

Saint Louis University Prison Program

Talking Points

Q: What is the Saint Louis University Prison Program?

A: The SLU Prison Program provides access to quality higher educational opportunities for incarcerated people and prison staff in Missouri and Illinois. These opportunities include both credit-bearing college courses and not-for-credit educational experiences.

Q: What is the history of the SLU Prison Program?

A: In 2008, the Prison Program offered a Certificate in Theological Studies at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre, MO. In 2011, at the urging of the Missouri Department of Corrections, the Program began offering a fully accredited Associate of Arts degree to prison employees and incarcerated people and the Prison Arts & Education Program, which provides humanities-based workshops and a speaker series for the entire prison community. In 2015, the first cohort of students graduated from the Associate of Arts Degree Program. In 2016, the Program has expanded programming to include the College Preparatory Program at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre, MO and at a second facility, the Federal Correctional Institution in Greenville, IL.

Q: What programming is offered by the Prison Program?

A: The **Associate of Arts Degree Program** offers SLU classes to prison employees and incarcerated people, taught on-site by SLU faculty, staff and graduate students. The 61 credits earned in the program culminate in an Associate of Arts degree from Saint Louis University. The **College Preparatory Program** offers pre-college courses for incarcerated people to prepare them for future college experiences in prison or upon release. The **Prison Arts & Education Program** provides intellectually stimulating workshops and a speaker series that foster human connection, an appreciation for the arts and resources for personal growth.

Q: What is the Associate of Arts Degree Program?

A: The Associate of Arts Degree Program offers credit-earning courses to currently incarcerated people and DOC employees at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Missouri, ultimately culminating in an Associate of Arts degree from SLU. This liberal arts education opportunity allows students to study various aspects of society, culture and the entire human condition; improve their comprehension, speaking, and writing skills; and think critically about their past, formation, and transformation during the program and their future.

Q: What is the curriculum for the Associate of Arts Degree Program?

A: The curriculum is modeled after the Core Curriculum of the College of Arts & Sciences. Students take core courses in: Communication, Fine and Performing Arts, English, History, Math, Philosophy, Theology and Science and various elective courses offered by departments in the College of Arts and Sciences.

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Q: When do classes meet and how many years are students in the program?

A: Two cohorts of 20 students each take courses that operate on a nine-week term and are convened once per week, for four hours at a time. Students take a total of five classes per year. To complete the total 61 credit hours required for the degree, each cohort remains in the program for approximately four years.

Q: Do staff and incarcerated students take courses in the same classroom?

A: No. Staff students and incarcerated students use the same curriculum, and both classes are taught on-site at the prison, but by different faculty in separate classrooms.

Q: Does any other prison in the country offer a degree program for staff?

A: No. The SLU Prison Program is the only program in the country offering an on-site college degree program for prison staff.

Q: Who teaches classes in the Associate of Arts Degree Program?

A: All courses are taught by SLU faculty, adjunct faculty, or advanced graduate students.

Q: What degree do students earn in the program?

A: Students graduate with an Associate of Arts degree from Saint Louis University. The diploma that Prison Program students receive is the same diploma awarded to students on the St. Louis and/or Madrid campus of Saint Louis University.

Q: Can Prison Program students enroll in a B.A. program on the St. Louis campus?

A: Currently, a transition plan does not exist for students in the Associate of Arts program. A goal of the Prison Program is to be able to support our staff students and incarcerated students upon release to enter B.A. programs at SLU.

Q: What is the Prison Arts & Education Program?

A: The Prison Arts & Education Program provides access to arts and humanities experiences to incarcerated people, prison staff, and community members at the facilities at which we operate. Components of the program include a speaker series; drawing, writing, and communication workshops; a video project; an annual theatrical and visual arts show; and a colloquium at which various members of the Program engage in dialogue about the prison in a transformed state.

Q: What is the College Preparatory Program?

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A: The College Preparatory Program prepares incarcerated people for future college experiences. A cohort of no more than 20 students takes noncredit classes, led by SLU faculty, to develop their collaborative learning and study skills. The students from this program either matriculate into the Associate of Arts Degree Program or will be better prepared for a college degree program upon their release.

Q: How many people are served by the Prison Program each year?

A: Currently, the Associate of Arts Degree Program at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Missouri, enrolls 40 students—20 incarcerated people and 20 DOC employees—every four years. The goal of the Prison Program is to expand to enrolling students every two years. The College Preparatory Program at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center enrolls 20 students every two years. The College Preparatory Program at the Federal Correctional Institution in Illinois enrolls 40 students every year. The Prison Arts & Education Program, at both facilities, serves approximately 120 participants a month.

Q: Why college in prison for incarcerated men and women?

A: The Saint Louis University Prison Program contributes to creating a world where everyone, regardless of the nature of involvement with the criminal justice system, has access to quality and sustainable higher educational opportunities. Education in prison is transformative and the skills developed through pre-college and/or college coursework create a more socially just living and working environment inside the prison, make possible employment opportunities that would otherwise not be available, are a preventative to returning to prison, and provides transformative learning experiences for students, teachers, family members and everyone who comes in contact with the program.

