



Prison Education Faculty Recruitment Toolkit and Training Resource Guide

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Contributors and Reviewers

SUNY Higher Education for the Justice-Involved Team

Teresa Miller, Senior Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Diversity Officer

Phillip Ortiz, Assistant Provost for Undergraduate and STEM Education

Daniel Knox, Assistant Provost for Academic Planning and Student Success

Rachel Sander, Prison Education Director

Rebecca Grace, Director of Academic Project Management and Strategic Analysis

Thomas Gais, Provost Fellow and Senior Research Scientist

Klarisse Torriente, Researcher

Katie Zuber, Research Scientist

Paul Wilner, Associate for University Planning and Analytics

Contributors

Carla Barrett, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Sociology Department at John Jay College. In June 2019, she became the Academic Director for Prison-to-College Pipeline (P2CP) program which provides credit-bearing college classes at Otisville Correctional Facility. She has taught within P2CP in a variety of capacities since 2014, including co-facilitating the Learning Exchange program for the past 3 years. She chairs the Sociology Department Curriculum Committee and was the founding chair of the Critical Pedagogy Collective of the American Society of Criminology Division on Critical Criminology and Social Justice.

Brian Fischer, MA, MPS is a recently retired Commissioner of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision after 44 years of dedicated service. Commissioner Fischer leads the nation's fourth-largest state correctional system with 57,069 offenders incarcerated in 67 facilities and is responsible for the community supervision of 37,917 parolees. He has served on the Board of Directors at Hudson Link since 2007. He has been an adjunct professor at both Pace University and John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Mr. Fischer holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, a Master's Degree in Guidance and Counseling, and a Master's Degree in Professional Studies.

Jessica Jensen, MSW, is the Director of Statewide Educational Initiatives at the Institute for Justice and Opportunity. In this role she oversees the Prison-to-College Pipeline (P2CP), CUNY's college-in-prison program operated at Otisville Correctional Facility. Additionally, Jessica oversees the Institute's provision of technical assistance to college-in-prison programs that receive funding from the District Attorney of New York. Prior to taking this role, Jessica worked at the Vera Institute of Justice where she provided technical assistance to college-in-prison programs that are part of the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiatives. Also while at Vera, she worked with public housing agencies in various parts of the country to expand their policies to be more inclusive of people with contact with the criminal legal system through Vera's Opening Doors Initiative. Before working at the Vera Institute, Jessica served as the Director of Academic Counseling and the Peer Mentoring Coordinator in the Institute's College Initiative program. Jessica holds a BA in Sociology from the University of Texas at Austin and an MSW from the Silberman School of Social Work.

Lee Cruceta is an Academic Coordinator for Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, who coordinates college programs at both maximum and medium correctional facilities in New York State. As a Hudson Link alumnus, who earned his degree while incarcerated, he is passionate about bringing quality education and support to incarcerated students.

Lisa Jean Moore, PhD, MPH is a SUNY Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at Purchase College. A medical sociologist by training, Dr. Moore has written several books in the fields of human health, animal studies, and social theory. Since 2016, she has taught in the Bedford Hills College Program.

Kyri Murdough coordinates the college program at Auburn State Prison for Cornell University. She has advised scores of students pursuing their Associate degree in Liberal Arts and Humanities through a partnership with the State University of New York (SUNY). She has overseen tutorials, a competitive debate team, and a literary journal published by the incarcerated students at the prison. Murdough has also observed and participated in educational programming in men's and women's prisons and jails at all security levels. Prior to joining the Cornell Prison Education Program, Murdough founded an Adult Basic Education program in two North Carolina county jails. She is currently pursuing a Master's in Public Administration with a focus on Human Rights and Social Justice at Cornell University.

Antoinne Murphy, MPS is an Administrative Assistant for the Department of Civil Engineering at The City College of New York, where he provides support for programs, special projects, and student organizations. He is a Hudson Link alumnus and holds a bachelor's degree in Behavioral Science from Mercy College, as well as a Master of Professional Studies degree in Urban Ministry from Union Theological Seminary.

Rachel Sander, MS, has dedicated her career to creating opportunities for current and formerly incarcerated individuals to pursue higher education. Since 2014, she has administered programs at men's and women's maximum and medium correctional facilities throughout New York State. Today, Rachel serves as SUNY's Prison Education Director. She previously held the role of Director of Strategic Initiatives for Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison. She also is a Marymount Manhattan adjunct professor at Bedford Hills correctional facility. Rachel is an active participant, leading facilitator, and cofounding member of the New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison. She holds a bachelor's degree from Sarah Lawrence College and a master's degree in non-profit management from Northeastern University.

Monica Szlekovics is a graduate of Marymount Manhattan College Bedford Hills Campus. She earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology in 2009 and then went on to work for the Program for nine years. She is a Marymount Manhattan College Gold Key Recipient and in 2015 she was awarded the Marymount Manhattan College Bedford Hills Thea Jackson Service Award. In January of 2020, after twenty-three years of incarceration, she was granted clemency by Governor Cuomo. She resides in Rochester, N.Y. and continues to support prison education programs.

