



BOSTON COLLEGE

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ADVANCING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS:

A REPORT ON THE BOSTON COLLEGE INSIDE-OUT
PROGRAM AT THE SUFFOLK COUNTY HOUSE OF
CORRECTION



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Inside-Out Program**

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Letter from Boston College Inside-Out Program Coordinator

It is with great enthusiasm that we present the first report on the Boston College Inside-Out Program. As you will read on the coming pages, the program has become a generative source of learning and growth for students from Boston College's campus and the House of Correction.

Developing this program has also provided constant learning and inspiration for me in my last five years at Boston College. My work with Inside-Out has given me the opportunity to meet dedicated university and correctional staff, engage with talented instructors and former Inside-Out students from around the world, and learn from the brilliant students who have participated in the Boston College Inside-Out courses that I have had the privilege to facilitate.

When I arrived at Boston College as a doctoral student in 2015 I reached out to Jim DiZio, Director of Education at the Suffolk County House of Correction. He saw potential in expanding his department's partnership with BC through an Inside-Out Program, and he has been a patient and encouraging collaborator over these many years. Today, Jim continues to be a strong supporter and advocate for the program, along with Bob Moran, and the many other staff at the Suffolk County House of Correction who make the course logistics possible.

At Boston College, David Goodman and Father James Burns at the Woods College of Advancing Studies were early supporters of Inside-Out. In particular, David Goodman, who is now at the Lynch School of Education and Human Development, has served the development of Inside-Out with an impressive and inspiring combination of big ideas and practical guidance. In the beginning, Anne Severo, Claudia Pouravelis, and Sarah Piepgrass at Woods College also offered invaluable logistical support – from enrollment to finances. Later on, Karen Muncaster, Michelle Bloomer and Sam Hay at Woods College took the time to get to know Inside-Out and offer a fresh perspective on a number of issues.

At the Lynch School of Education and Human Development, it has been a delight to be working again with Julia DeVoy, who has helped us to thoughtfully integrate Inside-Out into the Lynch School undergraduate curriculum. Terry Poullici and Rosemary Panza at the Lynch School have provided important assistance in stewarding our grant finances.

In the Sociology Department, my long-time research and academic advisor, Stephen Pfohl, has been a constant source of support from the moment when an Inside-Out Program was only an idea. Sarah Babb, and Andrew Jorgenson, in addition to Charlie Derber, Sara Moorman, and other members of the Sociology Department's Undergraduate Studies Committee also provided helpful guidance along the way.



We have been very fortunate to have financial support from the Hearst Foundations. George Irish and staff at Hearst who have provided helpful engagement and clear communication along the way. At BC, Susan Fonseca in the Office of University Advancement saw potential in this program and worked through countless budgets and proposals, along with Angelica Willshire, Susan Hoban and other staff from BC's Office for Sponsored Projects.

Lori Pompa, the Inside-Out staff and Think Tanks, and the network of Inside-Out Instructors around the world have provided both practical training and a constant source of inspiration, ideas, and encouragement. My interest and enthusiasm for Inside-Out literally would not be possible without this amazing network. Thank you for planting the idea of Inside Out in so many minds.

The Inside-Out Program has also benefited from dedicated Teaching and Program Assistants whose ideas have helped the program to grow and improve immensely in the last two years. These have included Diannelle Chaparro, Israel Montes, Isabella Langan, David Sellers, Kyle Summers, Khyeme Johnson, Jovan Diaz, Allison Pyo, Larissa Trunchan, and Jennifer Chiao.

Inside-Out is only what it is today at Boston College because of the inside and outside students who have given it shape as they engaged with difficult conversations and contributed their unique perspectives. We are especially grateful for those whose reflections have helped us to better understand Inside-Out at Boston College and whose words are found on the following pages: Audrey, Blake, Carlos, Dongjin, Gonzalo, Isabella, Jennifer, Jovan, Julia, Kelsey, Kristie, Kyle, Larissa, Lauren, Maria, María Christina, Mischael, Nicole, Ruperto, Sarah, Shawn, Symone, Tia, and Tin.

Finally, I am grateful to you – the reader of this report. Whether you are a student, faculty, or staff at Boston College, a staff member at the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department, an alumni of one of the early BC Inside-Out courses, or someone who is generally interested in Inside-Out Pedagogy, correctional education, or Jesuit Higher Education... Thank you! I hope that you will continue to engage with the Boston College Inside-Out Program.

Sincerely,

Matthew J. DelSesto

Coordinator & Instructor
Inside-Out Program
Boston College



Introduction

Inside-Out is a model of higher education that brings 10-15 students from a college campus (outside students) and 10-15 students from a prison or jail (inside students) to study together as peers. While the idea of bringing people with diverse experiences to learn together in a classroom is a common aspiration of educators, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program based at Temple University has been practicing and promoting the Inside-Out model for more than 20 years. As of this writing, over 50,000 inside and outside students have participated in a variety of Inside-Out courses and programs offered by more than 150 colleges and universities in 48 states and 12 countries.

