

The Prison University Project  
Qualitative Evidence on the Impact of Prison Higher Education

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## **Executive Summary**

Can higher education programs in prison increase the safety, health and well-being of incarcerated individuals, improve prison culture, and assist in reentry and recidivism prevention?

- Our research team interviewed 27 former students of the College Program at San Quentin State Prison, a liberal arts college program run by the Prison University Project (PUP).
- We conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews in person or by phone. Program alumni were offered a small stipend for their participation, and each interview lasted between 35 and 85 minutes. During the interview, participants were asked to describe whether and how PUP had affected their lives both during and after incarceration.

Nearly all of the former students with whom we spoke reported that participating in prison higher education had significant effects on their lives, both inside and outside prison.

- Over 90 percent of respondents suggest that PUP affected their self-identity, mental health, and social and familial relationships.
- More than two-thirds of respondents report that PUP has positively influenced the prison culture at San Quentin, particularly in regards to race relations.
- A majority report that their participation in PUP helped them reach their career goals. However, some still faced difficulties in securing stable employment or continuing their education after prison.
- Former students also credit PUP for helping to prevent recidivism.

Our interviews suggest that individuals who have participated in a prison higher education program believe their education provided long-term improvements in outcomes for them, as well as for their families and the correctional administration as a whole.

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## I. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed substantial changes in the political conversation around mass incarceration in California. Policymakers, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and the public are increasingly seeking new strategies to reduce the prison population, improve prison culture, and assist in reentry. As part of this conversation, California and a number of other states have looked at expanding access to higher education for individuals during and after their incarceration.

The Prison University Project (PUP) at San Quentin State Prison, an accredited college program administered through Patten University, offers an associate's degree in liberal arts to prisoners with high school degrees or GEDs. Although journalists have extolled the virtues of PUP and prison education in recent years,<sup>1</sup> little research has systematically examined the effects of participation in PUP or similar programs.<sup>2</sup>

Higher education programs in the liberal arts are unique among programmatic offerings in the penal system. Traditional work assignments, basic education, and treatment for addiction are all understood to have positive effects on recidivism.<sup>3</sup> However, higher education is potentially distinct in its ability to influence participants' self-identity. Success in completing a liberal arts program requires high-order cognitive processing, critical thinking about new ideas, and collaborative social interaction with individuals outside of one's own social group.

Providing incarcerated individuals with the opportunity to pursue a liberal arts education might therefore have far-reaching effects for a range of important outcomes. Although there is some evidence that liberal arts generally leads to positive outcomes among the population at large, such as increased "intercultural effectiveness, inclination to inquire and lifelong learning, well-being,

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1 Gonzales, Richard. 2011. "Inside San Quentin, Inmates Go to College." National Public Radio, June 20.

Kaul, Greta. 2014. "San Quentin's Prison University Gives Inmates Freedom to Learn." San Francisco Chronicle, December 27; Westervelt, Eric. 2015. "Why Aren't There More Higher Ed Programs Behind Bars?" National Public Radio, September 7; Wilson, Stan. 2009. "Behind the Scenes: Inside San Quentin's Prison University Project." CNN, February 26.

2 For one of the few examples of a study on higher education in prison, see Tootoonchi, Ahmad. 1993. "College Education in Prisons: The Inmates' Perspectives." Fed. Probation no. 57: 34.

3 Adams, Kenneth, Katherine J Bennett, Timothy J Flanagan, James W Marquart, Steven J Cuvelier, Eric Fritsch, Jurg Gerber, Dennis R Longmire, and Velmer S Burton. 1994. "A Large-Scale Multidimensional Test of the Effect of Prison Education Programs on Offenders' Behavior." The Prison Journal no. 74 (4): 433-449; Johnson, Byron R. 2004. "Religious Programs and Recidivism among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs: A Long-Term Follow-up Study." Justice Quarterly no. 21 (2): 329-354; Johnson, Robert. 2002. Hard Time: Understanding and Reforming the Prison: Wadsworth Belmont, CA; King, Roy D, and Kathleen McDermott. 1995. The State of Our Prisons. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

and leadership,”<sup>4</sup> existing research has not sufficiently addressed the effect of liberal arts education for incarcerated individuals specifically.

In this study, we employed intensive one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to gather the subjective assessments of prison higher education alumni about how program participation shaped their experience of incarceration and re-entry. Our evidence shows that PUP students who leave prison express the strong belief that the program changed their self-conception. Specifically, PUP alumni report that prison higher education helped move them from self-identification as “prisoners” or “losers” to more positive self-identification as “students” and “mentors.”

Research suggests that such self-conceptual transitions are associated with corresponding changes in psychology and social behavior,<sup>5</sup> and we find this to be true here. Participants reported that positive changes to their identities were associated with improvements in their behavior and mental health, as well as resulting in improved social and familial relationships. PUP participants were proud to report their academic progress to their families, and many felt that having a college-level education increased their ability to reintegrate into their communities and social institutions after they were released from prison.

PUP participants were less consistent about the effects of the college program on employment and recidivism. Formerly incarcerated individuals face considerable barriers to employment,<sup>6</sup> and while the majority of our interviewees reported eventually securing some form of gainful employment, some reported continuing difficulties in obtaining a steady job. Some former students also perceived their participation in PUP to be a primary reason for their ability to stay out of prison or jail. However, it is difficult to assess the effects of PUP on recidivism from our interviews alone. In this first phase of research, we only interviewed PUP participants who were out of prison. Nor did we interview a comparison sample who had not participated in PUP.

Taken together, the preliminary evidence strongly suggests that higher education in the liberal arts may provide long term cost-effective improvements in outcomes for current inmates, former inmates, and their communities. Although further study is necessary to obtain definitive conclusions, this first cut provides suggestive evidence that higher education in the penal system might substantially improve outcomes both inside and outside of prison.

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<sup>4</sup> Seifert, Tricia A, Kathleen M Goodman, Nathan Lindsay, James D Jorgensen, Gregory C Wolniak, Ernest T Pascarella, and Charles Blaich. 2008. "The Effects of Liberal Arts Experiences on Liberal Arts Outcomes." *Research in Higher Education* no. 49 (2): 107-125, p107.

<sup>5</sup> Bénabou, Roland, and Jean Tirole. 2006. "Incentives and Prosocial Behavior." *The American economic review* no. 96 (5): 1652-1678; Penner, Louis A, John F Dovidio, Jane A Piliavin, and David A Schroeder. 2005. "Prosocial Behavior: Multilevel Perspectives." *Annu. Rev. Psychol.* no. 56: 365-392.

<sup>6</sup> Pager, Devah. 2007. *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

## II. Research Design

In the spring of 2016, Professor Amy E. Lerman of the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley (the Principal Investigator, or PI) and Jacob Grumbach, a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at UC Berkeley (the Research Associate, or RA) designed and conducted a preliminary qualitative research assessment of former PUP students.

### *Interviewer Recruitment and Training*

The project was implemented in conjunction with an undergraduate course, which was supported by Berkeley's American Cultures Engaged Scholarship (ACES) Program. The ACES program aims to encourage academic courses that provide "opportunities for students to participate in collaborative projects with community partners, engage in experiential learning, create meaningful collaborative research environments with partners outside of the university, support reflective engagement on broad social issues and interests, and explore the possibilities and challenges of collaborative scholarship for both community partners and academic communities."

Entry into the course was by competitive application. The course content was then divided into four sections.

- First, students developed familiarity with existing research on the penal system in the United States, as well as with debates in public policy, sociology, and economics about the causes and consequences of incarceration.
- Second, the students learned about survey and interview research methodology. Of particular importance was familiarizing students with interview techniques that promote objectivity in questioning and reduce social desirability bias (defined as the tendency for interview subjects to give answers they believe the interviewer will deem to be "appropriate" or "desirable").
- Third, students assisted the PI and RA in developing a standardized interview protocol.
- Fourth, the undergraduates worked with the RA to schedule and carry out interviews. Each interview was conducted by a two-person team of students, one of whom was designated as the note-taker. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

### *Participant Recruitment*

PUP provided the PI with all available contact information for former PUP students who are not currently incarcerated. The RA sent study recruitment emails to all former PUP students with email addresses (177 total individuals). A substantial proportion of the email addresses were not functional; an additional group of individuals did not respond to two recruitment emails. The RA responded to recipients' questions by email and telephone. In total, 42 individuals agreed to participate in the study and were referred to an undergraduate interviewer team.

The interviewer teams and former PUP students worked to find a mutually-agreeable time for each interview. The PI secured suitable private interview locations on the UC Berkeley campus and also at the office of a non-profit organization in Oakland. For former PUP students who do not live in the Bay Area, interviews were conducted by online video via Skype. When this was not possible, interviews with non-local PUP students were conducted by telephone. Over the study period, interviewer teams were able to complete 27 interviews. This response rate is comparable to other studies of hard-to-reach populations, such as the previously incarcerated.<sup>7</sup>

### *Research Goals and Limitations*

Interview methodologies have both benefits and drawbacks. Interviews are both time- and cost-intensive, so sample sizes tend to be small. This can make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions, because individuals in the sample may not be representative of the overall population of interest. More critically for this study, investigators were only able to contact former students who have working phone numbers or email addresses on file with PUP. This raises concerns that individuals whom we were able to reach might have better social, economic, and educational outcomes, on average, than individuals we could not contact. Moreover, among individuals who were available by phone or email, those who choose to participate in an interview study—those willing to give up some of their day to talk to an interviewer—may be systematically different from those who do not respond to or who reject an invitation to participate in the study. In this case, it might be that those who agreed to participate have more favorable views of their experience with PUP than those who did not choose to participate.

A second limitation of these preliminary results is that they do not include interviews with a comparison group, such as individuals who were incarcerated at San Quentin but did not participate in PUP. We therefore cannot speak conclusively to how the experiences of our interview subjects diverge from others who have been recently incarcerated.

These concerns are not insignificant. However, interviews also offer important advantages. One feature of semi-structured interviews is their ability to *generate new theories*. Unlike surveys with closed-ended questions that test existing hypotheses, open-ended interviews allow for participants to report their own perceptions of how circumstances changed and events unfolded. This provides subjects with an opportunity to make their own connections and follow their own line of thinking, rather than constraining the range of answers they can provide. Interviewers, who themselves have substantive expertise, are then able to ask follow-up questions to more deeply interrogate the connections made by interview subjects.

We do not have information beyond the subjective assessments of our interview subjects. This means that our data is reflective of how the students themselves understand and reflect on their

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<sup>7</sup> Baruch, Yehuda, and Brooks C Holtom. 2008. "Survey Response Rate Levels and Trends in Organizational Research." *Human Relations* no. 61 (8): 1139-1160.

own experiences. While this is a primary aspect of what interviews can provide, it is distinct from other kinds of data that track objective outcomes. In this sense, interview methods are ideal for an early-stage study of the effects of prison higher education. It is unlikely that investigators—or members of the general public, for that matter—can *a priori* understand the distinctive experience of higher education within the prison system. In addition, few studies examine the effect of basic education programs in prisons.<sup>8</sup> The results of our open-ended interviews can thus pave the way for further research that contributes to our existing understanding of liberal arts education in a prison setting.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example Linden, Rick, and Linda Perry. 1983. "The Effectiveness of Prison Education Programs." *Journal of Offender Counseling Services Rehabilitation* no. 6 (4): 43-57.



### III. Experiences in the PUP Classroom

Many students reported liking school at a young age, even if they did not do well. Participant AO's response was fairly typical: "I liked learning. I liked finding out about things. I was pretty inquisitive." However, prior to PUP, many students had only been in classrooms that were deeply dysfunctional: those with frequent disruptions, little engagement with the material, and large proportions of students who are not academically prepared to succeed. As Participant AL described:

People always say when you get out of prison you get a second chance, you know, 'It's your second chance at life.' I disagree. I think that when you get out of prison, if someone is really helping us, giving the support that we need — that's actually our *first* chance. Because if you grew up in a low-income community like I did, you know, where there's a lot of violence, tell me when we really *had* a chance.

You don't really get a chance when you're in the projects, and all you see is violence and drug abuse. You don't see, you know, an entrepreneur. You don't see a businessman. You live in a rat-infested community, or you know, cockroaches. And you have like, sheets for curtains. That's not a chance... And your school system is funded by a property tax of a low-income community where the property is very low. So the quality of education is very low. So you never had a chance.

#### *Educational History*

Like many others with whom we spoke, Participant AV described his early education as lacking. In describing the neighborhood where he grew up, he said:

In the environment we grew up, people were getting jobs rather than going to college... The high schools had a lot more vocational programs as opposed to college counselors, daycare centers. Big high fences... Our junior high was the same thing; it's got the fence around it. Did we have metal detectors around it? I think they put them in right after we left... I think it's typical for high schools in that area. Surrounded by a fence. It's kind of like jail, a little bit.

