

Pushing the Envelope for Evolution and Social Change: Critical Challenges for Teaching Inside-Out

The Prison Journal
93(2) 189–210
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DOI: 10.1177/0032885512472691
tpj.sagepub.com



Alana Van Gundy¹, Angela Bryant²,
and Brian C. Starks³

Abstract

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (Inside-Out) is a program that offers college courses taught in a blended classroom within correctional settings, resulting in multiple challenges for instructors. This article focuses on three major challenges that should be considered by Inside-Out instructors: addressing legal challenges for the instructor, students, university, and prison site; creating and sustaining diversity in a blended classroom; and, balancing the rules of the Inside-Out program and the institution. Utilizing a post hoc observation-as-participant framework, we present our experiences of teaching Inside-Out courses to demonstrate these distinct challenges and provide recommendations for current and future Inside-Out faculty, as well as the National program.

Keywords

inside-out prison exchange program, inside-out challenges

¹Miami University, Hamilton, OH, USA

²The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA

³Delaware State University, Dover, DE, USA

Corresponding Author:

Alana Van Gundy, Miami University Department of Criminal Justice, 1601 University Blvd.,
Hamilton, OH 45011, USA.

Email: yoderal@muohio.edu

There are multiple levels of challenges that make teaching college courses in correctional institutions difficult. Faculty who teach in prisons often deal with varied opinions and support for correctional education, such as a lack of public funding, issues of societal understanding of the relationship between education, reentry, and recidivism, and prison-specific challenges (e.g., support of warden, correctional staff, etc.). Even when a correctional educational program is composed solely of incarcerated students with full-time instructors and is supported by legislative initiatives and state resources, the challenges are multifaceted, unique, and difficult to overcome.

Those who teach Inside-Out courses focus on the mission of promoting a transformative educational experience. They also face unique challenges from offering the course in a blended classroom, that is, “inside” and “outside” students. Each trained instructor must follow the specific rules and policy of the National Program as well as accommodate additional policies of their university and the correctional facility. Despite the uniformity, training, and mission promoted by the Inside-Out program, bringing outside university students into an educational domain in which half of the students are incarcerated adds another layer of intricacy, concern, and challenge for the instructor, the institution, and the students.

The authors participated in the National Inside-Out Prison Exchange Training in May 2009. Since the training, our individual experiences with Inside-Out have varied. One coauthor taught her first Inside-Out course in the Fall of 2009 at a prison that houses approximately 1,642 minimum and medium security men. A second coauthor taught his first course as a graduate student in the Fall of 2010 at the only state female prison that houses a maximum of 450 women. The third coauthor has actively advocated offering a course and has a local prison site eagerly awaiting an Inside-Out course offering. However, she is continuing to navigate her university’s legal issues and concerns.

The purpose of this article is threefold. First, the authors provide a literature review of challenges faced by correctional educators. We apply this literature to what we find to be the three greatest dilemmas or unique challenges of Inside-Out courses. Second, we discuss some of the prison and university legal liabilities, challenges of diversity in blended classrooms, and struggles resulting from inequities created by the structure of the Inside-Out rules. Third, we provide recommendations for future Inside-Out faculty and the National Inside-Out Program. It is our intention that this article aids current and future Inside-Out faculty as they address the unique challenges of teaching in a blended classroom in a correctional facility. We further call to light the nuances that faculty need to consider prior to becoming engaged in an

Inside-Out course or training, and ultimately, hope to advance the National Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program by allowing others to learn from our experiences.

Challenges for Correctional Education

Cormac Behan (2007) argues that within the correctional educational system “it is difficult to create a trusting learning environment in an institution that is built on mistrust” (p. 165). He further states, “any adult education programme, inside or outside prison should be based on trust, mutuality, respect, and the willingness to strive for equality in the learning space” (p. 165). The paradox that occurs within the inherent missions guided by the university educational systems, structure, and the locations of correctional institutions results in unique and distinctive challenges for educators teaching within the environment of a total institution.

Initial studies have shown that some of the challenges of teaching in correctional education include a deficit of teaching aids due to correctional rules and safety policies, negative student behavior, student and educator limited out-of-class time for problems relating to prison system structure and rules, inadequate class teaching time, and poor physical conditions (Osberg & Fraley, 1993). Additionally, correctional educators report that teaching within a correctional institution with a limited pool of resources and funding means using older and outdated textbooks and course materials and nonexistent or inadequate libraries. This translates to limited educational opportunities for students. Osberg and Fraley (1993) also found other common correctional education challenges that include little class time for mentoring and prevention of students’ class attendance by correction officers related to institutional lockdowns, visiting hour conflicts, and placement in solitary confinement.

