



## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JODY LEWEN

I am thrilled to share the news that we have begun work to establish an independent college at San Quentin and are preparing to seek accreditation from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges.

The main drivers for this decision are a combination of opportunity and necessity. Most immediately, Patten University, the school of

which the College Program at San Quentin has been an extension site since its founding in 1996, is closing. While we have explored the possibility of partnering with another school, we have decided that independence will best allow us to most boldly pursue our vision of providing radically inclusive and academically excellent liberal arts education at San Quentin.

Much of the work that lies ahead has long-since begun: for years we have been working to develop excellent, comprehensive college

We are resolved to accomplish this work because we are committed to expanding access to outstanding educational opportunity for people incarcerated at San Quentin, and throughout California. But we are also well-aware of how much our setting a powerful example stands to benefit not only the field of prison higher education, but the field of higher education itself. We intend to serve as a model of academic excellence, universal access, and educational innovation, and as an unapologetically idealistic reminder of the promise and potential of higher education.

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As we delve into the realm of institutional research (whereby schools generate data in order to analyze and monitor their own effectiveness, and to continuously improve) we will help reframe the national conversation about the purpose of higher education, and about what “effectiveness” means, and how it ought to be measured. By establishing a college that is committed, in every sense, to meeting its students where they are—academically, socially, psychologically, financially, and geographically—we will help raise the bar on what equity and inclusion mean, and what it looks like when institutions take responsibility for ensuring students’ success. By forgoing all fees and tuition, providing school supplies and materials free of charge, and dispensing entirely with conventional



preparatory, and college-level academic programs. We have also established student-centered, trauma-informed student support systems and administrative policies (for example, in admissions, assessment, advising, conduct, and faculty training) that promote student success. Now the challenge will be to fully build out the infrastructure necessary to support the “back office” side of operating a college—like robust student information management, institutional research, and information technology, including library services.

## CONTINUED

### LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

models of student financial aid, we will help overturn assumptions and generate new ideas about how higher education ought to be funded.

incarcerated people in the public imagination.

By both transforming the public's understanding of this landscape

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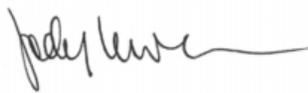
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By forming an independent, accredited college dedicated specifically to serving incarcerated people, we also intend to challenge the widespread cultural resistance to recognizing incarcerated students as “real college students” who are both worthy and fully capable of great academic achievement. We also hope that this step will allow us to shine a greater light and provide greater support to the efforts of other institutions and organizations to increase access to quality higher education for incarcerated people, whether by providing them with expanded training, technical assistance and financial support, or even eventually partnering with them to form new regional extension sites.

As the field of higher education in prison grows, we believe that the data, ideas, and human capital that our work generates will help strengthen the quality of programs nationally, increase the public's awareness of their impact (far beyond “recidivism” and cost), and humanize the image of

and continuing to increase access to quality in-prison higher education programs nationally, we will expand the prison-to-college pipeline, broaden the social, academic and professional networks of currently and formerly incarcerated people, and support their visibility and success. It is only a matter of time before criminal justice and higher education policy in the U.S. are fully transformed by the ever-growing movement of passionate, empowered, and educated currently and formerly incarcerated people, working together to create a more just world.



## FALL SEMESTER

### Course Offerings

- English 99A: Developmental English I
- English 99B: Developmental English II
- Regular workshops on student success (replacing Strategies for College Reading)
- Math 50A: Developmental Math I
- Math 50B: Developmental Math II
- Math 99: Elementary Algebra
- Math 115: Intermediate Algebra
- English 101A: Reading and Composition: Borders and Boundaries
- English 101B: Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing
- English 204: Research and Composition: Identity and the “Other”
- EST 204: Environmental Science
- Communications 146: The Art of Public Speaking
- English 220: Modern World Literature
- Sociology 230: Introduction to Sociology
- Philosophy 271: Introduction to Philosophy
- Art 210: History of Photography and Power

### Other Activities Happening This Fall

- A weekly discussion of philosophical and applied ethics, culminating in an Ethics Bowl competition against outside teams in the spring
- A weekly Math Circle, an alternative non-credit math enrichment program
- A workshop on philanthropy and criminal justice reform in partnership with the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative



## **WHERE THE MOVEMENT STARTS**

AMY JAMGOCHIAN,  
ACADEMIC PROGRAM DIRECTOR

On October 5, the Prison University Project hosted an academic conference inside San Quentin, entitled *Corrections, Rehabilitation, and Reform: 21st Century Solutions for 20th Century Problems*. Panelists included college students at San Quentin and outside academics, and Patrick Elliot Alexander, author of *From Slave Ship to Supermax: Mass Incarceration, Prisoner Abuse, and the New Neo-Slave Novel*, delivered the keynote address.

