



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JODY LEWEN

One of the first things I learned about higher education in prison was about the devastation wrought by the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which barred people in prison from receiving Pell Grants. Following its passage, what had been hundreds of post-secondary education programs in prisons around the country dropped to a handful. For the over two decades since, most people entering the field have essentially inherited the belief that the reinstatement of Pell was *the* path for restoring the field nationally.

“In the last several years, public, political, and philanthropic support for higher education in prison has entered the mainstream; nearly all of that support has been organized around the goal of making public funds available, most often by reinstating Pell.”

When I started teaching at San Quentin in 1999, there was virtually no political support for such a step; most discussions focused on whether such programs should even be allowed to exist. But in the last several years, public, political, and philanthropic support for higher education in prison has entered the mainstream; nearly all of that support has been organized around the goal of making public funds available, most often by reinstating Pell.

Few who have not experienced first-hand the logistical, administrative, ethical, and intellectual terrain that this field faces every day can grasp the complexity of “scaling” it; even less can they imagine the risks that public funding introduces. It would thus have been ideal if those early investments had started with a process of analysis and long-term planning, *led by experienced practitioners*, to address the field’s most pressing challenges and questions. What are the key characteristics of excellent academic programs, faculty training, and student support systems? How will we create a pipeline of quality program leadership and faculty sufficient to staff hundreds of new programs, including in remote rural regions? How can

schools provide access to technology and library resources? Whose job is it to create and uphold academic quality standards? How are schools to create relationships with prisons that foster the stability of programs and yet protect their independence?

The landscape now emerging, both in California and nationally, likely foreshadows what is to come in the event that Pell is fully reinstated without

both extensive changes to policy design and a massive investment in the field itself. While a number of schools now receiving public funds are doing great quality work, an alarming number are not. Many are instead launching programs quickly, without adequate planning or qualified faculty; offering classes inconsistently, primarily to maximize their FTE enrollment; or planning courses and degrees based on convenience or politics, rather than students’ needs. Others are relying on “tablets,” rather than teachers, to deliver course content; pressuring students to carry more units, to maximize revenue; or preventing students from enrolling if they are ineligible for financial aid. (While most people assume that all incarcerated students will be eligible for Pell in the absence of a ban, in fact, a large proportion are ineligible for federal student aid for reasons unrelated to their incarcerated status.) A few schools are now lobbying departments of corrections to push out quality face-to-face programs in order to replace them with low-cost, low-quality distance education programs. No one anywhere is systematically tracking and reporting publicly on these problems, much less crafting solutions to counteract them; nor does anyone have either the authority or the resources to do so.

The conditions that led to all of this were multifaceted. Many who participated in the design of these initiatives believed that the work required no content-specific expertise: simply

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amass sufficient political support to secure public funding through legislative action, and the work will be done. But structural incentives were also at play: many major funders believe that large scale systemic change occurs, by definition, only through legislation. No matter how vast or strategic their impact, actual programs are always merely “direct service.” As a result, many nonprofits depend on traditional advocacy campaigns to generate support for their work. And in the meantime, those organizations with the greatest expertise remain obscure and starved for resources.

In addition, as awkward as it is to write, the field of advocacy at times behaves like an industry. Intermediary organizations, consultants, and activists sometimes jockey for funding or positions of leadership and then box out critical voices because they view them as competition. Funders often prefer to invest in established organizations or people with name recognition, who are in turn unlikely to call attention to their own incentives or lack of expertise. Anyone charged with overseeing an initiative for which they lack the content knowledge; or who is seeking a “big win,” or a big contract; or who simply does not want to commit more than a year or two; may be glad to reduce an entire complex cause to a single legislative goal.

But the state of the higher education in prison professional community also played a role. For decades it had been over-worked, under-resourced, and barely organized, and it was ill-equipped to respond to the flash flood of highly-resourced, well-intentioned, yet ill-advised initiatives. In addition, some advocates believed that public funding — and specifically the reinstatement of Pell — whatever its flaws, would do far more good than harm, and that the public airing of doubt

would undermine the urgent cause of getting something, anything, to the thousands of incarcerated people currently without access to programs. As a result, some actively silenced dissent, insisting that concerns about quality were unfounded, even “elitist.”

