

# Inside Criminal Justice

A Replication Manual  
for Prosecutors and Colleges

Summer 2020  
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# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| About .....   | 1  |
| Foreword .....  | 2  |
| Introduction .....  | 3  |
| Creating the Course .....   | 4  |
| 1. <i>Identifying Academic and Department of<br/>        Corrections Partners</i> |    |
| 2. <i>Building a Team</i>   |    |
| 3. <i>Choosing a Curriculum</i>   |    |
| 4. <i>Identifying Students</i>  |    |
| 5. <i>Teaching the Course</i>   |    |
| 6. <i>Organizing Graduation</i>   |    |
| Teaching in Prison .....  | 13 |
| Addressing Conflicts of Interest .....  | 14 |
| Note on Language .....  | 15 |
| Acknowledgments .....   | 16 |
| Appendix A  |    |
| Appendix B  |    |
| Appendix C  |    |

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## About the IIP



The Institute for Innovation in Prosecution at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (IIP) provides a collaborative national platform that brings together prosecutors, policy experts, and the communities they serve to promote data-driven strategies, cutting-edge scholarship, and innovative thinking. The IIP is dedicated to criminal justice that promotes community-centered standards of safety, fairness, and dignity.



**Lucy Lang** is Director of the Institute for Innovation in Prosecution at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a think tank for prosecutors and communities across the United States. Lucy writes and speaks widely on prosecution and criminal legal reform, and teaches those issues in New York State prisons. She previously served as Special Counsel for Policy and Projects and Executive Director of the Manhattan D.A. Academy, a resource for professionals working at the intersection of law and public policy. Lucy is a graduate of Swarthmore College, where she serves on the Board of Managers, and Columbia Law School, where she was the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Gender and Law and where she now serves as a Lecturer-in-Law. Lucy was named a 2015 Rising Star by the New York Law Journal, was a 2017 Presidential Leadership Scholar, and is a 2019 Aspen Society Fellow and a Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

## About the Columbia Center for Justice



The Center for Justice is committed to ending mass incarceration and criminalization, and advancing alternative approaches to justice and safety through education, research, and policy change. Its mission is to help transform the approaches to justice from being driven by punishment and retribution to being centered on prevention and healing. The Center is interdisciplinary and works in partnership with schools, departments, centers and institutes across Columbia, other universities, government agencies, community organizations, advocates and those directly affected by the criminal justice system.



**Dr. Geraldine Downey** is the Director of the Center for Justice at Columbia University and a Robert Johnston Niven Professor of Humane Letters in Psychology. Dr. Downey has worked on and taught about issues related to incarceration since the 1970s. This work included a study of the first cohort of youth placed on probation in Ireland, co-directing a Mother-Child Visitation at Huron Valley Correctional Facility, Michigan, and teaching in several prison college programs, including Sing Sing, Bedford Hills and Taconic Correctional Facilities in NYS.

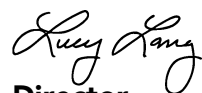
# Foreword

In October 2017, I concluded a homicide trial that resulted in the conviction of two men who had open fired on a busy Manhattan street, injuring four victims and taking the life of a fifth. The morning following the conviction, I called the mother of the young man who had been killed to ask how she felt about the result of the case. She told me that while she had slept well for the first time since her son had been killed, the only thing she could think about were the mothers of the two men who would be sent to prison for decades. Her compassion exposed me to the limits of my own, and I realized then how insensitive to the effects of my decision-making that I had allowed myself to become as a prosecutor.

I created Inside Criminal Justice to better educate myself and other prosecutors about what happens after a trial ends and to think more deeply about how we as prosecutors define public safety. I believe in the power of honest discussion, proximity, and the liberal arts model of the exchange of ideas to unite students and bring about better understandings of ourselves and the world around us. Since our first semester in January 2018, I have seen the power of this course to affect prosecutors' understandings of their role in the criminal justice system.

For two years now, I have watched as the course has broken down the barriers that exist between incarcerated people and prosecutors who handle their cases. I have listened as people who have suffered significant trauma express their grievances and have watched prosecutors grapple with the realities of not only prison, but also of aggrieved communities. I have seen unlikely friendships form between individuals who never thought that they would see eye-to-eye, and I have felt uplifted by the deep and honest exchanges I have witnessed in the classroom.

Though the elements of an Inside Criminal Justice course are simple, the experience of the course can feel at first awkward and difficult. As I have seen time and time again, that difficulty is worth it for everyone in the classroom. Many students, both incarcerated and prosecutor, have reported that after taking the course and hearing about the experiences and considerations of the people on the other side, they think differently about the justice system. Students universally graduate from the program agreeing that justice requires us to seek the best interest of all members of our society, to elevate the voices of those impacted most by the system, and to see one another as complex people worthy of dignity and respect.



**Director,  
Institute for Innovation in Prosecution**

# Introduction

Inside Criminal Justice is a seminar-style college course in which prosecutors and incarcerated students study together inside prisons. The original model follows a six-week semester and uses a curriculum designed by Columbia University Psychology Professor Geraldine Downey. The course is intended to encourage in-depth and respectful conversation about the criminal justice system, culminating in jointly-authored policy proposals. The objective is to think together about a justice system that emphasizes public safety while supporting healthy development from birth to old age and makes engaged citizenship possible for everyone.

Participating ADA students receive CLE credit for completion of the course—as long as the curriculum meets the requirements for CLE credit—and incarcerated students who finish course requirements are eligible to receive college credit.

The course is concluded with a graduation ceremony where students present the jointly-drafted policy proposals for improving the criminal justice system they prepared for their final projects. To support the graduates, the ceremony brings together both student populations, their friends and family, prison administrators, and criminal justice policy makers who are capable of enacting the proposals students have worked on during the semester.

It is worth noting that college in prison has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to reduce recidivism. According to a 2016 RAND study, incarcerated people who participate in educational programs are 43% less likely to return to prison than those who don't. Educational programs in prison also increase employability upon release and provide a network of similarly minded peers for motivated students. The RAND study notes that post-release employment was 13% higher for those who participated in academic or vocational education programs. Students who participated in vocational training were 28% more likely to be employed after release. The many salutary effects of education in prison make it a cost-effective tool for reducing recidivism.

# Creating the Course

## 1

## Identifying Academic and Department of Corrections Partners

### Identifying a College Partner

The ideal academic partner for an Inside Criminal Justice course employs a professor comfortable teaching in prisons and will provide college credit to the incarcerated students who complete the course. It is a plus if the college or university has resources for formerly incarcerated people (such as assistance finding jobs or educational opportunities) or community resources that may provide a network for incarcerated students once they are released. Ideally, dedicated students would be provided some avenue to matriculate there or elsewhere after their release and the completion of the Inside Criminal Justice course.

#### Things to Consider

- Distance from the DA's Office and prison facility.
- Professors with experience or interest teaching in prisons
- Ability to provide college credit for participating students
- Transferability of credits to other institutions.

### Identifying a Prison Partner

One of the most important determinants of success for an Inside Criminal Justice course is the relationship between the District Attorney's Office and the prison. Inside Criminal Justice provides a common goal between DA's Offices and prisons in the success of each incarcerated student who takes the course, but it is important to recognize that, in order to maintain consistency and protocol, prisons have distinct methods of operations that are unfamiliar to even most Assistant District Attorneys. When inside of a prison, ADAs should be aware that they must operate according to the prison's rules, so it is important to discuss any ground rules and requirements or restrictions with ADAs beforehand.

It will prove easiest to create a course inside of a facility with a proven record of providing educational opportunities. However, there is much to be learned by entering a prison that may not be known for being forward-thinking or intensively rehabilitative. Choosing a prison partner is one of the first, and most important, decisions that must be made when considering launching an Inside Criminal Justice seminar. The most concrete criteria is most likely proximity, but below are several considerations to make.



- It is important to choose a prison facility that is a reasonable distance for ADA members to commute to at least once a week for an extended period.
  - Choosing a facility that is rich in programming increases the chance of regular communication with the prison. It also increases the level of comfort that prison officials and staff may feel with having visitors entering the prison regularly.
  - If your college partner already teaches within a prison, you may want to operate within a prison where there is an existing relationship.
  - Attempt to schedule the graduation ceremony for the course as early as possible. Think with the administrators about where you might have the graduation and about what security requirements there will be for friends/family members who would like to attend the graduation.
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Once you have decided on a prison or are considering a number of different prisons, it is important to tour the prison before the start of the class. Below is a list of topics that you will want to address with prison administrators.

- Identify an appropriate space for class. Ideally, that area has a large table for all students to sit around together, but a large room where chairs can be arranged in a circle will suffice.
  - Identify a specific point person to act as your contact within the prison to ensure ease of communication and develop a rapport with the prison officials who will control your communication with your students.
  - Find out if the prison has lockers where ADAs can store their materials beforehand.
  - Ask about the requirements for repeat entrances into the prison. These requirements differ by state and facility. Complying with these requirements is essential.
    - Prisons have extensive requirements for “volunteers” to enter, often requiring a volunteer application, background check, TB testing, and day-long orientation in order to get repeat-entry clearance. Communicate with the prison’s volunteer coordinator or equivalent to find out the requirements. In New York State, there is an exception from some requirements for peace officers.
    - Collect the required documents from participating prosecutors and submit
-

# 2

## Building a Team

### Necessary Roles

The primary roles necessary for operating an Inside Criminal Justice seminar are those of the DA's Office and Academic Facilitators who will lead the discussion and teach the class each week. To manage the relationship between the participating DA's office, college partner, and prison, however, identifying additional support roles is highly recommended. As with all things related to operating an Inside Criminal Justice seminar, Facilitators should consider the resources at their disposal and determine what works best in their individual situation.