As Participant IA described, "We didn't even have a thesaurus... Which I think handicapped you to a degree that we didn't have the vocabulary to pass the SAT tests." And Participant AC told us, "I went to school mostly in institutions... I got a high school diploma through a state hospital, a mental hospital. One of the teachers liked me, and so we worked on it... But there was a catch: I had to get out and go to actual high school, to get the diploma—take one class. Well I went to the class, and before I didn't even finish the class, I was back in an institution."

Some PUP students also came from homes in which education was not emphasized. As Participant AC described, "We didn't read children's books at home. And we were not read to. But, so, I had some language problems in the earlier years." As Participant AJ described his childhood:

I lived with my mother who had me when she was 17 years old...So I would go back and forth between my grandparents and her until the time I was maybe 9. Yeah, that's when I went to go live with her. I only met my dad—my real dad—twice in my lifetime. Bad influence. The last time I saw him I was 15... I think that as [my mother] grew older, education was important to her, but she didn't finish high school because she had me. Then my dad, I don't think he ever did finish high school, nor did I.

He went on to say:

I liked school, but I didn't excel well in school, reading and writing. In fact, I couldn't read or write. It wasn't until I was in third grade that they started realizing that I had a real problem with it, and they didn't do much. They just passed me along. They just kept passing me... When I got to high school, I was partying heavy all the time. And I would cause a distraction when it was time for me to read or something. I just acted like I was tough and didn't want to read, but [really] I *couldn't* read. So they put me in...We were put in this room. We were given workbooks that y'know a third grader would get... and we're in high school, so it was embarrassing, and I dropped out.

Others said that their parents believed education was important, but did not have the time or resources to support their education. Participant AZ, whose parents were immigrants, noted that:

The issues that I was having at school, I couldn't really explain that to my parents or solicit any kind of meaningful insights or inputs from parents. So, they never been to school in America, they did not understand the type of discrimination and racism that I was experiencing at the time. So there was no way, even if I would bring that up to them, they was absolutely no type of feedback, meaningful feedback, that I could get from them. So, it's essentially, I was like what they call suffering in silence. I had absolutely no one to go to.

And Participant AU told us:

Mom was the stronghold of the family. My dad was an alcoholic. He never—wasn't around too much. He spent a lot of his money on alcohol and had his fun. He'd only come home to sleep, and then wake up in the morning and leave... It finally took a toll on my mom and mom kind of fell off for, you know, quite a period of time where she turned to drugs herself and that, that played a role in my life by introducing me to a different world. 'Cause this all started around the time I was gonna try to make an attempt to go to high school. And then I was just like, forget school. 'Cause no one was paying attention anyways. That pretty much kind of detoured my goals.

Participant AY similarly described how concerns about family made it difficult to succeed in school:

In elementary school, I had great teachers motivating me. But somehow my conscious wouldn't focus on academics, 'cause I was focused on security and safety

of my household. ‘What’s going to happen next? More blood?’ ‘Will she be there? Will there be a stranger?’ That’s what my mind went to, [so] I couldn’t focus on school during my years from kindergarten to elementary.”

### *Creating a School within a Prison*

In contrast to the barriers many had faced in their early education, PUP students generally contend that the PUP classroom environment gave them a “dose of the outside world” and led to positive changes in themselves and in those around them. Participant AN, discussing what he would want someone who has never been to prison to know about PUP, told us:

It’s giving men that are coming to their communities anyway alternatives. That lives are being changed in a very short time. That these lives, even before they actually step on the on-site campus, they’re already preparing weeks in advance... They’re already organizing what time, what time they’re going to work, what time they’re going to study. They’re already going over with themselves; they scheduling to make sure it goes according. They’re already preparing for this, this golden day of school, way before they even have stepped in. Once they get the packet in the mail saying, ‘Yes, you’ve been enrolled and you start this time, maybe three months from now,’ their lives have already changed.

In describing what PUP college classes were like, Participant AT said:

[PUP has] most dedicated students that you will find anywhere. People who were absolutely 100% focused on education... because it takes you out of the mindset of being incarcerated for that period of time that they are in class; and, while you are doing that it is incredibly stimulating... It was incredibly empowering for people to learn that they have the ability to learn things that they never thought they could learn. So many people you meet in there are intelligent, but they have learning disabilities or they never got past like 10th or 11th grade, but their reading levels were like 3rd grade... I loved being back in the classroom. I knew it would be helpful to learn and study again, and I loved the teachers in there. And while you are there for the two or three hours, you completely forget about the fact that you are in prison, and you are a student. That is why I liked tutoring so much. For that time that I would tutor, I would forget about the fact that I was a prisoner, and I was a teacher for that 2 or 3 hours.

We heard a similar description from Participant AI. When we asked him what he would want people to know about PUP, he told us:

You know, I just feel very strongly about education. And knowledge... There’s something special about an academic environment. Even though it’s in a prison, it’s just the mere fact that you’re in that environment, with a teacher, instructor, a facilitator. And there’s an exchange of information. It’s healthy.

Participant AN, describing how he came to be a PUP student, told us:

So, the word on the street was to say that there was going to be an actual, on-site [college program], that you could just go through the process. It's gonna be taught by college-level instructors... And soon enough, it was as real as they said... Like, this is all for real... And just to see the level where [PUP instructors] were at, and their enthusiasm, how hyped they were each and every day. I knew this was something I wanted to be a part of.

Talking about his experience in PUP, Participants AG went on to say:

I became more educated. And in some ways, it was just a way for me to maintain some sanity. It was a lot of contact with the outside world, which was important, okay? That being in a classroom with people and teachers was important. That whole socialization aspect of it was really important. This is how you're supposed to act. This is not how they're acting in the cell block. This is how you're supposed to act, so that was big for me.

And Participant AR said,

The classes were wide open and they were friendly, they were comfortable, you know? And it was like you had a place to go, somewhere to get away from that prison mentality, the block. A place to go where, you know, guys all had the same motivation... That time you were a college student. You weren't away in prison; you weren't on the inside. You were in the learning program.

Participant AM similarly told us that the teachers and classroom provided a refuge from the culture of prison:

I didn't have a history of criminal behavior you know, so that wasn't what I did. So I never fit in, which really affected me adversely. So I read books and then I ran out of books... then someone told me about that program and I said, 'That's amazing.' I liked school, I just didn't have the time or other issues prevented me from doing it when I was free, and so when I was in [prison] I could actually commit and, you know, use my brain for something and it was really great. It was exciting. The teachers were awesome and I looked forward to it. I felt free in there. It was just amazing, you know? It changes your perspective, you know? Any kind of education, anything you acquire, anything you assimilate, changes your perspective of the world and gives you another viewpoint on everything. So it was great.

### *Providing a Rigorous Education*

Former students credit the academic rigor of PUP for the program's effectiveness. Research in psychology emphasizes that wellbeing and fulfillment necessitates the pursuit of *mastery*, the indefinite struggle through healthy challenges within which an individual can perceive progress.<sup>9</sup> Frequently mentioned in our interviews were descriptions of PUP as "real" college, not a "5<sup>th</sup> grade

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<sup>9</sup> Lee, Hung-Wen, and Ching-Hsiang Liu. 2009. "The Relationship among Achievement Motivation, Psychological Contract and Work Attitudes." *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal* no. 37 (3): 321-328.

version” in the words of Participant AB. Participant AH, who went on to complete further degrees outside of prison, describes the quality of PUP’s program as “a comparable education to any community college or university that I know of. I do really mean that.”

Participants AE likewise described the quality of the PUP education as very high, saying, “They want to set the bar high, so people can get the full experiences. Just like [at UC Berkeley], they want [students] to have the full educational experiences.” This was echoed by Participant AP, who said:

I would say that most people that participated in higher education at that point in their lives were grateful to be able to a part of real education program, not the kind that the state offers to fifth graders. And so the gratefulness, the attitude and gratitude was just always present and [students] were respectful. They were not disruptive; they were mature, eager students. That was my experience.

And Participant AH told us:

I expected [PUP] to be a watered-down version of a College Program, of a community college, simply because it was located in a prison. When I got there, I was really impressed with the instructors. Their level of knowledge with their subject matter. Also the relationship, the dynamics that was built with the student/inmate and teacher... In comparison to how I went to school in community college. I was making comparisons. What I felt was that the [PUP] curriculum was just as rigorous, if not more so. They did not slack off because you were incarcerated... I had one-on-one tutoring with people who were really brilliant. To me, I actually was able to learn more and become a much better student, compared to former colleges... In prison you go back to your cell and look forward to being back in school. These tutors were really open to teaching you. I mean, we had some great tutors. I took some very rigorous courses.

Participant AS described PUP similarly. Recalling his initial concerns about enrolling in the PUP program, he said:

I just wanted to see what kind of, ya know, if it was really college courses, if they were gonna hold me to that standard and make me, because as you know, you're with some, there's such a drastic level of education. So were they all gonna meet up to a college level standard, and not water it down? Ya know, I wanted to make sure when they said college that it was college and they held ya up to that. And the homework and assignments were really college, up to college.

Asked what he would want someone who has never been to prison to know about PUP, Participant AT said:

It empowers the men there, that it takes them beyond the life that they knew in to something that they never imagined for themselves. That the students there are not going into classes just as a way to pass time, but they are very serious about their education, as anyone would. I think that is why the volunteers loved teaching. I

mean, any college professor, any professor would love to have a classroom full of twenty people who are 100 percent focused and dedicated in learning the material... Yeah, it is a serious working environment. And the guys, the people in the classroom take it very seriously. And I would want people to know that.

### *The Quality of PUP Instructors and Staff*

PUP students talked with immense gratitude about the work of PUP teachers and staff. “I just want everyone to never lose sight of the fact that they are restoring lives at PUP, for all the families, all the guys at the University of Hope,” said Participant AY.

The classroom setting provided many students with a way to maintain a connection to the norms and values of education outside prison. “They have study hall in [the PUP program],” Participant AQ told us, “and I would go to the study hall even when I really didn't have anything to do. I just liked the environment, you know? It was like an escape from the other environment of the prison.”

Teachers were an important part of this, according to many of our interview subjects. Participant AJ described PU instructors as “a set of saints” who offer “an open view and an open mind... They are helping heal hurt people.” This sense of gratitude to the volunteer teaching staff was repeated throughout our interviews. Participant AT said:

The volunteers were incredible. I mean, people in prison know that volunteers are coming in there out of their own time—no pay whatsoever. Respect for people like you. I can't even put it into words what that meant to us. I mean, it was just mind-boggling for people to realize. Especially younger people... like, here is a young guy who could be going out and hanging out with his friends having a great time, and he is choosing to come in here and teach us. So there was no monetary reward for the volunteers, so they had tremendous respect for the guys.

Many people talked about how teachers made them feel like people, not prisoners. Participant AG told us, “Wherever [students] were at, the PUP staff were willing to meet them.” Participant AL said, “So, you know, they saw the value in us, unlike most of society.” Similarly, Participant AH said, “I can't overemphasize the volunteers. They really made you feel comfortable. You never felt intimidated by asking a question. It was always responsive to any question. Wanted to help us understand what they were teaching.” And Participant AR thought the teachers were “great. You know, I had no complaints. None whatsoever. [The teachers] always treated like human beings. You weren't a number when you went into class. You were an individual. Your work spoke for itself.”

Participant AG described the psychological changes that happened as a result of participation in PUP. For him, PUP provided a way to counteract the trauma of incarceration, and PUP instructors provided a model of a different way of seeing the world:

PUP is the way to go. It's higher education, right? It's what [people in prison] have to do. It's a great opportunity. If they don't take advantage, you're going to stay in

some poverty, and it's going to be sad. People who go through life unconscious until consciousness dawns... Guys who don't make that shift in thinking of, 'Okay, I don't have to do the wrong thing. I can do something more positive.' It helps to have somebody from the free world show them, show them that. Because it is so hard to see in [prison]. It is traumatic. I mean, you're witnessing trauma and you're being traumatized. Every time the doors close behind you at night, that's trauma. So that's what they have to do to get out and think about insight, is to make as much contact with the outside world. And one way to do it is education-wise, higher-education wise, PUP-wise.

Many PUP students also credited Jody Lewen, the program's director, with changing their lives. Participant AJ described Jody as "one of the biggest influences on me, keeping me going." He said:

We always knew Jody would fight so that we got our education... Jody did everything to make sure we had access to the classroom, notebooks, pens, books, all of the materials, the teachers, the best. I mean Jody is, I don't know, she's just amazing. She's like a saint to me! If someone should be canonized [it's Jody], for giving up her life for other people and not focused on herself. And that's my perspective. I don't know her as well as you, but the way I see her: I see her as a saint, because she made sure we didn't have any obstacles. She was always talking to everybody—inmates, guards. She is truly amazing.

