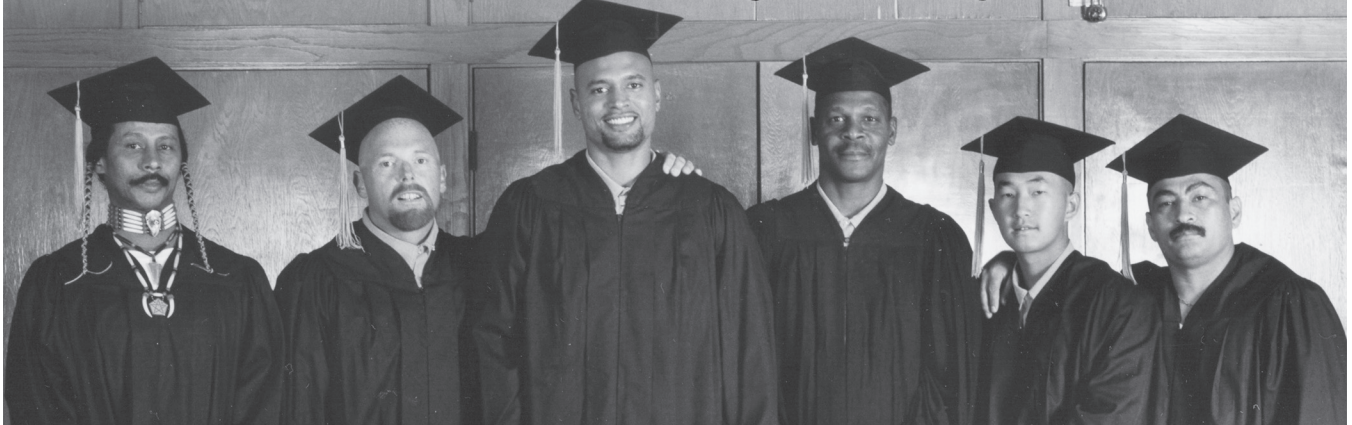


Prison University Project



A Newsletter of the Prison University Project

November 2005 Vol 1, No. 1

Dear Friends of the Prison University Project,

Welcome to our first newsletter! We hope to make this a semi-annual tradition, through which to bring you news about the program at San Quentin, as well as word directly from students, both past and present.

It's been an extraordinarily productive and challenging year for us. This fall we are serving an unprecedented number of new students, especially in the College Preparatory Program. We've improved and expanded our sequence of Spanish language courses into a bona fide intensive program, with classes meeting four nights per week, and student retention is at an all-time high. We've also run several new classes for the first time this year, including Ancient African History, Environmental Science, Theater Improvisation, and Calculus. With each new field we develop contacts with a new set of academic departments and professions, and the network of people directly involved with, and affected by, the program continues to grow.

In the process, the San Quentin College Program has become a model and resource for people around the state – and around the country – who contact and/or visit in search of information about prison higher education, prison reform, and reentry services. During the last year, individuals in Alabama, Arizona, and New Jersey have contacted us in search of guidance on starting up or expanding programs at prisons in their states. We have also hosted visits from legislators, including Congresswomen Barbara Lee (California) and Sheila Jackson Lee (Texas), staff from the Legislative Analyst's office, as well as an array of researchers, scholars and journalists.

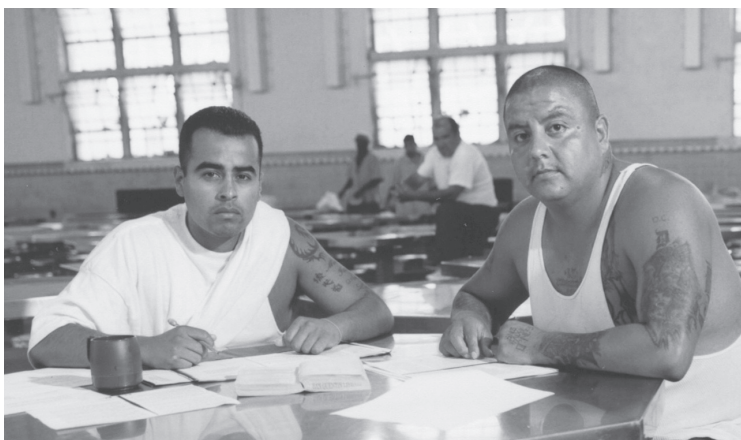
During the next five years, we will continue to work toward our long term goals of replicating the San Quentin College Program at other institutions throughout the state, implementing an extensive research and evaluation program, and cultivating the San Quentin College Program as a center for dialogue between people in prison, the corrections community, academia, the media, government agencies, and the public.

