

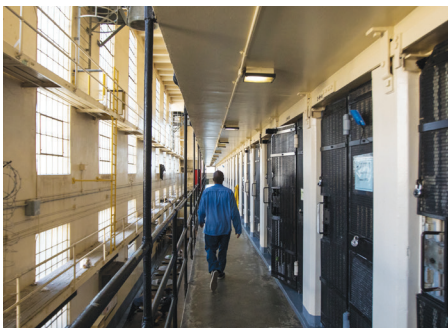


LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JODY LEWEN

Years ago, in an interview by a major radio network of a student at San Quentin, the reporter suddenly said, “Now tell us about the moment you changed!” The student said there hadn’t really been a specific moment; he had been growing and changing for years. But the interviewer pressed him, as if he were being coy.

To some extent, this dynamic may result from widespread cultural assumptions: prisoners are lost and bad; programs make them “found” and good.



Finally the student shared a conversation he’d had with his mother during a visit, when something she said made him begin to think seriously about pursuing his education. But that conversation had taken place long before he had enrolled in the College Program. Even the sound guy seemed disappointed. They were clearly hoping to hear that the Program had changed him, in a dramatic fashion.



Behold the tension between the journalist’s desire (in this case, for a dramatic story of redemption) and the will of an incarcerated person to share their own unique, authentic story. This tension surfaces constantly, not just in radio, print, and TV journalism, but in documentary film, academic research, public policy, and simple conversation.

To some extent, this dynamic may result from widespread cultural

assumptions: prisoners are lost and bad; programs make them “found” and good. But I often wonder why so many people cling to such ideas, even when confronted with divergent information.

People at San Quentin spend thousands of hours every year educating journalists. They share their insight and experience; answer deeply personal questions; allow themselves to be filmed, photographed or recorded. A few may enjoy the spotlight, but they also know they’re accepting considerable risk, as even the most well-intentioned media sometimes betray the trust of incarcerated people, for example, by misrepresenting their journalistic intentions, distorting facts or statements, or sensationalizing content in a humiliating way.

One education reporter conducted a series of interviews about a specific college class, but opened her article with a graphic description of a student’s commitment offense – evidently found online. I wonder what causes so many journalists to lose all sense of boundaries, or even simple decency, when encountering people in prison.

I believe one reason that so many incarcerated people persevere in spite of all of this is because they know that ill-informed media are one of the greatest obstacles to criminal justice reform. They share their individual stories in order to share their collective humanity; their goal is to effect systemic change.

continued on page 4 >

One of the most brilliant characteristics of the student body at San Quentin is its extraordinary diversity of educational backgrounds and learning styles. Teachers, students and staff are constantly reflecting on the learning process, communicating about challenges, and collaborating to create strategies to address them.

The most valuable knowledge we have stems from this type of work, and from those students who are willing to share their own insight and experience. The essays at right are just two examples.

ON BEING IN THE WORLD

WITH AN “AUTISTIC BRAIN” JOSEPH KRAUTER

My name is Joseph Krauter (like Sour Kraut). I have ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder. I am a high functioning autistic; I was diagnosed with Autism in May 2015, here at San Quentin.

My clinician pushed for me to get tested here because SQ (and the prison system) don't have any protocols for autistics unless they are so low functioning that they have to become EOP and sent to a mental health yard or hospital. I don't qualify, thank God.

Part of my condition is “sensory sensitivity” or sensory overload. Because of the way an autistic brain is wired, sensory stimulation can be very overwhelming, even painful. I am sensitive to light, sound (specific pitches and tones), smell (certain smells), proximity and touch. Light, sound and touch are the most severe sensory issues that I endure and suffer through every day.

For me (because every autistic person is different) light sensitivity is bad. I'm sensitive to all forms of bright light or colors, even black light reflection. Initially the sensation is a sharp, stabbing pain. If the light persists the pain moves to my temples and upper left or right quadrants of my head, becoming the same pressure pain like a serious sinus-pressure headache or an ice cream headache that won't go away. The pain will return to my eyes making them feel like they are being covered with hot sand, and be very fatigued to where it is hard to visually focus.

