Restorative Justice Lab

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA

Module 6

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE LAB

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE LAB

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Module 6

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

At a Glance

This module provides an overview of the following topics:

- **Challenges and benefits of creating and sustaining relationships at the institutional level**
- **Strategies for building relationships with universities**
- **Strategies for building relationships with DOCs**
- **How HEP programs can bridge the divide between universities and DOCs**

Guiding Questions

1. **How can we scale community building at the institutional level, and what challenges do institutions present for HEP?**
2. **How do HEP programs build and maintain relationships with universities?**
3. **How do HEP programs build and maintain relationships with prison facilities and DOCs?**
4. **What practices can bring universities and DOCs into greater alignment?**

How can we scale community building at the institutional level, and what challenges do institutions present for HEP?

The relationships that higher education in prison (HEP) programs build with universities and prisons are crucial for meeting the needs of incarcerated students. In a study of HEP providers in Pennsylvania, Zukowski et al. found almost universally that "respondents, when reflecting on technology access issues, reflected on their political and moral obligations to their students and how critical it is to build a trusting relationship with students to effectively teach them. They stressed how important it is to also have a trusting, mutually respectful relationship with the DOC."[1] Access to learning aids

such as technology requires institutional permission, and permission is often predicated on relationships.

Relationships shift as we advance from individual to organizational and community structures. Abrams[2] uses the following social-ecological model, adapted from McLeroy et al.[3], to visualize nested levels of community building at different scales:

FIGURE 1: Social-Ecological Model, adapted from McLeroy et al., 1988



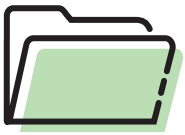
Abrams explains:

The social-ecological model presents five levels of influence—intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, and public policy factors—that are nested within each other (Figure 1).[4]

Each level of influence is described as follows:

- **Intrapersonal:** Individual characteristics that influence behavior, such as knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and personality traits.
- **Interpersonal:** Interpersonal processes in primary groups, including family, friends, and peers, that provide social identity, support, and role definition.
- **Organizational:** Rules, regulations, policies, and informal structures that may constrain or promote recommended behaviors.
- **Community:** Social networks and norms (standards) that exist formally or informally among individuals, groups, and organizations.
- **Public Policy:** Local, state, and federal policies and laws that regulate or support healthy actions and practices.

In *Module 1: Building a Strong Cohort* and *Module 2: Strengthening Relationships*, we shared strategies for the development and deepening of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, while *Module 3: Managing Conflict* reveals how we can use proactive and reactive restorative practices to weather situations and events that threaten these relationships. *Module 4: Modeling Accountability* shows how the organizational and community levels of HEP programs—rules, regulations, policies, and informal structures as well as social networks and norms—can reinforce relationships through expectation and boundary setting. Scaling these practices to build and maintain relationships at the institutional level with universities and prisons requires engagement at the public policy level as well. Universities and prisons are bound by state and federal regulations that cause these institutions to focus on threats—both real and perceived—to safety, security, and risk that may expose them to liability. Building and maintaining institutional relationships, therefore, requires HEP program administrators to be aware of and work within these policies. In *Module 2: Strengthening Relationships* referenced Frida Rundell's relational care ladder in which "structure helps to establish a sense of safety and regulation before participants can feel empowered and ready to challenge themselves."[5] The same is true of institutions, which will not take risks until they believe your program has established a sense of safety and regulation by adhering to existing policies.



Case study

When we first pitched the RJ Lab's Inside-Out model to university and prison administrators in Alabama, they shared concerns about liability for the outside students entering the prison. We set meetings with university administrators, including the university's general counsel, to discuss their concerns and share examples of the program model at other universities across the nation and globe. We also reviewed with them the guidelines and boundaries attached to the national Inside-Out Center.[6] The general counsel drafted liability and travel waivers that we use to ensure that students understand and assume the risks of program participation. We include the full waivers in Appendix A. The state's DOC took these documents under consideration when we presented our plan to them, though they also asked that we cap the number of outside student participants to further mitigate their risk. Through this process, we negotiated the first—and so far, the only—Inside-Out program in the state.

Institutional Restrictions

The challenges of continuously negotiating institutional relationships are myriad within HEP contexts. The restrictions that prisons place around technology and internet access remain one of the most challenging barriers for HEP. As Anderson has written, "Current postsecondary educational opportunities in prison are often limited by students' access to the Internet and devices that connect to it."[7] Additionally, "A physically restricted student can fall weeks behind when educational opportunities, computers, and material are already limited in regards to access to a specific time, day, and area of the facility"[8] when prisons experience lock-downs. Unlocked Labs' *Breaking Down Barriers: Practical Guidance for Correctional Education Technology* toolkit[9] is designed to help HEP programs request permissions and integrate technology into their curricula.

Because prisons emphasize security-based restrictions rooted in punishment and universities emphasize access rooted in education, these institutions often experience what *Module 3: Managing Conflict* describes as values conflict, the most difficult conflict to negotiate because it is rooted in opposing worldviews. As RJ Lab program consultant Dave Gussak writes of his own work in art therapy, the discrepancy between professional ethics in noncarceral settings and the institutional emphasis on "security" in carceral settings creates tension that must be navigated with care:

> *Institutional regulations take precedence over professional ethics and the moral treatment of others in the name of security. . . It is often necessary to work within the structures inherent in the system, acting as an ambassador would in a foreign culture, using methods in which the therapist might employ while introducing—but not force-feeding—new ideas and approaches.*[10]

As HEP program facilitators, we too must work carefully within these restrictions while also serving as "ambassadors" who advocate for educational access.

Institutional Culture

The emphasis on security and punishment within prison settings can present other values-level conflicts for HEP programs as well. According to a study of prison administrations in eight states conducted by Dewey et al., "Some facilities were characterized by a culture of negativity in which staff expressed sentiments that dismissed the possibility that prisoners can

change their lives for the better."[11] Additionally, some facilities insist on the omnipresence of prison staff, including requiring a correctional officer to be present in the classroom. As Bucher and Tseng note, "Officer presence in a class might suppress or inhibit student engagement and limit learning and growth."[12]

In our experience, officer presence can enhance the program's standing within the facility, as more prison-level staff are able to witness and understand what we do. At certain times, however, correctional officers have also intervened in Circles in ways that are not always supportive or therapeutic. Additionally, many prisons use programs as an incentive for people who are disciplinary-free and as a punishment for people who acquire disciplinaries; in this way, the program itself can become another tool for control. Like many HEP programs, we have experienced program attrition from students being removed due to disciplinaries that occurred outside the classroom. As program facilitators, we try to model the importance of restorative responses, reintegration, and repair to the extent that we are able.