Another critical factor — then and now — is how few advocates are evidently tracking the devolution of higher education itself since 1994, and considering its implications for incarcerated students. The threats facing vulnerable students today come not just from predatory for-profit education corporations; rather, the defunding of public higher education, combined with the declining enrollment and dwindling resources of independent institutions, has created a new hazard: otherwise legitimate colleges and universities seeking new markets for their lucrative, low-quality satellite or distance education programs. Given the already epic ongoing societal failure to protect even non-incarcerated students from these threats, it is unclear why anyone would expect outcomes to be less destructive in the prison context.

Nevertheless, glimmers of hope abound: in the steadily organizing community of dedicated practitioners; promising research initiatives exploring the complex impact of quality higher education in prisons; funders approaching the field with wisdom, patience, and humility; and thousands of currently and formerly incarcerated students who can attest to the impact of quality education. If we chart the next chapter well, this community will lead the way, not just on behalf of people in prison, but on behalf of people everywhere who want, need, and deserve access to affordable quality higher education.



SPRING SEMESTER

Course Offerings

- English 99A: Developmental English I
- English 99B: Developmental English II
- Math 50A: Developmental Math I
- Math 50B: Developmental Math II
- Math 99: Elementary Algebra
- Math 115: Intermediate Algebra
- English 101A: Reading and Composition
- English 101B: Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing
- English 204: Interdisciplinary Reading, Writing, and Research
- Philosophy 270: Social Ethics
- English 243: Critical Theory
- History 102: U.S. History II
- Spanish 101: Elementary Spanish
- Screenwriting 101
- Psychology 221: Introduction to Psychology
- Math 135: Statistics
- Art 117B: Introduction to Theatrical Improvisation

Other Activities Happening This Spring

- A weekly discussion of philosophical and applied ethics, culminating in an Ethics Bowl competition against outside teams
- A weekly Math Circle, an alternative non-credit math enrichment program
- A non-credit workshop on visual literacy and mass incarceration
- A non-credit workshop on environmental justice
- Regular workshops on student success

STUDENT-CENTERED

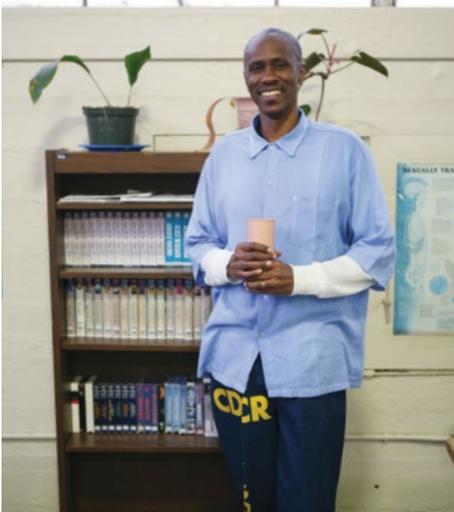
LEARNING AT SAN QUENTIN

AMY JAMGOCHIAN,
ACADEMIC PROGRAM DIRECTOR

I taught at UC Berkeley for over a decade before I joined the Prison University Project, and one distinct difference in our classrooms at San Quentin is that there is far less silence, far less need for the instructor to put on a song and dance to get students' attention.

This is fantastic, because the Prison University Project is committed to student-centered learning, which sees students as engaged participants in the learning environment, who bring their own knowledge, experience, and background to their learning, and whose learning requires active involvement. Our students at San Quentin are more engaged from the start, which can make student-centered learning feel easier to bring about.

But even though our students are so enthusiastically and fully involved, there are still profound barriers to their genuine engagement. In an authoritarian environment like the prison, free expression can be dangerous. And even if the classroom



space may feel “safe” in some ways, the fact that our volunteer base is so much whiter and more economically privileged than our students presents another barrier: will this instructor really understand and respect me? Many of our students also have obstacles to learning in the form of learning differences and prior lack of access to quality education. Finally, a good portion of our students are so grateful for the opportunity to attend college in prison that they feel that to voice a contrary opinion or complaint would be rude or ungrateful.

So to truly center our students' experiences and voices in the learning process, we are developing initiatives that address these hurdles. One exciting organizational development is that we have added a Learning Specialist position to the program team, who will closely support students with learning differences or other barriers to success. I'm thrilled that we were able to hire our own Allison Lopez, who is in a unique position to build this part of our program. By prioritizing the challenge of addressing barriers to learning, we seek to acknowledge the many different paths our students have taken to arrive at college and the desperate inequality in educational access that has contributed so deeply to the prison crisis.