With a commitment to rigorous liberal arts and formative education, **Boston College is an ideal institution to implement the Inside-Out model, within the special context of a Jesuit, Catholic University. Inside-Out enhances the work and mission of Boston College, and the context of Boston College expands upon Inside-Out Pedagogy in unique ways.** Inside-Out enriches Boston College's engagement with its nearby Boston community, and it offers an opportunity for its campus-based students that is distinct from the dominant service-learning or volunteering programs on campus. It is also an exciting way for students at the House of Correction to begin exploring or continue pursuing higher education, in a place where access to higher education is very limited.

After several years of planning across multiple departments and schools (Sociology Department, Woods College of Advancing Studies, and Lynch School of Education and Human Development) **Boston College offered its first Inside-Out course at the Suffolk County House of Correction in the fall semester of 2018.** Although Boston College has a 25 year partnership with the Suffolk County House of Correction Education Division, this was the first time that Boston College had offered college credit to incarcerated students at the House of Correction, or at any correctional institution. A generous three-year grant from the Hearst Foundations in December 2017 made the expansion of this partnership possible.

Since the Inside-Out Program began at Boston College it has grown to have overwhelming demand from students at Boston College campus and the House of Correction. **More than 65 (inside and outside) students have participated in courses offered through the Boston College Inside-Out Program.** This includes 28 scholarships that have been awarded to incarcerated students, who receive Boston College academic credit for completing the same readings and assignments as the students from campus. Many students continue to engage with Inside-Out on the Boston College campus or at the House of Correction – working to coordinate campus events, serving as a teaching assistant, participating in ongoing program evaluation, or pursuing an independent study on topics related to the course.



In February 2020 we also began to offer an Inside-Out Speaker and Film Series. Although this was cut short as the campus shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic, the first two events in the series engaged attendees from across the Boston College campus, with many participants attending from the wider community. In the Fall 2020 semester, we pivoted our programming and began offering a series of virtual events.

The impacts of the Boston College Inside-Out Program have been impressive. Students will often report that this is one of the most transformative learning experiences that they have had while at Boston College or while incarcerated at the House of Correction. Although the course certainly does have some different impacts for students from the campus or the House of Correction, all students report experiencing a tremendous amount of growth in multiple dimensions of their life. As you will read in the coming pages, this includes noticeably improved critical thinking, self knowledge, desire to participate in their community, and renewed hope or purpose in their learning and life.

There is a bright future for Inside-Out at Boston College, as a program that is meeting deep needs at two different institutions. On these pages you'll learn what the Inside-Out Program has been, and what it is becoming, as part of the unfolding story and tradition of Boston College. First the report describes the background of Inside-Out Program – its origins, values, and pedagogy. Next, it briefly reviews some elements of the Jesuit Tradition that are most relevant to Inside-Out. Then, it explains why students want to take Inside-Out and the impacts that the course has on students. The report concludes with some overall reflections on the present and future Inside-Out at Boston College.



What is Inside-Out?

Our educational institutions need the assets of the community – those tangible and intangible gifts that challenge, deepen, and enhance the world of higher education... Different from “studying” people as “objects,” creating a space for informed community-based voices to emerge – as “subjects” – benefits everyone involved.

(Lori Pompa)

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, or Inside-Out, was developed by Lori Pompa, on the suggestion of an incarcerated student, in hopes of facilitating dialogue and exchanging perspectives beyond prison walls. Inside-Out higher education classes bring students together from a college campus (“outside students”) with people who are incarcerated (“inside students”) to learn, as peers. While the initial Inside-Out courses focused on topics related to criminology, in the last 25 years more than 1000 courses have been offered at over 200 prisons and jails around the world, on subjects ranging from criminal justice to literature to architecture. Regardless of the course topic, students ignite their enthusiasm for learning, find their voice, and are challenged to “consider what good citizenship requires.”[1]

Although Inside-Out has many affinities with service learning, it is important to distinguish Inside-Out classes from service learning or research, which is often the context in which university partnerships are formed with prisons and jails. Instead of these approaches, Inside-Out strives to incorporate both “community-based learning” and “experiential learning.” Community-based learning is a “teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community engagement with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience with a greater emphasis on reciprocal learning and reflection.”[2] In a similar way, experiential learning is a holistic, process-centered approach to education that makes space for dialogue and disagreement, the lived experiences of students, and intentional reflection.[3] Students from the campus are not “helping” anyone, nor are they conducting research on people who are incarcerated. Instead, it is a learning opportunity where “everyone is seen as having something vital to offer in the learning process,” and the instructor acts not as a lecturer but as a facilitator of the discussion.[4] Students’ personal thoughts, feelings, and reactions make valuable contributions to interpreting the readings or engaging in reflective activities.

[1] “The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program: Social Change through Transformative Education,” Inside Out Center, College of Liberal Arts Temple University, 2020, <https://www.insideoutcenter.org/>

[2] “What is Community Based Learning?” Marshall University: Center for Teaching and Learning. Marshall University, 2020. <https://www.marshall.edu/ctl/community-engagement/what-is-service-learning>

[3] Alice Y Kolb and David A Kolb, “Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education,” *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 2005, Volume 4, Issue 2.

[4] Lori Pompa, “Drawing Forth, Finding Voice, Making Change: Inside Out Learning as Transformative Pedagogy,” in Simone Weil Davis and Barbara Sherr Roswell, eds. *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.



