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Prison Poetry Group

Master of Fine Arts Creative Writing Program, College of Liberal Arts, University of Massachusetts Boston

Bay State Correctional Center

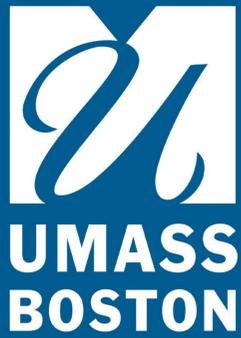
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Prison Poetry Group

Master of Fine Arts Creative Writing Program, College of Liberal Arts, UMass Boston
Bay State Correctional Center

Summary

Beginning in September 2012, a graduate student enrolled in UMass Boston's MFA Creative Writing Program served as the volunteer instructor for a Poetry Group at Baystate Correctional Center. Through creative development and community discussion, this program, which operates during the academic year (September-May), facilitates positive behavioral change in order to eliminate violence, victimization, and recidivism.

Goals and Objectives

- To foster a creative environment that provides an expressive outlet in preparation for successful reentry
- To build positive ties between the community and the inmate population
- To improve inmate verbal and written communication skills
- To develop positive relationships among members of the Poetry Group
- To appreciate the value of poetry as a means to enrich one's life experience
- To provide inmates with tasks that engender responsibility

Results/Impacts

- Instructed 8 participants per year
- Hosted 12 2-hour classes during 2012-2013
- Increased frequency to host 18 2-hour classes (*projected*) during 2013-2014
- Developed group fellowship, which taught inmates the importance and value of cultivating and strengthening interpersonal relationships
- Provided a constructive, creative outlet for students to write, increase critical reading abilities, build empathy, and develop communication skills
- Increased participants' ability to foster positive relationships within the prison and with volunteers

Approaches and Methods

- Provide readings, writing assignments, and discussion topics during class
- Encourage constructive criticism among inmates
- Provide written feedback to encourage further creativity and communication skills development
- Host poetry performance contest during spring

Conclusion/Next Steps

- Graduate student volunteers gained practical classroom experience
- Participants developed interpersonal and communication skills, self-awareness, and educational goals

Participant Testimonials

- "I want to take classes when I am finished with my incarceration..."
- "[I gained] a stronger tolerance for constructive and/or non-constructive criticism."
- "I didn't think I would enjoy sharing due to my insecurities, but [the instructor] made all the writers feel good..."
- "I believe the course brought together people who ordinarily wouldn't associate in an everyday setting. This extended outside the program..."

Partnership Information

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