entire gamut of prison experiences and behaviors, I witnessed a lot of men doing a lot of things to get an education, trying a lot of things. Education is not information; we have to be careful that we are not speaking of delivering information as though that is the end-all of our efforts. Realistically, the overwhelming majority of men I knew who obtained their education while incarcerated would not have succeeded without human interaction. We were not built with the type of mindset that leaned toward cell study, towards long-distance learning.

As a professor myself and a wife of a husband who had spent 20 years in prison, I understand the importance of these face to face classes. I try to communicate as much as possible not only for the education, but also in knowing the importance of connection and advancement of academics.

We already use educational technology with our courses on the outside like Canvas so students have the benefit of in-person and asynchronous content on the outside. My hope is to provide students inside with access to what outside students have- research, canvas, and the importance of in-person contact.

Our Governor has already put us on quarantine through June 10, so we know we can't offer face-to-face courses this summer. However, I realize that our students need to know that we are here to support them and WILL NOT allow learning opportunities to end. We will strategically plan to offer courses through mail that would benefit them and help them get through this crisis - a course related to health and wellness, humanities, religion, etc.

Moving to remote learning has resulted in almost half of my inside students dropping out.

The work of these programs is to create community inside of a system that is intentionally structured to divide people from each other. That's how it's NOT like higher ed in the free world. So, we understand those spill-over effects to be as essential to the college experience as the content that exists inside a textbook.

As someone who took classes on the inside the most important part was interacting with professors and the outside students. It is way more than academics.