### DA's Office Facilitator

Inside Criminal justice can be operated by just two facilitators: a DA's Office facilitator and an Academic Facilitator. The role of the DA's Office facilitator is to bring together the participants of the course, lead the course in partnership with the Academic Facilitator, and fulfill the CLE requirement for a lawyer to lead the session. The DA's Office Facilitator should be well respected within the office and should be dedicated to understanding the issues of re-entry, mass incarceration, and criminal justice reform. Once Inside Criminal Justice has been established in an office, future facilitators would ideally be graduates of previous semesters, thereby freeing any single office employee from teaching every semester and allowing your office to conduct multiple courses at once. Along with their academic partner, they will lead the class each week, and are primarily responsible for setting the tone of each session. Teaching experience is also helpful but not necessary. The DA's Office Facilitator should converse each week with the Academic Facilitator to discuss any necessary modifications to the syllabus and should identify any potential class issues (such as recurring arguments between students or common misunderstandings of the law) and address them as necessary.

#### DA's Office Facilitator Responsibilities

- Lead class each week in partnership with Academic Facilitator
- Address logistical issues or conflicts of interest as they arise
- Select Assistant District Attorney Students
- Liaise with Department of Corrections officials and DA's Office administrators

### College/Academic Facilitator

The second teacher within an Inside Criminal Justice course is the Academic Facilitator, who works with the DA's Office Facilitator to lead the course each week, and offers an additional level of academic expertise to seminar conversation. An ideal academic partner has taught in prisons or is enthusiastic about education in correctional facilities, and would have some expertise in a field related to criminal justice. In the original Inside Criminal Justice course, the academic partner was a professor of Psychology at Columbia University who has taught in New York State prisons for many years.



This teacher is an invaluable partner first because they can often provide a deeper understanding of academic literature research on criminal justice or a related subject. Their teaching experience also comes in handy when structuring each class session. If your Inside Criminal Justice course offers college credit for incarcerated students, it will most likely be a requirement to have a faculty member leading the course. The Academic Facilitator is thus also important for navigating a college's credit requirements and submitting necessary assignments and paperwork to ensure that students receive credit.

#### Academic Facilitator Responsibilities

- Navigate college partner's academic requirements for student credit
- Help craft class curriculum
- Provide academic & research expertise within classroom

### Teaching Assistant

The Teaching Assistant's role is to manage the many logistical requirements of running a college course. They should be organized, dependable, and enthusiastic about the subject matter. They are typically employed by the participating District Attorney's Office, but can be a student at the participating college/university as well. Their responsibilities include collecting and grading students' papers, assembling the necessary class materials for each session, and teaching an additional class session each week if necessary (see Choosing a Curriculum for more information on additional class sessions). If there is no teaching assistant available, these responsibilities can be handled by the DA's Office and Academic Facilitators as necessary.

#### Teaching Assistant Responsibilities

- Organize class materials & distribute during class
- Help grade papers & submit course materials to academic partner
- Lead additional class session weekly if necessary
- Keep track of attendance for CLE purposes (for prosecutors) and academic credit (for incarcerated students)

### Legal Training Liason

If the DA's Office offering Inside Criminal Justice has a Legal Training Unit, it is helpful to have a Liaison who can determine how the course fits into the office's overall legal training strategy and schedule. The Liaison can also help facilitate the issuing of CLE credits for ADA students. This role can also be filled by the DA's Office Facilitator.

#### Legal Training Liason Responsibilities

- File CLE credit for participating ADAs
- Help integrate Inside Criminal Justice into office training strategy

# 3

## Choosing a Curriculum

The curriculum for an Inside Criminal Justice course need not be related to criminal justice to be successful. Much of the magic of the course stems from the deep connections formed between classmates and the ways that class participants redefine what they thought they knew about prosecutors, incarcerated students, and communities. These goals can be achieved through discussions of literature, history, and other subjects. The benefit of teaching a course on criminal justice with incarcerated and prosecutor students is that all class participants are experts on the subject matter in one way or another, and the legal nature of the course enables prosecutors to receive CLE credits for completing the course. Not only is each student able to contribute meaningfully and confidently from their experience, they are also able to ask questions and learn about a topic they may have thought they knew everything about.

The original Inside Criminal Justice Curriculum is adapted from Columbia University Professor Geraldine Downey's undergraduate course on the social and environmental factors necessary for healthy societal and early childhood development. Additions were made to the syllabus to center the curriculum on the criminal justice system and community interactions with law enforcement, and texts that were more directly interested in psychological methodology were removed or made optional.

It is necessary that the curriculum be approved by both the prison and the college before committing to a curriculum. Some prisons have lists of banned readings, and in order for students to get credit, you may have to use a curriculum approved by the college. It will be up to the DA's Office Facilitator and the Academic Facilitator to determine whether it is preferable to submit a syllabus for a new course, such as the one included in these materials, or to use or modify an existing syllabus. If you are unable to provide credit for incarcerated students, consider creating a non-credit-bearing certificate that they can add to their prison files or providing them with letters of recommendation tailored to their performance in class.

# 4 Identifying Students

## Selecting Students

Inside Criminal Justice is taught as a seminar style class that depends heavily on the dynamic within the classroom and the quality of each class' conversations. Classes should have a similar number of incarcerated and ADA students to avoid creating a dynamic that makes one population feel elevated above the other within the classroom. An ideal class will contain about 10 ADA students and 10 incarcerated students.

## Selecting Incarcerated Students

Incarcerated students for Inside Criminal Justice are chosen with the help of the correctional facility and through a number of presentations inside of the prison. Flyers or promotional materials including the dates for the course and the key details—including the availability of college credit, the subject of the course, and the opportunity to interact with prosecutors—should be posted within the prison to promote the course weeks in advance of beginning class. See Appendix B for a sample poster for the course.

The most effective way to gather students is to take advantage of orientation meetings, assemblies, or other formal gatherings to make a presentation about the course. If no such gatherings exist within the prison, ask prison administrators to gather potential incarcerated students who have shown a history of interest in educational programs to present to and recruit from. It may be necessary to schedule multiple meetings with potential students in order to gather enough interest for a single course. Prison counselors are also helpful partners in recruiting students during their individual meetings with prison residents.

It is also important that prison counselors do not require students to take the course. Unwilling participants may disrupt the classroom rapport and dynamic. If at all possible, students should also not be added during the middle of the semester. Counselors should make clear, however, whether or not future semesters will be held at the facility.

The original model for Inside Criminal Justice allows students to choose whether or not they wish to take the course for college credit. Credit acquiring students must possess their GED, complete all of the class' assignments, and participate in class for a grade.

There are various reasons that an incarcerated student may not want to take the class for credit. Some students choose to participate in the course despite already having a college degree; others may not have completed high school educations. Some students have expressed concern about their reading level or ability to meaningfully engage in class. In our experience, all students have something valuable to offer to class discussion, although the applicability of this statement may vary with class curriculum. All students who attend and meaningfully engage in all classes are awarded a concluding certificate, regardless of whether or not they sought academic credit.

## Selecting Assistant District Attorney Students

For the first cohort of ADA students, it may be preferable to select participants who are known for their thoughtfulness and interest in topics related to criminal justice reform and policy. As with any new venture, the first semester of an Inside Criminal Justice course will involve hiccups and uncertainty; if possible, choose a class of students who will be willing to tolerate these initial issues and will provide meaningful feedback for future semesters.

Subsequent classes of Inside Criminal Justice can be filled using a simple application process. Having ADAs fill out an application such as the one attached in Appendix B allows the administrators of the course to select students who will have enough time to dedicate to the course and to form a class that is diverse in terms of their views and seniority in the office. Inside Criminal Justice can provide an excellent opportunity for members of the office who may rarely interact to get to know one another.

## 5 Teaching the Course

This guide is not meant to educate facilitators on pedagogical techniques or teaching methods. In the Teaching in Prisons section of the manual, there are several tips that the instructors of the original Inside Criminal Justice course have gleaned from their experiences. In Appendix A/B, you will find a number of educational resources, including first-hand accounts from educators with extensive experience teaching in prisons. Your course's Academic Facilitator will be a fantastic resource for pedagogical tips and teaching support, however, and the DA's Office Facilitator should work with their academic partner to develop an effective teaching style that works for both facilitators and students.

It is important, however, to prepare thoroughly for each session. It is recommended that the DA's Office Facilitator, Academic Facilitator, and Teaching Assistants have weekly meetings to discuss the following week's lesson plans and to debrief from each class, discussing both successes and any issues that may have arisen during the previous class. An example of a common issue is that of attendance, which sometimes varies from week to week. Sometimes, students lose interest in the course, but other reasons for a lack of attendance might include missed prison callout times, disciplinary issues, or unexpected transfers to another facility. Often, the only way to properly diagnose these issues is to contact your prison administrators, so be sure to develop a communicative relationship with your point of contact inside of the prison.

# 6

## Organizing Concluding Ceremony

Although Inside Criminal Justice is only a semester long course, the concluding/graduation ceremony is an important recognition of the work done by both the incarcerated students in prosecutors who participated. The original syllabus' final project consists of a jointly-created policy proposal aimed at improving part of the criminal justice system that is presented at the graduation ceremony. This project requires students to experience a piece of the process of collaborating to create policy. At the graduation, students presented their presentations to assembled friends, family members, and policy makers who had the power to potentially implement the policies proposed by the students.

