

TPEP Newsletter

Trinity's Prison Education Project. May 2024



Professors Sheila Fisher and Joe Lea co-teaching a TPEP class at Hartford Correctional Center, Fall 2023

A YEAR OF GROWTH

TPEP has grown rapidly this past year! For 12 years, we have offered college classes at York Correctional Institution, the state's only prison for women. Last fall, we expanded to Hartford Correctional Center (HCC), the city jail. Most people in jail have not been convicted of a crime, but they often spend months and even years in detention. We are proud to be the first college-in-jail program in Connecticut, and we hope to help other colleges to start similar initiatives.

At HCC and York, TPEP creates pathways to education that support incarcerated people and help them succeed after release. Most incarcerated people have not had access to high-quality education. In the past decades, the US has come to rely heavily on prisons and jails to "solve" social problems, at the expense of investments in public goods like education. Our work is a small step in reversing this punitive trend. We could not do this work without the dedicated faculty members, students, and supporters who taught classes, offered one-on-one tutoring, and proctored weekly study hall. You can read more about their contributions in this newsletter.

With gratitude,

Joe Lea and Anna Terwiel, TPEP Co-Directors

"Even though I'm in jail, it didn't feel like it once I set foot into the classroom."

TPEP Student at York CI,
Spring 2024

2023-2024 at a glance

5 classes taught by 9
Trinity faculty
members

44 incarcerated
students enrolled

5 campus students
trained as TPEP Writing
Associates

68 writing tutoring
appointments
completed

2 information sessions
held at HCC by CT
State Community
College - Capital

Year-round study halls
led by 4 facilitators

TEACHING AT YORK CI: INTERVIEW WITH TPEP FACULTY MEMBERS

In Spring 2024, Shaznene Hussain, Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science, and Glenn Falk, Professor of the Practice in Public Policy and Law, co-taught a course at York Correctional Institution called “Gender, Law and Empire.”

Q. What led you to teach at York?

Shaz: Prior to teaching at Trinity College, I had worked with formerly incarcerated people in Connecticut to advocate for rights to housing. Given this experience and my interests in decolonial and feminist approaches to incarceration, I became interested in teaching at York CI when I heard about the Trinity Prison Education Program.

Glenn: I was a legal aid lawyer before I became a college professor. I represented many women who were incarcerated at York. On top of the loss of their liberty, people should not be further punished by depriving them of other things such as their dignity and the right to an education.

Q. What were the highlights of your teaching at York?

Shaz: A number of moments come to mind. I appreciated the opportunity to meet and get to know the students. Even though many of the topics we covered, such as displacement of indigenous communities, gendered violence, and restorative justice, were difficult to talk about at times, I loved the moments in class when students were able to combine their critical thinking skills and a sharp sense of humor to engage with the course materials. I also enjoyed working with [longtime TPEP study hall facilitators] Jackie and Peg; hearing their perspectives and their work with students during study hall helped to create a great classroom environment. Working with Glenn

was also a highlight for me. I learned a lot from the classes he facilitated; it was wonderful to work with someone so thoughtful and generous. Our collective reading of the play he assigned was a lot of fun and I think everyone enjoyed it.

Glenn: Among other readings such as articles and court opinions, we assigned a play called *Sovereignty*. It was written by Mary Kathryn Nagle, a member of the Cherokee Nation and an attorney. Going back and forth between the past and the present, the play describes how Indigenous women have long been subject to sexual assault and an inability to obtain justice because of jurisdictional and other obstacles. For me, a highlight of the course was having the students do a reading of the entire play together. They really got into their roles.

Another highlight for me was co-teaching with Shaz. It is rare we get a chance to observe another professor. Shaz was great. I learned so much from her, as did the students.

TESTIMONIALS FROM TPEP STUDENTS

“Thank you for your professionalism and the load of information you stuffed into my brain. It was a wealth of history and important factual evidence.”

TPEP Student at York CI, Spring 2024

“[This course] gave me new ideas and a new outlook on life in general.”

TPEP Student at HCC, Spring 2024

“My favorite part was...having the option of free writing and being able to apply it to my everyday choices and circumstances.”

TPEP Student at HCC, Fall 2023

FROM TRINITY TO JAIL AND BACK: REFLECTIONS FROM TPEP WRITING ASSOCIATES

Professor James Truman joined forces with TPEP to bring Trinity's Writing Center to Hartford Correctional Center. Trinity students on our Hartford campus have access to one-on-one writing tutoring from "Writing Associates," Trinity students who have been selected and trained to work with their peers. In the spring of 2024, Prof. Truman, who is Assistant Director of Trinity's Writing Center, trained and supervised five Writing Associates to offer similar one-on-one tutoring at HCC.



From left to right: Prof. James Truman and TPEP Writing Associates Jake ('25), Molly ('24), Caitlin ('26), Beatrice ('26), in front of HCC. Not pictured: Theodora ('26)

Molly ('24): Trinity College students on our Hartford Campus have access to the Writing Center. Trinity College students at Hartford Correctional Center should also have access to the Writing Center. I was interested in tutoring at TPEP to do exactly this: **to be able to provide all of Trinity's services to all of Trinity's students.** Being able to provide that service to all of Trinity's students has been an amazing experience.

