



photo by Philip Carter

Prison University Project

A Newsletter of the Prison University Project

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From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

I'd like to share a story that illustrates the kind of deeply rooted problems currently facing the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, problems that go far beyond the lack of funding for educational and recovery programs.

A few months ago, individual students in the College Program – some close to completing their degree, others just starting out – began to receive notice that they would be transferred out of San Quentin to prisons around the state within 10-60 days. It seemed like every evening we heard from another student who had been devastated to learn that he would be leaving, and would thus not be able to remain in school. People began to be shipped out – to Chuckawalla, California Men's Colony, and other prisons. (A letter from one of these students, now at CMC, is on page two.)

CDCR had begun a "population realignment" – a plan to move "Medium A" prisoners living in cells to dormitories at other institutions, in order to make room for the ever-increasing "Close B" population around the state which, per policy, cannot be housed in dorms. (Close B status is determined primarily by previous escape attempts or the amount of time one has left to serve.) People began to be moved into and out of San Quentin without regard for their interest in participating in any of the extremely rare programs offered there. About a third of our students are classified as Medium A.

To their credit and to our great relief, the Department recently imposed a temporary freeze on transfers of some participants in the college program and some other programs, though it's not clear how long this will hold. But the even bigger question is, what are CDCR staff supposed to do in the long run? The problem is rooted in overcrowding, and specifically in sentencing: the Close B population is increasing because the number of people sentenced to long prison terms is increasing; the current "population realignment" will be, at best, a short-term solution to a massive systemic problem.

One could change Departmental policy concerning who is classified as Close B, or where Close B prisoners can be housed, but policy change is both mind-numbingly complex and slow. Even more, many staff and administrators would oppose such change, for fear that it might lead to the very problems the rules were meant to prevent – such as violence or escapes.

In fact, administrators are often unwilling to seek a change in

policy, or to exercise the discretion allowed by regulation, even if they believe that doing so would pose little risk. This seems to be rooted in an almost superstitious aversion to departing from long-standing practice, as well as in a stark awareness that if something goes wrong and it later comes out that standard policy had not been followed, someone will be punished, or even fired. This has indeed been true historically, even when circumstances such as overcrowding or understaffing had left no other option. CDCR's relationships with the legislature, the media, and the public have long been defined by scapegoating, and this has produced a culture that is defensive, disempowered, averse to innovation, and at times immune to reason.

One of the most painful things I've observed while working in this environment has been individual administrators who, faced with this sort of impossible bind, attempt to rationalize arbitrary and destructive "solutions." We've been told on a number of occasions that moving students out who've only just started in the college preparatory program, or who have been enrolled for a while and are taking longer than average to complete the degree, would be a reasonable "compromise." The former are described as not yet invested; the latter are characterized as malingersers.

The sad irony is that almost everyone I have met working inside CDCR – including those who've made these arguments – would be thrilled to see us expand our programs, serve many more people, change more lives, and improve public safety – all at no cost to the taxpayer. As I write, I picture the students now scattered to other institutions across the state, and I picture the staff and administrators at San Quentin and at CDCR headquarters whose hands have been tied, and I feel the depth of all of their frustration.

Aside from the sentencing laws that have produced this crisis, the great tragedy here is the extreme lack of educational opportunities at other institutions across the state, which this whole situation has underscored: If higher education and other valuable programs were available in every prison, being moved involuntarily would surely be disruptive, but it might not feel quite as catastrophic. I hope that both CDCR and the Governor's office will step up and offer the leadership and political coverage necessary to clear the way for real solutions to these and other problems, and to support those who are on the frontlines of this crisis. In the meantime, we are deeply indebted to those who continue to advocate on behalf of our work.

With warm regards and best wishes for a happy holiday,

Jody Lewen

Why the Caged Man Smiles!

My name is Daryl Bouie E-31124. I am a 43-year-old black man from Chicago, Illinois. I'm currently serving a Three Strikes sentence of 35 to life for a serious, but non-violent PC 1192.7 burglary/robbery charge. In my past, I've spent 19 years in state custody on four separate prison terms and one federal term of seven months.