The original Inside Criminal Justice seminar took place inside of a reentry facility, meaning that most of the incarcerated students were within three months of their release. As such, the graduation ceremony was scheduled for after all students' release and then held at the partnering academic institution. For most Inside Criminal Justice courses, however, the graduation will be held inside of the correctional facility.

Discuss with the prison administrators what security requirements there are for bringing friends and family members into the prison for the graduation ceremony, and make sure to alert students of the graduation at the beginning of the semester so that they have ample time to invite their guests. As with any event, attempt to provide refreshments and create a celebratory environment.

In our experience, we have found it fruitful for both ADA and formerly-incarcerated Inside Criminal Justice alumni to meet on regular basis to discuss prosecutorial innovation and criminal justice reform, reflect on how the prosecutors' practices have evolved since taking the course, advance the jointly created policy proposals, and incubate new ideas. In many ways, the work group also serves as a support group/safe space, where ADAs from across the office can speak candidly about criminal justice and the obstacles standing in the way of change.



# Teaching in Prisons

It's worth noting that teaching in prisons can be a logistically challenging experience. Make sure to take the proper precautions to ensure that your course runs smoothly. Your experience within the prison may change considerably each week depending on who is on duty, their familiarity with you and your team, and other unforeseen factors. Some of this uncertainty can be mitigated with proper preparation, but some amount of friction is unavoidable. Consider this a learning experience for the class facilitators and ADA students—life within a prison can be at times highly regulated and unchanging and at other times capricious and unpredictable.

## Tips for Teaching Within a Prison

- Be early. Submit all materials as far ahead of time as possible to avoid delays in processing or the possibility of cancellation from the prison. Arrive to the prison early to provide time to go through security and potential delays.
- Double check everything. Check in with the prison before arriving for the first session to ensure that you will be able to enter, that there is a callout placed for inside participants, and that all ADA names are on the entry list to prevent anyone from having to leave the prison without participating in the course.
- Find out what other programs are taking place in the prison. Volunteers with extensive experience in the prison can be helpful in navigating the prison's requirements and regulations. Other educational programs can also be of support.
- Collect the phone numbers of the prison administrator who may be on duty during the time of class in case anything goes wrong.
- Choose a class schedule that is most easily accommodated by the average line prosecutor in your office.
- Ask in advance who will be on duty on class days.
- Provide as many handouts as possible to your students so that they are never unsure about assignments or deadlines. Remember that unlike typical college students, they are unable to email their professors or ask clarifying questions outside of class.
- Bring backup materials to class each week to give to students in case they misplace materials
- Build in time for your prosecutors to meet informally after class, perhaps over a meal. This can be a good time to decompress from class, get to know your classmates, and further evaluate lessons from each session.

## Safety Concerns

The safety of all participants involved is of the utmost importance. Before entering a prison, Facilitators should discuss the prevalence of violent encounters and disciplinary infractions with prison administrators. If necessary, a relatively clean disciplinary record can be made a requirement of incarcerated student participation in the course. It is antithetical to the spirit

and mission of the course, however, to categorically refuse students with violent convictions; doing so limits the full potential of the class. Coordinate with the prison in advance about where security will be stationed during the course. It is preferred that corrections officers be nearby, but not inside of the classroom.

It is worth noting that the third facility to house an Inside Criminal Justice seminar was located on Rikers Island, a correctional facility infamous for its violence, but no disciplinary infractions took place during the semester. Classes are regularly taught in prisons without disciplinary issues, and with the right precautions, there is little reason to fear teaching

## Addressing Conflicts of Interest

It is possible that an incarcerated student who enrolls in your class will have been prosecuted by your office or even by an ADA enrolled in the course. You should, to the extent possible, check on this possible conflict in advance by receiving a list of the incarcerated students in your class and checking the ADAs on their cases against the list of enrolled prosecutors for that semester. Incarcerated students' cases should be reviewed to ensure that there are no pending appeals or other outstanding post-conviction motions.

If a conflict arises, you the safest way to avoid a conflict may be to request either the ADA or incarcerated student take the class during a later semester. It is possible, however, that there is a learning experience to be had by having a prosecutor and defendant engage over topics unrelated to their case. In the case that your office wishes to proceed with both parties in the course, the DA's Office should contact both the ADA involved and the incarcerated student and ask if they are comfortable attending a class with one another. If they are, you should contact the incarcerated student's defense attorney and have a discussion about the aims of the course. Invite them to sit in on a class session, and have all three parties sign a waiver, such as the sample attached in Appendix B, which promises that no details discussed in the course will be used against the incarcerated student in any current or future proceedings.

# Note on Language

The language used to discuss incarceration and incarcerated people is often dehumanizing. Words like “inmate,” “felon,” “convict,” and “prisoner” can often create distance and invoke negative feelings. It is also worth noting that different people feel differently about each of these words, and it is not uncommon for incarcerated people to identify with one of these words while rejecting the others. As educators, advocates, and fellow classmates, it should be our goal to create a classroom where everyone feels welcome and encouraged to participate.

The best way to avoid using dehumanizing and alienated language when discussing incarceration is to use human-first language. When discussing people with criminal records or in prison, use language such as “people in prison” and “formerly incarcerated.” It was the practice of the original course to refer to non-ADA class participants as “Queensboro students” or “incarcerated students.”

This is not of concern for political correctness purposes; it is intended to promote a health environment for discussion and indicating that all class participants will be treated with respect and dignity both inside and outside of the classroom. For more on language, see “A Note on Language” in Appendix C.

# Acknowledgments

Inside Criminal Justice could not exist without the support and guidance of many teachers, public servants, students, mentors, colleagues, and friends.

We would like to thank John Jay College President Karol Mason; Superintendent Dennis Breslin; Superintendent Seiveright W. Miller; Deputy Superintendent Michell Yon; Deputy Superintendent Judi Malfi; Queensboro ORCs Benjamin Matthew and Gregory Wilson; Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Acting Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci; D.A. Cyrus R. Vance, Jr.; Executive A.D.A. Karen Friedman-Agnifilo; the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; and our partners at Career Gear and Bottomless Closet for their contributions to our Certificate Conferral Ceremony.

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# Inside Criminal Justice Replication Materials

## Appendix A

Appendix A includes the course materials for the original Inside Criminal Justice curriculum. Included in the Appendix A are:

- Course Syllabus
- Weekly Course Agendas
- Course Handouts
- Sample Assignments
  - Personal Change Project Example
  - Examples of Policy proposals

# Inside Criminal Justice Syllabus

Inside Criminal Justice, a joint initiative of The Manhattan D.A. Academy, the Institute for Innovation in Prosecution at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and the Center for Justice at Columbia University, is a semester-long seminar comprised of individuals incarcerated at Queensboro and Edgecombe Correctional Facilities and prosecutors from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. The course is intended to encourage in-depth and respectful conversation about the criminal justice system, culminating in jointly-authored policy proposals.

The course reviews and integrates current psychological research on the role of social factors in healthy and unhealthy personal, community and societal outcomes and considers how this knowledge can be translated into action to promote personal and societal health.

Reading materials and discussion will focus on analysis of the criminal justice system and the ways that it affects individuals and communities. Students are expected to participate actively and to pull from their personal experiences as well as the academic, journalistic, narrative, and sociological readings assigned each week. Critical analysis and development of creative alternative perspectives are encouraged. Consideration of how conversation between law enforcement agencies and constituent communities can contribute to societal well-being, justice, engaged citizenship and effective social policy will be a focus of class discussion. Queensboro, Edgecombe, and prosecutor students are all expected to attend every session and to engage thoughtfully with the weekly assigned reading materials.

*The overall objective of the class is to think together about a justice system that emphasizes public safety while supporting healthy development from birth to old age and makes engaged citizenship possible for everyone.*

## Class Meeting Schedule

Classes will be held on dates to be determined in consultation between the DA's Office and the correctional facility. There will be a graduation ceremony on a date to be determined based on the release dates of the incarcerated students. Prosecutors should meet at the correctional facility no later than 20 minutes before class begins so that they can pass through security before each session.

Incarcerated students will attend an additional class session each week where they will watch the required videos for the following week and participate in extended discussion.

## Class Assignments

1. General preparation and class participation
2. Personal Change Exercises:
  - a. Due Week 2: Proposal for Personal Change Project (worksheet)
  - b. Due Week 5: Personal Change Reflection (two-page maximum)



3. Credit-seeking students must write four reaction papers about the readings, including developing questions for class discussion, to be handed in at the TA sessions.
4. GROUP WORK – Due Week 6: One page policy proposal plus 5 (five) pages of reflection & research with your group.
5. GROUP WORK – Presentation of policy proposals given at Graduation Ceremony

### **Columbia University Policy on Academic Integrity**

As students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student. Failure to meet these standards may lead to a failing grade.

