



THE MICHELSON 20MM  
FOUNDATION

## “Teaching Higher Ed in Prison: A Look at Faculty Training and Development”

*Wednesday, April 6, 2022 | 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. PST*

### **Kenia Miranda-Verdugo** 00:06

Hello, everyone, my name is Kenia Miranda-Verdugo, and I'm the Smart Justice Program Manager with the Michelson 20MM Foundation. Thank you for joining us for this conversation concerning the future of faculty teaching in prisons. Before we begin, and as we give folks a few minutes to hop on Zoom, I would like to share a bit of background on our foundation and describe what we have in store for you today.

Founded by Dr. Gary K. Michelson and Alya Michaelson, the Michelson 20MM Foundation is a private nonprofit foundation organization that seeks to accelerate progress towards a more just world through grant making programs and impact investing. Four years ago, we launched our Smart Justice Initiative to leverage higher education as a catalytic force for transforming the lives of justice involved individuals, while also reforming the justice system itself. We work to transform the communities impacted by our country's punitive legal system to forge brighter, more prosperous futures via education.

Today, you will hear from subject matter experts who have implemented teaching practices within prisons, both in the state of California and around the country. This conversation will look at pedagogy in a correctional facility, building a rapport with students while maintaining mandated policies in higher education and prison programs, understanding inherent carceral environment demands on students, and using open educational resources to lower educational costs. The opinions expressed in this webinar are each participant's own perspective, which in no way represent the opinions or views of the Michelson 20MM Foundation. Before we get started, I would like to remind everyone that you will be able to ask questions via the Zoom Q&A function. We will dedicate the last portion of our webinar to answering some, if not all, of your queries. With all that said, it is my pleasure to now introduce our founder and co-chair, Dr. Gary K. Michelson, who will make a few remarks to get us started.

### **Gary Michelson** 02:08

Welcome, everyone, and thank you so much for joining us today for the Future of Faculty Teaching in Prisons. While many of us are starting to settle back into some sense of normalcy, students and faculty within our prisons continue to experience the damaging repercussions of a pandemic. Most faculty members have not been allowed into the prisons for over two years, and many critical education and faculty training programs have suffered significant setbacks and fallen into disrepair.

Today, we hope to jumpstart critical components of this recovery by identifying key best practices to empower our passionate faculty leading the charge. We are, of course, thrilled that Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students has been reinstated after 26 years and has precipitated this current expansion in higher education and prison programming as a national priority. By the Vera Institute's estimates, the

restoration of Pell Grant eligibility for students in prison will allow half a million additional students to qualify for federal funds that have been unavailable for the last quarter century. These are 500,000 students who deserve the opportunity to succeed.

However, merely restoring Pell Grant eligibility will prove insufficient if we fail to provide the training and resources that faculty need to deliver quality in prison programming. Recognizing this vital gap, the Michelson 20 Million Minds Foundation recently awarded a Spark Grant to faculty members at Cerro Coso Community College in order to catalyze the development of an open license, faculty training and professional development program explicitly for higher education in prison programs. Cerro Coso's work has been a powerful driver in California justice reform, and they have been responsible for building and sustaining the nation's largest face-to-face prison college program. We are beyond proud to help scale the wisdom of this amazing community of practitioners, and I thank you all for joining us in this endeavor.

**Kenia Miranda-Verdugo 04:21**

Thank you, Dr. Michelson. I would also like to introduce Connecticut State Representative Josh Elliott, who will share a few remarks on this work.

**Representative Josh Elliott 04:48**

There we go. All right, can you hear me okay? I would assume yes, yes. Okay. So I am State Representative Josh Elliott out of Connecticut, representing the 88th District in Hamden. I'm the Chairman of the Higher Education Committee, and a lot of this work was brought to my attention by Dr. Erin Corbett—I couldn't be more excited to work with her and Dr. Zelda Roland, over at Yale, because a lot of my work that I did before I became Chair was in the world of criminal justice reform. My primary bill was to ensure that Connecticut became the first state to make telecommunications free for people who are incarcerated, and we're gonna go from being the most expensive state to now the first state to make these calls free.

A big part of the argument that we used when pushing this conversation and this legislation was this idea that we don't simply want to reduce recidivism, we want to make sure that people are successful upon reentry. So a lot of that was tied into this idea of keeping families in touch with each other because then, when you come back to the general public, you're going to have a family structure of loving people to come back to. I'm in a race for Secretary of State, so I weave criminal justice reform into that work by saying that everybody should have the right to vote. If you're somebody who is paying attention to the political climate, and you want to be part of that process, then you too are going to be more successful. And I also know that if you're somebody who is paying attention to your own education, and you're using the time in a way to develop yourself personally, again, you are going to be successful when you return. That's why higher education, with the criminal justice reform lens that I wear, there's an incredible tie in there. Whatever we can do to ensure that resources are being sent to people that want to view the system through rehabilitative lines, that I'm constantly pushing, that's what we are doing to make this a more restorative process in a system that was never built to be restorative and it was never built to be rehabilitative. How can we dismantle that system as it is, and recreate something that ends up helping people, not just hurting people? So I applaud you all for this work, and I'm happy

to be in this fight with you and helping you in any way move things through my committee, as it pertains to this work, and I'm here for you.

**Kenia Miranda-Verdugo 07:29**

Thank you, Representative Elliott, for your insightful comments. It is now my pleasure to introduce Peter Fulks and Alec Griffin from Cerro Coso Community College, who will be leading a presentation and a following panel discussion. Take it away, Peter and Alec.

**Peter Fulks 07:45**

Thanks, Kenia, and both the Representative and Dr. Michelson. So faculty training is near and dear to Alec and me because we both are faculty and we both deeply understand the kind of practitioner level knowledge that's needed within here. We've been working for five to six years, almost full time inside of prisons, as full time paid professors for Cerro Coso Community College. So luckily, in the state of California, it kind of coincided at the same time where we had a few Second Chance Pell Pilot programs, but the state in 2014 issued a Senate Bill 1391, which allowed our Board of Governors' tuition waiver to be applied to anybody that was incarcerated—just like somebody who couldn't afford college on the outside—this now applied to everybody.