At its core, Inside-Out overall aims to move beyond deficit language in discussions of crime and justice. While society is full of discussions about personal and social problems, Inside-Out focuses instead on the creative possibilities of its students. The correctional system often emphasizes the deficits in people and portrays them as broken people in need of fixing. A similar assumption is found in broader society, in which some systems and individuals are seen as only broken or deficient. This point of view, common to academia and wider society, can breed cynicism. Educators and leaders have the responsibility to instead foster a more hopeful outlook and encourage change among generations. This is essential for educational institutions, especially Boston College, which strives to form students to “go forth and set the world aflame,” providing hope in a world that is sometimes overcome with suffering and despair.

At Boston College, the Inside-Out Program initially involves a course titled "Perspectives on Crime, Corrections, and Justice," which provides a chance for all participants to gain a deeper understanding of the United States criminal justice system through the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience. The course draws students with a wide range of academic and professional interests from law, social work, and education to social policy, law enforcement, and community advocacy. It is cross-listed as an elective for Sociology in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, Criminal and Social Justice in the Woods College of Advancing Studies, and Applied Psychology and Human Development in the Lynch School of Education and Human Development.

After a course orientation, Inside-Out activities and discussions at the House of Correction address a different topic in each of the weekly three-hour course sessions – causes of crime, the role of prisons and jails in society, myths and realities of prison life, institutional analysis of the criminal justice system, theories of punishment and rehabilitation, victims and victimization, restorative justice, and the relationship between crime and community. Students are assigned readings to complete beforehand, which provide background knowledge on what they will cover during the class. Once in class, they not only discuss the readings, but also participate in related activities to engage the content on a deeper level. These include community building exercises, large group brainstorming, guided small group discussion questions, and role-playing exercises. Through such activities, students have the opportunity to personally reflect on their own values and experience related to course topics and collectively analyze illustrative case studies that connect theories to real-world implementation.

Students also complete reflection papers that include observations, analysis/integration of readings, and personal reactions. The observations section encourages students to be present in class, as they reflect on what they noticed about class dynamics or content during the session. In the reactions section, students describe their evolving emotional reactions to the course. The instructions are to describe their emotional reaction to the class meeting and explore the depth, length, and changes of these reactions.



This kind of assignment recognizes the importance of students' social-emotional experience in shaping course learning, and it gives value to the lived experiences of the students, providing a space to examine feelings they might otherwise ignore. Overall, the papers encourage students to pay attention to the multiple dimensions of their experience, so that they can reflect on its meaning in deeper ways.

As a culmination of the course, students spend the last few meetings creating a final project in groups, a process which is designed to shift the conversations from analytical and critical to hopeful and solution-oriented. The students are able to step back and combine what they learned into something tangible that could realistically be implemented. During the Inside-Out Closing Ceremony at the end of the semester, students present their projects to their peers and guests, which have included Boston College faculty and deans in addition to staff from the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department. The guests, then, have the honor of presenting each student with a certificate for their achievements. Students reflect on the meaning of Inside-Out in their lives, have a chance to say parting words to their inside and outside classmates, and later complete a final integrative paper.



Inside-Out at Boston College and the Suffolk County House of Correction

There are two aspects to every university. The first and most evident is that it deals with culture, with knowledge, the use of the intellect. The second, and not so evident, is that it must be concerned with the social reality – precisely because a university is inescapably a social force: it must transform and enlighten the society in which it lives. But how does it do that? How does a university transform the social reality of which it is so much a part?

(Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J.)

Jesuit Education and Inside-Out

As a Jesuit, Catholic University, Boston College has a rich tradition that is enlivened by the presence of the Inside-Out Program. The Boston College Inside-Out Program deepens the University's meaningful engagement with the wider Boston community beyond the Chestnut Hill Campus. It also contributes to BC's Jesuit, Catholic mission in several important ways.

Ignatian Pedagogy. The vibrant life of Boston College today has its origins in early Jesuit practices. This spirituality is represented in St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and gave rise to what has come to be known as Ignatian Pedagogy. In contemporary times, Ignatian Pedagogy involves three key elements: encouraging people to **pay attention** to their experience, **reflect** on its meaning, and decide how to **act**.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius emphasizes the importance of creating learning contexts that allow people to better orient toward "realities to be contemplated, scenes to be imagined, feelings to be evaluated, possibilities to be explored, options to be considered, alternatives to be weighed, judgments to be reached and choices of action to be made."^[5] For Ignatius, books were only the beginning of a journey towards deeper understanding of the world. His exercises were not meant to be read and only discussed, but instead with his words he urges the reader to participate in community and discern the best course of action. Ignatian Pedagogy encourages education to strive for more than the memorization of factual information or coming up with a detailed academic analysis. It urges educators to partner with students to explore their dreams and desires, reflect on who they are becoming as people, and take action to live a moral and ethical life.

[5] Society of Jesus. *Ignatian Pedagogy: Practical Approach*. 1993, p.6.



