

PUSHING THE FRONTIERS OF

JUSTICE



Reframing the discussion has been at the heart of LAS's Inside-Out restorative justice program since it began in 2011.

"We all have ideas about what we believe prison is like and about who prisoners are," says Jacqueline Lazú, associate dean and an associate professor in the Department of Modern Languages. Lazú built the Inside-Out curriculum through the community service studies minor, a partnership between LAS and the Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning. "The Inside-Out experience allows our students to insert themselves into this critical issue in our society and see the humanity of the people who are dehumanized by a flawed system, moral disengagement and public attitudes about crime and punishment."

DePaul's Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program launched with Restorative Justice: Engagement with the Prison, a 10-week course taught at Stateville Correctional Center in Crest Hill, Ill., by Kimberley Moe, an instructor in the Department of Philosophy. Through readings, papers and peace circles, student and inmate pairs explore the concept of restorative justice, which asserts that offenders are rehabilitated by repairing harm to victims and the community.

The popularity of the initial Inside-Out course and a curriculum development grant awarded to Lazú led to the creation of two new courses: Law and the Political System, taught by Christina Rivers, an associate professor in the Department of Political Science, and Masculinity, Justice and the Law, taught by John Zeigler, director of the Egan Office of Urban Education and Community Partnership in the Steans Center. (See the story in the fall/winter 2016 issue of Insights.)

The program expanded outside of LAS in spring 2017 when Laura Biagi, a visiting multicultural faculty member in The Theatre School, taught a class on healing narrative at Cook County Jail. "I'm excited to be able to welcome other colleges and other disciplines into this network," Lazú says. "It's a natural extension of DePaul's collaborative strength."

Starting in January 2017, inmates at Stateville began earning college credit for the courses they take with DePaul students. Providing credit to inmates has always been a goal, says Lazú. Inmates feel pride and a renewed sense of purpose when they earn credit, and recidivism drops substantially among ex-convicts who further their education. This arrangement certainly would please St. Vincent de Paul, who ministered extensively to convicts.

"This is a direct reflection of our mission to treat people, regardless of their situation, with dignity," says Howard Rosing, executive director of the Steans Center, which administers the program.

"It's always been clear that Inside-Out is a transformational experience for our 'outside' students, our DePaul students, but it's equally important that this is a transformational experience for our 'inside' students as well," Lazú says.

Faculty enthusiasm around restorative justice is an example of the issues-based clusters that will define LAS in the 21st century, says Dean Guillermo Vásquez de Velasco. "It's issues-based, mission-based, multidisciplinary, experiential. These groups that span discipline-based departments can innovate and educate in a way that is unique to our college, to Chicago and to DePaul."

CRIMINOLOGY DEGREE COMPLEMENTS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CURRICULUM

DePaul's distinctive new bachelor's degree in criminology capitalizes on the university's strong network of community partners, some developed through the restorative justice curriculum, and LAS's multidisciplinary expertise. Social justice is at the heart of the program, which debuts in the fall of 2017. Concentrations are offered in community justice, criminal justice administration, and race, class, gender and justice.

"Through our requirements, we insist students understand our system of justice as one that is complicated by issues of inequality and how we as a society respond to it," says Jacqueline Lazú, associate dean and an associate professor in the Department of Modern Languages.

Students will have extensive interaction with professionals in the field, public officials, community organizations, activists and people who come in contact with the criminal justice system. The highly experiential program will create gateways into a wide variety of careers, including public policy, social work, corrections, law enforcement, politics and law.

More importantly, graduates will be prepared to take leadership roles in changing the justice system for the better. "What really makes our program different is our commitment to transforming the conversation," Lazú says. "We're in a position to bring all these stakeholders together to problem-solve. We mean to impact discourse and practice."

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