Q: Why college in prison for Department of Corrections staff?

A: The Prison Program approaches the prison as a holistic environment where everyone is “serving time,” some in consecutive months and years, and some in eight hours shifts. For prison staff, access to education and advancement opportunities in employment remains limited. With few campuses in rural communities, as the cost of college tuition rises, and as wages stagnate, the chances of prison employees attending college diminish. Offering staff opportunities to develop the prosocial and intellectual skills that are the hallmark of a liberal arts education can transform their lives and benefit the daily experiences of the incarcerated men and women they supervise.

Q: How many college-in-prison programs exist across the country?

A: There are approximately 200 higher education in prison programs across the country; each different in its size, history, academic focus, and approach. Compared to other programs, the SLU Prison Program is unique. We are the only program in the country that offers on-site degree

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programs to both incarcerated individuals and prison staff. We were the first and are now one of only two college-in-prison programs in the state of Missouri. We are one of a few college-in-prison programs in the country working in both State and Federal facilities and that is working in two different states.

Q: Where does the Prison Program currently operate?

A: The Prison Program offers programming in two facilities: 1. the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre, MO—a state institution housing approximately 2,500 men, and approximately 600 staff, in a maximum security institution; and 2. the Federal Correctional Institution in Greenville, IL, which consists of two populations – approximately 1,000 adult men in a medium security prison and 350 adult women in a minimum-security camp.

Our administrative team, executive team, and advisory boards operate at Saint Louis University's main campus in St. Louis, MO.

Q: What are the admission requirements for the Associate of Arts Degree Program?

A: The general admission requirements include:

- A high school diploma or qualifying GED or HiSET score;
- Successful submission of an application, relevant transcripts, and an essay;
- Successful completion of an on-site interview with members of the Prison Program administrative team; and
- Staff applicants must be employed by the Missouri Department of Corrections.

Q: How much does programming cost for students?

A: In order to eliminate as many barriers to higher education as possible, our programming and all associated expenses are free to our students.

Q: Why should people in prison receive a free education?

A: We believe that all people deserve the opportunity to succeed academically and experience the social, personal, and cultural rewards offered by higher education. Most of the 2.2 million men and women incarcerated in the United States did not have access to quality educational opportunities prior to their incarceration. Because more than 95% of these men and women will return to the community, it is a benefit to everyone to offer them a first chance at high-quality education.

Q: How is the Prison Program funded?

A: The Prison Program receives generous support from Saint Louis University, the SLU College of Arts and Sciences, individual donors, philanthropic foundations, and corporations. By

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combining support from our community network, corporations, foundations, government sources, non-profit organizations, and individuals including faculty and staff of the Program, we are able to not only sustain ourselves but also continuously grow our programming.

Q: How can I donate to the SLU Prison Program?

A: To make a donation to the Prison Program, contact the Community Outreach Coordinator (Julie O’Heir at 314-977-3206 or uheirja@slu.edu) or visit our website at prisonprogram.slu.edu.

Q: How will my financial contribution be used?

A: Financial support is needed for general operating expenses, including: books and supplies for students, reimbursement for faculty mileage from St. Louis to each facility, salaries for incarcerated and staff teaching assistants, fees and travel costs for Speaker Series guests, and honoraria for Workshop leaders.

Q: How does the Prison Program evaluate success?

A: Because our program is still relatively new, and because many of our participants have yet to finish their time in prison, it is too early to see all of the effects of our programming on recidivism. However, we are already seeing positive results. Several staff and incarcerated students are now continuing their education after receiving the Associate of Arts degree. Program participants are serving others more than ever, both in and outside the prison. More books have been added to the prison library.

In addition to this feedback, we evaluate our courses on both an individual and degree level in order to ensure that we are providing high-quality, meaningful programming catered to the needs of our students.

Q: What is the Prison Program currently working on?

A: We are expanding our programming to a second facility, the Federal Correctional Institution in Greenville, IL. In keeping with our goal of being a mentor to other higher education institutions, members of our executive team consistently speak at conferences for and publish academic projects related to prison higher education, and our director is actively engaged in the formation of a national organization for higher education in prison. We are always working to raise funds to expand our work and are hopeful to have the resources to start another cohort of students in 2018.

Q: What can I do to get involved?

A: If you are interested in becoming a Prison Program faculty member for the Associate of Arts Degree or College Preparatory Programs, or if you are interested in becoming a part of the Prison

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Arts & Education Program as a Workshop leader or speaker, please contact the Prison Program Community Outreach Coordinator (Julie O'Heir at 314-977-3206 or ohairja@slu.edu).

One of the best ways you can contribute to our success is through financial partnership. To make a donation to the Prison Program, contact the Community Outreach Coordinator or visit our website at prisonprogram.slu.edu.