Randall Wright (1997) extended this train of thought and identified additional challenges that prison system educators face. He argued that prison education is not a “family member” of the correctional program or institution: there is often an “ongoing war between the keepers and the kept” (p. 11). This translates into little support for the transformative capability and personal development contributions of correctional education programming. He also argued that the public’s skepticism of correctional education and emphasis on retribution and punitive measures have caused correctional education to become the “target of public ire” (p. 11). These challenges have proven difficult for incarcerated students, educators, and prison administration to overcome and tend to result in a lack of support for educational funding.

Kathryn Hackman's (1997) study focuses on the mainstream trends of education and corrections while emphasizing the intersection of the two. For example, she states that the tension that is created by overcrowded prisons often leads to an overload in the institutional classroom, contributing to a stressful environment. She further discussed challenges inherent to the correctional educational system itself such as the frequent transferring of students, security concerns, balancing coed correctional classrooms, facing routine searches for contraband, gang wars within the facility; and following rigid regulations compared to public classrooms. Hackman notes the challenge that many university and correctional educators face; the rule of not being able to directly contact students after course completion. While her state's educational department initially required this "no contact policy," they eventually found that it was important to discontinue this rule to allow educators to be involved in the process of offender reentry.

An additional challenge for correctional educators is that they are often trained in their discipline focus, but they are not necessarily trained in correctional education. Many will enter the field of corrections with little or no formal training in the correctional classroom and, as a result, they may experience the culture shock of teaching in such a unique environment (Matthews, 2000). Randall Wright (2005) suggests that this "culture shock" may occur because the "teaching world and the prison world" collide. In fact, new corrections teachers will enter an environment for which they are not trained, have no experience, and may perceive like a "foreign land" (Wright, p. 19). The "adaptation shock" often results in the educator experiencing disorientation and becoming unable to navigate the restrictive and oftentimes unresponsive environment of prison education.

Lastly, an important challenge that correctional educators face is the inability to meet students' needs because of correctional system structural barriers. In a noncorrectional educational environment, educators focus on meeting student needs by improving their classroom, learning environment, and pedagogy, mentoring and communicating with students consistently, and keeping up with advancements in their fields (Gunn, 1999; Zaro, 2000). However, in a correctional environment, there is tension between educators and prison administrators that preclude a focus on pedagogy, with classroom interruptions by security and daily routines, lack of educator training, restricted material use due to security concerns, removal of "manipulative" students, encouragement of authoritarian style, and a general lack of clerical help, volunteers, and security clearance. Essentially, the clash between the institutional emphasis on punishment/restriction and the priority on education often make it difficult to address student needs (Gunn, 1999; Zaro, 2000).

These challenges occur for both the postsecondary programs and Inside-Out faculty in the correctional environment. The offering of courses with a blend of incarcerated students and outside college students has resulted in an additional level of challenges that must be addressed.

Method

Since our training in May of 2009, two of the authors have offered Inside-Out courses in our state facilities, and one has repeatedly tried to establish the program at her university. Our experiences with course implementation, university parameters, and facility support and participation have differed, but each has experienced multiple challenges. Throughout the process, from course training to course offerings, the authors have been concerned with significant challenges either with the facility, the classroom, the university, and/or related to the Inside-Out program parameters. We recognize the importance of the Inside-Out experience for students, faculty, and society, but wish to present our observations about the process, significant challenges, and concerns that faculty (in particular, junior faculty) must consider and address prior to participation in this experience.

We employ the method of post hoc observation-as-participant to extrapolate collective themes we have found in our experiences preparing for and teaching Inside-Out courses. Specifically, identified themes were informed by literature reviews, our own experiences as Inside-Out instructors, and from new knowledge gained throughout the multiple discussions we had about our experiences (Bulmer, 1979; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Weston et al., 2001). Consequently, this article offers our reflections on our personal experiences and offers suggestions for those who may be beginning or considering participation in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program.

Challenges Specific to the Inside-Out Classroom

From our experiences, Inside-Out instructors face most, if not all, of the same challenges that general correctional educators face as identified above. In addition, the structure of the Inside-Out Program lends itself to challenges that are unique to setting up a university and correctional institutional partnership in which the classroom consists of students from both institutions. Each course offering is contingent on approval by the current state and political system as well as multiple levels of university administration, the current warden or state department of education, and the willingness of a

non-correctional employee to navigate the terrain related to course availability, structure, interviews, and closing ceremonies. Because the Inside-Out course experience is a freestanding program that is not an embedded correctional education course offering, is not a state- or federally mandated course, nor a program staffed by correctional employees, challenges that arise must be managed by university faculty and correctional administrators.

