

“Whom We Include”: Teaching and Learning among the Incarcerated

ASU is a comprehensive public research university, measured not by whom we exclude, but rather by whom we include and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves.

ASU Charter Statement

In July 2016, a new Pen Project (prison outreach) intern and ASU Online student residing in New York, Annie Anzaroot, drew my attention to the exemplary fit of ASU's Prison Education Programming (PEP) with ASU's Charter Statement. On reflection, this fit seems inevitable considering that ASU's Prison Education Programming has arisen from faculty's and students' concerns as active world citizens, both part of and beyond the university proper, extending educational opportunity into nontraditional communities.

Not only has ASU Online sought to include students from around the world (enrolling over 19,000 online students in the 2015-2016 academic year), but ASU PEP seeks to include students from among the most disenfranchised among us: the approximately 1 in 100 adults in America's jails and prisons. Given the skimpiness of education behind bars and the enormity of the United States' world-leading prison size—with more people living behind bars than in any other nation, both in raw numbers and by percentage—perhaps there is no group in greater need of inclusion. And since 95% of this group will be

released at some point to become our neighbors and associates, and since education does substantially more to prevent re-offense and re-incarceration than any other measurable factor, educating the incarcerated benefits the whole society.

More fundamentally, before what the numbers teach us, faculty and students who volunteer as teachers among the incarcerated believe education is a human right, not just a luxury for the shrinking upper economic classes. All human beings deserve an education, whether they are students residing on the outside or are "in for life" or on the verge of parole. Curiosity about the world we inherit, inhabit, and together evolve is not bounded by the vagaries and shenanigans of the marketplace. Enrichment of that curiosity should not be out of reach for anyone.

During 2015-16, ASU volunteers—faculty, graduate students, and upper level undergraduates—taught weekly classes at the Eyman and Florence State Prisons in: Acting and Playwriting; Biology; Chinese; Creative Writing (Poetry, Fiction, and Nonfiction, in person and via the Pen Project), which extends to New Mexico; Social Justice, via the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program; Mathematics; Philosophy; and Psychology. This fall, ASU will add courses in American History, Choir, and Political Science.

We also established *Iron City Magazine: Creative Expressions by and for the Incarcerated* in print and online formats: see also "Constructing Iron City" in *Accents on English* and an interview with co-founder Natalie Volin in *Niche Magazine*.

We welcome volunteer teachers and teacher-interns in all fields and subjects.

—CORNELIA "CORRI" WELLS

Prison Education Programming (PEP) Director
Pen Project Coordinator, Department of English



Cornelia "Corri" Wells

At right: Natalie Volin, an active member of the Prison Education Awareness Club (PEAC) and co-founder of *Iron City Magazine*, represented the literary journal at an end-of-year ceremony for the Changemaker Central @ ASU, Woodside Community Action Grant on April 16, 2016.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Prison Educators Reflect

Boldly Going Where No Biologists Have Gone Before

A couple of years ago, a friend and colleague in the Department of English, Joe Lockard, told me of Anika Larson, a highly motivated Pen Project student who was majoring in the Biology and Society Program of the School of Life Sciences (SoLS). Larson, explained Lockard, needed assistance in creating a biology course for people incarcerated in facilities of the Arizona Department of Corrections. He asked if I would be interested in getting involved. The idea was certainly out of my comfort zone, and I was apprehensive but intrigued at the same time. I met with Larson, who infected me with her enthusiasm. Together, we put out a call for socially motivated graduate/upper-division undergraduate students to boldly go where no biologists have gone before.*



Tsafirir Mor

Perfectly resonating with ASU's New American University tenet that the university be "embedded" in the community, the new internship course, BIO 584, is going into its third year. It provides ASU students with an opportunity to become socially engaged through an interdisciplinary project while gaining experience in curriculum design and instruction. Interns teaching the non-credit biology course, which supplements the literacy and GED programs currently offered by the Department of Corrections, work with 8-10

incarcerated students at the "supermax" Browning Unit of Eyman State Prison in Florence, Arizona. This course offers inmates an opportunity to practice basic literacy and math skills, while also providing exposure to a new academic field (science, specifically biology) and hopefully piquing their interest in future education.

