

Assessing the Pedagogy of an Inside-Out Course (Soc 294)

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The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is a national initiative directed at transforming ways of thinking about crime and justice. This program was established in 1997 to bring college students and incarcerated individuals together as peers in a classroom setting that emphasizes dialogue and critical thinking.



2010 Inside-Out Course Graduates



Soc 294

The Inside-Out course I teach is SOC 294: Group Studies (Corrections). I taught the course as a group studies topic because I plan to teach this course every Autumn quarter in order to meet the OSU requirements of moving the course to a permanent course offering in the sociology/criminology curriculum. The course content includes a series of critical readings and discussions focused upon such topics as the origins and development of the American criminal justice system, the historical and contemporary use of punishment and rehabilitation, the re-emergence of restorative justice, and the broader relationship between criminal and social justice.

The course structure includes weekly two hour and 15 minute sessions at the prison site. Enrollment includes 10-15 undergraduate university students and 10-15 incarcerated students. All course participants complete the following during the semester:

- write a minimum of six reflection papers;
- a final paper of approximately 7-10 pages in length;
- A final group project designed to utilize empirical research to guide specific criminal justice policy recommendations; and, the final product is formally presented to all participants at the public closing ceremony.
- each student is presented with a certificate acknowledging his/her participation in the Inside-Out Program

Inside Out & Assessment

Sociology courses that incorporate service-learning are seen as important ways to expose students to the value of civic engagement and advocacy (Mobley, 2007). Pompa (2002) clearly outlines how Inside-Out courses espouse service or experiential learning objectives by providing students with the following:

1) immersion/exposure to the context of prison while allowing critical discussions between those outside and inside prison walls; 2) the pedagogy of weekly dialogue in which all voices are equal (including the instructor's), and participants are allowed to confront deeply entrenched stereotypes and assumptions held about crime, criminals and justice; and 3) the weekly exposure to the context of prison life, the creation of a safe space to explore critical sociological issues and problems in society, and the individual and group activities/assignments allows participants to move beyond the class and see themselves as agents of social change.

Mobley (2007) and others have argued that there is still scant evaluation and research showing whether and how service learning courses promote students' awareness and participation in social change; similarly, published Inside-Out course evaluation/research into whether and how student transformation occurs is still limited (Allred, 2009).

Through the Carla B. Howerly Teaching Enhancement Grant I will accomplish two primary objectives for my second Inside-Out course, to develop and implement replicable outcome assessment tools and to set in place a sustainable long-term educational programming partnership with ODRC/SCI.

Methodology

- Conduct a comparative evaluation of University-based sociology course SOC 209: Intro to Criminal Justice (follows a typical University model of pedagogy (lecture and discussion) and experiential-based sociology course SOC 294: Corrections/Inside-Out which utilizes the Inside-Out model of pedagogy (circle format, small and large group discussions).
- Collect pre- and post survey data from both course participants to measure (1) students' perceptions about individuals who are incarcerated, (2) knowledge/perceptions about the U.S. criminal justice system, long-term education/career goals, and (3) knowledge and experience in social policy and advocacy.
- Work closely with the research committee to finalize the pre-post test instrument and evaluation design. The proposed study will contribute to the broader sociological literature on service/experiential learning, as well as provide empirical data for Inside-Out to be replicated in other sites in order to test the model's pedagogy on a National level.

The second objective I plan to achieve is the necessary short- and long-term groundwork to develop the sustainability for a long-term partnership with ODRC/SCI. Specifically, work with OSU admissions, ODRC, OPEC, and Ohio I-O instructors to address current barriers that prevent Inside Students from obtaining college credit for the course (if interested), and to lay plans to build Inside-Out course offerings in the state of Ohio.