In this article, we will present what we have found to be the three most pressing challenges that faculty must consider before and during the Inside-Out course: legal challenges and liabilities, creating and sustaining diversity within an institutional setting in a blended class, and balancing the rules/parameters of the university, the prison site, and the National Inside-Out Program. We find that in comparison to a traditional correctional educational class (single-sex, no “outside” students, and most often no university partnership exists), these challenges are unique to the Inside-Out Program. The addition of university legal liabilities, the composition of a blended classroom within an institutional setting, and the rules mandated by the university partnership result in significant and time-consuming challenges that must be seriously considered by future and current Inside-Out faculty.

Legal Challenges and Liabilities

Unlike a course that is offered within a structured correctional education program, the Inside-Out classroom brings additional legal liability to both the correctional facility and the partnering university. Primarily, instructors need to consider who can be held legally liable under particular circumstances as well as what that legal liability entails. On considering these legalities and responsibilities, the faculty member must implement appropriate measures to address any of the institutional or university concerns.

Institutional legal challenges. Inside-Out courses may be held in prisons of any classification level, ranging from minimum to maximum security, and this generally results in safety and security concerns by all involved. The incarceration facility is solely held legally responsible for all individuals who are wards of the state within their institution, and they must provide safe conditions for the students (both inside and outside students), faculty members, and anyone either party comes into contact with (correctional officers, family of prisoners, etc.). Creating a safe classroom is paramount to engaging students in the Inside-Out program. Throughout the Inside-Out course, prison administrators are legally required to ensure the physical safety of the students and faculty. The university educator must protect the emotional safety of inside students who are expected to participate in the classroom (they are

often unable to speak freely in front of the correctional officers who “guard” the classroom). Both the educator and the prison administration must legally protect the privacy concerns of both inside and outside students (e.g., the use and dissemination of student background checks).

These legal responsibilities create a challenge for all involved in the Inside-Out process. To focus on safety, prisons mandate background checks for entrance into the facility. Students at our universities must grant permission for the prison to run a background check to be considered for inclusion in the course. If student background checks are returned with any cause for concern, the facility may feel the need to ban entrance to the course/institution. This creates a dilemma for the institution because they must notify the student and faculty member that there is cause for concern. Yet, simultaneously, they must also maintain confidentiality. For example, if a student was unaware that they had a relative who was incarcerated or they did not want to disclose a particular item of interest to their university, students would need to be made aware that the result of the background check may not be held confidential and may be provided to individuals involved in the application process.

To date, the only reason we have had student applicants rejected is if he or she has not completed the paperwork honestly. For example, if a student has a significant relationship with someone who is incarcerated in any of the state facilities or is under state supervision in the community (as evidenced by visitation and phone logs) and this information is not disclosed, the prison will prevent the student from taking the course. Also, if a university student has a family member who is incarcerated at the specific Inside-Out prison site, this student cannot take the course, regardless of whether or not the student has contact with the family member. We find the last exclusionary criterion for Inside-Out participation particularly problematic due to the imposition of yet another collateral consequence of incarceration for family members (see Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002), but it is state policy rather than a specific prison policy and, consequently, a concession instructors must make to offer Inside-Out courses.

Many facilities also require an officer to be present in the classroom, and privacy concerns addressed by Inside-Out parameters (e.g., no use of last names and ensuring every participant decides what to share about her or himself) may easily be bypassed by officers (such as referring to inside students by their last names) as well as students through direct or indirect communication (such as searching the public records of incarcerated students). Faculty and prison administrators must both cooperate and negotiate the delicate balance between security rules and liabilities of the facility and openness of the

classroom environment to maximize the potential for learning in the Inside-Out environment.

University legal challenges

Student safety. One of the most pressing challenges for Inside-Out faculty can be the issue of the university's legal responsibility with taking students into a correctional facility. Universities differ in their approaches for experiential learning, but one of their utmost concerns is maintaining the safety of their students when taken off campus. Whether or not the university is legally liable for a student who is participating in educational endeavors off campus will depend on the viewpoint of the university. It often depends on whether the endeavor is required or voluntary. If, for example, the Inside-Out course experience is required for completion of a college major or minor, the legal liability of the university may extend to the students' travel to and from the experience, the actual experience, and any issues that arise that are part of that experience.

To address this challenge, a university may respond in multiple ways, but, in any case, the university legal department must be consulted and involved. One way the authors have experienced navigating this legal issue is by offering the course as an option and not a requirement. Therefore, if it is not required, the university legal liability may decrease (as students have a choice in which to participate versus being forced to attend). Another possibility is the creation of a university waiver, which may release the university from legal liability when the student is off campus. All of the authors' experiences have included the requirement that students sign a waiver. These waivers differ across universities and may focus on students' free will to attend the course, request a release of the university from legal liability, and address student accountability for course participation.

