

**When ‘Inside-Out’ Goes ‘Upside-Down’:
Teaching Students in a Jail Environment During the COVID Pandemic and Implications for the Use of Correctional Technology Post-Pandemic**

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Abstract: *The transient population of county jails pose unique challenges for program implementation and maintenance. This past year, the spread of COVID-19 substantially increased such challenges, particularly since most correctional institutions are opposed to using Internet-based technologies, such as Zoom, in the secure part of their institution. Although college programming is rare in most jails, Inside-Out type classes, which allow college students to take a credited course alongside the incarcerated in a correctional setting, is a great way to provide a missed opportunity for purposeful intervention for the incarcerated, while providing a unique experiential learning opportunity for traditional undergraduate students. Based on an Inside-Out class conducted during the first wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, this paper examines the challenges of providing such instruction during a statewide shutdown, with preliminary data suggesting that despite a change in instruction mid-semester due to COVID-19, innovative technological methods can be utilized to maintain program integrity if correctional administrators are amenable to its implementation. Even though inside/outside students could not remain in the same classroom for the entire semester, as the original program was intended, both groups of students still benefited from a modified pedagogical model. Implications suggest that such methods could be utilized to maintain the integrity of correctional-based programming (post COVID) when the physical presence of faculty is prohibited or hindered.*

Keywords: *Inside-Out, corrections, experiential learning, COVID-19, online education, correctional technology*

Introduction

Since the inception of the reformatory, educational programming has always been an important component of American correctional facilities (Gaes et al., 1999). Although data on the extent of college programming is available for prisons, little is known about its extent in jail facilities, where college programming appears rare. Jails have difficulty supporting long term programming because of their transient population, limited applicant pool, and the fact that they house all security levels (i.e., minimum, medium, maximum, etc.) (Link, 2016). It is unlikely that jails can offer a full course of study (such as an associate degree or higher) but they can offer individual classes (rather than a full degree program) to help incarcerated persons begin their college education and possibly alter their crime trajectory. Inside-Out courses, where traditional college students take a college course alongside incarcerated students in a correctional setting, is one effective way to provide college programming to those who are incarcerated; such programming is very effective in creating a unique learning experience for both inside and outside students (Pompa, 2013). In response to this need, Pace University partnered with the Westchester County Department of Correction (WCDOC) to develop, implement, and evaluate an *Inside-Out* course for incarcerated men/women and Pace undergraduate



students.

The WCDOC jail, like many institutions, unexpectedly went on lockdown mid-semester due to the Coronavirus pandemic, creating challenges for the delivery of educational services. The current paper will discuss the benefits derived from participating in one *Inside-Out* class, the challenges faced when New York State was forced into lockdown during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and how those challenges were addressed. An examination of future pedagogical possibilities, including a discussion of the technological impact on correctional education, will also be discussed. It was hypothesized that although there was a change in instruction mid-semester, the contact between Inside-Outside students, albeit limited, would still create a positive experience for both groups. Going forward, when there was time allotted for planning (i.e., between semesters), it was hypothesized that innovative technological methods could be utilized to maintain program integrity if correctional administrators were amenable to its implementation. With few college classes allowed to continue in correctional institutions during the pandemic, it provides a model for how such classes can be modified in instances when the professor cannot be physically present, allowing inside students to complete their coursework, without jeopardizing their ability to complete the course.

Literature Review

Most correctional institutions, which afford college programming for its residents, do not have an *Inside-Out* model, a model that demonstrates benefits for all involved students (Allred, 2009). The idea of bringing inside and outside students together originated between a lifer, Paul Perry, and Temple University's Lori Pompa, implementing their first session in 1997 (The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, n.d.)¹. Classes are offered in different disciplines, all over the world, from colleges and universities of different sizes to correctional populations of varying security levels (Pompa, 2013).

Inside-Out focuses on a model of equality; both student groups are treated the same by the instructor (Heider, 2018). Inside and outside students are contemporaries, often learning in a circle, with a vested interest in the learning process which essentially becomes "transformative" for the instructor and students (Pompa, 2013, p. 129). The collaborative work between students is an integral component of the course, allowing for the equal exchange of ideas. The interactions with one another helps to encourage growth and community building (Allred, et al., 2019). This model differs from traditional correctional-based college programming where all students are incarcerated or where outsiders come into the facility to impart their knowledge to the inside group (i.e., a power differential is clearly evident) (Inside-Out, n.d.). Research shows that when inside students learn with outside students, both groups tend to be more engaged in the course material, have more self-reflection, think more critically, and develop altered perceptions which help to counteract previously held stereotypes (Allred, 2009; Hilinski-Rosick & Blackmer, 2014; Long & Barnes, 2016; Martinovic et al., 2018). Outside students can learn in an environment (i.e., the jail setting) that helps them to understand the concepts they are discussing more deeply, while inside students have an insulated space that provides them brief separation from the rest of the correctional environment (Allred, 2009; Werts, 2013). This experience lessens the monotony, encourages interactions between inside and outside students and inspires in-depth discussions (Allred, 2009). Research finds that inside students gain more knowledge of the criminal justice system, while stereotypes held by outside students (i.e., incarcerated people are inherently bad people), as well as their view of the criminal justice system, is changed (Martinovic et al., 2018; Mishne et al., 2012). Outside students develop more positive views of the criminal justice system and hold less punitive attitudes toward the incarcerated (Philippan, 2018). There are statistically significant changes in their views when compared to those students not involved in *Inside-Out* programming (Wyant & Lockwood, 2018). Classes in criminal justice often discuss components of the system but they are missing interactions with the incarcerated; these classes allow students to know the population they will

1 Instructors are certified by completing a six-day training through the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program.

serve as future criminal justice professionals (Link, 2016), helping to prepare more competent professionals for the field.