Part of the growing Prison Education Programming at ASU, now under the leadership of Cornelia "Corri" Wells, BIO 584 students and instructors believe that education is a human right that should not be deprived even at supermax prisons, and that educational opportunities for inmates carry societal dividends, both short-term (increasing inmate welfare, which reduces prison violence) and long-term (reducing recidivism). The biology program enjoys the full support of the prison officials. In fact, the course we offer hardly fulfills the demand. Last year more than 70 inmates sent a "kite" requesting to participate—we have room for only ten in the classroom. Our ability to offer more diverse courses depends largely on the willingness of ASU's students, faculty and staff to volunteer their time and participate.

For more information, please visit the Prison Biology Education webpage.

—TSAFRIR MOR

Professor, Molecular Biology and Biochemistry,
School of Life Sciences

**To our knowledge, this is the first biology course ever to be taught in a "supermax"—maximum security—unit.*

The Pen Project: Something Much Greater amid Shocking Realities

Having recently completed my fourth consecutive semester with the Pen Project, I can't help but reflect on how much I have grown as a person, thinker, and writer as a result. I joined the Pen Project in my third semester of college after taking Corri Wells' Honors Freshman English class, where we briefly discussed the U.S. justice system and some of its shortcomings. While the topic fascinated me, I could never have expected how enlightening this internship would be.

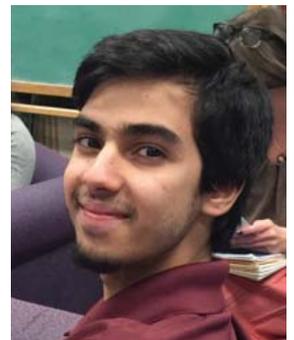
I remember sitting at my first Pen Project orientation as we discussed prison statistics and reviewed guidelines about how to respond to the writings we would receive. I was eager to give my feedback to the first cycle, but for

selfish reasons—the novelty of attaining unfettered access to the thoughts of maximum-security prisoners while concurrently sharpening my writing skills. But during my first reviews and the many that would follow, the Pen Project evolved into something much greater.

Though the initiative serves in part to open interns' eyes to the shocking realities of the U.S. justice system (and it certainly does—did you know that America houses 25% of the world's prisoners but only 5% of the global population?), the Pen Project's true value is the undeniable humanizing effect it has for the prisoners who submit their work to it. Reading their stories and poems for two years makes you realize that murderers, rapists, and drug

dealers—people society works so hard to demonize—are humans with insecurities, dreams, fears, memories, and families.

I am often met with bewilderment when I express this opinion to others because they think I am condoning the horrible acts committed by the individuals who send their work to us. Though I, like most reasonable people, believe that



Rohan Murty

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

...[continued from page 2]

killers and robbers should be met with appropriate consequences, the Pen Project has allowed me to see that all humans, even those society deems worthless, have value. This realization has completely changed my mind about the death penalty, mandatory minimum sentencing laws, and several other issues I ignorantly held extremely strong views on for a long time.

Perhaps just as important, this internship has given me keen insights into the nature and causes of crime. While it ultimately takes the will of a person to commit a deplorable act,

crime is a complex function based on the variables of one's socioeconomic status, family life, education level,

“ The Pen Project has allowed me to see that all humans, even those society deems worthless, have value.

and surroundings. Gaining a deeper understanding of why so many Americans end up incarcerated has shown me the futility of making punishment our primary aim rather than rehabilitation.

I am forever indebted to Wells, the other interns, Pen Project facilitators, and the incarcerated writers of the NMCD and ACD for increasing my humanity and broadening my worldview. If more Americans shared my experiences at this internship, this country would have a vastly different view of crime, punishment, and prisoners in general. There is undoubtedly a need for change in our system, and educating yourself is the first step towards achieving this goal.

—ROHAN MURTY
Senior, Chemical Engineering

Moving beyond the Walls That Separate Us

Where is the most beautiful place in the world? That was the first question we asked ASU students to discuss with an incarcerated individual as they sat, one-on-one, facing each other—a gap of about five feet between them. Thirty seconds would pass. A slow, awkward murmur occupied that time. Often they'd lean in to try to hear one another better. Then, each ASU student would get up, move to the next incarcerated individual, and answer another question.

Teaching is incredibly rewarding. The opportunity to positively impact the lives of hundreds of college students is a gift. In turn, students positively impact us, and we never stop learning.