Institutional Policies

Policy changes at either or both institutions can strain program operations. DOCs, for example, may change their processes for visitor or volunteer approval or for the approval of program materials. Universities may restructure offices in ways that impact the delivery of student services. State universities in particular are vulnerable to changes in state legislation. These changes place special burdens on program coordinators who mediate between these institutions. Often, coordinators must develop new protocols to reflect new policies and communicate them with stakeholders. These changes can also strain relationships with other stakeholders, including funders. Still other challenges and strains result from understaffing and turnover, which can lead to inconsistency for HEP programs and students. As Dewey et al. point out, "Rampant understaffing makes it nearly impossible for a single staff member to remain a consistent point of contact"[13] to support HEP.

Naturally, the impacts of these institutional dynamics and tensions are experienced directly by HEP students. Take, for example, the policies regarding spatial restrictions that govern students' living quarters. "We have three drawers to put all our belongings in," writes Hawes.[14] "Any time of day, we can be asked to do a two-bin compliance. That means that we have to fit everything we own into two plastic containers."[15] With such severe limitations on storage, students cannot maintain their own records, keep their books from class, or "save the things that would be helpful in future work."[16]

HEP programs can help negotiate these policy-based limitations by developing creative and collective solutions. For example, the RJ Lab maintains digital copies of student work and creates class libraries for shared books that can be returned. We have also negotiated the use of supply closets for our class materials at the prison, and we use our on-campus offices for additional storage. Artwork poses a special challenge as it must be stored carefully. Art therapist Dave Gussak has worked with our students to create masks that reflect the identities we reveal and conceal, pictured below. They are kept in our office on campus and brought back to the facility for his recurring workshops where we use them for dialogue and deeper explorations of identity.



Institutional Relationships

Research indicates that coordinating and maintaining institutional relationships at the local level are the key to building institutional alignment and long-term sustainability.[17] The federal landscape for HEP has always been unpredictable. Pell grants, for example, became suddenly inaccessible to people in prison in 1994 before access was restored in 2020. As Conway et al. have stated, "Public opinion and political willpower for supporting such programs have been fickle historically," and therefore "sole reliance on federal support may be detrimental to the long term safeguarding of access to higher education for incarcerated students."[18] Additionally, as Middleton[19] argues, HEP programs are often sites of generative teaching and thinking *because* of the unique pressures and constraints created through the intersection of these incompatible institutions:

> My experience teaching in a correctional setting has shown me that bringing higher education into these spaces takes more than a good curriculum. It takes trust, open communication, flexibility, and strong relationships that are built and nurtured over time.
>
> *RJ Lab Faculty*

> *HEP educators adapt their pedagogies to these place-based dynamics—the size and configuration of the classroom, how students relate to each other, and what tools are available (or not)—to mobilize responsive teaching practices. So too do incarcerated students collaborate when leveraging knowledge to work around the material constraints of the prison.*[20]

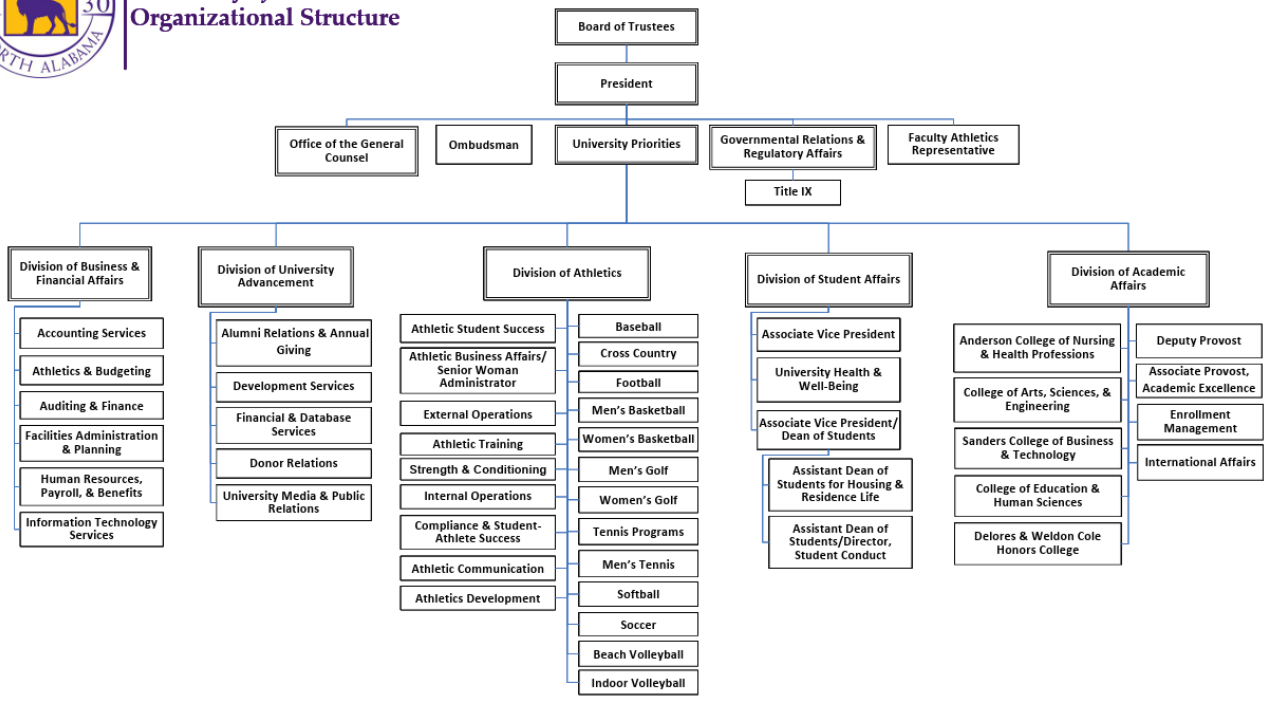
These gaps and constraints create the potential for programs to maximize creativity and responsiveness through community building in and around HEP classrooms.

How do HEP programs build and maintain relationships with universities?

Building and maintaining relationships with universities requires HEP programs to understand the structures, divisions, and administrative hierarchies that govern these institutions. Typically, universities are organized through two major units: **Academic Affairs**, which governs faculty, curriculum, and academic policies; and **Student Affairs**, which governs

student experiences more broadly and holistically. Each unit has different structures, functions, and reporting lines: divisions of academic affairs report to a provost, and divisions of student affairs report to a vice chancellor or vice president. These units also exist alongside other divisions that guide the university's priorities. UNA's other units include divisions of athletics, university advancement, and business and financial affairs, as shown below. Most universities display their organizational charts on their websites.