In order to achieve these long-term goals, we must address the program's need for additional staff and classroom space. We are currently in the midst of developing a proposal to the Department of Corrections which would make space available for additional classrooms as well as a research library. We are also launching a fundraising campaign to hire three additional full-time program staff. These steps will enable us to serve more students, increase the number of graduates and the rate of degree completion, and implement a Bachelor of Arts degree program.

The Prison University Project has come this far as a result of the hard work and commitment of students, volunteers, and donors. The financial contributions of our friends and supporters make possible everything we do -- from supplying textbooks and school supplies to students, to hosting volunteer trainings, meetings, and other events. Your renewed support will now allow us to expand the Program at San Quentin and to move closer to achieving our ultimate goal of providing quality higher education to people incarcerated throughout California. Thank you!

Jody Lewen
Director

Nicole Lindahl
Program Administrator



Manuel and Martin studying in North Block dining hall. In a place where tables and chairs are considered luxuries, access to study space is a major “perk” of a kitchen job assignment.



Swinney Russell and family, San Quentin Graduation. A very rare emotional opportunity for students, family members and teachers to gather and celebrate the hard work and accomplishments of the San Quentin student body.

A letter from Hector

The impact that the college program has had in my life can be seen in the relationships that I have with others. After serving over eleven years in prison, I was starting to become bitter over the abuse that I had witnessed throughout the years. The prison authorities are quick to punish those that break the rules while not taking responsibility for their own misconduct. Just after a few classes at Patten University, my outlook on life and people had changed. The college program has allowed me to channel my frustrations in a positive way. Through classes – such as Sociology, Psychology, and Critical Thinking, for example – I have learned to appreciate how poverty, drug addiction, the media, and a person’s environment can play a major role on how people interact with one another. For example, I used to have strong anger toward those that turn the key on my cage, strip search me, and give me orders in a disrespectful manner, now I understand that they too have been institutionalized in some way. Through class discussions, I also have gained a greater understanding of people from different cultures and beliefs.

The program has also had an enormous impact on how my family and friends view me as a person. They learned that even in prison I have not let my mistake define who I am. I am dealing with it the best way possible. I am not just doing time, I am doing good things with my time and this has made my relationship with my children, ex-wife, and siblings much stronger. Before I came to prison I was given high respect from my family members and friends. I am the “Godfather” of five children and this was only because I was seen to be a responsible person. When I came to prison, I lost some of that respect. However, sharing my progress, in the form of my report card, with my children and “God-children,” I have gained some of that respect back. They see me as someone who takes responsibility for his actions and with his time. My communications skills with my children have helped them to open up to me. As I share my ideas with them, they share their ideas with me. During my visits, my family and I talk about some of the things that I have learned. We no longer talk about old problems and terrible things that go on in prison. Their interest in me has grown and I receive more letters from my nephews, nieces, Godchildren, and other family members, wanting to know more. I also send a copy of most of my essays out to them. This allows me to share my knowledge and help them with their own education. My son and daughters tell me that they are proud of me. That makes all the hard work that I had to do for my degree worthwhile. Furthermore, since I started going to college in 2002, my children have taken their education more seriously. My eldest daughter and son graduated from high school and are thinking about taking college courses. My youngest daughter returned to school after dropping out and she is trying harder than before. In my family, I was the first to graduate from high school and I am now the first to earn a college degree. After I graduated from high school it became a normal thing for my family and most of my nephews and nieces have graduated and some are now in college. They all write me and we are much closer than ever before. Thank you Jody, Nicole, and all the other volunteers.

