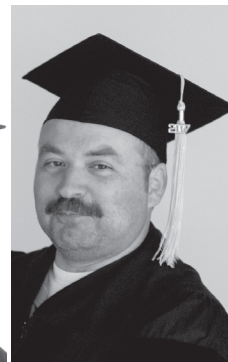
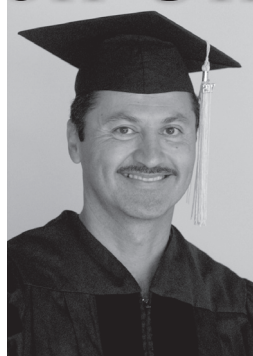


Prison University Project



photos by Peg Skarpinski

A Newsletter of the Prison University Project

December 2007 Vol 3, No. 2

From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

In the past several months since graduation, we have received some wonderful and diverse news coverage, most recently in Chemical and Engineering News and the North Bay Bohemian newspaper. (Links to these interesting articles can be found on our website; anyone without internet access is welcome to write to us for hard copies.) Each time an article about the program appears, whether in a local newspaper or a professional magazine with a national readership, the number of enthusiastic responses we receive illustrates how much interest and support there is out there for what we do.

While our plans to expand the program await a solution to the classroom space shortage at San Quentin, we continue to focus a great deal of energy on strengthening the programs that we currently offer. In particular, we've begun to tackle the issue of learning differences/disabilities among our students, by seeking both input and active participation from experts in this field. This line of inquiry has opened up whole new ways of thinking about teaching and learning for all of us. Our hope is not only to provide students with new pathways for learning that restore joy and excitement to the experience of being in school, but also to offer training and guidance to our teachers that will strengthen and enrich their work, even beyond San Quentin.

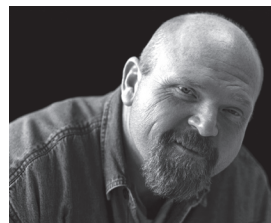
The rest of this newsletter will fill you in on other exciting developments, most of which come down to the steady progress of many individual human beings, as they each create their own, and our collective, future. By supporting the Prison University Project, each of you is making a direct investment in that future, so thank you!

With appreciation,
Jody Lewen

Who We Are

On November 13, the Prison University Project presented a panel discussion at the San Francisco Public Library on the impact of incarceration on individuals and the role of the arts in personal transformation. The event, which was attended by over 100 people, took place in conjunction with the opening of *Who We Are: Essays and Photographs of Students at San Quentin State Prison*. *Who We Are* features photographs by PUP volunteer Heather Rowley and personal essays by students who took a creative writing workshop offered by the College Program during Fall 2006. We're very proud to be able to share their work with the public.

The exhibition is on view at the Main Branch of the San Francisco Public Library through January 20, 2008. If you can't make it in person, visit our website (prisonuniversityproject.org) to download the anthology of student essays and view some of the photographs featured in the exhibition.



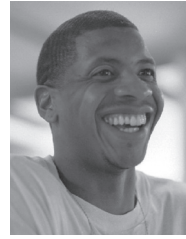
Pictured above are photos from the exhibit. Bottom right photo of panel participants from left to right: memoirist Joe Loya; former San Quentin Public Information Officer Vernell Crittendon; photographer Joseph Rodriguez; and PUP Program Director Jennifer Scaife.

Remaking the Self Through 2500 Years of Philosophy

Socrates was executed in Athens in 399 B.C.E., convicted of corrupting the youth and believing in false gods. Offered the chance to escape, Socrates refused, claiming that the value of his life was nothing compared to the state of his soul. Two thousand years later, Rene Descartes also believed the world of experience was akin to a prison of doubt, and that a mind freed from the cumulative weight of ungrounded beliefs could obtain certain knowledge of self and God. In the 1940s, Albert Camus rejected these twin commitments to truth and a soul, instead encouraging us to accept the indifference of the world to our pain and the absurdity of a life that can find no justification.

These and other philosophical classics are being engaged this fall semester by participants in Introduction to Philosophy. Twice a week, two dozen students ask the hardest questions of these philosophers and themselves: What can convince a man to face rather than flee death? How can I be sure my conscience accords with reason? Can I purge myself of false beliefs? Shall all hope be vanquished in the face of indifference, absurdity, and death? Philosophy, we learn, is always a gamble, for it calls us to risk our very self, the core of what we have known. And while it offers the possibility of finding new truths to live by, those truths may be more demanding than the norms of our everyday lives.

Jeffrey Paris
Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of San Francisco
Instructor, San Quentin College Program



Philosophy 271 is an analytical and transcendental class in which the students explore central philosophical issues, such as the nature of a person, virtue, and beliefs. All this is done by focusing on two main methods of philosophy -- "traditional" and "decolonial." While this "traditional" form is aimed at each philosopher's concept of how people learn and gain wisdom, the "decolonial" form takes us through a world of racism in which our true self is lost due to this infringement.