Our program at our school kind of began very small, but for the last few years has been very engaged in faculty centric development, both with guided pathways and things like that. So do we have slides that we can throw up? Awesome. So I just want to get started and center ourselves a little bit with a student voice, and this is one of my students from a few semesters ago. In his own writing, I just wanted to look at it, I could have quoted it, just put it on there. But I wanted to look at it in their own writing because I think it has, it has a bit more impact that way. But within this student's statement here, I think we can begin to see that the classroom environment is where this transformation happens. I also want to qualify when Alec and I use the word transformation we're talking about a human's idea of what their own transformation has been, not that we're prescribing that somebody has to become one way or the other or something like that. Transformation, from the faculty perspective, should be allowed to happen within the classroom, and what we provide should allow the student to go from A to C or A to F or A to Z, wherever they need to get to. We're simply facilitating that process within the classroom with the content that we deliver. I am a faculty lead for Career Technical Education within our program, but I'm the Department Chair of Administration of Justice. So we have one of our more successful programs: our Associate's Degree for Transfer and Administration of Justice. And then Alec, you want to introduce yourself?

**Alec Griffin 10:30**

Yeah, I'm Alec Griffin, I am also the Prison Program Faculty Lead for Arts and Sciences. I teach anthropology and sociology, and sometimes political science. I've been on every single yard of the seven within both prisons.

**Peter Fulks 10:54**

Awesome. So can we advance two slides forward, please, to the first diagram? Cool. So between Alec and I's discussion over the last half decade of trying to figure this work out, while we're kind of being confronted with multiple issues going on, here and there, we've also found peers within there across the

country, two of which are on the call with us. And so we're going to work with Dr. Andrew Beckett, who's in Iowa, for the Iowa Consortium Higher Education Prison, and then Dr. Erin Corbett, who is at the Secretary of Education Alliance out of Connecticut. We're going to bring them into this as a panel, but we've talked about this with this group of four people—we've talked about a couple of these components here—and so one of the things that I'd like to frame the discussion with today is like a conceptual framework for when we talk about faculty training.

You can have Second Chance Pell, you can have an administrative component—that practitioner doing the job in the classroom—I am absolutely biased, but needs to be a primary focus of program implementation. That is where things might go very well, things might go very wrong with an implementation, but it's also the space where student contact happens the most generally people don't have within our carceral settings, they don't have open counseling offices and other things like that that you find on a campus. So the faculty member really becomes kind of like a central focus of the end all be all of your program. And so when, when framed that way, and when look at it that way, we also found, after doing a needs assessment, both within our state and nationally, with over 180 respondents—Alec I just kind of like developed one on our own, honestly, for our program, and then we sent it out to the rest of the people—after 180 respondents, we found that one of the issues is there was no formalized training, or very little, even in formal training that was taking place from the educational institution. It was almost always defaulted to a compliance based setting.

So this our conceptual framework is that we have three types of, you know, training and professional development and call us semantic, you know, faculty members, or whatever, but we really think that there's a hard slice difference between these. At a systems level, you generally have compliance based training that's required, you might have free training, legal standards, adherence to law, the way in which people go in and out security requirements, that essentially to us is compliance that's generally going to be taken care of, and or required by the Department of Corrections (I hope that they have some sort of solidified process to allow anyone else inside of the facilities, they generally are going to take care of that). If we spend our time focusing on compliance based education for our teachers, we're missing out on what needs to happen inside of the classroom.

Here then we have on an organizational level, we have the training procedures that exist, like regular old onboarding. We're in California, we have 114 community colleges, there's a lot of competition for adjuncts or for full time faculty, and if you have a master's degree in a pulse, you might be an adjunct for us one day. So that's kind of one of the things that we tried to get away from within our program is that we actually have an onboarding process and it's not used very well with the rest of our school, achieving the dream organization put out tiered approach at like multiple different sites, like an r1 institution, or and then down the way, all the way to a small community college to see that, you know, 90% of the faculty are not getting onboarding training. They put out a report for one for each of the different tiers of Carnegie designations.

So when we look at an organizational understanding, we're looking at things like training procedures within the school, how do you write syllabi, those kinds of things. This is surprising, a huge, surprisingly, a massive gap across the country, because it's kind of like it's been in this volunteer stage where as long as we can get somebody to come in, we'll figure it out on the way. There's very few programs that

have a formalized process of going about, at least that's what the data tells us in addition to our own sort of qualitative interactions with programs. We have 20 schools Alec and I work with at the state because we help lead an informal consortium within our state, but then we also have the individual level, and to us, this is where the professional development part came about. And we almost couldn't even access it theoretically or within our own minds. We couldn't access it because we hadn't had the experience to really dive into what we needed to do in a professional development way. And so at this tier, we're looking at things like a specific academic freedom, there might be rules in your state, like there are in ours, that faculty have purview over certain things within their classroom, reflective teaching practices. Also we have the day to day of what goes on within the classroom and how we train to that. So those are the three salient categories we're going to look at today. Within those, we can go ahead and advance this slide forward.