We are also working to develop effective venues for students to voice their needs and opinions. One exciting project in this vein is that Spanish and College Prep writing instructor Nayeon Kim is working with a group



of students to develop a student-led teacher training in diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom. Nayeon is meeting with this group of students regularly to learn about their experiences in Prison University Project classes, with the goal of building a bridge to understanding between students and faculty of different backgrounds. This project will create a sustainable feedback loop between students and instructors about best practices in our unique setting. The first training is scheduled for April, and we plan to build it into the regular trainings offered to instructors.

There is a huge amount of work left to do: we need better strategies for fostering more diversity in our instructor pool; we need to develop more trainings for instructors on student-centered learning; and we need to develop institutional support for the use of resources that are not yet allowed inside the prison to address learning differences. But I'm proud of the fierce commitment our staff and instructors have to centering students in the learning process. Not only are we working to provide a rigorous, quality, and equitable education, but we are building a model of what this can look like even in the face of some of America's most intractable economic and societal inequities.

BUILDING BRIDGES: REFLECTIONS ON THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM AND PHILANTHROPY WORKSHOP

TONY DETRINIDAD, STUDENT AND WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT



This fall brought, for me, an entirely fresh outlook on life when I was given the opportunity to enter the Criminal Justice Reform and Philanthropy workshop. A bit before the beginning of the semester I received an invitation, as all Prison University Project students did, to apply for the workshop.

The process consisted of writing a short paper on what I saw as the element needed for “effective” criminal justice reform. I admit to having some degree of hesitation before deciding to apply. I just didn’t look at myself as the kind of person who could impact this world in any substantial way. Then a friend posed this question to me: “Who better to contribute to the solution than those closest to the problem?” So I wrote on the need for those of us with the vision for change to be able to build bridges to those with the power to make that change happen.

And I’m so grateful I submitted that writing, because building those bridges then became possible. Once in the class, I was given a chance to study and begin to understand the great many dynamics of power and the structures through which it takes form. Many of the readings were a lot to take in, but I couldn’t imagine when or where else I’d get the opportunity to read any works such as those by John Pfaff. And I got not only to meet, but to also sit with and learn from some of today’s greatest minds in the world of change, including people such as Jack Dorsey (co-founder of Twitter).

Here I am in prison, and I had a bonafide research assistant. It was amazing to be able to tell that and inspire a fun bit of jealousy to loved ones back home (who, themselves with Master’s Degrees, have never had R.A.s!). With the help of those

R.A.s and my classmates, my ideas finally coalesced into an actual proposal. I then presented that proposal along with the rest of my class to a room full of people who cared enough about our ideas to come into San Quentin on a Saturday and hear them. I will never forget how it felt to watch guys with whom I’ve joked and chatted transform into inspirational leaders of change, as one by one they bravely went up before this crowd and presented their visions for change to a room full of strangers.

It was then I realized what this meant to me. I felt humbled by the gift given to me that semester. I was inspired to see that people did care about my situation, and that I could make a difference. The bridges we built are still there, and even though the workshop is over, the work continues.



INTRODUCING NEW BOARD MEMBERS

IN 2018, THE PRISON UNIVERSITY PROJECT WELCOMED SIX NEW MEMBERS TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.



Theresa Roeder is Professor of Decision Sciences in the College of Business at San Francisco State University. There, she is

actively involved in improving student access to education as well as the education itself. She earned her Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering and Operations Research at UC Berkeley, where she also occasionally teaches. Theresa is a current Prison University Project math tutor and has co-taught Introduction to Business and Communications. She previously served on the Board of Directors for and as webmaster of the Oakland Symphony Chorus.



Jeff Feinman is the West Coast Executive Director of Springboard Collaborative, a nonprofit that supports

school districts to close the reading achievement gap through family engagement. Prior to leading Springboard, Jeff was the Vice President of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula where he redesigned all college access programming. A Bay Area native and UC Berkeley and USF alumni, Jeff also led Mission Graduates as its Executive Director from 2006–2012 and founded The DJ Project — an urban arts program that leverages hip-hop pedagogy and entrepreneurship to engage young adult populations. The program celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2019.



Patrice Berry is currently a FUSE Corps Executive Advisor in the Office of Mayor Libby Schaaf in Oakland, CA. Previously, she

was the Director of College Track, East Palo Alto. Prior to College Track, Patrice served as director of the Student Success Center at the Netter Center for Community Partnerships and co-founded the Leaders of Change program. Patrice earned her B.A. in political science from Swarthmore College and holds an M.Ed. from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, where she was a Woodrow Wilson-Rockefeller Brothers Fund fellow. She is currently completing her Ph.D. at Temple University.