This was only possible because all came off as planned. There could have been a lockdown or a quarantine, either of which would have kept students from attending or guests from coming into the prison. There might have been delays, so students missed half of the event. There could have been an alarm on the yard, leaving students stuck on the spot until it cleared. Student speakers and facilitators may have found themselves in risky situations, called upon to critique their captors or disagree with others in the face of potentially serious social or political repercussions. The list goes on and on, and even after several years working inside the prison, I know I don't know the half of it. But all such contingencies are examples of the reason it is critical for incarcerated people to have a voice in academic conversations

about prison: only they know in depth the realities of incarcerated life. Only they have some of the true keys for analyzing what reform should look like, or if "reform" is in fact the answer.

The goal of including incarcerated voices in academic conversations about incarceration was what led us to start planning this conference. Students and alumni inside the prison applied to be on the conference committee, and together a small group of us collaborated on a call for papers, which hubristically announced this as the first academic conference to be held inside a prison—this is not the case, as it turns out, but we were excited to start receiving dozens of submissions, both from our students inside and from outside scholars from across the U.S. In the end we received almost 100, so many that we realized, to some of the committee members' dismay, that we would have to send out some rejections.

We were also eager to help our student participants prepare for this professional opportunity, in which they were on panels with academics far more experienced in writing and presenting: volunteers Chris Alfonso and Debbie Mayer stepped up to help

student presenters with research and writing; Prison University Project Board member and volunteer instructor James Dyett assisted student speakers with public speaking skills and student panel moderators with facilitation strategies. Our students did magnificently.

These and other concerns filled our sometimes twice-weekly meetings. We disagreed, argued, and spent hours upon hours talking through complexities of panel configurations. I'm filled with admiration for the dedication, hard work, and brilliance of my co-planners—Chris Alfonso, Wayne Boatwright, Noble Butler, Clark Gerhartsreiter, James King, Timothy Thompson, Jesse Rothman, and Jesse Vasquez, many of whom had never attended a conference, but all of whom approached the planning with passion, seriousness, and a spirit of collaboration. The theme of the National Conference on Higher Education in Prison in Indianapolis this November is "Building a Movement," but we demonstrated with our own sister conference that the movement truly starts inside.



## FOR EACH CAGE FROM WHICH I BREAK FREE

ARTHUR JACKSON,  
STUDENT AND CONFERENCE PANELIST



My experience with the Prison University Project's academic conference has been challenging, nerve wracking, and exciting all rolled into one. Being that this was my first academic conference, it was a learning experience that I welcomed.

On this educational journey, I have discovered that I am more than a prisoner. I am bigger than the cages of racism, poverty, illiteracy, criminality, and prison that have held me captive, in one form or another, since the day I was born. I found that for each cage from which I break free, my head is held a little higher, my back straightens a little more, my shoulders roll back a little further, and I become a little more dignified.

Now in the shadow of the Prison University Project's academic conference, I am poised to break free of yet another cage. The "I don't feel like I quite measure up" cage. This one I built for myself. I've been in it for most of my life. Now I am standing on the precipice of being free. But, at the thought of the academic achievements of those who surrounded me, I shuddered. My stomach churned. My heart raced. Again I was confronted by the "am I good enough?" cage. Will I fall on my face? I don't want to do this. It is in this moment

of doubt that I'm confronted with the reason I must push forward: the young African-American man. His pants are hanging low. He greets me, "What's up, my n\*\*\*a, you got the time OG?" I cringe at the "N" word. I say to him, "It's 9:30 youngsta." I turn to walk away. Taking a look back to ensure he continues walking, heeding the old prison policy of "staying ten toes down at all times" (prison lingo and mentality for watching my back.) As I catch a glimpse of him walking away with his head in the clouds oblivious to what the future holds for him, the moment becomes too real. I see myself in him.

It is 1992, I'm in Jamestown State Prison (Sierra Conservation Center.) It is my first prison term. My head is in the clouds. I'm oblivious, unaware of the lives I would wreck and the 24 years that would pass in the blink of an eye as I walked yard after yard in prison after prison. I shake off the nostalgia and regret, with the intimate understanding it is for him and the future victims I hope are never created, that I wrote my conference proposal about social etiquette training as one of the tools needed to help young prisoners. I remember very vividly that the masks I wore were there to conceal my feelings of inadequacy and intimidation, while in the presence of those I had come to believe were somehow more than me. More what, I could not tell you,

just more. But once I discovered those little niceties which fostered positive relationships, my confidence grew and so did my belief that I more than measure up to anyone and any challenge.

With this knowledge, I've come to understand and appreciate two sayings: "to know better is to do better," and "with knowledge comes responsibility." Now that I know better, I am doing better. My intimate knowledge of the many problems within the judicial system makes me responsible for presenting a solution. Today I am part of the solution, and not the problem.

In the final analysis, when all is said and done, it matters not if any actions are taken as a result of my contribution to the conference. All that matters is that some real rehabilitative actions, or at least plans for future actions, come out of it. Whatever those actions are, however they look, it is my responsibility to contribute my time, effort, and resources to advance them! This—the real possibility for long-lasting systemic change—is what excites me most about the Prison University Project's academic conference.