The university does have primary responsibility for the safety of their students, but faculty members who take students off campus must also consider what legal challenges they might incur. Essentially, as an extension of the university, the faculty member may also be held legally liable for their student throughout the experience. These challenges include transportation to and from the experience (e.g., university bus or vehicle transport) as well as issues that may arise with student conduct and safety within the classroom (if a student gets harmed, the institution, university, and faculty member could all be held liable). Faculty members may address this by including themselves in the university waiver, having students complete a waiver for their personal liability, or by relying on the university and correctional institution rules to ensure their protection. At a minimum, these challenges should be

considered and at a maximum, the faculty member should codify legal responsibility and accountability.

Access to college credit and resources. The Higher Education Opportunity Act enacted by the U.S. Department of Education also becomes a significant challenge at the university level (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), especially related to course participation and credits. This Act requires every institution that participates in Title IV student aid programs to provide information regarding tuition, scholarship, and loan information to students. It also governs regulations for transparency, textbook information, commitment to affordable college education, supplemental grants, partnership programs, and a need analysis that focuses on the cost to the university and the discretion to make adjustments. When the university partners with prisons to include incarcerated students in courses, questions include “Is the incarcerated individual a student of the university?” “Is the university willing to provide a needs-based cost adjustment for those that are incarcerated (therefore, complying with the concept of affordable education), and should the university grant credit to the inside students?”

One ongoing criticism of correctional education is that those who are incarcerated are provided “free” educational opportunities. The Federal Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 repealed Pell Grants for persons incarcerated in a state or federal correctional facility. This action was premised on the notion that in an era of budget cuts, Pell grants should be reserved for law-abiding college students. However, during the 1993-1994 academic year, approximately 27,000 prisoners received around US\$35 million in Pell Grant funding, less than 1% of the total US\$6 billion spent on the program that year and no university student was ever denied a Pell Grant because of prisoner participation in the program (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1994). By 1997, only 21 states offered formal postsecondary education programs in their prisons. This enrollment was less than 2% of the total prison population nationwide (American Correctional Association, 1997).

The subsequent 1998 Federal Incarcerated Youth Offender (IYO) block grants have been a key source of funding for postsecondary correctional education programs in many states but is limited to those prisoners who meet the eligibility requirements (age 25 or younger, holding a high school diploma or GED, and within 5 years of release). Consequently, data suggest a rise in offering postsecondary education programs in 43 states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, but there are great differences in enrollment numbers (Erismann & Contardo, 2005). Out of the 44 prison systems, only 14 states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons had total enrollments of at least 1,000

incarcerated students for the 2003-2004 academic year, and these 15 prison systems enrolled 89% of all prisoners who participated in postsecondary correctional education nationwide (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). By 2004, close to 5% of the total people incarcerated were enrolled in post-secondary education, which is comparable to the percentage enrolled prior to the loss of Pell grants. Notably, almost two-thirds were enrolled in for-credit vocational programs (Erisman & Contardo, 2005).

Post-secondary education is found to be the most effective prison education program available for recidivism reduction. For example, research demonstrates that only 25% of incarcerated individuals who participated in post-secondary education programs recidivated 3 years following their release, a reduction of 50% compared to the recidivism rate of those who did not participate in post-secondary education courses (Batiuk, Lahm, McKeever, Wilcox, & Wilcox, 2005). "Studies clearly demonstrate that prisoners who participate in post-secondary correctional education have lower recidivism rates than those who do not have access to higher education while incarcerated" (Erisman & Contardo, 2005, p. 9). This is not surprising given education can lead to greater and more diverse employment opportunities. Furthermore, recent research in Ohio disentangles the effects of college, high school, GED, vocational training, and no education on the likelihood of returning to prison for any reason up to 13.5 years post-release (Batiuk et al., 2005). Batiuk and colleagues (2005) find that college participation has the strongest (and only significant) effect on reducing recidivism compared to the three other educational programs.

It is problematic that Pell Grants have yet to be reinstated for incarcerated men and women foremost as well as disappointing that many Inside-Out incarcerated students across the country do not earn college credits for their participation. Inside students may or may not pay tuition, receive credit, or have access to computers and course materials. If, for example, the inside students do not pay tuition, yet they receive credit and are provided course material, then it may be perceived as discriminatory by the outside university student. However, according to the Higher Education Opportunity Act, not offering those who are incarcerated affordable education may be in direct conflict with the regulations and parameters of either the Act, or university regulations. Each university must hold discussions and make careful decisions as to how to address these challenges.