University *of* North Alabama
Organizational Structure



Universities often undergo restructuring and can experience turnover, which is why it is important for HEP programs to know not only the people in these administrative roles but also their job duties and reporting structures.

HEP programs are required to work across each of these units on campus. At UNA, for example, we work with a number of offices in Academic Affairs, including:

- Office of Admissions, which processes student applications
- Office of the Registrar, which registers students for classes
- Office of Institutional Research, which assists with tracking program-level data
- Standing academic committees, including department, college-level, and university-level curriculum committees that approve curriculum changes

- College-level deans, who enforce academic policies
- College-level staff and faculty advisors, who assist in recruiting outside students to our program
- Department chairs and administrative assistants, who assist with course offerings and rotations
- Accreditation liaison, who assists with compliance and reporting
- Library Services, which assists with student research
- Print Shop, which prints our program's flyers, brochures, and certificates of completion

We also engage a variety of offices in Student Affairs, including:

- Office of Student Conduct, which reviews and considers applications from students with criminal backgrounds and enforces course policies, such as plagiarism
- Office of Accessibility Support, which assists with disability accommodations and veterans affairs
- Office of Event Management, which assists with on-campus recruitment and professional development events

We work with offices within Business and Financial Affairs, including:

- Grants and Contract Accounting, which processes and manages our program's grant funds
- Office of the Bursar, which handles student tuition
- Human Resources and Payroll, which supports our program staff
- Facilities, which allows us to reserve and use university vehicles for transportation to and from the facility
- Information Technology Services, which assists with our program's technology needs

We engage additional divisions as well. Governmental Relations and Regulatory Affairs advises our program on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and has helped develop resources that guide students in requesting formal classroom accommodations. The Division of University Advancement, especially Media Relations, has helped us generate positive publicity for our program.

Finally, we work with the Office of the General Counsel on policies and liability waivers specific to our program. The General Counsel also helped

us develop our MOU with the state DOC, which we discuss in the following section.

Establishing relationships with each of these offices takes time, and turnover within these positions can require programs to re-establish relationships with new people who will have varying levels of knowledge and comfort with HEP. Program coordinators play crucial roles in managing these relationships and providing consistency over time. As McBeath emphasizes, "Having a coordinator responsible for managing these processes is highly recommended, and it is suggested that the coordinator obtain training in these areas in order to assist students during each step of the educational process."[21]

Module 5: Creating Opportunities for Continuous Engagement details the importance of celebrations for community building. We invite stakeholders from all of the offices with which we interact as guests to our graduation ceremonies at the facility so they can experience the program firsthand. Below is a photograph of a RJ Lab student at his graduation ceremony receiving his certificate from the program director (left), university provost (right), and college dean (far right).



We also invite staff to represent their offices at our orientation for new students and at our study hall sessions so students can gain a clearer understanding of the on-campus offices that support their academic growth and well-being. These interactions also allow university staff and administrators to better understand our students and their needs.

> Working to cultivate relationships with other programs and departments has been a key to success for our program. I try to attend university events and other spaces where I can get to know other departments so we can find ways to work with each other.
>
> *RJ Lab Staff*

On-campus offices are often already strained as many universities have expanded student enrollment without proportional increases in staffing. Programs such as ours can help lessen this burden by liaising with university staff to develop documents and protocols that streamline and customize their work for HEP. For example, we coordinated with our office of admissions to develop an application that provides the university with the information they need for processing our students; you can find this application in *Module 1: Building a Strong Cohort*, Appendix C. Additionally, we have created a form to assist our librarian with student research requests. As we noted in *Module 1*, RJ Lab students have access to a limited, offline version of JSTOR through the JSTOR Access in Prison Initiative. You can locate our library research handout in Appendix B.

How do HEP programs build and maintain relationships with prison facilities and DOCs?

Because they prioritize security, DOCs and prison facilities appreciate advance notice, transparency, and clear expectations. The following strategies can assist HEP programs in supporting these goals.

Advance Planning and Scheduling

Planning in advance can be a challenge for HEP programs, which are often underresourced and understaffed. However, some facilities require advance approval for reviewing and approving program materials and special visitors. Because space in prison facilities is limited, advance schedules also help ensure that your program has a suitable and reliable meeting space.

We send advance calendar schedules for upcoming semesters requesting when and where we would like for our classes, study halls, workshops, and special events and performances to operate.

Regular Communication

As a warden's administrative assistant once told us, "There is never such a thing as too much communication!" At the beginning of each week, we email the warden at the facility where the RJ Lab operates. Upon his request, we detail all the personnel and materials that our class requires for that week. If we are requesting special materials (such as art supplies) or materials that require additional storage space (such as chairs), we request permission for those items before we place the order.

Different prison administrators have different communication styles. Some prefer in-person conversations to emails and vice versa. Like HEP programs, prison administrations can become overburdened with requests, tasks, and conflicting pressures. It can be helpful to ask the warden and other prison staff how they prefer to communicate with your program.

I always make a point to thank the correctional officers for sitting in with our program at the end of the class. Many times, they respond that they would rather be in our classroom than elsewhere in the facility. We have even seen correctional officers take it upon themselves to ask questions about restorative justice and some have even desired to read the assigned course books. This kind of relationship building is especially useful when we need to address an issue, like checking on a student who is absent from class or remedying an issue with the classroom space. I also make a point to make small talk conversations with the staff I see regularly at the facility, like the security checkpoint officers, officer administrators, etc. Being a reliable, friendly face helps me in my work on the inside and also helps the program's sustainability and longevity.

RJ Lab Staff

Case study

The RJ Lab sends weekly emails to the warden, and we also schedule monthly office visits to handle any additional program updates or requests. In addition, we have developed our own contacts at the state DOC in case we have program-related requests that the facility itself cannot answer or handle. Programs will want to be careful that these state-level relationships are not sidestepping facility-level approvals but furthering connections that can alleviate the burden on facilities and reduce opportunities for miscommunication.

Clear and Formalized Agreements

Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) are formal agreements that establish the roles and responsibilities of institutions that are entering into partnership. HEP programs cannot create MOUs with individual facilities, but they can—and should—create MOUs with their state DOC.

The MOU provides an opportunity for programs to create and negotiate educational standards with institutions that were not designed for education. Weaving the language of your regional accreditation body into your MOU will help your program establish that your requests are generated from best practices and regional standards. Such language also allows programs to articulate what specific supports HEP programs are required to provide for students in correctional spaces.

An MOU template modeled after our own is provided in Appendix C.