This class has been a great experience for me, as well as very informative. It has taught me how to read a piece of philosophy, removed from a preconception of the subject, and interpret what the philosopher is trying to say. I recommend this class to those who like to be challenged, and get into deep thought about questions that have been discussed for thousands of years. I can truly say this is one class I'm going to miss, once the semester is over.

Jai Fontenot
Student, San Quentin College Program

Through the Eyes of the Students

In June, 2007 a team of seven researchers with national experience related to urban education reform visited PUP math and English courses and interviewed 42 students. Following are excerpts from the full-length synthesis of the interviews, which can be found on the PUP website.

Overwhelmingly the men saw the program as highly beneficial and in some cases transformative. Its most significant impact appeared to be in the socio-emotional arena and on the "quality of life" they were experiencing in prison. Of particular importance was how it helped them feel that they were accomplishing something and not just wasting time. For many it had a significant impact on their self esteem, showing them that they could meet a challenge and achieve goals that they initially saw as impossible dreams. Some credited this change in turning them from bitterness and reactivity toward a positive goal orientation.

Others valued the courses primarily for the intellectual stimulation and the escape from boredom and the pervasive negative environment surrounding them. They appreciated the chance to be with other prisoners and PUP staff who were committed to doing something positive with their lives. Prisoners cited the PUP classrooms as the only place where they were safe, respected and where men easily interacted across racial lines. Some noted that the cross-racial alliances fostered inside the program served to diffuse potentially explosive situations on the yard.

While all of the men interviewed cited the immediate in-prison benefits of PUP, many also spoke to the benefits it provided for current or future relationships outside of San Quentin. Striking in this area was the impact many cited on their family relationships. Some credited the program with enabling them to proactively engage with their children. As one man stated, his coursework gave him something positive and substantive to discuss with his teenage children and a way to encourage them in their own education. For others, it provided a way to reconnect with children, spouses or parents and provide hope for life after prison. In addition to the family connections, many spoke directly about how the program was preparing them for work or to continue their studies in pursuit of a BA after release. For some the program had inspired career or volunteer goals involving social service and giving back to the community.

While the sample of interviews was small, the consensus regarding the Prison University Program's greatest benefits and challenges was strong. It paints a clear picture of value add and identifies a number of intervention points that could significantly increase the impact of the program.

Dr. Louise Bay Waters

Researchers: Amy Epstein, Dr. Derek Mitchell, Susan Portugal,
Dr. Malika Starr, Dr. June Rimmer, Ryan Waters

EMERITUS NEWS

Greetings everyone! I arrived in Barcelona one year ago. It is a wonderful city – big, with a lot of opportunities, but we miss the Bay Area very much. During this year I studied to get my credentials as an English teacher and got a part-time job at a private school in the city. I teach English to 7th grade students and in addition I work as a “monitor de patio” during lunchtime (which means: stay with the kids and be sure they manage to enjoy their free time without killing themselves).



I try to share my Bay Area experience with my students. Since the United Kingdom is very close, all school material is about that country. But students are extremely curious about the US. They know things, see movies, and of course have a kind of “collage idea” about it: parishilton + sexandthecity + fifthavenue + everybodyisfat + everybodyisglamorous + everythingthemediashowsthatgetspeople’sattention. Which is the popular stereotype about the US. For this reason, I try to share my experiences to overcome the stereotypes and try to build a more complex image.

Of course, I’m also studying Catalan, which is the official language they speak in Catalunya (in addition to Spanish). It’s difficult to work without it. The language issue is very controversial here. It’s related to identity. In Spain there are three regions: Catalunya, Galicia and the Basque Country, which are struggling to have their different identities and languages recognized. But they are constantly challenged by the privileged position Spanish language and identity have in the country. A very sensitive issue.

So, in addition to all the languages I’ve been learning, I’m now learning Catalan. Two hours per day, every day. Ara jo puc parlar una mica de catala. Now I can speak a little bit of Catalan.

Now that I’m here, I often think about my work as a Spanish teacher at San Quentin. It was a great experience for me, since it gave me the opportunity to get in touch with a hidden part of the society that I was living in. Working at SQ gave me the opportunity to overcome simplistic TV images and get personally in touch with the complexity of reality. I think the Patten University program is a wonderful and necessary link between two parts of the same society that need to be connected.

My best wishes to all San Quentin students,
Sabrina Restituiti
Former SQ Spanish teacher

Dear San Quentin Friends,

It’s been five and a half years since I taught my last course at San Quentin, but I still think of my former colleagues and students at the Prison University Project often, and with admiration and affection. These days I work at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, where I teach



courses on African architecture, American housing, and slavery (Atlantic slave trade and other systems). Because I feel so strongly about making higher education accessible in correctional settings, I’ve also become part of a group based here at UIUC that has organized with the goal of establishing a degree-granting program at a Central Illinois prison. We call ourselves Education Beyond Bars and have received support from university administrators, prison authorities, and the Illinois Department of Corrections. We’re currently trying to raise funds and hope to offer our first courses in 2008.

