

PRISON EDUCATION NEWS



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IMPACT: BUILDING A MOVEMENT

ASU'S PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMMING (PEP) COURSES GROW FROM 8 TO 30 IN THREE YEARS

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HOW DO MOVEMENTS OCCUR?

One volunteer educator, ASU alumna Hannah Good, who graduated with a bachelor's in political science, recently explained in reference to prison education: *How do you build a movement? Does it begin with a single and singular person, placing the bricks down, one at a time?*

Almost all movements begin with one person, one event, one purpose. Then someone walking by has the curiosity to go up and ask the person what they are doing and the person not only answers but tells them why and offers to let them help. Another person comes up, and the previous person responds the same. It's like a school-house game of "Telephone," only the message is easy to relay. Before you know it, dozens of people, hundreds, even thousands, begin to help lay the foundation.

In January 2015, when I assumed directorship of ASU's



Cornelia "Corri" Wells
speaks at the 7th Annual
Prison Education
Conference

Prison Education Programming (PEP), formerly Prison English, we offered eight weekly outreach classes in two state prisons for men in Florence. Volunteer faculty and student interns taught classes in biology, Chinese, creative writing, drama, drawing, and philosophy.

By January 2018, just three years later, PEP was offering 30 weekly classes in the same two state men's prisons in Florence plus the women's state prison in Perryville and the Adobe Mountain state facility for both male and female youth offenders in Phoenix. The new classes included instruction in American government, American studies, art, business skills, composition, journalism, math (basic math, algebra, geometry, precalculus), organizational behavior, public health, psychology, and Spanish. In August 2018, classes are being taught for the first time in calculus, financial planning for small businesses, physics, and public speaking. And our reach has extended to two more facilities: the Phoenix state prison for men and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community correctional facility for men, women, and youth.

Why is educating the incarcerated so urgent?

Ninety-five percent of all prisoners will be released at some point. Over seventy-five percent will recidivate (re-offend) and be reincarcerated. All education behind bars lowers recidivism. And the higher the education level that's achieved, the lower the recidivism. The less recidivism, the safer our communities, the fewer the victims, the fewer compromised families, the less suffering behind bars, the less



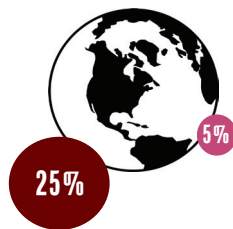
Building A FOUNDATION

mental deterioration, and the lower our taxes.

How does educating the incarcerated lower taxes?

The United States spends on average \$33,000 to house a prisoner for one year, with Alabama seeming to spend the least at around \$15,000 per prisoner and California the most at over \$75,000 per prisoner and outliers like New York City spending between \$118,000 and \$168,000 per prisoner, depending on your data source (though the State of New York spends “only” a bit over \$69,000 per prisoner). By contrast, it costs \$3,440 per year for a public two-year college and \$9,410 for a public four-year college (CollegeBoard.org). Studies reveal time and again that education received behind bars reduces recidivism (reoffending and returning to prison) from the national average of 77 percent within five years of release to 0 to 44 percent. The more education received behind bars, the lower the recidivism, with the recidivism rate for those earning graduate degrees falling to virtually 0. Taxes go down through two phenomena. One, incarceration costs decrease (because there are fewer people in prison). Two, additional legally employed and law-abiding citizens are now paying taxes rather than wasting the taxes paid by others. Of the 2.3 million men, women, and children currently detained in America (more people than reside in the whole of New Mexico, the nation’s 36th most populated state), 95% are released at some point. With more education, that could be a lot of people (most of them incarcerated for nonviolent offenses) who now pay taxes and have the skills to remain gainfully employed, avoiding future crimes.

Who can volunteer to teach an existing course or propose a new one? All faculty and graduate students and upper-level undergraduates who are drug-free. PEP classes are typically co-taught in pairs but can be taught solo. If interested, contact me at cornelia.wells@asu.edu or PEP co-director in the School of Mathematics Naala Brewer at nbrewer@asu.edu.



**THE U.S. IS HOME TO:
LESS THAN 5%
OF THE WORLD POPULATION, BUT
ALMOST 25% OF ITS PRISONERS**

PEN PROJECT INTERNS SHARE PERSPECTIVE WITH INCARCERATED WRITERS

“When I first began the program, I knew about social injustices. I knew about oppression. I knew about these things, but I didn’t pay much attention to them. It took me less than a month to build a passion for prison education; today, I talk about it to everyone.”



“We let ourselves escape through our fingertips, and the words that have filled our chests for so long can finally be free. We can change the direction of the wind if we so please. Characters and worlds all are waiting for you to uncover them. To create puts you among the greatest.”

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A PRISONER'S CRY

By John Bergeron, California
From Iron City Magazine (Issue 2)

A cosmic explosion that knows no bounds
like the gates of hell guarded by hounds.

A deep thing we hold on to fast
as we're tripping forward into the past.

Déjà vu is a bottomless pool;
how many times must we go to school?

Lessons taught again & again
until they are learned with a friend.

The key is not to swim alone
or you'll sink to the bottom like a stone.

Please be my friend and swim with me,
and together we'll make it out of this sea.



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: REMOVING THE BLINDFOLD

By Jacqueline Aguilar
Globe Volunteer Teacher

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“IMPACT: BUILDING A MOVEMENT” is the theme for this year’s Prison Education Programming (PEP) Newsletter. This newsletter contains personal reflections, recountings of inspirational events, and promises for the future made by a growing community of prison education activists. This community strives to give a voice to the students, writers, artists, dreamers, children, and adults hoping to diminish the razor wire that surrounds them. Razor wire is a symbol of punishment and alienation from the outside world. This razor wire has become a blindfold. A blindfold blocking compassion and success. However, growing communities of people inside and outside the razor wire are removing this blindfold and its false message of the “impossible”—helping individuals whose being has been reduced to the label “criminal” to actively realize that failure in one aspect of their lives does not prohibit success in all aspects. The pieces in this newsletter all contribute to the theme “Building a Movement” by showcasing the diverse communities that have connected themselves to the path of prison education. Reading and editing these pieces has made me realize how vast and connected the movement towards prison education is becoming as more individuals are touched by the basic human right of education, a right that is mentally and physically empowering to a human being. I hope you see the power of empathy, the power of resilience, and the power of education I have seen demonstrated through the actions and words of individuals represented in this issue.

-Jacqueline Aguilar



(Left) Jacqueline Aguilar and (Right) Casey McKinney staff *Iron City Magazine* table

THE POWER OF GIVING BACK



Naala Brewer speaks at 7th Annual Prison Education Awareness Conference

“Education greatly reduces recidivism. Prisoners who are educated have a much greater likelihood of not being reincarcerated. The higher the education level the lower the incarceration rate.”

-NAALA BREWER

**AWARDED VOLUNTEER
OF THE YEAR IN 2017
FOR THE ARIZONA STATE
PRISON AT FLORENCE**



MATHEMATICS AND THE POWER OF GIVING BACK

By Naala Brewer

Florence Volunteer Teacher

Prison Education Program (PEP), Co-Director, Arizona State University

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MY PATH INTO PRISON EDUCATION WAS NOT DIRECT. It took many twists and turns but led me to rewarding and meaningful work that affects human lives in a powerful way. I always tell my students to find a subject that interests them and pursue it. I encourage them to never, ever let naysayers or negative people talk them out of their dreams or allow them to feel they cannot achieve what they set out to do.