Legal issues and challenges may also arise regarding whether or not the inside student has access to the same offices, resources, and rights as university students. If the university is open to admitting an incarcerated student, the student must technically apply, pay all relevant fees, complete entrance

exams if required, and complete appropriate paperwork. Federal legislation will also drive these legal issues. For example, universities often will not allow people convicted of felonies (particularly, those convicted with violent or sexual offenses) to gain admission to their college, leaving the inside students as “floaters,” students who are not really students.

Diversity in the Inside-Out Classroom

The Inside-Out classroom is a blended classroom that consists of students from different cultures, races/ethnicities, and genders. In general, blended higher education classrooms should focus on cross-racial and gender interactions and dialogues that bring individuals from different cultures together to discuss different issues. These forms of communication will enable individuals to better function within a multicultural, multiethnic environment and foster mutual respect for others from different cultures (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez 2004). This, in turn, can affect future citizenship and involvement in societal participation. Literature that focuses on how to manage diversity within the classroom offers general strategies and tips on how to do this. For example, Gross-Davis (1993) recommends overcoming stereotypes and bias within a blended classroom by becoming more informed about the history and culture of groups, conveying the same level of respect and confidence in the ability of all students, and being fair in acknowledging students' good work.

Because the climate of the classroom greatly impacts students' success, interest, and learning process throughout the course, those teaching in the Inside-Out blended classroom must navigate the complexity of a blended classroom of males and females, of different races/ethnicities, social classes, and inside and outside students (the latter is unique and specific to the Inside-Out experience). The experiences for Inside-Out faculty teaching in such a unique environment are rife with challenges surrounding and promoting diversity. In the classroom, our goals are to have both groups and cultures of students come together on an equal playing field and for our classroom climate to be inclusive. However, the environment in which the class is held, the rules and parameters of the programs and institution, and the legal and safety concerns converge to make this challenging.

Wright's (2005) concept of culture shock is particularly relevant for understanding the importance of diversity in the blended classroom. Wright applies the impact of culture shock when two worlds collide (the teaching world and the prison world), but in the Inside-Out context, there is a collision of three worlds: the teaching world, the prison world, and

the student world. While all involved with the Inside-Out program may experience some form of culture shock from this experience, it is important that both the instructors and students have access to sufficient resources in the forms of supportive social networks, friends, as well as psychological help.

Inside-Out offers the novel experience of being in a blended college classroom setting. Correctional institutions have a rigid schedule and unique rules, a distinct subculture, and those who are incarcerated must adapt to these tenets to successfully survive their incarceration. Having outside students come into a classroom may be exciting, but incarcerated individuals may not have had many opportunities to interact with people outside the institution and/or their family/friends for some time. As a means of protection, they may feel the need to place emotional and mental walls up and it can even be an extreme challenge for them to let their guard down in front of other inside students, the outside students, and of course in many cases, the correctional officer "guarding" the classroom. Similar to new correctional educators, students will need to adjust to being close to those who are portrayed in the media as "monsters," correctional officers who may or may not support the program, possibly having their belongings searched, their motives questioned, and the fear of being in an environment that is unknown and initially uncomfortable.

According to the National Inside-Out office, most Inside-Out courses across the country take place in male prison facilities and most instructors/outside students are White women. Specifically, only 26% or 81/311 instructors who completed the National Inside-Out training from 2003-2011 were men. Unfortunately, the national office does not capture race/ethnicity for instructors nor do they capture demographics for all students who complete Inside-Out courses. Hence, we do not have access to specific data to represent participant race/ethnicity and gender for both inside and outside students. However, it is safe to assume that inside students are likely to be representative of national statistics on those in prison; disproportionately racial/ethnic minorities who have drug or property felony convictions (Alexander, 2010). Spry (2003) accurately describes the importance of addressing diversity in prison classrooms: "Diversity in the correctional education setting is not only visible from an ascetic state, but also an underlying deterrent to the learning process if not explored and neutralized by the correctional educator" (p. 75). Consequently, it is important to address some of the challenges of this unique course context instructors must consider during recruitment and the class itself.

One significant challenge of recruitment deals with the population characteristics of the students at predominantly White academic institutions. Searching for a balance of gender and race relative to student make-up is indeed a challenge. In our short tenure offering Inside-Out courses, we have found it important to implement purposeful recruitment to ensure male and student of color representation for outside students. Even with these efforts, our outside student bodies reflect the national Inside-Out (anecdotal) trend; primarily White women take the course. The diversity of Inside-Out students is fundamental to ensure a variety of perspectives which foster growth for the students as well as the instructor. Furthermore, it is critically important for the national program to make attempts to collect data on race/ethnicity of instructors and students as well as gender for students to begin assessing whether or not this issue is problematic.