If the light sensitivity overload has no relief then it will begin to spill over into my other sensory issues causing uncontrolled raises in volume (sound), including my own inner dialogue, dizziness, nausea, tactile overload until I could lose my ability to walk.

Sound sensitivity is tolerable as long as light sensitivity is managed. But when things get brighter, things get louder. Mostly high-pitched sounds and tones cause anxiety or can trigger a mild flight response. If sound overload persists it could trigger anger flashes.

Touch is rough. Whenever I am unexpectedly touched it feels like an electric shock. Like a mean static electricity shock. If I can see the contact coming or if I can initiate the touch, I can brace for impact and tolerate the feeling. This sensory overload is constant. I've just learned to mitigate it over time.

My peripheral vision is dominant. Without the proper glasses frames and prescription – along with transitional lenses to protect me from the light sensitivity, it is extremely difficult to focus. My glasses prescription does two things: it corrects my nearsightedness and forces my eyes to focus directly ahead of me rather than let my peripheral eyesight take control. If the glasses and frames are correct, then there is very little sensory overload. If all the requirements are not met, the glasses fail within 30 days at best. Sunglasses don't work well because if I wear something continuously tinted or shaded, I will lose my depth perception.

Because of the way an autistic brain is wired, sensory stimulation can be very overwhelming, even painful.

ON BEING TERRIFIED OF MATH

LIONEL SCOTT

For a while I enjoyed school. It was a place to be outside of my home where I felt comfortable. What I looked forward to was how some teachers would show genuine interest in their students.

I tried to be one of those students that the teachers would notice because of my hard work and dedication. The reading teachers for some reason always seemed to have a lot of patience. School had its ups and downs especially because of the environment I was raised in. I was raised in a dysfunctional household. There were times when we could relax. For instance, when our father was at work, ninety-eight percent of the time we could relax. When my father was home and my mother was away we had a ninety-nine percent chance of relaxation time. On the other hand, when they were both in the house we always knew to keep our guards up. There were arguments and physical abuse at any given moment.

Once I entered school I had to figure it out. On the way to school I kept my guards up. When I was in the classroom I could relax. When we had recess my guards were up. After recess I could relax again until after school was let out. There was the lunch period but then everyone would be so busy eating you didn't have to worry about much. All and all I would receive seven hours minus the thirty minutes for recess and the thirty minutes for lunch to feel safe.

I would say out of fifteen teachers, seven would be irritated, three couldn't have cared less and five would stay after school if needed to help a student. I never thought of one subject

as being harder than another. I just did what was set in front of me two thirds of the time.

Math was a subject that I thought was the same as any other, but there was a teacher that changed me. Today, the teacher would have been put in jail for what he done. At that time it was socially accepted. I remember it was a nice sunny day and our math class was right after recess.

was going to be afraid of something it should have been the things that happened to me after that incident. I have learned how to overcome almost any obstacle that is placed in front of me or get around it. I haven't won every fight but I have never feared anyone or anything. I've stood in front of men with knives, guns, and other weapons but none of that comes close to the phobia I have when it comes to being taught math.

I met some special people that reminded me of those caring teachers that devoted their time to teaching

We piled into the classroom and a third of the class was still hyped up from recess. I wasn't paying attention to the teacher the way I should have. He called me to the front of the class and told me to work out a problem on the blackboard. I got the answer wrong I also got hit with a wooden stick that they called a pointer. This stick was approximately thirty-six inches long and at least a quarter inch thick. It felt like a first degree burn across my butt and the humiliation that came along with it was enough to know that I didn't ever want to experience anything like that again. That was the first time I could remember being caught off guards, humiliated, and hurt outside of my home in less than four seconds. I had lost my last comfort zone.