As an undergraduate I chose a major because it sounded impressive: aerospace engineering. My first course in my chosen field was an eyeopener. I was taking a fluid mechanics course and at the same time a course in differential equations. I easily got one of the highest grades in the class for differential equations and my lowest grade ever in fluid mechanics. Since mathematics and physics were my strong suits and came easily to me, I decided to not fight my academic desires and go into the field that I loved – mathematics. A book by the physicist Richard Feynman called *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!* confirmed my decision. Feynman stopped doing work that he did not enjoy and that drained him and instead followed his interests, which eventually garnered a Nobel Prize in Physics.

My introduction to academia in mathematics consisted of politics, access to intellectually innovative ideas, politics, access to brilliant people who don't play politics, politics, doing my best and ignoring politics and enjoying the other rewards of working in academia. I sought out people who wanted to give back. My first introduction to such people was at the Mathematical and Theoretical Biological Institute (MTBI) at Arizona State University. MTBI was a breath of fresh air in academia with its spirit of excellence and truly giving back. I met professors, graduate students, and undergraduate students from all over the U.S. and the world who share this spirit. MTBI gave me an outlet to avoid the politics to focus on helping others achieve academic success. It also gave me great material to put on my CV. MTBI has given me lifelong professional relationships and lifelong friendships. The things I learned while working at MTBI greatly helped me in my prison outreach classes: to always work hard even if the results do not show immediately; to always, always be honest and speak your mind when disparity or worse is present; to believe that hard work, perseverance, and intelligence will win out; to be a person of excellence.

My introduction to prison outreach began with a prison ministry connected to my church. I was familiar with the background check and clearance procedures required to volunteer in corrections. I was not interested in politics or “busy work” that was not meaningful. When I received a school wide email from Al Boggess, the director of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences, for volunteers

THE POWER OF GIVING BACK

to teach at the prison, I thought this would be PERFECT for me.

The first semester, I taught a two-hour Precalculus class once a week. The second semester, I also taught a weekly GED class. The Precalculus students were so inspired that one student wrote a 290-page book on investing to be used as a stand-alone course for other prisoners. Another student demonstrated an original proof that was submitted to the Southwestern Undergraduate Mathematics Research Conference and was accepted (though he had to present by proxy). The students went on to finish Calculus I and are starting Calculus II.

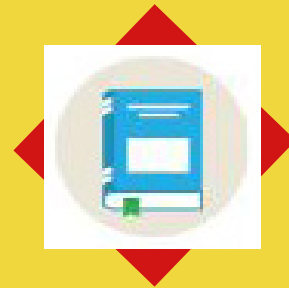
Since prison students do the same coursework as ASU students, the next task is to create a mechanism whereby they can receive university credit for their work. President Crow has set up a task force to explore course credit for prison outreach classes.

For my passion and dedication, I was awarded Volunteer of the Year in 2017 for the Arizona State Prison at Florence and in 2018 I was selected to help administrate the Prison Education Programming (PEP) as Co-Director with Cornelia Wells, who has directed the program for the past three and a half years. I am excited about this new position. It is more rewarding than anything I have done in my life. In Spring 2018, PEP sponsored 30 classes at four state facilities: Florence and Eyman State Prisons for men, Perryville State Prison for women, and Adobe South Mountain School for juveniles. PEP is collaborating with Mesa Community College professor Mark D. Somers to add a physics course at Eyman. Also for the first time this fall, PEP will staff math and business tutors for the Phoenix State Prison for men and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community Department of Corrections for both men and women.

Education greatly reduces recidivism. Prisoners who are educated have a much greater likelihood of not being reincarcerated. The higher the education level the lower the incarceration rate. A former prisoner who earns a PhD has a virtually 0% chance of returning. A small investment in prison education results in a savings of hundreds of millions of dollars in incarceration costs and results in productive members of society who actively give back.

My work as a prison education volunteer has taught me to find what I am good at and to follow my dreams. To ignore the naysayers and politics. To always do my best so the right people will notice. To surround myself with positive people who make a difference. To give back as soon as I can because no one got where they are without help. I have had the most rewarding experience of my life. Spending quality time in prison.

SELECTED IN 2018 AS CO-DIRECTOR FOR PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM- MING (PEP)



“I learned...to always work hard even if the results do not show immediately; to always, always be honest and speak your mind when disparity or worse is present; to believe that hard work, perseverance, and intelligence will win out; to be a person of excellence.”

-NAALA BREWER



PEOPLE WHO CARE: THE SOLUTION TO SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINES

By Benjamin Williams

ASU Alumna, BA English (Writing, Rhetoric, and Literacies)



THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE—this was the theme of the 7th annual Prison Education Awareness Conference, hosted by ASU's Prison Education Awareness Club (PEAC), supported by the Department of English and the School of Social Transformation. On March 16th, early in the morning, more than 200 people, including students, parents, faculty, prison administrators, and other visitors, gathered in a large conference hall in the heart of the ASU Tempe Campus.

A silent observer, I was amazed as I watched it come together. As the first people stepped to the registration table and formed a line that snaked its way towards the door, I was awe at the number and variety of lives touched by prisons, and the number of people who want something better for “inmates.”

Inmate. I shake my head as I type it. The word for a person whose right to be considered a person has been taken away. Having been a prison volunteer myself, I'm painfully aware that prison workers within Arizona are required to call prisoners by “inmate” instead of their names. Johnny Perez, a keynote speaker at the conference, who was himself formerly incarcerated, said it plainly: “There are things that you can do to an inmate that you can't do to a human being.” Perez then urged us to eliminate the word inmate from our vocabulary. “Just say people,” he encouraged.

The idea that prisoners are, first and foremost, people was powerfully introduced into the conference by the first keynote speakers, two formerly incarcerated men who have long outgrown their cells. First, Dr. Johnny Perez spoke of his own school-to-prison pipeline, of school districts like the one that he grew up in, that funnel toward and prepare kids for prison. He recalled removing his belt, watch, and wallet daily, so he



(Left) Pastor Benny Custodio and (Right) Johnny Perez speak at 7th Annual Prison Education Awareness Conference

“My colleague and my brother and my good friend Johnny and myself are products of your labor, we are the fruit of your labor. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for investing in us, in our success, while other people invested in our failings.”

-PASTOR BENNY CUSTODIO



Panel speakers (Left) Nathan Young, (Middle) Connor Syrewicz, (Right) Nancy Gomez

7TH ANNUAL PRISON AWARENESS EDUCATION CONFERENCE



could step through the metal detectors to attend school. He remembered that the first time he saw a gun, it was on the hip of a high school safety officer. He reflected on the feeling of his first pair of handcuffs from within those school walls. Pastor Benny Custodio then spoke in-depth of his experiences behind bars, for a crime he still maintains he did not commit, and his journey into education. His was a twenty-year transformation, an incredible journey toward redemption and, finally, freedom. Both men shared experiences with volunteer prison educators, experiences that were turning points in their lives. The power and depth of their gratitude was palpable. “My colleague and my brother and my good friend Johnny and myself are products of your labor, we are the fruit of your labor,” Pastor Benny said to the prison educators throughout the room. “Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for investing in us, in our success, while other people invested in our failings.”

