

Two Innovative Approaches to Higher Ed in Prison

Center for Prison Education



Prison Education Initiative

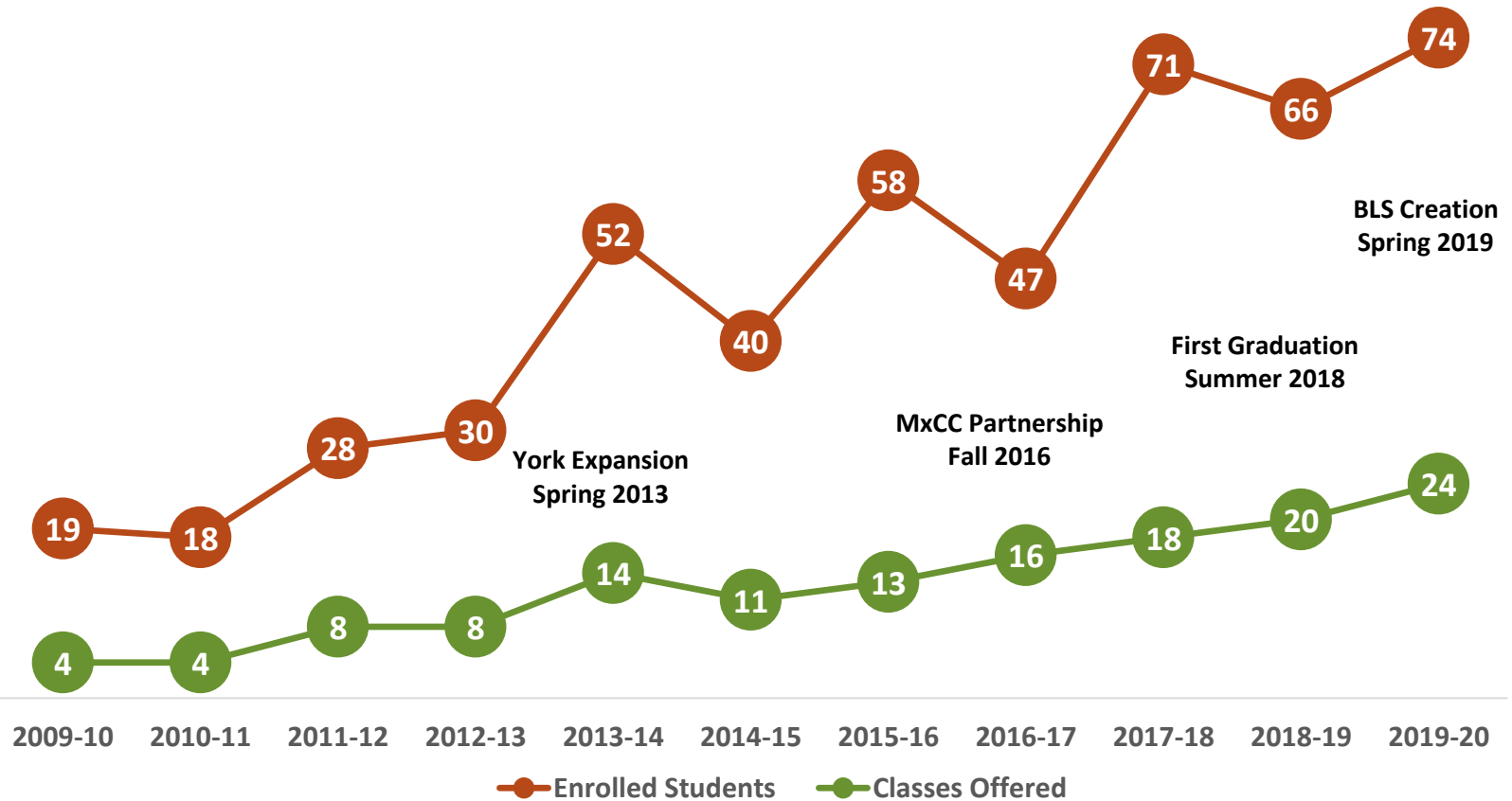


Center for Prison Education

- Public-Private Partnership
- Cheshire (Men) and York (Women) Correctional Institutions
- Faculty and courses from both institutions leading to Associate Degree in General Studies (MxCC) and Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Studies (Wesleyan)



CPE Enrollment 2009-20



CPE Facts and Figures

Since 2009, CPE has...

