

Prison University Project



A Newsletter of the Prison University Project

May 2008 Vol 3, No. 3

From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Recently a visitor to the College Program chatted with a student who transferred from Corcoran last year in order to enroll in the Program. Expressing his appreciation for the opportunity to attend college, the student said, "I look forward to getting out so I can be one of the Program's success stories."

It occurred to me that in any other setting, a college student who was doing so well in school would already see himself as a success. But the lives of people in prison are almost always judged by others in terms of what they do after they leave. His comment made me wonder if he had come to think about himself in the same way.

How do you value your own life, or the life of another, in a time or place where almost no one else does? This is a challenge that each of our students and we as an organization confront every day: programs that serve people in prison are almost always measured in terms of their impact on "post-release outcomes." Indeed, this is one important reason why we are now planning to embark on a long-term program evaluation of our own. There is no question that preventing re-arrest has profound human and fiscal implications, and should be a valued outcome. But what about all the other standards by which academic institutions and individual lives are normally judged? Why the exclusive focus on recidivism and cost? Surely it must be possible to talk about both the societal benefit of educating people in prison and the equally meaningful benefit to the individual, and to measure such programs by the same standards we would those that operate on the outside.

We are able to pursue these ambitious goals solely as a result of your support.

With appreciation,
Jody Lewen

"Why should higher education be given to inmates who may never leave prison?"

This question was posed to me, a non-lifer; here's what I believe:

By Lamarr K. Mainor, Sr.

The infectious nature of higher education has a ripple effect, meaning that the more people you educate, the more likelihood that those educated will encourage and assist others in educating themselves. We should offer higher education to inmates who may never leave prison because, systematically, it is the lifer who has the most persuasive influence over the percentage of the population who will get out of prison. It is the lifer who has completed the most time, experienced the most lessons, and gained the most wisdom through these experiences. It is the lifer that the young, first time inmate looks to for guidance on how to live and, ultimately, survive in prison. So it is the lifer who should not only have the answers on how to do the time, but also the solutions for how to grow, mature, change, and stay out of prison. Higher education can equip an individual with these tools. To educate, by definition, is to develop, mentally and morally, by providing information, instruction, and discipline. Imagine the effect it could have on the entire community within the prison if this core of the prison population were highly educated. Not only would it empower inmates to give back to society from inside the prison walls by mentoring at-risk youth and assisting in victim-offender groups, but these lifers would be the tutors and counselors who help those who are going home. I know all this to be true because I was mentored and influenced by a lifer who had been highly educated, and I am forever changed because the lifer I looked to had the knowledge within to pass along to me. It is my honor to continue this ripple effect!



photos by Andrew Kenower

More than 6,200 people visited the San Francisco Public Library to see Who We Are: Essays and Photographs of Students at San Quentin. Among them were family and friends of students in the exhibition. Below are some of the responses they left in the guest book.

This summer, the exhibition will travel to Alcatraz Island, where hundreds of thousands of tourists from all over the world will see it. Check our website for details about exhibition dates and the opening reception.



photo by Jennifer Scalle

ESSAYS AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUDENTS AT SAN QUENTIN: PUP EXHIBITION FOLLOW-UP

My son Paul, Your whole family is here today to see your work and hope you can see that you are supported and loved.
—Mom

Paul, Your vision and your dream, so surreal and vivid, sends a very awesome message to me at a time that I needed to read it! To challenge your path, your destiny, to make it your own...I love you Uncle Paul.

—Damon Uribe

As a friend of the Countryman family, I've often heard about Randy. His mom is always so proud of him (and for good reason – he's a tremendous artist!) I feel like I finally got to know you. I'll go tell David, Les, and Mary Ann that you're equally gifted as a writer. But then, they already know that.

—Barry Figgins (Troop 282)

Felix Lucero is my son and his work is gorgeous and I have so much faith in him and all these guys that put all this work in this project. Also a girl named Marlene who I met here today says she loves your work.