**Peter Fulks 15:47**

So one of these things is how can this benefit students. I love quantitative data, so in my program, the area that I work within as part of the program, like one of my talents that I bring to it, is that I want to look at the quantitative data. And so here's a quantitative assessment that we did over about 14,000 enrollments on main campus, to 4000 enrollments inside of prison, over a three year period within our program, we're able to find out at the end of this, that there's about a 14% higher success rate within prison with our education, even though it's the same faculty members that might be teaching inside as they are outside. This led us to ask questions about what we are doing and where professional development fits in this, we can go ahead and advance one more. And so what we need to look at is what happens when you engage faculty. And so leading out of that last slide that I showed you, if we can, you know, look at this area between 2016 - 17 and 2017 - 18. academic years, this is within our own program, we had a massive spike in overall unique headcount with students that also drove more teachers being involved, and more classes being offered. And so we had to respond as a program and as faculty having primacy over professional development within our systems. In California, we needed to develop something that was really a structured way to carry onboarding, and then ongoing training through this. Not sending people to conferences, but really saying and becoming professionals and subject matter experts ourselves in our program, to say, what do we need for our program to be effective, and then creating an evaluative measure that we can rely on year after year, where we're able to pull data immediately and determine its success going up success, or retention going down, did faculty actually attend these trainings, those kinds of things. These are important parts and across the nation, we're looking at programs struggling with KPIs key performance indicators for this in our system in California, we have KPIs that are required and recidivism is not one of them, surprisingly. So the way Alec and I look at this generally is that we need to stop talking about recidivism. There is a lot of academic coverage of that subject, but it doesn't affect my day to day inside the classroom, because I'm not here to cut recidivism down. I'm not, I'm not a criminal justice employee anymore, I used to work in law enforcement, I'm an educator. And so I need to know what's going on in my classroom and how it's going to work. And so I think there's a more proximate measure we could use in terms of student success, climate surveys, overall satisfaction of employees, as well as needs assessment, which we've developed one, and we can put out later, Alec, you have anything to say.

**Alec Griffin 18:32**

I was just going to point out that one of the ways that we've ensured that the professional development is integrated into our whole incarcerated student education program was through Peter and I hustling for a grant to be able to get released time or stipends to be able to host those trainings on weekends, and then going after more grant money so that we could actually pay adjuncts to donate their time to go to these professional developments. A few of them are covered within our own school system, but we also felt that there weren't enough of them so we started to integrate more. In fact, we're going to be hosting one for our own school on canvas training, as CDCR implements laptops and canvas shells inside, we're going to be hosting a Canvas training for our faculty members this Saturday, because we've been able to tap some of those grants. I was just going to kind of point to the need to be able to supplement people's time with compensation for ongoing professional development as maybe one or two days isn't enough in the year.

**Peter Fulks 19:52**

Yeah, absolutely. So for us, it's an ongoing process within our program. Can we push the slide forward one, please. And so when we look at this training, which is that second organizational component when looking at the framework, the organizational component is a training response that we needed to develop. We have no solidified training for anything on our entire campus. And I know that there's a lot of other schools that may fall in there. I think the closest we could find was probably online instructor training, where they needed to go through like a little something first. So what we did is in working with our local unions, and this is going to be a very fast, fast forwarded survey of the different areas of professional knowledge that is needed to encompass faculty training as we worked on developing an MOU with our union that required four hours of training. When that was completed, we then said, "Hey, we'll do the four hours of training instead of relying on the union to do it", which was very "Watch out, you're gonna die, you might get stabbed, don't say this word, that kind of thing". We, after working in the facilities, felt like the training was only a replication of Department of Corrections training. And so we felt as though we needed real teacher training to go in there. And it's now kind of become the primary type of onboarding at our school because we can also use grant funding that we wrote to pay teachers to come to it and we run more ongoing training for our prison programs than any other topic within our school.

So our prison faculty, 57 of them right now that currently go inside, are paid employees of our school that go inside to work, and teach about 100 to 115 core sections per semester there they go through this training all over and over and over again. So one of those things was first we needed to develop a governance structure. So we have a standing participatory governance structure within all California Community Colleges, part of that representation is through the Academic Senate of California Community Colleges, which is not a union, but it is a professional responsibility organization that is legislatively designated to handle issues within our college that then administrators are meant to administer. For instance, curriculum, we have privacy on that and develop that, programs, hiring recommendations, as well as professional development. So we felt that this fit right in there, we read the policy landscape, we created a resolution that formed a committee that had a primary goal of getting people trained and establishing a standard at our own campus. And that developed and blossomed into understanding and creating guided pathways. So we now have seven degree pathways, transferable degree pathways, this last semester graduated 167 Associate's Degree for Transfer folks from inside of our prison program, the year before that was 93, and this current year is

going to be somewhere around 199. It amounts to about 40% of our entire school's awarded degrees for our community college now come out of prison because we have a very engaged and knowledgeable faculty base, even our adjuncts, we treat them as we would with full timers. And part of that is them understanding everything, and then looking at it from the student perspective, right, because we are in there and we're interacting with it. Alec, do you want to talk about the PTK component about like how that informs us?

**Alec Griffin 23:10**

Yeah, sure. So a very large percentage of our students, because Peter alluded to their success rates, qualified for Phi Theta Kappa, the Honor Society. And we have a very engaged student population on a specific yard at tach V. In particular, I think we have over 100 PTK members that are just constantly trying to engage in helping the college, but also engaged in helping to change the dynamics of the prison yard with projects, with citizenry, give back kind of donation drives, and all of these other different things. PTK, to a large degree, has also become our tutoring structure, which is on that yard, it's our largest yard in terms of student population. They're helping to inform us because they bring up a lot of the positives and negatives of our program in meetings and how to make them better and how they can help. And so there's this integral student relationship with not only the college and helping us out, but also the cultural dynamic that they bring to the yard itself. They've become kind of the cool gang on the yard where incarcerated folk, who are not even part of the college, are asking to do projects with Phi Theta Kappa. So I'm the advisor for these groups. The yards have changed a lot during COVID, but I was able to meet with them last semester when we were able to go in with kind of limited time, and they're engaged right now in recycling projects and some of these other things that are going on—just astounding at not only the work ethic, but the vision they're putting together right now for your prison-wide newspaper structure and also podcasts too. So there, they are highly motivated and act kind of like the college's arm and or care structure inside of the prison yard; hopefully, that alludes to what you were getting after, Peter.