Three weeks ago I transferred to San Quentin from CSP Solano. I immediately signed up for the two college preparatory classes, which are not in existence at any of the other five prisons I've been to. Well, one of the teachers asked me why I smiled so much, and was in such a good mood. So I told her that it was because of the opportunity to attend these college prep classes, and that they weren't offered to inmates at Solano, so I felt blessed at being given the rare opportunity.

If I could've expounded on the subject, I would've told her, my life's biggest mistake was attending Illinois State College for one day only, and never returning. Now I'm in prison, with no girlfriend or wife. Not one single friend or family member in California. In the eight years that I've worked at Solano prison, I didn't get paid one thin dime, and I'm broke. Solano and Susanville and Tracy and Folsom prison, also doesn't have or promote higher education. From what I've experienced and seen, it's as if they try to turn out worse criminals through denying rehabilitation programs. These prisons are making pit bulls out of poodles, by the way they deny us jobs that have pay numbers, higher education, also by assigning us to trades that we have no interest in. Those that aren't assigned to anything have no incentive at all to change.

And yet, when I'm in class, I smile because an education is priceless, and it changes people for the better. My grandmother, who's 83, and my mother are gonna be extremely proud of me once I obtain my degree, so I'm smiling also for them.

I sincerely want to thank everybody who's involved with this college program and Patten University itself, for all that you do. You're underpaid, or receive no pay, and under-appreciated. Thank you for giving some down and out prisoners true help in the face of adversity and hardship as we seek to change ourselves for the better and cause a ripple effect of positive change in others.

May God bless you, amen.



On October 2, PUP board member Keith Wattley, founder and managing attorney of UnCommon Law, was honored at the Santa Clara University Law School's Diversity Gala, together with California Supreme Court Justice Carlos Moreno. Shown in the above photo from the event are (L to R): former College Program students Jai-Lee Fontenot and Leonard Hutton, Darnice Davis, Keith Wattley, and Jody Lewen.

UnCommon Law advises and represents clients in various legal matters, including parole consideration (lifer) hearings, parole revocation proceedings, prison classification, discipline and safety matters, and handles both administrative proceedings and court challenges to unlawful state conduct.

Letter from Foggy San Luis Obispo (CMC)

This place adds new meaning to petty; we really had it good at SQ. Sure there is a lot more freedom to move around and there are no bars and concrete but I'd rather be in a dungeon with access to an education than on a sunny prison yard with nothing to do but exercise. I miss the weekend visits from my family and to some of us, the Prison University Project was their family. I really valued all of the opportunity and the programs at San Quentin. This transfer, by taking away these opportunities, exemplified just how unique SQ is in offering us inmates a chance to better ourselves. If I had to define what rehabilitation in prison is, it would be the Prison University Project and its effect on men in conjunction with all of the self-help programs available at San Quentin.

A litmus on just how much of an impact the PUP program has had on us can be seen in where us transferees were placed in prison work assignments. Out of four of the SQ transferees on the unit two yard, three of us were put directly into clerk positions. The one inmate that did not get a clerk job was not a PUP student and therefore was not given a clerk position. What really puts these job assignments into perspective is that one, clerk jobs are highly sought after and there is a waiting list; and two, there are 900 men on this yard and only about 70 have jobs. Most men wait up to two years before they are assigned a prison job, let alone a clerk position.

In all, none of us like it here one bit. I can't speak for all of us but I want to come back and finish up my AA. I hope that I get the opportunity.

—Aly Tamboura

Group Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean, and at San Quentin

This semester I am teaching Ancient History in the College Program at San Quentin, together with UC Berkeley graduate students David Devore, Tim Doran, Lisa Eberle, and Tom Hendrickson. The course studies selected topics in the history of the ancient Mediterranean, focusing particularly on the development of a group identity among Israelites, Greeks, and Romans. Reading ranges from the Bible and Homer to Greek tragedy, Herodotus, Vergil, and Tacitus.

