Inside-Out Mission

Education through which we are able to encounter each other, especially across profound social barriers, is transformative and allows problems to be approached in new and different ways.

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program increases opportunities for men and women, inside and outside of prison, to have transformative learning experiences that emphasize collaboration and dialogue, inviting participants to take leadership in addressing crime, justice, and other issues of social concern.

By studying together and working on issues of crime, justice, and related social concerns, those of us inside and outside of prison can catalyze the kinds of changes that will make our communities more inclusive, just, and socially sustainable.

Inside-Out Supporters

- The Ford Foundation
- The After Prison Initiative of the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation)
- The Brook J. Lenfest Foundation
- The Chace Granting Group
- The Douty Foundation
- The Gulati Family Foundation
- The Kalliopeia Foundation
- The Patricia Kind Family Foundation
- The Phoebus Criminal Justice Initiative (Bread and Roses Community Fund)
- The Threshold Foundation (Restorative Justice Funding Circle)
- The Vital Projects Fund
- An Anonymous Foundation
- An Anonymous Major Donor

The Inside-Out Center

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“It’s so important that people can talk to and understand each other. What Inside-Out is doing is letting people see each other, and really talk. That’s the value of education. Bringing young people into prisons for classes means that they really meet each other. They hear each other’s stories and see each other as real people. That’s so important in creating justice in this world.”

– Sister Helen Prejean
Author of Dead Man Walking

“Inside-Out should come with a warning label – in big black and yellow letters: Warning: may cause severe damage if taken internally. We have seen, first hand, the kind of damage the program can do to preconceived notions, stereotypes, and most importantly – ignorance. ... Inside-Out has acted, for many of us, as a kind of eye-exam for the soul, forcing us to realize what we believe and why we believe it. And we now realize that our vision was never 20/20. We leave here with a little better vision.” (Outside Student)

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“If you don’t already know about the Inside-Out program, check it out and get involved! It’s so important that we end the separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – those labeled ‘prisoners, criminals, felons.’ It is this separation and demonization of the ‘others’ – and our failure to truly see, hear, and engage with those who have been locked up and locked out – that makes it easy for us to remain in deep denial about what we, as a nation, have done. Inside-Out challenges that denial in a powerful way.”

– Michelle Alexander
Author of The New Jim Crow:
Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

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“The wall isn’t there just to keep me in, but to keep you out.”

– Tyrone W.
(former inside participant)
The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, founded in 1997, was based on the simple hypothesis that incarcerated men and women and college students might mutually benefit from studying crime, justice, and related social issues together as peers. Participants in that first course, and every subsequent course, have said that Inside-Out was not simply another learning experience -- it transformed the way they viewed themselves and the world.

Inside-Out has become a movement, driven by students, incarcerated women and men, and college and university instructors trained to design and teach Inside-Out courses in their own subject areas. In turn, these instructors have become advocates within their schools and correctional systems for a model of prison-based, post-secondary education that is financially sustainable and an engine for both short- and long-term change in the justice system and in their communities.

Inside-Out creates a dynamic partnership between institutions of higher learning and correctional systems in order to deepen the conversation about crime, justice, freedom, inequality, and other issues of social concern.

Moving beyond the walls that separate us...

Inside-Out brings college students together with incarcerated men and women to study as peers in a seminar behind prison walls. The core of the Inside-Out Program is a semester-long academic course, meeting once a week, through which 15 to 18 'outside' (i.e.: undergraduate) students and the same number of 'inside' (i.e.: incarcerated) students attend class together inside prison. All participants read a variety of texts and write several papers; during class sessions, students discuss issues in small and large groups. In the final month of the class, students work together on a class project.

Through college classes and community exchanges, individuals on both sides of prison walls are able to engage in a collaborative, dialogic examination of issues of social significance through the particular lens that is the 'prism of prison.' Inside-Out creates a paradigm shift for participants, encouraging transformation and change agency in individuals and, in so doing, serves as an engine for social change.

Inside-Out brings people together to share learning experiences in which each person is continually reminded of his or her own humanity as stereotypes dissolve, layer after layer. Each interaction gives us the opportunity to encounter each other and to recognize differences and similarities in experiences, perspectives, and beliefs. By sustaining the practice of listening and seeing more deeply, Inside-Out creates a temporary but significant place for us to invite forth our own and others' best selves and inspires us to create more such places in the world.

Training Institute

Inside-Out is a model of transformative education. Its unique pedagogical approach focuses on change for everyone involved: college students, prison participants, as well as the instructor facilitating the class. Inside-Out has a growing national network of instructors who are taking this pedagogy forward in their own areas, both in geography and discipline. It is very exciting to see this expanding national and international body of instructors take shape, as each new instructor brings a unique insight to the practice of the Inside-Out teaching model.

As of August 2014:

• 550 instructors from 40 states, 3 Canadian provinces, and abroad have taken part in one of 37 International Inside-Out Instructor Training Institutes.
• Scores of classes in the Inside-Out model are being offered every semester throughout North America each year – through small liberal arts colleges, community colleges, and large research universities – in county jails, state prisons, and community correctional facilities – in a range of disciplines, including the humanities, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, history, criminal justice, public speaking, political science, urban studies – and the list goes on.
• Nearly 20,000 inside and outside students have taken an Inside-Out class at last count. As one instructor commented: “The experience has highlighted the transformative value... of combining intellectual, emotional and experiential learning. I have expanded my capacities and deepened my knowledge as an instructor and as a human being.”

Upcoming Trainings in 2015

Dates are tentative. For the latest information, go to: www.insideoutcenter.org

• Training #39: May 16 to 22 – Michigan
• Training #40: June 15 to 21 – Philadelphia
• Training #41: July 20 to 26 – Philadelphia