around THE quad

Tearing Down the Prison Walls


SPENCE

STUDENTS ENTERING the criminal justice field confront a perception that criminals are violent and aggressive. A course is tearing down those stereotypes and the societal walls between the imprisoned and those on the outside.

Incarcerated Women: Rehabilitative Programming in Women's Prisons was offered for the first time in fall 2015 at the State Correctional Institution (SCI) Muncy, near Williamsport. BU students commuted to the prison to attend the class taught by criminal justice professional John Adami. What makes the experience unique is that their classmates were incarcerated women serving time at SCI Muncy.

Adami has more than two decades of experience in the criminal justice field. A unit manager at the federal maximum security prison in Lewisburg, he supervises a group of case managers and counselors who interact daily with inmates.

"We're trying to show university students what it's like inside a prison," says Adami. "The whole idea is to give students some hands-on experience."

Modeled after The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program started at Temple University in 1997, the course is designed to expose students directly to various aspects of the prison environment. Inmates and students interact and collaborate in a classroom setting.

"I look forward to this class every week. These women are smart, motivated and kind-hearted," says Brooke Spence, a junior criminal justice student from Hellertown. "It really changes your perspective on the inmates, the staff and the prison system itself."

The course exposes BU students to career opportunities in correctional facilities, while inmates are given the opportunity to share their experiences and prepare for their eventual return to society.

"They want to know about what it is like outside of the prison, since a lot of them have been in there for over 10 years," says Spence. "When you're on the outside, you have this stereotype that prisons are filled with violent criminals. In reality, a majority of them are there for nonviolent crimes and just want to better themselves and get back to their families."

Working alongside prison inmates is a challenge for students. Spence admits it is difficult to learn about the struggles of incarcerated women.

"We do not have the right to judge these women," she says. "Being in this class has reassured me many times that I am in the right major, and that finding a career that involves interacting with inmates, especially women, is what I want to do." •

— By Nick Cellucci '16

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