Inside-Out Pedagogy brings out the best of Ignatian Pedagogy in its exercises that encourage students to pay attention to themselves and their surroundings in new ways, reflect on their own evolving experience, and imagine or discern pathways for action. The rhythms of the week – gaining first impressions from the readings, discussing the issues with perspectives during the weekly class meeting, and then writing reflections on the most important take-away about the topic of the week based on a combination of reading and dialogue – reflect a profoundly Ignatian approach. The course also culminates with an in-class group project which guides students to apply what they've learned – allowing their hard work writing, discussing and thinking to bear fruit in the development of a proposal for an action-oriented project related to course topics.

Humanism. A Boston College education seeks to embody the Jesuit ideal of **cura personalis**, or care for the whole person. Jesuits have long emphasized that while we may have many roles or professions in our lives, our most fundamental vocation is to be human. At Jesuit universities, faculty and staff strive to help students to see more deeply into their own humanity – exploring what it has meant to be a human being throughout history and in contemporary times. The 21st century is a time of great progress, and also of growing attention to inequality and human vulnerability in the face of global social and ecological change. The Jesuit Tradition teaches us that, as we develop a deeper understanding of our own humanity, we can make it possible for others to realize theirs. This push for the realization of humanity in others is perhaps best embodied in Boston College's motto, **men and women for others**.

The early Jesuits also recognized that our perspectives are enriched by understanding the experiences and expressions of others' humanity. That is, in helping others find their humanity, we cannot assume what it looks like or impose our own. One must engage in ongoing learning about the lived experiences of others in order to be open minded enough to take effective action. Learning how every individual holds different experiences in their humanity is essential to knowing what it means to be a human being living in a society at a given moment in history.

The Inside-Out Program is an extraordinary example of this humanism as it allows all participants to gain a richer understanding of the humanity of themselves and others. Most notably, Inside-Out courses create a small satellite campus of Boston College. During class sessions, one room in the House of Correction becomes a BC classroom, which upholds the same values and rigorous standards as any course at Boston College. This is to say that regardless of how students have found their way into the Inside-Out classroom – whatever their sentence, major, or prior life experience – they are first and foremost a human being.



While there are, of course, some practical differences in holding a Boston College course in a House of Correction, the Inside-Out Program consistently emphasizes the common humanity of inside and outside students – as people who have experienced suffering and joy, accomplishments and setbacks. Inside-Out Program participants do not only learn about the course content. They discover new insights about their own particular human experience and about their shared humanity – even across profound social divides.

Student Formation. At its core, the student experience at Boston College is meant to be a formative education. As a Jesuit, Catholic University, Boston College has long been committed to helping students grow intellectually, socially, and spiritually.[6] The intellectual dimension involves the structured syllabus with readings and academic assessments. It requires instructors who will strive to be a guide or role model, and inspire passion for learning among students. The **intellectual** dimension is about mastering knowledge and skills in a specific discipline. Additionally, the intellectual aspect of university life aims to recognize the diversity of gifts in students and encourage them in their quest for knowledge.

The **social** dimension provides an experience of making new friends, joining in clubs, learning healthy habits, and understanding the complexities of adult life. It aims to expose students to situations that will give them joy, challenge them, or even disappoint them – teaching them how to explore their emotions. This social dimension also provides students with the opportunity to reflect on how they have been marginalized and privileged in their lives, or how others are marginalized in society today.

Finally, the **spiritual** and moral dimension is one of the most unique aspects of a Jesuit education. In this dimension, Boston College encourages students to search for meaning as they incorporate insights from the past and lessons from new experiences. A Jesuit, Catholic University like Boston College encourages students to grapple with the moral and ethical dimensions of their lives – for example in drawing on long-standing theories of justice or the ethics of a range of religious and spiritual traditions. Students are encouraged to seek out new experiences and communities to nourish their moral commitments and religious or spiritual life.

Overall, these dimensions of student formation are neither a linear journey, nor another way to fragment student experience. It is meant to be an evolving and dynamic process – as students move towards the integration of their intellectual, social, and spiritual lives.

[6] Boston College Division of Mission and Ministry. *The Journey into Adulthood: Understanding Student Formation*, Chestnut Hill, MA, 2006.



Much like the tradition of Boston College, the Inside-Out Program is grounded in a commitment to the social, intellectual, and moral formation of its students. Rather than seeing these as separate dimensions of students' lives, the course integrates these aspects of student experience into discussions, assignments, and activities in class. For example, reflection papers in the course ask students to pay attention to their reactions to the experience, and role-playing exercises encourage students to develop empathy for people in different life situations. Students also report that lessons from the classroom are often carried over into other aspects of their lives. The opportunity to share and exchange ideas on a deeper level across profound social divides can be very meaningful. Overall, students are also intentionally selected to have a wide range of ages and experiences (across multiple schools at Boston College and within the House of Correction), which creates opportunities for different kinds of social connection beyond traditional peer-groups of BC's Chestnut Hill Campus.