#### **Week 1      Course overview and introduction to the life course perspective**

- Underhill, S. "Did the man I sentenced to 18 years deserve it?" NYT op-ed
- "Choosing Empathy: A Conversation with Jamil Zaki"
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. (2-page explanation)

#### **Optional**

- Travis, J., Western, B., & Redburn, S. (Eds.). (2014). The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences. National Academies Press. "Chapter 2: Rising Incarceration Rates."
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In International Encyclopedia of Education Vol. 3, 2nd Ed. Oxford: Elsevier.
- A poem for a father to his youngest son
- A Cell (poem)

#### **Week 2      What caused mass incarceration and how can we end it while supporting the health, well-being and safety of communities?**

- Benko, Jessica "The Radical Humaneness of Norway's Halden Prison," The New York Times Magazine, March 26, 2015.
- Alexander, Michelle "The New Jim Crow: How the War on drugs gave birth to a permanent American undercaste," The Nation, March 10, 2010.
- Lantigue-Williams, Juleyka "Are Prosecutors the Key to Criminal Justice Reform? Given their autonomy - only if they want to be," The Atlantic, May 18, 2016.

#### **Optional**

- Alexander, M. (2012). The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness. The New Press. CHAPTER 6
- Pfaff, J. (2017) Locked in: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration and How to Achieve Real Reform. Basic Books Publishing. CHAPTER 6

#### **Media**

- Foss, A. “A Prosecutor’s Vision for a Better Justice System” TED Talk
- Goffman, A. “How We’re Priming Some Kids for College – and Others for Prison.” TED Talk

### Assignments

- Proposal for Personal Change Projects Due

## Week 3      Intersection of social-historical, contextual, and personal experiences that shape one’s life

- King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
- Case, A. and Deaton, A. “Mortality and morbidity in the 21st century” Brookings (2 pages)
- Hatzenbuehler, M. et al, “Stigma as a Fundamental Cause of Population Health Inequalities”
- Case, A. and Deaton, A. “Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century” PNAS
- Voigt et al. (2017) Language from police body camera footage shows racial disparity in officer respect. PNAS.
- Ross Gay, “A Small Needful Fact” (2015) (Poem)

### Media

- Senghor, “Why Your Worst Deeds Don’t Define You” TED Talk

## Week 4      Trauma & Restorative Justice

- Terr, L. “Childhood Traumas: An Outline and Overview”
- Sered, D. “Young Men of Color and the Other Side of Harm: Addressing Disparities in our Responses to Violence”
- Williams, T. “When Killer and Victim’s Mother Meet, Paths From Grief, Fear, and Guilt Emerge”
- Tullis, P. “Can Forgiveness Play a Role in Criminal Justice?”
- Senghor, S. Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison” (Prologue)
- Browne, Mahogany L., “Kite Patterns” (2019)

### Optional

- Maruna, S. “Desistance and restorative justice: it’s now or never”
- Coppola, F. “Valuing Emotions in Punishment: an Argument for Social Rehabilitation with the Aid of Social and Affective Neuroscience”

### Media

- Stevenson, B. “We need to talk about an injustice” TED Talk

## Week 5      Stages of Change Model & Life Course Development

- Downey, G. and Negrón-Mutaner, F. "Jailing Old Folks Makes No Sense" NYT op-ed
- Duhigg, Charles. *The Power of Habit*. (2012). Chapters 3 & 8
- Konnikova, "The Struggle of a Psychologist Studying Self-Control" New Yorker
- Ross, D. "Tackling Mass Incarceration – ROCA program"
- Prochaska, J. O., DiClemente, C. C., & Norcross, J. C. (1992). In search of how people change: applications to addictive behaviors. *American psychologist*, 47(9), 1102.
- Tuckson, Cheleta. "My Eyes Have Seen What My Heart Has Felt" (Poem)

### Optional

- Duckworth, A. L., Kirby, T. A., Gollwitzer, A., & Oettingen, G. (2013). From Fantasy to Action Mental Contrasting With Implementation Intentions (MCII) Improves Academic Performance in Children. *Social psychological and personality science*.
- Parker-Pope, T. "How to Build Resilience in Midlife"

### Assignments

- Personal Change Projects Due

## Week 6      Resiliency, identity, and transitions: supporting reintegration after incarceration

- Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*
- McAdams, D. P., & Olson, B. D. (2010). Personality development: Continuity and change over the life course. *Annual review of psychology*, 61, 517-542.
- Browne, Mahogany L. "Blueprint and Hymnal" (2019) (Poem)

### Assignments

- One page policy proposal plus 5 (five) pages of reflection & research with your group.

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 1 Agenda

Week 1 readings should be distributed in advance of week 1 and students should be informed that they will be expected to have read the materials before the first class meeting.

### Course Overview and Introduction to the Life Course Perspective

Bring:

- Copies of syllabus for all
- Copies of week 2 readings for all
- White board/blackboard/easel with paper
- Pads of paper and pens for all
- Large nametags
- Markers for nametags

The room should be laid out with enough seats in a circle (ideally around a large table) for all students and the instructors to be seated, and ideally have a large easel with paper or a white board or blackboard. Provide a pad and paper at each seat and materials for all students to make large nametags.

Week 1 of the course focuses on establishing a rapport between prosecutor students and incarcerated students and addressing some of the assumptions and unease that may exist around a meeting between prosecutors and residents at a correctional facility. Before addressing topics such as race in America and the history of mass incarceration, it is important that both groups feel comfortable with one another and that they begin to see themselves as part of a cohesive group in which discussion is welcome. It is critical that the instructor(s) establish a dynamic in which everyone is considered equal and valuable to the discussion.

The first session also gives the instructor(s) the opportunity to welcome the students to the class and introduce her/himself to the group. It is a good time for the instructor to share some of what brings him/her to this work and why s/he feels it is important work in which to be involved. There may be tension in the classroom initially and it may take a week or two to break the ice.

As students enter, encourage them to sit alternately prosecutors and resident students, and invite students to put the name of their choosing on a nametag and to wear their nametag. We have adopted the practice of shaking each student's hand as they enter the room and introducing ourselves. Be aware, though, that some incarcerated students may at first be uncomfortable with a handshake.

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 1 Agenda

In order to address potential case conflicts, we recommend the following language be read as a part of the introduction to the course:

Some students may have had cases with the [jurisdiction's DA's Office], either now or in the past. If anyone has a case from [our county] and takes any new steps in that case, please mention to your attorney that you are taking this class so that your attorney can advise you about how to handle any possible conflicts that could arise.

- 6:00 PM** Welcome  
Introduce Instructor(s)  
Explain Today's Agenda
- 6:10 PM** Read **goal statement** from syllabus & generate collective **ground rules** such as those below. Ask students to suggest ground rules.
- Students will not be asked to disclose their charges, convictions, or sentences unless they wish to.
  - Students are not permitted to research students during or after the course
- Instructor(s) should list collective ground rules on the white board and preserve for future sessions
- 6:30 PM** Wagon Wheel Exercise (approximately 40 minutes)

The goal of this activity is for all students to meet each other individually in an intimate and non-threatening way.

- Make sure all students are seated alternating between prosecutors and residents.
- Once the seating arrangement is in place, an instructor gives the group instructions
  1. You will be given an unfinished sentence to complete with the person that you're teamed up with. Each of you can finish the sentence in whatever order you want – introduce yourselves, finish the sentence, and let the conversation flow from there.
  2. You'll only have two minutes in which to do this, then you will hear/see a signal, and the ADAs will get up, leave their chairs in place, and move one to the next empty seat on their left, so that everyone now facing a new person.
  3. Once you are with that new person, you will be given a DIFFERENT unfinished sentence to complete. The same thing will happen – after two minutes, the ADA group will be asked to rise and move one empty seat to the left for a new sentence.

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 1 Agenda

4. The exercise continues until the ADA circle has made a complete rotation, every resident student has spoken with every ADA student. Remind students when they are seated at the last rotation that they will be expected to report back on the results of that last conversation.

### Note 1:

Be thoughtful in choosing appropriate unfinished sentences. Anything that highlights the differences between the resident and ADA students should probably be avoided at this early stage. These sentences work best when they ask respondents for responses that are about the shared human experience.

### Note 4:

It might help to start with the less serious sentences at the beginning of the exercise and, in the last couple of rounds, use the more serious ones (e.g.: ones about personal characteristics, concerns, etc.).

(Adapted from *Values Clarification*, by Sidney B. Simon, Leland W. Howe, and Howard Kirschenbaum)

### Recommended Unfinished Sentences

- One of the funniest things that ever happened to me was...
- One of my favorite movies is...
- When I was a kid, I was known as...
- If I were an animal, I would be a...
- The thing that I like most in people is...
- The characteristic I like most about myself is...
- I get really frustrated when...
- The thing I'm most proud of in myself is...
- I think one of the most important things in life is...
- Anyone who knows me well would tell you that I'm...
- My motto is...
- Probably my oddest habit is...
- You would probably be surprised to know that I'm...
- I think, in my last life, I was...
- In my next life, I think I'll...
- I think the most beautiful place in the world is...
- The things that tend to amuse me most are...
- When people first meet me, they...
- The best thing about being a kid is...
- My favorite book is...
- My favorite TV show is...
- In one word, I am...
- The best kind of music is...
- The hardest thing I've ever done is...
- I matter because...



## Inside Criminal Justice Week 1 Agenda

- On the way to this session, I was thinking...
- My greatest experience was...
- When I grow impatient, I...
- If I had a super power, it would be...
- When I look at the rain, I think of...

### 7:10 PM Large Group Introduction & Generation of Dialogue Guidelines (approximately 20 minutes)

The goal of the exercise is to challenge students to speak in the large group through introductions of one another, and to generate ground rules for respectful conversation.