The first day at work at San Quentin can be a pretty anxious one. The mere clanging of the heavy iron gate behind one is enough to create a few shivers. Entrance into the class on that first day with a room full of unknown inmates (for a course in ancient history at that!) can only raise the level of apprehension.

But the nervousness evaporates quite rapidly. The Prison University Project and the San Quentin authorities make a point of creating a genuine classroom atmosphere. No guards are conspicuous or in the immediate vicinity. The room is set up for educational purposes and everyone fits immediately into the role of instructor or pupil as in a university setting. The inmates in this context are simply students, polite, serious, and genuinely interested in learning.

Our experience in this ancient history course has been overwhelmingly positive. Students with little background in the subject (almost all of them) are eager to fill in the gaps, to gain knowledge of unfamiliar but intriguing material, and to offer their own thoughts on it. They also bring their own special experience to the classroom, with a comfortable self-awareness that is impressive. In response to a question about the different ways in which people express their identity, a student said “either as law-abiding or criminal” – a rather moving reply that few instructors or students outside that context would have thought to make.

On the whole, students have been conscientious and industrious. In individual conversations about written work, we have found them to be intensely interested in improving style, content, and analysis. In class, we get pointed questions, sometimes thoughtful, even searching ones.

To be sure, there have been ups and downs. On one occasion, we got little or no participation from students who had evidently paid no attention to the assignment. But this led to perhaps the most touching and welcome result. In the following session, without prompting, we received apologies, heartfelt, genuine, and sincere. Students paid tribute to the fact that we are donating our time and effort, expressed contrition and a determination not to let it happen again. I don't recall that ever happening from students at Cal!

Erich Gruen is Professor Emeritus of History and Classics at the University of California, Berkeley.



photo by Philip Carter

The Challenge of Dreaming Big, Even When Times Are Hard

This last year has been bleak for most non-profit organizations, but as we look towards a new and better year, we have resolved to re-commit ourselves to the dreams we have deferred – among these the long-awaited Program Evaluation and the Learning Differences Program.

The Evaluation will track the long- and short-term impact of participation in the College Program on students – not only in terms of rates of recidivism, but further educational attainment, employment, mental health, recovery from addiction, and the wellbeing of family members. The Learning Differences Program will address the needs of students who face special challenges, whether classic learning disabilities such as dyslexia or ADHD, English as a second language, or emotional issues like extreme anxiety. All are common within our student body.

Beyond these two projects, we hope in the coming year to hire a part-time development director, and to launch “Facing Sentencing,” a multi-media public education project that will combine photographic portraits, autobiographical essays, interviews, policy facts, and research, to inform people about sentencing in California and to link all that information with the faces and individual stories of people who've been impacted by those laws.

We also still hold out hope for the creation of additional classroom space at San Quentin, most likely through the renovation of existing space. We do not anticipate that CDCR will be in a position to dedicate resources to this any time soon, but such a project would clearly be feasible with private support.

Finally, we think constantly about when we might be in a position to develop new college programs at other prisons. This has always been a long-term goal, but it seems even more pressing now that we have former students sending us first-hand accounts of the dire need for education programs at other prisons around the state – another important reminder of how much more vividly a crisis grips us when we know the messenger personally.

ALUMNI NEWS

Second Chances Are Worth Giving A Letter From Randall Countryman

Life on the outside is everything I thought it would be and more. It is not without its challenges, but they are very welcome challenges considering the alternative of where I spent the last 21 years. Everything has changed so much and it seems like an alien world. Some of the changes are for the better (toilets that flush themselves for example fascinate me), some changes I've experienced are for the worse (paying my own bills comes to mind). But I wouldn't have it any other way.

I live in Chula Vista (a suburb of San Diego), and from my back yard on a hillside, I have the San

Diego city skyline to my right, Tijuana, Mexico to my left, and right smack in the middle of it all is the Pacific Ocean. I get the ocean breeze and smell the salt in the air every day while I watch my two dogs (Barbie and Eddi) wrestle to determine who the boss will be for the day.