Each of the remaining speakers brought a new angle from which to view the school-to-prison pipeline. The progression helped me understand that the pipeline begins long before a person commits their first crime. The pipeline can begin as early as birth, when a person with non-white skin is born into a system that is built to fear, hate, or withhold privileges from them, simply because of their color. The prison pipeline can begin in early childhood, when a single mother has to work late hours to provide, and has no time to spend reading with or teaching or loving her children. It can begin when a 4-year-old with a disability is abused by his stepfather and develops defense mechanisms that resemble violent behavior in order to ward off danger and protect his loved ones. It was heartbreaking to hear story after story of how our system continues to fail its children, a staggering number of whom are funneled into the prison pipeline every year.

But the question at the center of the conference—the lynchpin—was: how do we combat the school-to-prison pipeline?

A panel of volunteer prison educators, current ASU students and alumni, passionately shared their first-hand experience of the transformative power of passing through prison walls and seeing lives change. They talked about the humanizing interactions they had and the growth they witnessed in the individuals they have served and continue to serve. So-

phie Etchart, president of Read Better, Be Better, spoke of her work to combat the literacy crisis that drives young, underprivileged students away from education and into prisons. Michelle Campuzano’s harrowing story of a young child’s journey through life with learning disabilities and all the disadvantages such a child can have, moved the audience to love someone they’d never met. I fought stinging tears when Campuzano revealed that the child’s story was her own, and when she showed all what she has become through the support of organizations designed and equipped to help single mothers. She is now a Title I special education teacher and beacon of hope for so many young lives. Finally, Memo Arrubla, a Phoenix police officer and founder of Beat Street AZ, shared his journey from a crime family to criminal justice to helping juveniles ages 12-18 build a better way of life.

All of these stories carried a single common element. People. People who care. People who find their niche in caring for others. People with a desire to help others see and realize their potential, when all others in their world just want to see them fail.

In his closing remarks, President Christopher Harvey of PEAC addressed the conference, saying, “Whether one is a current student, a teacher, a former prisoner, whether one is having the best of days or the worst, knowing we’re all connected, we should have a spirit of loving kindness and not malice.”

—
To view the conference online, [click here](#) or search ASU Prison Education Conference 2018 on YouTube or Vimeo



Michelle Campuzano speaks at 7th Annual Prison Education Awareness Conference

EDUCATION: THE RIGHT TO FORGE A NEW PATH

By Lana Marie Mousa

Globe Volunteer Teacher

Vice President, Prison Education Awareness Club (PEAC)

Majoring in English and Justice Studies

TEACHING AT THE PENITENTIARY in Globe was a transcendent experience. It was surreal, invigorating, and unceasingly captivating. I was perpetually amazed that I was inside a prison for I never imagined I would have such an opportunity. What shocked me most was that I, a nineteen-year-old, was giving a lesson on Shakespeare and sonnets to grown men. Fortunately, the age difference was irrelevant to them. When they looked at my peers and me, they didn't dismiss us as young, underqualified students. They saw passionate adults who cared about the Pen Project as much as they did, and thus, gave us their undivided attention. They expressed their endless gratitude for what the Pen Project has done for them both inside and outside the classroom: acknowledge their existence, self-worth, and potential, qualities many people tend to diminish among prisoners.

Like music, education is a universal language because what is taught in one place can be taught anywhere else in the world. It might be communicated in a different language or conveyed using different methods, but ideas that are exchanged in any classroom can connect people from every facet of life, and incarcerated individuals are no exception. ASU's adoption of the Pen Project has allowed ASU's students to connect with one of the most marginalized groups in society. Not only has it opened our eyes to incarceration, but, more importantly, it has given incarcerated individuals an outlet for self-expression and an opportunity to evolve. Forced into seclusion, there are very few, if any, chances for prisoners to develop as individuals, especially as intellectuals. As obvious as it may seem, the importance of education is unparalleled, but powerful individuals who forbid the implementation of educational programs in prisons overlook or refuse to acknowledge the transformative effects of education, especially on individuals who have found themselves on the wrong side of the law. Fortunately, ASU's English department and the incarcerated men in this class have recognized its eminent value. One might assume that prisoners would have no interest in pursuing a higher education, which is true for many, but the men in this class are per-

sistent in doing just that.

When the men saw us approaching the classroom, they began to holler emphatically. Their excitement and sense of relief implied that they had assumed we weren't coming after we arrived twenty minutes late due to unforeseen traffic. Once they were standing before us, one man turned to me and said, "We thought you weren't coming. We were just about to leave." For a moment, I was taken aback by his sadness because in college, a canceled class is one of the most exciting moments in a student's life. It means an extra seventy-five minutes to finish a homework assignment for a later class or, better, catching up on sleep after pulling an all-nighter. However, I realized that a canceled class for these men meant another day of being hidden in the shadows and having their potential suppressed yet again. If we hadn't arrived, they would have returned to the daily prison grind and the class would have been delayed for another month. Such uncertainty is likely another reason as to why they were upset. Students at ASU know that even if class is canceled, it will resume the following week, but these men's opportunity to learn is precarious.

Once the class began, my focus was unceasingly captivated by the verbal aesthetics of the room—the "ADC" (the Arizona Department of Corrections logo) printed in block letters four to five inches high across their shirts and down the legs of their orange pants (as if the glaring orange itself were insufficient to proclaim their prisoner status) and a forbidding "NO ENTRY" sign hanging above another sign one third the size that read "Education." The irony of these poorly assembled words struck me. I was overwhelmed with questions: why is the word "Education" so small? and why is it paired with a "NO ENTRY" sign, ironically implying "No education"? and why were they directly in the students' line of vision? I realized later that the "NO ENTRY" sign was appropriate because it was on a door to the teacher's office, where supplies and confidential records are kept; however, the "Education" sign needed to be moved. There should never be a place that implies education is not welcomed, especially not in a classroom.

Despite these unfitting arrangements of words, the students were beyond anxious to learn. While my peers gave their lessons, I admired their eagerness. They sat at the edge of their seats and never took their eyes off the teacher speaking. It was truly inspiring to witness such a deep love for knowledge. As these men have expressed to us and other ASU participants, the Pen Project has transformed their lives. In a place where dreams appear impos-

sible, they have defied expectations and begun a journey towards a brighter future that will impact them both during and after incarceration. I hope that the Pen Project continues its service and extends its work to prisons around the country, so others can likewise exercise their right to forge a new path in a new direction.

THE FORGOTTEN ONES

By Lindsey Saya, Arizona

We are the forgotten ones
the lost ones,
the broken hearted ones,
the all or nothing ones,
the I coulda' been something ones,

We are the dangerous ones,
the full of ANGER ones,
the I AINT PLAYIN' ones,
the damaged ones,
the savage ones,
the DIE for my HOMIE ones
the DIE for a Forty ones.

We are the feared ones
the too filthy for you to come near ones,
the guilty ones,
the derelict ones,
the I've forgotten what it's like to care ones.

