



OAI 2018 Innovation in Teaching Award Winner

About the Award

The 2018 OAI Innovation in Teaching Award honors faculty who have implemented outstanding innovative teaching approaches shown to increase student learning and success. Innovative teaching is defined broadly and may include the use of new instructional technologies, the use of traditional technologies in creative ways, novel approaches to instruction, and new ways to engage students in the learning process.

In judging each award, a campus-wide Award Review Committee also asked:
To what extent did each project demonstrate a positive impact(s) on teaching effectiveness, student learning, supporting diverse student learners, student readiness, and/or retention rates?

To what extent did each project address current teaching and learning trends, research, practices, issues, and/or Towson University's Presidential Priorities?

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

Faculty Winners

Dr. Elyshia Aseltine, Associate Professor, SOAN/CJ

Dr. Michelle Manasse, Professor, SOAN/CJ

Project

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (CRMJ 475) is a unique opportunity for Towson University students to study the criminal justice system from inside a jail, with incarcerated men/women as their fellow students. This pedagogical approach is based on a national model developed at Temple University, and more than 300 Inside-Out courses have now been taught throughout the United States and abroad.

The core of the Inside-Out Program is a semester-long academic course, through which "outside" (i.e.: undergraduate) students and the same number of "inside" (i.e.: incarcerated) students attend class together inside a correctional institution to learn together as peers. Participants read a variety of texts and write reflective/analytical papers; during class sessions, students discuss issues in small and large groups. In the final month of the class, students work collaboratively on a group project (e.g. designing a model jail facility).

Innovative Approach

Since visitors are prohibited from bringing in any electronic devices, teaching inside correctional facilities necessarily requires a low-tech approach. The "innovation" of Inside-Out comes entirely from the instructional environment and instructors' pedagogical approach.

Inside-Out is an opportunity for college students to go beyond textbooks and behind jail/prison walls to reconsider what they have come to know about crime and justice. Although many of our students expect to work in the criminal justice field, most have not been inside a correctional facility or spoken directly with an incarcerated individual. The experience of Inside-Out therefore provides unparalleled experiential learning; every week the "outside" students process into the jail, interact with correctional officers, experience the "inside" students' living environment, and discuss the functioning of the criminal justice system with individuals actively enmeshed in it. As one "outside" student reflected: "Inside-Out has meant a lot to me. It is not just another class, because it actually puts you in a position outside school. It is really important for students to bridge the gap between book learning and real-world learning."

At the same time, Inside-Out is also an opportunity for incarcerated individuals to place their life experiences in a larger theoretical framework. In many ways, the "inside" students are experts on the criminal justice system, but they are often so alienated from conventional society that they perceive their voices to be irrelevant to criminal justice reform. Inside-Out allows them to be equal participants in the exchange of knowledge, and their contributions to course discussion are often detailed and profound. As one Inside student reflected: "That class has meant a lot to me. You guys treated us as if we were really people and not inmates. Best two days of the week. Best college class."

As such, Inside-Out creates a paradigm shift for all participants, encouraging personal transformation and an increased sense of agency, thereby serving as an engine for social change.

Impact

Inside-Out responds to the need for prison-based education programs (see below), thereby lessening the burden on local correctional institutions and supporting the needs of incarcerated men and women about to reenter society, all while exposing Towson students to the realities of incarceration and the broader criminal justice system.

As instructors we have noticed consistent patterns in student learning and personal growth as a result of the Inside-Out program. Participants develop a deeper and more complex understanding of the causes of crime and our societal response to it. They express greater compassion for those who are different from themselves and a stronger sense of their own ability to create change. However, the students' own words best express these impacts:

1) A deeper understanding of diverse perspectives/experiences

"Inside-Out has basically changed the way I look at life overall. People from all walks of life can wind up in all sorts of places. After taking this class, it would feel unjust to ever judge someone again. This class has opened my eyes to the complexity of people and the strangeness of life."

"Inside-Out was the most eye-opening experience I have had; it has changed me for the better and opened my eyes to issues and ideas within the criminal justice system that I had not thought of before."

2) Translation of theoretical concepts into real-world applications:

"...this class allows us as criminal justice majors to go into an environment where we had the opportunity to experience the criminal justice system in action and the impacts that the system has on people's lives. This class is tangible proof of what the criminal justice has done both correctly and incorrectly."

"I enjoyed taking this class this semester and I hope to use the knowledge and insight that I learned and apply it to my other classes and my career as a probation officer. The lessons we learned could not be taught to us in a textbook by a professor lecturing us and that is what makes this class so unique and special."

3) Student readiness:

"The program meant accomplishment to me. Completing the program has given me motivation to go back to school and do better."

"I entered thinking this would be a "resume-builder". I left wondering how I could get back in and how I could make this experience my life work."

"It has provided me with a sense of duty and purpose, it has given and sustained a passion and pushed me into a career of service, to change the way the world operates and how we see it."

4) Recognizing the value of all people/perspectives:

"Inside-Out has meant giving humanity back to women who have had their dignity and femininity stripped."

"I will hold the stories, thoughts, and ideas from the Inside-Out experience close to my heart and remember them as I move on and further my career in criminal justice."

"Thank you all for treating us equally, and not as just inmates."

Connection with Current Teaching and Learning Trends, Research, and University Goals

Research on prison education programs suggests that higher education in prison reduces recidivism, saves taxpayers money, and improves the broader communities to which formerly incarcerated individuals return. Specifically, in 2001, the Correctional Education Association's "Three State Recidivism Study" found that correctional education lowered long-term recidivism by 29 percent, while a 2005 report from the Institute for Higher Education Policy found recidivism rates for incarcerated people participating in prison education programs were (on average) 46% lower than those who had not participated in such programs. Yet, funding for such programs is increasingly scarce and often depends on the efforts of volunteers.

As stated above, Inside-Out directly responds to this need for prison-based education programs and does so in a manner that:

- 1) Supports local correctional institutions in efforts to rehabilitate offenders and reduce crime;
- 2) Exposes Towson students to experiential learning directly related to their career aspirations;
- 3) Challenges both "inside" and "outside" participants to dialogue and collaborate in a diverse group;
- 4) Inspires and Empowers participants to act as change agents in their lives, their workplaces, and social institutions perpetuating inequity.