**Peter Fulks 25:34**

Yeah, I think so. I just lobbed that one over to you. PTK is a National Honor Society, it has about 1500 different opportunities for scholarships when students get out, and 25% of our 1300 students qualify for PTK and they take it very seriously. We have aligned our PTK chapter inside of our seven prison yards with our main campus chapter, so those students have come in there too. So it's a way for us to have an ongoing pulse, you know, a qualitative pulse on like, how's the things going with the program? Where can we change? Where can we do this stuff? With Alec being an advisor, then he and I can talk about this and then we can guide and implement new training. So it's kind of like where our roles fit into this program. And then this was all working in the background as we came up to this thing, and we got an opportunity to write that catalyst grant for an OER faculty training handbook, which Alec and I have finished, it's like 100 pages of content. And it's and it's kind of, it's maybe a more like a train the trainer type of document, that's going to be open resource that Michelson has helped us with, as well as adding a training component, which is through an event that we're going to be running in June for faculty and program managers or whatever else, that some of the other people on this call are also going to attend. So we'll get to that in a little bit. Can we forward the slide?

Understanding and using OER to our advantage allowed us to come to scale. It was impossible to afford textbooks, so we needed to go through and teach and train our faculty and how to adopt OERs. Let's come to a consensus and we say teach and train, but honestly, a lot of this is Alec and I being consensus builders. Okay, what's a great way to serve students? Let's implement OERs. And so when we implemented OERs, we went from like 20 core sections to 85 within one year inside the prison because now we could actually have the classes being offered. We had teachers that pick and chose and curated groups of OER materials and textbooks, so that they can be delivered; we then had to get printed. I've had to drive the U-Haul into our prison, like a 25 foot 30 foot U-Haul into our prison with 1000s and 1000s of pounds of books. I just did that at the start of this semester, and that kind of stuff comes out of the training component. Then we move into okay, this is challenging us to pick the right textbooks, there's no more hand me down syllabi going on, there's no more hand me down textbooks within the program.

So as we teach and train people within what our organizational structure is going to be like, let's look at the next slide, which is professional development isn't just "I'm going to train you to do this thing", really, it's a comprehensive approach to understanding and responding to what our faculty need most. And so for us that fell into the category of trauma informed practices, we then worked within our state informal system and were part of a community of practice that brought in NYU is McSilver Institute of Research part of that, like all these things have been interlinked. And it sounds like a lot because it is honestly the most substantial part of our program that's been able to produce these types of desired outcomes across the country, both in terms of amount of students served the full time equivalent metric as well as graduations, and success in transferring people to a variety of four year institutions in our state. One of those things has been faculty taking a primary role within the program because Pell might pay for administrative support, but how are you going to engage your faculty to actually do stuff beyond just teaching the classroom. And so for us, that's been a core component. Like Alec said, you know, the cool gang on the yard is college, at our school. Detachment crew is a problem when we show up in the parking lot with four people and hop out at graduation like. "Uh oh, to attribute crews here", because they know that we work differently, we work as a community of practice with our instructors, we have time, and we actually prioritize that type of work. So Alec and I are doers. We love theory, but we'd like implementation and practice more—we're actually putting it to work. And so that's one of those components. So in doing that, this came up where it's like, "Hey, there's an opportunity to do a community practice event, but no, no one's willing to run an event". So we went through and were able to snag some grant money in 2019 within our college, and we put on an event. We can advance the slide. And we put on an event that we call base camp, so base camp is run as a retreat for faculty and program educators around prison, but also includes every carceral environment like jail community corrections, and we had about 92 people come and then the pandemic hit that next spring. We're actually running another one, though, in June, this June, June 8 to the 12. Right here, join us in the community.

### **Peter Fulks 30:26**

So the ability to register for this event is now open. It's June 8 to the 12th. It's fully all inclusive for faculty, including food, housing, everything to come together, gain consensus. And what we wanted to do, this was a statewide opportunity we had in 2019, we want to do this now nationally. Michelson has helped catalyze this work so quickly, because within the program we were writing this train the trainer

handbook, we also wrote out this agenda and did this kind of stuff, we had to go on pause because of the pandemic, but now we're ready. We're ready to run it. We've got facilitators, one of which is Dr. Eric Corbett, who's coming up here soon on our panel. And we want to extend a heartfelt and heartwarming welcome to anybody in this country who is going into the facilities who needs support and needs a community of practice, we want to build that with you. We're going to do co-production of research, ethnographies. We have actual guided wellness sessions—not just like a room off to the side where you can go for quiet, but we have guided meditation yoga.

It's in an outdoor environment, in response to COVID, to where it's gonna be very safe, in that respect, but then also our connection with nature allows us to sort of disengage from the bars and the razor wire in the concrete walls and things like that. And we can associate a little bit better about who we are because we think professional development falls back on me as a professional. And within there, I am a human, right? So I need to have some personal development that coincides and parallels my professional development.

And really over the last few years, I've started to talk like this, and Alec has noted that this is very different. Seven years ago, I was hopping fences chasing people as a police officer. Now I'm doing this work, it's absolutely transformed my life. My interaction with my students has transformed my life. And this type of stuff is where we see the need in such an intense and toxic environment of incarceration, we see that this is needed.

So what we're going to do is open up the panel now and we're going to talk about what this looks like across the US. We have Connecticut, on the east coast; we have Iowa in the central part of the Midwest; and then we have California, us. And so what it looks like for us in our program is we've had the opportunity to really develop, scale, and scale out different types of programs and training. And we'd like to offer that as open resources as possible for people to be able to interact and do what they need to do and get it done there. And we want to be your support mechanism when you need data—when you need qualitative information about why this is important—we want to support all the rest of the people on this call across the country with that. I think that's the ultimate goal of why we even did this call was to let you know you're not alone, we're here to support you. And we've been able to be working in a very structural way, now an implementation way that now we're into full adoption.

### **Peter Fulks 33:36**

So that catalyst grant that we got with Michelson that led to an Andrew Mellon grant with the state of California and the Academic Senate of California Community Colleges. So now there's 12 faculty, two of whom are Alec and I, Alec and I both also sit on the steering committee for the state for new policies, adjusting penal codes, rewriting guiding principles, things like that within this type of work, and working directly with our Department of Corrections partners, who have been great with us. But also this new Andrew Mellon grant is a multi-year grant to establish a structure within our state that will address all 20 colleges that work inside of the prisons. 400 or so faculty that are currently employed to do that, you know, on a rotating basis and to create a structure and institutionalize, but I want to use that word very loosely, a way in which we know we're doing what needs to be done for our faculty. And so that's developing a standing committee just to address faculty concerns, components, regional events over and over again, what we'd like to do is honestly have this become a model but that small little catalysts

that Michelson worked with us on that seemed like a long shot when we applied a few years ago has now blossomed into what is a structural component.