Additional Reviewers

Joseph Joseph, Assistant Commissioner of Programs, New York Department of Corrections and
Community Supervision

Evan Goldstein, Policy Associate, CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Part I – Recruitment Toolkit	3
Why Faculty Recruitment Matters to Students	3
Why Faculty Recruitment Matters to DOCCS	4
Why Faculty Recruitment Matters to Colleges	4
Program Administrator’s Role in Recruiting Faculty	5
Motive for wanting to teach inside prison	7
Capacity for maintaining boundaries	9
Ability to teach without technology and planning ahead	9
Professor Support and Evaluation.....	10
Part II – Training Resource Guide for Faculty	11
Understanding Your Role and Setting Boundaries	11
Inside of the Classroom	11
<i>Use Appropriate Language.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Importance of Clarity and Upholding Academic Integrity</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Be aware and mindful of personal space and what your presence signifies.....</i>	<i>13</i>
Outside of the Classroom	13
<i>Respect DOCCS policies and procedures</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Understanding Students’ Day-to-Day Realities</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Student Privacy</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Have your own space to process and ask questions.....</i>	<i>15</i>
Appendices	17
Appendix A: Resources and Reading	17
Appendix B: SUNY Campuses Including Prison Education Programs	19
Appendix C: Bibliography	21
Appendix D: Acronym List	23
Additional Information	24

Introduction

"He who opens a school door, closes a prison"

— Victor Hugo

As the field of higher education in prison expands, the State University of New York (SUNY) is contributing resources and materials related to building quality college-in-prison programs. Colleagues within New York State and throughout the country have been successfully running programs inside correctional facilities for almost three decades. The fruits of their labor, along with newer research and resources that provide a deeper history and broader analysis of the field can be found in the Reading List in the Appendix of this guide. However, despite the extensive work done and growing



interest in the field, there is no complete handbook or “how-to manual” detailing best practices or secrets to success when it comes to running college programs in prison. Most recently, some critical work has been done on this subject by the [Jamii Sisterhood](#) and the Higher Education in Prison Faculty Training group, who have been convening practitioners to collect and develop best practices on this subject. Notes from these meetings have been made available to the public, at [the following link](#).

Additionally, the [Equity and Excellence in Practice report](#) from the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison lays the groundwork for the creation of best practices and offers suggested guidelines for thinking about standards for the field. Rather than being prescriptive, the Equity and Excellence report presents a conceptual foundation for programs to aspire to regarding program excellence, equity, and access, with full acknowledgment that programs are dynamic and correctional facilities by design are perpetually changing environments. In the same spirit, this toolkit and resource guide were created and informed by the experience and expertise of those who have been students, professors, or administrators in various prison education programs throughout New York State to make suggestions regarding ways to approach hiring, training, and supporting faculty teaching in prison education programs.

Our hope is that this toolkit and guide can help support administrators and professors to best serve students by considering their power and responsibility inside the prison context. The first goal of this document is to help guide programs through developing hiring and training practices that can support quality programming inside the correctional facility. The second goal is to generate a larger conversation about what programs consider to be best practice and how hiring, training, and supporting faculty contribute to the overall goals of building and maintaining quality college in prison programming. To that end, Part I of this toolkit is designed for program administrators who are developing or overseeing hiring for their college in prison program. It outlines the role of the professor in prison settings and identifies the qualities to look for in candidates applying to teach in prison. Part II, which was created for

both faculty and program administrators, speaks to training for faculty once they've been hired and ongoing professional development. It offers a set of best practices for faculty who are considering teaching in prison. These materials are created with the acknowledgement that programs need to develop their own unique processes and practices conducive to their campus settings and capacities, and thus there should be expected variation.

A guiding belief behind this toolkit was honoring those with lived experience in the field. All contributors of this toolkit have significant on the ground experience related to higher education in prison as either a former student, teaching faculty, or as college program or corrections administrator. The initial project concept was developed by Klarisse Torriente as part of SUNY's work on the College-in-Prison Reentry Initiative funded by the New York County District Attorney's Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII). The project evolved over the course of 2019-2020 academic year. The initial draft, prepared by Rachel Sander, was circulated among faculty, administrators, former students, whose personal and professional experiences offer critical insight into best practices and procedures for implementing college-in-prison programs. Contributors provided feedback on written drafts on the document and offered suggestions regarding additional content areas. We like to think of this as a continued collaborative work in progress, leaving room for new learning as the field grows and changes.

Part I – Recruitment Toolkit

“Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

— Malcolm X

Why Faculty Recruitment Matters to Students

Inside prison, professors play a critical role in shaping, supporting, and guiding students through their academic journeys, just as they do on traditional campuses. Students develop long term educational relationships with faculty that mentor, inspire, and motivate students to pursue academic and professional endeavors. Especially inside of a prison, these relationships have the potential to be deeply meaningful and productive in establishing a student's identity as a scholar.