I would like the world to know that getting tough on crime does not have to mean keeping those that do the crime stupid, or ignorant. Educating prisoners is not only good for the prisoner, it is good for society as a whole. We learn how to be better thinkers. What we learn in the college program will most likely be taught to our own children, who in turn will become better students and more likely to go to college instead of prison. All you need to do is ask yourself, who would I rather be living in my neighborhood: someone who came out of prison and gained nothing from the experience other than being harder and more antisocial, or someone that has rehabilitated and educated himself to become a better thinker, more social and more understanding? Most of the prisoners will come home. Who would you rather be living in your neighborhood? They know what they did wrong. They know that they must pay for their mistakes. But when all you do is punish a person, they really do not learn anything of value. They just learn how to hate and become harder from their experience of living in a cage and being ordered around. They become institutionalized and that even scares someone like me, who has been in prison for 14 years. I

Exciting Innovations in Our College Prep Program: Math 50

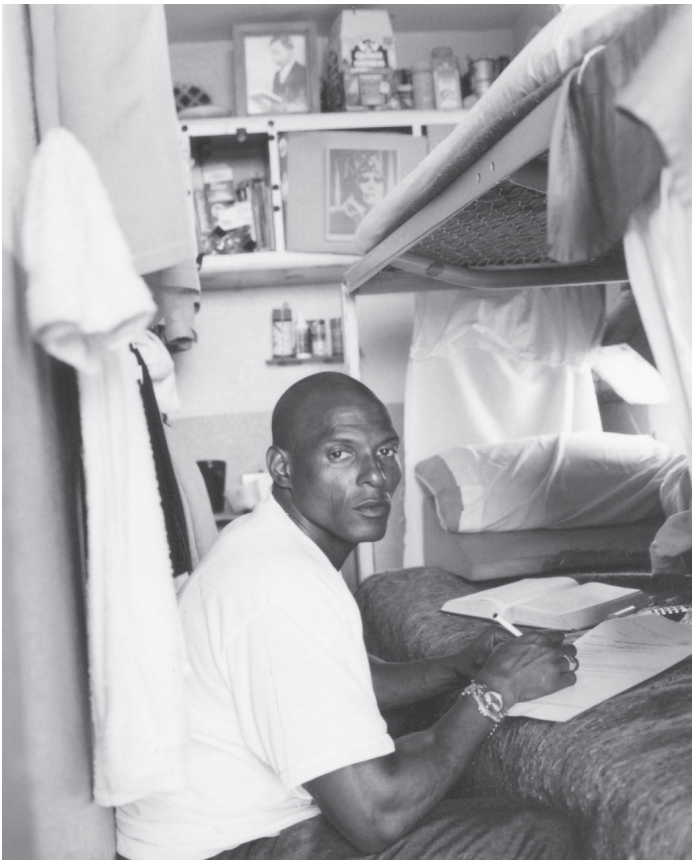
At San Quentin we have already figured out how to fix what most math departments are struggling with!

The most common complaint of math college instructors is the lack of preparation of their students. It is impossible to progress in mathematics without a solid foundation. Many colleges offer remedial classes but they tend to fail because they cannot cope with the heterogeneity of the student body, both in terms of previous knowledge and pace of learning.

To solve this issue at San Quentin we created a self-paced developmental mathematics course, Math 50, the goal of which is to prepare students for Algebra. After a placement exam, students start learning at exactly the right spot. They do not need to waste time with anything they have already mastered, and they

can spend as long as needed on every topic. Tutors are always available for individual explanations. The method is designed to provide constant feedback and review, and to keep every student challenged, but not bored or overwhelmed. Since the new course was implemented in spring of 2004, the number of students registered has increased by 200% and, perhaps more importantly, the rate of student retention has increased from 20% to 75%. This semester, a total of 30 volunteers are participating in this class, which meets Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This means our teacher student ratio each evening is about 1:5.

— Alfonso Gracia-Saz, Ph.D. Candidate in Mathematics, UC Berkeley; Volunteer Instructor in math and Spanish since 2002



Ansar doing homework in his cell. Classes meet 6:30 pm – 8:45 pm. All students in the program hold full-time day jobs; most get up at 4:30 am. Time for homework is mostly before dinner, late at night, and on the weekends.

News Research and Evaluation

In recognition of the achievements and unique potential of the Prison University Project's work at San Quentin, the Department of Corrections and the California Correctional Peace Officers Association agreed last year to jointly fund a two-year independent evaluation of the college program. This is an exciting and unprecedented opportunity. The project will evaluate the impact of the work that we have been doing over the course of the last decade, as well as document a model of best practices for future implementation in other prisons, and in other states.