And Participant AR told us, when describing his affection and admiration for Jody:

[The] enlightenment I got from her and just her attitude in general made me want to go [to school]. You know, one thing about prison, when you've been there a long time, you learn how to read people. Guys in prisons are some of the hardest critics that you will ever be around. I don't care what it is, what format you are in, they are some of the hardest critics that you will ever face. For her, she touched so many people, so many guys in this program to better yourself.

#### **IV. Perceptions of Identity and Prison Life**

Study participants overwhelmingly reported substantial changes in their experiences in prison because of their participation in PUP, and participants frequently claimed that their experiences in PUP positively shifted their self-identities. In particular, most respondents report that PUP helped to shift their primary self-identity from one of “prisoner” to one of “student.” Participant AT described the profound way that PUP changed people’s lives:

For some people, it is like being born again. It is like they go from this lifestyle that is a total prison lifestyle to, you know, something that is preparing them for the future. Or at the very least, even if they are in a life sentence, changing the way they see themselves.

##### *Changing Orientations towards One’s Self and the World*

Participants reported that liberal arts education introduced them to new understandings of themselves and the world around them. “It gave me a new reality. Not as an escape, but something that was greater, larger, more important,” said Participant AC. And Participant AL described school as something that “definitely helps with whatever you’re gonna do in life. You know, especially to be able to look at life from a critical mindset and to think critically. It really helps you develop that skill set and analyze things.”

Before prison, many felt that a liberal arts education seemed irrelevant to their lives and circumstances. However, through PUP, many students find that the liberal arts’ investigation of the human condition unlocks possibilities for self-understanding and broader social understanding. Participant AI recalled:

San Quentin was kind of like the innovative place when it came to bringing in classes. To bringing in people from the outside who would help a guy prepare himself to get back into society, so he could function in the community and be a productive citizen... There were a group of volunteers who were committed and dedicated and very sincere about teaching. And it was quality teaching. Matter of fact, I took a critical thinking class. And to this day, it assisted in terms of critical thinking skills... I tell people all the time, that was one of the best classes I’ve ever taken... It was a class that provoked you to think.

Participant AC, for instance, described how PUP “provides an opportunity not just to escape the yard, but to enlarge your vision... The horizon, it’s just like your perspective, right? If you’re up high, my god, Look at all of this! So it elevates your perspective, I believe....Maybe I haven’t communicated well, but it’s probably one of the best things that has ever happened in my life.” Participant AY told us “It was amazing to me that people were coming there to help me get my life back, to help me understand what was going on with me. It gave us understanding about society and how it works.”



Higher education in prison provides a framework for inmates to engage in transformative learning. To be transformative, though, education must not only offer skills and knowledge; it must expose students to ideas that transform their very experience of the world.<sup>10</sup> Reflecting on how PUP had changed the way he thought about life, Participant AU said, “It made me feel like there’s a whole lot to learn out here. And it made me feel like there’s a whole lot more to education than I thought. Where it’s like, ‘I don’t know anything!’”

When students realize that they are grappling with questions of the human condition with which scholars have struggled for centuries, they gain a sense of “self-worth,” coming to view themselves as full members of society rather than marginalized outsiders. As Participant AJ described:

When you walk in through the classroom you’re no longer in prison, you’re in school. Y’know, you’re in a College Program and you’re treated pretty much with respect and no one cares what you did. And everyone in there is all trying to do the same thing, y’know: just do the work.

Likewise, Participant AY told us:

[PUP] was a unique place at San Quentin, because the campus was inside prison. It’s the only campus in the prison. You were interacting with professors, interacting with students, with the books. You had access and that was impressive to me. It’s a campus. I had decided the only way I was going to survive was through knowledge. In prison, knowledge gives you power. Society thinks power is with the gang members, but it’s not. Guards see you have some knowledge, they come to you. Some guards can’t read or write themselves. Dangerous guys would come to me and ask to read them their letters.

For many, education provides a meaningful sense of purpose. Participant AW said:

[PUP] gave me a milestone to achieve. Instead of just looking forward to going home, I was looking forward to turning in an assignment then seeing what I got. I had a really tough time in school when I was younger. I was sober now and putting my full effort in it. I really wanted to do well. It gave me those milestones and small successes. Those milestones and small successes helped me build confidence in myself, so that I could better communicate and better formulate a document and later present to the warden. I guess that it was just something to aim for.

Participant AR described going to class as an activity that came to define his daily life in prison. “Everything else was irrelevant. I had my blinders on; I was going to class. It gave me something

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<sup>10</sup> Madsen, S. R and Cook, B. J. “Transformative Learning: UAE, Women, and Higher Education.” *Journal of Global Responsibility*, 1 1 (2010): 127-148; Mezirow, J. Transformative learning: Theory to Practice. In P. Cranton (Ed.), *Transformative Learning in Action: Insights from Practice – New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, (1997):5-12; Mezirow, J. “Transformative Learning as Discourse”; Taylor, E.W, and Cranton, P. *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

to look forward to besides being in jail, being in prison.” And Participant AE said of PUP, “I saw it as a generous gift. I came to learn that no one could take away an education. So, I took it as a chance to push my growing edge and myself.”

Participant AG described the PUP classroom as providing an opportunity to discover what he was actually capable of accomplishing:

It was a matter of just using my time positively and associating my time with people from the outside: civilized people and acting civilized, mental stimulation versus being in the hole... So the mental stimulation of the program was: ‘Hey! Think!’ That was important to me, that I didn’t atrophy and actually improved... I’m grateful. I didn’t know that my brain could do that. I mean, if I wanted to quit what I’m doing now and jump into math for six years? Yeah, I could graduate with a B.S. in engineering.

Telling us his feelings about his time in PUP, Participant AV said, “I think people are grateful to have something. There were people who, including myself, that used to be treated in a certain way. Then, people treat you like a human being... I think the best thing [PUP] does it let people critically think about their situation. Yeah, I think that is the best thing it does.”

And Participant AW described the joy he felt in being part of the program, and having a chance to accomplish something positive. He said:

I felt really good, I felt better and happier there than even before, driving a new SUV. Being locked up I am not supposed to be happy about it, and I was quite happy. And you can quote me on this: There are not many people who are happy they were locked up, but I was. It was, I needed to realize there was more value to me and I just never applied it. For once, I applied it in the right direction.

This was a recurring theme, especially among older students or those with long sentences. These participants would tell us that they did not enroll in PUP for a degree, but rather for more general intellectual development. For these participants, such as Participants AG, AH, AI, AJ, AU, and AV, the goal is the education itself, rather than the credential a degree can confer. For this reason, Participant AO said he would encourage everyone in prison to enroll in college:

I would encourage everybody. Regardless of what they think they can and cannot do. Don’t let that be what keeps them from trying. If anything, go to the lowest hanging fruit. Take the lowest introductory class, just the one. Don’t put any great expectations. Take the one, go through it slow, and enjoy it. If you like it take more. If you don’t like it, take more. Because the process of doing is going to have its own reward. Most people are going to find out they are a lot more capable than they believe. And so, you’ve heard me say self-esteem and confidence, that’s going to come. Hopefully with that process you will build relationships with other guys that are going in the same goal. And the more you do, the more you involve yourself in your education, the more you’re investing in yourself, the more you’re leading yourself away from destructive behavior or attitudes that you might have held dear.

### *Going from “Prisoner” to “Student”*

At its core, transformative learning is a process by which individuals “make meaning” of their lives.<sup>11</sup> College classes in prison can offer students the capacity to become self-reflective,<sup>12</sup> and the ability to exercise reflective judgment,<sup>13</sup> both of which are common features of higher education more generally.<sup>14</sup> As Participant AP describes:

I learned to develop integrity, because being a student and challenging yourself academically, you became responsible for your grades, you became responsible for your education. You learn to develop integrity first... If you can imagine living in a five-by-nine cell with a bathroom that you share with another man, and the routine is so ordinary, day-to-day the same thing, and then you’re given the opportunity to experience a whole other set of worldly thoughts, and opinions, and activities, and lessons. Yeah. Yeah, your self-esteem definitely changes after you start to develop an identity, and that’s why I started to develop not only an identity of who I was, but one that had character and strengths and just responsibility, accountability, and integrity.

Through high-quality liberal arts courses, uncritically assimilated or problematic identities can be questioned and revised.<sup>15</sup> Self-reflection assists in the construction of a coherent biographical narrative that serves to counteract the stigmatized identity that comes from seeing one’s self as a “criminal” or a “prisoner.” As Participant AH put it, “I didn’t see myself as someone incarcerated. I was a student. I carried books all around and was constantly studying.” Participant AN said, “I just would like to see every man have the chance to at least give themselves some self-worth. And that’s definitely what the college gave me.”

As Participant AJ told us:

PUP does away with all of those misconceptions. Then you realize, ‘I don’t have to take this attitude. There is something better than that. I can be me, and not necessarily *the* better person but *a* better person, and treat everybody with respect. Because [PUP instructors] treat us with respect and dignity, I never felt less than.

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<sup>11</sup> Cranton, P. “Spiraling Into Transformative Learning.” *International Journal of Vocational Education and Technology*, 41 (2010), 1-13; Mezirow, J. “Transformative Learning as Discourse.” *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1 1 (2003): 58-63.

<sup>12</sup> Kegan, R. “What Form Transforms?” In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Learning as Transformation*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> King, P. and Kitchener, K. *Developing Reflective Judgment*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Mezirow, J. (2003). “Transformative Learning as Discourse.” *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(1), 58-63.

<sup>15</sup> Cranton, P. (2010). “Spiraling Into Transformative Learning”; Mezirow, J. (2003). “Transformative Learning as Discourse.”

This process of self-identification has emerged as a distinguishing feature among individuals who successfully reintegrate into society after prison.<sup>16</sup> Existing research suggests that individuals who hold negative self-identities are more likely to feel that their situation in life is hopeless and that they cannot improve their quality of life or change their own destiny. As a result, an individual may become trapped in a feedback cycle: negative self-identities can lead individuals to feel that pro-social behavior is unlikely to lead to positive outcomes, which in turn leads to additional negative outcomes and increased feelings of hopelessness.

Conversely, participation in PUP appeared to affect participants' ability to transcend negative identities and build positive ones. As Participant AH told us, "I treated San Quentin as if I was on a college campus. When I walked through the gate, I was a student." Narratives about the transition from self-identified "prisoner" to self-identified "student" were common among interview participants. As Participant AJ described:

I was, I believe, on my 14<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> year in prison, and I was looking for something to give me hope. And I found it in this place [PUP], with all of the volunteers. They were there to teach me, but every now and then I would get an opportunity to process certain parts of me, certain things that I had experienced or certain desires or goals. And I couldn't share with anyone else in prison, and I had that opportunity with the volunteers. So it helped; it healed me a lot. And that was something. When something is good, you return. You keep coming back for more.

Above all, a shift toward the positive self-identification of "student" led PUP participants to see potential in themselves. Participant AJ went on to say that participating in PUP was:

...an opportunity for me to show people who I was, so I would be acknowledged as a student. The classroom, the teachers, the volunteers [were] non-judgmental, very open, very willing to teach us and help us in any way they could to, you know, so we would learn what they were trying to teach us. It was like being back in college. I'm not in prison right now, I'm free for this two-hour classroom... I loved the opportunity to raise my hand and I knew the answer. I did my homework.

When asked what he liked most about taking classes, Participant AO said, "Accomplishment. Self-esteem... I started seeing to be able to be introspective about my own life." Responding to a similar question, Participant AP told us he liked "the challenge. Yeah, being challenged to think, to be creative, to think outside the box. You know, that was important to me because when you live in a prison existence is so mundane and routine laden, and [I liked] being challenged from an outside source and exploring a world that you maybe have never seen before." As Participant AI put it:

Well, I think that that any time you're taking classes—whether in there or rather out here—I think it helps with your self-esteem. You should feel good about yourself. You're doing

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<sup>16</sup> Maruna, S. *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives*. (Washington DC: American Psychological Association Books, 2001).

something positive; you're accomplishing something. So, hell yeah you feel good about yourself! You get an exam you get the results back, that's uplifting. It makes you feel good.

This shift in self-identification produced behavioral changes. In the words of Participant AY:

Philosophy, biology, math, the whole excitement of having a campus in the prison... [We started to act] like men instead of sitting around the yard talking about nothing. We could talk about Plato and Aristotle. The guys started to take it as a challenge like how many classes you could take... it became a competition. We focused on bettering ourselves. That's the importance of having a campus in the prison.