—Love, Mom (Juanita Rivera)

"I Love You This Much" was wonderful along with many others. Prison seems a lot different behind the eyes of a prisoner or at least that's what I think. I hope my dad starts writing books because he's an amazing writer. And also I think people judge prisoners too quickly when they don't know anything about the situation. —Desiree Lucero

I'm here again son and I feel like as if you were here. The audio is very good. All the essays and photographs of everyone are excellent. I am so proud of you and all of you. We don't want to leave, but the library is going to close eventually. We love you. Happy Birthday. —Love, Mom

Scientific Inquiry at San Quentin: Introduction to Physics

Physics 154, a Spring 2008 course offering, was taught by Brian Kessler, Michael Rousseas, and Jim Watkins, with an enrollment of more than 20 students. We asked a student, Aly Tamboura, and an instructor, Brian Kessler, to share some of their experiences in the class.

In many college physics classes, a common question is, why do we have to learn this or, what does this have to do with real life? I have never heard those questions at San Quentin. The students in our class will learn about a physical principle like the conservation of momentum and immediately inquire about how it applies to a car accident they observed. Every Friday morning, I look forward to the string of insightful questions that are sure to follow any lecture. The enthusiasm of the students for learning has made teaching at San Quentin a very enjoyable and rewarding experience.

"Every Friday morning, I look forward to the string of insightful questions sure to follow any lecture"

Physics is the study of the fundamental properties of matter and it requires just that spirit of inquiry in order to master the material. The introductory physics class covers a wide range of material, from the motion of the largest planets and stars to the vibrations of the smallest atoms. We have dealt with abstract concepts like the origin and fate of the universe to practical concerns of electricity generation and building efficient engines. Students have applied the scientific method to reason about observations and the physical laws which follow from those observations. By the end of the course, I hope students will have a more

precise understanding of the physical world around them and be able to apply the principles of scientific inquiry to observations they make outside of the classroom, from the arc of a jump shot into a basketball hoop to the inner workings of a radio.

—Brian Kessler

The Impact of the College Program on the Lives of Students' Families

Jennifer Scaife (PUP Program Director) interviewed Mrs. L. Harts, the wife of a current student. Following are excerpts from their exchange, which was conducted by email.

How would you describe the impact of your husband's incarceration upon you and your family?

The impact of my husband's absence from our home is disturbing. Once we came to grips with reality, we used prayer as our personal comforters. Although my husband is incarcerated, he still remains the head of our household by offering guidance spiritually, mentally, and emotionally via telephone, through letters, or visits. This has definitely helped the kids and I cope with him being away from us physically.

What differences have you noticed in your husband since he transferred from Corcoran to San Quentin and started taking College Program classes?

I noticed a difference in him from the first phone call away from Corcoran. Attending college classes at San Quentin seems to have allowed my husband the ability to structure his week in a way that he's able to push his envelope of growth and use his prison time more effectively. In spite of everything, he can now use this time to pursue a college degree and fulfill our family dream.

Has their father's involvement in higher education changed your children's lives in any way?

Our children actually enjoy knowing that daddy is going to school. They want to know if he's performing at his level-best and receiving good grades. It has changed their lives in a way that they expect for him to do "nothing less than his best" and that he takes heed to the same advice he reiterates to them often. I solicited our children's responses

to this question and each of them said, I quote:

(Son - 14) - "I'm proud of him! I enjoy hearing that my dad is going to school, but I know that this only sets the bar higher for me, my sister, and my children... great!!! thanks dad!" -Smiling-

(Daughter - 10) - "My dad going to school...I think it's a good thing...I know he has to be in prison right now but at least he's able to go to college."

What are your hopes for your husband and your family once he comes home?

My hope is that we as a family continue to move forward in an upward spiral.

I admire his creative mind and intellect. Being a man of his caliber, it is my hope that he is able to enter back into society, with numerous opportunities available that will grant him success and an abundance of blessings. Additionally, I hope that his overall prison experience will be used as a vehicle to help make a difference in others' lives.