However, inside correctional facilities, professors also serve as a point of contact for students who are unable to access the various offices and departments of the main campus. Incarcerated students do not have access to the same recourse or support afforded to main campus students when they are struggling in a particular professor's class. While we hope all students are appropriately challenged, it is critical to hire faculty that are respectful and responsive to unique student needs and can maintain appropriate boundaries. Unlike traditional students, students inside the prison classroom cannot always get up and leave the room if they are uncomfortable, triggered, or offended. It is important to consider that many students inside the correctional facility have had negative, if not traumatic, educational experiences in the past and some are learning how to be successful in a classroom for the first time. Additionally, unlike traditional main campuses, most prison campuses do not offer multiple sections of the same course during the same semester. Meaning if a student needs to take a degree required course, they have no option to switch to a different faculty member's section. These differences of the prison campus illustrate the importance of considering the student experience when making hiring decisions.

In addition, faculty sometimes serve as a primary connection in incarcerated students' lives. For some students who may not receive phone calls, visits, or letters, college professors could be one of their only contacts to the outside world. Also, some students may never have been to a college class on a traditional campus setting. Some may never have had a positive relationship with a teacher; in fact, some may have only had traumatic educational experiences. Black students, for instance, are expelled three times more frequently than white students and schools with more Black students tend to have higher suspension rates (Nelson and Lind, 2015). Students who are new to the idea of a positive professor-student relationship may be unsure of how to navigate this new connection, making it an added responsibility for the professor to maintain appropriate boundaries. Regardless, students often feel the classroom is one of the only places within a prison where they can get a sense of normalcy and be seen as a student. One of New York's leaders of higher education in prison, Cheryl Wilkins explains:

“I was free inside prison. I couldn't leave prison physically, but mentally it freed my mind because I learned so much about the community I came from. I learned about what might have brought me into prison in the first place: childhood issues, economic issues—and it basically freed my mind. I found my purpose in life through achieving a college education. I didn't have a purpose in life before I looked at the things that I thought may need changing in my community. So I pursued a degree in policy so I could affect a large amount of people and change policies that affect my community” (Halkovic & Fine, 2013, p.14).

Cheryl's words illustrate the important role prison educators play in their students' lives and highlights the incredible power faculty have inside the correctional facility classroom. As Cheryl also alludes to, the

classroom can be a space that encourages self-reflection, emotional processing, and existential reflection, making it critical to identify faculty who are self-reflective, aware, and responsive to students and the prison environment.

Why Faculty Recruitment Matters to DOCCS

While DOCCS is supportive of college programming inside facilities, college program staff and professors are guests of the correctional facility. This means they must adhere to DOCCS rules and regulations and maintain a respectful attitude to correctional facility administrators and staff. A strong partnership with the facility is essential to building and maintaining a strong program. It's important to hire faculty who can be trusted to follow the rules and who can understand the complexity and delicacy of the relationship with DOCCS. Professors are used to teaching in environments that celebrate their right to be expressive of academic freedom. And while you don't wish to squelch academic freedom, faculty need to be reminded that they are not in a traditional college setting and that their typical demeanor, dress, or behavior might not be appropriate to the long-term goals of a college education program in a prison. It's important that DOCCS trusts that your program has a good understanding of the way their facilities operate and why certain rules are in place to help protect the population.

Why Faculty Recruitment Matters to Colleges

As the field of prison education grows, more schools are implementing prison education programs as an extension of their commitment to serving students in their community and/or their commitment to social justice. Sometimes these conversations can help introduce or contribute to broader critical conversations about equity and opportunity on campus. Additionally, as public funding continues to become available in the spirit of expanding access to education for all, campuses may face added

Developing a Process

It's advisable that your college prison program develop a process for evaluating candidates in addition to following main campus HR policies and procedures. Some programs may choose to have a panel interview prospective faculty. This panel could involve current faculty or administrators that work inside the prison and/or former students of the program who can speak to the unique nature of the prison environment. This process enables the panel to get to know the candidate, explain the process for getting volunteer clearance within DOCCS, answers any questions about what it's like to work in a correctional facility, and perhaps most importantly assesses if the candidate is the right fit for your program.

scrutiny and it's important for campus leadership to be able to speak to the quality and integrity of the prison education program and know that the program is in compliance with the college's policies and hiring practices. Colleges are accountable to a variety of stakeholders and funders, in addition to the Middle States Commission for Higher Education (MSCHE) and therefore must demonstrate the comparable rigor and resources in the prison campus. It is also useful to have faculty who are well acquainted with college policies and procedures, as incarcerated students do not have access to departments and offices on campus. In many ways, program administrators and faculty can be ambassadors of campus culture and policies.

Program Administrator's Role in Recruiting Faculty

Recruiting faculty for your prison education program is a major responsibility that ensures the integrity of your program. It's important to make intentional hiring decisions to not only best serve your students, but to protect the viability and longevity of your program by building and maintaining strong relationships with New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS).

