

LTCC taking education to prison inmates



Inmates at Folsom State Prison are receiving an education from Lake Tahoe Community College staff. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

Being in prison does not mean being sentenced to a life without education.

For nearly a year Lake Tahoe Community College has been striving to educate a slew of inmates in Northern California correctional facilities. There are 127 active students, with 234 inmates having been part of the program since it started in spring 2015.

Shane Reynolds, who heads the incarcerated student program for LTCC, gave an update to the board of education on Feb. 23. About every two weeks he is at the prisons, working one-on-one with inmates, delivering materials, seeing how he can help them succeed. LTCC is affiliated with the five prisons that are under Folsom State Prison as well as High Desert State Prison in Susanville.

Instructors from LTCC videotape lectures. Regular online

classes are not an option at this level of prison because Internet access is limited or nonexistent.

Students are given packets of work from the English, math and history departments. The whole sequence of math classes is required. Instructors Bruce Armburst and Wynn Walker make trips to the prisons to offer tutoring.

Next quarter geology will be offered.

As with all classes, these students have deadlines for turning in coursework and are graded like any other student. LTCC is the only college offering incarcerated students the opportunity to make the dean's list and honor roll – of which seven have done.

“We want to be leaders in education to the incarcerated,” Reynolds told the board.

LTCC works with the state board of governors when it comes to getting these students enrolled and then receiving payment as though they were taking classes on campus. Their books are also provided for free. The college is not losing any money on this remote education program, but instead is actually getting credit for the students as though they were in South Lake Tahoe.

The goal is that after nine quarters these students would have an associate of arts degree in social sciences that would be transferable to a UC or CSU. Most are taking three four-unit classes per quarter.

One thing Reynolds said needs improving is the bridge from prison to higher education once the person is released.

At the start these incarcerated students are given a 29-page guide detailing what is expected of them, it has the course descriptions, program details and a brief history of the college. It is an outline that would be beneficial to any

student.

“The students want to know what is going on on campus. They want a connection to the campus community,” Reynolds said.

Reynolds, though, reiterated multiple times that this is a unique population working under constraints that those on campus aren't contending with. Many of the prisons were on lockdown at various times last fall. All learning stops at times like that.

It took two quarters for Reynolds to convince prison officials that pencils should be allowed. The concern is they would be a weapon. Staples keeping papers together were another no-no at the get-go. It took three quarters to change the policy.

The next goal for Reynolds is to have the local jail be part of the incarcerated student program.