An Expanding Partnership: Boston College & the Suffolk County House of Correction

The Inside-Out Program builds on a 25-year partnership between Boston College and the Suffolk County House of Correction. The partnership has involved three departments/divisions at Boston College that contribute to the educational mission of the House of Correction including the 4Boston Program of Campus Ministry, the Pulse Program for Service Learning, and The Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program. During the academic year, the Pulse and 4Boston programs have created a consistent capacity for the Suffolk County House of Correction Education Department to facilitate ongoing tutoring in areas of the high school equivalency program, college preparation, K-12 education, and daytime assistance for teachers. During the summer months, several Boston College Students in the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program have enabled the House of Correction to sustain this tutoring program.

With support from dedicated service that decades of Boston College students have provided, many people who are incarcerated have gone on to advance their education level, pass their HiSet test, prepare for careers, or even enroll in college courses upon their release. In addition to advancing educational goals of students at the House of Correction, the partnership also makes powerful contributions to the learning and formation of Boston College students. The students travelling from Boston College for their service are often powerfully affected by their time at the House of Correction – as it shapes their academic learning, career trajectories and personal interests.

Overall, the Inside-Out Program expands and furthers this mutual partnership by offering credit-bearing college courses to the House of Correction that bring the best of a Jesuit Liberal Arts Education to the House of Correction. Incarcerated students are no longer only service recipients. They become peers of campus-based students and active participants in the evolving story of Boston College.



Evaluation Methodology

In approaching this evaluation, we aimed to hold to some big ideas as well as a set of values that aligned with the Inside-Out mission and the tradition of Jesuit, Catholic higher education.

One significant idea we kept in mind during this evaluation was an emphasis on the connection between Inside-Out and a Jesuit, Catholic University. While sorting through course applications, anonymous Inside-Out evaluations, selected student work, and our own experiences, we considered what ways the themes we noticed related to Jesuit, Catholic ideas and Ignatian Pedagogy. By staying centered with this focus, we hoped to clarify the ties between Inside-Out and Boston College.

A main value we held throughout was being participatory. We tried to include as many voices as possible in the process of writing this evaluation despite the logistical complexity and coordinating difficulties it sometimes brought. By including both inside and outside students in the process of working with the instructor to describe key course outcomes and frame the evaluation metrics, however, we were able to more directly represent the experience of Inside-Out at Boston College.

Similarly, we aimed to be representative by including people with various roles in Inside-Out in the process. Our experience over four Inside-Out semesters – as instructor/facilitator, student/participant, and teaching assistant/co-facilitator – allowed us to convey multiple dimensions of the Inside-Out experience. This value of representation was furthered in the way we evaluated information from our sources, such as student applications and evaluations. We focused on including as many different students' voices as possible, using their own words to explain impacts whenever possible. In fact, we derived the themes outlined later in this report directly from patterns that emerged from the responses, rather than prescribing themes preemptively. By doing this, we hoped to stay as student-centered, and representative of the many different experiences people have with Inside-Out, as possible.

We were also constantly discerning the ethical implications of our evaluation together. Student work in the course has potentially sensitive and emotional reflections that we understood that students may not want to share. To respect anonymity and this sensitive information, we only included student work with their permission and after the course was completed.



The reader will notice that, in many cases, we do not identify whether or not a quotation is from an incarcerated student or a student from campus. This is because our evaluation aimed to see inside and outside students as equal learners and participants. There are, of course, many practical differences between the experience of how an inside or outside student comes to the classroom. At the same time, on the most basic level, both inside and outside students receive the same credit, complete the same readings and assignments, and are held to the same high standards as any campus course. It is important to emphasize that when incarcerated students enroll in an Inside-Out course, they actually become Boston College students for the semester. For this reason, throughout the report, we try to avoid unnecessary distinctions between inside and outside students. Although, there are some instances where this sort of distinction proved useful for explaining the unique impact or dynamics of the course.



Why do students want to take Inside-Out?

Honestly, I want a chance to break the cycle of incarceration. I believe that advancing my schooling will improve those chances.

(inside student)

I want to have open dialogue with people who have been personally affected by our prison systems because these people are the ones who most probably have the best ideas about how to reform it.

(outside student)

To participate in the Inside-Out Program, prospective students on the inside and outside complete an application and interview process that asks them about their interest in the course. The purpose of the applications is to help students clarify their motivation for participating in the Inside-Out Program and to get input for adapting course content based on students' personal and professional interests.

By the Spring 2020 semester, demand for this kind of course far exceeded available capacity. While the program received more than 30 applications from interested outside students and more than 25 interested inside students, funding and space availability only allows the program to enroll about 12 inside and 12 outside students – for a total of about 24. One thing is clear, the Inside-Out Program is addressing deep needs among students at the House of Correction and Boston College.

In this section, we take a closer look at these applications, especially responses to why students want to take the course. Through this evaluation, we aimed to better understand the reasons students are interested in Inside-Out, and therefore identify how the program can expand and continue to serve students' identified interests and needs.

Interest in the course content. Inside-Out attracts students that want to “learn first-hand how the criminal justice system affects other people, and how it affects [themselves].” In their applications, students expressed their interest in learning more about the criminal justice system and the “deep rooted problems within our system.” Students showed interest in various topics within the criminal justice system like the “school-to-prison pipeline,” “disproportionality of the prison population by race and gender,” and “the private prison debate.” At Boston College, the Woods College of Advancing Studies' Criminal and Social Justice major only offers a few courses a semester, and the House of Correction has historically never offered a class that allows students to explore topics of crime and justice in an academic setting. Inside-Out helps fill this need of formal ways to learn more about the criminal justice system.