- Reassemble into the large circle, and the instructor(s) asks if anyone would like to volunteer to start the introduction process. The volunteer briefly introduces person to his or her right by name and their answer to the final unfinished sentence, and then offers one idea they have for how to have successful dialogue in the class.
- Instructor(s) should list the ideas for successful dialogue on the white board and preserve the list for future sessions.

### 7:30 PM Coffee Break

### 7:40 PM Distribute Syllabus; Explain Expectations Explain Personal Change Project – **first assignment due next week!** (approximately 10 minutes)

The Personal Change Project is meant to demonstrate to students how difficult it can be to create change, even on a small scale. The eventual goal is to understand why creating change on a large scale, such as policy, can be such a gargantuan task.

- Hand out assignment & examples

Instructions:

- Identify something you would like to change about yourself that you are willing to discuss in class.
  - Your choice should be something relatively small, such as reading more each day, exercising more often, getting up earlier in the morning, or calling loved ones more often. Big changes such as “I want to be a better person” or “I want to be happier” may be too large to change over the course of a few weeks.
  - Choose something that you can work on now and that is important to you.
- **Due next week** – develop and begin implementing a plan for change based on the stages of change model. Write a short proposal on what you would like to change

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 1 Agenda

and why you would like to make that change. Be prepared to discuss your proposal briefly in class.

- Continue working on the process of creating change over the course of the seminar.
- In week 5, you will hand in a paper written about the description of your experiences trying to create this change within yourself.

7:50 PM Discuss Bronfenbrenner model of human development (approximately 15 minutes)

8:05 PM Group Reflection: Dostoyevsky Quote (approximately 15 minutes)

In order to get the discussion started on prisons, part of the first class should be devoted to a brainstorm of different perspectives on the following quote by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, from his book, House of the Dead.

**“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”**

- The instructor puts the quote on the board and then asks the students to take about three minutes and make notes on their thoughts.
- The instructor can encourage participants to draw from personal experience or from the assigned readings.
- The instructor then asks people to offer some thoughts or reflections on the quote. (This is not designed to be a dialogue given the limited time and the desire to get wide-ranging perspectives -- This exercise is really a warm-up for future classes.)

8:20 PM Closing  
Ask each student to use one word or phrase to describe how they are feeling in response to this experience  
Collect nametags  
Distribute week 2 readings to each student

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 2 Agenda

### What caused mass incarceration and how can we end it while supporting the health, well-being, and safety of communities?

If the first week was meant to bring together incarcerated students and prosecutor students as individuals, Week 2 focuses more on thinking the responsibilities and purpose of the criminal justice system on a theoretical level. The key questions at the center of this week are what should the ideal criminal justice system do and how is that ideal different from reality?

The readings for this week include Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and John Pfaff's *Locked In*, two major inquiries into the causes of mass incarceration. Many students find these readings compelling, and the themes in these readings will probably resurface later in the course.

**6:00 PM**      Recap of first week  
                    Finishing up the Dostoevsky quote (if necessary)

**6:10 PM**      Discussion of Personal Change Project (approximately 40 minutes)

This exercise will help everyone to understand the personalities of their classmates. If necessary, project proposals can be workshopped during the TA sessions. Make sure to time students' responses to 90 seconds so that you have time for everyone to present.

- Ask everyone to present individually to the class what their topic for the personal change project is and why they chose it. Make sure to inform students that they have 90 seconds and will be cut off afterwards in order to get to everyone's response.

**6:50 PM**      Purpose of the System – Goals of Crime Response (approximately 15 minutes)

During this exercise, students will come up with a list of the purposes of crime response. Typically, students will think of prison when considering "crime response," so be sure to note that prison is one option, but community service, home arrest, and the whole range of responses to crime can be considered for this exercise.

You will use the responses to this prompt for the subsequent exercise.

- As a full group, discuss the purposes of punishment. For what reasons should a society have prison or any other form of response to crime?

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 2 Agenda

- Keep a running list on the board of people's suggestions.

### 7:05 PM Purpose of the System – Percentages Exercise (approximately 30 minutes)

Now, students will use the list generated during the previous exercise to try to create an ideal criminal justice system. The purpose of this exercise is to make students work together and have candid conversations about what society should aspire for in creating a system that addresses crime.

- Split students into groups of approximately 2 prosecutors and 2 incarcerated students
- Drawing on the purposes of punishment listed on the board during the previous exercise, ask each group to try to calculate what percentage of the consequences of criminal activity should each reason constitute. A sample might look something like this:
  - A response to a crime should be 30% punishment, 30% rehabilitation, 20% deterrence, 20% statement of community values.
  - (approximately 15 minutes)
- Note that groups don't have to use the list generated in the previous exercise, but that they may find it helpful to try to draw on a number of different responses.
- Ask each group to tell the class what percentages they came up with and why they came to those conclusions. Was it easy to come to a consensus?
- Talk as a class about how you would define the current state of the criminal justice system's percentages. How are those percentages different from the ones you came up with in class? Why do you think that is?

### 7:35 PM Coffee Break

### 7:45 PM John Pfaff & Michelle Alexander (approximately 45 minutes)

Take time at the end of the class to zoom out to theories of mass incarceration and the inner workings of the criminal justice system. Michelle Alexander points to the war on drugs as responsible for the growth of mass incarceration whereas Pfaff points to the growth of prosecutors' offices, increased sentence lengths, and harsher prosecution of violent crime.

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 3 Agenda

### Intersection of social-historical, contextual, and personal experiences that shape one's life

This week's readings speak in highly academic terms about the ways in which our surroundings and life courses affect us—the ways in which stigma affects our outlooks, race and other factors affect our mortality (in sometimes surprising ways), and how race affects the ways in which we interact with law enforcement.

On the syllabus for today is also Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail, which is one of the most powerful readings on the syllabus. Feel free to point to this reading and to ask students to think about the ways in which King would change the social and political systems that affect our lives according to his letter.

Week 3 is also the week in which students will be introduced to the Social Change Project, which consists of the policy proposals that will be the final project for the members of the class. Be sure to save ample time at the end of class to introduce these projects and try to give students a sense of urgency for the project. There will be a presentation at the end of the class and who knows who may be in the audience. It is also important to recognize how unusual it may be for some of the incarcerated students to have their thoughts and opinions on the criminal justice system elicited and considered.

#### 6:30 PM Speaking to Experience (approximately 40 minutes)

This exercise should point to the ways in which our experiences have shaped us without pressuring the incarcerated students to make a statement akin to "I decided to commit a crime because X." Rather, they should be asked about what part of their interaction with the criminal justice system they would change if given the chance and why.

- Going around in a circle, ADA students should explain why they decided to become prosecutors.
- On their turns, Queensboro students should describe a criminal justice policy area that they'd like to change or work on. Even though policy proposals will happen in groups, each student should also be encouraged to think independently and to voice one area that they feel strongly about.

#### 7:10 PM Coffee Break

#### 7:20 PM Underhill & Senghor – Letter from Birmingham Jail (approximately 40 minutes)

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 3 Agenda

Senghor's article provides a nice contrast to Underhill's (which was assigned in Week 1)—one perspective is from behind the bench and the other is from someone who stood before it. The discussion can be framed in a number of ways, but the discussion should attempt to weigh the responsibilities and circumstances of people with different positions in relation to the criminal justice system. First, give everyone a moment to refresh their memories concerning these two articles, both of which were assigned in Week 1, then hold a class discussion. The following questions may be helpful:

- How can we go about making communities safer for everyone?
- Is prison a valid response to crime? Is it effective?
- What changes could be made to make the transition back to society from prison smoother or more "successful"?

### Letter from Birmingham Jail

Although there is no exercise on the agenda devoted solely to King's Letter from Birmingham Jail, it is one of the most powerful readings on the syllabus and has insights to offer to the conversation comparing the Senghor and Underhill articles that are next on the syllabus. If you think you may have time and that your class is up for a slightly more academic conversation, consider inserting King's Letter into the conversation as yet another foil. If Underhill is a judge who has sentenced someone to prison and Senghor is writing after having been released from prison, King represents a prisoner who is thinking seriously about the reasons for his own intentional criminal transgression. What does King's writing have to say about the laws that govern us?

- Think together about what he proscribes for societal change.
- What jumps out as you as a reader?
- How does he persuade his readers to interact differently with one another and with the systems around them?
- How does he combine personal experience with reports from his allies to create a persuasive argument?

8:00 PM Beginning of Social Change Projects (approximately 30 minutes)

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 4 Agenda

### Trauma & Restorative Justice

This week's readings discuss victimization and reconciliation in a number of contexts. Sered's "Young Men of Color and the Other Side of Harm" complicates the typical narratives around victims—men of color have both higher crime rates and higher rates of victimization. Several of the readings address unresolved PTSD and the effects it can have on later life. Bryan Stevenson mentions in his TED Talk that it is often better in America to be rich and guilty than poor and innocent when facing the criminal justice system. What do trauma and victimization look like in America? What does it mean to be a victim? Who gets left out?

**6:10 PM**      Memories of Race (approximately 50 minutes)

By week 4, it may seem that race has been hovering around all of the class' conversations without being the central topic of any. This exercise is meant to bring race to the fore in a personal way that requires students to acknowledge their own relationship with race. These personal reflections help make race a more approachable topic, in contrast to the often difficult-to-face role that race plays on a macro level.

- Ask students to think back to the first time they realized their own race.
- What experience made them first think about their race?
- How old were they when they realized they had a race?

