# THE INSIDE-OUT PRISON EXCHANGE PROGRAM

**POLICY ON NON-PROGRAMMATIC CONTACT**

1. **If an Inside and Outside student develop a connection during their Inside-Out course, is it appropriate (and permissible) for them to exchange personal information and be in touch after the class, as they might with any other peer?**
   1. **No.**

**Q. Why?**

**A. Two reasons.**

**Reason #1: DOC Ethics Policies for Staff and Volunteers**

Corrections officials have a host of concerns to consider in running a prison safely for everybody. Clear rules help them do that. This is taken straight from a typical Department of Corrections (DOC) staff/volunteer handbook:

Employees: executive service, management service, classified, and unrepresented employees of the department, temporary employees, **volunteers** and contract service providers. *(Emphasis added.)*

Inmate/Offender: any person under the supervision of a federal, state, city or local correctional agency who is **in custody or on parole, post-prison supervision or probation status**. *(Emphasis added.)*

Relationships with Inmates/Offenders: …**All employees shall confine their relationships** with inmates/offenders, or their family and friends, **to those activities which are within the scope of the employee’s duties.** – Oregon DOC Code of Conduct *(Emphasis added.)*

Does it seem strange to define “volunteers” as “employees?” Does it seem strange to categorize outside students as “volunteers?”

In general, there are two categories of outside people permitted in prison, “employees/volunteers” and “friends/family.” A key difference: **Friends/family do not go past the visiting room.**

The DOC almost always categorizes outside students as volunteers in order make Inside-Out possible under their rules. That’s because decision-makers at the DOC think Inside-Out is important and want it to happen.

But outside students are not volunteers, are they?

Not really, from Inside-Out’s point of view – the program considers outside students as peers – with the inside students – in an academic learning experience.

But for the DOC, the designation is necessary and has real ramifications. You need to be willing to live with that. If you can’t, Inside-Out is not for you.

If a person violates this contact rule, it is considered by most if not all prisons to be a security concern. If Inside-Out causes a security concern, the institution may decide to stop hosting it. If one institution stops hosting the class due to security concerns, others may join them. And if this happens, it could be the end of a program that has touched and inspired thousands of people, and has the potential to reach thousands more. Do you want to be that person?

Most times, the Inside-Out contact rule parallels prison rules regarding approved contact with volunteers coming in from the outside. It is important for instructors and students (inside and outside) to know the actual rules of the facility as well as Inside-Out policy. Often, even if the contact rule isn’t already a formal rule of a correctional facility, it is nonetheless key to the administration agreeing to allow Inside-Out to take place. *Regardless of rule variations from one correctional facility to another, the Inside-Out contact rule stands for all students.*

# Reason #2: Leadership

Because of prison volunteer contact restrictions, any person found by the prison to have violated the rule on non-programmatic contact will likely face a sanction.

For inside folks, this could include going to the “hole” or transfer to a different prison. For people on parole, it could mean re-incarceration.

For outside folks, it could mean being permanently barred from that specific prison or that whole prison system. It could mean additional sanctions from the college or university. Depending on the seriousness of the violation, it could affect graduation, transcripting, and recommendations for further schooling or employment.

In either case, the person’s ability to develop their leadership abilities through Inside-Out and related programs can be seriously compromised.

This sounds like an appeal to self-interest. It’s not. Inside-Out’s mission is, in part, to nurture future leaders who will help their (inside or outside) communities develop creative approaches to crime, justice, and social change.

Inside-Out exists as it does because many, many specific incarcerated people and people from outside have worked hard for decades to make a difference *without* being personally in touch. You would not be here without them.

Looking ahead, who knows what change *you* might be part of in 10, 20, or 30 years?

If you care about justice issues, please preserve your credibility, your reputation, and your colleagues’ trust in your ability to follow ethics guidelines, so that you can play a leadership role in the future.

# Q. So what does this policy mean in practical terms?

As long as a student is incarcerated or under criminal justice supervision (e.g. on parole), s/he and his/her outside classmates may not independently:

* Exchange last names or personal contact information.
* Correspond via snail mail or (where available) e-mail during or after the duration of the course.
* Communicate by telephone or through visits during or after the duration of the course.
* “Friend” one another on social networking sites such as Facebook.

# Q. What IS allowed?

With the approval of your instructor, education manager, or Inside-Out supervisor, participation in prison or community-based Inside-Out-sponsored events, programs, and related efforts is permitted.

# Q. What if I see a classmate on the street, and one of us may be under CJ supervision?

Don’t make yourself crazy with anxiety. If you’re happy to see them, be happy. If you are interested in being involved in any Inside-Out projects, perhaps you will have the opportunity to collaborate. Chance encounters don’t inherently break the contact rule, but continued relationships outside of programmatic involvement do.

# Q. What if coincidentally we join the same church or get jobs at the same place?

Again, don’t make yourself crazy. If you are on CJ supervision, protect yourself by letting your parole officer know. If you were an outside student, let your instructor know. This has happened – in fact, former classmates have been employed together at the Inside-Out Center itself.

# Q. What if, after completing an Inside-Out course, I am ethically opposed to this policy?

Talk to your instructor, an Inside-Out staff person, or the prison education manager about it. If you have an idea for a better approach, one consistent with DOC policy that will protect the program, put it in writing, and send it to Inside-Out. We’ll read and consider any good faith suggestion.

# Q. What if I am asked something that I think violates the policy but I’m not sure if it does or I don’t want to be rude?

You could say, “I’d like to check with the instructor about this. I don’t want to jeopardize the program or get either of us in trouble.” If the request is not legitimate, the person will drop it.

But some things are on the line and are judgment calls, so if you’re in doubt, it’s worth asking. A typical example: An outside student may have a copy of an article relevant to class that s/he has offered to give an inside student. But the inside student is worried about violating the policy against accepting things carried into prison. If the inside student accepts the document, it could become a problem. But if the students ask the instructor about it and the instructor agrees the article is valuable, the instructor will probably find an institutionally acceptable way to make it available to the inside student.

# Q. What if I am, for some reason, absolutely committed to being in touch with a particular person while one of us is still under criminal justice supervision?

If you’re committed enough to jeopardize the program, and to accept the potential personal consequences that could result for you or someone else, then be committed enough to talk to the instructor, Inside-Out staff, or education manager first, so they can encourage you to reconsider or at least try to find a way to proceed that causes the least damage to the program and the individuals involved.

# In closing…

Just to be crystal clear, the policy detailed here applies only if and while one classmate is incarcerated or under criminal justice supervision (i.e. incarcerated or on parole).

We encourage you to think of your classmates of colleagues, and to think of your potential working relationships stretching into the future. If you honor DOC ethics policies, continue to educate yourself and develop yourself as a leader through Inside-Out and/or other programs, and involve yourself in activities promoting education and justice in your communities, inside and outside of prison, you may well find opportunities for continued collaboration.