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## **Bard Prison Initiative brings award for college president**

By Jan Larraine Cox , Special to the Freeman

Bard College President Leon Botstein has won a prestigious national award from Pipeline Crisis/Winning Strategies Initiatives for his stewardship of the Bard Prison Initiative, which brings higher education to prisons, reducing recidivism.

The Bard College Prison Initiative was founded in 1999 by Max Kenner. Kenner, who graduated from Bard College in 2001, is now the program's director.

In July, Botstein was honored in New York City for his stewardship of the program.

A national effort called the Pipeline Crisis/Winning Strategies Initiative, which gave the award to Botstein, targets ways to tackle the barriers that limit the number of young black men in the "pipeline to higher education and professional endeavors."

"A college education dramatically reduces the rate at which students return to prison after release and spreads the benefits of higher education into many of New York's most isolated communities," Kenner said. "And it reduces crime, saves the states money, and offers the opportunity for incarcerated New Yorkers to use their time in a way that is productive for themselves and our communities."

Currently, Bard Prison Initiative offers a Bard College education inside five New York state prisons: the maximum security Green Haven, Eastern, and Elmira correctional facilities and the medium-security Woodbourne and Bayview correctional facilities. Bayview is one of five New York state prisons for women and is located in Manhattan.

Some 200 prisoners are now enrolled full-time in rigorous liberal arts courses. On June 4, Woodbourne Correctional Facility held the fourth commencement of the Bard Prison Initiative, and awarded the first Bard College bachelor's degree, in addition to associate's degrees.

Mark Primoff, Bard College spokesman, said of the Bard Prison Initiative program and recent award, "Reaching out to constituents beyond our campus is central to Bard's mission, and the Bard Prison Initiative is an ambitious and successful element of that mission."

Primoff continued, "The program not only serves an essential societal need, it also enriches the lives of students and faculty at Bard, many of whom volunteer to work with the Bard Prison Initiative. We're gratified to have received this recognition as it serves to reinforce the importance of projects such as this."

Of note, Bard alumni have helped to build similar volunteer prison education organizations across the country.

With support from a major three-year grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education, Bard is developing and offering a new curriculum on criminal justice and American civics to all its students, in particular those who volunteer with Bard Prison Initiative inside regional prisons.

Bard Prison Initiative is one of very few remaining college programs for the incarcerated, although college-in-prison programs effectively slashed rates of reincarceration from 60 percent to 15 percent over a 20-year period. The war on crime/tough on crime stance during 1995 eradicated national funding for prison colleges, ending 350 prison colleges nationwide.

Visit the Bard Prison Initiative Web site at [bard.edu/bpi](http://bard.edu/bpi) to read more about this topic and to view the CBS News 60 Minutes feature on Bard Prison Initiative, called "Maximum Security Education," which first aired on April 15, 2007.

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