

THE COASTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH (CLEAR) INITIATIVE

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ABSTRACT

The *Coastal Law Enforcement Analysis and Research (CLEAR)* initiative is an experiential learning opportunity that provides students with real-world intelligence experience. CLEAR provides students interested in pursuing careers in intelligence with the opportunity to work with local law enforcement agencies. Students identify clients' intelligence needs and collect, analyze, and present their intelligence products to their clients. The article discusses the initiative's origins, the challenges and opportunities of developing partnerships with local security practitioners, and student learning outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

As Mark Twain once noted, "One gains at least two to three times more experience grabbing the tiger by the tail than reading about it in a book." (QuoteFancy, n.d.) The *Intelligence and Security Studies* program at Coastal Carolina University has taken this lesson to heart with a service learning/apprenticeship opportunity that allows students to support local security organizations' intelligence needs. This article delineates the genesis and evolution of the *Coastal Law Enforcement Analysis and Research (CLEAR)* initiative. The initiative is an effective way to familiarize undergraduate students with the intelligence profession.

INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY STUDIES AT COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Coastal Carolina University is a mid-sized public liberal arts university located in the South Atlantic Census Region near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Founded as a junior college associated with the University of South Carolina system in 1954, it became an independent institution in 1993. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accredits the University. Since gaining its independence, the University has experienced substantial growth in enrollments and programs. The current population of 9,410 graduate and undergraduate students is more than double the original enrollment. All students must complete one experiential learning course as a part of their graduation requirements.

The Intelligence and Security Studies program reflects the University's growth. The University hired its first full-time faculty member for the program in 2011. Since then, the program has launched itself as an independent academic department with eight full-time faculty members and more than 300 students. The department focuses on preparing students for entry-level positions in security-related career fields that involve research, analysis, planning, and evaluation of policies and programs (Coastal Carolina University, 2022).

COASTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

CLEAR is a logical extension of the departmental mission of providing students with the requisite knowledge and skills needed for an entry-level intelligence analyst career. This is done by developing a working relationship with an actual government organization needing intelligence support and allowing the students, with substantial faculty supervision, to provide that support. The CLEAR initiative has worked with four local and state law enforcement clients.

The logic of this arrangement is potentially beneficial to both sides. With the growing focus on intelligence-led policing, smaller departments recognize the potential value of such support. These departments often have limited resources to add staff to support this function. At the same time, students in the Intelligence and Security Studies program are eager for the ability to apply their skills and develop relevant work experience.

The initiative is designed to simulate the environment of an intelligence organization as it provides real-world support to local security organizations. The first step is for the faculty advisor to coordinate with a local security organization. In this meeting, the advisor and client will develop the intelligence requirements, identify the appropriate data needed for the work, and identify the client's preferred end state concerning the time and format of the analysis.

That coordination can be a challenge to initiate and maintain. For instance, a substantial obstacle in developing such an experiential activity is developing trust with the client. With CLEAR, our initial intelligence product in 2017 was developed based on data obtained by a Freedom of Information Act request. This data was used to create a "Proof of Concept" document that could be shared with prospective clients to demonstrate the potential value of this collaboration. Even with that, several personal interactions between the clients and the project advisors proved prudent. Indeed, this ongoing dialogue between clients and faculty advisors via e-mails, phone calls, and site visits engenders a positive working relationship and future opportunities for CLEAR participants and practitioners.

One up-front cost for clients is ensuring that the students are cleared to view the information used to develop the analysis. Students who join the group must submit to a background investigation and fingerprinting. This is a valuable introduction to the security clearance process they will face in their future career. From here, students are organized into analytic teams that meet once weekly for a coordination and planning meeting. Students then can work on the analytic product according to their schedule, with the team leader monitoring the group's progress.