Methods

Program Overview During COVID

This class consisted of 22 students. It was comprised of 11 inside students (consisting of two females and nine males) and 11 outside students (consisting of one male and 10 females) taking CRJ 242 – Crime & Public Policy - a three-credit enhanced writing course, focusing on criminological theory, from Pace University during the Spring 2020 Semester (15 weeks). This project was unique as it allowed Pace students to work with both incarcerated men and women simultaneously. The class took place at the WCDOC, a county jail located in Valhalla, NY, within the County of Westchester, a large suburb of New York City; it is the second largest jail in New York State. Students from both campuses (The NYC Campus and the Westchester campus) participated and were transported via shuttle from Pace's Westchester Campus to the jail site. Outside students were able to attend class at the jail for seven weeks before the jail closed to outside visitors for COVID-19. During the six weeks of instruction (the first week each group had a separate orientation before they were brought together), inside and outside students sat next to one another – sometimes in a circle and other times at smaller tables that faced the professor toward the front of the room. Each class required inside and outside students to work together in small groups on various projects – most class activities were integral components of the *Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program* curriculum. These exercises allowed for the development of team building skills and it was an opportunity for both groups to become better acquainted.

Data Collection

It was hypothesized that innovative technological methods could be utilized successfully for program completion if correctional administrators were amenable to its implementation. It was also hypothesized that although there was a pedagogical modification mid-semester due to COVID-19, the initial contact/interactions between Inside-Outside students were sufficient to create a positive experience for both groups. Seemingly, onsite interactions would be preferable, allowing for maximum engagement between student groups, but if the class is planned with the correct technological tools at its inception (which is possible when the professor knows the class will be remote, rather than when the class switches to a remote format mid-semester unexpectedly), there is no reason to believe that positive experiences in an online format for both student groups could not be similar (although probably not as significant) to the positive experiences incurred during an onsite format.

To evaluate student experience, students were given a pre and post-test survey to assess their perceptions of corrections and their experience in the class. Although inside/outside students did not have to participate in the survey to participate in the class, all volunteered their participation. Both surveys took approximately 30 minutes to complete and were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Outside students accessed their survey via email, while inside students completed their survey at the jail. The pretest ascertained demographic information, in addition to their reasons for taking this course, their feelings regarding the criminal justice system and whether they were nervous to take this class, etc. The post-test included questions to understand students' experiences learning in an *Inside-Out* modeled course, such as what they found to be most challenging in the course, most rewarding, how they felt about their interactions with the other student group and their feelings regarding the criminal justice system. Outside students were given a specific scale (ATP – Attitude Toward Prisoners scale) to measure their attitudes toward incarcerated persons (Mackey & Courtright, 2000; Melvin et al., 1985). The ATP scale, comprised of 36 items about attitudes toward those who are incarcerated, are scored on a Likert scale from 1 (representing the most negative attitudes toward those who are incarcerated) to 5 (representing the most positive attitudes toward those who are incarcerat-

ed), ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. ATP has good test-retest reliability (Melvin et al, 1985). Differences from the pre and post-test were examined to determine if changes in perception occurred. Students were also asked to maintain a journal and write a reflection paper at the course's conclusion detailing their feelings about their experience in the course and with one another. Qualitative survey data, journals and reflection papers were analyzed using content and thematic analyses and coded utilizing the open-ended approach (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Initial themes were organized into categories and reorganized during several readings. Representative quotes were selected to describe categories and/or distinguishing themes within categories. Frequencies/percentages were used to quantify responses from the closed-ended questions.

Inside Students

Potential inside students were selected by the WCDOC Program Board based on eligibility criteria, such as possession of a GED or high school diploma, approximately three months remaining at the jail, English speaking, and a non-violent disciplinary record at the facility. Upon meeting these criteria, the program sergeant approached potential students to ask them if they wanted to join the class. Interested students could also send a letter to the Program Board asking to be included. Eleven students were selected; two of these students were women. Regarding ethnicity, the majority were black (n=6), followed by Latino (n=2), white (n=2), and one who identified as biracial (n=1). Three of the inside students had children (both women and one of the men), only one was married, and seven were employed prior to their arrest. Eight (73%) suffered from substance abuse issues and almost half (n=5; 45%) were being treated for a mental health issue.

Outside Students

The professor sent email blasts and posted flyers to recruit interested Pace students. Criteria included completion of CRJ 150 – Introduction to the Criminal Justice System - and the ability to pass a background check (i.e., no convictions for misdemeanors or felonies). Interested students emailed the professor and then the professor would email them a background packet. Once 11 students completed background packets, all 11 were registered as a group by the professor and the course was closed. Outside students were traditional college students; all were full-time, and the majority were 18 (n=4) and 19 (n=4) years of age, while three students were in their twenties. Most students were from the New York Tristate Area (n=9) and seven of the students were from the Pleasantville campus, while four students came from the NYC Campus. Regarding race, almost all students were white (n=9); one student reported as Asian. Approximately half of the students held jobs while attending school (n=5) and the majority aspired to be lawyers (n=4), forensic psychologists (n=2), law enforcement (n=2) or other (n=3). The majority of students were freshmen (n=4), followed by sophomores (n=3), juniors (n=2), and seniors (n=2). Almost all the students had no experience with the criminal justice system, with all presenting with clean background checks; one student reported having a cousin in prison and one student reported having a friend who was incarcerated. All outside students attended a jail orientation and were provided with volunteer badges for the semester, which assisted in easing entry into the facility each week.