## V. Perceptions of Interpersonal Relationships

Many people discussed the effect of PUP on a range of social relationships, both within and outside prison. Participant AO described PUP as a way to move toward a more positive social circle, and to leave behind people in prison who might encourage bad behavior:

Maybe that's just what the person needs, whoever it is, to step away from the homies. The homies are gonna clown you for having all these books, calling you a square. Yeah, I'm a square, so be a square. All the hot girls hang around the squares. C'mon now! It's cool to be functioning, well adjusted, and intelligent about the world you live in. What's not cool is to live in ignorance, and to pursue that ignorance with the zeal that will only get you to jails, institutions, or death, just like drugs and alcohol.

### *Relationships among PUP Students*

Many prison programs attempt to assist participants in building teamwork skills, but former students report that liberal arts education offers a unique possibility for social change. Trying to put this into words, Participant AR said:

You know, sometimes it's hard to put into words, the experiences that you experienced. I just know it was extraordinary for me, and for many other guys. 'Cause I saw them change. I saw guys change when they were going to school. They were hanging on the tiers, they were in the cells doing homework, you know, they were reading on the yard. We were helping each other. We were doing homework. 'What do you think about this? I need help here. Can you give me some insight on that?' It brings people together. I know that for a fact, because I saw it. You know, it's an experience you can't describe unless you've been there, and been where we've been.

"We worked in groups you know, we discussed things," Participant AD told us. "I thought that was really cool... The guys were really cool cause we'd get into groups and really work hard on doing things." Participant AM described PUP as a place for like-minded people to connect: "...good people that are in [prison], that are trying to do good things, that are wanting to change their behavior, [PUP] is the place where they can meet. And that's where they can foster relationships and develop positive relationships for the future."

PUP generates "a sense of camaraderie," noted Participants AR and AF, not only during group discussions and assignments, but "because the [students] leaned on each other to get through the curriculum." Participant BA described students offering each other support, telling each other, "You're not gonna flunk. We're not gonna let you."

Talking about what he liked most about college classes, Participant AV said, "For me it was the social experience. I could read books and get facts, learn stuff, on my own. But, things like going into classes with other students, having discussions and throwing your opinions out there."

Participant AR summarized his perception of PUP participants as “the guys that you would want living next to you.”

This dynamic does not necessitate that individuals all pull in the same direction, though. In addition, classmates must engage in deep cooperative analysis of course material and mutual understanding of different perspectives. Describing the day-to-day classroom experience in PUP, Participant AC said:

It was so much fun. The teachers had the discussion. Okay, I went to college on the outside after [PUP], just four classes to get my associates degree. And it's like night and day. In school outside of prison, there's just lectures. No discussion, very little discussion. But in prison, the discussion was dynamic.

Participant AI summed up his views about the college program's effects, saying:

The guys that started participating in the classes, you could actually see changes in behavior. There's something about an academic environment that can help transform a person. And so you found guys that were taking classes, instead of talking about some bullshit or something, right? They're actually exchanging information about the classes and doing something productive and interesting. Matter of fact, that was something I talked about with some of the other guys on the yard: the fact that you could just see the changes in a certain individual's behavior when they started participating in the class, you know? You know, you got less time now to be dealing with gang politics and you got less time actually to be dealing with other activities that aren't, uh, wholesome. Because a prison environment is a microcosm of the big world. You as an individual, who you choose to associate yourself with, the type of activities you want to participate in, just like out here [outside prison], that's gonna shape how you prevail in life.

Participant AD said, simply, “to live around a bunch of guys who are going to school and trying to do something with their lives, that's a, that certainly improves the environment.” Participant AU talked about how his interactions with others became more focused on school, saying “My conversations weren't about you know, a lot of prison stuff. It was more like, ‘Oh, you wanna hear something new? Check this out! Or, I said, ‘I know Macbeth, Shakespeare. You wanna hear some Shakespeare?’ ...And they're like, just like, ‘What? Yeah!’”

Describing how PUP had changed his experience of being in San Quentin, Participant AS told us:

I had something to look forward to. I had assignments to do... You know that you're improving your mind; they can't take education away from you. So at least you're doing something positive... You found that the guys that were in the college program, they wanted to be there, obviously. Nobody was forced to, and y'all had, ya know, you shared classes together. And you might get feedback from one another or, ya know, maybe some help writing. So you have time that you set aside. Instead of just vegging or getting out on the yard, you're doing something positive, You're exercising your mind as well, your body and your mind. Ya know, the

people I used to see going to school were the people that wanted to, the people that wanted to do something with their lives, that wanted to move forward, not get stuck in the old mentality.

### *Interactions with Non-PUP Students*

Many found that the skills they had learned in college allowed them to help other people who were in prison with them. Participant AT described how he would “help people write letters to their loved ones, to their parole officers, and stuff like that. I was someone who would help you out and not expect anything in return. There were a lot of people in there that if they helped you out, they were getting their hustle on, and that was okay too. I just wasn’t about that. I was not about that, you know?”

Participant AG gave a similar account of how the skills he learned in PUP gave him a way to help the guys around him:

I mean when you speak with a vocabulary that has more than two syllables, y’know, you’re suspected of being a brain in there. So there were always guys asking me to help them with their legal work... Help them do their homework, reading their papers, making recommendations... I was like, ‘Well do you want the truth? Or do you want me to lie to you?’ Alright, this is what [the teachers] want. They want complete sentences. They want a nice paragraph. They don’t want you to make these dinky spelling mistakes. They want you to subject-verb agreement. And, y’know, we’re making your paper from a D paper into a B paper. And then, if you do a little bit more work, you might make it an A paper. So breaking through that denial and making people see that they can write better, y’know, is a nice thing to be doing.

Participant AZ talked about similar experiences, telling us how being a student not only changed perceptions of himself, but altered his relationships with other people in prison:

“Once I graduated [from PUP] and then I had the requisite skill to teach others, tutor others, I started doing a GED class. So I started teaching a GED class, which I did for three years... [GED students] were fearful of going to college and I couldn’t relate to that. I didn’t have any fears because I had already experienced education, literally got my toe wet in the pool, they didn’t. And so, I would communicate with them and try to get them to open up... I noticed that most people that fit into a specific demographic, specific socioeconomic background, specific age group, they were afraid of going to college. So I sat there and actually started communicating with them and allayed some of their fears.”

By shaping students’ view of the world, PUP classes affected how they understood and interacted with others in the prison setting. When asked whether PUP had changed his experience of being at San Quentin, Participant AX said:

I learned a lot about myself by evaluating the biases of other people. It caused me to question the assumptions I had. Prison, you meet such a wide variety of people,



it was really fascinating since I'm really into psychology. You have people I might have avoided typically on the street, but when in prison you are right next to whoever they put there. You learn to get along, change your mind about stuff, and to see people as they really are. Made me realize everyone is my friend.

Participating in the college program changed how many students interacted with others in prison, outside the classroom. Participant AL told us:

If I wasn't going to [PUP] and I was sitting in a cell block smoking pot or smoking cigarettes, of course our interaction is going to be different, than of the interaction of someone who's studying. It's like, 'Hey, he's studying. Let's let him, you know, get his work done,' you know. You have a community [in PUP] where everything you have out here you have inside. Of course, you can't leave and there aren't any women in there (laughs). But everything else is pretty much the same. The same type of atmosphere you get out in the free world.

Similarly, Participant AU told us that being part of PUP made prison life easier:

It made me feel - made me feel like I was a free man. It made me feel smart and it just took me out of that environment altogether where it's all just "Oh, I'm going to my cell now, and I'ma go study or I'ma go to the library." ...The college program kept me out of trouble, kept me away from everything that goes outside the prison walls. Because as a student there, the people who don't go to school, they're just like "Oh leave him alone, he goes to class." So by having the Prison University Project there, it eased the tensions with students that were participating in the classes.

In this way, Participant AT believed that having college students in a prison had effects even on those who did not participate in the program, saying:

It is obviously, in the larger scheme of things, it is a relatively small percentage of the total prison population who are in [the program], but the influence that those guys have on the other people that are not completing the program is important too. Because they bring that back, and other people see them taking it seriously, and they bring that back to the cells where they live. It plants seeds for other people who may not ever take that program in San Quentin, but they may have plans in the future. For them, once they get out, some may think about going back to school.

Participant AZ talked about PUP as a training ground for people who could then become role models and leaders within the prison:

It's a great program in creating not only an educated class, but it's also giving them very important leadership skills for when they get out, and is giving them the tools that they need for when they get out. And I forgot to add this: not just when they get out, but while they're in prison. If you look at the eighty-something groups that exist in San Quentin, the overwhelming majority were created by people who had

graduated from [PUP]. And if you look at all the benefits that are going at San Quentin, at the root of all of that is people that have graduated from [PUP].

Participant AV went even further, suggesting that PUP reduced prison violence:

There's a lot more peaceful conflict. I think that guys that come in that are not even in the program have a lot more appreciation. I think there [are], like, negotiations. So, there is not a lot of violence. Because it's the end of the semester and people have to take a final... Yeah, the discussion is different. You hear people talk about Foucault. It definitely affects the whole atmosphere.

And in some cases, PUP gave students both the skills and framework to advocate for themselves and for others within the prison setting. Participant AH, talking about how he related to peers who were not in the college program, told us that although sometimes "people made some fun of me because I was always carrying books, you know, in jest," he was able to help them navigate the racial biases he saw in the correctional environment:

I did also do a lot of legal paperwork. Administrative grievances and things like that. I was the guy known to go against the grain in terms of administration. I have seen a lot of atrocities that were going on, especially racial profiling and special treatment based on race. I stood up and challenged those. Not verbally, but through the process. In that regards, people would come to me for help.

### *Race Relations*

Before coming to prison, many students have limited life experience interacting with individuals from other racial groups or positions in society. But in the PUP classroom, they find they have something in common. When asked what he liked most about taking classes, Participant AT said, "The comradery that formed around guys of very diverse backgrounds, but we were all motivated on some level to be in the classroom. So I built connections with people in there, in those classes, that I might have not built on my own outside of there." In some cases, according to Participant AC, these connections could carry over to prison life outside the classroom:

School and the yard are like night and day. Okay, so Whites don't associate with Blacks and Blacks not with Whites. There are the yard divisions that dictate how an inmate comports themselves. And that is different in the classroom. You could talk. You could be more honest. You could have a debate. You could have discussions, you know? I had some Black classmates that, we respected each other. Like I said, over the years you see a lot of these people in classes over and over again. So you kind of have a relationship that can extend to the yard, as long as you're cool.

Participant AX describes how "exposure to information and people" through PUP "allows people to gain a sense of compassion" for individuals of other racial groups and social classes. Participant AC, who is white, discusses the ways that participation in PUP allowed students to transcend the traditional racial divisions of prison life:

There are the yard divisions that dictate how an inmate comports themselves. And that is different in the classroom. You could talk. You could be more honest. You could have a debate. You could have discussions, you know? I had some black classmates—we respected each other. Over the years, you see a lot of these people in classes over and over again, so you kind of have a relationship that can extend to the yard.

When asked whether being a PUP student changed his daily experiences while in prison, Participant AE said:

I think one of the things was that it gave us a... Remember, we live in a very hyper-masculine society. Also a very racist society. So, before going to SQ, it was not only taboo but also your life could be endangered if you engaged with other races. So, SQ creates this tolerant space that is conducive of ripping the chains that bind people to these things. Being able to culminate friendships with people of different races without any uproar.

The culture of PUP was seen as particularly important in terms of how it undermined racial and social divisions. Some students reported that race relations at San Quentin were different than at other prisons:

In some prisons, yeah, in some prisons you can't go to school depending on your gang. Depending on your gang, they're not going to allow you to go to college courses; it's just not gonna happen. Your race or your gang will not allow that. So in San Quentin, there was no such issue... In fact, a lot of people in San Quentin, they actually wanted you to take college courses. You know, a lot of the prisoners, they actually want you to take college courses.

Tense race relations among inmates in the correctional system have been a topic of considerable debate among correctional administrations and academics in recent decades, particularly in California.<sup>17</sup> Participant AP told us that PUP was one of the only places that tackled racial issues head-on. He said:

When [PUP] first introduced a multicultural curriculum that was huge because, if you know anything about prison, it's based on racial politics. And my very first time [in class]—I didn't hardly remember who the professor was; I wish I did—they brought in a multi-cultural course. And it really made the Americans, Samoans, Pacific Islanders, Half Native Americans, Latinos, Mexican American, Indian, it drew everybody into that course... That played a role in how people interacted out on the mainline, because they were becoming educated to the sensitivity of other people.

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<sup>17</sup> Carroll, Leo. 1974. *Hacks, Blacks, and Cons: Race Relations in a Maximum Security Prison*: Lexington, MA: Lexington Books; Genders, Elaine, Elaine Players, and Valerie J Johnston. 1988. *Race Relations in Prison*: Oxford University Press; Phillips, Coretta. 2012. *The Multicultural Prison: Ethnicity, Masculinity, and Social Relations among Prisoners*: Oxford University Press.