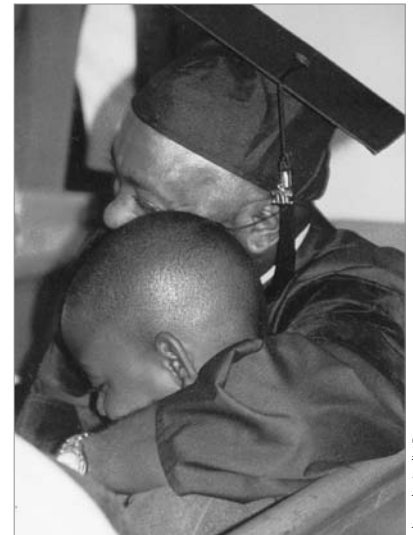


photo by Leslie Payne

"How is your Physics class?" was the question my mother asked me in the prison visiting room. The question was immediately followed by another, from a long term friend who was also visiting: "You're taking Physics in prison?"

The class that I am taking is challenging to say the least. I am learning the same language used by nearly all of the well-known scientists like Newton, Einstein and Galileo. It was very difficult in the beginning, because from the onset most of the language the teachers used in the lectures was foreign to me. This language includes terms and symbols like delta, velocity, theta and kinetic. I was pretty much terrified, as well as dumbfounded by the extent of this new language. I never understood the mechanics of a baseball being thrown through the air, but now I do. Who would have thought that the thousands of calculations the brain makes when running

"You're taking
Physics in prison?"

to catch a fly ball on a baseball field could be jotted down on a chalkboard in a language I can understand?

My answer to my friend was "yes, I am taking Physics in prison." This turned our entire conversation to the reality of me, an inmate, participating in a Physics class at San Quentin's Patten University. I explained that my days are busy, something hard for a person not in prison to understand. Telling him about my fifteen-hour days consisting of time at my prison job, time spent studying, and time in the college program left him awestruck.

Though incarceration is not a glamorous situation, I can honestly say that I am proud to be able to participate in the college program at San Quentin. Furthermore, I am grateful for the opportunities granted to me in this adversity. Physics is just the beginning of the knowledge I wish to attain. Being in a place where I am able to learn means the world to me.

—Aly Tamboura

ALUMNI NEWS

Making the Most of an Opportunity

Hi guys,

I don't know how many of you have just messed up once and were unlucky enough to get caught and sent to prison. I had been a chronic screw up for a long time. Today though, I am making the most of an opportunity that I feel is worth the effort to make something out of, an opportunity that is there for you to make the most out of as well.



photo by Jennifer Scaife

Today I've been out of prison for just over 3 months. I am enrolled in a local community college taking a full load of work (12.5 credits). I am majoring in Computer Science, and though I am not yet sure whether I will pursue an AS or BS Degree I am certain of this: I will get one of them, which one is up to me.

I look back and thank the Prison University Project for the chance to get used to this rigorous schedule. The truth is I don't think I would be ready for all this without experiencing it first at Patten University. I'm not dumb but it's been a long time from my school days, and in between I had been self taught on the streets, so just the little bit I was exposed to over two semesters there really helped. Most of all though, I think just sitting down and FEELING that "hey I can do this again" is the biggest gain from the time I spent in prison.

I have to believe that we can make a positive out of a negative in our experience as an inmate in the prison system. We have to be able to hit the ground and stand on both feet once we get released. I'm making the most out of what is available to me now and that's the best that I can do.

Leonard Hutton
F-57488

Willie Rahman Green, who graduated from the San Quentin College Program in 2002, was released from prison on March 20th, after spending 25 years in prison for a murder he did not commit. Rather than declaring a finding of factual innocence, the judge dismissed the case and the D.A. has declined to seek a new trial. For more details, visit our website for a link to the Los Angeles Times article.