Class Structure

When outside students arrived for the first combined class, the inside students were already assembled in the classroom and sitting with one another. The professor began by rearranging seats and starting with an icebreaker activity, which required the outside students to sit in a circle, facing a larger circle of the inside students, who faced them. This icebreaker, known as the wagon wheel, is taught to *Inside-Out* instructors during their certification training. The students had five minutes to introduce themselves (i.e., their name, why they wanted to take this class, how they were feeling, one thing they were proud of, and anything else they felt comfortable sharing). Once time was called, the outside students would rotate around the inside

students, and this was completed until every outside and inside student had the opportunity to meet individually. This activity proved to be highly beneficial. Clearly nervous at the beginning, all students were laughing, joking, and much more comfortable by the end. Student seating was then arranged where an inside student would sit next to an outside student; this model was maintained for all subsequent classes. When broken into smaller groups, equal numbers of inside and outside students were assigned per group. Each class would include a lecture and at least one smaller group activity based on the lecture.

During the second class, students discussed victimization. Students broke into groups to discuss Dostoevsky's quote – "The degree of civilization in society can be judged by entering its prisons" (another activity in the *Inside-Out* curriculum). Both groups diverged in their understanding of its meaning. Inside students discussed how they felt incarcerated persons were viewed as uncivilized, while outside students felt it was a quote about treating everyone humanely. Students also discussed how perceptions, based on media portrayals, changed from when they arrived at the jail. Many students said it was not as scary as they thought. Some inside students said they were "schooled" by others before they were remanded to the jail. During class three, students broke into groups to discuss target hardening strategies as the class learned about situational crime prevention. Inside students discussed ways that crimes could easily be committed and helped outside students to think about various target-hardening strategies. During class four, students took their first test. Many inside students expressed nervousness and anxiety because it was a long period of time since they last took an exam. After the exam, students broke into groups to talk about positive and negative reinforcement in childhood. It was during this class that inside students began to share intimate details about their backgrounds. This intimacy added a new dimension to the class and really helped the outside students to understand more about those who were incarcerated. Several inside students talked about being abused as children and how that affected them. One inside student discussed his suicide attempt and his struggle with drugs. He shared a song with the class that he wrote about his life experiences. After the class, it was clear that the outside students were very empathetic to his situation and were quite moved by his openness.

By class six, the students really seemed to come together as a cohesive group. Inside students, especially the few who had not taken the class very seriously, were beginning to participate more and there was less time the professor had to spend getting the class focused. One inside student asked the professor to write a letter to the judge overseeing his case. He wanted to stay in jail longer so he could finish the class. It is important to note that if inside students were released prior to the class' conclusion, the WCDOC administration provided approval for these students to return to the jail, with the outside students, in order to finish the class. This particular inside student did not want to return; he felt he would perform better if he was permitted to remain at the jail and finish the class. Hence, the professor wrote a letter to the judge on his behalf. The class activity for class six involved discussing the 'Alligator River Story,' an activity in *the Inside-Out* curriculum, which is a story with several characters that have different levels of responsibility in an assault. Students broke into smaller groups to discuss and debate levels of blame. This was one of the most productive activities because it generated tremendous discussion and every student was engaged. It was unfortunate that it would be everyone's last time together, although students did not know this at the time. Once the professor left with the outside students, Pace University sent a notice to all students that classes would be remote for the next several weeks due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Outside students were so upset about this news and wanted to know, while boarding the shuttle back to campus, if they could still "sneak" into the jail for class without the University's knowledge. Students were willing to forgo their spring break if it meant that they could continue with the class. Unfortunately, Pace, like most universities, was not able to return to onsite classes during the Spring 2020 semester and within a few days, the jail also closed to all non-essential staff. It was at this point that this one class divided into two classes.

COVID – Trying to Maintain Course Integrity

By January 2020, as college classes were beginning the Spring 2020 semester, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern (WHO, 2020). At the start of the virus, New York State became the primary epicenter of the U.S. (McKinley, 2020). New York's *Stay-At-Home* Order went into effect mid-March of 2020. Universities delivered classes remotely and some correctional-based college programs shifted to distance learning during the pandemic; others were disbanded indefinitely (Burke, 2020). Bail Reform in NYS, coupled with a partnership between the Westchester County District Attorney's Office and the Legal Aid Society of Westchester, helped to release incarcerated men and women at the WCDOC who might have been eligible for early release or who presented with underlying medical conditions (Lartey, 2020; Westchester County New York Office of the District Attorney, 2020). Completion of programming in a correctional setting can be difficult under normal circumstances because of unanticipated transfers (Allred et al., 2013; Long & Barnes, 2016) but the Coronavirus led to an increase in the number of releases (Collica-Cox & Molina, 2020). By the conclusion of this class, only two of the 11 inside students remained at the jail.

The Lockdown

The lockdown occurred suddenly (during week eight) and lasted for the remainder of the semester, with no ability to organize or plan. Initially, the professor and students thought a return to the jail was possible but within a few days, New York State's Governor declared a disaster emergency (March 7, 2020) and New York itself was on lockdown (NYS, 2020). To protect the jail residents and curtail the spread of COVID-19, there was strict quarantining of the incarcerated, which made it difficult for the professor to work with them. The outside students were able to meet live on Zoom to continue their studies, but the inside students had no access to technology. It was clear that a plan had to be developed quickly for the inside students and it required assistance from correctional staff.