Depending on your academic institution, you may recruit professors from a variety of sources. Some schools have a waiting list of professors eager to teach inside the prison campus and others may have to look outside the main campus to find an available instructor that may be onboarded as an adjunct. Others may rely on professors receiving course release to get permission to teach inside the prison campus. Some programs may choose to post for the position online and others may rely on referrals from teaching faculty or other college in prison programs. Regardless of how or where you find interested candidates, it is important to be intentional in your hiring decisions. This can be tricky, especially when navigating internal campus politics. It may be valuable to discuss with campus leaders and department heads ahead of time to familiarize them with the important and delicate nature of teaching in the prison campus. Additionally, because the DOCCS process for clearing a new volunteer can take time, in addition to planning in advance, it is critical to build your pool of professors who are cleared to teach inside to prepare for last minute staffing changes or changes to the course schedule. If you are having trouble finding interested faculty, it may be valuable to host an information session, lecture, or film screening related to the field of higher education in prison on your main campus to build interest and support. The Reading List in Appendix can provide some suggested content for campus presentations about the college program and also introduce prospective faculty to the field.

Who is a good fit to teach in the prison setting and how to identify who is a good fit to teach inside the prison?

The first and most obvious answer is any prospective hire should meet the college's hiring standards and follow campus hiring policies and procedures. This means the prospective

Things for program administrators to consider when selecting a course for the prison setting

- What academic value does this course bring to students?
- What skills will students gain from this course?
- How will this course contribute to, complement, or supplement other course offerings and/or advance degree completion?
- Is this course required or will students have a choice to register for this class?
- Do students have the appropriate prerequisites to take this course?
- Will students have adequate access to supplemental course materials or research required to be successful in this course?
- Does this course rely on student access to technology? How might the course need to be modified to better fit the technological limitations of the correctional facility setting?
- Does this course, by design, require students to divulge or share personal information? (Such as ethnography or journalism course)
- How can curriculum or assignments be modified so students are not required to share their personal information?
- Does this course fit within the guidelines of what DOCCS would consider an appropriate course?
- Will the course material meet the guidelines of DOCCS Media Review?
- If questions arise from students, college administrators, or prison administrators about why the course is being offered, are you able to defend the decision or provide further information?

instructor meets all the academic and professional requirements as on-campus instructors. Professors should be qualified and experienced in their subject matter and receive department head approval. Finding appropriate faculty to teach appropriate courses is a key responsibility for program administrators and some courses may be inappropriate for a prison setting. Setting faculty up for success also means careful consideration should go into course offerings (see insert on page 5).

It's also important that professors who apply to work inside the correctional facility have experience working with groups of diverse students and have a wide and flexible repertoire of pedagogical approaches, as they may need to adapt to changing circumstances. It's critical to hire faculty who also have familiarity or training in working with nontraditional learners who tend to come from marginalized academic and life experiences. A strong college in prison professor is mindful of their privilege and constantly strives to be culturally and socially responsive. Students inside correctional facilities are

Suggested Interview Questions for Potential Faculty

- *Why do you want to teach in our program?*
- *Have you ever taught in prison before?*
- *If there was an opening to teach this same course on our main campus, would you be interested in the position?*
- *How do you feel about working with the Department of Corrections?*
- *Technology inside the prison is limited and students don't have internet access—how would this impact course delivery and what are some ways you might design the course and assignments to accommodate the different resources?*
- *How familiar are you with teaching students from different educational backgrounds? How do you plan to address learning disparities in the classroom?*
- *What are your major concerns about teaching inside a prison?*
- *What do you think would be the greatest challenges of teaching inside a prison?*
- *What is your style of dealing with conflict in the classroom?*
- *How do you typically respond when students interrupt one another and the discussion becomes animated and lively?*
- *What questions do you have for me about teaching inside a prison?*

diverse in many ways, but particularly when it comes to prior learning experiences. Professors who are able to teach to a range of academic experiences and abilities will be better prepared for the inside classroom and potentially more successful.

Additionally, providing your students with a range of professors from diverse backgrounds and with different experiences and teaching styles is important. Because the prison campus is significantly smaller than a main campus, it is important to be deliberate about creating opportunities for professors with diverse educational and political backgrounds, who represent different race, age, and gender demographics. Paying professors and ensuring they follow the college's hiring process, as opposed to relying on volunteers, not only ensures college human resources policies are followed to protect the college from liability, but can also help ensure diversity.

However, just because someone is a qualified or experienced professor doesn't mean they are the correct fit to teach in the prison. In fact, teaching in prison isn't for everyone and it's important to help gauge candidates' ability and willingness to teach under stressful circumstances to ensure that they are comfortable taking the position. Here are some other critical factors to consider when recruiting faculty for your prison education program.

Motive for wanting to teach inside prison

Assessing the motives of a prospective professor can seem uncomfortable, but is an essential hiring responsibility. When hiring for your prison education program, your primary duties are to protect your students and the relationships with DOCCS. The DOCCS background check and clearance process can help bring to light a candidate's motives for wanting to teach inside, but you should not rely solely on DOCCS processes to make these assessments. While the DOCCS volunteer screening process may identify issues with a prospective professor, it's important to do your own vetting to respect the time of DOCCS personnel and to demonstrate to DOCCS your good and careful judgement when it comes to hiring.

