



UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Omaha | Lincoln

FROM PRISON TO COLLEGE

HARNESSING THE POWER OF EDUCATION TO CHANGE LIVES

“I **LOVE** BEING IN COLLEGE.
IT GIVES ME A SENSE OF **PURPOSE**
AND ACCOMPLISHMENT.”

— ANONYMOUS, OCC STUDENT





AT UNO, EDUCATION OFFERS A NEW PATH FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

Professor Peggy Jones, associate professor of Black Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, leads a class on creative writing at the Omaha Correctional Center, while Klint Bitter listens intently. Photo credit: Omaha World-Herald.

When Minds are Opened, the Walls Fade Away



In this classroom, the students are attentive and respectful, and the instructor is engaged. She challenges their minds and inspires them to share their stories. The students write autobiographical essays and read complex literature. It's a tough course. But that's what's expected at the university level. These are University of Nebraska classes provided by elite faculty and instructors.

The surroundings — the bars over the windows, the sound of clanging gates and jostling keys — all fade as each student listens to the others read. Here, what matters is the work. This is a classroom where people are learning to think critically and open their minds to higher education. The surroundings don't matter. They disappear, even if it's just for a moment.

“THE DEGREE OF
CIVILIZATION IN A
SOCIETY CAN BE JUDGED BY
ENTERING ITS **PRISONS.**”

— FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY



PREPARING FOR LIFE AFTER PRISON

The U.S. has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world — 1 in 100 American adults is currently behind bars. One of the major drivers is the significant number of people who return to prison after being released. This is due in large part to the numerous barriers formerly incarcerated individuals face to rejoining their communities successfully. One of the most cumbersome is finding a job. The majority of incarcerated people are uneducated — many never finished high school, and very few attended college. That places a significant hurdle on their search for employment, which is already made more difficult when they disclose their record to employers.

Approximately 95% of those currently in prison will eventually reenter society. In Nebraska, this equates to nearly 2,000 individuals released from prison each year. The effect of reentry on Nebraska communities can be positive or negative depending on what occurs in prison. Research consistently shows correctional programming, especially prison-based higher education, reduces the likelihood of reoffending and helps individuals find employment upon release. Research also shows education has intergenerational impacts, improving the future outcomes of more than **not only** just those currently in prison, but also their children.

THE POWER OF EDUCATION TO TRANSFORM TRAJECTORIES

About 90% of jobs in the fastest-growing fields require at least some postsecondary education. So offering incarcerated people a chance to complete college-level classes while in prison provides a head start to completing



their degrees upon release and finding good-paying jobs that empower them to become productive members of society. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice estimates that every \$1 spent educating an incarcerated individual saves \$5 long term due to lower recidivism rates.

The University of Nebraska believes every student, no matter how nontraditional, deserves the opportunity to access a world-class education that has the power to change the course of their lives.

With this in mind and empowered by a generous private gift, NU recently began a pilot project offering university-level classes to incarcerated individuals at the Omaha Correctional Center, expanding soon after to the Lincoln Correctional Center. What has resulted is an exciting and powerful program that has already changed numerous lives.

46%

LOWER RECIDIVISM RATES AMONG PRISONERS WHO ENROLL IN COLLEGE COURSES DURING THEIR INCARCERATION

- Although the nation's prison population has grown exponentially in the last four decades, states are spending less on prison education programs now than in 1982, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

However, more support is needed to continue and expand this transformative work. With your investment, more people can be reached, more lives changed and more communities improved across Nebraska.



HELPING INCARCERATED PEOPLE GET ON THE RIGHT TRACK

NU first began delivering higher education inside the prison walls in 2017. The pilot program began with a universitywide team, which partnered with the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services to provide courses at two minimum-security prisons where most incarcerated individuals are serving relatively short sentences.

Created through the generosity of a private gift, the primary purpose of the program is to offer NU courses, taught by NU professors or adjunct instructors who offer the same level of excellence they would to any student, to incarcerated people at the Omaha Correctional Center and Lincoln Correctional Center. By engaging the students in new knowledge, the respectful exchange of ideas and self-achievement, the classes provide an opportunity for incarcerated people to transform their lives and earn college credit while also offering NU instructors a distinct opportunity to teach and learn from a unique and diverse population.

The program has received a tremendously positive response, and the students are engaged, motivated and highly appreciative of the opportunity. In three short years, it has achieved encouraging results:



20 courses have been taught to 180 students since the program's inception.

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- The course completion rate is 76% (Omaha) and 79% (Lincoln), and the average GPA range is 3.30 to 4.00.
- 77% of students surveyed at the Omaha Correctional Center in 2018 said they *definitely* want to continue their studies after release, while the remaining 23% said they *probably* would continue.

This program is achieving its goal of using education to enhance incarcerated students' general knowledge of the world, improve their self-worth and increase their likelihood of choosing education and work over criminal activities upon release. Now NU is seeking private support to build capacity within the program and allow it to get more people across Nebraska on the right track.

Rodney Freeman listens to Professor Jones during class.
Photo credit: Omaha World-Herald.

“THESE ARE COLLEGE-LEVEL CLASSES, NOT REMEDIAL MATH OR ENGLISH. PASSING ONE OF THESE CLASSES IS AN ACCOMPLISHMENT THAT BEGINS A RIPPLE EFFECT.”

— ANONYMOUS, OCC STUDENT



WORKING TOWARD A STRONGER FUTURE FOR ALL

Numerous faculty and staff at NU have contributed hours of their time, expertise and — at times — personal treasure to build this project from the ground up. Most have done so without compensation; they have simply assumed the duties in addition to their existing workload. This kind of commitment is what makes NU faculty and staff such treasured resources and speaks to their passion for the program. However, it is an unsustainable model. In order to realize the potential of the program to its fullest, investments in human capital, operations and student support are needed.

A gift to support the program will help create staff positions and graduate assistantships to oversee it and develop a long-term, sustainable model. It will also help to cover the tuition costs for each class by supporting the teaching faculty and funding learning materials, such as class supplies and textbooks. The average class costs \$13,000 and enrolls between 10 and 15 students.



THE INFLUENCE THAT THE UNO CLASSES HAVE ON MY LIFE IS HUGE. AND WHEN I GET OUT I WISH TO GO THERE AND BE THE **FIRST IN MY FAMILY** TO EARN A BACHELOR'S. I THANK UNO AND THE DONORS FOR THEIR **GRACIOUSNESS.**"

— ANONYMOUS, OCC STUDENT

Your gift will help the university expand offerings to students enrolled in the program and strengthen learning opportunities. It will promote self-efficacy and confidence and share best practices at the local, state and national level. By helping to reduce recidivism rates, your gift will also help save Nebraska millions of dollars each year in costs to manage overcrowded prisons across the state. In addition, it will help Nebraska fulfill urgent workforce needs, as the demand for skilled labor continues to outweigh supply in numerous industries in the state.

But, of course, your gift will do much more than that. By investing in people who have made mistakes, some grievous, you are offering them a second chance. You are believing in them and their potential to be a positive impact on the people closest to them and the world around them. And that is powerful — because you may be the first.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.



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The University of Nebraska Foundation grows relationships and resources that enable the University of Nebraska to change lives and save lives.



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