Other participants also drew direct connections between PUP and altered relationships between inmates of different racial groups. Former students report that PUP “kept the violence down.” When asked whether he felt that San Quentin as a whole is different from other prisons because it has a college program, Participant AN responded:

Yeah, it is... Well, there are no riots, that’s number one (laughs). There's no riots, no race tension. There's no tension. Everyone, for the most part, realizes that—even if they particularly are not there so much to participate in the College Program—there’s enough respect there where they respect the next man for being there, going through it. And there’s nothing else going on; now they’ll actually resolve issues. And you often find that the issues are often less, because you don’t have a bunch of people there on drugs or the other half selling drugs. Because now, they actually have something to do.

In particular, participation in PUP was seen to decrease conflict by increasing contact between people of different races. Participant AQ told us, “[PUP] did help me meet more people that I wouldn’t normally talk to. Because, you got all different kinds of races going in the classroom. And you talk to them and people know you, ya know? Just from being in the class.” In turn, this helped create a sense of social solidarity that crossed racial lines. In the PUP classroom, said Participant AN:

There's a sense of respect for everyone. There's no segregation. I mean, you sit immediately wherever your seat is, with not even a care or whatever about who you're sitting next to. You know, it’s just your seat. And it’s all about class, not the individual. And immediately upon arrival, it’s like the instructor, no matter what age they are—they may be 20 years old to your 45—it’s just this immediate sense of respect. So as soon as they walk in there's quiet, and all ears and eyes on the instructor. I loved it, I mean, I just loved that whole ‘unit as one’. Even if you have issues outside the gate, once you step in this classroom, there's just a one unity between everyone that we're all here to learn.”

### *Interactions with Correctional Officers*

Potential animosity between inmates and COs is a reality of prison life, and considerable research has investigated the causes and consequences of CO-inmate conflict.<sup>18</sup> However, several individuals report that their participation in PUP led to improved relations between inmates and COs by generating mutual empathy. Participants AB and AV argue that participation in the college program humanized them in the eyes of COs, by allowing them to demonstrate their efforts at self-improvement. Participant AJ told us, “Since I’d been [in PUP] a long time, the officers know and

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<sup>18</sup> Farkas, Mary Ann. 1999. "Correctional Officer Attitudes toward Inmates and Working with Inmates in a “Get Tough” Era." *Journal of Criminal Justice* no. 27 (6): 495-506; Jurik, Nancy C. 1985. "Individual and Organizational Determinants of Correctional Officer Attitudes toward Inmates." *Criminology* no. 23 (3): 523-540; Kauffman, Kelsey. 1988. *Prison Officers and Their World*: Harvard University Press Cambridge, MA.

see that I'm trying to straighten up. They'd see me walking with my books and stuff and with a whole different crew of people and they were glad for me."

Participant AI described a similar response from COs when they saw him taking college classes:

I think that staff and the officers, obviously, if they see guys that are going to the college program, they see 'em with their books, and they see 'em with their material, and they see 'em studying, the officers themselves are gonna have a positive perception of you... They see you being positive. You're doing something productive.

And Participant AU said:

Yeah, most of the officers when they see you going to school, an inmate going to school, they're like "Let him go, he's programming. He's doing a good job. He's trying to change." It changes with certain CO's there, obviously. Some [say], "They don't deserve this. Why are you giving it to them?" Majority of the COs that I know, [though], they would just leave you alone, because they knew you were trying to make a change in [your] life.

In addition, participation in PUP was perceived as a signal to COs that students were less likely to violate behavioral regulations. Participant AS described the effect of PUP on his behavior, and how he and other students would not want to get caught up in things and potentially jeopardize their opportunity to get an education:

I mean, as far as, you don't wanna mess it up. You didn't wanna get transferred. If the people in the education program, the majority of them I found cherish that. [They] knew that they were only one stupid act away from going to the hole or getting transferred out. Opportunity, you know? So I think it's not the carrot-stick approach, but people know that you really are, you're lucky to be able to [get an education]. So I think you want to be on your best. You're not going to get caught up. Ya know, a majority of the education program are not gangbangers. They're lifers that want to get out, that want to do something, and [they] know that education is the way out.

Participant AH recalled, "A lot of times when I had a bag full of books they would search a lot of us. I rarely got searched, [because] I think they knew about my programs. One time, I was asked to be inspected... Then, he just looked at me and gave me the bag and told me to get out of there. I only got searched like twice when I was there." And on this topic, Participant AP said:

You know, look, [officers] are not dumb; they're wise. I mean, they had to do their job and they saw that a number of people were participating in their education and getting college educated. And then they'd walk on the shift, or walk in the yard, and hear guys in groups talking about a curriculum that was offered the night before. So instead of talking about the basketball game, they were talking about education. So I'm sure that opened up their rumors that not all these guys are dirty dogs, or ex-cons, or cons that are going to go out and start hurting everybody again.

Similarly, higher education in the liberal arts increased some inmates' empathy toward COs. Participant AV said:

When you think about your captors and people that are holding you, intellectually you feel that you are at higher level than the guy that might have power over you. You realize that he is stuck in his own little world and he can't think. He is stuck in his role. He is stuck, just like how I am stuck.

Discussing his feelings about correctional staff, Participant AJ told us something similar:

In prison, I realized I no longer had the us vs. them. That's one thing I learned in PUP. I don't know who said it, but it was a recurring theme: the us vs. them. It's not us vs. them; we're all together. Even though I am being held accountable, it still wasn't an us vs. them. And that's what [PUP instructors] brought. [Instructors] brought the fact that we're not going to be separate, we're not going to place a wall between you and us. We are going to embrace you and show you it's not us vs them. We're all together. We're all a family working together to make things better. From [their] side, from the volunteer perspective, I saw you guys as, 'This is my contribution to my society as a citizen. This is what I can do to help. Instead of voting for the law and paying your taxes and letting the politician take, [instructors] were proactive in saying, 'I'm volunteering, I'm coming to help. This is the way I see it. And I'm going to make you feel that part of me, that you're not different from me or separate from me.'...

That idea, that concept, changed me. And it helped me realize that I could do the same. That it wasn't me against the cops. It was the cops doing their job... And you start to realize, that they have a certain, that a lot of them only have a high school education. And so a lot of them, they're not able to see beyond what they learned. And a lot of them have a dualistic point of view where it's us vs. them. But I said to myself, 'It doesn't have to be that way anymore.' I understand, I respect police officers, and I still do to this very day. My perspective changed in a healthy way.

In the words of Participant AR, PUP allowed him to relate to COs "on a different level, on a more intellectual level." This deeper communication stands in contrast to more typical interaction between COs and inmates, which might be restricted to purely programmatic communication about regulatory enforcement and characterized by mutual vilification.

However, some participants perceived resentment from COs because of their participation in PUP. Notes Participant AG, "Maybe you've heard that prison guards don't think for the most part that we deserve to be getting college education at the tax payers cost. or for any reason." Because members of the public face significant financial barriers to attending college, some COs and members of the public may believe that inmates are undeserving of "free" higher education. Participant AX described this dynamic, saying:

There is sort of an attitude among the cops, some of them think the college stuff is too much for us. We shouldn't have it [because] they can't, they couldn't go to

school, why we should. I can understand it, I mean, we broke the law and here we are getting rewarded, you know what I mean, for bad behavior. They didn't break the law and couldn't go to college or they know people in their family that couldn't, they had to work... Sometimes there's an attitude just that we are criminals; once a criminal always a criminal, which I don't agree with.

### *Family Relationships*

Research suggests that healthy relationships and frequent communication with family during incarceration reduces the likelihood of recidivism.<sup>19</sup> A large proportion of interview participants report that their participation in PUP improved relationships with family members. Participant AV said, "My mom loved [that I was in college]. She used to think Jody was a god. She still goes to the [PUP] Christmas party!"

Explaining the effect of the program on his family relationships, Participant AN told us:

It gave me something, something other to talk about than winning this month's Domino tournament. Up until then, the only thing I ever wrote home about was Mother's Day, their birthday, Christmas, and that's about it. My grandmother still has all my papers, grades that I sent, all my report cards. Just, they were able to see that my life had changed, that I was able to have new things to talk about...as opposed to being able to write about was all "this week we won the basketball tournament." You know, it gets kind of old...

A huge thing for me is that I wanted to see what my grade on that paper was. Even if my work was a 'B,' I was ecstatic. And I already had money saved up for the stamps and envelope, because I wanted to send that home to my family. And I loved the return knowing that, a week later, I'm going to get in the mail feedback. And those were the congratulations... because someone was proud of the work that I put in.

Participant AD described this general sense among PUP students, saying:

A lot of the guys weren't just thinking of how to get out of prison. They were thinking about wanting to make something of themselves before they got out of prison. A lot of these guys have family and children or you know single-parent or whatever. They wanted to, you know, reunite with them, reunite with their families and move on.

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19 Hairston, Creasie Finney. 1988. "Family Ties During Imprisonment: Do They Influence Future Criminal Activity." *Fed. Probation* no. 52: 48; La Vigne, Nancy G, Rebecca L Naser, Lisa E Brooks, and Jennifer L Castro. 2005. "Examining the Effect of Incarceration and in-Prison Family Contact on Prisoners' Family Relationships." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* no. 21 (4): 314-335; Ryan, Joseph P, and Huilan Yang. 2005. "Family Contact and Recidivism: A Longitudinal Study of Adjudicated Delinquents in Residential Care." *Social Work Research* no. 29 (1): 31-39.

In addition to changing the content of their conversations, some reported that participation in PUP had positively affected their ability to communicate with friends and family. For instance, Participant AU reported that:

My conversations and my writing changed a lot. They're like, my mom, she'd be like, "Wow! That college program is doing something for you." She says, "You write in complete sentences now. Your punctuation is good and you know when to change a paragraph to another paragraph," and just all that kind of stuff that was noticeable from my family when I wrote to them. When I talk on the phone, they were like, "Is that you? Man, put [NAME] on the phone." (Laughs) Yeah, it helped.

Participant AM gave us a similar account of how PUP shaped students' communication with their families:

You need to be able to convey what you're thinking. You need to be articulate. You need to tell people things, and I mean you need [math and English]. It's very, very important in their life. And like I said, for their kids. For them to set a good example for their kids, they need those two things. And no one wants a dad for a dummy. I mean, you get stuck with a dad that's a dummy and it sucks. But you want to be able to be proud of your parents, and I said, 'That's what you guys can do by, you know, just pursuing higher education.'

Participants frequently send and show their PUP report cards to family members. Some participants used report cards to demonstrate effort and progress to guardians and elders, as Participant AN did with his grandmother and Participant AJ did with his parents. Describing how PUP had affected his family relationships, AJ noted, "My mom my dad were both very proud of me. It helped them a lot, because they felt that they had done something wrong. And seeing me graduate from college went a long way in helping them feel better." Talking about how he'd encourage everyone to enroll in PUP, Participant AU said "While you're here, instead of wasting your time in these cells or going outside and wasting your time outside on the yard, learn something. Go to school. Prove to the people that you've changed." As Participant AS described it:

[My family] knew that I was doing something positive and that I wasn't coming out talking that same person. I think they saw somebody that wanted to do something with their life, moving forward, knowing that the past was the past and you could either come out still caught up in that old lifestyle or you could... I'm sure they saw change in me.

Participant AO told us that a college education was a concrete way to show his family that he had changed while in prison:

My mom was real happy because, except for my uncle who's younger than me, we didn't have anyone who graduated...I'm the only one who has a two year degree and the only one with a four year degree real soon. That's made a real difference with extended family, and they've been real supportive... because that's something



that you can point to. You can point to some of these [other] programs that lead to self-introspection, but when you explain that to other people they don't grasp it. But when you talk about college, well, that seems more easier to grasp for everybody. Once they grasp that, they can feel good about lending you more support.

Frequently, participants aimed to set positive examples for their own children and young members of their extended families. Participant AJ continued, "My mom passed away and so my sister kind of, y'know, I'd seen her from time to time but now it was really only me and her. And she went to college and she became a journalist major, so it was really positive for her to see me doing this. And she was really proud of the fact that I was going."

Participant AL described how PUP made him a more authentic role model to his two children. Initially, Participant AL and others worried that their children would view their incarcerated fathers' educational appeals as hypocritical. But being part of PUP, they believed, led their children to take their fathers' parental advice more seriously. Participant AL described how "[his children] were like, 'Okay, Dad's getting A's so I should strive to get A's as well.'"