We are the UGLY ones,
the shameful ones,
the hated ones,
the damn right I'm HATEFUL ones.

we are the lonely ones,
the "if only" ones,
the too late to be sorry ones,

we are the haunted ones,
the make it stop ones.

we are the unforgiven ones,
the i would give a pound of flesh ones,
the all that's left is death ones,
the i've spent my breath ones.

we are the forgotten ones.

A STORYTELLER'S JOURNEY LETTER FROM PEN PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Dear Pen Project,

The purpose of this letter is to say thank you. But how do I do that? How do I express my deepest gratitude? I'm not really sure I can, but I will try.

I always dreamed of being a storyteller, a great storyteller. But the years have a funny way of making dreams crumble away, like a sand castle kicked over by the mean kid you can't stand. Or, maybe, it's just this place. Either way the desire to be a great storyteller was hardly the reason why I started submitting to the Pen Project. I think a part of me just looked forward to seeing a response waiting for me. It's a silly motivation, but enough time and loneliness will do that. And so I began submitting pieces to the Pen Project. And with each response came new lessons to be learned, new stories and poems to be read. Readings that engrossed me and moved me. Material I would never have discovered if not for you. During those submissions I barely knew where a comma went (not that I'm an expert now), but now I know what a dangling modifier is. I know about metaphors and similes, idiosyncratic detail, objective correlative, plot, The Hero's Journey, so much. So much I have learned because of all of you.

I think of my work now, and of how far I've come. I think of those first submissions, how poor they were. Along the way, from then and now, something strange happened to me. Something inside of me was awoken, something insatiable, something that would not be silenced. A desire. It is the desire to be something more than what I am, something that would dare to seek out greatness. You have allowed me to believe that I could be something...better.

However, having felt this, I often return to a single question; why?

Why do you help us? Why do you help me? I am...a nothing, a criminal, an undesirable. I am a bad person deserving my fate. What I don't deserve is your help. And yet you give it anyway. You have given me knowledge; you have been patient with me and humored me. It is a great kindness what you all do. And for that I thank you all.

Not too long ago, when the Pen Project first began here, at the end of one of our workshops, I approached Dr. Wells and proceeded to tell her how much I appreciate what you all do. She responded by telling me that I was talented and that I should keep writing. I doubt she remembers that day, but to me it meant a great deal. I've been writing ever since. And to the rest of the Pen Project interns, you all are doing a good thing, and good things are rare these days. I doubt that I'll ever be great, but for what it's worth, you all let me believe I could be. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Lindsey

FAIRY TALES AT ADOBE MOUNTAIN

By Addison Rizer

*Adobe Mountain Volunteer Teacher
Majoring in English*

I ENTERED THE WORLD OF TEACHING at the Adobe Mountain School of the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections uncertainly. I had no experience with prisons, or teaching, so it was completely uncharted territory for me. On my first day, I had planned a lesson with some time for freewriting. I wanted them to see how fun writing fairy tales could be, and I wanted to learn more about them through their writing. Walking around and conversing with them on their ideas opened my eyes to this population. Not because they wrote about violence or crime, but because they wrote about talking animals, tea parties, princes, and princesses. One soft-spoken boy read aloud to me his story about tea parties, and I was struck by how they were just kids. Kids who wondered about college but weren't sure who to ask. Kids who talked about calling their moms the same way I do. After that moment, I had a much better understanding of how to approach the class. With creativity, with compassion, and with as much freedom as possible. Let them be kids. Let them explore. Let them write about what they wanted to say to the world. I got stories about family bonds, about brothers who made a mistake but came together in the end, about animals in prison who realized their mistakes and tried to make them right. We all came into the classroom each day looking to explore, create, and engage, and I think doing this really impacted all of us. I hope I enriched their education.

“ I WAS STRUCK BY HOW THEY WERE JUST KIDS...KIDS WHO TALKED ABOUT CALLING THEIR MOMS THE SAME WAY I DO.”

SINGLE LEAF, SAME FOREST

By Chandler Fritz

*Adobe Mountain Volunteer Teacher
Majoring in English and Philosophy*

THERE'S THIS MOMENT when you read E.E. Cummings's poem "l(a)" when something clicks. The poem, consisting of four words, is broken into nine lines from one to five letters per line, so at a glance it appears to be a jumble of falling words. Horizontally, the nine lines would read: "l(a leaf falls)oneliness." Our literary brains, though, understand that a poet is not in the business of splattering letters on a page at random, and so we rearrange the letters and the structure until that single leaf of autumnal poignancy appears. What's more, in that moment when the poem makes sense we receive more than just a surge of the poem's emotion—we feel a personal triumph, that despite initial difficulty we can still discover the fullness of what one fellow human being once felt: the loneliness in separation.

"l(a)" stood rigidly on a whiteboard in my class at the Adobe Mountain School of the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections. My students wondered at its meaning. For many of them, this kind of canonical poetry was sappy when it could be understood, and unconcerned with their lives when it could not, yet in the context of a competition it suddenly invigorated their interest. The challenge was simple: who could tell me the meaning of the poem first. Hands shot up: "That part says a leaf falls!" "Good," I'd say. "Now tell me what the rest of it says." Faces would gnarl up again in concentration, and in no more time than it would take any decent high school English class, each student had it: a leaf falling in the middle of loneliness. What's more, they had it—the thought of some old dead white guy from Harvard, a rare good thought, within their grasp in a juvenile detention center in the Arizona desert.

"You know, that's actually pretty dope," one student said. I agreed, 'twas dope, but wasn't it even cooler that we can all understand it? In helping teach slam poetry with Tarah Ausburn, a high school English teacher at Adobe Mountain, the goal was never to force what I thought was good down the students' throats in hopes that they would regurgitate it in their own poems. I wanted them to read what they liked reading and write what they liked writing, in the best way that they could. The good I've seen in prison education, though, is that we can teach students that they belong in these canonical conversations, so that when they don't hear their voices being represented they have the confidence to speak up. And what comes of this, of course, is the simple comfort that they are not alone with their tragedies and their successes, but a single leaf in the same forest as you and me.

STORIES FROM THE TRENCHES

A DAY IN GLOBE

By Lian Ammerman

Globe Volunteer Teacher

Majoring in English (Creative Writing)

I WOKE UP WITH MY STOMACH IN KNOTS. Up to that point, I hadn't worried once about teaching at the Globe state prison. It was going to be a fun, eye-opening experience, and I was so excited. But by the morning of the actual day, fear had set in: I was going to have to teach actual people. I've always liked to think that I'm not nervous about public speaking, but that's probably not the truth. As the time got closer, my stomach felt heavier and heavier. What if I messed up? What if I didn't say anything of value? All I wanted was to do a good job, and provide the best, most helpful information possible.

My roommate was already up, and the smell of salty, greasy bacon wafted under my door. I could hear the cracks and sizzles as she added new pieces. Normally excited for bacon, I couldn't even think about having a bite of it. She was surprised that I quietly left without asking for a piece.

Getting into the car eased my nerves a bit. Being able to talk to the other students that were going to the prison was really helpful. We each talked about being unsure how teaching would go, and we assured each other that it was going to be perfectly fine. Apparently nerves and stage fright are a common occurrence!

The two-hour drive felt much shorter because we had some meaningful conversations, which definitely helped to loosen me up. We talked, we laughed, we viewed the majestic mountains that grace Highway 60.

