

MOUNT  
TAMALPAIS  
COLLEGE

# TamGram

Spring 2024  
TamGram

Dear MTC students,

Another semester is done and Summer is underway! Congratulations to all who completed a class, and warm welcome to all new students.

Besides running MTC's courses, extracurriculars, student support services, computer lab, and special events, here are some of the initiatives MTC's Academic and Student Affairs Team is focusing on this year:

-Advancing student outcomes by studying retention and improving academic readiness.

-Strengthening faculty teaching effectiveness by offering improved training and support materials.

-Building and nurturing a larger, more engaged MTC Alumni community to increase our impact on alumni, their families, and their communities

-Continuing to build student services by strengthening systems of communication and outreach.

In case anyone thinks MTC staff sit around eating bonbons, this is actually what we're up to! Here's to more semesters and years of high-quality education.

Amy Jamgochian  
Chief Academic Officer

*Amy*



## UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE COLLEGE

### COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

**Friday, June 28**  
**9-12:30 pm; Location: Chapel B**

We're getting ready for the 2024 Mount Tamalpais College Commencement Ceremony, and are looking forward to honoring this year's graduates and their long and varied journeys to receive the Associate of Arts degree. This year's commencement speaker is Lateefah Simon, an organizer and nationally recognized advocate for civil rights and social justice who is currently running for the U.S. House of Representatives.

### ALUMNI FREEDOM WALL

**Sunday, September 1**  
**6-8 pm; Location: B Building**

Last year's Freedom Wall event was such a special occasion of storytelling and community building, we've made this an annual event. We look forward to again bringing together currently and formerly incarcerated MTC students to celebrate this community's accomplishments.

### RESOURCE FAIR

**Sunday, September 27**  
**8 am-2pm; Location: Chapel B**

The Resource Fair is an opportunity for MTC students to connect with reentry and higher education professionals in the Bay Area. MTC students will visit multiple tables with representatives from fifteen different organizations and agencies working in higher education, employment, family reunification.

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: Antoine 'Aziz' Brown Incarceration to College to Saving Lives

One of the many Alumni who attended Mount Tamalpais College, Antoine "Aziz" Brown, is eager to share how the college inspired him to inspire others.

Aziz arrived at San Quentin in 2010, the same period when Governor Arnold Swartznegger added Rehabilitation to the name of the California Department of Corrections. Aziz was surprised to see that there was an on-grounds college campus at San Quentin, free of charge, and it was not one of the many opportunities that got cut in the budget that year.

While at San Quentin, Aziz completed many college courses and self-help groups before he earned his release on August 17, 2018. After he joined the outside world after 23 years of incarceration, Aziz wanted to continue his juvenile advocacy work, similar to what he did while incarcerated. He joined Re:Store Justice, a Los Angeles-based organization that addresses many issues including the harm caused by criminal justice systems.

Navigating public transportation to get back and forth to work proved one of the most challenging aspects of Aziz's transition. His fear of encountering ex-rival gang members in his changed state added an extra layer of difficulty to his parole conditions.

***"We learned to turn challenges into opportunities while sitting in a classroom."***

He also stated that those situations are similar to his college courses, recalling scenarios where he had to use critical thinking skills. "We learned to turn challenges into opportunities while sitting in a classroom," Aziz said. "I wanted to use this to help my community, even if they are my ex-rival gang members."

That inspiration to help others led Aziz to graduate from The Forestry and Fire Recruitment Program (FFRP), who was then hired to serve as a wildland firefighter with The Urban Association of Forestry and Fire Professionals, a non-profit Fire Department. In his role,



*Aziz in Malibu, Ca with the Los Angeles County Training Center (LACTC)*

Aziz actively trains individuals to become professional wildland firefighters. The FFRP is stationed in various locations throughout California and is currently promoting a pilot program in Calabasas where they partnered with LA County to start training in Camp Gonzalez.

There is a chapter in Oakland for those interested in connecting with Aziz and the organization. They welcome individuals who are on parole share their passion and commitment to making a positive impact through firefighting.



*Blodgett Forest Research Station is owned by UC Berkeley who partnered with FFRP for Forestry Week*

# MTC STUDENTS' FEEDBACK HELPS SHAPE THE COLLEGE

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM COURSE EVALUATIONS

MTC students completed 235 course evaluations across the 25 classes offered in Fall 2023. Below are some highlights of student feedback and the actions MTC staff are taking in response:

- \* 90% of students rated their course as "excellent," "very good," or "good." Of note, 50% rated their course as "excellent," which is the same as last semester.
- \* 90% of students feel as though they were placed in the right math/writing course when they first enrolled (up 5% from last semester).
- \* 15% of students thought that the material covered in their courses was covered too quickly (up 4% from last semester, as well as the semester before), and 16% thought the class covered too much material (up 9% from last semester).
- \* Similar to last semester, only about half (46%) of students used a laptop. However, the top use for computers has shifted to "assignments for class," whereas last semester the top use was to "build computer literacy."
- \* 47% of students used a tutor this semester (up 9% from last semester). Of those students, 92% found it at least somewhat helpful.