**7:00 PM**      Restorative Justice (approximately 45 minutes)

This discussion considers restorative justice as an alternative or supplement to a more traditional response to crime. Make sure to begin by having someone explain the concept of restorative justice, as the conversation about what restorative justice is, can, and should be can be a productive one in and of itself. It might be a sensitive topic to ask incarcerated students to talk about whether or not they would be willing to speak with their victims, but the question may not be completely off limits if the class is particularly talkative and forthcoming.

- Discuss the articles about restorative justice. This is a good way to think abstractly about restorative justice without involving anyone's case directly.
- Who are the victims of crime and who need restorative justice?

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 4 Agenda

- How would you feel if you had a family member who was a victim? A perpetrator? Would a restorative justice disposition be satisfying for you?

7:45 PM Coffee Break

8:00 PM Work on Policy Projects (approximately 30 minutes)

With a six week semester, it is important that students begin working on their final projects early and in an organized manner. Much of this organization will be up to the instructor, who should check in with the prosecutor students between sessions and take note of how each group is progressing.

At this point, the instructor should have come up with the groups in which students will work on their policy projects. This decision can be made based on professed interests, working chemistry between students, or another criteria. It is helpful for the instructor to maintain some level of control over the groups, though, so that switches between groups can be made later if necessary.

- Divide students into groups; each group should contain a roughly equal number of prosecutor students and incarcerated students.
- Distribute sample policy projects for reference.
- Give students 20 minutes to brainstorm policy projects they are all interested in. It may be helpful if the instructor had suggestions in mind beforehand to prompt conversation.
- During the last 10 minutes, instruct students to come up with concrete to-do items for the next class period. Tasks will have to be unambiguous and strategic since prosecutor students and incarcerated students will most likely be unable to contact one another outside of class.
- Inside students have limited access to the internet and other research materials. Ask them to write about their own experiences or to draw upon readings from the class or elsewhere. If they have access to a library, encourage them to do some amount of research with a librarian.



## Inside Criminal Justice Week 5 Agenda

### Stages of Change Model & Life Course Development

This week focuses on personal change and accountability, as opposed to the origins and goals of law enforcement on a systems level. The readings for this week are somewhat dense, and students may shy away from talking about them, although students may also find them particularly useful for promoting self change.

The personal change projects are also due this week. Ideally, students have been working somewhat diligently at this for the entire seminar.

#### 6:10 PM Personal Change Project Due (approximately 50 minutes)

The personal change projects are meant to have everyone acknowledge how difficult the process of change can be and to continue to work of humanizing incarcerated students and prosecutors – we all want to improve ourselves, and we all sometimes struggle to do so.

Make sure to be encouraging of each student's story, but try not to get sidetracked with conversation. Instead, save time at the end of class presentations for conversation rather than allowing comments in-between reports to save time and prevent anyone from feeling like they are under particularly harsh scrutiny.

- Have students speak about their experiences working on their personal change projects. Give everyone two minutes to talk about their experience. Keep a timer!
- Did they manage to create the change in themselves that they imagined they might?
- At the end of presentations, ask what the process of personal change might have to teach you about making change in general? Do you think any of the lessons you've learned here are applicable to making broad policy change?

#### 7:00 PM Expanding the Conversation – Can People Change? (approximately 30 minutes)

This conversation topic is left intentionally broad. Invite people to draw on their own experiences as well as their own experiences. This conversation may pre-suppose its own answer; if people cannot change, why have a system of “corrections”? Why work on a personal change project? Yet, this conversation may be particularly poignant after the process of consciously attempting to create personal change over the last several weeks.

- Ask the class, can people change? How can we know that someone really has changed?

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 5 Agenda

- How can we help people who may have committed crimes to change? What does it take to create a change in the first place?

7:30 PM Coffee Break

7:45 PM Social Change Projects (approximately 45 minutes)  
Combining personal change and policy change

At this point, groups should have performed some preliminary research and writing about their social change projects. Some students will take the process quite seriously and spend much of their time outside of class compiling materials, doing research, and writing on their own. Other students will spend less time and will be less prepared to engage. Try to appeal to students' sense of accomplishment and the possibility that something could come from one of the proposals.

Next week is the last week of the semester, and so the end of the allotted in-class time for completing the policy projects. The instructor should go around to each group to get a sense of whether or not a topic has been chosen, what the dynamic is like between group members, and if the groups have good ideas of how to proceed with planning and writing their presentations. Don't be afraid to give advice, but note that the process of collaborating on a proposal, and the difficulty sometimes involved in that process, are part of the point of the assignment.

- By the end of this session, students should think about what they want their final presentations to look like. Who will talk about what? What should they prepare for the final week?
- Make sure that everyone has assignments for the final week.

Note:

If the policy presentations are going to be held inside of the correctional facility, it may still be useful to schedule one more session just for presentations, rather than using the entire final class for presentations. If presentations will not be ready for the presentation date, prosecutor students should begin to think about when they could make trips into the facility on their own time to put the final touches on their presentations.

## Inside Criminal Justice Week 6 Agenda

### Resiliency, Identity, and Transitions: supporting reintegration after incarceration

The last session requires students to wrap up their policy proposals, but also requires time for reflection. This class' structure may be even looser than that of previous classes, as an instructor may be more tempted to allow conversation to flow naturally to allow students to get off their chests whatever they may want to say before the end of the semester.

#### 6:10 PM Discussion on Policy Proposals

Since this is the last class, groups will want to figure out the final details surrounding their policy proposals. If they have not finished writing the proposals, they should figure out how to finish the projects after the last session of the seminar. They should discuss the presentation and division of labor.

#### 6:40 PM Imagining Your Path (approximately 40 minutes)

During the last class, it may be helpful to think about the future, and in Inside Criminal Justice fashion, this process will be facilitated by thinking together about something very personal and expanding that conversation into broader narratives.

This exercise is the closest the curriculum comes to asking incarcerated students to "do better" or anything of the sort. Be careful not to seem paternalistic when asking students how they want to live their lives going forward, but stress that each and every member of society has to work intentionally to structure their lives in ways that will promote healthy communities.

- Split the class into groups of twos. Discuss the following prompt: what path did you imagine for yourself when you were little? Have students present their reflections to the class at the end of 10 minutes.
- Next, ask the class to think about where they want to go from here. What are the next steps that you'd like to take in order to reach your goals? What help will you need in order to help build healthy communities?

#### 7:25 PM Coffee Break

#### 7:40 PM Reflection on Frankl

Inside Criminal Justice  
Week 6 Agenda

8:15 PM Final visit to Dostoevsky quote

We began the class by considering this quote by Dostoyevsky. Now that the class has spent six sessions together thinking about criminal justice and how we are all affected by the system, revisit the quote.

**“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”**

- How have your thoughts on this quote changed, if at all, over the course of the semester?
- What kind of prison might exist in an ideal society?

# STEPS TO CRAFTING POLICY PROPOSALS – Guidelines for Inside Criminal Justice Policy Proposals

1

## Step 1: Identify the Problem

- State the problem/What is your proposal aiming to address?
- What policies, practices, laws, or societal factors contribute to this problem?
- Describe the population most affected by the issue
- What data/information might be helpful to measure the problem or strengthen your narrative/argument?

2

## Step 2: Describe your proposal

- Detail the features/aspects of your proposal
- How will your proposal address the problem you have identified?
- If possible, include examples of other jurisdictions/programs that have implemented a similar policy or provide related research
- What are the goals of the proposal? How will it create better outcomes?
- How will you measure its success?

3

## Step 3: Identify Key Stakeholders

- Who is affected by the problem and/or the solution?
- Who do you need buy-in from in order for your policy to be implemented and successful?
  - *Government Agency? Community Organizations?*
  - *Specific Communities?*
- How should stakeholders be involved?

4

# “Public School Lunches Should Be Food for Thought!!”

→ great sentence, very catchy!

By: [unclear]

October 13, 2017

In 2000, Stephen Schoenthaler conducted an intriguing year long study in 803 New York City public schools. His study sought to evaluate the relationship, if any, between nutrition and academic performance. Schoenthaler found that the “academic performance of 1.1million school children rose 16% after the diets were modified” (Siegel, 2003: 142). Notably, aside from a tweak in the school menu, no other changes in school programs were initiated during that year and, yet, “the number of ‘learning disabled’ children fell from 125,000 to 74,000” (Siegel, 2003: 142). Based upon the results of the study, Schoenthaler surmised that the improvements in academic performance were attributed to diets containing more vitamins and minerals than the old diets and that “these essential nutrients in the new diets were believed to have corrected impaired brain function caused by poor nutrition” (Siegel, 2003: 142).

In 2004, in Berkley California, a collaborative effort between educators, parents, nutrition experts and the *Chez Panisse Foundation* and the *Center for Ecoliteracy*, launched an ambitious initiative (The School Lunch Initiative) that “revamped” Berkley Unified School District’s cafeteria lunches. The servicing of processed foods was “outlawed” and the children were only served food, freshly cooked on site, along with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. “Produce was purchased from local farms, dairy products from local creameries, and bread and pizza crust from local bakeries—organic whenever possible” (Finz, 2009: 1). A study conducted a year after the launching of the initiative revealed that students “scored higher on knowledge of nutrition, food, and environment and ate more nutritious foods and less junk” (Finz, 2009:1).

You could have summarized instead of having a standalone quote ↳ makes cohesive paper.

Why is this important?