We also have a \$10 million yearly line item, categorical funding for colleges in California now, through our work on the steering committee, that is now going to be paying to support faculty professional development in this space on an ongoing basis and so structuring that is there. So we would like to have you join us for this event so that we can then talk through how we can make these things work here. And six years ago, when I got hired as a faculty member coming from being a cop, I never would have thought that I could have been sitting at a steering committee for a state. And so it's really hard. And I know I see a comment like, "Yeah, I know that my state's like this", we understand that. And so part of that is, where do you address burnout? Do you address burnout? Because you're trying to, you're trying to struggle with systems level issues that can't be solved when you could be working more locally, or addressing local issues, which is what we were doing is like, "Why the heck does this keep happening?" Why does this keep happening? We need to go to the system's level. And we need to start knocking on doors, hearts and minds, campaigns, all those kinds of things. So anyways, let's open up the panel. We'll put more information about that. Kenia, are we good to just keep rolling?

**Kenia Miranda-Verdugo 35:55**

Yeah, we can just go ahead and introduce the panel and start the discussion.

**Peter Fulks 36:00**

Let's start with Dr. Corbett, do you want to introduce yourself?

**Erin Corbett 36:06**

Sure. Good afternoon, and good morning to folks wherever you may be as you're tuning in. My name is Erin Corbett, I am the CEO and co-founder of the Second Chance Educational Alliance here in Connecticut. I am also the Director of the Quinnipiac University Prison Project, which is also here in Connecticut. In addition to those two jobs, I do a little bit of external evaluation on some state level projects with Minnesota and Iowa, so I know Dr. Beckett very well. I am a part of the executive team of the Jamii sisterhood, and I have two dogs who you may hear in the background at any given moment.

**Peter Fulks 36:52**

Awesome, thanks. How about you Dr. Beckett?

**Andrew Beckett 36:53**

Hello, Andrew Beckett. I am definitely the novice of the panelists of the group and probably come at this a little bit differently, relying very heavily on Alec and Peter and Erin's expertise over the last few years. I'm the Associate Dean at University College at the University of Iowa. In my normal portfolio, if you will, I oversee a lot of the First Year Experience programs and supplemental support tutoring for our traditional aged residential students; but, four years ago I was asked to assist some faculty in creating a college and prison program. We oversee the two online degree programs, so University College was the most obvious fit for that, and so I began that work about four years ago. Most recently, last year the University of Iowa Grinnell College joined a consortium with five community colleges in the state of Iowa, who are doing this work, and we've just actually celebrated our one year anniversary, if you will,

of being a consortium. So learning as we go, I can probably provide a lot of insight on what not to do, but I'm happy to be a part of this discussion this afternoon.

**Peter Fulks 38:10**

Awesome, thank you. So I'm going to throw out the first question here, which is that all three of us, like all three of the areas that we represent across the country, have a different way of going about this. And like Andrew, you just said, that kind of developing a consortium first; for us, it took a long time for us to actually develop the consortium, we had to pick up the phone and call people and say, "Hey, can we get space on your agenda? You don't know who we are. You've never met us." Alec and I were both not tenured at the time, and so we started hesitant and then we got really bold. We started going around and kind of calling people out saying like, "Hey, we really need this to be working this way, but it's not. What do we need to do?" They said, "Well, nobody's doing it." And so we just insert ourselves in the process. So maybe can you just give? We'll start with you, Andrew, and then we'll get back to Erin and about just like, why was the idea specifically around faculty training or something like that constructed first? Or how did you come about that process? Does that make sense?

**Andrew Beckett 39:12**

Yes, I mean, I think when we first got started, it certainly was a coalition of the willing, if you will, those who were very interested in this work. We got started, actually, because faculty were essentially reading, volunteering, and leading a book group, if you will, at a prison that's located five miles from University of Iowa's main campus. The university actually already has a relationship with it, they rely very heavily on the Iowa Health System for medical needs for incarcerated individuals. So some of the relationships between the university and the prison were already there, but in terms of the faculty support, there were people who wanted to go in and they had been leading a book group, and they said, "Why can't we then, you know, turn this into a classroom?" There's a lot of differences between reading, doing a weekly book group with rotating faculty members coming in, and not having that ongoing engagement and actually running classes, right? So, you know, some of the things that, that our faculty noticed initially, is, when you're teaching students on campus, they tend to come in for 15 minutes, three times a week, and they have some discussion and they leave. And the next week, they come in, and they're not bringing their experiences back to the classroom, right? They're talking about calculus, they're talking about whatever the subject matter is, when you're teaching in prison, life goes on after the faculty leave. And when they're teaching, when they come back into the prison the next week, students will obviously bring up what is going on. And so that takes a lot of ongoing development with faculty about how to maneuver that. It's a strength, right, because it's also changing the dynamics in an ideal situation. You've got students who are engaging in coursework with each other every single day because they're living together, but knowing how to navigate that is not something that you necessarily have a lot of expertise with, and you certainly do not want inexperienced faculty or graduate students doing that.

That was one of our early mistakes, if you will, is just, I think, Alec, you know, anybody who has an adjunct instructor, come on, and we'll, we'll take you. And so a lot of the things we tried to do was just to kind of build a faculty development kind of group learning community, if you will. We just gave folks who are teaching an opportunity, on a weekly basis, to dialogue and talk about what are some of the issues and how can we help There's a lot of other issues that we dealt with that are more technical, like how

do you do authentication, trying to log in behind bars when you don't have a cell phone, those types of things, which those those are very, I think that's what you said, the system level of how you address that. I can certainly talk about that later, but I'll let Erin jump in.