Theodora ('26): The moment I began working in the Writing Center as a tutor, I recognized

the potential there is for community engagement. For me, working with our community is not an additional, but an inherent part of the Writing Center's mission. Also, I find TPEP to be a valuable program for our community, considering the impact education can have on incarcerated individuals. Overall, my experience working as a writing tutor for TPEP has been amazing! It has given a whole new meaning to my work as a tutor and changed the way I view writing. **With each session, I find myself getting a deeper understanding of what it truly means when people say "writing is empowering."**

Caitlin ('26): Extending my work as a tutor at Trinity's on-campus Writing Center to the Hartford Correctional Center has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my sophomore year. Prior to participating in TPEP, I was already very interested in becoming involved in prison education programs because of my academic work in public policy and community action. After semesters of reading about the prison industrial complex and mass incarceration, I was frustrated by having repeated conversations about the injustices of the U.S. carceral system while feeling powerless to do anything to disrupt that system.

While beginning this work and entering the jail was undeniably intimidating at first, **I have seen so much positive development between myself, my fellow tutors, and the students** in the past months since we started this program.

In our first study hall sessions in February, many students chose not to have Writing Center sessions, and the sessions we did have were certainly not seamless. However, as we near the end of the semester, I have built a rapport with a number of the students, and we have fulfilling Writing Center sessions each week, which has allowed us to work long-term on improving their writing and developing who they are as students. It has taken time to build trust, and we continue to build upon it every week. In one of our first week at HCC, one of

the students who I now have weekly sessions with asked that we treat him like we would any Trinity student at the on-campus Writing Center. [...] **Demonstrating to the students that we were not there out of pity or obligation but to genuinely help them grow as writers was an incredibly important step in building trust.** [...]

Beatrice ('26): During my freshman and sophomore years, I took various courses that focused on the issue of mass incarceration. **Tutoring at HCC provided me the opportunity to employ and apply what I learned in those courses.** Further, I got the chance to hear really amazing ideas from individuals who have different life experiences with me and I was always impressed by the great writings that I've seen.

Jake ('25): My focus both academically and professionally is on racialized mass incarceration and policing in the United States, so the ability to simultaneously tutor and learn from students taking Trinity courses at the Hartford Correctional Center (HCC) was immediately exciting. **I see education as a form of empowerment and liberation,** and to be able to work with students in the HCC felt like a great way to use my skill set to support people who have been entrapped in the criminal legal system.

This has been an amazing opportunity to both support people who have been severely disadvantaged in being part of an academic community while also helping, in some small way, to combat the 'social death' and perpetuation of cycles of economic deprivation imposed by incarceration through working with students to earn valuable college credits.

Additionally, TPEP has provided an amazing opportunity to connect with the Hartford community and use Trinity's resources to give back to the Hartford residents who do not always have access to the wealth and privilege concentrated at the college. The experience has thus far been amazing. **Getting to engage with the perspectives, ideas, and works of students is inspiring and fascinating.** Being able to tutor and

think through assignments with these creative, intelligent students is truly a privilege that has opened my mind and deepened my understanding of the world. A few times students have proudly told me that they received an A grade after working with me; and there's no better feeling than to have helped someone achieve their non-traditional academic goals and, even more importantly, embolden their academic curiosity.



From left to right: Prof. James Truman, Molly ('24), Beatrice ('26), Caitlin ('26), Theodora ('26), Jake ('25).

TUTORING FROM TPEP STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Students at HCC shared the following observations about the writing tutoring that they received from the TPEP Writing Associates:

"It is extremely helpful to have insight on our papers from those who are current students"

"Just learning from other opinions gave me the chance to see from another person perspective"

"I worked with several different tutors, each possessing a different perspective and skillset which was very beneficial"

TEACHING AT THE HARTFORD JAIL: REFLECTIONS FROM PROF. ANDREW CONROE

In Spring 2024, Andrew Conroe, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology, co-taught a course at Hartford Correctional Center called “Thinking and Writing Culture” with Erin Frymire, Lecturer in the Allan K. Smith Center for Writing and Rhetoric.

Teaching a class at the Hartford Correctional Center with TPEP was an exciting and eye-opening experience. What initially seemed to be the limitations of teaching at a correctional center—namely, the absence of technology in the classroom—ended up in some ways positively affecting the dynamics of the class. **The direct, unmediated interactions pushed us to engage more closely with the texts, and to**

devote more time to class discussion.

And we had quite the discussions! I always try to show how the anthropological concepts I teach are relevant to the students’ own lives and experiences, but these students outpaced me in taking our discussions in interesting and meaningful directions. At their initiative, material that initially seemed far-removed launched discussions of topics such as prison labor, code switching in a correctional facility, and the tacit cultural practices that develop among incarcerated individuals.