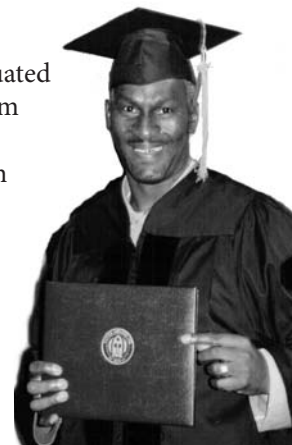


photo by Robert Rubin

PROGRAM UPDATES

Miguel Kaminski joined the staff of the Prison University Project in January, replacing Karin Collins as administrative assistant. (Karin has moved on to a new job with Amnesty International.) Miguel completed his BA in English at UC Berkeley last spring. Welcome, Miguel!

PUP ON FACEBOOK Volunteer **Seth Zenz**, currently living in Switzerland, has established the Prison University Project as a Cause on Facebook. He writes, "If we had a critical mass of people joining the page, it would show up more easily on searches for people interested in the causes of prison reform and education. Word would spread, and we could use the page as a way to distribute information about the program. There's even a way to donate, and a lot of small donations can add up!" See: <http://apps.facebook.com/causes/41300>

Seven students will celebrate the completion of the Associate of Arts degree this June; for details about the graduation ceremony, please contact us.

Who We Are and What We Do Prison University Project

Our Mission

The mission of the Prison University Project is to provide excellent higher education programs to people incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison; to create a replicable model for such programs; and to stimulate public awareness and meaningful dialogue about higher education and criminal justice in California.

Our central goals are to educate and challenge students intellectually; to prepare them to become leaders, within and beyond their own communities, both inside and outside of prison; and to provide them with the skills to obtain meaningful employment and economic stability post-release.

Program Description

The College Program at San Quentin is the central project of the Prison University Project. It provides approximately 12 college courses each semester in the humanities, social sciences, math

and science, as well as intensive college preparatory courses in math and English, to over 200 students. It is the only on-site, degree-granting higher education program in all of California's 33 state prisons. The Program is an extension site of Patten University in Oakland, CA.

The Prison University Project also produces a bi-annual newsletter and an annual journal of student writing, and hosts an annual graduation ceremony, a literary reading series, and numerous other special academic and cultural events.

Students

In order to enroll, students must hold either a high school diploma or a GED. No consideration is given to length of sentence or commitment offense. All students begin in the College Preparatory Program, unless they place directly into credit classes through exam. Students range in age from 22 to 72; the average age is 36. Approximately 32% are white, 37% are black, 18% are

Hispanic, 7% are Asian, and 6% identify themselves as "other." San Quentin's entire prisoner population is classified as male.

Faculty and Staff

All instructors in the Program work as volunteers; most are graduate students or faculty from UC Berkeley, San Francisco State University, University of San Francisco, Stanford University, and St. Mary's College. All primary instructors in credit-earning classes hold at least a master's degree in the given field.

Funding

Because no state or federal funding is available for prison higher education in California, the Program is supported entirely through donations from individuals, private foundations, and corporations. Students in the Program pay no fees or tuition. All textbooks and school supplies are provided by the Prison University Project; the bulk of all books are donated by the publishers.

Here is my tax-deductible contribution to reducing recidivism and changing lives!

\$5 \$50 \$200 \$500 \$1000 \$10,000 Other_____

Please make checks out to "Prison University Project" and mail to:

Prison University Project, Post Office Box 492, San Quentin, CA 94964

To make a donation using a credit card, visit our secure website: www.prisonuniversityproject.org
or call our office: (415) 455-8088, Ext. #1

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

(OPTIONAL) This gift is in honor/memory of _____

Double my gift! My employer will match my contribution. Enclosed is the form.

Please keep this gift anonymous.

PUP's Tax ID Number (EIN) is: 20-5606926

(see reverse)

Help expand the network

If you know others who might be interested in learning about our work, please send us their contact information and we will add them to our mailing list.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

Former Students

Please stay in touch with us! We'd love to hear about what you're up to, what your plans are, any challenges you may be dealing with, and what we might be able to do to help. If you have an email address, please write to us at info@prisonuniversityproject.org.

If you move, please send us your new mailing address and phone number. If you're in touch with other former students, please make sure we have their contact information as well. (see reverse)