Responding to the Challenge

Maintaining good working relationships with correctional staff and administrators is essential to the success of any correctional-based program. This proved to be even more essential during the lockdown. Correctional staff stayed in consistent contact with the professor and worked with her in developing a plan for the continuation of the program. The WCDOC has custodial program staff consisting of a program warden, sergeant, and two correctional officers. These staff, although often deployed to work in other areas during the pandemic, were able to assist in this process to ensure the success of the program. While the professor worked with the outside students on Zoom, she worked with the inside students remotely through the program sergeant. The syllabus and assignments had to be revised for the inside students. With quarantining in place, inside students could not be in one room to take an exam and there was no one available to proctor individual exams. All assignments needed to be revised. With the inability to continue in-person instruction, the inside students no longer had access to university library resources, which were shared with them by the outside students. The only material in their possession was their textbook. At this point, inside students had modified assignments when compared to the outside students. The group project and the exams were eliminated for the inside students, and both were replaced with writing assignments. Similar to the outside students, they were asked to write a reflection paper at the course's conclusion. The professor wrote detailed instructions and emailed them to the program sergeant. The program sergeant printed those instructions, made copies, and hand delivered the assignments to the inside students. Once the assignments were completed, she went to each of the housing blocks, collected the assignments and submitted them to the professor.

The WCDOC, unlike many institutions, has been amenable to innovative teaching methods, including the use of technology (Collica-Cox & Molina, 2020). They have utilized

video platform technology for many years that allows for virtual visitation (i.e., for family visits, court appearances, meeting with probation/parole, etc.). The use of video technology is becoming more commonplace in American correctional institutions – approximately 30% of states use this technology with their incarcerated population (Digard et al., 2016). It was the availability of technology, coupled with the assistance of the program sergeant, which allowed the inside students to successfully continue their studies. Within one week of the lockdown, the professor obtained permission to utilize WCDoc's video visitation system to meet with her inside students individually. The system was never used for educational purposes previously but the professor, as well as several other community-based agencies, utilized this system to maintain a continuity of services during the lockdown. The professor was able to schedule her visits in advance with the inside students from her computer and then could meet with them independently to answer questions or discuss concerns. This proved to be extremely helpful in clarifying assignments and in motivating inside students to remain focused, while providing positive feedback for work that was already completed.

As mentioned, many of the inside students were released early as a result of COVID-related policies to reduce the jail population, providing additional challenges. Nine of the 11 inside students were released prior to the class's conclusion; seven of them completed the course. Four of the inside students who were released early never completed their work prior to leaving the facility, and although the professor tried to find these students upon release to encourage them to complete the class, she was unsuccessful in locating them. Three of the inside students who were also released during this time regularly attended classes on Zoom with the outside students. Although the interactions between the inside and outside students did not seem as productive as in the correctional setting, the outside students were clearly happy for the reunification. Difficulties arose, however, since many of the inside students did not have access to computers when released and were using their smartphones to complete assignments. They were unable to Zoom in quiet locations and sometimes had difficulty following proper netiquette. Post-release services were virtual and difficult to access for releasees. One releasee died of a heroin overdose three weeks after his release, directly at the end of the semester. The professor learned of his death from a released inside student. Since it was the last class when the news was learned and there would be no time to help students process their feelings effectively, the Professor did not share this news with the other students.

Findings

Impact of Pandemic Experience

It was clear that both inside and outside students benefited from their participation in this course but those benefits were hindered when they were separated as a result of the lockdown. This change was reflected in students' responses to the survey. However, data suggests that even limited interaction can produce beneficial results. Despite the lockdown, all inside students enjoyed the course, primarily because it gave them the opportunity to learn, as well as earn college credits:

I loved learning the material and having this opportunity.

It was good to get back into a learning environment for the first time in a long time.

All outside students said that they enjoyed the class because it was a great experience outside of the classroom (n=9) or because they enjoyed working directly with the inside students (n=2):

This was probably my favorite course that I have ever taken. I learned so much and I got to know so many people and it was overall a very valuable experience.

I definitely did enjoy taking this course at the jail. It opened my eyes to so many things. I'm grateful that I got to end my college career with this experience. It was awesome to be able to take a class in a different environment with [those incarcerated] who were also determined to learn.

Inside students felt the experience was rewarding because they learned new material (n=2), they had an opportunity to go to college (n=2), they liked being with the Pace students (2), or they discovered they were able to do the work (n=1):

The most rewarding part of this course was, of course, having [everyone] from Pace come in. I find it rewarding because that never happened.

I always wanted to go back to college and I took the first step. [It] made me feel like I achieved a goal.

Learning all of the theories because I like theories and it opened my mind more. I never thought about why people do what they do.

For outside students, the most rewarding part of the course was watching the inside students' growth:

I think the most rewarding part was getting to see the inside students each week, to share that time with them and try to help them learn and make them smile. I found it rewarding because just getting to spend time with them and talk about either class topics or random things, we were making connections.

I think the most rewarding aspect of this course was just being a part of a program that gave [those incarcerated] something to work towards, and it was really amazing to see how motivated some of them were. I could tell that a lot of [them] were just really glad to be a part of the class and earn college credits rather than just sitting in their cellblocks all day.

The most rewarding part of this course was hearing people open up about their struggles. I think if everyone heard what some of them have gone through, they would be more empathetic to people in jail/prison or with a criminal record.