Data Sharing

MOUs may contain guidance for and agreements around data sharing. New federal requirements surrounding Pell grant access for **Prison Education Programs (PEPs)** ask universities and prisons to cooperate in order to arrive at "best interest determinations" for students and to agree on outcomes that will be measured for purposes of program evaluation. Loyola University New Orleans' *PEP Data Collection Inventory Tool*[22] is designed to assist other programs in navigating these various agreements. University student access services and facility compliance coordinators for ADA can also work together to meet the needs of students with disabilities. As Dewey et al. write, "Strong relationships between state departments of correction and departments of education may provide valuable opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing."[23]

Other Strategies for Relationship Building

HEP administrators, faculty, and staff can proactively prepare to navigate institutional relationships through role-playing activities that encourage them to rehearse common scenarios.



Activity: What Would You Do?

Overview: *Ask for volunteers (at least two) to role-play each scenario. One person should be a correctional officer; one person should be program staff/faculty. Ask remaining participants to provide feedback and brainstorm restorative suggestions for building and maintaining institutional relationships.*

Session flow: *60 minutes.*

Note: *This is a good activity for faculty/staff retreats and new faculty/staff orientation.*

Scenario #1: *You show up to the facility to teach your class and are told your attire is not appropriate.*

Sample restorative suggestions:

- *Keep a backup outfit on hand or have a plan to change clothing.*
- *If you have a teaching assistant or other support staff, leave them with a set of instructions and a class agenda to get class started while you find a change of clothing.*
- *Scout out nearby thrift stores so your team has another clothing source.*

Scenario #2: *You are kept waiting for a very long time from entering the classroom. Class was supposed to begin 30 minutes ago.*

Sample restorative suggestions:

- *Use that time to check in and build relationships with prison staff.*
- *Perform icebreakers with program staff and/or outside students.*
- *Bring material for reading, grading, and other tasks if you are solo.*
- *Ask to speak with an administrator at the facility who can provide context for the disruption.*

Scenario #3: *You are met at the front desk by a correctional officer who is not familiar with your program and is unsure if you should be granted entry.*

Sample restorative suggestions:

- *Come prepared with hard copy permissions documents from the warden for class time, materials, etc.*
- *Call for a familiar administrator so they can speak to your reason for being at the facility.*
- *Use that opportunity to introduce your program and the work that you do at the facility.*

Scenario #4: *You are holding a Circle on a sensitive topic and a correctional officer enters the discussion in a way that shifts the power dynamic and stifles discussion.*

- *Clarify the context for the day's Circle.*
- *Redirect discussion back to participants in the wider Circle.*
- *Refer back to the group's community agreement.*
- *Speak with the officer after class about the sensitive dynamics of Circlekeeping.*

Community Agreements Redux

In order to address rising tensions at the facility on days when the program was not operating smoothly, we recently amended the community agreement for our program faculty and staff to address how we will work to help maintain relationships under duress to include the following category:

Practices within the Facility

- Remain mindful of how we are presenting ourselves inside the facility as representatives of UNA and the RJ Lab program.
- Try to be time sensitive when arriving at the facility and conducting class (while also being aware that some things at the facility are out of our control when it comes to starting on time).
- Flexibility is appreciated when it comes to making up time (when class starts late due to the facility's delays) so students can have the full time needed for class and study hall.
- Greet and show appreciation to COs who sit in on our class (extending the olive branch).

- Keep others informed of procedural changes, especially concerning checkpoint/security protocol (dogs, shoe removal, pat downs, etc.).
- Practice patience even in challenging circumstances (such as late start, dress code, etc.).
- Communicate with students in ways that maintain consistency, professionalism, and equity among all students.
- Remain trauma informed and sensitive to what energy we bring into the classroom. Also, be aware of the daily challenges our students face in their living environment and be mindful that we are able to leave, whereas they cannot.
- Refrain from participating in gossip about prison staff, recognizing the difference between strategy and venting.
- Recognize that our actions inside have ripple effects: what we do can also impact other faculty, staff, students, and the program as a whole.

Student Advisory Councils Redux

HEP students and alumni are the best ambassadors and relationship builders within the facility itself. They know more staff and better understand institutional hierarchies and politics than any outside program administrator or faculty ever could. We consult our student advisory councils—both inside and outside—when we need advice about how to approach navigating relationships with, and within, the facility.

> I am an ambassador for the program within DOC. I use restorative values, such as relationship building, respect, and accountability, to communicate with staff. When you show up respectfully, people listen.
>
> *RJ Lab Student*

What practices can bring universities and DOCs into greater alignment?

Module 3: Managing Conflict illuminates different types of conflict, and some are easier to manage than others. Universities and prisons have conflicting values, and the transformative goal outlined in the summary table, "understanding without judgment," may only get HEP programs so far. Instead, HEP programs will have greater success if they reframe conflicts as "motivation conflicts," where people have different reasons for supporting the same action. This strategy emphasizes goals (rather than values) and promotes adjustments in language to reflect these shared goals.



Emphasize Shared Objectives

HEP programs can make their appreciation for these shared goals explicit. Within the context of HEP, universities and prisons share the objective of enrolling incarcerated students in postsecondary education. The same cannot be said for facilities that do not have HEP programs. There are plenty of universities that do not believe in extending education to prisons, and plenty of prisons that do not believe education has a place in carceral settings. The RJ Lab begins and ends every communication to the warden with gratitude for supporting our program. Our motivations may differ, but by emphasizing the outcome, we can develop and deepen a shared sense of trust and cooperation through our commitment to meeting this outcome.

Programs can also reflect these shared goals in the language they use to frame the program and its value. The mission of the RJ Lab, for example, is to prepare students to make systemic change in their communities by providing them with skills that foster community accountability, perspective taking, and social engagement. We break this mission down for our DOC stakeholders as follows:

- **Accountability**: The program teaches students to understand accountability as a complex and multistage process that involves reflection, awareness, communication, and action.
- **Perspective Taking**: The program also encourages students to adopt the perspectives of others through coursework that develops skills in reading, performance, listening, and dialogue. Because restorative justice is survivor centered, the program especially encourages participants to consider the profound impacts of our actions on others.
- **Social Engagement**: The program's unique Inside-Out model combines incarcerated and nonincarcerated students in ways that challenge them to communicate across differences. Coursework is primarily discussion-based and students complete collaborative projects in small groups.

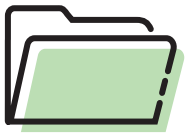
By emphasizing accountability, perspective taking, and social engagement, the RJ Lab's program objectives align with the DOC's emphasis on repairing harm, successful reentry, and pro-social behavior.



