

# Prison University Project

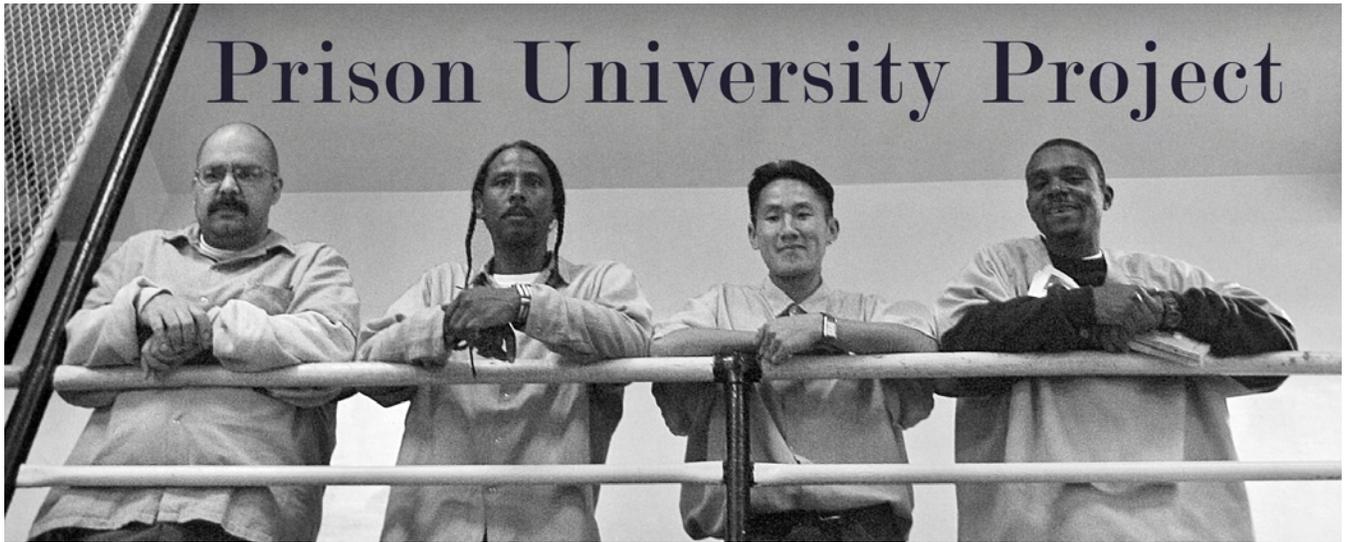


photo by Brian Frank

A Newsletter of the Prison University Project

June 2006 Vol 2, No. 1

## ***From the Executive Director***

These last several months have illustrated the extent to which the fortunes of the College Program at San Quentin are tied to the situation within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Overcrowding, understaffing, and rapidly deteriorating physical infrastructure, among other factors, continue to exert pressure on available classroom space. While our sights continue to be set resolutely on expansion, today our most pressing goal is keeping the number of courses we offer constant.

And yet the program continues to thrive: this semester we are offering History of India for the first time; Clinical Psychology last semester was another very significant first. In July, Jennifer Scaife joins the Prison University Project as the Program Administrator, while Nicole Lindahl takes time off before returning as Program Consultant. In June, Larry King came to San Quentin to interview several men, most of whom were College Program students (see the PUP website for transcripts.) And on June 29th, Jerry Elster, Bobby Evans, Steve Higuere, Darnell Hill, Olish Tunstall, Willard Weeks and Christian Willis celebrate completion of their Associate of Arts degrees. As we honor their tremendous accomplishments, we are more resolved than ever to expand this program – to serve more students, offer more classes, initiate a Bachelor's degree program, and continue to realize our potential as a site of individual achievement, community collaboration, and societal transformation.

The following pages relate some of this extraordinary work in much greater detail. I hope all of you who support this program will recognize these accomplishments as belonging as much to you as they do to us: *without you all, none of this would be possible. Thank you!*

Jody Lewen

## ***Valedictorian's Letter*** Bobby Evans

Friends and Supporters,

Because of education, time in prison has been an experience beyond my wildest dreams. When I came to prison I hated school. I had gotten kicked out of high school, and then dropped out of continuation school because I saw no value in education. To my surprise, I passed the GED to please my mother because she was always on my back about it. Ten years ago there was no way I would have dreamt that education would be my way out of crime and violence.

Years later, with God in my life, my way of thinking changed and I started looking at education as a possible way out of the mess that I was in. Patten University at San Quentin allowed me a place to nurture dreams of bigger and greater things. Going into the College Program I thought I was dumb and had no aspiration to do anything with my life. But I knew crime was getting me nowhere quick. Determined to make sense of my world that I had lost control of, to my surprise, just as I was surprised when I passed the GED test in one sitting, I found out that I did have a brain and excelled in all classes: Biology, Geometry, Geology, History, Critical Thinking, and even Physics.