But teaching can also be frustrating. And perhaps for reasons that you might not expect. The field of criminology and criminal justice is filled with fascinating examples of human behavior under difficult circumstances. Sometimes a traditional classroom can suck the “life” out of those experiences. Statistics. Another textbook. Another PowerPoint lecture. More statistics. Maybe a video. Sure, you can bring in guest speakers, but how do you consistently engage students in a way that retains all the raw emotion and interpersonal complexities that only human interaction can provide?

What if our students could learn alongside people who are incarcerated—together, as one class—within a prison setting?

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at ASU does just that. Inside-Out was founded by Lori Pompa and first taught out of Temple University in 1997. The program now exists in over 40 states and 8 countries. Our spring 2016 class was the first to be taught in the state of Arizona.

What is the best thing about being a kid? We're about four questions in now. The murmur is growing louder. We're having a hard time getting students to stop and move on after thirty seconds.

Each week, ten ASU “outside” students would meet twelve incarcerated “inside” students in the visitation room of the

East Unit at the Arizona State Prison Complex in Florence. They'd read the same books. They'd complete the same assignments. And they would spend each Monday evening discussing critical questions of social concern: What causes crime? What are prisons for? How can we improve the system?

At the end of the course, they developed their own projects designed to improve the system: a reentry preparation packet, a family reunification program, and a victim intervention program. The Arizona Department of Corrections is in the process of implementing all three projects.

If you could have any super power, what would it be? The ice has been smashed. Everyone is now knee-to-knee with their partner. It's loud. There's constant laughter.

Both inside and outside students have considered this to be a life changing experience. The highest grade in the class was earned by an inside student who said the course gave him the confidence to succeed on the outside once released.

This is transformative learning that cannot be accomplished in the traditional classroom—for both sets of students, inside and out.

Last question: *When you first came to prison, what did you think?*

For more information, please visit ASU's Inside-Out webpage.

—KEVIN WRIGHT
Associate Professor,
School of Criminology and Criminal Justice



Kevin Wright

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Prison Educators Reflect

PEAC President's Farewell: *Prison Education Fever*

I fell into prison education four years ago only knowing buzz words like *drugs* and *crime* and *order*. I've had—and still have—an affinity for order. Tidy room. Tidy car. Tidy inbox. Despite my hefty desire to order and to maintain order, my desire to connect and to help outweighs it. Per the suggestion of Corri Wells, my honors ENG 102 instructor, I joined the Pen Project internship as a freshman. Being the I-must-do-what-the-syllabus-says student, I attended a meeting of the Prison Education Awareness Club (PEAC—pronounced "peace") not even knowing it was optional.



Jessica Marie Fletcher

Twenty minutes into the meeting and only a few pages into my assigned books, which were intended to teach me about the prison climate, I was named an officer in the club, where I started my time in prison education activism.

Once in, I was all in. My fellow club members and prison education enthusiasts told me I had caught "prison fever." Really, "fever" is the right word. I burned from the inside out as my body's moral immune system fought the toxicity—which aptly labels the well-adapted "tough on crime" virus.

What started as a small officer role metamorphosed into a three-year term as president of the club, which was growing in size and strength like antibodies. Each year, our club incumbents wondered how we would survive after losing vital members to graduation, and each year, new members, equally

vital, would find a way to us. I had an unusual blessing being president for so long. I learned what worked and what didn't. I learned how to be a better leader. I learned how to teach. I learned how to remove labels when necessary. And truly, I am humbled to have been afforded these lessons.

My involvement led to weekly volunteer teaching in the Florence State Prison with doctoral candidate Sarah Hermann, a life-changing experience. Going beyond the wire, I started applying the work our club had advocated. I taught students who were thirsty to learn; they were not simply orange-clad inmates society had labeled and boxed—just as I once had.



Promoting inaugural issue of *Iron City Magazine* at AWP (Association of Writers & Writing Programs) Conference and Bookfair, Los Angeles, March 30. From left: Jacqueline Balderrama, Jessica Marie Fletcher, and Gary Garrison, three of *Iron City's* editors.

