

NYU Launches Prison Education Program Backed by Ford Foundation Grant

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New York University has launched an initiative to bring college education to incarcerated individuals at the Wallkill Correctional Facility, a medium-security prison in New York State's Ulster County.

Backed by a \$500,000 grant from the Ford Foundation, NYU's Prison Education Program (PEP) offers credit-bearing, university courses that will enable students to earn an Associate of Arts (AA) degree from the university.

"By expanding access to a university education to incarcerated students, the NYU Prison Education Program aims to help redress inequities that result from the fact that the United States incarcerates more people than any other nation in the world—over two million—the great majority of whom are poor, African American, and Latino," explains Nikhil Pal Singh, an associate professor in NYU's Department of Social and Cultural Analysis and faculty director of PEP.

"NYU PEP strives to link NYU more deeply to the diverse communities of New York City and to offer an example of how a university can serve its community while advancing new models for education and citizenship," adds Bryonn Bain, a visiting professor and artist-in-residence at NYU's Gallatin of Individualized Study and PEP's director for public affairs.

"Supporting high quality, postsecondary education programs in prisons is vitally important and will contribute in many ways to renewing communities, strengthening families and breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty," says Douglas E. Wood, program officer at the Ford Foundation on Higher Education for Social Justice.

"I'm extremely grateful to both the Ford Foundation and New York University for investing and establishing a college program at DOCCS," Acting DOCCS Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci says. "This private partnership will undoubtedly give inmates a second chance, future opportunities, and help break the cycle of re-incarceration. Since the central goals of replicating college behind bars are to prepare more inmates to be employable, to support their families, and to lead law-abiding lives both in their communities and behind the walls, the Ford Foundation and NYU have taken DOCCS one step closer to achieving these goals."

Beginning in the Spring 2015 semester, 36 men will take one of two NYU classes taught at the Wallkill facility, with up to three additional courses offered during the summer of 2015. Classes will be taught by NYU faculty and offer both intensive liberal arts study and introductory courses from NYU's professional schools.

Once released from prison, students enrolled in NYU PEP may seek to continue their college education at NYU or by transferring credits to another institution. This initiative will also include providing educational and employment counseling, community support for families, and other services such as legal assistance to address human rights, housing, and employment issues. The program is also working with the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions (CNUS), one of the nation's leading community-based organizations addressing post-prison release issues.

This semester, George Shulman, a professor in NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study, and Bain will co-teach "Critical Perspectives on Justice through Creative Writing"; Toral Gajarawala, associate professor of English in NYU's Faculty of Arts and Science, will teach "Literary Analysis and the Politics of Interpretation".

The leadership for this initiative arose from faculty and deans in NYU's College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and the Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

"NYU faculty and staff have worked for several years to develop this program driven by the belief that the university has a special obligation to provide educational opportunities to incarcerated individuals," says Gallatin Dean Susanne Wofford. "We're delighted that the Ford Foundation has generously supported the university in this effort."

"We at NYU are thrilled to be working to serve the people of New York State in this important way," adds CAS Dean Gabrielle Starr. "Our program will offer New Yorkers a strong foundation for a new life, and helps to offer families, communities, and individuals a safer, better, and more productive future."

NYU PEP is being coordinated with the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) and overseen by a steering committee composed of faculty from several NYU Schools: the College of Arts and Science, the Gallatin School of Individualized Study, the Silver School of Social Work, and the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. CNUS, the Program's community partner, is a nonprofit founded and developed by formerly incarcerated professionals.