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Pablo Gomez

Psychology professor reflects on first year teaching at CSUSB Palm Desert Campus during a pandemic

PALM DESERT, Calif. – Many people say that teaching is a difficult profession. Pablo Gomez can attest to that. As the first-ever full-time faculty member hired at the Cal State San Bernardino, Palm Desert Campus, Gomez was hired in 2020 and began teaching virtually for the university during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gomez, who was born in Mexico City and obtained his Ph.D. from Northwestern University in 2003, teaches statistics, introduction to psychological research and critical thinking, and was hired specifically for the Palm Desert Campus. His appointment marked an important milestone in the campus's 35-year history because since its inception, all faculty members have been non-tenure adjunct faculty.

One of the challenges the Palm Desert Campus has experienced over the years is that it has a 100 percent reliance on academic program delivery from departments on its San Bernardino campus. While this dependence provides tremendous advantages to PDC, housing its own faculty benefits the campus in many ways: they are generally more available to students, they

develop courses and programs, they conduct research involving students and they participate in campus events.

“I don’t think I fully appreciated how difficult it was going to be to learn online,” said Gomez. “I know that students learn less online, and that attention is incredibly fragmented when taking a class online. I tried to have very active courses in which students did a lot of screen sharing – all along I knew I was competing against the kitchen, Instagram and all other distractions that are easily available to virtual participants. We are wired to interact and learn from each other in person.”

Gomez says that he is delighted to finally be on campus this fall for the first time – after a year of teaching virtually – and is looking forward to interacting with students in person and getting his research program going.

Gomez was recently awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation for his project Collaborative Research: Interaction of Sensory and Response Processes in Decision Making to further his research activities at the Palm Desert Campus.

His research will focus on the timing and interaction between sensory and response processes in decision making utilizing students from communities that have historically been underserved by higher education STEM programs – those from the Coachella and Imperial Valleys in Southern California.

Undergraduate students will play a critical role in the development and implementation of these student projects, and the findings will be made available to other institutions that seek to enhance STEM education through research training in neuroscience. Gomez says that he also intends to start a data science center at PDC.

In his spare time, Gomez is an avid walker and runner and recently placed 10th in the Team U.S.A. Olympic Track & Field Trials. He wants to start a program at PDC to encourage students and give them the opportunity to train and compete in the Olympics.

September is Hispanic Heritage Month and Gomez believes in the importance of it being celebrated at CSUSB.

“I know that my exposure to the literature, the science, the theology, the arts, and the history of the peoples that speak Spanish and other Iberian languages has enriched my life tremendously,” he says. “To me, every month is Hispanic Heritage Month because I live a tri-cultural life; I am lucky to have had a mother that is a Hispanic literature professor in Mexico, to have grown up learning the history of our countries, and to have a great working relationship with Spanish universities. I know that many people in the USA would benefit from exposure to the culture that has given me so much. And also, at a time in which portrayals in the media begin and end with Narco movies, it is great to remind everyone that science, literature and the arts are also part of our history.”

The CSUSB Palm Desert Campus offers bachelor's and master's degrees, a doctorate in educational leadership, and teaching credentials and certificates. With more than 1,600 students, it is the Coachella Valley's four-year public university and plays a vital role in educating and training the region's growing population.

For more information about the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, contact Mike Singer in the Office of Strategic Communication at msinger@csusb.edu or (760) 341-2883, ext. 78107, or visit the PDC website at www.csusb.edu/pdc.