**Erin Corbett 42:05**

Yeah, thanks. Thanks for that insight, Andrew. So I come to the faculty training space very much from two distinct places: One is kind of a broad conceptual framework about instructional practice and praxis, and what that means for the students that we're working with. The other is, my aunt who is from and lives in Brooklyn, has two master's degrees and taught special ed in Brooklyn for over 25 years before she retired. And so education is very much a part of kind of my DNA was part of my upbringing. And I wailed against it in high school saying that I would literally never be a teacher, because students are terrible, but here we are, you know, there but for the grace of God.

So when I think about teaching as a practice and a praxis, there is a lot of reading and learning that goes into what I do and how I arrive in the classroom. Part of what I think is missing a lot of times in faculty training programs is the necessary consideration of how we arrive in the classroom as instructors, and how students arrive in the classroom as students. I think we take a lot for granted, especially if there are those of us who are teaching on campus and inside prisons, I think there's a lot that we take for granted, in terms of how our free world students show up ready to learn. We try to map that on to our students inside and assume that that is also how they show up ready to learn when that is not, in fact, the case. There's a ton of theories about, you know, sort of what happens inside of prisons, how the culture is replicated and duplicated and perpetuated, but there is this theory of prisonization that, you know, folks who are incarcerated, especially folks who are incarcerated for a long time, there is almost an internalization, in many instances of the culture that is perpetuated within the particular institution. That level of institutionalization often not always includes pieces like lack of trust and authority figures, lack of desire to be open or vulnerable and communicate in ways that are kind of transparent. And we expect that that is actually so so being open and being vulnerable and understanding kind of the learning space as what it is we assume, and expect our free world students to show up in that way ready to participate. In doing so with our inside students, we ignore that there might be other things at play that are impacting how they are showing up to the classroom to take part in the class. A

I think the first part that I try to communicate to people who are going inside for the first time is to literally take a couple of pauses and a couple of breaths to have this conversation about what they are bringing to the classroom and what they think the students inside are bringing to the classroom It's from that starting point that we can start to break down what are the conceptions that people have, you know about our students, but what are also the conceptions that people have about themselves. There are lots of people who think they are wonderful instructors, who think that they are just the greatest thing to instructional practice and they're actually trash. And so it allows us, you know, the kind of flexibility to have the conversation where you can tell someone they're trash, but you can also say, here are the ways that you can be better for yourself and also for your students.

The other piece that has been really exciting, but then COVID, you know, just made it garbage, because that's what COVID does. In Second Chance we had crafted a process—and I use we very

deliberately—we had crafted a process for faculty vetting. So before even getting to the point where we're training faculty about, you know, what to do in the classroom, how to, you know, enter the classroom ready to teach, we came up with this process of how to get students involved in the faculty vetting process. And so we came up with this, again, with this process, I feel like I've said that 15 times, so forgive me for that, where people you know, would send in their resumes, their CVs, et cetera. We would have a couple of released students, some former students of ours, look at the credentials of the person who wanted to teach. If they felt that those credentials, you know, were sufficient, we would ask that person to come in for a first round interview. So they would meet with those students, and the students would lead that interview process. Sometimes I didn't even have to be there, which was even greater, because I think it provides students more of that autonomy and just kind of ownership of the process. And so they were taught to the person asking the questions, the candidate would be able to ask questions of the students. Then after that was over, the students would let us know if they wanted that person to proceed to the next step. If they did, the person then observed a class inside and they would, you know, observe a class that was taught by a phenomenal teacher. So obviously, it was my class, or, you know, maybe someone else if I wasn't teaching on a particular night, but they would observe the class, again, observe the dynamic of the students and also observe the dynamic of the facility. Because if you haven't been in a prison before, and you're sort of walking into a maximum security facility for the first time, it can be very daunting, it can be very, like, just oppressive on your spirit. And so this visit was also designed to just kind of get folks oriented to the atmosphere inside the facility, they would observe the class. And then at the end of the class, the students, the current students would have the opportunity to ask questions of the candidate as well. Once the candidate left, the students would decide if they wanted to have them come in for a not a mock lesson, but just like a mini lesson, to get a sense of their teaching style, etc, see if they had absorbed any of the information that they had gotten from these many steps. And so the teacher would come in. Our classes are 90 minutes, so they would teach for 45 minutes, and then the last 45 minutes would be in real time feedback from the current students. And then the students decide if a person will be brought on board, so this is very much an inclusive, collaborative process, because our students are our partners. Certainly there is no content that we are trying to make sure students learn. Obviously, we want to make sure if they're doing things for credit, we get the seat time and all of that stuff, all the compliance stuff for hire, and we want to make sure that's happening, but we also want to be very, very clear with our students that they are our partners in this venture. And this process, I really think that it helped to make that really just more palpable, more powerful and more, more authentic feeling of inclusion and ownership of the program.

So once someone you know, just kind of got through that process, then they met with me. So we, at second chance, do not have a line item in our state budget. We do not have a staff, I am the staff. And so the training that would happen with faculty would be led by myself. At the time before COVID. I was working with the University of Connecticut to have some teaching assistants, as well as Eastern Connecticut State University, and we would run the train the the faculty trainings, very much like what Peter was talking about in terms of the professional development opportunities that that they have created, and it was also an opportunity for our TAs, some of whom I worked with for all four years of their time and undergrad, again, prior to the world shutting down. And so it was really great to have them as kind of the next generation of folks who are going to be in this work so much so that there was one TA that we had, who went on to get her PhD and is trying to start a second chance chapter in that

state. So when you equip people with the knowledge, the understanding the broad, like conceptual frameworks of what we do, they are far better able to understand how they themselves are situated within the context of this field, as well as where our students are situated. And they're better positioned to serve them well, so that our students are having the best educational opportunities that they can. I hope that answers.

**Peter Fulks 51:10**

I think, more than answers the question, we should just call it coffee time. Awesome. Thank you so much. So I want to work kind of back in reverse, because you mentioned a couple of things there. And I want to ask Andrew, and then I want to go back to Alec and see. So what other types of evaluative measures is your program considering for faculty, like structured evaluations, like Erin was talking about students meeting somebody is our hiring process, that kind of thing. So Andrew, what does that look like within the consortium?