In preparation for the evaluation, we have begun an internal review of our record-keeping procedures, and have begun to compile the data we have available and prepare it for analysis. We are excited to be at the forefront of the Department's renewed commitment to the role of research, and we look forward to building an ongoing relationship with the both the corrections and academic communities around issues of research and evaluation.

— Amy Lerman, Ph.D. Candidate, Political Science, UC Berkeley; Volunteer Instructor since 2003; and Pro Bono Consultant in Research and Evaluation

(Masthead photo) Patten University at San Quentin, 2005 Graduating Class (from left) Jahmal Wallace, Red Frye, Sam Vaughn, Michael Palmore, Jay Ly, and Hector Oropeza.

All photos by © Heather Rowley 2005

Letter from Hector (continued on page 2)

have family and friends that will have to live near those who are freed from prison and have not done anything with their time. I wish everyone would go through this program. I wish everyone could receive a higher education. How is it that we can find money to lock someone up for 25 years, at a cost of more than thirty thousand dollars a year, but we can not find money to better educate our children? College is good for everyone and more people should support this program. In the end, it will pay for itself. The volunteers of the college program are true crime fighters. The people that volunteer for the college program have inspired me to become a better person, and I think that I am because of them.

Hector Oropeza

Patten University at San Quentin Graduate, 2005

Who We Are and What We Do *Prison University Project*

The San Quentin College Program

The College Program at San Quentin is an extension site of Patten University, a small independent university in Oakland, California. It is supported by the Prison University Project, a non-profit organization fiscally sponsored by the Tides Center of San Francisco.

The Mission of the Prison University Project

The mission of the Prison University Project is to provide free, high-quality higher education programs for 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; and to generate public support for prison education and rehabilitation.

Program Description

The San Quentin College Program is the only on-site, degree-granting higher education program in all of California's 32 state prisons. It has three components: the College Preparatory Program, the Associate of Arts Degree Program in liberal arts, and the Pre-Release Academic Advising Program. Approximately 200 students currently participate in the College Program. Since its beginning in 1996, 54 students have earned their Associate of Arts degrees.

Students

All general population inmates who hold either a GED or high school diploma are eligible to enroll. Students range in age from 22 to 72; the average age is 36. As of 2004-2005, 37% were black, 32% were white, 18% were Hispanic, 7% were Asian, and 6% identified themselves as "other." San Quentin's entire population is male.

Faculty and Staff

The San Quentin College Program and the Prison University Project are coordinated by two full-time, paid staff people: the Program Director, Jody Lewen, and the Program Administrator, Nicole Lindahl. All instructors, teaching assistants, tutors, and advisors are volunteers; most are professors and graduate students from the University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco State University, and other Bay Area colleges and universities.

The College Preparatory Program

Virtually all new students begin in the College Preparatory program. These courses in developmental mathematics and English provide the basic skills needed for college-level work. Most students remain in this program for at least two semesters before beginning credit classes.

The Associate of Arts Degree Program

The program offers 12 – 15 courses each semester, three semesters per year, in the humanities, social sciences, math, and science, as well as independent study classes. Average class size is 16 students. In addition, we offer courses in more advanced math, science and foreign language to allow students to complete transfer-eligibility requirements for four-year colleges and universities.

Pre-Release Academic Advising Program

The Pre-Release Academic Advising Program provides future parolees with individualized assistance in developing a plan for continuing their education post-release. The program supplies them with college catalogues, application forms, financial aid information, and links to other resources critical for educational success, such as housing, employment, and drug treatment.

Special Events

PUP regularly sponsors special events, including poetry slams, guest lectures, and an annual graduation ceremony in June. The program also regularly hosts visits and meetings between students and journalists, legislators, private citizens, and other members of the outside community.

Forward the message

The Prison University Project

If there is anyone else you'd like us to send a copy of this newsletter to, please let us know:

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZIP _____
EMAIL _____
PHONE _____

The **Prison University Project** relies entirely on contributions from supporters like you. Donations from individuals and foundations are our sole source of financial support, and fund all of the work that we do. We receive no funding from state or federal government. All donations to the Prison University Project are tax deductible.

Send your DONATIONS to: Prison University Project
Post Office Box 492
San Quentin, California 94964

☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$1,000 ☐ \$5,000 \$ _____

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You can also donate online with a credit card at: www.prisonuniversityproject.org and ask your employer about matching grants!

To contact us, send email to: info@prisonuniversityproject.org or call 510-524-0496