It's worth mentioning that DOCCS does approve volunteers with a criminal history. The department differentiates between a "clean" background and an "acceptable" background. "We value individuals who have been through the system coming back," Assistant Commissioner for Programs Joseph Joseph explains. "It's inspiring for everyone to have them come back and demonstrate how they've turned their lives around." The process can take longer when a candidate has a criminal background, but the department does not automatically disqualify these candidates. Factors such as the time that has passed since the incident and the specifics of individual situations are considered when DOCCS makes the "acceptable" distinction. It's critical that volunteers be willing to disclose this and other personal information at the time of application, as failure to disclose this information at the start of the process can prevent an individual from receiving approval for DOCCS volunteer status. "In general, the Department values timely communication and prompt reporting when it comes to applying for volunteer status or in reporting incidents in the facility," AC Joseph explains.

While it is valuable to hire individuals with a passion for social justice, it is critical that professors understand that per DOCCS policy, they must refrain from advocacy work. This means refraining from public advocacy or making public comments that could be interpreted as adversarial or critical of the Department of Corrections. It also means abiding by DOCCS Volunteer policies regarding public presentations and information sharing.

Be wary of candidates who are seeking teaching opportunities to further their own personal agenda. Students inside correctional facilities are students—not research subjects or political points. Students should not be made to feel like they are being interrogated, observed, or studied. Professors are there to teach and students need to be treated the same way as outside students would be treated with their right to privacy respected. Journalists and researchers must follow other NYS DOCCS procedures to access correctional facilities.



Professors must be willing to learn and understand various aspects of prison policies and prison culture that influence the correctional classroom. This can include classroom visits from prison administrators, occasional security check interruptions, last minute classroom changes, policies regarding classroom equipment, students limited access to technology, practices pertaining to student 'movement' lines, package room, or medication lines.

With the heightened awareness of mass incarceration and cultural emphasis on criminal justice reform, teaching inside a correctional facility can almost be worn as a badge of honor. While faculty may feel deeply connected to their students and the work, this can lead to paternalistic attitudes and/or an opportunity for faculty to fulfill a quest for voyeurism. It's critical to find professors who have an

Red Flags during Interview

Red flags that surface during the interview process can appear in the following ways.

(Note, these answers should not disqualify a candidate from teaching, but could be signs of the need for further questions/conversation.)

- Mention of research project/advocacy/journalism related to criminal justice
- Questions about specific high-profile students
- A disrespect for incarcerated students or language demonizing incarcerated individuals
- A disrespect for authority or language signaling inflexibility to abide by rules
- Overtures of pity for students or language indicative of a savior complex

awareness of their own emotional needs and are able to set and enforce personal boundaries. Professors should also feel comfortable holding students to the same academic standards they would hold outside students. Professors who feel overly sympathetic to incarcerated students may make allowances for students while grading assignments due to their feelings related to the content of the assignments or because they feel badly for students. It's important to hire professors who understand the students' reality, while holding them accountable for their academic performance. Candidates should have a commitment to academic rigor and adhere to course curriculum and learning objectives as they would in a main campus classroom setting. Conversely, faculty can become so enamored with the high level of engagement and ability of inside students, they sometimes put more work and higher expectations on students.

Capacity for maintaining boundaries

It's important to assess a candidate's capacity for setting and maintaining boundaries. It's also important that professors understand that becoming a volunteer with Department of Corrections means you are not permitted to stay in contact with students after the course has ended. Asking questions that speak to a candidate's willingness to set boundaries is important. In addition to being willing and able to set boundaries, professors need to understand the reasons why boundaries are so important. Although it may seem obvious that developing an intimate relationship with a student is inappropriate, in the prison context it's not just a violation of professional or ethical boundaries, but there are actual legal consequences, as per the [Prison Rape Elimination Act \(PREA\)](#), incarcerated individuals cannot consent. Below are some examples of the kinds of boundaries related to teaching inside a correctional facility that relate to pedagogical and security concerns:

- Not oversharing personal information with students
- Not soliciting personal narratives, information about their crimes, or lives from students
- Being mindful of where you stand or sit in relation to students and refraining from making physical contact with students
- Not requiring reading or film viewings that depict graphic sexual violence
- Not intervening between correctional officer disciplining students in the hallway
- Fielding program and academic concerns to program administrators and only involving correctional facility staff in matters related to security

Ability to teach without technology and planning ahead

While DOCCS and program administrators are working to improve student and professor access to technology inside NYS prisons, students and professors do not have internet access inside the correctional facility and must be able to teach without online materials. Compared to the 21st century classroom, teaching inside the prison is significantly different and may require professors to adapt on-campus course materials to better fit the prison campus.

When it comes to classroom management and lesson planning, professors teaching inside a correctional facility must adopt a “go with the flow” mentality. Assessing candidates' ability to express flexibility and capacity to amend lesson plans is crucial. Professors may also need to switch a planned reading, activity, or even course meeting due to reasons beyond their control. Due to the changing nature of the prison environment, as well as security protocol changes, being able to adapt when needed is a necessary component of successful teaching in correctional facilities.