Both inside and outside students reported that the part of the class they liked best was learning and engaging with one another, which is consistent with the literature (Pompa, 2013). For the inside students, the interactions validated that they were more than their crime:

That we got to interact with other students. It felt good to not be treated like some sort of animal.

Everybody participated. How [they] came in and didn't look at us like criminals even though we were wearing oranges. [They] looked at us like normal people.

All students would recommend this course to other students. One outside student stated:

This is a once in a lifetime learning experience. I think Criminal Justice majors should definitely take this class because it's a crucial part of the criminal justice world. I would also recommend anyone to take this class in the jail because it opens your eyes to a different world.

Changes in Perception

Initial perceptions each student group possessed about the other were changed over the course of the semester, which is consistent with the literature (Pompa, 2013). This result was very encouraging considering they were not together for the entire semester, such as in traditional Inside-Out courses. All the inside students enjoyed taking the class with the outside students and said that they felt differently about them after the class started:

At first I was nervous of the judgement of us being inmates. But I personally think it was such an amazing experience. Some of their personal stories are amazing. They definitely left a place in my heart. Miss them!

It was the best part of the class. They get to see the jail firsthand and we get to bounce ideas off each other.

At first I was not comfortable because I didn't really know people. I thought they would discriminate against me but after seeing them, it was wonderful. They didn't discriminate. It made me feel better to talk to regular people other than COs (correctional officers). They could connect. They were my age.

They all felt that the outside students demonstrated growth during the class:

They opened up more. They let their guard down. Everyone was nervous and shy on both sides but they saw we were just a person in orange.

Nine of the outside students said their feelings changed from the beginning of the course to its completion; they were no longer nervous, realizing the inside students were just regular people:

At first I was really nervous about having [incarcerated people] in the class because I didn't know what was going to happen, but I adjusted to it and realized that I was safe and they were all pretty nice people. We didn't go to the jail up until the end of the course, but I do believe that as we all adjusted to each other, our nerves went down and we all felt more confident.

Inside students felt the outside students added value to the course:

The Pace students gave incentives for us to come.

We felt as if we were all equal no matter if we were behind bars.

It felt more real. It felt like an actual college class instead of just something the jail offered.

One inside student commented that seeing the outside students once a week was not enough for him but it provided him with the motivation to complete his work:

I hardly got to see [them], only once a week. We had to do our work. I didn't want to do it but when I came to class, the first class, I really liked it. I wanted to graduate. I wanted to pass it. I got on others to get our work done.

Outside students also felt that the inside students added value to the class:

It 100% increased the value. We didn't just take a class or learn something new. We were able to sit down with people our ages and see how quickly life could change for all of us. However, it showed us that there is still hope. It was

more of a life lesson than just a class.

Specific Changes Inside Students

Inside students reported feeling much more confident in their ability to perform college level work:

I definitely feel more confident. At first I was nervous going back at a college level after being [out of school] for 10 years. Also [coming to class] without drugs involved was a huge achievement.

I feel better. I am still nervous but I know I am able to do it.

All of these students, except for one, said it made their time at the jail easier:

[It] made me feel like time wasn't just wasting away. [It] gave me something to look forward to each week. And having projects to do were fun.

It was something to keep me busy and focused. I didn't want to get in trouble because the class was good.

Inside students' perspectives toward the criminal justice system changed slightly. Three were optimistic about the criminal justice system (compared to two in the pretest) (three were neutral) and three did not believe the criminal justice system was doing a good at preventing crime (compared to five in the pretest) (two were neutral). In examining levels of responsibility, four thought people should obey the law even if it goes against what they think is right (one was neutral) (compared to eight in the pretest), and three agreed that one cannot be blamed for breaking the law if they can get away with it (two were neutral) (compared to six in the pretest).

Specific Changes Outside Students

Outside students' views changed by the end of the course. Six students' views of corrections changed as a result of being in this course; four realized the inside students were just people, one realized that change was possible, and one said the jail conditions were much better than she anticipated:

They are truly real people and just humans and want to make sense of things.

They are not combative all the time and they don't just want all fun and games; they truly care.

Four students also had a change in their views of punishment; two acknowledged that inside students were not necessarily bad people but just made mistakes, one student's beliefs in rehabilitation was heightened, and one student recognized the role external forces played in shaping behavior:

After seeing [them] firsthand and building some relationships with them, I have so much more compassion for [them] than I previously did. I got to see that these are real people who really aren't very different from me, and they are all struggling in one way or another. I definitely gained a new perspective on punishment and I saw that most of these people just need help rather than harsh punishments.

Five students changed the way they felt about rehabilitation, where all believed in the possibility of rehabilitation by the course's conclusion:

I believe even more so that prison can change a person's life.

After taking this course I saw [them] in a different light from how I previously did. I don't just see them as criminals, I see them as victims of abuse, trauma, neglect, loss, and I have compassion for them. I think that a lot of them need

rehabilitation, which I believe would be much more effective in healing them and setting them on the right path, instead of being locked up and having all their individual rights taken away.

Positive changes in attitude toward their incarcerated classmates were reflected in changes in the ATP scores. Utilizing a paired sample *t*-test, data indicated statistically significant changes in the ATP Scale concerning positive attitudes toward the inside students ($M=50.36$; $SD=15.78$; $t=-10.59$, $p\leq.01$, $p<.05$; $d=-.284$) (1st ATP $M = 50.45$; 2nd ATP $M=100.82$). Students discussed some of the myths they had in the beginning of class regarding the inside students which changed over the course of the semester:

I expected the inside students to participate minimally. I assumed they would just come to the class at the scheduled time to get their credits and go. I was completely wrong. Most of the inside students were very vocal in a good way. They participated in class discussion and group discussion. I also expected it to be a much different experience. The inside students were very nice to be around and all around fun people.