It was an honor teaching in the TPEP program, and I hope it continues well into the future!



Prof. Andrew Conroe

COMING UP: 2024-2025

We look forward to offering four more classes at HCC: two in fall semester, and two in spring. We will continue to work with TPEP Writing Associates to provide tutoring. In the spring of 2025, we will offer one seminar at York in the spring of 2025.

Course topics will include **science fiction** and **Hip Hop**, and faculty members will include Prof. Seth Markle (History and International Studies), Prof. James Truman (Writing and Rhetoric), Prof. Erin Frymire (Writing and Rhetoric), Prof. Glenn Falk (Public Policy and Law), Prof. Emerita Leslie Farlow (Theater and Dance), and Prof. Shaznene Hussain (Political Science / American Studies).

If you are interested in teaching with TPEP or facilitating study hall, or have other ideas to contribute, please reach out to co-directors Joe Lea or Anna Terwiel (contact information on next page).

2023-2024 in detail

HARTFORD CORRECTIONAL CENTER

Fall 2023

“Friends and Enemies”

Prof. Josh King (Language and Culture Studies) and Anna Terwiel (Political Science)
Study hall: Joe Lea

“Postcolonialism in Fiction”

Prof. Sheila Fisher (English) and Joseph Lea (Human Rights)
Study hall: James Truman

Spring 2024

“How Writing Works”

Prof. James Truman (English)
Study hall: James Truman

“Thinking and Writing Culture”

Prof. Andrew Conroe (Anthropology) and Erin Frymire (Writing and Rhetoric)
Study hall: James Truman

York Correctional Institution

Spring 2024

“Gender, Law, and Empire”

Prof. Glenn Falk (Public Policy and Law) and Shaznene Hussain (Political Science)
Study hall: Peg Meehan and Jacqueline Stack

In addition, TPEP would like to thank Sonia Cardenas, Dean of Faculty at Trinity College, and Ben Carbonetti, Director of Trinity’s Human Rights Program, for their support of TPEP. We also thank Teresita Romero for her administrative assistance.

DATA ON MASS INCARCERATION

These two graphs, taken from the *Prison Policy Initiative* and the *Sentencing Project*, respectively, show the US prison boom, which affects people without a college degree most intensely. Poor people of color are incarcerated at the highest rates.

From high school to college graduate General public & formerly incarcerated

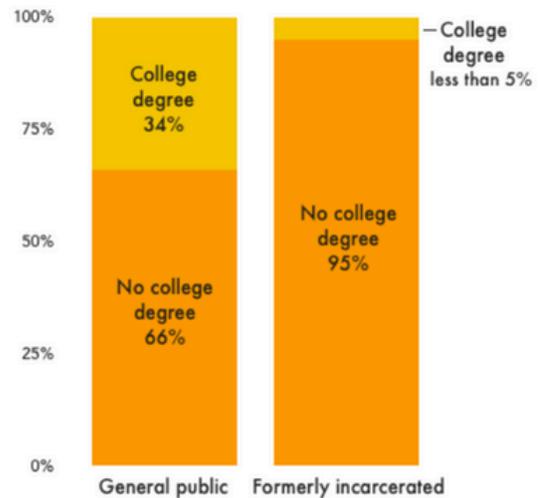
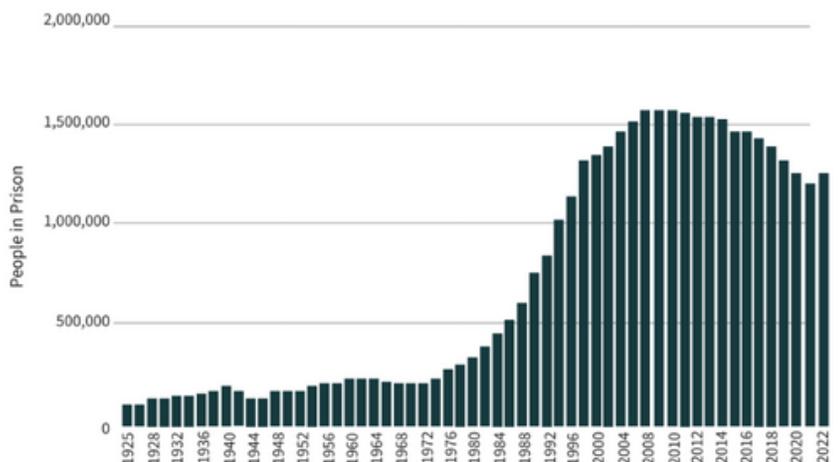


Figure 4. Percentage of people 25 or older with a high school diploma or GED who also attained a Bachelor's degree or higher. For the data, see the [appendix](#).

Figure 1. U.S. State and Federal Prison Population, 1925-2022



To learn more about TPEP, please visit our website at <https://www.trincoll.edu/human-rights/trinity-prison-education-project/> or reach out to TPEP Co-Directors at joseph.lea@trincoll.edu or anna.terwiel@trincoll.edu.