Approach Problems as Opportunities for Collaboration

Another strategy involves approaching challenges with curiosity and as opportunities for collaborative problem-solving. Transforming frustration

into curiosity—why this policy change, and why now?—can help place these challenges in a broader context. Expressing what is challenging and why, and how it affects the delivery of the educational program, can be an important step toward troubleshooting the problem. Ask your contacts in the DOC how to successfully navigate changes in policy while maintaining the integrity and structure of your program. Inquire about what contexts may have inspired these changes. Respectfully request they help you arrive at a workable solution. As Gordon et al. write, "Creatively problem-solving and turning challenges into solutions are key components to the success of this work."[24]



Case study

Recently, the DOC imposed new rules for outside visitors regarding the process for obtaining clearance to enter prisons in Alabama. Visitors are now required to go to designated sites for in-person fingerprinting and "security threat group" assessments; none of these sites are in our area. Unfortunately, this new policy applies to educational staff and even to outside students in our program. We expressed to several administrators that because students were still on summer break and our semester was due to begin in a matter of weeks, we did not have enough time to comply. As a result, we were able to negotiate a temporary reprieve for outside students until we could work the additional trip into our class schedule.



Create Opportunities for Joint Professional Development and Resource Sharing

Guest speakers, film screenings, trainings, and joint meetings with opportunities for dialogue can help universities and prisons develop a shared understanding of the unique barriers that incarcerated students face in HEP programs. Because campus units are siloed and fragmented, they do not always have the opportunity to communicate, learn about one another, and build relationships despite sharing common goals. Creating workshop spaces for education, dialogue, and resource sharing across campus units can allow HEP constituent groups to educate one another about programs and policy.

Case study

The UNA RJ Lab invited The Community, a nonprofit with a special focus on disability access in prison, to facilitate a workshop on our campus. In addition to inviting our RJ Lab faculty and staff, we invited the staff from the university's Access Center to participate. During our question-and-answer session, Access Center staff were able to offer some assistive technology options that they were willing to donate to the program to help students during study hall sessions. In exchange, our program learned more about the documentation they require for formal accommodations. The Community then conducted a parallel workshop at the prison facility for our student advisory council so our inside tutors can better meet the needs of current students.

Learn the Bureaucracy

Despite all of their differences, universities and prisons share similar bureaucratic and hierarchical structures. These structures can be difficult to navigate for those unfamiliar with the particular institutions. Nevertheless, relationship building at institutional levels requires that we learn to navigate them.

Understanding roles and hierarchies is especially important for navigating permissions. When classes are running behind, we often ask the officer stationed in or near our room if we can have extra time. Frequently, the answer is, "I am not allowed to make that decision." They, or we, must then communicate with the shift office that coordinates officer placements. Some requests require conversations with multiple stakeholders. For example, we initiated conversations with the warden, the chaplain, and coordinators for an on-site technical college to negotiate new classroom and storage spaces. The warden also helped us obtain videos and photographs of our most recent graduation ceremony by contacting the DOC's media coordinators.

Case study

Recently, the RJ Lab has been navigating program attrition as students experience changes in their custody levels. Several students were dropped to minimum custody and suddenly transferred from the maximum security facility where our program operates to a work release center. Consequently, we initiated a request with the warden and classification office that students in our program who wished to finish have a transfer hold put into place. This will ensure they are not prematurely removed from the program before they can complete their certificate.

On the university side, special permissions regarding academic coursework often involve conversations with multiple stakeholders, as well. For example, decisions around late adds or drops and other enrollment issues are often made at the dean's level and require the involvement of the registrar's office; tuition reimbursement involves the bursar's office. Loyola University New Orleans has developed a tool to help HEP programs navigate these systems for purposes of data collection. The *PEP Data Collection Inventory Tool*[25] provides guidance and templates for convening university stakeholders from the registrar, admissions, financial aid, institutional research, career services, and student services offices.

Navigating bureaucracy and institutional policy can feel exhausting, but it is necessary for the long-term health and sustainability of HEP programs. The more institutionally embedded a HEP program can become within both university and DOC structures, the less likely it is to be sidelined or dissolved. These relationships are developed over time through patience, persistence, and communication.

Resource: Spreadsheet for Program Contacts

One organizational tool that has helped RJ Lab staff better navigate bureaucracy is the development of an internal contact list: a spreadsheet with tabs for the university, prison facility, funders, resources, consultants, and professional organizations. As we meet and engage with new professionals whose work intersects with ours, we document their contact information and add context in the notes section that describes their relationship to our program. With this tool, our program's connections and relationships can be easily accessed by any staff member who needs them for reference.

Below is a screenshot of a sample page.

Name	Organization	Role/Title	Email	Phone	Notes
Name	*Organization*	*Role/Title*	*Email*	*Phone*	
Name	*Organization*	*Role/Title*	*Email*	*Phone*	
Name	*Organization*	*Role/Title*	*Email*	*Phone*	
Name	*Organization*	*Role/Title*	*Email*	*Phone*	
Name	*Organization*	*Role/Title*	*Email*	*Phone*	
Name	*Organization*	*Role/Title*	*Email*	*Phone*	
Name	*Organization*	*Role/Title*	*Email*	*Phone*	
Name	*Organization*	*Role/Title*	*Email*	*Phone*	

> In the RJ Lab, we joke that one metric of success for our program is the number of people and offices that are cc'd on a single email. It shows that institutions are making an effort to integrate our program into their operations. Communication and coordination is one of the challenges of this work, but when done effectively, it builds relationships at institutional levels in ways that clearly benefit our students.
>
> *RJ Lab Director*

Additionally, HEP programs are uniquely positioned to bridge the divide between universities and prisons. As Conway and Lally have found, "The environments of correctional institutions and universities and colleges are often heavily siloed, rarely intersecting in tangible ways if not for the development of such programs."[26] Beyond these institutions themselves, HEP programs are beginning to build even more robust communities of support. To that end, Zukowski et al. note, "We also need a broader buy-in from stakeholders in general: non-profits, foundations, state and local authorities, and educational institutions across the state."[27] Additionally, "the Department of Corrections and the legislature need to recognize the need for a shared investment in the future of returning citizens."[28]

During a recent art workshop, we invited students in the RJ Lab to create "squiggle" drawings without looking at their paper, and then challenged them to find meaning within the chaos they had created. HEP programs, like these art pieces, are often assembled ad hoc and emerge from what feels like disarray. As Hean et al. suggest, "Processes typically rely on informal procedures, goodwill, imagination, determination and the skills

of dedicated individuals."[29] Over time, and with the intentionality of community building, they can become organized into patterns, shapes, and color that cohere together for a broader purpose. These are the institutional relationships that secure the success of HEP programs over the long term.