Studies have shown that lack of proper nutrition can adversely affect a child's developmental processes and "predispose them to contact with the juvenile system". Unfortunately, far too many underprivileged children live in "food swamps" (areas where unhealthy food is cheap and plentiful) and have little access to nutritionally dense, fresh foods. Notably, decreased academic performance, increased absenteeism, antisocial behavior, asthma, obesity, anemia, aggression and violence are prevalent in those communities: phenomenons that have been linked to the lack of proper nutrition. Lynn Todman, a Chicago urban planner, "was galvanized when she saw a Chicago city map that overlaid communities with the highest rates of gun violence and homicide with those lacking access to healthy food...the two maps were almost identical" And what role do schools play in all of this?

According to Juliet Simms, program coordinator for the Prevention Institute, an Oakland non--profit dedicated to health and social issues, 30 to 50 percent of a child's daily diet is consumed during the school lunch period. The USDA recommends that everyone get five to nine servings of fruit and vegetables daily. However, many schools lunches, nationwide, are failing to supply even the minimum amount of daily nutrients necessary for developmental growth. Director of the Center of Weight and Health and an adjunct professor in public health and nutrition, Pat Crawford, posits that only 1 percent to 2 percent of children in the United States meet the recommended dietary guidelines and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has predicted that one in three children will have diabetes at some point in his or her life.

What can be done? And how much will it cost?

The road map has already been laid out. The Berkley Unified School district and several other states have implemented cutting edge initiatives with real world results. Furthermore, organizations such as *FoodTank*, a think tank that advocates for "sustainable solutions to hunger,

like show or questions give you per forward

Washington Park -  
over culture

conclusion



esity and poverty worldwide, and *Just Food*, a New York city based non-profit, have viable solutions for remedying the array of societal ills caused by food deserts.

Great question. Short-term vs. long term returns

The important question is *not* how much will it cost to implement new policies and practices, but the real question is: How much does our *present* policies and practices cost us in terms of economic, social and human capital? Our children are our greatest investment and it is our responsibility to provide them every opportunity to develop into healthy, happy, productive members of society. Our elected officials and public figures must place the health of our children above everything else. If something as simple as changing a school menu can improve the lives of our children, then why not?

Powerful ending.

Great reaction paper. Your message comes across very well and your briefing document is easy to follow, coherent, and well supported by the studies you mention.

S+

# Columbia University

**Urgent!!**

Policy Change: Good Time for Inmates

Professor: Geraldine Downey

Date: November 8, 2017

The New York Department of Corrections currently makes inmates serve 85% of the term they were sentenced to. This means if you are sentenced to ten years in prison, the earliest you can be released is after serving eight and a half years. This is called your conditional released date. Meaning if the Department of Corrections determines for any reason that you are not ready to be returned to society they can hold you until the full term of your imprisonment.

This policy must change because it deters inmates for bettering themselves, it does not decrease violence, and there is no incentive for involvement in programming that rehabilitates prisoners.

Most inmates involve themselves in any frivolous activity that occupies their time. You see, most people who are incarcerated simply want time to move faster. Being in prison is like watching every minute and second of the clock at a job you hate. Time drags, especially when you are somewhere you do not want to be. There is no motivation to do anything productive when it will have little to not effect on when you will be released. Because when you are locked away in a cage the only thing that consumes your mind is getting out. My new policy change would give inmates the motive to be productive with their time. By affording inmates the opportunity to receive as much as 50% of their good time, will encourage inmates to participate in activities that will more ready them for returning to society. Having the chance to have your prison term cut in half, is a great incentive for bettering your state of mind and evaluating your behavior.

The terms of my new policy, which I will discuss in detail later, will significantly decrease the violence inside the prison system. Many inmates are hopeless waking up everyday knowing in some cases they will not be going home for decades. How then do you motivate a prisoner to conduct himself like a model human being, when we are locked inside cages like animals most of our day? What moral obligation does he have to not act out violently, when no

the info  
is needed  
for  
policy

Great section  
summarizing  
& outlining  
new paper.

Nice  
description

this policy  
amendment -> "prepare them better to return..."

Maybe you  
could have  
referred to  
studies about  
motivation & what  
pushes people to  
change to that  
your claim  
even more  
powerful.

matter his conduct it will not result in him being rewarded with the only thing that really matters, his freedom? My policy change would encourage positive behavior because inmates would be fully aware that every severe disciplinary infraction will result in them being incarcerated for a longer period of time.

✓  
Powerful  
question

The policy currently in place has done very little in terms of rehabilitating inmates. Which in theory, is suppose to be the purpose of the prison system? We know this is not the case. The rate of recidivism is as high as it has ever been. What the prison system fundamentally is a warehouse of human beings. People locked away and left to rot or spoil for years. But unlike old and damaged goods that get thrown away, these people will be released back into the world for society to consume. Do we really want prisoners returned back to society in a worse mental and emotional state than they were before their incarceration? My policy would encourage the inmate to participate in programming catering to their specific needs, ultimately aiding in their overall rehabilitation.

Good way  
of showing  
the impact  
of your policy  
not only on  
individuals but  
on society as  
a whole.

My policy change will consist of inmates receiving up to 50% of their good time up front.

But only under a strict set of circumstances. Such as, the completion of specific programming detailed to each inmates offense, psychological evaluation, educational requirements, and disciplinary conduct while incarcerated. Under my new policy inmates will know exactly what is expected of them if they wish to be released early. In this way there will be no subjectivity or bias on behalf of the state of New York because the control is now in the hands of the inmate, who is fully aware of what he must do in order to receive his good time. When going in front of parole boards there will be a simple review rather than a judgment that will conclude wither or not a prisoner completed all of the requirements for him to be released early. My policy gives prisoners hope, and a clear understanding that rehabilitation is in their hands.

very detailed  
policy proposal  
as paper  
will have  
a clearer  
and more  
succinct if  
I had put  
a paragraph  
in your  
intro.

ST

Insightful and detailed proposal. You explained well how the policy change will affect the behavior and perspective of people in prison

# Inside Criminal Justice Replication Materials

## Appendix B

Appendix B includes the additional logistical materials for building an Inside Criminal Justice course. Included in the Appendix B are:

- Sample flyer for advertising the course in prisons
- Sample application form for ADAs
- Sample conflict of interest form for incarcerated students

# Inside Criminal Justice — Weekly Seminar



## Tues Evening & Friday Morning

A small number of Lincoln residents will get the opportunity to participate in a weekly seminar on Criminal Justice and Psychology jointly taught by a Manhattan Prosecutor and a Columbia University Professor. Half of the class participants will be Manhattan Prosecutors. The course will encourage students to think about how to improve the criminal justice system.

## Jan 8 – Feb 12

Graduates of the course will be connected to resources from Columbia University's Justice-in-Education Initiative *and will be eligible to receive college credit from Columbia University.*

The course is meant to foster deep conversation between individuals most closely involved in the criminal justice system. Participants are expected to complete substantial weekly readings, attend all courses, engage in active discussion, and present their ideas after release.



**Manhattan D.A.**  
ACADEMY



**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**  
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

## Fall 2019 Inside Criminal Justice Seminar Application

Inside Criminal Justice is a college-level seminar that takes place within Queensboro Re-entry Facility and Edgecombe Correctional Facility where Manhattan Assistant District Attorneys and individuals incarcerated at these two facilities engage in conversations around the policies, history, and impact of the criminal justice system. Inside Criminal Justice is now accepting applications for its Fall 2019 Semester. **The deadline for submitting applications is September 30<sup>th</sup>.**

*Fall 2019 Semester classes will take place from October 29<sup>th</sup> – December 1<sup>st</sup> on Tuesday evenings from 6:00 – 8:30 PM. Due to Election Day on November 5, the second week of class will take place on Wednesday, Nov 6<sup>th</sup>. Enrolled students will be placed in class either at Queensboro or Edgecombe Correctional Facility. Students are expected to attend every session and complete all readings and assignments. If you will not be able to attend each session this semester, please consider applying for a future semester. Please email completed applications to \_\_\_\_\_.*

**Name:**

[       ]

**Bureau:**

[       ]

**How long have you worked at DANY:**

[       ]

**How did you find out about the Inside Criminal Justice Course?**

[       ]

**Why do you want to participate in this course? (limit 150 words)**

[       ]

**The course requires participants to complete weekly reading, attend class for six consecutive Tuesday nights, and draft a policy proposal to be presented to the graduation ceremony at the course's completion. Do you think that you can commit to the requirements of the course?**

[       ]

**Would you prefer to participate in the Queensboro or Edgecombe course?**

[       ]

**Do you have any further questions?**

[       ]

# Inside Criminal Justice Replication Materials

## Appendix C

Appendix C includes additional pedagogical materials and supplemental information that may be useful for anyone building an Inside Criminal Justice Course. Included in the Appendix C are:

- An Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language
- Guidance on Teaching in Prisons
- The Effectiveness of Teaching in Prisons





## An Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language

**“When there is emotional pain, psychiatrists like me believe that we can help. But before we act we need to find some handle for the problem, some name to guide action. Once in awhile, we realize that these names are inadequate for the problems we are seeing. Then we search for new names, or new ways to group old names.”**

*-- Mindy Thompson Fullilove, M.D., “Root Shock,” 2005*

Dear Friends:

The Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions is a human justice policy, advocacy and training center founded, directed and staffed by academics and advocates who were formerly incarcerated. It is the first and only one of its kind in the United States.