Real-world context for engaging with the issues. Interest in this class, however, does not only come from the course content; it comes from what students see as an opportunity to explore the topic through different perspectives. One student mentioned, “I hope to gain a new view of criminal justice from a human perspective... This class presents a space in which we come together as human beings to share [the] perspectives that we have gained through a defining moment of our life.” Students also show interest in the additional human side to education that Inside-Out provides in learning from real people with different perspectives. The applications demonstrate that this course attracts students because of the potential they see to learn from other people in a classroom context that would otherwise not be available. One student was “grateful to take the class with outside students and other inmates for the chance to hear other perspectives.” Another student wrote, “I want to have open dialogue with people who have been personally affected by our prison systems because these people are the ones who most probably have the best ideas about how to reform it.”

These two student perspectives are representative of the sentiments of many prospective Inside-Out students. Students in the House of Correction do not typically get to spend time with people from the outside world, and Boston College students rarely learn about social issues from within the institution being studied. Although inside and outside students may have very different relationships with the course material, they both show interest in the opportunity the class provides to learn from others’ perspectives beyond their typical social groups and think about change together.

Sense of personal achievement/ accomplishment. Students who want to take the course typically recognize that it is more than a purely academic experience. For some students, it can be seen as a potential for personal achievement or accomplishment. One student expressed interest in the course because it might be an opportunity, “to accomplish something and earn some college credits at the same time.” Before taking the course, the student added, “I’m not one-hundred percent sure exactly what Inside-Out is all about, but my interest is piqued and I love to learn.” This course provides a chance to accomplish something unique in a student’s time at the Suffolk County House of Correction or Boston College.

Additionally, students hope that Inside-Out will provide a space to be authentic and open up conversation to make personal and social change. In this sense, Inside-Out is also of particular interest for inside students who express an eagerness to personally contribute to a conversation on issues that directly impact their lives—as they hope to make their experience of incarceration into something positive or constructive. As one student explains, “[With Inside-Out] I have the capability to complete something that will better my future so that I can come home and be a productive and positive influence in my community.”



Personal and professional development. Students also see this course as an opportunity for personal development. One of the students responds to the application by saying, “I want to enroll in the [Inside-Out] program because I feel like it would be a fresh start for me to try something different for once. It seems like you get the same results when you do the same thing. I want different results.” The course provides a change in routine within incarceration, as well as the routine from taking courses in a college classroom on campus. For inside and outside students, Inside-Out is seen as a course that will challenge themselves in a new way and discern their career interests or personal strengths. Another student writes, “I would also like to feed my brain while incarcerated and make the best of a bad situation.” Students have a sense that this course will provide them with an opportunity for personal growth.

Many students that are interested in the Inside-Out course want to use the space of diverse perspectives and the topic of crime and corrections to further learning for their professional careers. Inside and outside students demonstrated a desire to use this course to enhance their understanding of crime and corrections for careers such as law, corrections, social work, and many others. One student interested in pursuing education policy shares, “the greater understanding of the criminal justice system I would get through this class would allow me to better understand the situations of the students I hope to help in the future.” The course also provides all students with college credit, which is important to further the path towards receiving a degree.

Disrupting the norm of a system and being part of the solution. Students are also interested in the course because they see it as an opportunity to have new conversations about the criminal justice system and be a part of the solution. One student wisely said, “I have a stake in this game and am no longer an observer.” For those inside or outside students who have a personal relationship to prisons or jails, it may be difficult to be in a space in which this topic is discussed openly. One student recognized this and said, “I cautiously expect this class to open my eyes to more such programs and possibilities, but I understand at times my heart may not walk in a perfect parallel. My extended family has ridden this painfully infinite merry go round for my entire life. We all want off it. I am determined to get off it, learn from it, and change it. I am thirsting to take this class to change my jaded view of the criminal justice system – period.” This student recognized the opportunity Inside-Out provided in changing life’s trajectory and learning from a negative situation. For one inside student, being part of the solution meant getting educated: “I am determined to get a degree when I get out. I can’t tell my son education is everything without a degree myself. I am supposed to lead by example and that is what I would like to do.” The student sees Inside-Out not only as a way to earn college credits, but also as an incredible opportunity to learn and improve – as an opportunity to break the cycle of incarceration, disrupt the norm, and contribute to the solution.



How does participation in Inside-Out impact students?

In studying with, not about, inside students, we were given the opportunity to dive deeper than any article or theoretical lens would be able to provide for us

(outside student)

Inside-Out allows students to reclaim their self worth, value, and mental/ creative strengths

(inside student)

Students often identify Inside-Out as one of the most influential or transformational experiences they have had in their time at Boston College or the House of Correction. It has become clear that participation in Inside-Out impacts students in a variety of ways beyond simply the attainment of knowledge. At the end of each semester, students reflect on what Inside-Out has meant to them. These reflections are compiled and shared with the whole class, in addition to any guests who are visiting the class, during the closing ceremony. We reviewed what students said across three semesters of the course. We used comments from some students' final papers, but only those who had already completed the course and gave us permission to use their work for this report. Overall, students identify many themes in their learning from Inside-Out, including a change in perspective, a change in attitude, and a growth of hope.