The analytical work is not typically complex. It frequently involves pattern analysis projects requiring limited data and geospatial analytic training. However, the experience provides a realistic glimpse of the environment for intelligence professionals. Students must wrestle with data and process and organize large volumes of information. They also have to grapple with the challenge of incomplete information that impacts their analytical work. And this work is not just valuable for the student analysts. The student team leaders get positive (and negative) lessons in program management and intelligence leadership.

To be sure, deadlines to complete the project and the prospect of briefing a room of policymakers may cause the students some anxiety. Moon (2004) notes emotion and feeling are essential parts of the experiential learning process for students. This pressure ensures that students approach this task with exemplary professionalism. One way to mitigate students' concerns is for them to provide a first draft brief to a representative from clients. The feedback at the action-officer level (e.g., the intelligence officer of the police department) is a formative assessment practice. It can be invaluable to student confidence in their briefing skills and product quality. This preview is also helpful in preventing surprises at the formal brief.

For the students, this activity is about service learning and apprenticeships. Students provide real-world intelligence support to assist these local security organizations in improving decision-making and serving their communities. At the same time, these students have additional apprenticeship opportunities. First, the faculty advisor serves as the intelligence analysis operation's supervisor. In that capacity, the advisor sets the expectations of being an intelligence professional, reviews students' work, and provides guidance that will benefit aspiring intelligence professionals. There are also opportunities for apprenticeships directly with the clients, which recognize the potential recruitment value of this collaboration on full-time staffing for their organization.

ASSESSMENT

Since the CLEAR initiative is not a credit-bearing course, there is no formal academic assessment of the student's work in the common understanding of the term. Because this activity is a service-learning experience, the evaluation is driven by clients' feedback. When the students brief the leaders of a local security organization, they face pointed questions, which gives them direct feedback on their efforts. What is more, what is being assessed in these moments is the CLEAR initiative itself. After all, a poorly produced analytic product will likely ensure that the client does not want to collaborate with CLEAR on future projects—an informal but potent feedback mechanism. While students are not formally assessed, they certainly receive substantial feedback from the client and are aware that their performance impacts the collective reputation of the group.

This feedback tends to be quite effective. Students in the program typically stay with the CLEAR initiative for several years. While it is not a structured assessment technique, students learn from previous experiences and adjust their activities accordingly. The result tends to be improved student performance year after year.

THE ROAD AHEAD

To be sure, the CLEAR initiative looks to deepen its relationships with its current clients. As a result of these connections, new analytic opportunities arose in intelligence support to exercise development and serve as exercise evaluators during the actual events. Entertaining the notion of new clients is always dependent on the level of student interest in the initiative. For instance, during the pandemic, when most academic instruction at Coastal Carolina University was online, the membership of CLEAR diminished. While our initiative has rebounded with the return to in-person learning, the issue of student support is always a critical factor in this activity. After all,

over-committing to clients is a recipe for missed deadlines and lower-quality work, both of which can damage the future opportunities of the CLEAR initiative.

One development that will assist in furthering the educational objectives of CLEAR is establishing the Intelligence Operations Command Center (IOCC) at Coastal Carolina. Launched in April this year, the 1,500-square-foot facility is designed to give students a realistic intelligence-watch floor experience. The IOCC contains a collection-analysis space as well as a briefing room. Here, students participate in simulated real-world intelligence operations replete with day-to-day operations and the dynamics inherent to interagency collaborations. The IOCC also creates new opportunities for student analytical work to support practitioners. Beyond new clients, the CLEAR initiative is developing a new project that conducts open-source intelligence collection and analysis in support of critical infrastructure sectors in the state. The intent is that this work will grow into a weekly intelligence summary document that can provide situational awareness to practitioners in the community.

CONCLUSION

Students interested in careers in intelligence often seek academic programs that purport to assist in that effort. The CLEAR initiative, both by the environment it creates and the substantive mission it advances, is a valuable adjunct in allowing students to experience the life of an intelligence professional. While it cannot wholly reflect the wide range of experiences associated with such a career field, it does give students an initial understanding that informs their subsequent career development efforts.

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