- Served 151 total students
- Offered 135 total classes
- Appointed 73 total instructors, incl. 31 returning
- Witnessed an average GPA of 3.2
- Maintained an adjusted retention rate of 94%*

** Adjusted to discount for release from prison*



CPE Facts and Figures (cont.)

- In 2018, 24 students earned their Associate degree from MxCC in ceremonies at Cheshire and York
- Next week, 7 more women at York will graduate
- In summer, 13 more men at Cheshire will graduate

Roberto Alvarado, Class of 2018



“Wesleyan and Middlesex gave us the opportunity to take pride in ourselves. Now we know we have made our families proud.

“We’re just so grateful someone is giving us an opportunity to make another life for ourselves.

“In defiance of all labels imposed on us, today our caps and gowns speak not only to our dedication to hard work, but to our dedication to becoming productive members of society.”

Live Like a Philosopher, Fall 2018



“They got me to read texts that I thought I knew well in a new light. Several of the class discussions we had in this course were some of the best I’ve had in my ten years of teaching at Wesleyan, and I’ll treasure them.

“The course also got me to introduce innovations that will have an impact on my future teaching. I added an extra set of assignments in the form of in-class debates, for instance, which I plan to assign again the next time I teach this course at Wesleyan.” (Tushar Irani)

Film Study and Appreciation Spring 2017



“I wasn’t totally sure what to expect when I first started and what the students would be like. But I probably had some of the same prejudices most people would have about prisoners being somehow different and more intimidating than other people.

“Thus, my biggest change of perception involved this preconception. They were very engaging, real human beings no different than any of my other students, and were actually better students than many of my regular students. (John Shafer)

BENNINGTON COLLEGE

PRISON EDUCATION INITIATIVE (PEI)



Consortium

- PEI is a grateful member of Bard College's Consortium for the Liberal Arts in Prison.

Location - Students

Great Meadow Correctional Facility
(Comstock, NY)

Population: 1,600 men. Approximately
half have a High School Equivalency
Diploma or better.

PEI Students

- Fall 2014 – students enrolled – one preparatory course, not for credit
- Spring 2015 – we enrolled 29 students and offered three credit-bearing classes
- Spring 2020 – we have enrolled 44 students and will offer 6-credit-bearing courses, as well as two courses that don't bear credit: College Prep and a basic course on computer literacy

PEI Students

- Since Great Meadow is one of the highest security prisons in New York State, it is reasonable to assume that the proportion of men serving life or virtual life is higher.

PEI Students

- Our student body is divided into those who will attain a lower security rating, and transfer – and those who will stay at Great Meadow for the foreseeable future.

Significant Differences to other college-in-prison programs

- PEI does not put an academic hold on its students.
- Almost half our students in any given year will transfer to lower security prisons. Few will be released directly from Great Meadow.
- Currently we hold admissions twice a year.
- We stagger the start dates of our classes in order to offer classes for ten and a half months each year

Life or Virtual Life

- In the United States, 1 in every 7 people incarcerated in a prison is serving life or virtual life.
- For men of color, the proportion is 1 in every 5.
- In New York State, the proportion is 1 in every 5.

Life or Virtual Life

- In June 2020, we hope to graduate our first seven students, at least three of whom are serving life or virtual life.
- Three of these students will transfer to lower-security facilities, and will at some stage be released, and four will most likely stay with us indefinitely. What should their education look like?

Life or Virtual Life

- Our challenge is to provide the best education we can to both those who will be at Great Meadow for only a term or two at the same time as for those who will in all likelihood never leave

Life or Virtual Life

- The conventional metrics for assessing the success of a prison education program - degrees granted, reduced recidivism, and employment do not apply to our students

What Students Say

I found the class both enjoyable and illuminating and have left it with a deeper appreciation of democracy, the concept of popular rule, and for political theory itself... Given the opportunity to be treated as a person and to be challenged has helped me to feel as though I have some value as a human being - (PEI student)

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