Furthermore, the life lessons I received in addition to the content of the course were most important to me. For example, enrolling in a Buddhism class as a Christian was difficult for me. As many Christians do, I fiercely guarded my beliefs, stuck in a state of cognitive dissonance, not allowing any new information (that I feared would be contrary or that would contradict my beliefs) before my eyes, in my hearing, or around me at all. But in order for me to do well in the class, I had to open my self up to new information. In doing so, I learned that I did not have to divorce my beliefs and Christian ideologies, but was able to strengthen them while better understanding the culture, reason, and practice of Buddhism. Moreover, I was able to see that many of my preconceived ideas of Buddhism were false, having no factual foundation. They were created by my own misunderstanding. Now because of this life lesson I am able to rightly discern the truth of any new information that comes before my eyes, ears, or person.

Thanks to my educational experience my search for a new way in which I can give back to a world that I denied and deprived so much is over.

*continued on page 4*

## Program Developments



### A note from Jennifer Scaife

Since August 2005, when I became a part of the passionate intellectual community of students and instructors inside Patten University at San Quentin, I have taught English 99a (the first half of the College Program's developmental English curriculum) continuously. It's an exciting time to encounter students: right as they enter college, many for the first time. My students' patience—with themselves, with me—as they discover and hone their writing skills is nothing short of inspiring.

Because I have had such positive experiences with my students and colleagues throughout the past year, it is with extraordinary enthusiasm that I join the College Program staff as the new program administrator. In this role, I will face instructive challenges daily. I look forward to sharing these moments, along with other program developments, in future newsletters.

### A note from Nicole Lindahl

Once Jennifer officially takes over my responsibilities on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006, my role will shift to that of program consultant. This new position will allow me to focus on projects related to program improvement and development that I have been interested in pursuing throughout my tenure as program administrator. I am particularly excited about helping develop program materials such as our website and future newsletters; continuing to cultivate a dynamic campus life by facilitating guest lectures, seminars, and special events at San Quentin; and increasing the impact of the college program and our students on criminal justice discourse and policy by creating and strengthening ties with community organizations, the media, research institutes, and politicians. I look forward to working with Jody and Jennifer on these projects, and to sharing our achievements with all of you as they develop.



Photo by Brian Frank

## Making Lemonade out of Lemons

### THEATER IMPROVISATION

*from a student.* . . I wanted to take a moment to tell you all about a wonderful class that is being taught here at the San Quentin College Program. I, along with several other students I've spoken to, believe that the Theater Improvisation Class can have a profound effect on our lives and the way we often view things around us. This class is much more than just some "acting class." The boundaries of each individual are explored within himself. You can go into this class being anti-social, a loner, quiet, reserved or shy and there is always some exercise in this class to get you past those stages. Especially important is how all the different ethnic groups come together as teams, often working together in some of the funniest situations. We learn to see our true selves and communicate together in accord. This class would never be what it is without our fearless leader Majestic Matt, or now as I've heard this semester Magic Matt. I recommend this class to my fellow inmates because it really rejuvenates and challenges you. It gives us the opportunity to find our inner potential and discover that the only obstacles in our lives are ourselves!

Jeff Brooks

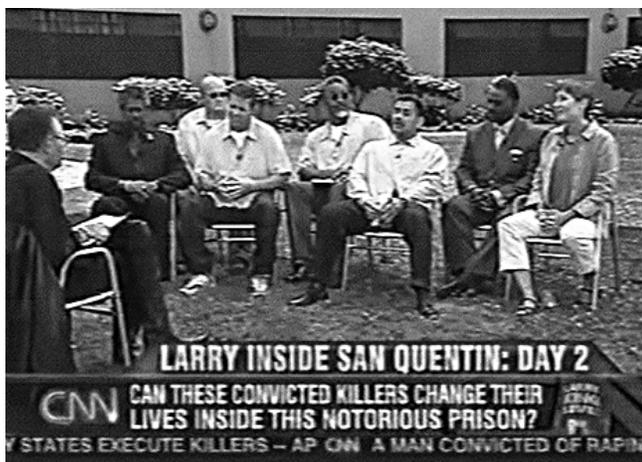
*. . . and from a teacher* Over the last three years of teaching theatre improvisation at San Quentin, I have met an endless cue of human beings waiting on long lists, desiring an opportunity or space in my class to challenge themselves, to unlock creative expression, to find refuge from the continuing violent war of races and gangs that currently plagues the prison.