After that I tried to be tough and suck it up, after all I was not someone that had not faced abuse before. I grew up with this type of stuff happening all the time. I don't know for sure what it was that happened. All I know is from that day forward I have had a fear of math. It seems to me, if I

I know I'm going to have to face that fear. I just pray that my math teacher will be a female because that man took something away from me that I'm having a hard time getting back. I dropped out of school, went to prison with my guards up one hundred percent of the time. While serving time in San Quentin Prison I met some special people that reminded me of those caring teachers that devoted their time to teaching before that incident. Now I'm thinking of taking math again.



FALL SEMESTER

Course Offerings

- Reading and Composition
- Critical Reading, Writing and Thinking
- Critical Reading, Writing and Research
- Communications (Public Speaking)
- Sociology
- Ancient World History
- Ethics
- Shakespeare
- Creative Writing
- Introduction to Film
- Math 50A (Pre-College, Part I)
- Math 50B (Pre-College, Part II)
- Elementary Algebra (Pre-College, Part III)
- Intermediate Algebra
- Statistics
- Pre-College English, Part I (2 sections)
- Pre-College English, Part II (2 sections)
- Reading Strategies (Pre-College)

Other Activities Happening This Fall

- A weekly Math Circle
- A weekly debate group, culminating in a debate against outside teams in spring
- A 5-week public policy workshop series
- A lecture by Reza Aslan in December
- Book club event on Matthew Desmond's *Evicted* in October

CONTINUED

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Some journalists are also committed to disrupting their profession's complicity in the current system; in fact, the stereotypical redemption narratives may be a byproduct of precisely this intention. Yet while such narratives may evoke compassion, they largely sidestep the larger imaginative breakdown.

For most people, both prisoners and prisons are otherworldly abstractions – they exist not just geographically apart, but symbolically beyond the real. Prison is a place where many Americans feel it's fine if people are hurt or killed; it's a place where they can find rape funny. The problem is not simply animosity or even sadism; it's the failure to even recognize the incarcerated person as an ordinary human being who is located in this world.

The Redeemed Prisoner, while no longer overtly feared or hated, still remains in a form of symbolic exile, trapped in the rigid binary of Good Prisoner/Bad Prisoner – still forbidden to be a unique, complex, imperfect human being.

I also wonder about the role of the many shallow clichés that pervade prison-related journalism – the references to students as a “captive audience”; images of barbed wire, watchtowers, handcuffs and leg irons; muscular men working out on the yard; close-ups of tattoos; the sound of clanging gates, alarms, staticky radios, and harsh voices over the PA system.

If such details simply mirrored the environment, then why would so much other significant content be so consistently ignored? They seem much more to reflect a combination of inattentional blindness and fantasy – expressing that which is not just expected, but sought, even craved. Their endless repetition reinforces the specter of the prison as a real-life cartoon, and reduces the “media

coverage” to a form of vicarious thrill tourism.

Some say that such content is there to hold the audience's attention, or to please editors. Or that more nuanced content ends up on the cutting room floor; or limited access to the prison, or tight deadlines, leave too little time for original content. Many say it's all about demand.

Clearly the public's hunger for depictions of prison that hyper-focus on aggression and the paraphernalia of confinement is real, and I have tremendous sympathy for the economic pressures facing journalism today. But there must be alternatives. Real journalism is not simply a commercial product or a form of entertainment; it is a critical public service. It is also a form of power with the capacity to perpetuate dehumanizing prejudices that legitimize destructive public policy.

Thankfully, people inside San Quentin have begun to change the terms of engagement – by producing media themselves. Through Prison Renaissance, the San Quentin Prison Report, Ear Hustle, San Quentin News, and myriad other projects, they are taking up the tools of representation and speaking for themselves.

The challenges are formidable: lack of internet access; limited technology; censorship (including strategic self-censorship); knowing the Parole Board may read and judge one's work. And incarcerated people are by no means immune to reproducing stereotypes. But the work is increasingly original, unpredictable and real. Deploying their creativity, insight and critical skills, incarcerated writers are posing questions, crafting stories and shedding light, to – painstakingly – move this society forward.

John Lewis



OUR STRATEGY

“When is the Prison University Project going to expand beyond San Quentin?”