Recap of Module 6: Building and Maintaining Institutional Relationships

Key takeaways:

- **Scaling relationships and building trust at institutional levels requires awareness of policies, guidelines, and other institutional and legal frameworks.**
- **Prisons and universities may experience values conflicts but share similar goals in HEP contexts.**
- **Programs can work toward institutional alignment by emphasizing shared objectives and problem solving.**
- **Programs should learn to navigate organizational structures within both universities and prisons in order to communicate effectively and secure necessary permissions.**

Notes

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Appendix A: Liability Waivers

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA
WAIVER AND HOLD HARMLESS FORM

I, _____, the undersigned, acknowledge that I am aware of, appreciate the character of and voluntarily assume the risks involved in participating in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program ("Program").

By my signature below, on behalf of myself, my heirs, next of kin, successors in interest, assigns, personal representatives, and agents, I hereby:

1. Understand that there are dangers, hazards, and inherent risks to which I may be exposed, including, but not limited to, the risk of serious physical injury, temporary or permanent disability, and death, as well as economic and property loss. I further understand that other risks and dangers may be involved, whether known or unknown nor reasonably foreseeable;

2. Fully understand the scope of the activities and the risks involved in my participation in the Program. I voluntarily accept and assume, without limitation, the risks of bodily injury or property damage, the unavailability of emergency medical care, or the negligent or deliberate act of another person arising out of voluntary participation in the Program;

3. Release and fully discharge the UNA Board of Trustees, UNA, including its officers, employees, and agents, from any and all claims or causes of action, including all liability for damage to personal property or personal injury which may result from my participation in the Program, that may be brought by me or for any injury or loss that I may suffer while participating in the Program, whether caused by negligence or otherwise, to the fullest extent permitted by law;

4. Release, indemnify, and hold harmless the UNA Board of Trustees, UNA, including its officers, employees, and agents, from and against any and all liability, actions, debts, claims, and demands of every kind whatsoever, including, but not limited to, any claim for negligence and/or any present or future claim, loss, or liability for which I may be liable to any other person or to UNA that arises out of my voluntary participation in the Program;

5. Authorize representatives of UNA (in the event of an accident or serious illness) to provide medical treatment and transport, if necessary. I waive my right to receive informed consent prior to such transportation or treatment. I hereby hold harmless and agree to indemnify UNA from any claims, causes of action,

damages and/or liabilities arising out of or resulting from the medical treatment or transport. I further agree to accept full responsibility for any and all expenses, including medical expenses that may derive from any injuries to me that may occur during my participation in the Program;

6. Accept responsibility and will reimburse UNA for any damages or expenses that arise out of or relate to my own negligent or intentional action or omission;

7. Have read and understand this Waiver is intended to be as broad and inclusive as permitted by the laws of Alabama and agree that if any portion is held invalid, the remainder of the waiver will continue in full legal force and effect. I further agree that the laws of Alabama shall govern this waiver; and

8. Have read and understand and agree to all of the terms of this Agreement. I understand that I am giving up substantial rights (including my right to sue) and acknowledge that I am willingly signing this document. My signature on this document is intended to bind not only myself, but also the successors, heirs, representatives, administrators, and assigns of myself.

_____ _____

Name of Participant (print) **Signature of Participant**

_____

Date

STUDENT TRAVEL WAIVER AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY, ASSUMPTION OF RISK AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT

This form must be completed by all non-employee participants (students, volunteers, alumni, chaperones, etc.) and submitted to the appropriate Program Administrator prior to participation.

Mark the type of program with an "X" and provide name of program:

____ Education Abroad: Faculty-led (short-term) program:
_____

____ Education Abroad: Student Exchange (long-term) program:
_____

____ Alternative Breaks program: _____

____ Domestic Experiential Travel: _____

__X__ Alternative Breaks program: Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

I, _____ (print your name), a student (non-employee) at the University of North Alabama ("University") or other non-employee (i.e. volunteer, chaperon, etc.) hereby acknowledge that I have voluntarily elected to participate in the type of program marked above ("Program") and understand the Program consists of the following (please provide specific details of trip, including location, below): _____

_____

_____

From: _____ to: _____
(Program Start Date) (Program End Date)

In consideration for being permitted to participate in the Program, I hereby acknowledge and agree to the following:

1. I have been informed of and I understand the various aspects of the Program I have selected including, but not limited to, travel, itinerary, logistics, cancellation, and related Program activities. I also understand that as a Participant in the Program, I may sustain serious personal injuries, illness, property loss or damage, or even death as a consequence of the actions, inactions or negligence of myself or others, travel, weather conditions, and other risks not known to me or not reasonably foreseeable at this time. I further understand and agree that any such injuries and consequences that I may sustain by any means are my sole responsibility.

2. I understand there are potential risks inherent to my participation in the Program and these potential risks include, but are not limited to: travel to and from the Program; local travel within the Program site(s); consumption of food; weather conditions; language barriers; contagious diseases; terrorism and military conflict; negligent first aid operations or procedures; and other risks that are unknown at this time. Although the University has made every reasonable effort to assure my safety while participating in the Program, there are unavoidable risks. I understand that the University is not in any way responsible for my wellbeing with respect to any travel destinations and/or participation in activities beyond those specifically required for the Program that I may choose to undertake before, during, or after the Program. I knowingly and voluntarily assume all such risks, both known and unknown, even if arising from the negligence of the Released Parties (described herein) and I voluntarily assume full responsibility for my participation in the Program.

3. I understand and agree that, although the University will attempt to maintain the Program as described in its publications, it reserves the right to change the Program including, but not limited to, the curriculum, instructors, itinerary, travel arrangements, or accommodations at any time and for any reason, with or without notice, and that the University, or its employees and agents, shall not be responsible or liable for any expenses or losses that I may sustain because of these changes.

4. I have no known physical or health-related reasons or problems that may preclude or restrict my participation in the Program and related activities, or I have disclosed to the University any physical, mental, and/or emotional conditions or problems, permanent or temporary, including special dietary and medication needs, or the need for visual or auditory aids that might impair my ability to participate in the Program. I hereby release each of the Released parties from any and all claims, damages, injuries, or loss arising out of my failure to disclose such conditions or problems.

