



Conference 2021

Concurrent Paper Presentations – Day 2 - Session 3 Track A – Equity and Inclusion

12:15 – 1:15

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87447930712?pwd=VzlvNWVlOHBLUWQ1WXliY3BNejZTUto9>

Building a Statewide Network of Formerly Incarcerated Students in Washington Michelle Burchett & Steven A. Simmons

In our presentation, we will be examining the development of the Washington State Student Council on Reentry. We will look at the beginning conversations that developed around Michelle receiving a grant from UW to pursue a community project, the interactions with non-student formerly incarcerated partners, the organizing ideas that were chosen and those that were not, the process of developing a group identity, and the current state of affairs in the group which are continuing to develop over the summer and until the Rise Up Conference event. Mission: As currently and formerly-incarcerated students, we seek not only to break barriers in pursuit of our own education and career goals, but to do the structural work necessary to create doorways where the barriers existed, so that future generations of formerly incarcerated persons can reenter our communities freely, to continue the work in new and more integrated efforts. Vision: We imagine a world where incarceration and recidivism are eliminated through the strengthening and healing of our communities. A world where access to existing resources is increased, new resources are developed, conditions of incarceration are improved, and where the economic and structural barriers to the successful social reintegration of formerly incarcerated peoples are dismantled.



Selling the Dream of Post-Incarceration Life: Education, Teacher / Prisoner, and Justice Work at Home and Behind Bars

Jason John Kahler

On September 19th, 2017, I reported to a low-security federal prison in the Midwest to begin serving a 41-month sentence for one count of possession of illegal pornography. In the years prior, I was a PhD candidate, then a graduate, and eventually a tenured Assistant Professor of English teaching writing at a small public university. In prison, I continued working in education, teaching in the GED program and volunteering to facilitate Poetry Writing and a National Novel Writing Month program through the institution's Adult Continuing Education program. After a little over two years, I was released to home confinement where I completed my sentence and began my five years of supervised release. My presentation will explore the role of prison education in adequately or inadequately preparing for students to live full, productive lives, obtain employment, assume community leadership roles, and establish new / improved personal relationships. I argue prison education systems are ill-equipped to prepare prisoners for much of what comes after the incarceration experience, and in many cases, society is not prepared to accept the story of rehabilitation that gets publicized by our criminal justice institutions. This piece will necessarily be informed by my experience as an educator / prisoner / prison teacher / re-entering citizen, a complicated and fractured identity that this chapter will, in part, attempt to describe. I will write in the form of autoethnography as I explore my time both working "for" the system while being "in" the system, and how I find paths for change now that I am (mostly) "out" of the system. In part, I will draw upon the journals I kept during my time away to describe what it means to sell education and the power it has in post-incarceration life while simultaneously hoping to take advantage of that power myself. As the call for proposals mentions, my chapter will investigate the permeability of the borders between teacher / student / prisoner / staff / probationer, and the challenges of maneuvering through those ecosystems when one lacks the power to make those moves on their own.



Where Are the Teachers Who Look Like Us? The Need to Increase Diversity in HEP

Lisette Bamenga

Instructors in higher education in prison (HEP) are predominantly white while the majority of the students they teach are Black and Latinx. Students benefit greatly from having teachers who look like them and have had similar experiences. Working in a women’s correctional facility, where many of the students have suffered some trauma prior to their incarceration, the process of instilling self-esteem and a sense of self-worth is just as important as the education we provide. Having professors of color who possess advanced degrees also serves as a confirmation that education opens doors and provides the students with a perspective that inspires them to feel like they can pursue advanced degrees as well. As a formerly incarcerated Black woman with a Master’s degree who is pursuing an Ed D, I feel it is my duty to expose the students in the program to civilians who can relate to their situation. If students feel they have a place in society, they will be more likely to be civically engaged and become change agents in their community. In this presentation, I will describe my outreach to increase diversity in my HEP program by recruiting minority professors as well as instructors who have had legal system involvement. This topic fits well with the scope of the conference which is to center the voice of systems impacted individuals and decolonize and eradicate the racism that exists in the field of higher education in prison.



Conference 2021

Concurrent Paper Presentations – Day 2 - Session 3 Track B - Advocacy

12:15 – 1:15

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84395974813?pwd=eERvYWRLenNhYU1pakdWbzFrUVJCUT09>

Earn Your Seat At the Table

Sheryl Recinos, MD

Formerly incarcerated people need access to educational opportunities to give them an opportunity to live freely, independently, and reduce their chances for re-incarceration. This talk will focus on ways to increase educational access for juveniles and adults during and post-release. The importance of mentorship and networking will be discussed. Current advocacy issues will be addressed, including “ban-the-box” and restoration of Pell Grants.

Is Our Job Finished after the Four-Year Degree?: A Community Discussion

Jarrold M. Wall

This presentation would be a community discussion about what our mission in HEP should be. The mission, of course, is to provide quality education and equitable opportunity for retention, success, and completion of a four-year degree. Yet does our mission end with the four-year degree? Some individuals earn their degree right before release; others have years remaining to serve. Should we accept responsibility for further programming opportunities post-graduation? Former students discuss how their “bid” changes after college, both for good (able to procure better paying clerical positions; able to enjoy better reading and the life of the mind) and for bad (a return to the ennui and doldrums of prison after the continual barrage of new ideas, challenges, and attainable goals; the lack of opportunity to use their education). Should we only be concerned about new and current crops of students? What about those who graduate and remain incarcerated? If time allows, we could consider other forms of social justice, such as Occupational Therapy’s “Occupational Justice,” which provides “occupational enrichment”—meaningful activities, roles, and relationships—as an antidote to “occupational deprivation” (lack of meaningful activities, roles, and relationships), commonly suffered by prisoners and other populations as noted in the OT literature. Rather than returning individuals to occupational deprivation, how can we provide occupational enrichment with further post-degree opportunities? As educators, is it our responsibility to continue to provide opportunities for our



former students? What current examples exist? Some are: History Project, Think Tank, Participatory Action Research. What are others?

Frontiers of Justice: Men and Women Proposing policies during COVID

Carlos Ivan Calaff, Wilfredo Laracuente, Deb Soule, Charles Watson

The presentation will feature policy proposals developed by students (four women and four men) participating in college-in-prison classes offered by Columbia University in partnership with Hudson Link during COVID. Students identify issues that they care deeply about and over the course of the semester develop these ideas into concrete proposals for policy change. This conference provides the opportunity to demonstrate how the lived experience of incarcerated students can and should inform the policies that shape their lives and those of their families and the justice system more broadly. While the focus will be on showcasing students' policy proposals, examples of how this educational approach promotes policy and pedagogical innovation beyond the prison classroom will be discussed.