The members of EBB are especially inspired by studies that show that inmates’ home communities benefit when they enroll in prison education programs. Inmates’ children are more likely to take their own education seriously when they see an incarcerated parent taking college courses, and education programs can provide opportunity for family-inmate contact, which research indicates has benefits for inmates, families, and communities. For these reasons, our program design includes working with community organizations in Chicago, where most of Illinois’ incarcerated population comes from, and building community involvement into the educational process.

If anybody reading this happens to be in the central Illinois area and would like to become involved, please contact me at rginsbur@uiuc.edu.

Keep up the good work, Prison University Project! You’re a model to many of us around the country.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Ginsburg

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We’ve redone our website! Visit prisonuniversityproject.org to see a totally redesigned and updated site, complete with new photos and information. We welcome your feedback and suggestions.

Our annual Holiday Volunteer Appreciation Party is coming up on December 8, from 6pm-9pm at Northbrae Community Church in North Berkeley. Don’t forget to RSVP!

Pictured on the top of page one are the 2007 Associate of Arts degree graduates: Noel Valdivia, Fernando Lemus, Henry Frank, Abdul Stewart, David Cowan, and John Warren. Not shown is Fred Harris.

ALUMNI NEWS

Hey everyone. It's Tuesday morning, November 13, 2007, and I am trying to write this while the little black and white abandoned kitten that I found tears around my room, running over the keyboard and attacking the mouse—computer, that is. It's my last day with her, as I found her a home with a co-worker. Well, the one-year mark is one month away. Very hard to believe. Even harder to write an account. Time dictates that this be quick and short.

I had six weeks after I got out before my first semester started at college. I took 21 units, and got one B. This brought me to summer, and I took an externship to learn MRI at a hospital in Gilroy, where I now work. I am taking 13.5 units this semester, and I'll have one more semester to go (plus a couple of classes) to have an AS and my requirements for transfer to UC.

I write and talk about prison in most of my classes. The classes that I took at San Quentin undeniably prepared me for school out here. Not only that, but they provided an out-of-prison experience that directly correlated to my transition back into society. At this point, everything I did while incarcerated has paid off. If anyone is reading this and thinking about taking classes at San Quentin or donating to the Prison University Project, I recommend making that thought a reality, because you will be making a tangible difference.



I must prepare now to be off to work, with my kitty in tow. I am gonna miss her very much, even knowing I found her a good home. She has the most amazing eyes.

Love & Respect, Justin



Who We Are and What We Do Prison University Project

Mission

The mission of the Prison University Project is to provide high-quality higher education to people incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison and throughout the California State Prison system; to create a national model for the replication of such programs; to generate public support for prison education, training, and recovery programs; and to increase public awareness about criminal justice issues nationwide.

Program Description

The Prison University Project provides all financial and administrative support to the College Program at San Quentin. The College Program is an extension site of Patten University and it is the only on-site, degree-granting program in the entire California state prison system. The program charges no fees or tuition; textbooks are lent to students each semester and school supplies are provided by the Prison University Project.

The Associate of Arts Degree Program in liberal arts offers approximately 12 classes each semester (three semesters per year) in the humanities, social sciences, math, and science, including advanced independent study math classes, and other courses needed to complete transfer-eligibility requirements for four-year colleges and

universities. The Program also provides college preparatory courses in math and English, in which most students generally spend their first year.

Approximately 200 students are currently enrolled in the College Program. As of June 2007, 68 students have earned their Associate of Arts degree.

Students

Anyone who is classified as general population at San Quentin and holds either a GED or high school diploma is eligible to enroll in the College Program. Students range in age from 20 to 72; the average age is 36. As of 2004-2005, 32% were white, 37% were black, 18% were Hispanic, 7% were Asian, and 6% identified themselves as "other." San Quentin's entire population is classified as male.

Faculty and Staff

The Prison University Project has three full-time, paid staff members: Jody Lewen, Executive Director; Jennifer Scaife, Program Director; and Karin Collins, Administrative Assistant. All instructors, teaching assistants, and tutors work on an entirely volunteer basis. Most are professors and graduate students from the University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco State University, Sonoma State University, and other Bay Area colleges and universities.

Reentry Advising

The California Reentry Program at San Quentin provides future parolees with individualized assistance in developing plans for life post-release, including to continue their education. This program supplies college catalogues, application forms, and financial aid information, in addition to providing links to other vital services in areas such as housing, employment, and drug treatment. Allyson West is Director of the California Reentry Program, and can be reached at ca_reentry@yahoo.com.

Special Events

The Program regularly sponsors special events, such as a semesterly poetry slam, guest lectures, and an annual graduation ceremony in June. We also often host visits and meetings between students and members of the outside community, including journalists, private citizens, legislators, and legislative staffers.

Financial Support

The Prison University Project is an independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization. It receives no state or federal funding and is supported entirely through contributions from foundations, corporations, and individuals. We thank all of you for your support!