When we pulled up to a café just minutes from the prison, the nerves crept their way back into my stomach. Again, the thought of speaking to a group of incarcerated writers about writing made me anxious. I had read some of their work in the Pen Project (a distance learning internship where we learn about the prison system and anonymously critique prisoners' writing). I knew how well they wrote. What if I wasn't able to offer them any new information? I reminded myself that all I could do was my best. I ate a few bites of savory, gooey grilled cheese and calmed myself.

The prison itself looked pretty harmless. It was nestled with the Gila County Fairground and a go-kart track. From the outside, except for the razor wire, it looked like a high school. To gain access, we had to go through a met-

al detector. My first time through, it beeped. "Oh no," I thought. "I already messed up." The officer noticed a couple of metal buttons on the back of my shoe.

"Do you mind removing your shoes for me?" he asked.

"Sure, of course, no problem," I said politely with a smile. I handed him my shoes and passed through again. This time there was no beep, and a wave of relief washed over me. The nerves started to fade. I was excited to share craft information with like-minded individuals that wanted to talk about writing and improving.

I wasn't sure what to expect once the incarcerated writers walked into the room. Even though I had a handout to look from, I felt wildly unprepared. When I started talking, I was crazy nervous. All I could think was "At least I'm not shaking!" I felt the blood rush to my cheeks and tried hard to push my nerves back down.

The further I got into the lesson, the more I saw how interested these men were in what we had to say. They were engaged with the exercises, and they asked a lot of questions. They were easy to talk to, and they helped me get over my anxiousness about speaking in front of other people. I loved hearing the examples of writing they shared, and I loved their willingness to learn.

What absolutely moved me was their passion for writing. They talked about their ideas and Iron City Magazine: Creative Expressions By and For the Incarcerated. Their discussion opened my eyes to how heavy censorship is in correctional facilities. This is frustrating to the prisoners.

As bummed out as I was to see their frustration with the system, it was really inspiring to see how involved they wanted to be. They so badly wanted to see their work published, and I thought that was amazing. It made me realize how similar we are. At the end of the day, we were all just writers that wanted to one day see our names published next to one of our pieces in a magazine.

I learned so much from this experience, and I'm so glad that I had the opportunity to do it. As we drove away, a melancholy calmness washed over me. Here these men were, stuck in this building away from the world. All I could think about as we drove home was how they had to read and write to escape into something beautiful, while we were able to drive through beautiful mountain landscapes just a couple of miles away.

WHAT I LEARNED TEACHING AT GLOBE STATE PRISON

By Victoria Cejka

Globe Volunteer Teacher

ASU Alumna, BA Business Law & English (Writing, Rhetoric, & Literacy)

BEFORE FALL 2017, MY SENIOR YEAR, when I enrolled in the Pen Project (wherein ASU interns critique scholarly and creative writing by incarcerated writers), I was undoubtedly sheltered and unforgiving in my perception of prisoners. In my mind, criminals deserved their time—they weren't products of their environments, victims of poverty or racism, or for that matter, even humans. They existed under the veil that society so willingly constructs to hide them away and to invoke fear of them. They were the closest thing I could ever imagine as "the other."

Due to the Pen Project course readings on mass incarceration, I knew that I needed to see a prison. I desired to meet incarcerated writers in person. I wanted to know, to see with my own eyes, whether beast or being lay beyond the walls and security fences. So I volunteered to go with Dr. Wells to teach a workshop at the Globe unit of the Florence state prison. Sleep evaded me the night before going. Perhaps it was nerves about teaching, excitement for a new adventure, or fear of what I might find.

We arrived at the prison at noon; I was excited but on edge. I had no idea what to expect. My teaching experience and literary education were minimal. I felt unqualified to guide and instruct these men in creative writing. I feared they would sense this and leave, call me out, or even worse, sit there the entire time, not participate, and leave with no new knowledge.

I could never have foreseen their excitement, their willingness to participate, their desire to share. They joked. They smiled. They read aloud without being pushed; they shared their writing; they asked questions; they contemplated. They were, without question, infinitely better at playing the role of student than my fellow college students who sit in the back of class complacent and uninvolved.

I am not sure that my lesson was all that inspiring to them, attempting to teach something that can't quite frankly be taught: voice. In so many ways, I felt that I learned more from them, hearing their comments, observations, and writing—and witnessing their general willingness to learn.

For most new prison visitors, the first experience comes as a bit of a shock. Although I arrived with hopes to help

and provide guidance in the prisoners' learning, truthfully some of my reasons for going were selfish and based in curiosity. This initial experience changed my perception, and I can now focus on main goal—to educate.

Now that I have seen the setting, interacted with the group, and perceived their (immense) ability, I feel much better able to construct a lesson plan tailored to their level—a level much higher than I had expected. In so many ways, learning is a conversation as opposed to a lesson plan and lecture. In the future, I hope to better integrate my own experiences and observations into class examples and exercises to help make that conversation much less one sided.

When I first met the men, I wondered what they had done to arrive at the penitentiary. As they talked, smiled, joked, and listened, I found myself losing interest in what they had done. I found myself much more concerned with what they would do in the future and how I could make my short lesson plan in creative writing somehow a way to make that future better, whether helping their writing skills to expand, giving them a break from monotony, or showing them that supporters exist, maybe even random strangers, that believe a prisoner can accomplish great things.

Dr. Wells thought my fellow intern Bailey Roos and I taught far more effectively than we perceived. Consequently, she invited us to return to Globe the following semester. This time Bailey and I taught a rhetoric workshop, both of us being more comfortable with rhetoric, than, say, poetry. I cannot speak more highly of this teaching and learning opportunity nor describe just how it changed my perception of the world more than any other of my college experiences, even if only in one facet of society. I am so grateful for the chance to learn about the shadowed and forgotten within our prison system. Teaching at Globe was a learning experience I will not forget.

“AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE WERE ALL JUST WRITERS THAT WANTED TO ONE DAY SEE OUR NAMES PUBLISHED NEXT TO ONE OF OUR PIECES IN A MAGAZINE.”

STORIES FROM THE TRENCHES

FADE FROM ORANGE

By Bailey Roos

Globe Volunteer Teacher

Writer's Studio Mentor

Majoring in Finance

FOR WEEKS, DECEMBER 1ST HOVERED IN THE BACK OF MY MIND. It was the day I was going to teach a creative writing class at the Arizona Department of Corrections in Globe, AZ. As part of the Pen Project (a partnership with ASU students and state prisons where interns critique creative pieces by incarcerated writers), we were given the option of teaching a course at the prison. Thinking about this task, I told myself I was not afraid, but I was also not excited or eager. I told myself that December 1st would be just another day; however, when I arrived at the prison, I was overwhelmed with nerves. My mind ran through the reel of classroom settings I'd been in before. I recalled the year I taught Hebrew to a lively group of sixth graders. Then I remembered my daily lecture halls, where hundreds of nameless students sat buried in their phone screens, inattentive to my professors. I feared that I too would be ignored by my students at the prison.