## PEOPLE, PLANET, PROFIT:

### REFLECTIONS ON BUSINESS 101

Theresa Roeder, Prison University Project  
Instructor and Board Member



This summer, I had the great pleasure of teaching Business 101: Introduction to Business, with Will Bondurant and Jennifer Lyons. We each have expertise

in distinct areas of business—Will is in marketing, Jen is in finance and economics, and I’m operations. After we’d covered the subject-specific material, we talked more broadly about entrepreneurship, communications, professionalism, and ethics, while students worked on their business plans.

The level of enthusiasm for the class was high, and it opened students’ eyes to all that goes into starting a business. In class, we talked about the Triple Bottom Line (the 3 P’s) of sustainability: people, planet, profit. The students came up with business ideas that would allow them to simultaneously earn a living and better the lives of their community. We had projects from training/placing former inmates in tech jobs to opening a neighborhood convenience store with affordable, healthy foods. I had several conversations with students about how their attitude has changed. Now, they are actively trying to help others lift themselves up. It made me reflect on the effect education can have on people.

The writing in their business plans was better than some of what is turned in to me at my “day job.” While I can speculate about a number of factors that might be contributing to this, the two big ones are that students really want to learn, and that the Prison University Project encourages them to spend as much time in introductory writing (and math) classes as they need. This, sadly, is not what happens on the outside, to the detriment of our students. Despite teaching in a business school, I think liberal arts education is critically important, especially for incarcerated students. Nonetheless, there’s also great value in providing them with additional skills that will assist them when they seek work on the outside.

#### TARE BELTRANCHUC, STUDENT IN BUSINESS 101



As a future entrepreneur, taking Business 101 was a blessing. I have learned to build houses from the ground up and I plan to begin my own house flipping business upon

release. This course provided me with valuable information that would increase my chances to succeed in my business, specifically, the financing and marketing aspects.

Before taking this class I only knew the physical aspect of my future business, which is how to flip distressed houses. I had no idea of the importance of creating a well-thought-out business plan. I learned the different ways to finance a business and after reflecting on that, I chose the bootstrap financing strategy to get my

startup expenses as low as possible. The main characteristics of the strategy are: hiring as few employees as possible, borrowing or renting equipment, using personal savings, and getting small loans from friends or relatives. I created a break-even analysis of my business, which allowed me to estimate the number of houses I need to sell at which net income is zero (have no profit or loss). This is relevant because it tells you at what point you will begin to make profit.

Developing and implementing a marketing strategy is vital. It all starts with research to make sure that a market exists for my service or product, then, choosing a pricing method. I learned what factors to take into consideration when setting a price for a house. After carefully examining the distribution channels, I decided to directly sell my house because as a startup company, I need to cut expenses whenever possible. This class

explained in detail the most common way for promoting a product or service, so one can decide which method to use according to one’s business.

After taking this course, I not only feel prepared to start my own business, but I have confidence that I would be successful in flipping houses. Throughout the semester all the teachers made me think outside the box and focus on risk management. Life is full of “what ifs” so it’s always wise to have a life plan and be ready when the unexpected occurs.

I want to express my sincere gratitude, appreciation, and admiration for Theresa Roeder, Jen Lyons, and Will Bondurant for their excellence, professionalism, and making the most challenging topics easy to understand.



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- Who We Are & What We Do

“The San Quentin conference was a singularly historic moment—blending an equal ratio of incarcerated and outside participants, tackling difficult questions, and preserving the highest integrity and respect for dialogue.”

– SOL NEELY, PANELIST

### 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

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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](https://prisonuniversityproject.org/donate).



### PHOTOS

Cover: Audience listening to speakers on Panel 3, “The Fine Line Between Help and Harm,” at the academic conference. (Photo by Eddie Herena); Prison University Project student Greg Eskridge (Alexandra Blackman)

“Corrections, Rehabilitation, and Reform” page: Amy Jamgochian (photographer unknown); Arthur Jackson (Alexandra Blackman); Carina Gallo, unknown, and Louis Gibson listening to speakers on Panel 8, “Incarceration and Intersectionality: the Experiences and Analyses of Formerly Incarcerated Women,” at the academic conference (Eddie Herena); Brita Bookser and Jesse Vasquez chatting before the keynote address at the academic conference (Eddie Herena)

Fall Semester photo: San Quentin watchtower (Alexandra Blackman)

“People, Planet, and Profit” page: Theresa Roeder (photographer unknown); Tare Beltranchuc (Alexandra Blackman)

Above: Venus Rountree, Karen Shain, Romarilyn Ralston, and Lily Gonzalez on Panel 8, “Incarceration and Intersectionality: the Experiences and Analyses of Formerly Incarcerated Women,” at the academic conference (Eddie Herena)