



BU's Prison Education Program: A Legacy of Social Justice

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Elizabeth “Ma” Barker

1912-2001



Prisons that don't help people change their lives aren't tough on crime. They are tough on society.

Timeline

- 1972 – present MCI-Norfolk
- 1989 – 2005 Bay State Correctional Center
- 1991 – present MCI-Framingham



Degrees Awarded 1990-2019

Gender	MLA	BA	BS	BLS	Total
Male	28	0	47	265	340
Female	0	1	3	59	63
Total	28	1	50	324	403

Course Offerings – Spring 2020

MCI-Norfolk	MCI-Framingham
MET HI332 – Contemporary History of Europe	MET EN127 - The American Experience Through Short Stories, Essays, and Novels
MET PY211 – General Physics	MET CJ501: Special Topics: Mass Incarceration
MET SOC201 – Research Methods	MET HI332 – Contemporary History of Europe
PH155-Politics and Philosophy	MET MU118 Music Appreciation
MET PO501-Special Topics: Introduction to Comparative Politics	
MET PO315-American Political Culture	

Course Offerings – Fall 2020

MCI-Norfolk	MCI-Framingham
MET AS102 - Astronomy	MET AH380: Special Topics - Women and Art
MET SO335 - Technology, Environment, and Society	MET IS400 Great Ideas
MET MA118- Algebra	MET IS401 - Communication Skills
MET MG410 - Entrepreneurship	MET MG305 - Principles of Marketing

Recidivism among Students in the Boston University Prison Education Program from 1990 to 2017

- descriptive analysis of students who participated in the Boston University Prison Education Program from 1990 to 2017
- to determine the recidivism (rate of reoffending) of participants
- recidivism is defined as reincarceration after three years of release from custodial supervision (imprisonment, parole, and probation)

Participants are defined as:

Students who were enrolled in the Prison Education Program:

1. completed the Metropolitan College degree while in custody (n=393)
2. completed the degree post release on the Charles River Campus (n=26)
3. did not complete the Metropolitan College degree (n=798)

Studies

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

- Jillian Baranger, Danielle Rousseau, Mary Ellen Mastroilli, and James Matesanz

Learning From Teachers: A Needs Assessment of Faculty in Postsecondary Correctional Education

- Anne Weaver, Danielle Rousseau, Amanda J.G. Napior

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

Methodology

- Survey
- Qualitative Interviews

Participants

- Students (4)
 - Women who participated in post secondary education while incarcerated
- Faculty (3)

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

- Student Demographics
 - Average age 46
 - Range of enrollment 1994-2014
 - Educational outcomes
- Faculty Demographics
 - All men
 - Average age 62

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

Student Survey Findings that PEP

- Had positive impact on their lives
- Benefited the prison community
- Positively impacted behavior in institution
- Improved reentry
- Witnessed positive changes in other participants
- Mixed findings on connection to employment

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

Faculty Survey Findings

- Improved employment (either obtaining or maintaining a job)
- Relationships post release
- Motivation for other goals
- Faculty relationships positively impact reentry
- Increased confidence with program

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

Qualitative Findings - Institutional Environment

- Change in environment
 - Surround selves with others who had similar goals
 - Structured schedule
- Behavioral change
 - Fewer disciplinary issues
 - Less fighting
 - Not wanting to lose programming

“You know, it gave like a structure to the days and I think a sense of accomplishment and everything was goal-oriented in a place where you’re like kind of just floating and you know there’s nothing . . .”

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

Qualitative Findings – Communication and Study Skills

- Improved communication
- Faculty as models for communication and positive connection

professors treated them as “serious students . . . especially in an environment that is infantilizing and filled with powerlessness and arbitrary authority. To be dealt with, not just like a grown up, but a serious person with development and something to contribute.”

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

Qualitative Findings – Social Relationships

- Meaningful connections within institution
 - Increased cultural capital within institution
 - Improved self-perception
 - Encouraging others to join program
- Tool for reconnection with family

“You’re doing time . . . why don’t you do it wisely? . . .”

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

Qualitative Findings – Self-perception and self-confidence

- Improved critical thinking, perseverance
- Program as empowering

“I always thought, well something must be wrong with me, you know? . . . today I know that . . . I am capable and I am qualified of doing anything that I put my mind to.”