Stepping from the car, I took a deep breath. We crossed through the iron gates, which were opened by an unseen operator, and entered a world fashioned by many restrictions, rigid power dynamics, and bureaucracy. There were protocols to follow: handing in our ID's, walking through a metal detector, and being escorted by a corrections teacher. She led us outside to a courtyard, where I felt like I was back in high school: some men played basketball; others read book or huddled in groups catching up on gossip. As we walked to the classroom, one of the prisoners greeted my professor, Cornelia Wells, with a smile and a nod. Prisoners seemed to recognize her, but some knew her personally from past workshops. Upon entering the classroom and seeing the familiar set up of chairs, tables, and educational posters, I felt a little more at ease. Mentoring prisoners through the distance portions of the Pen Project was not intimidating, but suddenly being in a classroom with prisoners in orange, I was hesitant to meet their eyes.

I took another deep breath. What's the worst that could happen? I make a mistake in front of the class? Get over yourself, B. I began to relax. I felt my heart rate steady, and I averted my eyes from their glaring orange attire. Once we began the lesson, the orange faded into insignificance.

The men participated in the activities I had prepared, asked questions, and shared their writing aloud. At certain

points, we even side tracked from the lesson so they could share stories from their pasts. I was deeply moved by their level of involvement but, even more so, by their thankfulness. At the conclusion of the lesson, they expressed how grateful they were for the information we had provided them. Based on the thank you letters we, the interns, have received after anonymously mentoring Pen Project prison writers, I knew how appreciative they were of the work we did, but witnessing their gratitude in person was highly impactful. I feel honored and proud to have been part of this experience.

“I WAS DEEPLY MOVED BY THEIR LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT BUT, EVEN MORE SO, BY THEIR THANKFULNESS.”

THE PEN PROJECT

The Pen Project (ENG484) is a hands-on internship that connects ASU students with incarcerated writers. The interns remotely review incarcerated writers' work and provide critical feedback and related examples. The internship is open to students of all majors on campus and online.



STUMBLING UPON THE PRISON WORLD

STUMBLING UPON THE PRISON WORLD: A RIVETING AWAKENING

By Winter Roth
*Perryville Volunteer Teacher
President, Prison Education-
Awareness Club (PEAC)
Majoring in Biochemistry
and Psychology*



Winter Roth speaks at 7th Annual Prison Education Awareness Conference

AS I WAS LEAVING MY CHILDHOOD HOME, anticipating the life of college housing, one of my family members was also making a grand change in his life; he was gathering the courage to be locked in county jail for a year. It was during my first few weeks that I met Cornelia “Corri” Wells, director of the ASU Prison Education Program, who introduced me to an exciting opportunity: the Pen Project. For those unfamiliar with this program, the Pen Project allows prisoners across U.S. state prisons to send in written pieces for student-intern feedback. With incarceration recently becoming a prominent addition to my life’s concerns and prisoners appearing incredibly humanized through their creative abilities, I could no longer ignore the individuals trapped behind razor wire, as one of my immediate family members had himself become an orange number.

I began to mentor. The first written work I received was from a prisoner, whom I will refer to as James. To this day, it is one of the most profound pieces of poetry I have ever read. I put my entire heart and soul into my response. Weeks later, when he replied to my feedback, I saw how much I had contributed to his piece, and I was hooked on the program. In fact, every letter of appreciation we, the interns, received iterated the same reaction – thank you for allowing us an outlet, and speaking to us like we are worth something. These men follow a daily routine, are forced into identical outfits, and are monitored throughout the day, leaving them without free will. The Pen Project not only allows them to express their innate writing abilities, but also gives them someone to share their talent with. It gives prisoners hope while they serve their sentence and establishes a foundation for their future successes.

After a year and a half as a Pen Project intern, I craved a more direct form of interaction. I pitched the idea of a business skills course for the women incarcerated in the Perryville state prison. Every Sunday morning, my co-teacher

and I drove 65 miles round trip to provide these women with a completely voluntary, two-hour class. As a college student, I never imagined I would ever willingly roll out of bed before 9 AM to teach people information I’ve already learned. However, fifteen to twenty women consistently showed up, not only to sit and listen but to participate in the class. Homework was not mandatory since the class did not count for college credit, but despite this fact, every woman completed all the activities. Most even went above and beyond the work assigned. At one point, one of the students completed two different resumes and cover letters for varying job opportunities.

Their devotion and general studiousness baffled me. I have been a tutor and daycare teacher for youth of all grade levels, and I have never met a more receptive group of students than these women. They relish the educational opportunity they’ve been given because they understand the unparalleled impact it will have on their life both during, but especially after, incarceration. While my family member was in high school, prior to his arrest, he choose video games over novels, but during his imprison-

WHAT IS PEAC?

The Prison Education Awareness Club (PEAC, pronounced like *peace*) is a student organization at ASU dedicated to fostering action-oriented discussions on prison reform and education. PEAC knows, “The higher the degree, the lower the recidivism.” PEAC’s members have diverse voices and backgrounds, but are unified in their commitment to promote education in the hardest to reach places. www.facebook.com/prisoneducationawarenessclub



ment, the only items he asked for were books.

Last year, as vice president of the Prison Education Awareness Club (PEAC), I took the lead in planning our annual conference, working to bring a diverse group of speakers that would not only discuss the prison system, but the importance of education. As president, I want to continue to cater to the general population, most of whom are unaware of the lack of education in prisons. It is easy for prison education activists to lean on those already involved with the prison system but reaching those with a blind eye is a much more difficult task. I hope to educate and empower such people to be leaders and advocates for social justice for prisoners.

Even though my major does not involve social justice,

IMPACTFUL EVENTS AND NEWS IN BRIEF

I quickly found myself immersed in one of the most neglected areas of social justice. Large political controversies such as gun laws, abortion rights, and racial equality are more commonly discussed than prisoners and their right to further their education. Fortunately, the Pen Project and PEAC work diligently to make sure that prisoners are acknowledged and their right to learn is protected. I am grateful to have been introduced to these programs. I can't believe how easy it was to become involved with prison education. I am even more amazed at how impactful the programs are, both for those who run them and for the prisoners. Through my continued work with prison education, I hope to reach more and more people about the vitality of education within prisons.

A DONATION THAT BECAME AN INSPIRATION

By Jacqueline Aguilar
Globe Volunteer Teacher
Prison Education Programming (PEP) Newsletter, Editor
Majoring in English (Literature) and Communication
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ON APRIL 20, 2018 at ASU's School of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences Scholarship and Awards Ceremony, Professor Floyd Downs received a Grateful Appreciation Award for substantial book donations to three Arizona state prisons. Downs' math book collection started in high school and grew exponentially through his various professional roles. Albert Boggess, director of the School, added to Downs' donation, and math faculty Naala Brewer, who co-directs ASU's Prison Education Program and has taught math as a volunteer at the Florence state prison since 2016, delivered the books to prisons in Florence and Goodyear. Thanks to Downs, there are for the first time enough books for classes at all three prisons. This increased interest in math education encouraged one precalculus prison student to create a 290-page manuscript called Understanding Investing. Brewer explained, "The main purpose of the manuscript is to serve as a stand alone course that prisoners can use to teach other prisoners how to plan their expenses upon release all the way through retirement." Boggess had a copy



(Left) Elizabeth Lenci-Downs and (Right) Floyd Downs at Awards Ceremony

of the manuscript bound into a book and presented it to Downs at the awards ceremony. "I told this to the prison student author," Brewer recounted, "and the look on his face was priceless—initially of shock, then of a humble pride that he's probably never experienced before."