Additionally, classroom materials and readings must be submitted far in advance for review by the correctional facility. It's essential that prospective faculty are willing to respect deadlines and understand the importance of the review process. Academic freedom is important; however, program coordinators must abide by DOCCS policies regarding prior media review. Faculty should be expected to use good judgment when selecting appropriate materials and they may need to provide supporting information to program coordinators to help answer any questions on content. This can seem frustrating to faculty who are used to being able to use any materials/sources they want at a moment's notice. It's important to help faculty understand how respecting this policy helps protect students from being in possession of unapproved materials. It also helps protect the program and program administrators who must uphold positive working relationships with correctional facility leaders. Early and careful planning takes time but is in the best interest of prison education programs and their students. In that spirit, faculty need to be attentive and responsive to communication from the program and facility, as well as patient and understanding. Program administrators that work inside the prisons do not have email access while inside the facilities and therefore may contact faculty outside traditional business hours. Faculty teaching inside prisons must navigate relationships with program administrators and be flexible and considerate of the limitations of the program administrator's availability.

Professor Support and Evaluation

Teaching in prison is challenging and demands a lot from faculty. In some programs, faculty may incur significant costs in these programs (such as copying class materials and transportation) and may have considerable administrative duties that they would not have if they taught on campus. Administrators should be aware of these costs and responsibilities and, insofar as possible, try to alleviate the burdens, so the professors can focus on teaching. Additionally, it's important that after a professor is hired and even after a successful semester of teaching, professors are provided with ongoing training and support. This can include:

- Providing your own orientation, in addition to the one faculty receive from DOCCS outlining expectations and procedures (Section II Training Resource Guide for Faculty may be a helpful tool to point to)
- Providing strong administrative support and regular communication to faculty; this may include program updates, staffing changes within DOCCS administration, individual and collective student body issues, and changes in DOCCS policy
- Holding individual check ins with professors and/or regular faculty meetings
- Connecting new faculty with veteran faculty to create a community and support
- In person class observations to provide feedback on student engagement and pedagogy
- Ask students for input and feedback about the classroom experience to inform course development
- Discuss student performance, progress, and grades and monitor for grade inflation with faculty
- Support regarding classroom management, curriculum planning, strategies for student success, course material selection, and additional classroom resources
- Access to a professional community of prison educators facilitated by prison education faculty meetings, statewide and national consortium meetings, conferences, or other learning opportunities

Part II – Training Resource Guide for Faculty

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

—Nelson Mandela

Understanding Your Role and Setting Boundaries

As a professor inside a correctional facility you are a student’s connection to the outside world, but it’s important in the classroom to keep your focus on academic content. This is not only important to the students, but to the program, and the facility. Regardless of your political, social justice, or criminal justice reform interests, it’s important to understand the boundaries of your role and not unintentionally solicit personal information from students and help students have healthy and appropriate connections with educators. For some students, the professor-student relationship is new and unique, therefore it’s even more important to responsibly carryout this role.

There are ways to encourage sharing and community building while also establishing boundaries that respect all stakeholders and create a safe learning environment for all. It’s important to set the tone with students in the beginning and to provide clear expectations for the course and for students.

Inside of the Classroom

When in the classroom, it’s important to keep the focus of class discussions and course assignments on course themes. If the conversation starts veering off topic into personal histories or matters, redirect and clarify that your role is to teach. Both professor and student should not feel compelled to share anything personal, not just because it’s against DOCCS policies to share specific personal information, but because it could unintentionally trigger someone or make someone feel uncomfortable in the classroom. Consider the trauma incarcerated students may have endured and consider how that impacts curricular or pedagogical choices. For a careful analysis about why autobiographical writing assignments that may be successful on the outside, are inappropriate for a prison context, see Dr. Jane Maher’s chapter in *New Directions for Community Colleges*, “Teaching Academic Writing in a Maximum Security Women’s Prison.” (2015, p. 79-88)

Across higher education, we know that shifting students from personal narratives to academic writing strengthens critical thinking. As Dr. Gita DasBender has observed:

If critical thinking begins with a personal view of the text, academic writing helps you broaden that view by going beyond the personal to a more universal point of view. In other words, academic writing often has its roots in one’s private opinion or perspective about another writer’s ideas but ultimately goes beyond this opinion to the expression of larger, more abstract ideas” (2011, p. 43- 44).

In this regard, the prison classroom should not be different.



In addition to keeping instruction comparable to main campus, incarcerated students may not only be uninterested or unable to deal with prior traumas but may also feel uncomfortable sharing such personal information in front of their peers. It's important to understand the responsibility and power you have as an instructor. It's best to avoid eliciting personal histories or other personal information from students in class discussions. Similarly, even if one student is comfortable in disclosing past traumatic events, another may not be, and this could evoke unexpected reactions that instructors are not qualified or prepared to address in the classroom. While we want to uphold the same academic standards from the main campus, it's important to understand that inside students don't have access to the same support system or counseling resources. Therefore certain content should be reconsidered or at least prefaced with an explanation about the academic value it brings to the course. While the DOCCS media review process will help catch materials that contain graphic violence, it's important to not require students to complete assignments that discuss their personal experiences. Incarcerated students do not always have the option to leave the room if they are feeling triggered or uncomfortable. Additionally, multiple sections of a course may not be offered in the same semester, so students do not have options to switch to a different section of a degree required course.