Doing Time Wisely: The Social and Personal Benefits of Higher Education in Prison

Qualitative Findings – Re-entry

- Need for additional resources
- Education as only one “piece of the puzzle”
 - Housing
 - Employment
 - Mental health services
 - Medical services
- Need for supports for continued education

“The women who participate in higher education, probably tend to participate in other programs more regularly than do some of the other prisoners. So there’s probably a whole constellation of programming plus personal predisposition.”

Learning From Teachers: A Needs Assessment of Faculty in Postsecondary Correctional Education

Methodology

- 26-item survey
- Completed by 14 PEP faculty (of 25)
- Education
 - JD (1)
 - PhD (8)
 - In doctoral program (1)

Participants

- 71.3% white
- 64.3% male
- Age range
 - 30-39 (7)
 - 50-59 (1)
 - 60-69 (5)
- Teaching experience (non-carceral/carceral)
 - Over 11 years (5/4)
 - 6-10 years (1/1)
 - 3-5 years (4/2)
 - 1-2 years (2/2)
 - No experience (2/5)

Learning From Teachers: A Needs Assessment of Faculty in Postsecondary Correctional Education

Motivational influences:

- (1) teaching incarcerated students as a form of social justice/activism
- (2) helping incarcerated students achieve their educational goals
- (3) helping incarcerated students lower their recidivism rates

Learning From Teachers: A Needs Assessment of Faculty in Postsecondary Correctional Education

Qualitative Theme – Faculty experience and perspectives

- Teaching viewed positively
- Faculty would teach again
- Teaching was enjoyable
- Teaching as transformative

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One teacher wrote that teaching college in prison “has been one of the transformational teaching experiences of my career in terms of student enthusiasm, curiosity and commitment to course work.”

Learning From Teachers: A Needs Assessment of Faculty in Postsecondary Correctional Education

Qualitative Theme – Student engagement

- Students very engaged
- More engaged than non-carceral students
- Students demonstrated gratitude for participation
- Some indication of men as more engaged

“In general I think the men at Norfolk work a little harder than the women at Framingham—or at least a higher percentage of them put their all into it.”

Learning From Teachers: A Needs Assessment of Faculty in Postsecondary Correctional Education

Qualitative Theme – Institutional challenges

- Policy challenges
- Lack of access to students and resources
- Institutional disruptions

“The major impact is having less class time each week because of the delayed entry process.”



“I’m astonished at the inflexibility and sometimes even the Kafkaesque absurdity of the DOC rules! (They seem almost comically puritanical and totalitarian sometimes, especially applied to the women’s population at Framingham.) But I’m glad that the DOC educational staff is so great. And the guards at Framingham can be good too. Fortunately, it’s been a long time since repeated bad experiences with an unwelcoming and resentful Norfolk OIC (officer in charge) made me wonder where they got those folks. Overall, it becomes clear that teaching within a carceral setting brings with it unique challenges that faculty need [to] be aware of and prepared for.”

Policy Challenges



“I am teaching a Botany course—and it would be amazing to have a lab section where students could explore plant parts etc. . . . however, it has worked out better than I would have thought without a lab. Norfolk is more limiting than Framingham in my experience—initially they would not allow PowerPoint presentations which would have made teaching botany without a lab very difficult because it is so visual . . . but then they allowed us to use PowerPoint. . . this helped a lot!”

Lack of access to students and resources

Learning From Teachers: A Needs Assessment of Faculty in Postsecondary Correctional Education

Qualitative Theme – Program perspectives

- Desire for support and resources from administrators, especially among new faculty
- Support regarding policies and procedures
- Some felt it was “too late”
- Benefit of mentors for new faculty
- Ongoing connection
- Forum for issues

“I would have appreciated the opportunity to meet other faculty as well as BU PEP administrators.”

Recommendations for Best Practices

- Collaborative relationships with DOC
- Collaborative relationships with support programs
- Material provision and access
- Robust training
- Collaborative relationships between faculty and program staff
- Mentorship and support for new faculty



Questions?

Connect

BU Prison Education Program
<http://sites.bu.edu/pep/>

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