Participant AM described the guilt and shame he felt when he went to prison, and how PUP helped him regain a sense of pride that he could share with his family:

I had tons of shame from just the fact that I was stupid enough to be incarcerated and I think the only reason people are in prison is 'cause they're stupid. You think you can rob a bank and get away with it? You're stupid. You think you can hit someone and not get punished? You're stupid. You think you can sell drugs and affect people and not get punished for it? You're stupid. So that's the only reason. So it made me feel good to know, that you know, I was making some kind of headway, improving myself. And I wrote letters to my daughters all the time like 'I'm going to school too, I'm doing homework too so I know you girls can do it also.'...[family and friends outside] were proud of me, and then they knew that, even though I was in a bad situation, I was trying to make the best of it.

While many incarcerated individuals did not see higher education as a viable option in their lives prior to imprisonment, exposure to PUP can instill higher education as a value for an entire family. Indeed, Participant AL credits PUP in part for the academic successes of his children. Before PUP, he had never even considered college, particularly four-year college and study in the liberal arts, as a realistic or relevant possibility. Now the entire family has invested in education; he has one child in college and another in graduate school. As Participant AL described it:

You're improving yourself. You're doing something. You're learning, so you feel like you're actually accomplishing something, which is what I try and tell people in [prison], too, 'cause lots of people I tried to recruit, I tell people: 'You got to go,' I said. 'If you don't do it for you, you do it for your kids. They're gonna be proud of you for doing it, and when you get out you don't wanna be the dummy that can't help 'em with their homework.'

## **VI. Perceptions of Life after Incarceration**

Returning from prison, particularly for those who spent a long time inside, was often described as difficult and disorienting. Some talked about their confusion trying to re-enter a world where computers and cell phones had become ubiquitous; “The technology is mind-boggling!” said Participant AX. Some participants opined that they wished PUP offered more computer-based education and training. Participant AN, for example, lamented that he “had been locked up throughout the whole internet craze,” noting how people on the outside often have to “use the internet for every single thing.”

Even the basic rituals of day-to-day life could be complex. Participant AV described how difficult it was to get used to the world. “When I first got out it was the little things. Like judging the speed of a car going by.” Participant AT told us:

The guys who do 20-25 years, I think, get like 10 times more overwhelmed. And I used to tell people: you know, when you go to the store there is going to be ten different kinds of apples to choose from... You know, one of the things I looked forward to the most was shopping at the grocery store, because I love to shop and cook. The first time I went when I got out, I took an hour. I couldn't, it was really frustrating. My wife said, ‘Why did it take you so long? It used to take you 20 to 30 minutes.’ I told her that I had to compare the prices of every single thing that I bought, because everything seemed so expensive compared to prison, where you can get a soup for 20 cents. It is definitely an adjustment.

Most felt lucky that PUP had helped prepare them for a healthy, happy, and law-abiding life on the outside. Participant AI described PUP as “a very solid foundation to have for [people at San Quentin] to prepare themselves that, whenever they return back to society, that they're able to function in the community and be productive, responsible.” Participant AT described being a student in PUP as “part of my reintegration process, in a way”:

It was probably, in some ways, the beginning of that. Because, I lived my lifestyle for 30 years. From the time I was 16 to 17 years old ‘til the time I was 47 when I went to prison, I was always in the drug industry. You know, I worked for a finance company for a year and I worked for an insurance company for a year, but other than that I always supported myself selling marijuana and cocaine. So [PUP] helped kind of start the reintegration process, learning to relate. That is why I liked interacting with outside people so much, trying to normalize the way I interacted with people.

Nearly all study participants are stably employed or continuing to pursue higher education outside of prison. Although it is difficult to systematically infer whether participants' circumstances would be different in the absence of PUP, or whether this is true of the broader population of former PUP students, the interviews shed light on participants' perceptions of the role PUP played in their economic and educational outcomes. As Participant AR put it, “I can guarantee you, if you go into education things will be a lot better for you when you go home.”

## *Education*

PUP students come from a range of educational backgrounds and ultimately reach different levels of educational achievement in their lifetimes. But study participants, regardless of their pre-PUP educational backgrounds, often expressed the desire to continue to pursue education outside of prison. One participant, for example, suggests that PUP “implants in your head the opportunities that can come from going to school... when I came home, I already knew that I wanted to go to school.”

A number of PUP students and graduates continued to pursue higher education after release, and many claimed that PUP was instrumental to their persistence. PUP participants often have release dates that occur before it is possible for them to complete enough credits for the associate’s degree. Participant AS told us:

I came out and I was one class short—I should’ve had my degree, but I got really sick in there, but I was a history class short—so they knew that when I got out, I got back into school. And you know, all they hear about is people going back to their past behavior, high recidivism rates. The people I used to hang with were all gone or dead, so I didn’t really have any negative influences...I mean, yeah, after 3 years I had no problems, but I think [PUP] it prepared me totally for coming out of here.

Participant AH talked about how PUP had made continuing school on the outside easier by helping to connect him with a re-entry program.

I heard about [the program] through PUP. I would have never known about it if it weren’t for PUP. So, I was short a couple of classes and then all of a sudden the door opened. I wasn’t going to stay just to finish the classes.... You know, PUP guided me. I wouldn’t have known about these other programs without it. So, that was the biggest thing.

Some take computer classes or learn other basic skills that they were not able to develop while incarcerated. One student is now studying for his broker’s license. Another finished a general office AA at a local community college. Others return to school full-time to complete a degree. Participant AS and other former PUP students have gone on to complete their associate’s degree after release.

Additionally, some former PUP students go on to complete graduate degrees. One participant was recently accepted to a Master’s program and a few others recently earned their Master’s. One is now enrolled in a PhD program. Participant AH exuded pride as he described his journey toward achieving a Master’s degree:

When you look at these chains of events, I would not know about any [educational possibilities for myself] had it not been for PUP...Had it not been for PUP

instructors, I would have never made it to graduate school ...I just got the call last week that I got into their Master's program.

Other participants described wanting to pursue further education, but finding once they were released from prison that financial and family constraints prevented them from enrolling in higher education programs. Participant AJ told us he is participating in web development certification courses. However, he has not been able to continue his formal education because of his work commitments:

I work 48 hours and I don't ask anybody for anything, I'm totally independent. So I have to work the hours I have to work to pay my bills, to buy food, to buy clothes. I bought a car; I have a car payment, insurance... I have a driver's license. I pay taxes. Because of the amount of money I make here, I have to pay taxes. I haven't had time [to go back to school] and I'm comfortable with the situation, with my job. I'm comfortable with what I make. I'm not going to stay there forever. [But] one of the reasons that I've stayed there is I see it as a social investment. I want to stay at the same place. I want people to know me.

In addition to the challenges of getting by in a tough economy, formerly incarcerated individuals face additional financial constraints. Not only do prisoners lose potential income while incarcerated, but some participants are also required to pay child support, restitution, or both as in the case of Participant AQ. Several participants cite costs like these, not a lack of interest, as the primary barrier to continuing their pursuit of education once they leave San Quentin. Participant AQ told us, "I'd like to go back to school. I really thought about that today. But still, the thing weighs: Can I afford to? Because at the job that I do, sometimes we are required to work overtime where we are required to stay. So I wouldn't make class, you know."

But education, for many, was a way to keep themselves connected to a positive environment once they were released from prison and were no longer around other people in PUP. Talking about the PUP program, Participant AT said:

It empowers you. It helped you learn how to discipline yourself, helps you realize that you can do more than what you thought you could do, and that you can learn things that you never thought you could learn. I worked with a lot of young guys that I tutored in [prison]...I said, 'When you get out, go and sign up for the community college classes from the area where you live. Even if you do not aspire to be anything, you are around other people who have goals. You'll be in a positive learning environment, and it will continue to be helpful. And that is a great place to network and meet people, and find possible job opportunities.

## *Employment*

The effect of incarceration on employment is a topic of considerable scholarly investigation, and studies conclude that incarceration has a substantial negative effect on future employment.<sup>20</sup> Longitudinal studies suggest that only 45 percent of individuals are employed eight months after release.<sup>21</sup>

There is evidence that vocational training in prison increases rates of employment and reduces recidivism,<sup>22</sup> but there has been little study of the effects of general or liberal arts education. It is therefore notable that most of our study participants report that they are employed in long-term positions. One participant told us he worked as a materials manager for a sophisticated machine shop, and another got a trade job in carpentry. Another is still finishing school but has recently applied for a transit worker career ladders program. One person we spoke with now works in tech support for a major tele-communications company, and another worked in the “start-up scene, doing sales and business development.” Another just got a job with a major on-line retailer. And one student trained as a baker and got a job in a pastry shop. He notes that the math classes he took while in PUP came in handy when dealing with measurements in baking.

Participant AE works as a mechanic, and talked about PUP as helping him qualify for the job:

One of the big things that came up were math skills. So yeah, PUP helped me out with the astronomy and physics courses. I actually am now involved with the union that installs elevators. Part of me getting into the union involved me taking an aptitude test in regards to my mechanical skills and things like that... [It tested] my math skills as well as reading comprehension skills. So, after doing the test and after doing an interview, out of 2900 applicants, I scored 69. So not bad, considering.

Notably, more than half of respondents specifically credit PUP for having a positive effect on their ability to find employment.<sup>23</sup> When talking about how he would want to encourage other people at San Quentin to enroll in PUP, Participant AR said:

I would tell them, ‘Go for it, man, because you will be surprised how much a better person, how much [better] able you are to compete when you come home.’ It’s

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<sup>20</sup> Kling, Jeffrey R. 2006. "Incarceration Length, Employment, and Earnings." *The American economic review* no. 96 (3): 863-876; Western, Bruce, and Becky Pettit. 2000. "Incarceration and Racial Inequality in Men's Employment." *Industrial & Labor Relations Review* no. 54 (1): 3-16.

<sup>21</sup> Visher, Christy, Sara Debus, and Jennifer Yahner. 2008. "Employment after Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Releases in Three States". Urban Institute. Available from <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/411778-Employment-after-Prison-A-Longitudinal-Study-of-Releasees-in-Three-States.PDF>.

<sup>22</sup> Davis, Lois M., Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles. 2013. "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education". RAND Corporation. Available from [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html).

<sup>23</sup> The other 11 individuals did not draw a connection between their participation in PUP and employment opportunity.

something, that you have an education, to be able to look at life at a whole different way. An education, I tell my grandkids, I tell my nephews and nieces, education is the key to success... Sometimes it's hard to get into what field you are going [even] if you get a college education, but I can guarantee you will be a much better-off person if you get your education.

Some point to the network of teachers and peers that helped them find employment when they got out. Participant AV said, "I think that's another thing the College Program does well. You got a good network. The guys, former prisoners, have a nice network. Both of my jobs have been from someone calling me being like, 'Hey, come here and I'll give you a job.'

For Participant AV, his AA degree gave him credibility on the job market. This was particularly important as a way to off-set the "negative credential" of a criminal record:

If you can put that on your resume that you got some college or an AA, it definitely helps. Depending on what field you get into. Especially when you get locked up for a long time, you really don't have a lot of employment history. They go 'Wow, this guy is going to school.'

Participant AK said that other people found him interesting when he talked about his college experience:

I met a bunch of people there that once I spoke or talked to my experiences were like, 'What can I do for you? Do you need a job?' and that's how, I work for a man that heard me there. Um, so I think it did help me. I got the skills to go there and get a job. I'm not thinking that I can't get a job. I'm thinking that there's not many jobs that I *couldn't* get.

While the connection between direct vocational training and employment appears obvious, there are similarly strong reasons to expect positive effects on employment from liberal arts. Higher education in the liberal arts improves individuals' marketable skills in reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking, and thus may improve individuals' position in the labor market after incarceration.<sup>24</sup> Participant AY says, "My boss doesn't even look at me as a formerly incarcerated person because of the way that I speak, and all that came from PUP." Participant AQ told us the same thing, saying:

[PUP] helped me with my writing skills, big time. Because most of the time [when looking for a job], I was writing online. The way a person writes says a lot about the person, you know what I mean? How intelligent they are, their spelling, their uses of words, vocabulary. I'm confident with talking in front of anybody... I could talk to anybody. I could speak with all of them.

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the effects on employment of various facets of college education for the public at large: Sagen, H Bradley, Jerald W Dallam, and John R Laverty. 2000. "Effects of Career Preparation Experiences on the Initial Employment Success of College Graduates." *Research in Higher Education* no. 41 (6): 753-767.

Participant AC told us that PUP “improved my skillset with conversation, communication whether verbal or written. It gave me a different... I’m a thinker. I might not realize something at the time; there’s conversation, let’s say. Then I’ll have questions, and then I’ll kind of follow those questions, okay? So I guess they call that intellectually curious.”

Others describe participation in PUP as having introduced them to sectors of the labor market they were not previously aware of, or in which they did not believe they would fit. One student got certified in fiber optics and told us, “that’s something I would never have done if not for the college program. Nor would I ever have heard of the program they were offering if I was not in the college.”