Haley Pollack is the Principal of College and Career Pathways at Five Keys Schools and Programs. She has been an educator for more

than ten years, working in a variety of capacities to help students meet their own educational goals and gain confidence in their own innate abilities. After receiving her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she taught History and Gender Studies to a wide range of students at San Francisco State University, Diablo Valley College, and Santa Clara University. As a volunteer with the Prison University Project, Haley taught a number of classes, including working in study hall as a writing tutor. As an advisor at College Track, she worked with low-income and first-generation college students, helping them to achieve their goals of a college degree.



Kathy Richards, J.D., retired from a solo law practice focused on family and dependency law. She has served as an instructor

since 2014 for the Prison University Project and as coach for San Quentin's Ethics Bowl team. Kathy is currently the Treasurer on the Board of Directors of the Sonoma Speakers Series. Previously, Kathy served as a Board member for the Lawyer Referral and Information Services under the auspices of the SF Bar Association and as a Board member and Secretary of the Willmar Family Grief & Healing Center. She has taught as an Adjunct Professor of Legal Writing and Research at Golden Gate University School of Law and Adjunct Professor of Family Law at SF State Paralegal Program.



Elana D. Leoni is the Founder of Leoni Consulting Group LLC, a boutique consultancy aimed at helping edtech organizations

with their online marketing efforts, specifically focusing on social media, influencer, and content marketing, along with authentic community building. Prior to this, Elana spent eight years as the Director of Social Media Strategy & Marketing at Edutopia / The George Lucas Educational Foundation. Elana also spent five years at a SaaS corporate philanthropy startup, specializing in CSR and corporate volunteerism. Elana graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelors in Business Administration from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo and recently graduated from the Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley with her M.B.A.



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“By prioritizing the challenge of addressing barriers to learning, we seek to acknowledge the many different paths our students have taken to arrive at college and the desperate inequality in educational access that has contributed so deeply to the prison crisis.”

— AMY JAMGOCHIAN, ACADEMIC PROGRAM DIRECTOR

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

The mission of the Prison University Project is to provide excellent higher education to people incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison, and to stimulate meaningful public dialogue about higher education access and criminal justice in California and across the United States. We provide approximately 20 courses each semester leading to an Associate of Arts degree in liberal arts, as well as college preparatory courses, to approximately 350 students. All instructors work as volunteers; most are faculty or graduate students from local colleges and universities. We rely entirely on donations from individuals and foundations.

Prison University Project Board of Directors

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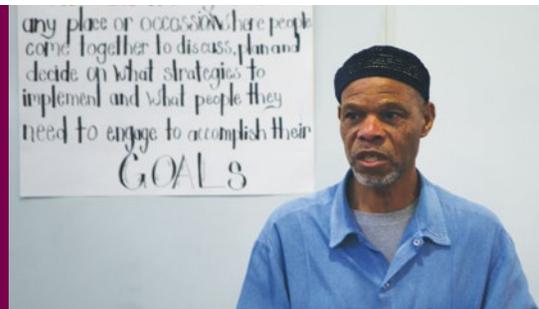
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Theresa Roeder
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YOU CAN HELP

We’ve accomplished so much through the generosity of our donors. Your contribution helps us increase our capacity at San Quentin, build a national model for prison higher education, train and support the next generation of prison higher education providers, and amplify the voices of incarcerated people across the nation.

To contribute, please go to prisonuniversityproject.org/donate.



PHOTOS

Cover: Student participants, workshop facilitators, and research assistants at the Symposium on Philanthropy and Criminal Justice Reform (Photo: *San Quentin News*)

“Student-Centered Learning at San Quentin:” Left — Prison University Project student Richard “Bonaru” Richardson (*San Quentin News*); Right — Impact Justice President Alex Busansky talks with Prison University Project student Conrad Cherry (*San Quentin News*)

“Building Bridges:” Left — Tony DeTrinidad presenting his proposal at the Symposium on Philanthropy and Criminal Justice Reform (*San Quentin News*); Right — Jesse Vasquez presenting his proposal at the Symposium on Philanthropy and Criminal Justice Reform (*San Quentin News*)

Spring Semester photo: Glasses and class notes (R.J. Lozada)

Above: Lonnie Morris presenting his proposal at the Symposium on Philanthropy and Criminal Justice Reform (*San Quentin News*)