



Using Zoom Instructional Delivery for Higher Education in Prison Programs A Rationale and Proposal

Main Contact: Molly Lasagna, Executive Director, Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative (THEI), molly@thei.org

Goal of Proposal: To build solutions to barriers in staffing higher education in prison (HEP) courses on-site.

Rationale for the Proposal: While face-to-face instruction is the preferred mode of instruction, we recognize that the urgent need for isolation in pandemics necessitates alternative approaches to instruction. Our college partner has currently suspended all campus classes, and transitioned many of them to online instruction. In order to ensure that inside students are receiving the mandated amount of instructional hours, and that we are able to honor our agreements with TDOC and our college partner, we seek an alternative instructional mode. Again, this is a stop-gap measure to ensure that students are able to move through their coursework and maintain contact with their professors during the remainder of the semester. All courses will resume on-site in future semesters.

Proposal: One solution is to utilize room-based, video conference technology to stream the instructor into the classroom. Video conferencing allows students to have uninterrupted access to instruction during a time when physical proximity is not possible. Additionally, it reduces travel time and costs, and provides cost savings to the college partner, all with minimal security concerns. The faculty are live-streamed, not filmed, into the classroom so no recording of faculty or students occurs. Even though the instructor will not set foot inside the prison, THEI will still require that all instructors complete volunteer training and follow proper TDOC protocols. There is a precedent for other HEP programs using video conferencing (examples provided upon request).

What is room-based, video conferencing? “Screens or projectors are mounted in one room, while integrated video conferencing systems are set up in a centralized location with hardware and programs written to convey messages to that room. This is usually used for boardroom meetings and classrooms settings” (www.eztalks.com). A video cart allows for mobility of this technology if a dedicated classroom is not possible. A video cart would be secured in a locked room or closet while not in use. THEI program staff, in collaboration with TDOC IT staff, will train prison staff working in the school building on simple set-up and break-down of the technology.

Equipment Needed: Most colleges and universities own video conferencing technology; THEI college partners currently use Zoom™ Video Conferencing. Further, all TDOC facilities utilize Zoom conferencing for parole hearings. THEI will purchase a full system that includes a monitor, microphone, and camera that streams the instructor into the prison classroom and the students back to the instructor. The system also includes a camera (with sound) to stream the classroom back to the instructor. This allows for an interactive classroom experience, despite the instructor not being physically in the room.