5. I further agree that receiving any inoculations (if necessary) is my responsibility and I will not hold the University liable for any adverse reactions as a result of taking the inoculations or illness abroad or at home due to not taking the inoculations. I will make all preparations necessary to safeguard my health and comply with all recommended precautions pertaining to my health and safety. I have further arranged, through insurance or otherwise, to meet any and all needs for payment of health care coverage or medical costs that I may incur while I participate in the Program.

6. The University may, but is not obligated to, make any decisions and take any actions regarding my health and safety that it considers to be warranted under the circumstances, and I hereby authorize the University to make such decisions and take such actions. I agree to pay all expenses relating thereto and release the University from any liability for any such actions.

7. I understand and agree that I must comply with all applicable University rules, regulations and policies. I understand and agree that the University reserves the right to dismiss me from the Program at any time should my actions or general behavior, in the sole discretion of the University, be determined to constitute a danger to myself, others, or is a detriment to the progress and objectives of the Program in any way. Should I be released from the Program, I understand and take full responsibility for any costs associated with my departure.

8. In consideration of the opportunity afforded to me and with full knowledge and acceptance of the risks associated with my participation in the Program, I hereby release, indemnify, hold harmless and covenant not to sue the University of North Alabama, its trustees, officers, employees, volunteers, agents, representatives, and any other person involved with the Program ("Released Parties"), either directly or indirectly, from all claims, suits, expenses, attorney fees and demands of any nature (including negligence) caused by, deriving from, or associated with my participation in this Program and related activities, including the travel to and from the Program or to any events associated with this Program.

I make these covenants, release and waivers knowingly and voluntarily. It is further understood and agreed that this Waiver and Release of Liability, Assumption of Risk and Indemnity Agreement is to be binding on my heirs and assigns and I sign it of my own free will.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Participant Printed Name

_____ _____

Participant UNA Student ID Number Date

Appendix B: RJ Lab Library Research Handout

Research Tips

When researching, you want to start with a question or a statement.

Ex. How does restorative justice and healing connect?

Then you want to break that question up into key term(s).

Ex. “restorative justice” “healing”

Try using these terms with Boolean Operators (see next section). If these terms do not give you results that you want, you can try synonyms as some articles may use a different term but be focused on a similar topic as the one you are researching. A thesaurus or dictionary may be helpful when it comes to searching for synonyms.

Ex. Synonyms for “heal” – restore, repair, rehabilitate, mend

Under the abstracts of suggested articles, you may see a list of topics that are mentioned in the article. These topics can be helpful in suggesting new search terms that will give you different source results.

Boolean Operators

Boolean operators allow you to expand or limit your search depending on the usage. These operators are: AND, OR, NOT

AND: Combines search terms so you can have a more specific search.

Ex. Restorative Justice AND Literature

OR: Will give you results that fit either term, whether they be similar or completely different.

Ex. Restorative Justice OR Criminal Justice

NOT: Allows you to exclude certain terms from your search.

Ex. Restorative Justice AND Literature NOT Criminal Justice

Requesting Articles

After conducting a search, you can scroll through the list of results and read the abstract or summary of each article. If there is an article you would like to request that we print for you, follow the steps below:

1. Select the "Request This" button next to the title of the article.
    a. The button will turn red and say "Added to Cart" when it has been successfully saved.
2. You can view your saved articles under the button that says "Your Requests." This should be next to the search bar.
3. Once you're done with your search, you can download the list of saved titles by selecting "Download list (.txt)" at the bottom of the pop-up box.
4. On the shared class flash drive, you can upload your downloaded list.
    a. Please put your name next to the date of the saved list so we know who to give the article once printed.

Article Citation Breakdown

Each source has a unique citation. This is important when writing a research paper and you need to cite a specific article so the reader knows to which work you are referring.

Ex. Goodstein, Jerry, and Karl Aquino. "And Restorative Justice for All: Redemption, Forgiveness, and Reintegration in Organizations." *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 31, no. 4, May 2010, pp. 624–28. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/41683932.

Breakdown:

- Author: Goodstein, Jerry, and Karl Aquino
- Title of Article: "And Restorative Justice for All: Redemption, Forgiveness, and Reintegration in Organizations."
- Journal Title: *Journal of Organizational Behavior*
- Journal volume/edition/date: vol. 31, no. 4, May 2010
- Page numbers of article in the journal: pp. 624–28
- Database source was found: JSTOR
- Link to source: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/41683932

Search Term Suggestions

Use topics and themes from the literature in your classes to help guide your search terms. Some that may be helpful in the field of restorative justice include, but are not limited to:

- Restorative justice
- Criminal justice
- Criminology
- Healing
- Forgiveness
- Reconciliation
- Responsibility
- Repair
- Reintegration
- Accountability process
- Healing-centered
- Survivor-centered
- Accountability
- Transformative justice
- Victim-offender dialogue
- Lived experience
- Restorative language
- Restorative conferencing

Appendix C: Memorandum of Understanding Template

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

On this the ____ day of _____ [month], _____ [year], the University of _____, for and on behalf of the College of _____ ("the University") and The _____ [state] Department of Corrections ("DOC") agree that eligible students (see below) may take credit-bearing courses toward _____ [certificate/degree] in _____ [certificate/degree program] offered through the University. The certificate will be conducted through an experiential educational program model called "Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program" ("Program") at the _____ Facility ("Facility"), wherein "inside" (currently incarcerated) participants shall be Facility-based students and "outside" participants shall be University-based (non-incarcerated) students. This MOU supports the Program's compliance with the University's regional accreditor, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges ("SACSCOC"); references appear throughout this document, and the off-site requirements for approval can be accessed here: https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/SubstantiveChange.pdf

DOC and the University have agreed that the Program shall be operated according to the following conditions:

A. The University and the ADOC jointly agree:

1. This Memorandum of Understanding (the "Agreement") shall be effective beginning _____, _____ [date], and shall continue until terminated by either party. Either party may at any time and for any reason, or for no reason, terminate this Agreement by giving notice to the other party thirty (30) days advance written notice. If this Agreement is terminated during a semester with students enrolled in the Program, the parties agree to take reasonable steps to allow current students to complete the Program.
2. This agreement entails no compensation or payment between the parties.

B. Responsibilities of the University:

1. The University shall designate one or more members of its faculty ("University Liaison") to coordinate all aspects of the Program with the DOC and/or the Facility.
2. The University shall require each participating student to complete, sign and return Attachment A, "Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program Guidelines, and Waiver and Release of Liability."

3. The University shall require each participating student to complete, sign and return Attachment B, "DOC Policies" prior to entering any ADOC facility.