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 Faye Verska (Department of English)
 Cornelia "Corri" Wells (Department of English)
 Kevin Wright (School of Criminology and Criminal Justice)

Because of Hermann's pioneering work, Prison Education Programming will have a team of psychology teachers spearheading various courses next year. Graduated, I still find a home in PEAC, and I get to honor my double major in psychology and fiction writing by teaching creative writing at the prison while I pursue my Master of Counseling in Mental Health.

Four conferences, growing programs, and a literary journal later (I am a fiction editor for the newly founded *Iron City Magazine*), I bid my role as president of PEAC farewell, grateful to have watched all of those things happen while feeling the fever.

—JESSICA MARIE FLETCHER

Graduate Student, Master of Counseling in Mental Health

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Natural Partners: Psychology Departments and Prison Education Programs

As a psychologist, I am a researcher as well as an educator. Before I volunteered to design and teach an Introduction to Psychology course for ASU's Prison Education Programming, I looked at the research. America's state and federal prisons hold approximately 1.6 million people, more than half of whom will be rearrested following their release from prison (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014).



Sarah Hermann

Correctional education increases inmates' well-being and reduces infractions while in prison (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). Additionally, participation in prison education reduces recidivism rates by 46 percent by increasing prisoners' chances of thriving upon release (Chappell, 2004; Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2014).

While some form of higher education is offered to inmates in 32 states, many prison education programs do not teach psychology, due to concerns that it may be used to make "smarter criminals" or to provide unlicensed therapy. Given the statistics about the benefits of education at reducing prison infractions, improving reentry, and reducing recidivism, combined with the practical benefits of psychology, psychology departments and prison education programs seem like a natural partnership.

Teaching psychology in prison is challenging; each week Jessica Fletcher, my teaching partner, and I drove over an hour each way between Tempe and Florence. Our classes took place inside the prison with limited resources (no textbooks or computers permitted) and no contact with our students outside of class. In lieu of a textbook, we read popular science articles from the *New York Times Magazine*, *Slate*, and *Scientific American*. Rather than present PowerPoint lectures, we gave students outlines of notes to frame the lecture and springboard discussion. Because students cannot email questions after class, we began each session with "unanswered questions" from the week before. Students would occasionally disappear if they were transferred to another prison or got a job without scheduling flexibility.

Despite the challenges, teaching psychology in prison is also incredibly rewarding. Our students brought perspectives to the material that gave it new life. Although I was originally advised to teach the class as if I was not teaching it in prison, talking about psychological concepts as they relate to life on the inside made for rich discussions and application to students' own lives. Our students had substantial insight and lived experience with many of the topics we discuss in psychology: power,

stress and health, substance abuse, mental disorders, and discrimination. More inspiring are the reasons students cited for taking psychology: facilitating re-entry programs, working in substance abuse treatment programs once they get out, and being better partners and fathers.

Although we were the first to teach psychology for ASU Prison Education Programming, we are thrilled that we won't be the last. Four more psychology teachers have signed up for the 2016-2017 academic year, continuing Introduction to Psychology and adding a special topics course: the Psychology of Thinking. I had invited two of the new volunteers to guest lecture. The students so impressed them, they wanted to teach weekly themselves. I am honored to have started this tradition and hope that we will continue to build a partnership for psychology education in the future.

—SARAH D. HERMANN, MA
Doctoral Candidate, Social Psychology

Prison Teachers and Courses 2015 – 2016

BIOLOGY

Tsafir Mor (supervising), Sisi "Grace" Gao (lead), Megan Berry, Jason Borchert, Joel Bray, Abby Finkelstein, Steven Hart, Emily Hoegh, Amanda Suchy, Shelley Valle

CHINESE

Meng Zhang, Shuran Zhang

CREATIVE WRITING

Bryan Asdel, Jacqueline Balderrama, Edward Derbes, Gary Garrison, Kyren Hunt, Joe Lockard, Mariah Rose, Mimi Wang

DRAMA

Rivka Rocchio, Jeff Sachs

MATHEMATICS

Albert "Al" Boggess (supervising), Alena Chang, Queen Harris, Brent Knutson, Sebastien Motsch, Janet Sipes