Participant AO told us that PUP made him “feel very capable”:

It allowed me to take the internal changes, and put the responsibility and commitment into action and accountability. At the same time though, the more that I’m being responsible and I’m honoring my commitments and stuff, and turning my stuff in on time by the way of grades, and this starts moving forward, I feel better about myself and I want to increase more and take more classes and just builds upon itself, at least for me.... I feel that I know now, especially being out now, I know how to evolve myself into areas of society that I hadn’t even been in. At the end of next month, I’m going to certified with the [city] as an AIDS and Hepatitis C tester. That would have never been possible without the previous learning that I went through. So, I get to do something that I hadn’t even imagined.

In addition, PUP students reported having developed soft skills through program participation that served them well on the outside. Participant AN described how, before PUP, he did not need to schedule his time. “Really just basing everything on what time Gilligan’s Island came on, or what time Modern Family came on. That was pretty much how I based my days: what TV shows were coming on that I liked?” Through PUP, he learned how to organize his time in order to get work done and meet deadlines:

Now, I had to actually build my schedule. I had to know that this was in the morning and I need to get up 50 minutes earlier to read/proofread my work from last night, just to see if I’m in the same mind frame the next morning. You gotta try to budget in your workouts and your work schedule. You gotta budget study hall. Not to mention all the other things, all the other little obligations that you might have had... These are all things you now have to include in your life that you find that, out here, it’s just basic life skills. They’re not even huge transformations to be made; they’re just, like, basic everyday life skills out here... And that’s definitely what I learned through PUP: that no time’s wasted. Nothing can be wasted, because you got a deadline for something due in English, you got another paper due in Algebra. Something is always due. Some paper always needs to be read.

Participant AI also talked about PUP as a place where students need to learn discipline and commitment:

I would recommend [PUP] to any new student. I would also instruct them, first of all, to take it serious. Be committed. Be prepared to exercise some discipline and be prepared to allocate adequate time to study, and do some research, and prepare yourself. And if you wanna go in there to do some bullshit, or play some games, I would strongly suggest: stay out of the way. I have a lot of, tremendous respect and admiration for anyone that goes into a penal institution and volunteers their time to help a person. You know, that's a special person to me. So, I don't feel that their time should be wasted.

Participant AN went on to talk about how being a PUP student had given him the confidence he needed to succeed in the workplace:

I would have that confidence when I turned in that term paper that I struggled with for 2 or 3 months, and then I get an A on it. Those are the accomplishments that I have, that I know that, even out here when I get paperwork or applications and they're stacked to the size of the dictionary, I no longer get overwhelmed. So that, because of term papers that I did... if I could do some of those, it let me know that I could handle this out here.

And participant AR described how PUP's college classes had given him perspective that helped him persist in his job hunt, even when some Human Resources departments wouldn't give him a chance because of his criminal record. When we asked whether anything he had learned as a student helped him deal with challenges finding a job, he responded:

Yes, definitely! Especially when I took sociology... and some psychology that I took. It helped me to have a better understanding of what people think of people that have been in different places. How society as a whole thinks, as individuals, when you've done something. And I don't let it bother me, because I am who I am. And I am a person who you can tell me 'no' but I'm going to keep going. I went to twelve [parole] hearings where they told me no, board hearings, but I kept thriving. I said 'No, I don't believe that. I wanna go home.'

Challenges persist for some participants, however. As Participant AO described, "Looking for employment was the biggest challenge. I put the suit the tie on, I dressed well, I presented well and it was very difficult to find a job. That [criminal history] question, that 'check the box' thing they had never gotten rid of that down here... that check the box thing which is how you know you're a second class citizen."

Participant AN likewise detailed the way that a criminal background has made it difficult to find a job, despite having gone to college.

Everywhere lately, roadblocks have been coming up due to my criminal background. As far as... criminal background checks... All that type of stuff. You



know when I first got out, I started driving for a limousine service. That was fine. That was good. And then Uber came along. I started driving with Uber and that was great. The pay was good; everything was fine. I enjoyed it... Then the background check came up... so unfortunately I lost that job. And then I started getting into food delivery stuff like Postmates, stuff like that. Then the background checks started coming back. So pretty soon, jobs that were basically open for people like myself—inmates that were getting out, they could make a living doing these things—now one by one they've all been blocked off. That has been a challenge.

When asked whether anything he learned as a college student helped him deal with those challenges, though, Participant AN responded:

Oh yeah, just keep pushing, most definitely. And good things happen. And yeah, I see, if you have the skills and you believe in yourself, you know that you don't have to let one door shut and lack confidence in yourself, where you have to go through something dumb like pick up a sack or pick up some guns. You know that you do have alternatives. There are solutions, positive solutions. So that's one thing that the college program taught me, is that when there's nothing else, worst come to worst, I can fill this application out and go get a job at a grocery store and bag some groceries and wait until my situation improves. And those aren't tools that I had before. And definitely, I learned those from the college program.

Participant AM also talked about the difficulties that people returning from prison face when they are seeking employment:

I've been out three years, but initially coming out it was horrible. Because, getting a job, you know I'm a good worker. I'm a hard worker. But there's so many negative connotations associated with being incarcerated that I never got a chance. So I signed up for classes immediately when I got out, and that's where [PUP] helped me. 'Cause I was already polished and ready to go, and I had great study habits... So it helped me when I got out, trying to find a job interview. But eventually the only job I could get was a busser in a really good restaurant. Which was horrible because I used to manage restaurants. I used to work in circuit boards and that was all I could do because of my history.

...But after three months of being a busser, they made me manager. And I wasn't making enough money, so then I got recruited to a travel agency... and I started in sales but I wasn't good at it 'cause I'm not pushy. I don't like forcing people. I'm too nice, so they put me in customer service. And now since I've been there, it's been amazing. They say they wanna make me manager, and out of the last three quarters that we've had employee of the quarter, I've won it twice. So its kinda cool that I'm kinda getting some kind of accolades and some kind of respect, after two years of being spit on and shunned.

## *Recidivism*

Many factors affect the likelihood that an individual will recidivate after learning prison. For instance, age is an important predictor of a declining likelihood of recidivism. As Participant AV notes, “If you keep someone in prison for ten years, they are older, they are more mature and less likely to want to commit a crime... If you are forty, you are not doing the things you were doing when you were twenty. So, yeah, I think age is huge when you’re talking about recidivism.”

In our small sample, disentangling the effects of age and program participation is difficult. Nonetheless, our interviews provide suggestive evidence that the effects of a PUP education may extend beyond benefits to the participants themselves, offering substantial benefits to the broader communities to which PUP participants return.

By providing people with critical thinking and other skills, college programs can contribute to sustained desistance, or the process through which people divert from lives of crime. Participant AJ and others reflected on how learning in the college program increased his self-confidence and made him believe “I could achieve anything if I put my mind to it.” At the same time, it also changed his behavior, by providing him with the ability for self-reflection. He told us, “The light went on in my head, working things clearer and thinking things through. For every action, there’s a reaction and, just learning consequences. So it really helped.”

Participant AJ noted that “The people who do participate in college, the recidivism rate is really low, y’know? Really low. And so that’s a sure plus for why there should be college.” As Participant AI described it:

When you talk about recidivism, I mean, if you come home and they just give you a couple hundred dollars and say ‘Okay, you’re on your own,’ chances are not that great that you’re gonna make it. And then, it’s unfortunate, but the places that do provide services, most of those are drug infested. So now you’ve got a challenge: you’ve gotta be real strong. If you were weak behind drugs, can you go into this environment and observe other people being high? Can you exercise enough discipline not to get caught up? It’s not that easy, you know. So it’s an individual thing. But I still say that if you were involved with the college program, self-help groups, positive activities, the chances are greater that you will prevail and be successful.

While our data do not enable us to draw definitive conclusions about recidivism rates, several participants expressed the belief that PUP improved participants’ ability to successfully reintegrate into society and avoid recidivism. Participant AJ told us that the public should support programs like PUP because it was in their interest: “It’s a win-win situation. And if you get behind these people and support education for prisoners, you’re going to have better society. You’re going to have people that believe in themselves that are not going to come out and recidivate. Or make the same bad decisions again.” He went on to tell us, “That’s what community is. Community is working together with everybody, not just the people that live in your neighborhood. We have a

responsibility toward each other and... if you help the PUP program you are helping yourself and your helping your kids.

Participant AD described recommending PUP to others as a way to avoid returning to crime:

You, need to put a map out for your life and find a path you wanna go. And this is where you're gonna go. You're gonna either get out and go to prison. [Or] you're either gonna get out and go to school, continue to go to school, and get a degree... So I says, if you need life skills, get a high school education. You wanna get a high school education, it's easy to do, you're gonna do this. You're gonna do manual labor. You're gonna do some type of, you know, restaurant business or some such. [But] you wanna get out and hold down an office job and do that and make money? you wanna be rich without being having to commit crime? You'd be having to go [college].

Participant AN concurred, telling us “[PUP] had every role... I've been to prison, this time was my third time. First time I returned in four months. The second time I returned in eight months. And I had the possibility of returning quicker than that; I just had not been caught up until those four months and those eight months. But, this time... I'm just blessed and grateful to say that... I'm growing. Definitely no signs of having to look over by back and worry. And that's all due to, yeah, the college program.”

Participant AT spoke more generally about these effects: “I think the [PUP] program makes quantum changes. I think it is something significant, and wish that people throughout California in the other institutions had that opportunity available. I think it would reduce the rate of recidivism significantly.” As Participant AQ put it:

Prisoners need education, you know. Because one of these days even these lifers... You got to give them education, because they're going to get out sooner or later. They were giving us “free education” or whatever like that, but what are you going to do? Send somebody back out on the streets who's been locked up for 20 years who has no education? He's going to make stupid decisions and do whatever. Or do you want somebody who has thinking skills and stuff like that, you know?

### *Living Well and Giving Back*

Without exception, those with whom we spoke were profoundly grateful for the opportunities they had received through PUP. Participant AW said:

I have heard teachers make the comment that they would rather teach inmates at San Quentin than students at their colleges, because the inmates really want to be there. All I want to say as my final comment is, that feeling of the teachers is so damn true. That is really where we want to be. If someone is trying to harm one of those teachers on the yard, they better watch out. That gut feeling is really true. We really do appreciate them. And even if it is hard to quantify how it helped us find a job, it is totally a worthwhile investment of their time.

Most were determined to make the most of it by living well and by remembering to appreciate what they had been given. Participant AE said, “Right now I am so blessed... I just want to live life with zeal. Cherish everything. Don’t take anything for granted... As far as being a student, I learned so much from so many classes. I took more classes than I need to. I took them just because I enjoyed them... One of the things I learned was just that we have to laugh at ourselves. We shouldn’t take everything so seriously. Just take a break from life. Smell the roses and just be in the moment.”

Many PUP students described how their education had left them with a strong desire to help other incarcerated men. Participant AP told us how his experience as a student had changed his perspective on the world in ways that made him want to give back. “If I roll up a book into a small little “centerable” thing you look through like a periscope, that’s how I looked at the world when I was younger. I saw a small piece.” But he told us that, after being in PUP:

I opened up to such an extent to where I believe that optimism and anything is possible. So along with dissipating that small world view, it changed the dissipation of attitudes and behaviors and stereotypes and crippled thinking and stuff like that. I changed as a result of my educational experience to become a person that instead of taking, I became a giver.

Participant AH described the importance of education, in part, as a way to make amends.

I would say that if you want to change your life, start with doing something that you might feel is out of your comfort zone. For most of us, education was out of our comfort zones. It opens up a lot of doors. Jody talks about how education balances out the fact that you are incarcerated. I continue to encourage people to pursue their education. To stay positive. It’s a life-changer.

Participant AH also talked about his desire to encourage others toward education, and he marveled at the many former PUP students he knew that were now making a difference in their communities. “It’s a horrible situation, whatever you did to get you in there. You can’t take it back, so make the best of it. Go to school. Get your education. Make yourself proud. Make other people proud of you...There were just so many good guys [in PUP], and I’m just hearing about them doing so many good things now, and they’re helping the community.”

We heard a similar story from Participant AO, who said that “I do see a lot of societal change that I never would have thought possible... people that make a difference, only because they invested in themselves first.” And when we asked Participant AZ what he would tell other people at San Quentin, to encourage them to attend or enroll in PUP, he said:

It’s hard to sum that up in a tiny little neat sound bite. What would I say? I would say that it is truly a transformative experience and one that will not only transform the individual but also allow the individual to regain a contributory role in society. And by that I mean that it will turn the individual from a beneficiary to a benefactor. And this is a very important distinction for me because, by definition, prisoners are beneficiaries. Most prisoners go into prison because of drugs and alcohol, and things like that... with their crimes resulting from their addictions... So I think, for

me, getting out and inheriting a contributory role in society would mean that you get out and no longer are a beneficiary, but a benefactor. You give back to the community. You are involved in programs that mutually and together uplift your community. And you're no longer a drag on the community; rather, you're dragging the community along to a better day.

