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Dennis Bradby says CCA's educational programs for Mexican inmates tell customers "that, if you contract with CCA, you get a value-added service."

# Mexican education program

## CCA efforts for inmates garners attention of competitors

BY MIKE STUHLREYER  
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Helping prison inmates gain useful knowledge and skills they can use after being released can be a challenge, especially when they'll be released to a foreign country where English isn't the official language.

That's the task Corrections Corp. of America was facing. The Nashville-based company houses 20 percent of the estimated 50,000 undocumented Mexican immigrants being held in U.S. prisons.

To provide relevant rehabilitative programs to such a large population of Spanish-speaking inmates — each destined to be returned to Mexico after release — CCA initiated an unprecedented effort to offer relevant educational programming Spanish-speaking inmates could take with them. That meant the program had to allow them to earn credentials that would be recognized in Mexico.

CCA is the fourth-largest private prison company in the country. Every day, some 31,000 CCA confinees from various ethnic backgrounds participate in addiction treatment and faith-based or educational programs.

"We offer an array of programming,

modern day approaches to changing attitudes and behavior and improving skill sets, so confinees have better opportunities for employment," says

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Corrections Corp. of America

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Dennis Bradby, vice president of inmate programs for CCA.

Until about five years ago, almost all academic programs available to inmates in CCA prisons were taught in English. The education focused on American high school equivalency certification, which is measured in the United States

by performance on the General Education Development Test, or GED. It didn't focus on meeting the requirements of Mexico's educational system, where a high school education can pay significant dividends.

"In Mexico, you are 10 times more likely to get a job if you have a 12th grade education," says Bradby. "So we felt we had a professional and moral obligation to provide our Mexican confinees with relevant primary and secondary education, college courses or vocational training in their native language."

In 2001, CCA officials approached representatives of Mexico's national adult education agency, INEA, to initiate such a program. The program, called the Mexican Education Program, launched at the company's Cibola, N.M. facility.

Today the Mexican government supplies materials and training to CCA employees, all of them credentialed teachers, at five CCA facilities. At those facilities, nearly 1,300 Mexican inmates are working to meet their country's standards for high school equivalency, earning college credits or receiving vocational training.

The program is open to any Mexican national who is not deemed a problem inmate. While academic achievement and literacy varies, most of the inmates need less than a year to attain Mexican high school equivalency.

The program's continued growth remains a priority for CONEVyT, the governmental agency charged with orchestrating all of Mexico's education efforts.

"Some skill sets we teach apply specifically to Mexico, but others apply to language usage and basic subjects that benefit Hispanics in general," says Bradby. "So Mexico has worked to get it accepted by other Spanish-speaking countries, like Columbia and Honduras.

Other private prison companies and some state governments are starting to adopt the program, says Bradby. "We're pleased to be a cornerstone for this growth," he says.

In late September, the head of CONEVyT is scheduled to visit Nashville and is expected to sign an agreement granting CCA complete latitude in setting up the Mexican Education Program in any CCA facility. The official also is scheduled to attend a graduation ceremony for 500 at the Cibola facility. It will be the largest graduating class for the program to date.

Bradby says the education program is a fiscal bargain.

"We have trained a considerable number of high-performing inmates to be tutors, so the program is costing us less than 5 pennies per confinee per day," he says. "And from a competitive standpoint, it tells our customers that, if you contract with CCA, you get a value-added service you can be proud of. That's important in the selection process, so in ROI terms, it's good business."

Bradby also sees the program as an innovative approach to a critical social problem that has defined much of this year's election race.

"If we provide Mexican nationals with skill sets to stay home and gain employment, there is a cause and effect," he says. "They won't need to come to this country illegally."