PHILOSOPHY

Haggeo Cadenas, Greg Yanke

PEN PROJECT, Creative Writing iCourse

Corri Wells, Shavawn Berry

PSYCHOLOGY

Sarah Hermann, Jessica Fletcher

CRIMINOLOGY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE, Inside-Out

Kevin Wright, Travis Meyers

FROM THE CONFERENCE

5th Annual ASU Prison Education Conference: March 19, 2016

An Attendee's *Report*



Sean Moxley-Kelly

I first attended the ASU Prison Education Conference in 2015, when I was teaching creative writing at Florence State Prison through the prison internship. Unfortunately, due to the vagaries inherent in prison volunteering, I was the only instructor for a course that is normally team-taught. The experience was (although rewarding) at times intensely isolating. That changed when I attended the Prison Education

Conference and met a community of people who shared my passion for this work. Presenters discussed pedagogical practices, considered the logistics of running prison education programs, read original literary works, and exposed the poignant challenge of writing poetry with someone who may never see the outside. It was affecting to see so many people come to discuss this topic, an issue which I knew was important but never received much public attention.

I'm no longer volunteering at Florence, but I returned to the conference this year to experience that energy. This event represents the culmination of considerable work on the part of the Prison Education Awareness Club (PEAC) and Corri Wells, the club's advisor. Having attended last year, I knew to expect a professionally organized and implemented event and PEAC again delivered. From the opening notes, through structured audience participation during lunch, and culminating in the keynote speech, the Prison Education Conference was both engrossing and educational.

PEAC has successfully grown the conference in both size and significance, and its fifth anniversary included presenters from a variety of roles and institutions. The conference began with some introductory notes from Jessica Marie Fletcher, PEAC president, who discussed the history of the conference. Mark Lussier, English Department Chair, then delivered a welcome in which he stated, "This program and its work is, to me, the most important task we have ever undertaken," in part because it provides "vehicles for coping, and therefore for hoping."

A panel of speakers from the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) delivered a talk addressing successful prisoner reentry and reintegration. Karen Hellman, Division Director of Inmate Programs and Reentry; Courtney Gottschalk, Transition Program Coordinator; Jan Weathers, Re-Entry Coordinator; and Nikki Studer, Community Corrections Manager, discussed their particular focus on developing important social skills through counseling and mandatory programs and the need for a "warm handoff from the inside to the outside world." ADC Education Department personnel presenting later in the day included Bridget

Carrington, Southern Region Education Director, and Laura Metcalf and George Arhin, both Education Program Supervisors at the Florence State Prison Complex. Collectively, the ADC speakers provided a valuable perspective on making positive changes from inside the system, while facing day-to-day challenges of managing and helping over 42,000 inmates.

A panel of prison-teaching volunteers, mostly ASU graduate students and faculty, provided an outsider perspective, focusing on the experience of working in ASU's volunteer program. Panel members spoke about the rewarding aspects of prison teaching, including "seeing my students gain confidence in themselves," as psychology teacher Sarah Hermann said, and having the "opportunity, in an environment that is incredibly dehumanizing, to treat individuals with respect and with dignity," as pointed out by Leah Weed, faculty at the New Mexico Corrections Department in Santa Fe. Other panelists included Queen Harris (Math), Donna Harati (AmeriCorps), Brent Knutson (Math), Kevin Wright (Criminology), Gary Garrison (English/fiction), and Jacqueline Balderrama (English/poetry).

In the afternoon, the conference took a turn to the creative with readings by Michelle Ribeiro, co-founder of ASU's Pen Project, which connects incarcerated writers in New Mexico with ASU undergraduates for writing feedback, and Sheldon Thompson, a former Pen Project participant who upon his release received a creative writing scholarship to the Institute

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I attend the Prison Education Conference not from professional obligation, but because it is rewarding.

of American Indian Arts. Ribeiro read from her nonfiction essay "Best of Times, Worst of Times: Reflections of a Prison Educator" while Thompson shared an evocative short story about a romantic bus-stop conversation.

Finally, Judge Lilia Alvarez of the Guadalupe Municipal Court and Kirstin T. Eidenbach, a prisoners' rights attorney, provided details on the Guadalupe Teen Court, a court staffed and judged by teens who deliver binding decisions on cases involving their peers. Some of the young Court members were also present; they took the opportunity to advocate for restorative justice and second chances.

The ASU Prison Education Conference provides both a macro- and micro-view of this important topic, and takes a uniquely interdisciplinary approach. I attend not from professional obligation, but because it is rewarding.