Some students may be ready to write or talk about their past and apply it to course themes. However, students should be assured that their grades will not be based on how well they can write about their traumas. Respecting that all students have different processes might mean differentiating instruction and being flexible when creating assignments. Here are some assignments or activities that could be inappropriate for a prison classroom:

- Requiring students to write about a traumatic experience
- Assignments that elicit personal histories, family trees, or other in depth personal experiences
- Requiring students to read out loud personal narratives that may or may not include descriptions of past traumas
- Requiring students to write about their life in prison

Another place to set boundaries in the classroom is navigating individual, student-specific questions. Some students may want to show you an early draft of an assignment, ask you individual questions related to their final paper, or ask for support. Rather than taking too much time during class to handle individual student needs, consider holding office hours. You can coordinate with your program administrator to make individual time slots available for one on one meetings with students. This will help you make the most of your time in the classroom and ensure all students have equal access to you.

Use Appropriate Language

Refer to your students as students, not inmates or offenders. While this shift in language may seem minor to an outsider, to incarcerated individuals, the classroom is one of the only spaces inside a prison where students feel they can be seen in a different light. Recognizing and respecting incarcerated students' identities as students at your college or university signifies a commitment to treating incarcerated students in an equal way to on campus students. This also extends to learning the proper job titles of correctional facility staff and appropriately addressing correctional officers, sergeants, Education Supervisors, Deputy Superintendents, and other facility positions.

Importance of Clarity and Upholding Academic Integrity

It's important to understand the forever changing dynamics within a prison related to security and programming. This can be frustrating. But it's critical that as a professor to provide clarity in communication to students regarding assignment deadlines and course expectations. For example, assignments should be handed to students for their perusal versus written on the board. Additionally, students want to be taken seriously and want to be treated like students on a traditional campus. Students want to be held accountable to the same academic standards and challenged in appropriate ways.

Be aware and mindful of personal space and what your presence signifies

It's crucial to be self-aware of your body and personal space inside a correctional facility, but especially when working with students of a different gender and race. In addition to following DOCCS dress code policies, understand that, regardless of your gender or physical size, your presence can be intimidating or threatening. Respecting appropriate personal boundaries is crucial in creating a safe space for learning. It also protects you from unintentionally violating any rules and protects students from getting into trouble.

You need to carefully consider behavior that may be considered inappropriate in a prison classroom:

- Sitting on top of a desk
- Any physical contact with a student
- Standing too close to a student
- Standing behind a student (as they may become startled)
- Passing in between two students
- Closing the door (at some facilities)
- Bending over to pick something up

Outside of the Classroom

Respect DOCCS policies and procedures

Even when you are unable to understand why, it's vital you respect and cooperate with DOCCS rules and regulations. It's critical that programs and faculty who serve as ambassadors of the programs maintain positive working relationships with DOCCS personnel. Because classes often happen in the evenings, when regular administration and staff are not present in the facility, it's important to know the proper chain of command for reporting an issue. This should be a conversation you have with program administrators to understanding the various appropriate channels for handling unexpected issues.

This also means not introducing new course materials without prior approval or without following media review guidelines. This is a way to demonstrate your respect not just to the program or facility, but to students. This protects students from being in possession of unapproved materials. If a student asks you to bring them more information or research from the internet, work with your program administrator to see if this is allowed. It's necessary to understand that if this is done for one student, it should be made available for all students. For more information about working with DOCCS, please refer to The Institute for Justice and Opportunities DOCCS Resource Guide.



Understanding Students' Day-to-Day Realities

Like outside students, incarcerated students have a variety of responsibilities and stressors they are managing in addition to their education. Students may also participate in mandatory programs, job assignments within the facility, and community organizations, groups, or committees. Additionally, some students have parole preparation workshops, legal work related to their case, parenting responsibilities, and other social or familial commitments. These are important things to be mindful of when making decisions around reading length requirements and other course assignments. Students may not have time to meet with one another outside of the classroom, so group work may not be an option, unless time is left during class. But just like on main campuses, time management is ultimately the student's responsibility and students should be held accountable. Things out of students' control, such as lockdowns, searches, and call-outs should be taken into consideration.

Student Privacy

Respecting student privacy is an important boundary to uphold and critical in building trust with students. It's inappropriate to look up a student's criminal history or sentence. Your role is to teach. Information about a student's past should not impact your ability to teach them. Additionally, it is not your role to advocate for an individual's case or release. This is explicitly outlined in the DOCCS Volunteer policies. If a student asks you for a letter of support for an upcoming parole hearing, check with your program administrator about the program's policy on this. Most of the time, professors are

permitted to write on a student's behalf, however, the letters must adhere to DOCCS policies regarding volunteer letter writing. Usually, these letters must specifically speak to the classroom interaction you had with the student, but not divulge any specific GPA information that may be considered a FERPA violation. These letters are usually given to Deputy Superintendent of Programs for review and then placed in the student's file. Talk to your program administrators about your program's policies but understand that you are not allowed to give the letter to the student directly as they must be reviewed by the facility first.