Maintaining the Parameters of the Inside-Out Program

One of the biggest challenges facing instructors of Inside-Out classes is maintaining both the institutional and program rules, while at the same time creating a comfortable classroom environment in which sharing, growth, and learning can flourish. The National Inside-Out Prison Exchange Curriculum manual states that for the class to be successful, inside and outside students must be able to develop peer relationships; however, this may prove to be difficult in the face of common policies found within the walls of correctional facilities. Instructors must then find a balance between ensuring that the rules established by the institution to protect all students do not interfere too greatly with the philosophy of the Inside-Out program and its mission of breaking down barriers.

Balancing prison and Inside-Out rules. Seating arrangements and facility logistics are often the first serious issues facing the Inside-Out instructor as the inside and outside students are brought together for the first time. Determining who can and will sit where as well as which spaces are available to both groups of students is important. For example, a rule of one of the coauthor's institutions is that students of the same gender are initially required to sit next to each other, to prevent inappropriate interaction. While this is an institutional rule, it clearly infringes on the philosophy of Inside-Out regarding inclusivity and breaking down barriers. Most courses taught by Inside-Out instructors are usually in all male or female institutions, while a few are taught in community corrections facilities that may be coed. The university students are typically a combination of both men and women, so the same

gender seating rule presents a challenge to the approach of the course. In this instance, one must communicate the philosophy to the on-staff employees as well as the contact person from the institution as to men and women being allowed to sit by each other so that the class is not divided based on gender.

An additional issue facing Inside-Out instructors is the policy of anonymity required by the Inside-Out program. This policy requires that neither inside nor outside students be identified by last name. For some instructors who are conditioned to referring to their students with prefixes such as Miss, Mrs., or Mr. followed by their last names, this is an adjustment. However, inside students and prison administrators are likely to face an even greater challenge of maintaining this rule. People in prison are usually only referred to by their last name or prison number. Correctional personnel usually require that those who are incarcerated address staff (including outside instructors) with the appropriate prefixes followed by their last names. Even though the instructor is well aware of the last names of all the students, one must not divulge such information to them as a means of protection for the students. For example, if an outside student learned the name of an inside student they may be able to have access to the criminal history or current convictions. Even with consistent reminders to prison staff and inside students, this information frequently comes out over the duration of the course, thereby posing a significant challenge to protecting the anonymity of all students.

One further issue with maintaining the Inside-Out rules, and perhaps the most difficult to regulate, is the policy forbidding additional contact between inside and outside students outside of class. To encourage a successful learning environment, the Inside-Out program must provide an atmosphere conducive to bonding among inside and outside students. These bonds promote the sharing of experiences throughout the course; yet, the Inside-Out program forbids the occurrences of these relationships outside the microcosm of a once-a-week class meeting. This policy presents multiple difficulties for students and is commonly challenged at the end of the course. Given that these students might never have had the chance of interacting with each other without being in this course, that the program's mission is to break down barriers, and that we ask students to bond for the purpose of the course, yet we request students break those bonds on its completion. This rule appears paradoxical to the fundamental concept of Inside-Out.

The National program has attempted to modify this rule in response to the growth of the program by stating that postcourse contact can occur, but only if it is Inside-Out programmatic in nature, for example, think tanks, alumni groups, and so forth. However, to truly break down barriers, all students should feel free to consider continued access to both each other and their

instructor as part of their educational careers. Regulating future contact between students becomes problematic and restrictive. The bonds formed within an Inside-Out course, which can offer a strong social support network for the inside student on release (particularly if they become a student at the university), may provide a continued and reciprocal learning opportunity for those at the university and within the agencies of criminal justice, and could allow for a deeper investment of both inside and outside students in social and political activism. While it is clear that the relationships of students must maintain appropriate boundaries, restricting contact between students does not appear to align with the mission of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program.

The exclusion of persons convicted of sex offenses. Another significant challenge of the Inside-Out rules is the exclusion of inside students who are convicted of sex offenses. According to the National Inside-Out office, this rule was established in the initial development of the program to appease correctional partners based on a “worst case scenario” analysis of the *potential harm* to an outside student on the release of an inside student who was convicted of a sex offense. While this rule may continue to satisfy many correctional and university officials throughout the country who offer Inside-Out courses, this criterion has not been acceptable in our locales.