I have everything I need; 4X4 Chevy, licenses (auto, and more importantly, fishing), insurance (auto, and medical), dogs, a cat, a roof over my head with a beautiful view, too much food, a good church, and family and friends to hang out with and for moral support. The highlight of my freedom so far has been being able to spend Mother's Day with my mother for the first time in 22 years and to present her with a big bouquet of flowers.

I haven't abandoned my education in all of this. With transfer credits from Patten University, I am almost half way to earning my Bachelor's degree.

Thanks and deep appreciation go out to all the Patten University staff involved with the Prison University Project at San Quentin, and to all my classmates and lifers who helped me get where I am today. I am striving at being the best example I can possibly be in the free world, to show that second chances are worth giving. That is the best support that I can give to those of you still embedding in the system.



Fall Semester at San Quentin

This semester we are offering: English 99A, English 99B, English 101, Modern Literature, Sociology, U.S. History, Ancient History, Neurology, Music Appreciation, Math 50, Algebra, Geometry, and Calculus. The fabulous volunteer instructors, teaching assistants, tutors and guest lecturers who are teaching these classes are:

Brendan Banister, Madelaine Bartlett, Clément Barthes, Josh Begley, Ben Boudreaux, Nancy Bourne, dom brassey, Judy Breen, Krista Brune, Adam Chanzit, Edward Clapp, Sarah Crews, Kathryn Crim, Phil Cullen, David Devore, Tim Doran, Dimitri Dounas-Frazer, Lisa Eberle, Lindsay Glesener, Ted Grantham, Nick Grener, Erich Gruen, Donna Hamamoto, Tom Hendrickson, Lianne Herzberg, Damon Horowitz, Michèle Insanally, Michelle Iorio, Kathleen Jackson, Doug Jones, Leif Karlstrom, Roshni Kasad, Gwendal Kervern, Brian Kessler, Laura Keys, Jessica Koistinen, Kelsey Krausen, Kali Lader, Maureen Lahiff, Amit Lakhani, Lasse Landt, Steven Lanzisera, Sang Lee, Julie Lifshay, Karen Lovaas, Rick Luttmann, Jennifer Lyons, Andrew Mamo, Nicholas Mathew, Annie McClanahan, Claire McDonnell, Ramsey McGlazer, Jess McIntosh, Adam Megacz, Raffi Moughamian, Jimmy Morales, Kater Murch, Blaine Nelson, Siobhan Noble, Naftali Presser, Gireeja Ranade, Julie Reh-meyer, Keramet Reiter, Sean Rhea, Adam Roddy, Kelly Jane Rosenblatt, Amy Roza, Shirley Rubin, Tim Ruckle, Scott Schlossberg, Tara Seekins, Sonal Singhal, Chris Smallwood, Murl Smith, Sandra Smith, Joseph Spinelli, Andrew Swan, Kara Urion, Megan Wachspress, Rachel Walsh, Adam Williamson, and David Wong.

Who We Are and What We Do

The mission of the Prison University Project is to provide excellent higher education to people incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison, and to stimulate public awareness and meaningful dialogue about higher education and criminal justice in California and across the United States.

The College Program at San Quentin provides approximately twelve courses each semester in the humanities, social sciences, math, and science leading to an Associate of Arts degree in liberal arts, as well as college preparatory courses in math and English, to over 250 students. The program is an extension site of Patten University in Oakland. All instructors work as volunteers. The Prison University Project receives no state or federal funding and relies entirely on donations from individuals and foundations.

Major expenses include textbooks and school supplies, publications, education and outreach activities (including conferences), office rent and utilities, and three full-time staff salaries. PUP's annual cash budget is under \$500,000, but when the value of all volunteer teaching hours (and other pro bono labor) is included, PUP's annual budget exceeds \$1 million.