Have your own space to process and ask questions

It is valuable to have support outside of the prison for you to individually process your teaching experience. This will not only help you grow as an educator, but ensures you are not seeking personal information or validation from your students. At times teaching inside can be an emotional, overwhelming, or frustrating experience. It can be helpful to find friends in your personal life and within your professional community to share what you're experiencing in the classroom. It's useful to maintain an open relationship with your program administrator and feel comfortable asking questions and for more support.

NYS DOCCS Directives to Know

[New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision](#)

- [DOCCS Research Policy Directive 0403](#)
- [DOCCS Media Review Directive 4572](#)
- [Prison Rape Elimination Act \(PREA\)](#)

Appendices

Appendix A: Resources and Reading

Research on Higher Education in Prison

[Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison Report](#)
[Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Post-Secondary Education](#)
[Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum Security Prison](#)
[Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education](#)
[Liberating Minds: The Case for College in Prison](#)
[Critical Perspectives on Teaching in Prison: Students and Instructors on Pedagogy Behind the Wall](#)
[Teaching Academic Writing in a Maximum Security Women's Prison](#)
[The Manifesto Assignment: Study with Women Prisoners](#)
[Needed Specialists for a Challenging Task: Formerly Incarcerated Leaders' Essential Role in Postsecondary Programs in Prison](#)
[Higher Education and Re-Entry: The Gifts They Bring](#)
[Degrees of Freedom](#)
[A Second Chance College-in-Prison Programs in New York State](#)

Documentaries about Higher Ed in NYS Prisons

[College Behind Bars](#)
[What I Want My Words to Do to You](#)
[Zero Percent](#)

New York Higher Education in Prison Organizations and Resources

[New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison \(NYCHEP\)](#)
[Institute for Justice and Opportunity](#) at John Jay College
[Cornell Prison Education Program](#)
[Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison](#)
[Bard Prison Initiative](#)
[Marymount Manhattan Bedford Hills College Program](#)
[NYU Prison Education Program](#)
[Columbia Center for Justice](#)
[Rochester Education Justice Initiative](#)

National Higher Education in Prison Organizations and Resources

[Alliance for Higher Education in Prison \(AHEP\)](#)
[Vera Institute of Justice](#)
[Jamii Sisterhood](#)
[Second Chance Pell \(SCP\) Experimental Sites Initiative](#)
[Mount Tamalpais College](#)
[Education Justice Project](#)

Appendix B: SUNY Campuses Including Prison Education Programs

- SUNY Adirondack: Washington Correctional Facility
- SUNY North Country Community College: Adirondack Correctional Facility, Bare Hill Correctional Facility, and Franklin Correctional Facility
- SUNY Genesee Community College: Attica Correctional Facility and Groveland Correctional Facility with Rochester Education Justice Initiative
- SUNY Cayuga Community College with Cornell Prison Education Program: Auburn Correctional Facility, Five Points Correctional Facility, and Cayuga Correctional Facility
- SUNY Corning County Community College with Cornell Prison Education Program: Elmira Correctional Facility
- SUNY Jefferson Community College: Cape Vincent Correctional Facility, Gouverneur Correctional Facility, and Watertown Correctional Facility
- SUNY Columbia-Greene County Community College with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison: Greene Correctional Facility
- SUNY Mohawk Community College: Marcy Correctional Facility
- SUNY Sullivan County Community College with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison: Sullivan Correctional Facility
- SUNY Purchase with Marymount Manhattan College: Bedford Hills Correctional Facility
- SUNY Herkimer County Community College: Mohawk Correctional Facility with Hamilton College and Midstate Correctional Facility
- SUNY Potsdam: Riverview Correctional Facility
- SUNY Ulster with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison: Shawangunk Correctional Facility

Appendix C: Bibliography

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Appendix D: Acronym List

CUNY	City University of New York	NYSED	New York State Education Department
DOCCS	Department of Corrections and Community Supervision	RIG	Rockefeller Institute of Government
EOP	Educational Opportunity Program	STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
IJO <i>(f/k/a PRI)</i>	Institute for Justice and Opportunity at John Jay College <i>(formerly known as the Prisoner Reentry Institute)</i>	USDOE/DOE	U.S. Department of Education
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding	NYSUT	New York State United Teachers
MSCHE	Middle States Commission on Higher Education	UUP	United University Professions
NYCHEP	New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison	DSP	Deputy Superintendent of Programs
NYS/NY	New York State	AHEP	Alliance for Higher Education in Prison
NYSIAEP	New York State Association for Incarcerated Education Programs	SCP	Second Chance Pell

Additional Information

Additional information available by emailing SUNY-HEJI@suny.edu.

Please direct inquiries to

SUNY System Administration
State University Plaza
353 Broadway
Albany, NY 12246
Phone: 518.320.1100

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