Here are some ways that we're addressing student feedback:

We know that there has been an increase in students feeling that courses are moving too fast and covering too much. To help students feel more comfortable with the pace and workload for classes, our Academic Directors are continuing to schedule strategic workshops, seminars, and prep

sessions throughout the year for students to start familiarizing themselves with topics and materials ahead of certain courses. Our STEM department is also focused on developing course materials to reflect students' needs (such as course workbooks) to support students during their coursework. The Writing department faculty and director are working together to further use classroom strategies to address students' needs.

We see how helpful tutoring is for our students. Going forward in future semesters, we want to continue increasing the use of writing tutoring specifically. In Summer 2024, our Humanities department will be closely tracking tutoring use, as well as piloting a program that encourages students to visit the Student Learning Center at least once a semester. Writing courses will also be including assignments to encourage use of the Student Learning Center, including writing tutoring and the Writing Space. In Spring 2024, we have been closely monitoring laptop usage in the computer lab to gain a better understanding of the days and times that work best for students. We will be using that information to inform the computer lab schedule for semesters to come. Additionally, we have created an MTC tech team to support students with their questions on a more regular basis.

**If you'd like to hear more, or discuss any questions you might have, please feel free to meet with MTC staff Jen Juras or Astrid Hoover-Batt.**

**Thank you** for your continued participation in shaping the college!

MOUNT TAMALPAIS COLLEGE

# OpenLine

An online journal documenting the intellectual and creative work of Mount Tamalpais College's student and alumni

**Listening to Taylor Swift in Prison**  
By Joe Garcia | September 15, 2023

**Freedom could use some self-help too**  
By Jonathan Chiu | February 9, 2023

**Marin Voice: Help reduce mental toll on correctional officers by closing some California prisons**  
By Steve Brooks | February 9, 2023

Mount Tamalpais College's online blog, *OpenLine*, would like to invite MTC students to submit their writings for consideration. Your written work can be fiction, short stories, nonfiction, personal essays, poetry, academic, journalist, or creative. Your work can only be up to 5 pages (or 1,000 words). Please send us your most polished, and ready-to-go pieces! If you would like to submit your work, please fill out a submissions form, (available in the education office), and attach it to your writings. For privacy, place your paperwork in an envelope, give it to an MTC clerk/staff member, and address it to the OpenLine Editorial Team. The Editorial Team will then decide whether to include your work in OpenLine, which may include a round of edits following a discussion with you. Once your piece is published on the blog, we'll bring in a printout for you and the URL that can be shared with friends family.

# CELEBRATION OF TEACHING & LEARNING

## *Education, Exclusion & Participatory Citizenship*

On a sunny March 30th, Mount Tamalpais College hosted our annual Faculty Appreciation Event inside San Quentin's Chapel, which this year was called "A Celebration of Teaching & Learning." Although the event usually celebrates faculty, this year was a little different.

The College's Dean of Academic Administration, Nandita Dinesh said to a packed Chapel before the event began, "Holding the event inside San Quentin was initiated by faculty who suggested that, 'For it to feel like it was truly an appreciation event, there need to be students as well.'"

This year the event was designed around students' presentations on the theme of teaching and learning, followed by their teacher's responses, allowing a brief look into the "extraordinary conversations" held in those classroom spaces.

Alumnus Michael K. Moore opened the event and touted being a 2022 graduate of Mount Tamalpais College, the first class to graduate since the college received independent accreditation. He prepared a speech called "Madness of Prison" which spoke to the misconception that we are free, having control of thoughts, feelings, and the the mind. Michael said, "Nobody can give you freedom but yourself."

A seven-year veteran faculty member at Mount Tamalpais College, Ian Sethre, expressed his appreciation that Michael had asked him to collaborate on their speeches together. Ian then expounded on a recommendation by Dean Dinesh to reflect on teaching and learning. Ian thought about what he values about teaching and learning at MTC and responded, "I'm particularly interested in the intersecting issues of education, citizenship, and felony disenfranchisement."

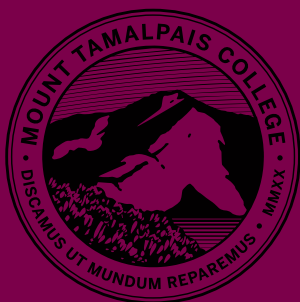
Amongst the other presenters were Theresa Roder who responded to Dennis Jefferson, Will Bondurant responded to Peter Bommerito, and Omair Akhtar who wrapped up the event by responding to Darryl Farris.

The Celebration of Teaching & Learning event concluded with Akhtar speaking to the audience in response to Darryl's speech, saying, "What communities, networks, mentors, and friends can you call on to help you navigate the world? -What is our role in that journey? (Gotta avoid white savior, we're not main characters) -When students graduate from MTC, what do we owe them, in terms of connecting them to the people and resources to succeed and navigate new worlds, wherever they find themselves?"

## VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

MTC NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2024



**There are many incredible people who make this work possible behind the scenes, including our Board of Trustees. Meet one of our newest board members, Meredith Levy -**

***"The vital role Mt. Tamalpais College plays in the lives of its students and alumni, and in turn the greater community is profound, and personally inspiring. I am honored to support Mt. Tamalpais College and feel fortunate to be a part of the MTC community."***