General knowledge about crime, corrections, and justice. In recent decades, the criminal justice system has come to the general consciousness of the wider public. The rise of documentaries, scholarship, media coverage about the plight of people who are incarcerated has raised interest in learning about the system – both for people who are experiencing the system directly, and for those who have no personal connection to prisons or jails. A foundational takeaway from the course is a deeper knowledge about the crime, corrections, and justice in the United States. Students say that they will take the “informative statistics from the readings” along with information about “different justice models [and] victims.” For individuals at Boston College, this class caters to a student body increasingly interested in the criminal justice system and the role it plays in United States society. Sometimes to their surprise, students who are incarcerated at the Suffolk County House of Correction also say they learn a great deal about crime, corrections, and justice.

Importance of being open to discussion. A key aspect of the course is being part of a discussion in which all opinions are welcomed and viewed as valuable to the learning experience.



Through this, many students have learned the “importance of perspective” or “the importance of looking at every situation from all viewpoints.” Another student describes having a revelation, realizing “the value of talking openly and honestly and actively listening to others do the same.” This course encourages the idea that student voices are just as much part of the learning experience as academic theories and text books – a key insight that is often overlooked in the higher education classroom. It encourages all students to have a voice. One student explains that, “it is so important to create a space where inside students can be heard and their perspectives and knowledge can be appreciated to its fullest.” In the words of another student, “in no other class, have I learned as much from the individual perspectives of my classmates...having different perspectives, listening to them, respecting them, and challenging them at times is what makes this course rich.”

Connection and community. Through listening to different perspectives and having open discussion in class, the class builds a sense of community throughout the semester. As one student says, “the unique community that was built because of the people [from such different experiences] who are in class is an experience that will always stay with me.” The respect maintained in the class allows “the class to be open, honest, and vulnerable.” Through the humanizing experience of connecting in the classroom, students are able to develop a “renewed sense of community in education,” especially for inside students who may have felt that being “inside [prevented them] from thinking outside the intellectual box.” For outside students, “the class added a layer of humanity to the statistics of mass incarceration.” One outside student thought that “many on the outside don’t think of people on the inside as human beings on the same level. That is something . . . to reconsider while having conversations and building community with classmates.” The sense of community and support in the classroom also enabled growth and learning “about how to approach conflict, how to look at things holistically, and how to be more understanding.”

Knowledge of self. Many students also identify a greater knowledge of self after Inside-Out. Students come away with a greater awareness of their own beliefs, personality, disposition, and social location. A student shared that because there were many divergent opinions and conflicting perspectives, the course allowed the students to reflect on their “position and intersecting identities.” Another student asserts the course was a space to recognize previously unacknowledged “narrow mindedness, biases and even soapboxes.” An inside student had previously identified as someone that would not judge other people, “saw how hypocritical [that] was... after the first class.” The perspective-taking frequently practiced in class prepared students to understand their life and social context more deeply and therefore gain this new knowledge of themselves.



Humility and intellectual modesty. Self-knowledge not only proves to be valuable on its own, but also fosters humility or intellectual modesty. In the process of learning through the voices of other students, the class has the ability to expose students to a variety of opinions and perspectives, and provides students with the opportunity to confront their previous assumptions. Students frequently report appreciating the chance to write openly and honestly about their “observations” and “reactions” from class. This allowed students to, over time, learn to share unfinished thoughts with humility and engage in dialogue while, “[challenging] and critically [analyzing] previous assumptions.” Students often state that the class helped uncover ignorance about course topics and classmates. This demonstrates the realization students often have during the semester: that they can engage in vigorous debate while still acknowledging that the assumptions of their arguments could be false, or in need of revision, in light of new ideas they have not yet encountered.

Analytical and critical thinking skills. The combination of the Inside-Out dialogic format and content related to crime and justice fosters critical-thinking and analytical skills. By analyzing their own experiences and assumptions about the criminal justice system and placing their personal experience in context of the readings from class, students are able to consider their own beliefs and the ideas of others from multiple perspectives. One student explains that Inside-Out teaches “how to think more about what’s going around... and see things more clearly.” Another student explains how Inside-Out, “helped... build skills to critically challenge and attempt to understand the history and functions of different systems in society that we are socialized to accept as normal.” This student has now learned to “question these things, rather than blindly accept how they are.”

Empowerment and agency. After participating in Inside-Out, students often report a newfound sense of empowerment or agency. For many students, this is related to the conclusion of the course, which involves discussing and developing a solutions-based project. Participating in authentic dialogue also more generally seems to give students a sense that they can contribute to change. One student intends to “take the stories and perspectives shared by... classmates into future advocacy efforts,” an idea echoed by other students that expressed feeling “armed with the information [needed] to propose and act out... ideas for solutions.” Another student explains that “[Inside-Out] has helped to spark a passion for criminal justice reform,” and encouraged consideration about “ways to incorporate this into [a] future career path.” For inside students in particular, however, an additional effect emerged: students voiced that the class “made [them] feel like human beings” and “allows students to reclaim their self of worth, value, and mental/ creative strengths.”