We get this question a lot! At present, we believe our best strategy for increasing access to higher education throughout the California prison system is not to create new Prison University Project programs, but to assist other colleges that are creating their own. To this end, we hold individualized trainings for specific schools, as well as larger ones for the greater community; provide extensive consulting; host regular site visits to San Quentin; and share our extensive program resources and tools.

Trainings topics include how to build programs driven by the values of academic excellence and inclusion (rather than by politics or bureaucracy); faculty recruitment, training and supervision; prison rules, regulations and culture; logistical planning; how to foster college readiness; the role of trauma in the prison classroom; and myriad other topics.

In August we held two half-day trainings for administrators and faculty at San Joaquin Delta College

in Stockton, which is now planning new programs for Deuel Vocational Institution and within the Division of Juvenile Justice. We were overjoyed to encounter such a competent group of administrators and faculty with a sincere interest in creating high quality programs. (For more information about these programs, please contact Martha Villarreal: mwillarreal@deltacollege.edu)

Many of the challenges facing the emerging field of higher education in prison are structural: meager adjunct faculty pay; inadequate funding for on-site administrative staff; the statewide shortage of qualified basic skills instructors. In addition, some schools in California have entered the field primarily out of interest in increasing their enrollment numbers, and thereby accessing more apportionment funding.

At the same time, there are no formal mechanisms in place to monitor the quality of programs. The focus of CDCR is primarily to increase the

quantity of programs throughout the state as quickly as possible, and the role of the Community Colleges Chancellor's Office in relation to the colleges is strictly advisory. At this moment it is therefore unclear who will ensure that courses and degree programs are aligned with the actual needs of students; that those faculty hired are qualified and well-prepared; that programs do not move away from face-to-face instruction and towards “distance learning,” or use low-quality course materials, in order to minimize costs and maximize revenue.

We are doing all we can both to set an example and to provide support. Yet as the field continues to grow, it is critical that we marshal the resources to share knowledge, cultivate leadership, and foster a robust professional community rooted in the values of expertise, integrity and collaboration.

it remains critical that we marshal the resources to share knowledge, cultivate leadership, and foster a robust professional community that is rooted in the values of expertise, integrity and collaboration



Post Office Box 492
San Quentin, CA 94964

“Everybody should have access to a college education because everybody counts. Everybody has value.”

– RAHSAAN THOMAS, PRISON UNIVERSITY PROJECT STUDENT

IN THIS ISSUE

- Letter from the Exec. Director about Prisons & Journalism
- Student Essays on Math Phobia & Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Fall Semester Courses & Other Activities
- Our Strategy for Expanding Access
- Who We Are & What We Do

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. The program is an extension site of Patten University in Oakland, CA.

Prison University Project Board of Directors

Maddy Russell-Shapiro, *Ed.M., Board Chair*
Peter Bach-y-Rita, *Ph.D., J.D., Secretary*
Lilly Fu, *Treasurer*
James Dyett
Sia Henry, *J.D.*

Anne Irwin, *J.D.*
Connie Krosney, *Ed.D.*
Kevin Robbins
Kelly Jane Rosenblatt, *Ph.D.*
Aly Tamboura

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: Classmates Phil Melendez, Brian Asey, and Adnan Khan celebrate graduate Shadeed Wallace-Stepter (photo by Eddie Herena); View down a San Quentin cell block (R.J. Lozada); Earlonne Woods, Antwan Williams, and Nigel Poor working on the next episode of Ear Hustle in the media lab at San Quentin (Nigel Poor)

“Our Strategy” page: The Producers of Ear Hustle: Antwan Williams, Nigel Poor, and Earlonne Woods (Eddie Herena); SQ News reporter Eddie DeWeaver interviews staff member Hannah Evans for a story about graduation (Eddie Herena); Graduate Eddie DeWeaver poses for a photo with his grandmother (Eddie Herena)

Fall Semester photo: One-on-one tutoring session at study hall by (R.J. Lozada)

Photo above: Chris Deragon and family at graduation in June (Eddie Herena)