

Roundtable on Higher Education in Prisons
Re-Visioning Justice Conference
April 18, 2015
Vanderbilt Divinity School 122

Victoria Bryan: Introduction of Panel and session events

-need for training and education inside

Doran Larson: *Incarcerations Witnesses*

"In prison people know, had they done better in school, and had schools done better by them, they would not be where they are right now."

RAND study data:

-every dollar spent in education and training inside = 400% return for tax payer

-13.7% recidivism rate for those that earn college credit inside, yet in 1994

Bill Clinton made incarcerated persons ineligible for Pell Grants (Inside-Out Exchange currently seeking to restore)

Funding & support is difficult to find in order to programs, but necessary if we want to lower recidivism rates and restore humanity

Panelists:

- ∞ Richard Good: Lipscomb University, coordinator of LIFE programs
 - LIFE offers Associates and Bachelor's Degrees at Tennessee Women's Prison and Riverbend Maximum security
- ∞ Claudette Pittman: formerly incarcerated at TPW, took courses with LIFE on inside & outside
- ∞ Julie Doochin: TN Higher Education Initiative
 - TN Higher Education Initiative founded in 2012, opportunity for men to take college courses for credit, works in partnership with TDOC, NSCC, and various other colleges & universities
- ∞ Omari Booker: former program participant at Charles Bass
- ∞ Adam Shelby: former program participant at Charles Bass
- ∞ Andi Stepnick: Professor of Sociology at Belmont University, teaching in prisons since 2008
- ∞ Victoria Bryan: Cleveland State Community College faculty, taught with TN Higher Education Initiative for 2 years, currently runs book club for women at Bradley County Jail

Richard Good:

-Higher education at its best fulfills promise of liberation

-one trademark of liberally educated individual is intellectual curiosity, the ability to ask probing questions, and to follow questions where they lead

-liberated individual is Intellectually incapable of living quiet, compliant life, she is driven to study systems and structures,

- engages perennial questions of humanity

-possesses inspired heart

- desire to enter into beloved community
- inspired by beauty or lack thereof
- liberating arts animate committed hands
- liberated, liberally educated person helps keep humanity alive

Introduction of Claudette Pittman, valued member of LIFE program, committed student on Lipscomb campus.

- 1st insider at TPW to outside student attending class at TPW, therefore incarnation of hope
- build and sustain communities of inquiry and dialogue

Claudette Pittman

shares Lipscomb entrance essay from 2011, when still in inside

- comes from abuse
- unaware of self, thought of as a possession
- 21 years at TPW
- no support system -- hard time reintegrating
- October 2012 started in housekeeping, now assistant manager at same facility
- unaware of how many similarities in real world there are to prison: everyone lives in a prison, sometimes self built
- work 3 jobs, attend class, BA in Business Management, Human Resources, plans to pursue Masters

Julie Doochin:

- nuts and bolts of creating college prison program
- TN Higher Education Initiative, 501(c)3 founded in 2012
- quality degree bearing education in correctional facilities
- funds and coordinates college educations in prisons
- desires students achieve self-actualization

Phase I:

- model of Bard Prison Initiative
- Inside out program -- Temple program
- Scholarships to correctional staff/buy in for students (\$20)

Phase II: volunteering

- Vandy & Riverbend (not for credit)
- Belmont & Charles Bass

Phase III: political/strategic phase, networks, etc. connection to Lipscomb, TN dept of corrections, Nashville State,

IYO: youth offenders

Nashville State Community College and start as non-profit, to raise funds

Bard vision: looking at longer sentences, change sense of self
culture of learning, internet

NOW: college program at 2 programs: Charles Bass & Turney Center = 50 students, courses and credits through NSCC

re-entry pop, men 10-15 years

business education

cohort model, has technology with computers no internet

transitional support

118 earned college credit

4th year of program

Adam Shelby: 1st cohort at Charles Bass: fulltime student at NSCC, veteran, 7 years/18
selling/delivering cocaine, 4th generation incarcerated
2012 NSCC at Charles Bass, found self through interactions with others in class
never been around diverse group of guys in prison until class: social stratification in prison:
blacks w/ blacks, whites w/ whites, and gangs
english comp. intro to ethics
unique: color, gang, personality
honorary secretary/tutor of class
men debating tolstoy or talking of theories , learned from one another
most out now, regular guys w/ regular jobs
posting pictures on fb
want to change world around

Omari Booker: 1st cohort at Charles Bass: BA from TSU
liberating education: power of imagination
essential to prisons that there is no liberation education
follow rules, do orders
need inmates to fathom what is life without these things
working on college degree pre-incarceration
education as value was ingrained by family, but still ended up in prison
chance to learn at Charles Bass: not because there is a job outcome or grades outcome (15
year sentence) so learning only thing that mattered
proximity: networking on college campuses (other students, professors), need this network
to find jobs, stable structures, vs. the people they knew in prison who could not help
what is school doing for me today?
instead of goofing off or fighting, in a classroom, bettering self
learning how to learn and work in society
prison education classes is a chance , something to look forward to

Andi Stepnick:
started in 2007
what I wish I'd known: getting to know landscape, pedagogy, not re-inventing wheel, look
outside of your fields, theologians, sociologists, outside frameworks
proximity:
look at different models, including inside out model
choose the right partners, co-teachers, institutions
students inside and outside from belmont and american baptist u
book clubs
preparation, collaboration, evaluation – plan time for these
stress from working with TDOC, prison staff, university staff, etc.
difficulty in scheduling, obtaining resources
politics: “things will not go well,” but you will get a sense you’re moving in the right direction
– 2 steps forward, 1 step back
you cannot control everything: there by grace, expect frustration, just be there and envision
partnership instead of adversaries with prison staff
staff see you as a security threat, try and get into headspace of guards

outside politics: new gov = new commissioner, which could present new challenges to access, running programs
never-ending needs of community: students rearranged, not able to find them, political edge to teaching
what to expect at parole hearings
commit: marathon, not sprint, long term framework, hardest and best thing
balance course content with inspiration, motivation, time to laugh
have high expectations & hope
screening students & training outside students
reflect on what you're doing
honor failure & courage to try -- don't separate into good or bad, think about project as whole
craft culture of support and inclusion
be prepared to do emotion work: managing your own emotions and emotions of others
you will need renewal time—take time away

Victoria: 2 years experience, worked with TN Higher Education Initiative
Memoir class not for credit at Bradley County Jail
only purely educational program without connection to religion at Jail
Sheriff/director of programming didn't want her to work with men, experienced some sexism, other hurdles you have to jump in order to get in
what am i willing to give up to get in?
women minority in jails and often overlooked for programming: funders looking for "biggest return" why females get overlooked
book club with female pod & dorm- some of these women work in kitchen (only work available to women)
turnover too high for novels
photocopied short stories, essays, poems
women building mission statement:
"we read, we write, we talk, we listen, we don't interrupt, we welcome people" (religion, nationalities)creating vision board, come together to produce something tangible for future groups to use

Time for Q&A