For the first couple of classes I was nervous about [the inside students]. I was nervous that they would act out once we were there or one would try to cross the line and put a Pace student in an uncomfortable situation. I didn't think [they] would take the class seriously. I assumed they were using it to be able to socialize with other [inside] and outside students. Now that the class has ended my impression has definitely changed. ...[They] took the class more seriously [than the outside students] and participated a lot in class.

Positive changes in their attitude toward correctional staff and corrections in general was also reflected in qualitative responses. Three outside students changed their views on correctional staff stating they were *nice* and *respectful*:

My opinion of correction staff has changed. I kind of viewed correction staff as being mean or having power over the [incarcerated] and not treating them well. But from the experience at the jail, I think all the COs and other staff seemed respectful.

A lot of the corrections staff that I interacted with actually cared about the [inside students]. I previously thought they would all just treat them as less than human, but I actually got to hear a corrections officer speak about how he actually cares about their well-being and respects them like he would anyone else. I saw that corrections officers don't just tell [them] what to do all the time and I saw that they actually have personal relationships with each other.

Most notably, students changed the way they felt about working in corrections. The experience opened them to the possibilities of new career options. Eight students (73%) would consider working in corrections, compared to five students when asked during the pretest:

I think these people make a huge impact on the lives of those who are incarcerated and I would love to have a job where I could help people.

Challenges

Both groups of students experienced challenges, which appeared to increase during the shutdown. Inside students faced some challenges, such as the change in pedagogy due to COVID-19 ($n=2$), having to take an exam for the first time in a long time ($n=2$), writing papers

(n=1), getting acclimated to a school setting (n=1) and being in jail (n=1):

At first I thought intermingling inmates and regular students would make me feel belittled and judged but in the end my challenge was not having our full course together.

After the pandemic, the most challenging part was that we couldn't meet. We had to take more of an initiative. There was no one to push you. I was in a little competition with my classmates and then there was nothing to light my fire.

The test because I haven't sat down for a test in years.

Inside students also reported to the professor that having assignments to complete during the quarantine helped to keep them occupied and they looked forward to the individual video visits with the professor. They would often ask about the outside students, and many wrote about a specific outside student in their journal/reflection paper who impacted them positively. They commented on the outside students' goals, achievements, and hardships as inspirational. They felt motivated by the presence of the outside students and most of them felt inspired by more than one outside student. As one inside student noted:

He [in reference to an outside male student] is a very good inspiration to others getting his goals and achievements accomplished so early in life... he has so much to offer society and life. She [in reference to an outside female student] made such an impact on me with her drive and determination...I truly admire her strength and courage to pushing forward and not down dark roads.

Another inside student stated:

There was someone in the class that every time I saw pushed me to work harder than usual and to be greater. She left a strong impression on me.

Like the inside students, the biggest challenge faced by the outside students during the semester was overcoming the obstacles created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The part the inside students liked least was the class' limited time together:

This course opened my eyes to many new things. I absolutely enjoyed it and wish the COVID-19 didn't ruin our time together.

Like inside students, outside students continuously asked the professor for updates on their inside classmates. The outside students also wrote about one or two inside students in their journal/reflection papers who impacted them positively. One outside student wrote about an inside student who shared a very personal story about the day he thought of committing suicide:

It [referring to what an inside student said] was very inspiring...It really goes to show that the perception [that others have about the incarcerated] are wrong to a certain extent. A lot of people can only see them for their crime and not what led to there.

Another outside student was impacted by the way the inside students' comments during class enhanced the course material:

Being able to hear their [referring to the inside students] stories and positions on a subject was very eye opening. Their personal experiences were very helpful in my understanding of the course content.

Outside students commented on how similar they were to inside students. One student spoke about an inside student that she identified with:

[Name of inside student] and I are the same age and have the same interests. I saw a lot of similarities between us and it was eye opening for me because one dumb move with my friends and I could have been [him].

Discussion

Lessons Learned

Even though course modality changed mid-semester, it was clear that the limited interaction between inside and outside students proved to be beneficial to both. This is encouraging because prior research has examined the benefits of inside/outside student interactions after a complete semester. This data suggests that similar benefits can be derived in less time and that any interactions/exposure between inside and outside persons can beget beneficial outcomes. Both groups of students enjoyed the course and the new experience it provided. By the end of the course, they all supported rehabilitation and believed correctional programming was an important component in this process. Initial nervousness, based on misconceptions each student group had about the other, subsided for both groups after the first class and both groups reported that they witnessed growth and change in the other group. The outside students stated that the change they saw in the inside students was the most rewarding part of their experience. For the inside students, the most rewarding part of the course was engaging with the outside students. They benefited from not feeling judged by the outside students. The outside students were able to encourage them and assist them during this process, which was evident during the smaller group work. This course created a moment of connection for two groups, who may not have otherwise met; their time together appeared to create a deeper understanding of the material for inside students and a deeper understanding of the incarceration experience for outside students. These findings are consistent with previous Inside-Out research (Allred et al., 2019). Both groups were disappointed that they were not able to be together as a class for the remainder of the semester when the University and the jail stopped the program mid-semester to minimize risk of COVID-19 transmission. Yet, the connections they made were strong as both groups consistently asked the professor about the other group.