The first couple of weeks the men find it difficult to generate stories about situations other than what is happening in a life of incarceration. By the third or fourth week, after the dust has been blown out of their heads, the stories begin to emerge. The Students become neighbors, parents, doctors, kings, painters, gold miners, policemen, women and children. They begin to remember what it was like to have different considerations and responsibilities before they were locked up.

My students find more than just access to boundless self-expression and creativity, they find connection with each other, they find shared experiences that lay the foundation of community, they build creative trust, they find a way to be inspired about themselves and discover that life is full of endless possibilities outside and inside the walls of San Quentin, but most of all they find a way to laugh at themselves and accept, embrace and once again, like kids, be excited about who they are, and what they can become. I kid you NOT.

The "Making Lemonade out of lemons" line is what it has taken me three years to understand about what tool matters most to these guys in my class: it is the ability to be comfortable with any kind of uncomfortable situation and make the best of it.

Matthew Gray



### Larry King at San Quentin

CNN LARRY KING LIVE Can Prison Reform?

Aired June 9, 2006 - 21:00 ET

<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0606/09/lkl.01.html>

## Darryl Littlejohn

*Darryl Littlejohn left San Quentin last year after completing the College Preparatory Program in math and English. We spoke to him on June 4<sup>th</sup> near his home in Fairfield, CA.*

**PUP:** *What is life like right now?*

**DL:** Life for me now is good. It's slow, but that's good. My daily routine: wake up, work out, get dressed, go to work – by the time I get off it's like 6:00pm. My life is really just basketball and work, but come June 19, my days will really be occupied – I've got Algebra and Public Speaking. In fall I'll be enrolled full-time, and I plan on playing basketball for Solano Community College. I'm staying with my aunt and uncle, but I'm working trying to save some money so I can move out, get my own spot – just working as much as I can til I get to summer school – school, school, school, school!

**PUP:** *What was it like when you first got out?*

**DL:** After I was released they wouldn't let me come straight to Fairfield; they said I had to parole to Oakland. That's where my controlling case was so they said I had to stay in the Alameda



Darryl Littlejohn with his little sister photo by Heather Rowley at Mankis Park, Vacaville, CA, June 2006

county area. But I don't have any family in Oakland so I had to stay in a – it was almost like a half-way house because they call it a clean and sober environment.

Of all the places that they have, I would probably say it was the most sane place, because they run a very structured program – they give NA classes, AA classes twice a week, they send people to other meetings if they have to, they try to provide as much as they can – they have a workshop there where they can get jobs – the place is called Allied Fellowship. So it

was a nice program – they provided everything I needed.

**PUP:** *What made you decide to start out with Public Speaking?*

**DL:** By being in that house, because there was a lot of drug counselors over there – that's basically what it was, they had classes during the day. And being that drugs isn't my problem – I don't do drugs, and I was probably the only guy in that house that wasn't doing any drugs – I was able to sit back and I was able to look and listen. And all these guys were a lot older than me, so it was like, man, these guys really need

*continued on page 4*

## David Deutsch

*David Deutsch left San Quentin in 2003 and currently lives in Oxnard, CA.*

**Dear friends,** The College Program helped me get back in study mode 26 years after completing my Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and Anthropology. By taking 3 semesters of Spanish I was well prepared when I got home to begin the Addictive Disorders Studies program at Oxnard College which I finished in 3 semesters with a 4.0 average. The SQ College Program also helped me stay positive and focused on my future.

I now work for both Lutheran Social Services and Alternate Action (a Prop. 36 Program). I continue to chair the Adult Services Outreach and Engagement Committee for the Mental Health Services Act. Our committee has been instrumental in the planning for the opening of an Adult Wellness and Recovery Center, which will hopefully open in late 2006. I am getting clinical hours towards my license and hope to be doing full time clinical work by next year. However, I love my current work which is why I have turned down three offers in the past six months to go full time at residential treatment facilities.

Please give my best to everyone there: Jody, Nicole, Allyson. And say hello to all my Spanish teachers: Amy, Bill, Anna, Martha and Daniel and the assistants too. I miss you all and want to thank you for all you did for me and for all you continue to do for the men of San Quentin. ■



David Deutsch with his 17 month grandson Spencer in his backyard in Oxnard, CA, June 2006

## Rodney Medley

*Rodney Medley completed 45 units in the College Program at San Quentin before leaving in spring of 2003. He currently lives in Rohnert Park, CA.*

**Dear fellow classmates/prisoners,** The endorsement that I'm required to have on my driver's license for my job right now requires an extensive FBI background check. When I first applied for this, at first glance [at my criminal record] they considered me a threat to the nation. And then they gave me a chance to explain myself. I put together everything I had done during my five years at San Quentin – I put everything together in a package – everything I did while I was incarcerated for those five years – letters from Jody, Jerry Stubblefield, Keith Baughn (sheet metal instructor), a letter from my parole officer, my psychologist, plus my GED certificate and my college transcripts and certificates from all the self-help groups that I did in there – I made copies of everything and sent them off. Because of all the work I did in there, the FBI changed their ruling and said they did not consider me a threat to this nation, and I got the endorsement.