In my opinion, that's what [PUP] did....If you just look at the people that have gotten out, they have graduated from San Quentin and [PUP], and people that were short of graduating [but took classes]... they didn't recidivate, nowhere near the levels that, you know, are common with recidivation. But not only did they not recidivate, but also that they're involved in their community. They're working with some nonprofits, trying to help their neighbors. They're doing something. Even the ones that are working a regular nine-to-five job, they're doing stuff on their off time that you can easily classify as helping their community—helping youth or something of that nature. And that is a direct result of [PUP], having those people in front of you in San Quentin that embodied that concept of giving back, that altruism. And just being around that every day, it rubs off on you. So, I think that the greatest thing at San Quentin, that [PUP did], was it allowed people to see their contributory role, and allowed people to inherit that contributory role.

One way many students made a contribution was by recruiting others into education. Participant AJ talked about how much he and others had gained from PUP, and that they wanted to pass it on:

You learn the fundamentals again, and I never knew them. I never really knew how to take notes and anything, so I would encourage [others] to get involved in the program. Don't feel bad with where you're at, and start off slow, y'know? Yeah, and you're going to have a good time. You got to put the work in; you can't just carry the books around. Yeah, and I think most of the students there encourage other people. The ones that are taking classes now encourage others to.

When we asked whether he would recommend PUP to others in prison, Participant AI answered that he would tell them, emphatically, yes! "God please, take advantage of this opportunity. If you're serious about education, redemption, self-redemption--not to prove anything to anyone else, just to find yourself—please take advantage of this opportunity. You'll never regret it, absolutely, 100 percent."

Participant AU described with pride how, while he was on the inside, he had made a point to steer other men toward PUP:

A lot of the students would become envious or they'd be like, "Man, I admire you." It's been said to me before, where "I admire you. [You] stay out trouble and you go to school. You learn, you gain education, and I wish I was able to do that." I've actually had some friends of mine who I would say, "You wanna get in?" I'd direct them there. I've pretty much got half of the students to get into the college program when I was there.

Participant AN imagined a future in which he and others who had left prison would be able to support students still inside participating in PUP:

I guess the number one thing I hope for myself to be, is to sponsor [PUP] classes. And even if there was a way where the outside world could just sponsor each individual—like, how they sponsor kids—and just donate. Because it truly does change lives and it unites people. And if there was a way they could just unite, say, a specific family that donates to one specific guy in college. And it would build a correspondence where he would have someone to share all his accomplishments, his work, his grades.

Participant AX hoped that one day, everyone would have access to prison inside. “[PUP] is an awesome program. It was such an influence on my life and others, it’s a crime that they don’t have it in more prisons. People that go through programs leave changed people—people who can bring stuff back to the people out here. There should be more money for PUP and other programs.” Participant AE likewise talked about his desire to see college programs made available to other people incarcerated at prisons across the state. San Quentin is in a metropolitan area, but other places are more isolated:

I would want [PUP] to go to people that do not have these resources. That is what I want to see. There are people who are hungry and yearning for something that they are not being exposed to. You don’t know what you don’t know. For me, I was so used to living in another prison. I was more in survival mode, and at San Quentin you can just be yourself. It is a whole other atmosphere and it is conducive of learning. It really is.

Participant AV also recognized how important the college program was, but had more complicated feelings about whether it should be expanded. His concern, he said, was that having a fantastic program in prison made it easier for people to dismiss the damage that mass incarceration was doing. Discussing the PUP graduation ceremony, he said, “You got the warden there, and they are filming everything and you got people start to thinking prisons are great. ‘Look what they are doing. They are helping all these guys.’ It is definitely not the case for our prison system as a whole.” He went on:

For me the College Program has always been this, I love it and there is a lot of things that I feel. Like I said, though, it validates that whole system. It does. I think for me that I have come to terms with it. I would rather have it, than not have it... [But] I don’t want people to have the idea that we need college programs in all the prisons; I want there to be less prisons. Get rid of sixty, seventy percent of the population and *then* start talking about college programs. That’s the problem: at least seventy percent of the people should not be in there. I don’t want people to think the college program is the answer. I think it is a meeting place for what we should do to tackle this bigger problem. ...It has to be a part of the system to be an agent of change, so people go out and knock down the walls... I think I came to terms with that [PUP’s] job is to help people critically think. Then, it’s up to you if

you want to burn the place down. That's your job, to decide if you're going to change the system.

For many, the desire to help others carried over to areas other than education. One student we interviewed took counseling classes, and now works helping to write proposals and grants for non-profits. Another student plans to go into substance abuse counseling and is currently volunteering with a harm reduction program. One student got out and began working as a counselor with city kids, and another founded a non-profit to serve low-income communities.

Participant AH volunteers with a re-entry organization that “provides an academic curriculum to men and women who are transitioning out [of prison]. It deals with professional skills and things of that nature.” He is going to graduate school, and then plans to work in the public sector. When he describes where these goals come from, he says, “When you look at these chains of events, I would not know about any of this had it been for PUP. You have to look at where it all started.”

Participant AO also described a future in which he would serve others, telling us that “ten years from now, let's say I've got the Master's. Let's say that I'm in a position somewhere... [I'd] be able to link different sections of public health together. That matters towards our homeless, our housing, our addicts, our battered women, all the big problems we have in these big cities. Our prison population.”

Imagining his future, Participant AR said he hoped to have his own landscaping business, but he also hoped he would be able to run “a youth diversion program, some houses, with safe houses for youth—maybe even one for women that have been battered and things like that. That's where I see myself, and I'm working towards that.”

Participant AS said, “I want to work in a recovery doing... alcohol and drug, you become a state certified alcohol and drug counselor. So that's what I pretty much want to see myself doing, working in recovery, working with those that are just getting out, those that are homeless, those that have substance abuse or issues. That's what I want to work with, those that have had challenges, who've just gotten out. All kinds of issues, but that's where my heart's at.”

And Participant AV told us:

I think I want to do something in the [social justice] field. I worked with these kids, and we gave these kids jobs.... There a lot of programs that I worked with have these mediocre training jobs. What I'd like to do is help if they are college bound, or expose them to actual careers in different vocational fields, like my job. Help them actually make money... So, I would like to do something in the general idea of helping young guys get jobs, good paying jobs.

Some aim to give back in other ways. For instance, Participant AM gives back closer to home:

I've got a really, really great family and I appreciate 'em, and they really look out for me and they visited me when I was in [prison]. They gave me support and they're glad that I'm home, 'cause now I'm doing things. When I was in there, everyone says it's like, 'I wish I was out there to help my family.' So now, I make

it a point to do it. Just yesterday, I got some dowels to fix some windows for my great aunt and my grandmother's sister, and I'm always going out trying to help the community... Like once a month, I'll pick up trash in my neighborhood just to help with like just random things that I would have done if I'd had the chance before.

Participant AE described how he wants to support the guys coming out of prison, just like he felt supported by the PUP student community:

One of the things I found awesome was that a lot of the guys at SQ were very embracing. Just as it happened with me, I pay it forward. I have been able to pick up friends who have finished with prison, taken them to breakfast, and taken them to their parole officer. You know, do those kinds of things. It has been such a gift.

And Participant AZ spoke of how PUP had changed him in fundamental ways. The college program gave him a deep passion for education. But it also gave him a chance to learn much more:

[PUP] fostered this love in my heart for education, and that's really important. It became this level of intensity for educating, edifying myself. It was something that I couldn't just put it back. You know that old expression, 'When the genie is out of the bottle, you can't put that sucker back in'? And you could not contain that. So when I got out I was like, I have to, I was addicted to it; I have to get back into education...

And that education was that you get to see altruism for what it truly is, and you see it upfront. You see these people—and we used to comment on it inside—you see these people who teach during the day and some of them are even adjunct professors. So, I didn't know what an adjunct was at the time, but trust me: once I started getting into education out here, looking at possible careers in education, I was like 'Really? that's what you pay adjuncts?' [Laughs]. So some of them were adjunct, there weren't getting paid much to begin with but I was looking at their ability to give back, you know, that level of altruism that I saw in them, coming into the prison everyday or twice a week, whatever the issue was. On their own time, having to go through the checkpoints—we used to call them Checkpoint Charlie—where they look at your ID and getting harassed by guards, and dealing with the administration... and staying two to three hours with a bunch of inmates who a lot of times were, even sometimes, not a lot of times, sometimes even unruly or ungrateful or whatever and putting in all of that effort, and then coming back again the next day. To me, I was like, 'Wow.'

So not only did it foster a love for education, but it fostered, I mean, it gave me, it was a manifestation in front on me of what altruism truly is. So, me having experiences, it completely changed my life... I could have gotten a better job in the factory, paying a lot more, but I got the job as the GED instructor, which didn't pay much but it allowed me to give back when I got out of prison. Starting up my own nonprofit...where I teach prisoners: that altruism. That's a direct result of what I saw and what I garnered from [PUP]. That would never have happened, neither the



GED class nor the nonprofit, giving back, teaching the prisoners, that would not have happened had this not manifested itself in front of me. I had the living example of that. And that, I think... the most lasting legacy of [PUP] on my individual life would be that I got to see a real-life example of human kindness and altruism.

## VII. Conclusion

Recent years have seen a precipitous increase in attention to the prison system among policymakers, stakeholders, and ordinary citizens. There is broad consensus that policy reform must address and reverse long-term trends—including the manifold increase in the prison population in recent decades, and the persistently poor economic and social outcomes for former prisoners. Can higher education in the liberal arts be a viable programmatic tool for improving the lives of people are incarcerated? Our results certainly suggest that they can.

At its core, PUP provides its students with a chance to change their lives and change their futures. Participant AJ put it simply, saying: “It saved me. I mean, the way you guys do everything. The study hall, the classes, the orientation, the guest speakers, I just I don’t know. The best, it just changed my life. I don’t know where I would be without the education that I got at PUP.”

As Participant AL told us:

The college gives inmates hope, where if you're at a different prison it's not much hope. It's like, 'I wanna get out and I'm going to be pretty much the same as I was before I went in.' But if you go to PUP and you come out with an Associates of Arts degree, you feel a little more confident. And I think that confidence transcends the prison.

And in the words of Participant AZ:

One of [the benefits of PUP] was that it fostered this love, in my heart, for education and that’s really important. It became this level of intensity for educating, edifying myself. It was something that I couldn’t just put it back, you know that old expression, ‘when the genie is out of the bottle, you can’t put that sucker back in’ and you could not contain that. So when I got out, I was like, I have to, I was addicted to it, I have to get back into education. I can’t let this go...I have to be in a place where I can continue my education, and that education was that you get to see altruism for what it truly is and you see it upfront.

This was echoed by Participant AJ, who said:

I had a drive. I was taking classes for which I was getting credit, and it was something that nobody could take from me. Nobody could take my education. It removed a lot of my fears. I always felt inferior because other people had an education and I didn’t. Or I had some education, but not like a lot of the other people. And so, I don’t know whether I learned it in the media or at school or at home, but I was under the impression that if I wasn’t educated, then I wasn’t worth anything. But then I realized that even some people with an education are still very consumer-oriented, materialistic, and in a lot of ways very shallow. And I realized that, as people, as I learned more from my social classes—philosophy, sociology, cultural anthropology, ethics—I realized that education is good, but more so it helped me think for myself, and that I didn’t need other people to determine my self-worth....

Everything that I learned, it's just that, in prison and outside of prison, the way [PUP staff and other students] rubbed off on me, changed me. I always use the word 'baptism,' because I believe the word baptism isn't just something Catholic or Protestant; it's being baptized with the spirit. At PUP I was baptized with the spirit of education. By being around [people in PUP] most of my day, as much as I could. And it wasn't just classes. We had a lot of guest speakers, and I always signed up....We had so many important politicians spend time with us, come in our classrooms, ask us questions. So it transforms you. It changes you. You're no longer the same person, and so those people's values become your values and you line up with them. And you're not doing it blindly! You're realizing, if you use your critical thinking it makes sense. It was just resonating with the values I had already learned as a child. It was like finding myself again in, of all places, prison.

Participant AV and others talked about the difficult task of convincing some people that prison college was beneficial, particularly when higher education remained unattainable for people who were not in prison. But seeing education as a scarce commodity was the wrong way to see it, argued Participant AV:

A lot of people, when they hear there is a college program, they say, 'I can't even send my children to college.' And I learned this from Jody, the argument that you're making is that *everyone* should have equal access to education. I think the argument with education is a philosophical one. It's: 'Who are we as a society?' And we do it because it will directly benefit someone to get a job. But it is the right thing to do.