Dedication to learning and commitment to education. Inside-Out also encourages a deeper dedication to learning and appreciation for education. The course, with its real-world implications, encourages students to deeply engage in the course material. For example, students report that Inside-Out has “increased [their] self-discipline on doing all [their] work,” has made them “want to learn more and educate [themselves],” and has been a “motivator to continue [their] education.” Inside-Out has presented an opportunity for inside students to realize they “can thrive in a college setting.” One student explains that the course has provided “motivation and more to achieve greatness after [being] incarcerated.” For some students from the BC campus and the House of Correction, Inside-Out is the catalyst for a realization that they have simply been “going through the motions” in their respective institutions. This leads them to express a desire to engage more deeply and authentically with their learning and education.

A new way of thinking. Many students leave Inside-Out expressing that they have a changed mindset—not simply in the way they can critically analyze or how they feel towards education, but a change in the way they view people and the world. Students seem to come into the course with some hesitancy and leave with a more complex and courageous view of the world—that sees more fully how their own humanity is influenced by social forces and intertwined with others. They are transformed by being pushed each day to open up, be honest, and challenge themselves and others. One student describes now “[using] labels less and [beginning] to understand and see the labeling used,” which suggests Inside-Out has provided a new perspective on the way people think and act along with a greater acknowledgment of the consequences of language. Another student shares that Inside-Out fostered “[a stripping] away [of] labels until all that is left is the person,” a skill this student hopes to be able to take forward. This mirrored other students’ realizations that “we are all just human beings aiming towards the same, overarching goals,” and of “the value of contact, communication, and conversation in working toward a common goal and the greater good.”

Hope. It may seem like the oppression and injustice we discuss throughout the course would lead to frustration and discouragement. While Inside-Out does leave students with a deeper understanding of challenging social realities, they also seem to take on a more hopeful view. One student explains that, “classes such as Inside-Out provide a beacon of hope.” Hope is a natural outcome of a course that empowers change, encourages solutions, and builds a strong sense of community among students who care about an issue and seek change. Students describe finding hope in meeting classmates “so passionate about learning and moving society in a positive direction” and taking with them a “better outlook on things and life” and the knowledge that “we are all connected.” This is not a naive hope that there is no suffering in the world, but a renewed commitment to seek out opportunities to act for personal and social change.



Future directions:

Building on foundations of Inside-Out and Jesuit Education

To avoid any redundancies about how spiritually transforming this class ended up being for myself and probably everyone else I will end with this last comparison. Sometimes the assignment is spelled out with a certain number of pages. Sometimes the lesson is so profound that you simply cannot exact the correct structure of the essay because you are so overwhelmed by the lesson that you learned. You know it is supposed to be 12 pages. You know you need that to pass. But when you really learn the lesson, it resonates through your soul. You don't need to pass the physical essay because you passed in your heart. My last comparison is exactly that. I am no longer seen as what the system wants you to see. Through this curriculum I can understand how to transform...

(inside student)

Over the last three years, the Inside-Out Program has become an important part of a Boston College education for 35 students from the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, the Lynch School of Education and Human Development, and the Woods College of Advancing Studies. In addition, after four semesters 28 incarcerated students have earned Boston College credit. Some have been released and applied these credits to their education at institutions of higher education around the Northeast. Throughout these three years, we have learned of the tremendous need for Inside-Out at Boston College and the House of Correction. This is evident in the deep desire students have to have meaningful dialogue beyond the many social and physical barriers that divide us today – and also the multi-dimensional impacts that students report from Inside-Out.

The 21st Century has been a time of increasingly global connection, and at the same time, it has brought new political, social, and physical divides that sometimes seem insurmountable. We have found that Inside-Out Program is more than a course. It represents the power of authentic dialogue – in the context of meaningful engagements between a university and its surrounding communities – to deepen our collective knowledge, enhance our capacity to respond to contemporary challenges, and cultivate a new generation of responsible civic leaders. At its core, the Boston College Inside-Out Program is about convening dialogues on issues of our day, creating learning experiences that transcend campus and correctional walls, and engaging in ongoing reflection with an ever-growing community of Inside-Out Program students and alumni.

There are a number of ways that the Inside-Out Program at Boston College can continue to grow, and we are always looking for ways to enhance our curricular and extracurricular offerings on the Boston College campus and the House of Correction.



In the past, after taking the initial Inside-Out course offering, inside and outside students have served as Interns or Program Assistants who facilitate small groups for Inside-Out courses, pursued further academic study on topics related to Inside-Out, or helped with research and logistics related to the program. In the coming years, the program could also offer a wider selection of courses based on student interest, expand peer mentoring options, develop graduate offerings or professional education, initiate community-based research related to incarceration and reentry, or host events, workshops, and further opportunities for the wider community. Whatever the future holds, we know that there is both immense power and untapped potential in Inside-Out Pedagogy at BC. The Boston College Inside-Out Program brings together the rich tradition of Jesuit, Catholic education with the Inside-Out model in mutually enriching and inspiring ways for all who participate.



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