One of our first initiatives is to respond to the negative public perception about our population as expressed in the language and concepts used to describe us. When we are not called mad dogs, animals, predators, offenders and other derogatory terms, we are referred to as inmates, convicts, prisoners and felons—all terms devoid of humanness which identify us as “things” rather than as people. These terms are accepted as the “official” language of the media, law enforcement, prison industrial complex and public policy agencies. **However, they are no longer acceptable for us and we are asking people to stop using them.**

In an effort to assist our transition from prison to our communities as responsible citizens and to create a more positive human image of ourselves, we are asking everyone to stop using these negative terms and to simply refer to us as **PEOPLE**. People currently or formerly incarcerated, **PEOPLE** on parole, **PEOPLE** recently released from prison, **PEOPLE** in prison, **PEOPLE** with criminal convictions, but **PEOPLE**.

We habitually underestimate the power of language. The bible says, **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”** In fact, all of the faith traditions recognize the power of words and, in particular, names that we are given or give ourselves. Ancient traditions considered the “naming ceremony” one of the most important rites of passage. Your name indicated not only who you were and where you belonged, but also who you could be. The worst part of repeatedly hearing your negative definition of me, is that I begin to believe it myself *“for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”* It follows then, that calling me inmate, convict, prisoner, felon, or offender indicates a lack of understanding of who I am, but more importantly **what I can be.** I can be and am much more than an “ex-con,” or an “ex-offender,” or an “ex-felon.”

The Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions believes that if we can get progressive

publications, organizations and individuals like you to stop using the old offensive language and simply refer to us as “**people**,” we will have achieved a significant step forward in our life giving struggle to be recognized as the human beings we are. We have made our mistakes, yes, but we have also paid or are paying our debts to society.

We believe we have the right to be called by a name we choose, rather than one someone else decides to use. We think that by insisting on being called “**people**” we reaffirm our right to be recognized as human beings, not animals, inmates, prisoners or offenders.

***We also firmly believe that if we cannot persuade you to refer to us, and think of us, as people, then all our other efforts at reform and change are seriously compromised.***

Accordingly, please talk with your friends and colleagues about this initiative. If you agree with our approach encourage others to join us. Use positive language in your writing, speeches, publications, web sites and literature.

***When you hear people using the negative language, gently and respectfully correct them and explain why such language is hurting us. Kindly circulate this letter on your various list serves.***

If you disagree with this initiative, please write and tell us why at the above address or e-mail us at [info@centerfornuleadership.org](mailto:info@centerfornuleadership.org). Perhaps, we have overlooked something. ***Please join us in making this campaign successful. With your help we can change public opinion, one person at a time.***

Thank you so much.

In Solidarity and Love,

Eddie Ellis  
Founder

#### **4 Easy Steps To Follow**

- 1. Be conscious of the language you use. Remember that each time you speak, you convey powerful word picture images.**
- 2. Stop using the terms offender, felon, prisoner, inmate and convict.**
- 3. Substitute the word PEOPLE for these other negative terms.**
- 4. Encourage your friends, family and colleagues to use positive language in their speech, writing, publications and electronic communications.**



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[Home](#) > Guidance on teaching in prisons (opinion)

## Guidance on teaching in prisons (opinion)

Submitted by Damian Zurro on January 31, 2018 - 3:00am

It is a sound I can still hear in my sleep: the doors of the sally port, the entryway into the prison, opening and closing. The distinctive clang of gears turning and barriers sliding is one that everyone inside this place knows. Once I was inside and the door lurched shut, an awareness would surge within me that I had entered a world where many of the normal rules and expectations of my daily life did not apply. I would then make my way to the school building and teach my class as normally as possible.

As more people have become aware of the United States' ranking as the world's leader in locking people up <sup>[1]</sup>, many academics want to teach inside prisons. I taught a two-semester composition sequence for three years inside a medium-security men's prison <sup>[2]</sup>, where I learned several valuable lessons. Traveling to a prison every week, teaching classes, running a study hall and interacting with inmates and staff helped me realize that, regardless of one's beliefs on what prisons are or should be, professors who desire to teach inside such places need to know certain things. Here are a few of them.

**Prisons are places of routine disruption.** Most professors I know expect a degree of organization. They assume, for the most part, that their students will show up on time to a designated room for class and that class will run normally with no interruption, ending at a certain time after which everyone goes on with their lives. They may have a chance to interact with students after the session and can always count on email or office hours to talk further with students about questions or concerns.

Prison teachers can count on almost none of these guarantees. You may never know until you arrive that a lockdown has occurred in the dorm just a short time before, canceling your class. Or chow lines may be delayed for

unpredictable amounts of time, leaving you waiting for your students, only to have them never arrive.

Sometimes weather is the enemy; at my prison, dense fog could delay the start of classes because the inmates had to walk from their dorm to the school building, and if the fog prevented the guards in the towers from seeing them, classes were delayed or canceled until it lifted. It would usually burn off by the middle of the day, but that does not help if you have morning classes.

Given these many issues, I have advised everyone I know who spends a lot of time in prisons that they must cultivate two important qualities: flexibility and resilience. Flexibility comes in when you have spent all weekend planning a great activity only to learn your students will arrive late or not at all. You need to adapt quickly to the limited time you are given and find the essence of what you were trying to do so that a precious learning objective does not disappear. Resilience is key because such situations may happen frequently, building up a feeling of stress or despair.

You must learn how to forgive the circumstances and bounce back quickly so that you do not freeze up or fall apart right when your students require you the most. Outsiders who go into prisons and don't adopt these strategies risk burning out. And one thing you can count on is that your students will be available at other times, as they are always kept in the same place. Thus, when a disruption occurs, you can always find a makeup time so that you do not shortchange these students' education.

**We should encourage liberal arts education for its own sake.** We must look beyond vocational education, group therapy and the recidivism rates.

Many prisons offer vocational training, and recent studies have shown that prisoners want those forms of education [3]. In addition, many facilities allow inmates to participate in what are sometimes called "therapeutic communities." Often happening in a group setting, such programs give those who are incarcerated the opportunity to learn anger management, cognitive behavioral therapy and other forms of self-control -- all with the aim of interior change and personal growth. Such programs have a place and should be part of a menu of options that reflect opportunities in the broader society.

Yet they also have drawbacks. Vocational training might train inmates for professions that are either outdated or for which there may be limited opportunities for employment upon release [4]. Therapeutic communities are often court mandated, limiting the personal investment inmates have in the program. They can treat these programs as boxes to check to attain a reduction on their sentence rather than a genuine chance for personal transformation.

Many people would point to the fact that inmates who complete degrees show lower rates of recidivism than those who do not [5]. This data is clearly a societal good, and those of us who support prison education can employ it to garner funding for programs that are sometimes politically unpopular. I support using this data to persuade people, especially when you present them with the status quo recidivism rates [6].

But it should not be the sole emphasis or even the main one for those who teach in prisons. I've found that inmates do not come to an educational program looking to lower their future recidivism. They come because they want to join an academic community and learn how to think critically, express themselves well and cultivate a lifelong love of learning -- all goals that one frequently hears about the value of liberal arts education [7]. Every prison educator should resist letting the utilitarian calculus about prison education's impact on the bottom line crowd out the important reasons to persuade inmates to pursue such learning.

**Viewpoint diversity is often more possible in a prison classroom than in a college one.** It has become evident that some college campuses confront an increasingly difficult challenge in remaining wide arenas for the most open exchange of ideas as possible. The past academic year saw many varied campuses erupt [8] into protests [9] that often sought to shout down speech deemed offensive or controversial.

Such disruptions over controversial ideas were never a problem in my prison classroom. Having taught composition, I often experimented with a wide variety of authors and viewpoints across many issues -- some perennial, some more timely. I had students who held white supremacist views and African-

American converts to Islam going back and forth about everything from Judith Butler to the controversy over Syrian refugees in the United States.

Discussions became heated, to be sure, but not once did a student seek to shut down the class, nor did a group of students ever try to interrupt my class or question my ability to teach.

In fact, one thing I noticed is that, far from wanting the conversation to end, the only real battle the students engaged in was who got to speak next. Ask any prison teacher who has conducted seminars, and they will doubtless tell you that they rarely ever have a lull in the discussion, as can happen in traditional undergraduate classrooms. I found that if I came in with a set of prepared questions, on many days we would rarely make it to the second question on the list before the conversation took on an unexpected life of its own -- enabling me to follow where it led and still come out the other side having accomplished the goals of that day. Therefore, fear not the controversial topic, because prison students will engage willingly, desiring to expand the conversation rather than shut it down.

In the end, an academic who decides to teach inside a prison must be willing to simultaneously remain conscious of the deep nexus of societal issues in a prison while also preventing that consciousness from overwhelming their ability to serve their students. It is possible to make one's classroom the freest place inside the prison without making the reality of the students' imprisonment a central focus. Most academics are aware of the problems of mass incarceration, but they will not do right by their students if they view themselves as advocates, spending time strategizing how to disrupt an apparently unjust system to liberate those in their classrooms. On the contrary, inmates want teachers to know them as complete human beings, held to the same standards as any other undergraduates, who can learn the skills to liberate themselves.

*Damian Zurro is a visiting assistant teaching professor in the University Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame. Follow him on Twitter*

*[@DamianZurro](#) <sup>[10]</sup>. The views expressed in this essay are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Westville Educational Initiative, the Bard Prison Initiative or the Indiana Department of Corrections.*