**Andrew Beckett 51:39**

So we had a lot of observations by our director at the time, we've actually not been teaching out for the last two years in person, for obvious reasons but a lot, it was just because of the site, the size is pretty small. We had someone obviously, who's a director, who would observe the classes. I think what we ended up doing was very helpful, which was just having dialogue with students after the fact in informal focus groups, if you will, not only about the instruction, but what they want because we've started with three courses and we quickly, you know, tripled that number per semester of course offerings. So I think also just trying to engage with students about what you're interested in learning at the time. We were looking at we this was a non-degree seeking program, but we were also looking for courses that would certainly transfer to another institution to to obtain an associate's degree, we actually engaged in a partnership with Iowa Central Community College in Iowa, which was a Second Chance Pell site, they were doing online courses, and we were trying to supplement them with in-person courses that to assist with that. So it was a very, you know, subjective process at the time. I think that that's what the IHS, right now, our consortium is trying to do is really lay a foundation for what that looks like. We're trying to create some professional development standards across the board for all the higher education and prison colleges. That will also include some metrics of what success looks like, as we move forward.

**Peter Fulks 53:18**

Awesome, and then Alec, I'm gonna kick it to you. Maybe you want to just cover sort of like, without us, can you talk about the note, and then the evaluation process like how when you've inserted insurgency, and stuff like that, to some degree, and to create a structure around it.

**Alec Griffin 53:36**

Now you're talking about the you're beautiful note? A lot of a lot of the impetus to Peter and I's gusto, we'll say, to implement some of this professional development and ensure that the program has legs to stand on and is integrated into the college was one of our instructors in my first semester, probably in the first month or two that I was in the prison. One of our female instructors was, I think, passed out either a note or it was written on a test, but it said "You are beautiful." And this instructor went on a witch hunt, essentially trying to figure out whose handwriting it was, along with the educational coordinator inside the prison. Essentially, when we found this out, Peter and I, we were working at the

same time with this individual, drove over to a bar to discuss this over brews and burgers and essentially came up with the idea that if we didn't somehow solve this structural problem, we may both be out of a job. So a little bit of self preservation, but also the fact that we believed in the product, we believed in education inside and whatnot, and essentially came up with various tactics. We've kind of called in the policy insurgency model, which was how do we integrate ourselves into the school so much that they can't just shut down the program based on a note or based on hearsay or based on one person's win. So essentially, right after that Peter and I reached out to some people within the community college structure, and they kind of advised us and helped us out to work through our local academic senate to produce the resolution, that resolution we created was the formation of the incarcerated student education program. Sanctioned by and signed off by the Academic Senate, they resolved and they were okay with it, because basically, nobody but Peter and I, and a few others were even involved in the program. So the main campus, okay, the resolution we integrated in, and at that point, it started to become kind of a cool group, and then the school president wanted it integrated into the college council. So that integration allowed us to have stability, but also start to form the structure of the program, which included faculty training and development because Peter, and I also figured out that we could easily have squash that issue, through a front loading of professional development, right, like something like that does not need to create a witch hunt, right? It just simply needs a class conversation like, "Hey, we're all in college here, and this is not what we do to college instructors. And if you want us all to keep coming back, you can't do it." It's a simple thing, and then say, now, I'm done being mom or dad, right, and move on and be college instructors. But that informed a lot of our a lot of, I would say a lot of fires. In the beginning, at least when I was starting informed a lot of the impetus to I don't know institutions, probably the wrong word, but but at least creating that that infrastructure that was in movable, that they could not pull away or get rid of, and that structure itself created an evaluative program measure, because it was part of that that committee process of of programmatic evaluation. So it was like, instantly integrated in.

### **Peter Fulks 57:16**

Yeah, and so kind of, sorry, to kind of diverge from the whole panel thing. But so what that did is in a structured way, so now, if there's a full time hire, that's going to happen that might teach inside the prison, someone from the ISEP, from our incarcerated student education committee, they sit on that hiring committee. And then we also needed to ensure through our union and stuff, we needed to ensure that we're doing our course evaluations, because they were not happening to start with. And so we actually went back and advocated that we need to do this, and either new chairs need to gather coming out of the prison, or designate someone which we found within our policy, they were able to have a designee do an evaluation. And so we're able to get that task out to people so that we can also do that. So we have, we had to merge a structure with sort of what was a wild west approach to like us just kind of doing everything we needed to do. And we felt as though we really needed to solidify that as we move on.

So whereas some people have started thinking across the country, here, the different people that might be a color, so people started with a more structural approach. We started with an approach that was totally in the dark, our admin had no idea what was going on on a daily basis, there might be conversations like to dare tell the Vice President, what happened today, and then we eventually found a way to manage how we could that deliver that kind of like, "Hey, by the way, like I got asked when I was

on, when I was teaching imager.” And so that happened, we don't want that to scare off other people, but how do we manage these types of things, moving on to the future and stuff. And so when we look at it that way, this is just an area and I don't want to call it out so uniquely, that it becomes so much of its own thing.

One thing that I think we agree on this panel across the board, is like, all this situation, this environment of the carceral classroom, it projects a lot more of the things that maybe individual students might struggle with on a main campus. And it becomes just very in our face and it really challenges us to try and find solutions to these types of things.