IRON CITY MAGAZINE 1ST FRIDAY EVENT HUMANIZES THE INCARCERATED

By Kylie Kilian
ASU Alumna, BA
Biological Sciences

ON JUNE 1, 2018, as Roosevelt Row bustled with the excitement of First Friday, ASU students, professors, and editors stood atop the patio stage of Modified Arts sharing pieces from *Iron City Magazine*, an online and print journal devoted



Lana Marie Mousa reads at *Iron City Magazine* First Friday Event

entirely to writing and art from the prison world. The magazine accepts submissions from incarcerated writers, previously incarcerated writers, their families, and people who work within the prison system. Readers shared selections from past and forthcoming issues while surrounded by patio lights and curious spectators. The passion in the readers' voices could not be ignored as they spread the overall message: prisoners are people. Many passersby poked their heads in, listened to a story or two, and left with a different understanding of the word "prisoner." In a society that easily forgets the prison population, this event highlighted the humanity of the men and women behind razor wire. *Iron City Magazine* seeks to "encourage a culture of understanding and transformation" through both their publications and events. To learn more about the magazine or to read an online copy, visit ironcitymagazine.org.



Jessica Fletcher, fiction editor, tables at *Iron City Magazine* First Friday Event

PHOENIX POETRY SERIES FEATURES PRISON WRITING

By Jacqueline Aguilar
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*Prison Education Programming (PEP) Newsletter, Editor
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(Left) Kelly Nelson, (Middle) Rosemarie Dombrowski, and (Right) Cornelia "Corri" Wells at Phoenix Poetry Series Prison & Poetry Event

ON MARCH 23, 2018, at Phoenix College, Phoenix Poetry Series presented their event Prison & Poetry hosted by Rosemarie Dombrowski, English faculty at ASU Downtown, Poet Laureate of Phoenix, and founder of merge journal (2005-2011) and rinky dink press. Guest speakers were Cornelia "Corri" Wells, English faculty at ASU Tempe, director of Prison Education Programming (PEP), and editor-in-chief of *Iron City Magazine: Creative Expressions By and For the Incarcerated*, and Kelly Nelson, Leadership and Interdisciplinary Studies faculty at ASU Tempe, anthropologist, and poet. Wells and Nelson read poetry and talked about their involvement with prison education. They augmented their comments with PowerPoint presentations and personal life stories. Nelson's tie to the prison world began by piecing together her uncle's life in poems. Nelson read a selection of poetry from "Outlaw," a lyric biography she composed from her uncle's 500-page prison record. She expanded on the poems by recounting her journey of returning to her family's hometown and discovering her uncle's hidden past. Wells talked about her involvement with the Pen Project (an ASU program of student interns learning about the prison world and critiquing creative pieces by incarcerated writers), prison teaching, and *Iron City Magazine*. Wells read past and forthcoming pieces from the magazine. Wells' discussion highlighted local education programs that contribute to prisoner rehabilitation. Both Wells and Nelson captivated the audience, who nearly all stayed afterwards to talk with the presenters and event coordinator while, Jacqueline Aguilar and Benjamin Williams, both on the editorial staff of *Iron City Magazine*, sold copies of the journal.

AFTER PRISON WHAT?

By Nathan Young
*Florence Volunteer Teacher
Majoring in Psychology and Neuroscience*



Hector Cedillos shares his story of resilience in the MU Coconino Room at ASU

HECTOR CEDILLOS—local artist, youth counselor, family man, and ASU alum—told a story of amazing resilience, his story, at the end-of-semester Prison Education Awareness Club (PEAC) meeting in the MU Coconino Room on 18 April 2018. Hector was raised in California in a chaotic household, rife with addiction and abuse. When his parents altercated, Hector would hide under his bed, scratching himself and the underboards with a staple as distraction. After a while, those senseless scratchings began to take form in shapes and designs.

Later, Hector's mother got a new boyfriend; however, he would beat Hector and Hector's mother as well. This led to Hector's next encounter with art: after Hector was beaten to the point of hospitalization, the boyfriend—perhaps out of guilt—brought Hector a magazine, and Hector found himself fascinated with the art in it.

The boyfriend's civility was short-lived. One day, when he was beating Hector's mother and sister, Hector stabbed him. This landed him in juvenile hall. If someone had simply picked Hector up, he would have been free to go—but no one did. So for three years Hector remained, where, at thirteen, he was immersed in a population of other aggressive, likely traumatized, children. He was forced to "turn tough" to survive.

Hector had a couple more encounters with prison but later pursued post-secondary education. With an incredible support system, Hector graduated from Scottsdale Community College and then earned a bachelor's degree in art at Arizona State University. Hector attributes much of his success to art: for his livelihood (he once had a tattoo shop) but also as an outlet for earlier trauma. "It's my getaway," he said. "You need to have a source of release. If you don't find a productive outlet, an unproductive outlet will surface regardless."

Hector is a living example of the power of expression,

IMPACTFUL EVENTS AND NEWS IN BRIEF

both spoken and visual. With his early life colored by violence, fear, and hate, and against damning odds, Hector has not only worked his way into productive society but has also dedicated much of his time to supporting his community, especially juveniles with experiences similar to his. He credits art for allowing him to do this.

After one incarceration, Hector left California and moved to Arizona for a new start, unfortunately violating his parole. He built a new life and remained free for some time before law enforcement caught up with him. As Hector's wife pleaded with corrections officials on his behalf, they asked if she knew what Hector had been convicted of. There's a lesson in her response: "I don't know who he was then. But I know who he is now."

PHOENIX PUBLIC LIBRARY TO HOST NATIONAL TRAVELING EXHIBIT ON INCARCERATION

By Leah Sarat

Associate Professor, SHPRS, Religious Studies,
Arizona State University

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"States of Incarceration at The New School in New York, New York."

WHO DO PRISONS WORK FOR? How do profits shape punishment? Who is a criminal? What is a crime? These questions are among the many raised by [*States of Incarceration*](#), a traveling national exhibit that will be hosted by Phoenix's Burton Barr Public Library between September 5 and October 26, 2018. Featuring content on twenty prisons and immigrant detention facilities across the nation, the exhibit tackles the issue of mass incarceration through a collaboration between students, formerly incarcerated individuals, and community partners, including graduates in ASU's School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies.

Interactive panels, videos, and audio clips delve into such issues as the history of forced labor and surveillance

in Louisiana, the architecture of immigrant detention in Texas, intersections of prisons with mental health care in Indiana, and public perceptions of Rikers Island in New York. ASU's contribution draws attention to the economic and human costs of Eloy Detention Center, a for-profit immigration facility owned and operated by the private company, CoreCivic.

The exhibit will launch with a reception and screening of a short documentary on detention during the First Friday art walk on September 7. On Saturday, September 22, a storytelling workshop featuring the voices of those directly impacted by incarceration and immigrant detention will invite the members of the public to grapple with the question, "Do we need prisons?" And on October 5, members of the arts-based immigrant rights group [*Aliento*](#) will bring their First Friday Open Mic series to the exhibit for an evening of spoken word, poetry, and song. All events and more are free and open to the public. For more information and to suggest programming ideas contact Dr. Leah Sarat at leah.sarat@asu.edu.

