



Metropolitan State partners with the national Inside-Out program

The School of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice has held two successful classes at the Dakota County Law Enforcement Center. The Inside-Out program brings college students and correctional inmates together in a seminar setting to study criminal justice issues.

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is a dynamic partnership between institutions of higher learning and correctional systems. It is designed to deepen the conversation about and transform approaches to understanding crime, justice, freedom, inequality and other issues of social concern.



Metropolitan State University joined this national program because it brings college students together with incarcerated men and women to study as peers in a seminar behind prison walls. Inside-Out provides a life-altering experience that allows the outside students to contextualize and rethink what they've learned in traditional classrooms. They gain insights that will help them be better, more compassionate criminal justice professionals who are better prepared to pursue the work of creating a more humane and effective criminal justice system. Inside-Out allows the inside students to rekindle their interest in learning and regain their intellectual self-confidence. It encourages them to recognize their ability to act as agents of change – in their own lives as well as in the broader community, both inside the jail and out.

The inmates and students attend class together inside the jail and are required to read a selection of books on issues on social justice and write several papers. Everyone in the class discusses issues in small and large groups and ultimately works together on class projects. Two classes have now been successfully completed wherein students from Metropolitan State University learned alongside students from the jail. Students completed class projects that developed life-skills programming options for the jail as well as ways to promote Inside-Out and encourage other facilities and institutions of higher learning to get involved.

Nationally the Inside-Out program, since 2004, has held 250 classes. 7500 students have already participated as have some 200 instructors from over 120 colleges and universities in 35 states and several foreign countries.

Our first classes have been a stunning success. Here are just a few of the many testimonials:



“The Inside-out program has provided a diverse group of engaged citizens with a uniquely comfortable and intimate space for dialogue about the criminal justice system. Throughout the 15 class sessions, the topics of discussion ranged from policy and politics, to the concepts of punishment, crime, and victimization.

In addition, we investigated the myths and realities of life on the ‘inside,’ along with the effect of incarceration and crime on our communities.

Without a doubt, the readings, personal experiences, world views and perspectives of the inmates, Metropolitan State students, Dakota County jail programs staff, and professor, have led to rich class discussions. This class has forced us to examine our own assumptions, as well as critique and analyze our prejudices about crime and incarceration as they are portrayed in the media and enforced in our communities.”

~ Emily

Inside-Out has completely changed my perspective of the prison system and of those who are incarcerated. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to be a part of such an eye-opening experience.

-Amanda

I now have a deeper appreciation of what it must be like to be incarcerated, how difficult it must be to have freedoms taken away, and how difficult it must be to be away from loved ones and society. It is clear that the system has many problems so hopefully we can continue to work together to find some solutions that most of us can agree upon.

-Kristi

This class has inspired me to work hands-on with other inside students in the future.

-Leo

This class was a time to come together as equals and discuss the negatives and positives of our criminal justice system.

-Tina

The Inside-out class deals with more topics than “what is it like in jail”. Because of the one-on-one interactions that we had with the inside students we were able to really connect and have a wonderful experience.



By taking this class I have learned that every individual, regardless of their circumstances, is no different than anyone else. This class inspired me to take a deeper look within myself and not take the luxuries of life for granted.
-anonymous