



Feature: The Future of Higher Education in Prison

“The United States has the highest documented rate of incarceration in the world, a rate that has increased by more than 400% in the past 40 years.”

The Future of Higher Education in Prison Conference brought together leaders from institutions like Bennington, Bard, Marymount Manhattan, and City University of New York, as well as organizations like the Vera Institute of Justice, The Brooklyn Community Bail Fund, Black Women’s Center for Carceral Empowerment, JustLeadershipUSA, and Housing+Solutions. Gathered in the CAPA symposium for a weekend of lectures, roundtables, and

panels, attendees discussed the work they've accomplished and their future plans for a more just and humane prison system.

incarceration



IN AMERICA

Bennington College is one of 67 colleges and universities in the United States to participate in the Second Chance Pell pilot program, which makes higher education accessible to 12,000 eligible incarcerated individuals in 100 federal and state penal institutions. This spring, Annabel Davis-Goff, David Bond, and Crina Archer have brought Bennington curriculum to the Great Meadow Correctional Facility, a maximum security men's prison in Comstock, New York. The first course of Bennington's Prison Education Initiative was offered in fall 2015; to date, the program has offered nine 4-credit courses to students in the subjects of literature, social research, political theory, social psychology, and U.S. history.

Access to higher education in prison means reduced recidivism and costs, but as the attendees of the conference emphasized, the most important outcome of access to education was a kind of mental freedom. For a group so dehumanized and confined to the language of punishment, the opportunity to engage with literature, history, politics, and computer science can be life changing. It also supports successful reintegration, and some participants go on to obtain further degrees.

The conference addressed the corrupt cash bail system which criminalizes structural poverty; the campaign to close Rikers, the notorious jail complex where 85% of the inhabitants have not been convicted of a crime; and the issues specific to women in prison, including the Women's Community Justice Project, which provides services and alternatives to jail time. Keynote speaker, Rev. Vivian Nixon, is the Executive Director of the College and Community Fellowship. In her words, **"Public safety is a natural outgrowth of an educated population, but it should not be the motivation for providing people with education. Education is a worthy goal on its own merits."**

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: Joaquin Contreras & GANAS

Q. How would you describe GANAS in a sentence?

A. GANAS is the Latino Community Outreach Mission in Bennington. We work with the Vermont Migrant Education Program, the Bennington Free Clinic, and the Legal Resistance Alliance to create a network of migrant workers, students, faculty and organizations with expertise in this initiative. My project is to help my advisee begin planning for life after high school.

Q. What motivated you to join this program?

A. Growing up in a very large and diverse family, I was able to understand the various issues family members faced



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: Lily Withington

Q. What are The Sababa Project and Quantum Leap?

A. I am volunteering in the Quantum Leap Classroom at Mount Anthony Union High School. It's a fantastic progressive program which engages at-risk students in Bennington through hands-on and project-based learning. I'm also working on a Quantum Leap page for the Bennington College website.

Q. What excites you most about the outcomes of your work?

A. I'm really excited about this work for two reasons: first, I'm passionate about progressive education and its transformative powers. Quantum Leap is a fantastic example of transformative progressive education, and I love to be

pertaining to discrimination in both race, class, and status as a citizen. The reason I came here to Bennington was to look at the ways I can incorporate my music into these different elements, and eventually address them through that line of work. This program is as new to me as it is to my advisee, but to be able to work with a student through many systemic obstacles he is set to face has helped me to familiarize myself with the many issues regarding undocumented students. It has also helped me to improve the way I approach those issues both effectively and ethically.

Q. What's an outcome of this work that surprised you?

A. I've realized how difficult it is to not only find previous work regarding these issues, but also to find ways of providing my advisee the help he needs. Because I'm not trained to deal directly with the more systemic issues he faces, my work was primarily as part of academically-based advising program.

there and observe the program in action. I found my passion for progressive education at Bennington, but I've discovered that the only way to study progressive education here is to craft these sort of educational opportunities. I sought out Quantum Leap because I truly believe that education can change a student's life. I really enjoy my time with the students at Quantum Leap. I genuinely hope that I'm impacting their lives in some way, even if it's just that they feel a little bit more confident writing papers after I help them, or if it's that I've reduced their stress level when I help them finish a project.

Q. What's something unexpected you have learned as a result of this work?

A. I've gotten some really great experience working with the students. I should have seen it coming, but I guess I didn't fully understand what I was getting into, and didn't process that I would be facing the real challenges of interacting with students. However, I'm learning how to deal with those challenges in a very forgiving and supportive environment (rather than in high-stakes teacher certification classroom aide settings). I'm incredibly grateful for this opportunity, especially because I want to go on to teach in a high school class.

Upcoming Events & Opportunities

For more events, visit the [CAPA Website](#)

Sept 16 | [Women's Economic Opportunity Conference](#) | Vermont Technical College

Sen. Leahy's 21st Annual Women's Economic Opportunity Conference (WEOC) will take place Saturday, Sept. 16th at Vermont Technical College in Randolph. This

FREE conference (including lunch and child care) is great for students. It draws hundreds of women to develop new skills, make new acquaintances and swap personal experiences. In addition to personally and professionally enriching workshop offerings, [Change the Story VT](#) will be the focus of lively discussions on how Vermonters can improve women's economic status.



CAPA: Classroom and Beyond

"The World in 2050" with Eileen Scully

"Futurists predict computers that host digital uploads of our brains, water crises, recycling breakthroughs, flying cars, shapeshifting skyscrapers, regenerating body parts, mass extinctions and experimental de-extinctions."

Students Dre James, Noah Levy, and Louay Youssef shared their experiences at Bennington Works this April. This visionary class is tackling the hard issues of our century, but sometimes the most interesting questions are the ones that are grounded. These small-scale problems are interconnected; No single lens can offer a simple answer. That's why the class has no prerequisites and is bringing students from all different disciplines together, from science to design and creative writing. Students have been studying the kind of sci-fi tech that have been left to tv screens until recently (Hoverboards? If Marty McFly is any indication, the trek up to Jennings should be a breeze by now). They've charted the course for the future of fashion and entertainment, law enforcement and privacy, and their own life stories. And when we're all back here in 43 years, they've got our reunion party covered.



The CAPA Newsletter is a student-run project with the mission of developing the CAPA community.

We want to share the amazing work that our friends and coworkers are producing. Each issue will include features on students and faculty members with inspiring projects, CAPA classes tackling important issues, and upcoming events and opportunities.

We want your feedback! If you have any suggestions to make this newsletter something that's truly beneficial to you [let us know](#).