States of Incarceration is a project of the [*Humanities Action Lab*](#), a coalition of thirty universities led by Rutgers University-Newark working with issue-based organizations and public spaces to foster new public dialogue on contested social issues, through public humanities projects that explore the diverse local histories and current realities of shared global concerns.

[*States of Incarceration*](#) is the first national traveling multi-media exhibition and coordinated public dialogue to explore the history and future of mass incarceration in the United States. The initiative, which launched in New York City in April 2016, is the culmination of the efforts of over 700 students, faculty, community partners, and formerly incarcerated individuals.

This project was made possible in part by [*the Institute of Museum and Library Services*](#), [*National Endowment for the Humanities*](#), [*Whiting Foundation*](#), [*Open Society Foundations*](#), and [*Andrew W. Mellon Foundation*](#).

NATIONAL TRAVELING EXHIBIT ON INCARCERATION
SEPTEMBER 5-OCTOBER 26

SEPT. 7....RECEPTION & SCREENING
SEPT. 22....STORYTELLING WORKSHOP
OCT. 5....ALIENTO (FIRST FRIDAY OPEN MIC SERIES)

IRON CITY MAGAZINE: CREATIVITY & HEALING

BY NATALIE VOLIN, *IRON CITY* FOUNDING EDITOR



IRON CITY MAGAZINE WAS BORN because there are so few options for incarcerated writers to submit to literary magazines to get their work published. Most magazines won't take mail-in submissions, and they certainly won't take hand-written submissions. But for inmates with no computer access, that's the best they have to work with. *Iron City* was designed to accommodate those special needs.

Our team of editors collects hundreds and hundreds of pages of hand-written poems, creative nonfiction, fiction, and plays. If 80 people submit work for consideration, we read 80 unique handwriting styles. Some look like calligraphy worthy of wedding invitations – a seemingly impossible feat using the standard prison-issue golf pencil or half-sized pen. Some are careful, each stroke deliberately made so as not to be misconstrued. And some handwriting is pure chicken scratch – as if a furious stroke of genius overtook the author and it was all he could do to get the words down on paper before the next sentence barreled through his mind.

As the ones who transcribe these handwritten pages, it can feel like a chore to have to squint at page after page of chicken scratch and guess if that's an *o* or an *a*, an *n* or an *h*, an *r* or a *v*. When you start trying to read a five-page story, and you can't make out even one word in the first sentence – and is that a period at the end or a comma? – it suddenly seems like a good idea to just put that piece aside and come back to it later. So you put it at the back of the stack and take care of the easy ones first.

And isn't that also a metaphor for how society treats inmates? They're difficult, so we put them away, out of sight and out of mind, and sit in denial that eventually there will come a time when we have to look at them.

Funnily enough, some of these nearly illegible submissions have turned out to be the wisest, wittiest, most poignant pieces we publish. And we never would have had the privilege of reading them had we not made the conscious effort to sit down, open our eyes, and wrestle with a little difficulty.

All the effort is more than worth it. In the months

IRON CITY MAGAZINE: *CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS BY AND FOR THE INCARCERATED*

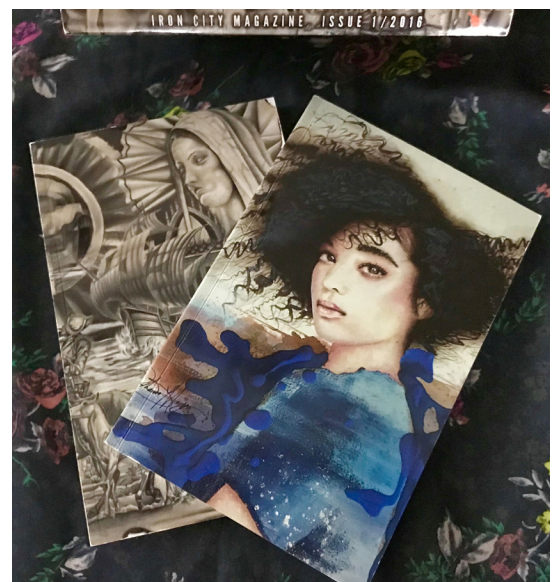
The first issue of *Iron City Magazine* was published in print and online in 2016. The magazine's third issue will be available August 2018.

www.ironcitymagazine.org

of positive feedback from inmates and prison educators alike. One letter was written in fanciful flowing cursive on yellow legal paper by one of the writers we published. He wrote:

"I imagine I'm not the only prisoner who feels lifted up by your heartfelt words and all the great work you've done....Thank you for all your work and dedication for me and so many other men and women to have the chance to show the world we're all here behind the bricks. People who are so much more than just a # number."

That's what *Iron City Magazine* is all about: reminding the world that there's humanity – valuable humanity – behind every story, if only we take the time to read them.



TOGETHER WE TEACH; TOGETHER WE LEARN

ABOUT PRISON EDUCATION



BEFORE RELEASE, ALL ARIZONA INMATES MUST HAVE AT LEAST AN 8TH GRADE EDUCATION.



INCARCERATED STUDENTS CAN TAKE GED PREP CLASSES. TO TAKE THE GED TEST, STUDENTS MUST PAY THEIR TESTING FEES.



SELECT STUDENTS WHO CAN PAY TUITION MAY ENROLL IN DISTANCE LEARNING CLASSES THROUGH RIO SALADO COLLEGE.



INMATES MAY PARTICIPATE IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL TRAINING PROGRAMS.



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS IS IN THE PROCESS OF INSTALLING ACCREDITED HIGH SCHOOLS IN ITS STATEWIDE FACILITIES.



STUDENTS MAY OPT TO TAKE NON-CREDIT CLASSES LED BY VOLUNTEERS LIKE THOSE FROM ASU.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

ASU students and faculty can apply to volunteer teach in prisons or to mentor in the Pen Project. Students receive internship credit for teaching and mentoring. We also collect books to donate to prison libraries.

For more information contact Cornelia “Corri” Wells, director of Prison Education Programming (PEP) (cornelia.wells@asu.edu), or Naala Brewer, PEP co-director (nbrewer@asu.edu).

“Somewhere in the world, there is someone wondering if anyone else feels the same way they do. Maybe they’re across the globe, maybe they’re five feet away, or maybe they’re a Pen Project participant like myself. Wherever they may be, they seek to encounter that expression that resonates with their experience. It is for that reason that every piece of art you make is vitally important. Each of your voices is vitally important. Never hesitate to speak out, even if only to one isolated soul. Someone will hear you.”

-Pen Project Intern

ABOUT THE ISSUE

This issue of *Prison Education News* was compiled and edited by Jacqueline Aguilar and co-editors Lana Marie Mousa and Benjamin Williams under the direction of Dr. Cornelia “Corri” Wells.

Prison Education News is the annual publication associated with Prison Education Programming at ASU. This publication would not be possible without support from the ASU Department of English.

Thank you to each of the contributors, who took great care in submitting meaningful pieces and sharing their experiences. This publication was a collaboration among many voices. We hope that those voices echo powerfully.

ASU Department
of English
Arizona State University