Overall, inside students reported that they learned a lot of new material, which mirrored other research that showed that inside students gained more knowledge of the criminal justice system after completing similar programming (Martinovic, et al., 2018). Inside students had the opportunity to earn three free college credits, they gained confidence in their ability to work at a college level and they felt that being in the class made their time at the jail easier. Inside students worked together on their housing blocks to help motivate one another pre-pandemic. These students were able to interact in a very pro-social way both in and out of class. This college course was something for them to look forward to weekly and additional work helped to occupy their time when they were not in class, especially during the quarantine. Once the class was divided, it appeared more difficult for the inside students to remain motivated. Although limited interactions can produce beneficial outcomes, a full semester of engagement would be preferred to maximize outcomes.

This course provided outside students with a unique opportunity to work directly with the incarcerated, which afforded them real world experience and the ability to address biases/stereotypes that they held about the incarcerated, an important change for future criminal justice professionals. By the end of the course, all of the outside students supported rehabilitation. They realized that the inside students were “just people” and that change was possible. Changes in the ATP scale proved to be statistically significant. It’s a humanizing process (Hilinski-Rosick & Blackmer, 2014) and it is important to consider that attitudes or beliefs can play a role in how students relate to the incarcerated (Melvin et al., 1985). Exposure to a correctional environment clearly helps to debunk myths and stereotypes toward those who live and work within its walls. Outside students not only experienced changes in their view toward inside students, but their views on corrections and correctional staff also changed. More students con-

sidered working in a correctional setting (five during the pretest compared to eight during the post-test). It is interesting to note that it did not take the entire semester to effect such change, suggesting even limited contact in a correctional setting is beneficial.

The benefits of this course for both groups were likely to be more impactful if the class was allowed to continue as designed. The abrupt change in teaching modality, the uncertainty about contracting the virus, and the anxiety surrounding the length of the lockdown, affected both groups of students, which were verbally reported to the professor throughout the remainder of the semester. Even though outside students greatly appreciated the inside students who joined the class via Zoom after they were released, the quality of the interactions were not the same, especially when inside students had difficulty connecting to technology. They were often late to class, with the professor calling them several times to remind them about class the day before and the day of class. An unstructured environment is a much more difficult environment to manage. However, with proper planning in a structured environment, technology could be used more effectively to facilitate educational programming in the correctional setting, especially for facilities that have had difficulty securing educational services for its population prior to COVID.

Inside students cited COVID-19 as a major challenge during the course, especially when the class was no longer allowed to meet and they were required to work remotely and independently. The pandemic proved to be particularly stressful for them; they feared getting infected with Coronavirus, they were not allowed to receive visits while incarcerated, and they were no longer able to participate in many programs (many programs closed during this time). Several inside students were awaiting early release decisions, which appeared to be anxiety-producing. For those who were released, there were limited services available in the community because of the pandemic. Once released, they discussed with the professor the many struggles they were facing (i.e., loneliness, lack of housing, no employment, other charges/court cases, family problems, drug use, mental health, etc.). Getting released from a correctional institution can produce feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression under usual circumstances, but their release during a pandemic was anything but usual. It was unfortunate that during the sixth week, inside students really began to demonstrate change (i.e., participating and sharing more, taking the class more seriously, etc.) but due to the Coronavirus, it would be the last time the class would be together. The camaraderie and group support that was formed during the first half of the semester was lost, especially for the inside students, during the latter half.

Self-Reflection

An Inside-Out type course requires tremendous preparation, and many lessons were learned by the professor, who was not only teaching this course for the first time, but also teaching it during an unprecedented pandemic. It was helpful to have a separate orientation the first week of class – one for the inside students and one for the outside students. This is recommended in the *Inside-Out* Program's curriculum. Rules and regulations could be discussed and warnings regarding inappropriate behaviors were provided. Students were allowed to ask questions (without the other group present) and meet with the professor prior to combining the groups. Group activities were the most beneficial. Pairing inside and outside students to work together on activities that were related to the respective lecture was a great way for students to connect and develop confidence, team building and critical thinking skills. Students overwhelmingly enjoyed this aspect of the course. It was unfortunate that the course was closed after week seven and the professor was not able to pilot all of the group activities. The activities developed/chosen for the first half of the semester worked very well and will be maintained moving forward. Since the class involved both incarcerated men and women, a correctional officer was placed in the classroom. It was important to establish a good rapport with correctional staff and most COs assigned to the class were encouraged to participate by the professor. Their participation and active engagement helped them to seem like a part of the class. Their presence did not disrupt the class or the students' ability to engage with one another. In fact,

inside students talked very openly despite the presence of correctional staff.

Technology was essential and is underutilized in most correctional environments. Although the class could no longer be together, technology was instrumental in maintaining educational integrity. The professor Zoomed with outside students during their regularly scheduled class time. As inside students were released, they were able to join the outside students on Zoom, bringing the class together, albeit in a different way. For those who remained incarcerated, the professor met with inside students via WCDOC's video visitation system to discuss assignments, readings, and answer any questions. Although inside students found this mode of instruction challenging, they benefited from this interaction, and most were able to successfully complete the course. As inside students were released, the professor spent a large portion of her time staying connected to them, encouraging them, providing referrals for services for them, and helping them to complete their assignments, despite the other difficulties they were facing.