All the positive work you do in prison – it does hold water in



Rodney Medley with daughters Carinna and Alisha at Marine World, June 2006

*continued on page 4*

**Darryl Littlejohn** *continued from page 3*

help, and I was looking at the situations they was in, and at the same time, a lot of people would come talk to me cause I wasn't on drugs, and they felt that I could help them. And in the process of me doing all that, I found like, well I'm doing exactly what these other people are doing, but they're getting paid for it! And I'm getting these people to listen to me, and I'm helping one or two of them, so why not go ahead and get paid for it – you know, I like to talk anyway. So I'm hoping that if I can transfer to a four-year with my AA degree I'll be able to do counseling, be a motivational speaker, anything like that. I want to work with less privileged people – and when I say that I mean people who may have drug habits, or any type of problem. That's all I can hope for. If I can help one person I'll be satisfied with that but I'd be glad to help many more! ■



photo by Heather Rowley

**Rodney Medley** *continued from page 3*

society – it's just in prison that it seems futile. I would encourage anybody to throw that TV out of your cell, throw away those dominos, and know that life can change right there where you're at – because there are numerous volunteers who are willing to give up their time so you won't have to do time ever again.

There are plenty of opportunities out here. Because of the massive prison system in California it is not uncommon for people to have to check that convicted felon box – all you have to do is be honest and people are not freaked out about it, they just want to see how much remorse you feel about, and who are they dealing with today. I've never run into anybody who thought negatively about me because of it. Because of the way I've carried myself with my company, my boss says convicted felons are the best workers and he would hire them all day long if he had positions open. I have run into this numerous times – people who have no problem with people's paths, they just want to know who they are today. ■

**Valedictorian** *continued from page 1*

Through education, which has given me so much hope and an avenue for change, my mind has expanded and my moral values have been challenged to rethink my world view. Before my educational experience in Patten University at San Quentin, I could have never foreseen in my wildest dreams, the metamorphosis that has taken place within me. I tell people all the time, "I would never give up this experience for anything in the world."

I credit education for showing me that I do have what it takes to be a better citizen, and a better father with much to contribute to society. My greatest accomplishment in all my 41 years is that in 2006, I not only graduate the same year as my 14 year old daughter Angelique, but I am also valedictorian of Patten University at San Quentin. Now my aspirations are such that I want to pursue a career in social work so that I can work in the field of reentry helping people like myself reenter their communities as productive citizens, never to return to a life of crime and violence.

■ Bobby Evans, *class of 2006*

## 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, training, and recovery programs.

### 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 the Program's beginning in 1996, 60 students have completed 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 prison 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 Executive Director, and the Program Administrator. 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 program also relies on volunteer interns for clerical and other support services.

### 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

Pre-Release Academic Advising is provided at San Quentin by the California Reentry Program (Allyson West, Director). In addition to providing individualized assistance developing educational plans (and supplying college catalogues, application forms, and financial aid information), CRP offers extensive one-on-one advising for developing post-parole plans, and provides resources related to 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.

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

\$5     \$25     \$50     \$100     \$500     \$1,000     \$5,000    \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

You can also donate online with a credit card at: [www.prisonuniversityproject.org](http://www.prisonuniversityproject.org)  
And ask your employer about matching grants!

To contact us, send email to: [info@prisonuniversityproject.org](mailto:info@prisonuniversityproject.org) or call 510-524-0496.

### *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:

1. PLEASE SEND THIS NEWSLETTER TO: (NAME/TITLE) _____	2. PLEASE SEND THIS NEWSLETTER TO: (NAME/TITLE) _____
ADDRESS _____	ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZIP _____	CITY _____ ZIP _____
EMAIL _____ PHONE _____	EMAIL _____ PHONE _____

**Former San Quentin students:** please stay in touch with us! Make sure we've got your current mailing address, phone number, and, if you've got one, your email address. We'd also be glad to hear about what you're up to, what your plans are, any challenges you may be dealing with, and what if anything we might be able to do to help.

*Return address*

Prison University Project  
PO Box 492  
San Quentin, CA 94964