And so I want to hit a couple of questions from the q&a. We have got somebody from Lagos, Nigeria. Hello. And yes, please come out to the event. And a lot of this. We think why we wanted to have a conversation that was more national instead of state or region centric as we're now International, I guess is that we think that these concepts of at least attending to the fact that faculty need this should be applied on a large scale. We just encourage you to do everything you can to structure and realize it in a way that it can be there. We had some people with what we deemed a savior complex that we needed to really address and just to be honest, root out of the program, and we're gonna cause they were already causing damage to the program. How do we do that if we can't hold a peer accountable saying like, “Hey, we all talked about this and came to a consensus on this ethical framework”? And so that's what happens within our training materials. Like, here's, here's an issue, if you're visiting on Saturdays, not during class time, people in their housing units, because you're a teacher, and you're not visiting, and you're delivering materials to guys in their boxer briefs, while they're on in their cells. That is what we would call not a professional way of going about delivering material, there's routes to do that, if that's something that absolutely has to happen, you need to make contact with the program manager, that kind of thing. So we needed to create some structure in these areas so that we can do that. Within that though, there's always a conversation of academic freedom, right? Like, where does academic freedom fall? Somebody from the Illinois Consortium for higher education in prison, Mr. Wade, he published an article in 2021, about censorship within the department correction system. So I'm going to come back across that. So Alec, you talked about how we address censorship, from an academic freedom perspective, in terms of training, and then I'll bounce to the other attendees, or panelists?

**Alec Griffin 1:01:08**

Yeah, we have decent support, I would say within CDCR, at least in the educational programs from custody is a little bit spotty. But, you know, training that is difficult, I kind of simplify it and say, you know, if what you're talking about is going to get you kicked out of the prison and our program, is it worth talking about it? I mean, there has to be some level of insurance that yes, you have freedom to talk about things, but how are they going to sound when somebody gets the flash bite? Right? I in fact, in anthropology, we cover sex, gender, and sexuality. In archaeology, if you talk about the Moche, all of their art is sexual. And essentially, you know, there are things that I will maybe skip over and I would say, “Are they necessary for my course content?” If that custody official is walking by at that moment, some things might be worth a risk. I would also advocate that you need to build rapport with your custody officers, once you have rapport with custody officers, they don't even listen to you anymore. Right? They don't, they're not even aware of what you're talking about, because you're just a mainstay

at that place in their space. So that you know, those things, we can say those things, training, it's probably a little bit harder, because I think that some, some faculty that go inside might get a little bit more encouraged to fly off the handle and say things they shouldn't. And I'm not gonna sit here and tell you that we haven't had those faculty, we have, but I would also argue that training, training is ongoing, it's constant. If we encourage our instructors to be reflective, that's the key component. That's the key component.

**Peter Fulks 1:03:06**

Awesome, how about let's go to Andrew, you know, is there a centralized disallowed materials list that you need to navigate, are you doing things like that?

**Andrew Beckett 1:03:15**

That's another one, but you learn things the hard way. So we had done a couple of semesters when one of our rhetoric instructors was just planning to use the same text that she used on campus, and the book had a swastika on it. That got axed. Like that was a no, no, and we could not use that text. So I think what Alec was saying is building that rapport, and, you know, realizing that this is not the same setting as teaching on campus, and so that, you know, there's a little give and take to it. I think another big issue is like what happens when you're teaching a rhetoric course, and things are revealed in the paper, like, so how do you respond to those types of things? So, I think, you know, we certainly want to provide the same educational opportunities inside as we do outside, but it is a different environment in a different setting. And so, you know, let's not kid ourselves academic freedom goes so far off on campuses too, right? We've all seen you just pick up the Chronicle, and you will see examples of something where you know, something so there are parameters that we have to work in.

**Peter Fulks 1:04:20**

Awesome, Erin, last? I'll give you the last little bit.

**Erin Corbett 1:04:23**

Oh, yeah. So in Connecticut, there is like a mystery text list of banned books that we are never allowed to see that apparently changes every semester. And so what I have done and what I encourage my instructors to do is to find more obscure texts that may not you know, have the word race, crime and justice right on the front cover. It's something that's more along the lines of carceral logic and society, right, because people like to see more general and vague things. And I generally try to encourage the staff faculty to just really dig in, you know, back in the old syllabi, like, what were some of the texts that really spoke to you that aren't necessarily mainstream, but that can still talk to students about the human condition that can still talk to students about how we talk about in view history and how we are living history in our bodies every day. And so I think there has to be a certain level of creativity and innovation when it comes to the materials that are provided because we don't want to shortchange students who are inside just because DOCs may believe that they're not capable of having, you know, controversial conversations without escalating to violence. And so that's been, you know, a method that's been really effective, we have not had any books turned away. And so I'm, you know, I'm just gonna keep on going.

**Peter Fulks 1:06:13**

On awesome. So I think that kind of begins to wrap us up, you can tell there's a lot this conversation needs to keep going. Honestly, that's why we decided to do a four day, five day intensive on it, Erin is going to be there to help facilitate some stuff. I don't know if Andrew's going to make it, but somebody for my jump is going to be there as well, and then Alec and I will be there pretty much digging out the trash. Not Erin's trash, though, but we'll be serving our fellow faculty members by helping cook and sourcing farm to table food and things like that. So we really want everyone to come, they can honestly and anybody that's involved in kind of like the carceral education setting, this is an event for you. But outside of that, I really do want to thank Michelson for giving us a platform to be able to discuss what we see from faculty across the board. As you can tell from this panel, what we can see is that there's going to be a gap that forms between where the funding comes from, and then the practitioner level application and implementation, and we want it all to succeed. And so we just asked you to really think about where the faculty fit in your program, and if you're more faculty, how well are you represented within that program? So, Ryan, do I need to send it to you for any closing thoughts, anything like that? All of us are available, I think our emails are gonna get dropped in there, but you can email Alec and I any time, or I don't want to speak to Erin or Andrew, but I'm sure if you have questions, we're actually gonna be out two weeks with Andrew, at their iGEM thing working on professional development stuff, so it's going to be a great time. Also, we just continue to learn and develop and if we don't close ourselves off to that process, we feel as though it's changing teaching, it's changing culture. And it's changing what we're offering as higher education to really be that, you know, like we continue to hone in on what our deliverable is to our students? Yeah. Thank you, everybody.

**Kenia Miranda-Verdugo** 1:08:12

Thank you so much to all of our panelists for the very insightful conversation. We also want to extend our gratitude to the audience for attending this robust discussion that will hopefully serve many incarcerated and justice impacted students and communities. Thank you all for taking the time to join us today, and I hope you all have a wonderful rest of your day.