4. A signed copy of A and B shall be provided to the Facility Liaison for each outside student enrolled in the program.

5. The number of outside students shall not exceed __ per semester.

6. The University Liaison shall recruit and identify outside participants who are eligible for the Program. Eligible inside participants must meet the following criteria:

    i. Complete an application and interview with the University Liaison.

    ii. Agree to complete, sign, and return Attachment A, "Inside-Out Exchange Program Guidelines and Release of Liability."

    iii. Agree to complete, sign, and return Attachment B, DOC Policies.

7. The University will provide or secure sufficient funding for inside student tuition, books, and supplies, as articulated by SACSCOC in Section 13, Financial and Physical Resources: "The institution has sound financial resources and a demonstrated, stable financial base to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services."

8. The University will not expect or solicit any funds from DOC nor any current or prospective inside student.

9. The University agrees to provide a 33% tuition discount for all state employees, including DOC staff. This discount is also extended to inside students. Should DOC staff be interested in enrolling at the University, they should communicate with the University Liaison.

10. The University agrees to provide Continuing Education Units (CEU) to DOC correctional officers who staff the program and complete an assessment. DOC staff interested in earning CEUs should communicate with the University Liaison as soon as possible.

11. The University will provide staffing to support and sustain the program at no cost to DOC.

12. All University instructors in the Program will have completed the required 60-hour Inside-Out training.

13. All University instructors will complete all DOC training including PREA training prior to the start date of this MOU.

14. All outside University students in the Program will have completed the paperwork and training required by the DOC and Inside-Out Program.

15. The University Liaison will be available to assist released inside students if they choose to enroll at the University to further their education.

16. The University is required to provide a complete list with names and copies of a government issued photo identification of each instructor, outside student, or any other individual who is expected to enter any DOC facility no less than two weeks before a semester's instruction is to begin. After this list is submitted, additional individuals cannot be added absent exceptional circumstances.

17. Any employee, outside student, or person in the Facility on behalf of the University must immediately report to Facility staff any inappropriate conduct while at the Facility. This includes but is not limited to inside students asking favors, receiving or requesting contraband, or inappropriate familiarity.

18. All programming related to this Agreement shall be on _____ [days] from ____ to ____ [time].

C. Responsibilities of the DOC:

1. The DOC and/or Facility shall designate one or more employees ("Facility Liaison") to coordinate all aspects of the Program with the University, including but not limited to, working with the University Liaison prior to the beginning of each semester to appropriately plan and consider logistical concerns specific to the Inside-Out Course.

2. The Facility Liaison will work with the University Liaison to recruit and identify inside participants who are eligible for the Program. Eligible inside participants must meet the following criteria:

    a. Likely to remain incarcerated at the Facility for the duration of the Program (____ years).

    b. Complete an application and interview with the University Liaison.

    c. Agree to complete, sign, and return Attachment A, "Inside Out Exchange Program Guidelines and Release of Liability."

3. The DOC and/or Facility will communicate immediately with the University Liaison any concern regarding any inside or outside student's behavior.

4. Facility will designate correctional staffing for program facilitation as

well as space that serves an educational environment, as articulated by SACSCOC in Section 13, Financial and Physical Resources: “The institution takes reasonable steps to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community.”

5. DOC reserves the right to restrict access to the Facility and/or inside students at any point, for any reason.

6. The DOC and/or Facility will agree, to the extent reasonable and practicable, to ensure inside participants are able to attend and participate in the Program at the scheduled times that are mutually agreed upon by University and Facility.

7. Facility will allow for weekly study hall sessions to be conducted by course instructor and/or graduate assistant and to allow for services (such as tutoring) to comply with regional accreditation standards for student success, as articulated by 13.7, Academic and Student Support Services: "The institution ensures adequate physical facilities and resources, both on and off campus, that appropriately serve the needs of the institution's educational programs, support services, and other mission-related activities."

8. Facility will allow the use of limited technology and research, including DOC-approved laptops with preloaded course and research materials; DOC will also allow the University Liaison to deliver library material requests to UNA’s Inside-Out library liaison, as articulated by SACSCOC in Section 11: Library Learning/Information Resources: “The institution provides adequate and appropriate library and learning/information resources, services, and support for its mission.”

9. Facility will provide a time and space for individual, confidential student advising once per academic semester, as consistent with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

10. Facility will allow University Liaison to use a flash drive to save student data for record-keeping in order to comply with regional accreditation standards for offsite programs, as articulated by SACSCOC in Section 12: Academic and Student Support Services: “The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of its student records and maintains security measures to protect and back up data.”

11. Facility will allow Program faculty to conduct research (such as program evaluation) that benefits and improves the Program’s delivery. At no time is the University or program allowed to disclose the identity of inside students except as required for their credit earning Program.

D. Responsibilities of the Participants

See Attachment A.

E. Responsibilities of the University Liaison

1. University Liaison will coordinate all aspects of the Program with the DOC and/or Facility. Additional duties include (but are not limited to):
    i. Setting the schedule for the course offerings and rotations;
    ii. Receiving student applications;
    iii. Scheduling student interviews and communicating with DOC about selection process;
    iv. Receiving student rosters for admitted students;
    v. Providing academic advising;
    vi. Helping to provide and review transcripts for students;
    vii. Serving as the point person for grade grievances, as articulated by SACSCOC, Section 12: Academic and Student Support Services: "The institution (a) publishes appropriate and clear procedures for addressing written student complaints, (b) demonstrates that it follows the procedures when resolving them, and (c) maintains a record of student complaints that can be accessed upon request by SACSCOC." UNA's grade grievance policy can be accessed here: https://www.una.edu/registrar/student-resources/grade-appeal.html

F. Program Admission and Retention

1. University does not require high school diplomas or transcripts for participation in the Program.
2. Applicants will be interviewed by University Liaison prior to admission in the Program. Facility will make accommodations for interviews.
3. To assist the University with retention and program completion, Facility will make every effort not to transfer students currently enrolled in the program unless deemed absolutely necessary or unless the student elects to transfer.

4. To assist the University with retention, Facility will agree to communicate with University Liaison and Program faculty, to the extent possible, if a student is suspended or removed from the course due to a DOC disciplinary infraction.

5. If inside student enrollment declines, ADOC and/or the Facility will allow University Liaison to interview and replace students who have left the Program as able.

6. If an inside student is transferred from ____ and returns to _____, the University will allow the inside student to re-enroll in the Program with no delay or penalty.

G. Terms

1. Modifications. It is understood that this Agreement constitutes the entire agreement of the Parties. Any modifications, renewals, or extensions, must be mutually agreed upon in writing by both Parties.

2. Termination Privilege. The DOC reserves the right to terminate this contract upon thirty (30) days written notice to the University.

Notes



Restorative Justice Lab

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA