

TamGram

Spring 2023
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Greetings MTC students,

I hope your spring term has gone well. We've been busy at MTC, preparing for the summer enrichment session and for the fall term. I'm personally really excited about some of the plans we're working on, both in terms of strengthening our academic offerings and student supports, and promoting a thriving college campus.

As you may remember, we will not be running a regular summer term this year. Although we have had three terms a year for decades, COVID quarantines made that impossible in 2022 and 2023. We hope to return to three terms in 2024, and we also hope you'll enjoy our summer enrichment offerings this year.

The other news that I wanted to mention is that we will not be holding a commencement ceremony this year, as we only have two students graduating in December 2023; we will celebrate these students at the 2024 ceremony. The graduating class is so small because a lot of our more advanced students paroled during COVID, and many of those who didn't, graduated last year.

Wishing all a good summer!
Amy Jamgochian
Chief Academic Officer

Amy



SUMMER EVENTS & WORKSHOPS

MTC will run a robust series of summer offerings including a business lab, film screenings, an author reading and conversation, computer literacy workshops, a science circle, co-designed workshops by MTC staff and students, and refresher courses for the Fall.

NON-CREDIT SCIENCE COURSE

In July, we will be offering a short, non-credit course for the students who plan to take science courses in the Fall 2023 or Spring 2024 semester. This course is intended to provide preparation for college-level science classes, with particular emphasis on critical reading skills for scientific research articles and scientific inquiry skills. It will introduce different concepts in biology, chemistry, and physics using primary scientific research literature, and will discuss diversity, equity and inclusion in different scientific disciplines.

ETHICS BOWL

Mount Tamalpais College and UC Santa Cruz students debated complex moral and ethical questions in the College's fourth Ethics Bowl tournament on February 26. Ethics Bowl is an intercollegiate debate tournament that models a constructive civic dialogue, with each team defending what they believe to be the best ethical approach to a particular case, rather than being assigned a pro or con position. We're proud to report that the MTC team—Angel Alvarez, Jessie Rose, Ben Tobin, Tony de Trinidad, and Rob Tyler—was awarded the win!

ALUMNI CONVERSATIONS

This summer, MTC will host a series of conversations with alumni who will share their experiences and views on what it takes to build healthy relationships in the communities they live in. The Alumni Conversations series will be recorded dialogues speaking to complicated questions and issues such as re-entry, gang violence, and growth. Our goal is to promote the empowerment, visibility, and civic engagement of currently and formerly incarcerated people.

IN THE COMMUNITY: Alumnus Javier Jimenez

Graduating During a Pandemic

MTC alumni Javier Jimenez was released to the small town of Tracy, CA on March 16th, 2020. Despite not being able to walk the stage that year with his classmates because of the COVID-19 pandemic, he recalls saying, "I'm just glad to be free." However, on March 18, Javier found that Tracy had closed operating buildings with businesses at half capacity. "I did not have the opportunity to apply for a job, get a license or a social security card because most government buildings closed down two days after I was released from prison," Javier said.

He was searching for employment and housing upon reentering society but soon realized that his support network group could not help him either, as the programs they were working with had shut down.

Javier stated that he visited 15 different apartments and eventually ended up buying a trailer to live in because nobody would rent him an apartment or a hotel room. "I went to one of those hourly hotels on Wilson Way in Stockton

and they asked if I had a felony and refused to rent me a hotel," said Javier, explaining that the person at the hotel started to question him because he had no identification to show them at that time.

"My parole officer tried to get me a job and help, I guess, but I didn't receive any," said Javier. He started selling bicycles on the marketplace Facebook – and that's what sustained him for eight months until he finally got a job through his friend. "If it wasn't for my mom finding an old washed-up social security card, I don't know what I would've done."

He printed a copy of his social security card, which was so old it was barely legible, and placed it in Photoshop like he has done many times as the

photographer for San Quentin News and darkened the numbers. He told his friend what he had done.

He said that his friend knew that he couldn't use a copy of his social security card to hire Javier, but he hired Javier as an Operating Engineer Water Tender anyway.

"It's my Zen and I want to make memories and capture them. I'm trying to leave my memories behind."



Javier Jimenez in 2019 before graduation

Javier stated that he acquired the skills he used to fix his social security card in Photoshop from his passion: photography. Javier graduated from high school in 1995 and started college in 1998 where he took a photography class.

"I never really paid attention in college to photography, but I knew I liked it," Javier said. He said he finds taking pictures peaceful. "It's my Zen and I want to make memories and capture them. I'm trying to leave my memories behind."

Javier said that his interest in photography peaked again when he became the photographer for San Quentin News. "When R.J. Mickelson from the San Francisco Chronicle came inside the San Quentin newsroom, I was amazed at all the information that he taught us."

Javier said that R.J. taught him about shutter speed and apertures. "He was our Internet at that time, and he brought me all the information I needed to become a professional photographer and I still have his material today.

I just started an Instagram and a Facebook page so I can show my work. I would love to become a photographer and leave my digital Imprint on this world."



Javier Jimenez standing over his friend Brandon pointing out a setting on the camera

IN THE COMMUNITY: Alumnus Adamu Chan

Building Community Through Filmmaking

We sat down with Adamu Chan and asked him about his documentary, What These Walls Won't Hold, and what he hopes to accomplish? His film was selected for inclusion in the San Francisco International Film Festival in March.

During the time I was incarcerated, I was privileged to learn the practice of filmmaking inside the San Quentin Media Center. I eventually rose to lead FirstWatch (now ForwardThis Productions), a film collective devoted to telling the authentic stories of people incarcerated across California prisons. This work allowed me to embody community organizing and relationship-building as essential values, and instilled a strong commitment to centering the voices of my incarcerated community who had been systematically invisibilized.

Shortly after my release from prison in 2020, I received a grant from Working Films, raised additional funding, and committed to a 2-plus-year journey of directing my first documentary film, *What These Walls Won't Hold*. The film was an expression of my sincere desire for impacted people to have

the agency to tell their own stories, and the ability to lead their own projects. I set out to create the kinds of relationships and support structures that would ensure my success in a space that was outside of my comfort zone, without formal filmmaking experience or a formal mentor. I also became a Stanford CCSRE Mellon Arts Fellow in 2022. The fellowship helped me create a community with other artists committed to social change,



supported my capacity and growth as an artist, and opened me up to being in a space of receiving feedback from people with different perspectives.

As an outgrowth of relationships that I've built in the film industry, I was granted the opportunity to direct a short documentary for Independent Lens' Bridge Builders series and chose a valued member of my formerly incarcerated community as the

subject of the film. These intentions have led me to realize the importance of stepping into positions of power myself and supporting others alongside me in a shared commitment to one another's liberation.

I have personally experienced the transformative power of filmmaking as a tool to tell my own story and defy dominant narratives, including those harmful narratives about incarcerated people and the communities they come from. My intention is to share this gift with people who may have also seen themselves represented in ways that are disempowering. The process of filmmaking has also given me an intimate knowledge of the trust-building that is imperative for me to cultivate in order to create space for others to share their stories from an authentic and vulnerable place. This has really informed my practice and philosophy toward filmmaking and its role in healing and shaping the world I want to live in.

Adamu hopes to one day have a viewing of his film inside of the Education Department at San Quentin State Prison.

FALL 2022 COURSE EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS

MTC student feedback:

- Nearly all students (99%) rated their course as "excellent," "very good," or "good" and most students (91%) said their courses covered the right amount of material.
- Of the students who did not use tutoring in humanities classes, 40% said this was due to scheduling conflicts.
- In math and science courses, 16% of students felt that their class moved too fast.
- Only about 22% of students used the new Writing Space that was designed for students to get writing help for their classes.
- About 14% of Introduction to College students felt that the course could cover more material.

MTC staff is addressing student feedback in the following ways:

- In the Spring of 2023, MTC explored having general Humanities & Social Sciences Tutors rather than Designated Tutors for specific classes.
- MTC is continuing to refine math and science course content to ensure that the pacing is in line with what works best for student learning.
- MTC will continue to make the Writing Space available and increase our promotion efforts in coming semesters so that students know this is available.
- The Intro to College instructors have added more material on the basis of student needs, and are surveying students mid-semester to check in about the course pace and content.
- When students have concerns or suggestions about specific course content, student feedback will be discussed with the MTC's Program Team and the specific course instructors to determine what, if any, next steps are needed.

MTC FACULTY APPRECIATION EVENT!

Mt. Tam College held another wonderful faculty appreciation event that was truly amazing. "You are a model of what education can do for the human soul. Thank you for your wisdom, passion, sternness, insight, and stories," shared one student.



SEEKING STUDENT SUBMISSIONS

MTC is seeking to build a portfolio with creative artwork from students to share with our community in newsletters like this one, on our website, and in print materials. We know that there's tremendous artistic talent among our students and we want to showcase it!

In addition to general submissions, we are currently working on our annual report and are looking for art that captures the physical world you inhabit: the spaces, objects, people, or landscapes that surround you. Consider both the meaningful aspects of your world and the mundane. We aim to showcase work that shows the world of the College or San Quentin through your eyes. Submissions can be illustrations, drawings, or doodles—any artwork on paper. Please include a title on all submissions. Do not submit any images that would not be appropriate for all audiences. We will not be able to use all submitted artwork, but we will scan your work and return the original to you. If we do decide to publish your work, we will ask that you sign a release form granting MTC the right to do so.

Please drop off your submissions at the Education Building, Attn: Bonaru Richardson, Mount Tamalpais College.

MTC NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2023