More information about the state of education in our prisons and the activities of PEAC at ASU are available on the club's Facebook page.

—SEAN MOXLEY-KELLY

Doctoral Candidate, Rhetoric / Assistant Director, Writing Programs

FROM THE CONFERENCE

27th Annual American Literature Association Conference: May 26-29, 2016

Presentation Excerpt: Why Prison Literature Is Crucial to U.S. Working-Class Literature

Why are prisons crucial to working-class literature? The most obvious answer is that U.S. prisons are not only the second home of the working-class, but they contribute heavily to its formation. Those who were not working-class or poverty-class when they entered, most likely will be when they get out. Approximately 20 million people in the United States have felony convictions,¹ of which about two-thirds have served time in prison or jail. If one escapes the cycle of recidivism, then prior incarceration for a felony cuts hourly wages for men by eleven percent, reduces annual employment by nine weeks, and slashes annual earnings by 40 percent.² Economic mobility substantially disappears, with a heavy majority of released ex-prisoners remaining stuck at the bottom of the earnings ladder.³

Imprisonment is among the severest social disadvantages in U.S. society and those with felony convictions or who were incarcerated pay throughout their lives in terms of employment, occupational barriers, educational access, and political disenfranchisement. In an economy where nearly fifteen percent of the U.S. population—over 46 million people—remain below the poverty line⁴ and the greatest job growth is in low-skill poverty-level jobs,⁵ the future for most released prisoners is clear. Their tenure in the free working-class likely will be short, and they will recycle through a massive county and local jail population of some 650,000 held in pre-trial detention, unable to meet bail due to poverty.⁶ Jails

“Literary imagination makes transformation of consciousness available to all, whether we are from the working-class or prison.”

and prisons are exchange sites where free labor becomes unfree labor, often at the service of prison industries. The U.S. prison-class and working-class today are interchangeable and function in a circular economy.

As readers and discussants of prison writing, we stand external to a consciousness of incarceration but function to produce that consciousness through our roles as taxpayers, voters, and citizens. We are all implicated.

To read prison literature is to read about ourselves and potential selves; to write contemporary U.S. prison literature is to write from within and about carceral systems focused on underclasses, yet systems that today encompass ever-expanding social domains. Working-class and prison literature share an impetus to transform class consciousness through expressive production. Literary imagination makes that opening and transformation of consciousness available to all, whether we are from the working-class or prison.

Concerning the intersection of working-class literature and prison writing: How do the specific tropes and concerns of canonical working-class literature, such as labor, poverty, and class, gender or race oppression, find expression in prison writings—especially by African Americans and Chicanos who constitute the disproportionate majority of U.S. prisoners?

Working-class literature studies include very little prison literature.

The still-tenuous canonization of U.S. working-class literature tends to center on public figures such as Eugene Debs, the near-mythological Joe Hill, or Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Few, if any, post-1930s imprisoned writers get represented as working-class writers. Other anthologies contain no prison literature.

Prison remains essentially outside narrative or editorial frames. This may have been due to an understandable Depression-era desire to emphasize the heroic qualities of labor in early constructions of proletarian or working-class literature, but that separation between two literatures is not tenable under the social conditions of mass incarceration.

In the published fiction, essays, and poetry emerging from a proliferation of prison writing workshops throughout the U.S., the prison-class demonstrates that it is an organic element of the working-class. By listening to America's prisons, working-class literature studies can discover a compelling range of voices.

—JOE LOCKARD

Associate Professor of English, ASU

Volunteer Creative Writing Teacher, Florence State Prison

Founder, Prison English / other ASU Prison Education Programming



Joe Lockard

The author wishes to thank participants in the poetry workshop at the East Unit of Florence State Prison for their many contributions to his better understanding.

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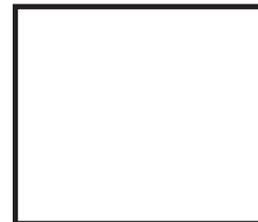
2. Pew Charitable Trusts, *Collateral Costs*, p. 3.

3. Pew Charitable Trusts, *Collateral Costs*, pp. 16-17.

4. US Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014*. Washington DC, 2015, pp. 12-14. Accessed May 15, 2016.

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CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS
BY AND FOR THE INCARCERATED