It is important to first acknowledge three points that guide our analysis of this rule as problematic. First, there is a broad legal continuum of sex offenses, for example, not all sex offenses are the same. Second, if the rule is based on the idea of harm coming to an outside student, it is counter to empirical research that suggests people convicted of violent offenses (including those convicted of rape) are much less likely to recidivate than those convicted of nonviolent offenses (see Langton & Levin, 2002). Additionally, perhaps the most sophisticated evidence-based risk assessments and treatment modalities are utilized to predict and reduce recidivism for persons convicted of sex offenses (see Blasko, Jeglic, & Mercado, 2011; Langton et al., 2008; Parent, Guay, & Knight, 2011). Hence, the rule parcels out a set of offenders who our prison partners usually have the most information available on and can utilize to address potential safety issues for screening their participation in the class. These points are important to keep in mind given that we believe the rule is in place based on the same fears or moral panic induced by the media’s disproportionate and inaccurate coverage of violent crime (see Miller, Like, & Levin, 2006), including sex crimes, rather than empirical research.

We must address the underlying assumptions the national “no sex offender” rule makes. There is great variance in the level of criminal justice information

instructors across the country receive from prison administrators. Utilizing our experiences, we receive current offense conviction data for inside students, either through prison administration or individual's self-report. Given that it is common knowledge that close to 95% of criminal convictions are the result of plea bargains, this information really provides little insight into the actual crimes committed. In addition, we are not provided with any official criminal history data, which means we do not know if we ever have inside students with previous sex offense convictions. Also, legal requirements for persons convicted of sex offenses vary by state. For example, in one coauthor's state, all persons convicted of sex offenses are required to complete sex offender treatment at one prison site prior to being sent to various prisons in the state (based on security classification), and those convicted of certain types of sex offenses (offenses against children) are excluded from all post-secondary course options available in the prisons. In sum, the problems with this Inside-Out rule lies in erroneous assumptions, great variance by state in terms of the legal classifications for persons convicted of sex offenses and the amount of information provided to instructors about their inside students and, in general, access to higher education (e.g., persons convicted of sex offenses against children are not eligible for federal and state postsecondary education dollars).

We must also address the inherent contradiction between the exclusion of persons convicted of sex offenses and the national Inside-Out philosophy: "Every human being—whether they reside behind bars or on the outside—has innate worth, a story to tell, experiences to learn from, and is an important and contributing member of the community" (Retrieved from <http://www.insideoutcenter.org/philosophy.html>). The "no sex offender" rule contradicts many of the principles of the Inside-Out: we are there to study issues and not people, for example, it is not important to know inside students' criminal convictions; Inside-Out helps break down barriers of "us" versus "them"; and the belief that complex social problems must include all voices. Yet from the onset, we parcel out a group of voices and essentially deem this group as noncontributing members to have as participants within our classrooms. Furthermore, this rule may indirectly exacerbate both inside and outside students' perceptions of a pecking order for offenders by reifying the notion that sex offenders deservedly occupy the lowest status in prison.

However, the allowance of inside students convicted of sex offenses in our classes does pose specific challenges. This issue came to the forefront in one of our states (one coauthor conducted a pilot including sex offenders in the course) because prison administrators found the exclusionary criteria problematic related to the screening process for inside participants. Given the national rule, it was made explicitly clear to both inside and outside students

that we may or may not have persons convicted of sex offenses in our classes. This particular coauthor presented the pilot information separately to the cohort of inside students and asked for anonymous written feedback regarding general thoughts about the national program's exclusion of persons convicted of sex offenses and any concerns they may have about including this population. Most men expressed the idea that there is no difference between persons convicted of sex offenses and those convicted for other types of offenses in terms of "risk to outside student safety." The few men who thought it would be problematic only expressed concern for men who have committed sex offenses against children, but it is important to note that the reasoning they provided was not safety of outside students. Rather, the few men who parceled out this type of sex offense stated that they thought most of society has huge moral, religious, and/or visceral types of responses to this "type" of offender, which could prohibit real discussions in the class. The majority of inside students mentioned that they did not want the outside students to think they were a "child molester," again a potential collateral consequence of this rule reifying pecking orders in prison.

In addition to transparency with prison and university officials as well as course participants, perhaps the biggest challenge to piloting the inclusion of participants convicted of sex offenses is how to measure success. Some of these concerns include ensuring persons are not singled out (e.g., case studies of the class rather than the individual); whether to exclude individuals convicted of certain types of sex offenses (e.g., whether persons convicted of sexual assault against adult women be barred given the predominance of female outside students in classes); how to assess the impact on class dynamics of including persons with sexual offense convictions, including impact on discussion, class comfort level, and/or any incidents of involuntary outing; and ensuring any type of evaluation or research can be generalizable to other prison sites. It is important for the many reasons outlined to question the role this exclusionary rule plays in the growth of Inside-Out. In particular, we must do our best to maintain safety for all participants while at the same time strive to ensure we proceed in an ethical and just manner. However, behind all the concerns, we believe that in many ways the inclusion of persons convicted of sex offenses will actually require the same leap of faith that premised the initial development of Inside-Out.