Implications and Future Research

This experience demonstrated that technology is critical to the maintenance of correctional-based programming, just as it was critical for community-based education at all levels, during a crisis. It was unclear whether any other Inside-Out courses were provided at other facilities during the pandemic; the author was not able to ascertain this information. However, it implies that such technology can be used far after the pandemic is over to expand educational services for correctional populations. Not only did the WCDOC utilize existing technology during the lockdown, but in preparation for the future, purchased a smart television with Zoom capabilities in summer 2020 and purchased several more for the Spring 2021. The professor, who teaches a parenting course for the WCDOC during the Fall semester (*Parenting, Prison & Pups*)² utilized this technology to teach her class. Outside students were not allowed to visit the jail because of their high risk for COVID-19, but the professor and her therapy teams were physically present with the incarcerated women and Zoomed the outside students into the class. From the professor's perspective, having the students physically present typically provided more engagement between them and the incarcerated women, however, without this technology, this class would have been cancelled. There were also benefits this technology provided over traditional in-person classes for the outside students. Students did not have to worry about transportation. They had to devote less time to their participation since they did not have to go through security, which is often a lengthy process. They did not have to worry about missed classes and could easily login via Zoom from any location. The fall 2020 semester had the benefit of time and experience to plan how to effectively incorporate technology and to improve upon the course structure, which the previous spring 2020 semester did not afford the facility or the professor.

As COVID-19 rates rose again, the WCDOC is not allowing non-essential staff to have contact with the incarcerated based on recommendations from the Department of Health. The professor, who taught the *Inside-Out* course again in Spring 2021, originally planned to teach the *Inside-Out* class in the same manner she taught the parenting class in Fall 2020 (i.e., being physically present in the jail with the inside students, while the outside students Zoomed into the jail). However, she was deemed non-essential and was remote until the recommendation changes. Fortunately, the approval of technology made this class possible. With these changes in mind, a plan was organized with correctional program staff and approved by correctional administration to continue the *Inside-Out* course without affecting the most important component of the course – the interactions between the inside and outside students. The smart television, which allows for Zoom capabilities, was used to Zoom the professor, the inside students, and the outside students together. A program officer was assigned to assist with these classes at the jail and monitor the technology. Having correctional support was essential; security concerns

² *Parenting, Prison, & Pups* is a parenting course, integrated with animal-assisted theory, taught to incarcerated women at two different jails, with the assistance of undergraduate student teaching assistants enrolled in a civic engagement course.

prohibit inside students from directly accessing technology, especially technology that allows for an outside connection. The presence of custodial staff ensures that protocols are followed and allows the class to function even though the professor cannot be in the physical classroom.

The smart television allows for everyone to be together while Zooming but will not allow for smaller group engagement (i.e. breakout rooms) between the inside and outside students, which is the most important component of the course. Hence, Pace University donated four laptops to the jail for the semester. One laptop was shared by two inside students to allow for social distancing (i.e., the inside students each sat at the opposite end of a rectangular table with the laptop between them). These laptops were used to place inside and outside students in Zoom “breakout” rooms where they were able to complete the smaller group work essential to the integrity of the course. The author knows of no other facility that was able to facilitate an Inside-Out course during the pandemic with the use of similar technology. This class included a smaller number of inside students than would normally be included (six inside students) and all of these inside students were from the same housing block (unlike last year), which limited the number of incarcerated persons eligible. There were two reasons for this change. First, without the professor onsite, a larger number of inside students, who often need additional support, would be difficult to manage. It is important that they receive the support they need. The professor was able to meet with them individually through the WCDOC’s video visitation system. Second, it will allow the class to continue should COVID rates continue to rise and comingling between blocks prohibited, as it was last year during the height of the pandemic. The professor spent time revising assignments and adding additional group work to increase the interactions between inside and outside students. Although they cannot be together, the more time spent in these smaller groups, the more intimate and more connected they felt.

The WCDOC can serve as a model to other correctional institutions that may fear the use of similar technology. Technology can be properly monitored and effectively used when outside agencies work together with correctional staff to ensure that security protocols are the highest priority. The use of technology for the past year at WCDOC, with several programs, has been without incident. The implementation of video technology could expand programming for other correctional institutions, even post-COVID. This could be instrumental in bringing programming to facilities where programming has been difficult to implement because of distance from the nearest college/university willing to provide educational resources. Such technology can also be used when there is another reason the professor may be unable to be physically present at the correctional institution (i.e., inclement weather, sickness, etc.). Class would not have to be cancelled if technology was available. The use of these resources will far exceed the benefits it provides during and after the current pandemic.

Through college programming, even remote programming, opportunities can be created for inside/outside students to have transformative learning experiences that highlight partnership and discourse, while encouraging them to take primary roles in addressing vital social issues. With empirical evidence, there is an opportunity to impact policy by demonstrating why partnerships between correctional facilities and universities/colleges are crucial in addressing social inequity (i.e. educational attainment) among our most disadvantaged citizens. Jail populations receive fewer programs than prison populations, with jailed women being the least served (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019). There is sufficient research which shows that college programming often leads to lower rates of recidivism and improved disciplinary behavior (Gaes et. al., 1999). Those housed in American jails, who often suffer from a paucity of programming, especially college level programming, will have the opportunity to take a college course for no cost. The use of technology is an important consideration in helping to maintain programming during a crisis, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Correctional facilities should consider how the use of technology can expand service opportunities for the incarcerated without jeopardizing security.

College education in correctional facilities is cost- effective (Davis et al., 2013) and fu-

ture researchers should examine which pedagogical approaches are most effective in a correctional environment, especially a jail environment, in order to determine the best way to invest limited programmatic resources. *Inside-Out* courses appear to be a highly effective modality. Challenges in the jail setting, in terms of the implementation and maintenance of programming, should not dissuade educators or researchers from conducting this important work.

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