

REPLY ID: i6pk

Bucknell University
Inside-Out Sociology Class

I want to talk about education in prison. It's a rare thing in Pennsylvania. In most prisons you can obtain a GED but schooling pretty much ends after that unless you have your own money to pay for college, OR, if you are lucky enough to be chosen to participate in an Inside-Out class. Well for reasons unknown to me, I was lucky enough to be chosen. After over 25 years in prison, I was given the opportunity to take a real life college class. And I want to say, at first, I was overwhelmed, intimidated, I felt out of place. Here I am in a room with 8 college girls who are young enough to be my daughter and they are so bright.

As we began the readings for the course, I was nervous that I would fail from the start. It took me a few classes until I felt like I belonged. At first I really didn't understand structural inequalities or what it really meant. But thanx to my teacher, Sociology Professor Karen Altendorf-Cheville, my Bucknell University classmates, Zoey, Dora, Maya, Caroline, Xochitl, Kirah, Izzy and Sammie, I learned so much from this class.

One of the most special parts of this class for me was how my outside classmates treated me. Like I was one of them. None of them cared that I was in prison for murder. They came in here and found the good in us and treated us as equals. Thats equality for you. These young women were not intimidated by the prison or convicts, they came in here ready to work, learn and form a bond in the classroom. As I got to know each of them, I saw them as I would see my daughter, who is just a few years older than they are. We shared stories, experiences, life goals and dreams. Professor Karen was very interactive with us. She made this experience so much easier with her lessons & advice. I leaned on her heavily at time. I am not dumb but I am not educated either. I have a GED but only a 6th grade education. Having a teacher who can guide and encourage me was extremely important. In prison in Pa, you go to school but it's self taught. You are given books and you teach yourself. Thats kind of difficult for me. This experience for me has changed my outlook on education. I am now looking for more. I am no longer pessimistic about it. There isn't much to do in prison. Jobs are scarce, they don't really teach you a real life job skill in here. But when you have the chance to learn, thats a rare opportunity and these young ladies made it alot easier. We will have a graduation ceremony on May 1st where they can bring in 1 guest and we can as well. I am sending my girlfriend to the 2nd chances Rally in Harrisburg 2 days prior so she

cannot take off of work for this again but even though I'll be solo, I am so very excited to celebrate and graduate with my classmates. I am also looking forward to meeting Zoey's grandpop "Coach". For these kids to come into a mens prison and take their sociology class along side of men who are mostly serving life sentences, and with no fear these kids were leaders in the class. Not just listening but also educating us. I cannot thank them enough. I also received alot of advice, support and encouragement from my inside fellow classmates. I couldn't have done it without them. If anyone in any college in America reads this, Please know how important education in prison is. There is a sense of Normalcy in it and we grow as we learn. If you are in Bucknell University, get involved. Sign up for a college course inside of a prison. It is life changing. I don't know how the actual graduation ceremony will go but I do know that thanx to Bucknell University, I will have garlic knots for the 1st time in my life, I will enjoy a celebration meal with my classmates and as a man sentenced to death by incarceration, I just wanted to say, Thank you. Thank you for seeing me as who I am today and not as the 21 yr old who took a mans life. Thank you for supporting me and helping me. A part of the program is we are not allowed to know the kids last names. So I will never know if they see this or not but if they do, Thank you for making this experience for me such a positive one. These 8 young women have such good hearts and goals in life. They will go on to do great things helping society. Thank you to Between the Bars for being so dedicated to this platform for prison writers. We cannot do this alone. Take care and thank you. Forever Grateful, Rob, Prison Dad

PS: If you are reading this Father John, I was blessed to have connected with the Catholic Bishop of the Harrisburg, PA diocese, Most Reverend Timothy Senior. And we hope to get the Catholic church involved in the fight for 2nd chances and finding redemption in Pennsylvania.