Conclusion

In this article, we have reflected on specific challenges that we faced when teaching Inside-Out courses within the broader context of the overall difficulties faced with correctional education. While correctional educators experience

many of the same challenges, we have found that being part of the National Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program has introduced us to additional challenges imposed by the unique partnerships between our universities and our local prisons. Our concern for future Inside-Out faculty led us to hope to present some suggestions to consider prior to becoming a part of this experience:

- Garner support from academic and institutional administration prior to applying for the training—Support for our endeavors has varied by university. However, one issue that has remained consistent is the need for strong administrative support. It is critical that the department chair, promotion and tenure committees, Deans, and all upper level administration understand and approve of the time commitment necessary for implementation of this program, the value of the partnership between the university and the local institution, and the significance of program involvement toward a faculty member's service requirements.
- Consult your university legal department—While our experiences have also varied with support at the legal level, we suggest discussing waivers, equal opportunity, access to higher education with respect to tuition, course credit, and textbooks, and willingness to support faculty endeavors prior to and throughout the process of offering an Inside-Out course. Based on the legal department's response, we suggest that faculty make an educated decision as to their willingness to be engaged in legal issues prior to, during, and post Inside-Out.
- Evaluate the potential for diversity within your classroom—The Inside-Out classroom is a prime opportunity for faculty to promote diversity, have students learn from each other, and greatly impact the future citizenship and societal engagement of our students. However, the limitations of our student population may not allow for us to provide a diverse classroom. Due to the recruitment process, background checks, and institutional rules, we may not be able to create a diverse, blended classroom that offers an equal balance of gender and race. Therefore, our classrooms may not be as enriching as we would hope. When considering involvement in the program, it will be important for the faculty member to think about how they will recruit and engage a diverse population as well as how they will value and encourage diversity within the classroom.
- Be fully aware of the parameters of the National program prior to creating and implementing your course—Faculty become involved in the Inside-Out program primarily because they are passionate

about immersing their students in a program that shows them ways to break down barriers, which also happens to be the mission of the Inside-Out Program. However, the Program mandates that we exclude particular offenders from our classrooms, that we maintain anonymity in spite of prison rules, and that we encourage our students to forge important bonds. Yet we request the breakage of those bonds after the designated course time has ended. Faculty must think about whether they are willing to follow these guidelines, if they are comfortable with placing those regulations on both inside and outside students, and what their choices must be if they are unable to follow those parameters.

In addition to the recommendations for Inside-Out faculty, it is important to reflect on issues that the National Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program should consider for the sustainability and future growth of the program. The National training curriculum should be modified to address the potential legal challenges for the instructor, students, university, and prison site. In addition, much more effort needs to be directed at assessing and understanding the demographics of all those attracted to participating in Inside-Out experience given the importance of interactional diversity for educational growth as well as promoting the mission of breaking down barriers of “us” versus “them.” Moreover, the current “no sex offender” rule must be reassessed utilizing empirical research and case studies to understand whether or not this rule needs to be amended or abolished given the program’s growth in the last 15 years. In general, the Inside-Out program would benefit from a nationally directed multisite evaluation to assess the short- and long-term benefits of the program for participants, prisons, colleges, and communities, given published Inside-Out course evaluation/research is almost nonexistent (with the exception of Allred, 2009). The findings of such a multisite evaluation can be utilized to secure external grants critical for the sustainability and growth of Inside-Out as well as encourage other universities to consider the vast benefits of partnering with local prisons to offer this incomparable community-based learning opportunity.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Author Biographies

Alana Van Gundy is assistant professor of criminal justice, Miami university. Her research specialties include female criminality etiology and risk factors, development and extension of feminist criminological theory, and implementation of gender-specific policy and procedure in the American corrections system.

Angela Bryant is assistant professor of sociology, Ohio State university–Newark. Her research focuses on the organizational contexts of juvenile/criminal courts, racial/ethnic, gender, and class disparities in case processing decisions, and the implementation and consequences of formal/informal crime control policies and programs for juvenile and young adult offenders.

Brian C. Starks is assistant professor of sociology at Delaware State university. His research interests include criminal court social organization and decision making, specifically the first court appearance and the impact of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and age on this phase of the criminal court system.