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HOW CAN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE REENTRY PROGRAMS BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO JUSTICE-SYSTEM IMPACTED STUDENTS?

Gail Ann Rulloda

***Supporting Justice-
System Impacted
Students***

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BIOGRAPHY



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Gail Rulloda is a loving wife, mother of two beautiful kids, and a life-long learner of the world. Gail has found joy working, co-learning, co-creating with students in the early intervention, K-12, and higher education settings. She has found great inspiration, hope, and exhilaration being in community with Aspiring Radical Leaders institute family. She loves to learn through experiences, courageous conversations, and through food!

She believes this work of social justice and equity needs to be continued, not just within the institutions she works for, but outside of it in her home, in her relationships, her kids, and with people she meets. She is grounded in love and often goes back to it when she is going through difficult times. Gail seeks to resist perpetuating trauma and hurt through healing, learning, and finding joy.


There is an opportunity to create and have meaningful support programs for justice-system impacted students within the California Community College system. Programs are growing within the CCC system and the Rising Scholars Network is providing the financial support that the students deserve. I have two experiences and roles that inform this writing. The first one is having the honor of teaching a class to students who are justice-system involved. This means I teach within a correctional facility such as county jail and/or state prison. I also get to serve justice-system impacted students if students identify as having a disability through the Disability Support Programs & Services (DSPS). Students often disclose disabilities that result from the carceral system, such as physical disabilities (hurt and damaged legs due to the hard, concrete floors in the prisons or jail) or mental health disabilities (such as anxiety and depression).

It is important to share that I am neither justice-system impacted nor do I have family members or close friends that hold that identity. I am here to share what I've learned from different institutions, peers, and the Rising Scholars Network. Most importantly, I am here to share my experiences and what students have shared with me as being situated in an institution with a program for justice-system impacted students in place.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift in education has been to learn how to do school in an online setting. For some students who are justice-system involved, they did not have that opportunity. Many have had to pivot to **correspondence work** to complete classes at their community

Terms I have learned:

- ***Justice-system involved refers to students who are currently incarcerated***
- ***Justice-system impacted refers to students are formerly incarcerated***
- ***Former incarceration can include simple arrest with no conviction, juvenile and/or women's detention, city and/or county jail, state and/or federal prison, military or immigrant detention.***



college. Correspondence is when students complete their courses through U.S. mail. The hardest part about this is the turnaround time it takes for a student's work to reach the instructor, grade it, and mail it back to the student. Sometimes a student wouldn't be able to mail it to the instructor in a timely manner because of the lockdowns within the corrections facilities due to COVID-19.

This is a statement I received from one of the students in my course in one of the assignments he turned in to me.

“Professor Gail,

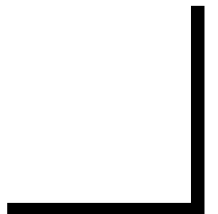
I hope it's okay that I won't be turning in the optional final. I am getting released and won't be able to write it! I appreciate you teaching this course! Since I'm going back to where I'll be living, I'll be attending a community college in Cupertino. I heard about their auto program and transferring to San Jose State. Since you know it, can you tell me who to go to for help?”

When the student sent me this in the communication sheet attached to the assignment, I frantically looked to see if the local school had a reentry program. When I searched the website, I didn't see anything. I thought, *“Well maybe I just didn't know how to navigate the website.”* Then, I googled keywords because, in many situations, googling keywords is a lot faster than navigating an institution's website. *Nothing.* My heart sank. I sought advice from a trusted colleague involved in the Rising Scholars Network, a network committed to serving incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students by providing degree-granting programs in

correctional facilities and on-campus support for students who have experienced the criminal justice system.

Again, *nothing*. I reached out to the Rising Scholars to check again, hoping I made a mistake. I was met with the sorrowful answer of, “I’m sorry, it doesn’t look like they have anything there for formerly incarcerated students.” There was nothing I could do to help that student connect with great folx within a reentry program that he could trust. I thought to myself, “Why doesn’t a reentry program exist here?”

“THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE AND HAVE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS FOR JUSTICE-SYSTEM IMPACTED STUDENTS WITHIN THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM BECAUSE AS IT STANDS ONLY ABOUT HALF OF THEM EXIST.”



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

I am sure more students have gone through this scenario. According to the Corrections to College California report (2018), there are approximately 700,000 Californians estimated to be in prison, in jail, or under criminal justice supervision on any given day. At least 95 percent of people in prison will eventually be paroled, and their ability to access and complete some form of a college degree or credential will increase their chances of overcoming post-incarceration barriers (Hughes & Wilson, 2020; Oakford, et. al., 2019). *California has over 50,000 systems-involved individuals released from prison each year* and transitioning back into society with logistical, material, emotional, and social obstacles that continue to discriminate, exclude and punish them (Prisoner Reentry Network, 2020). The academic gaps reveal systemic barriers preventing many students from accessing a college education and from completing degrees. In a focus group by The Campaign for College Opportunity (2021), it was found that inconsistent services, messages, and policies work against the success of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals working hard to improve their lives and contribute to the state.

CENTERING STUDENTS' VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES

In my role within Disability Support Programs and Services (DSPS) – while getting to know justice-system impacted students – they typically share stories of punitive school practices

placed upon them due to their identity of having a disability. Too many times, students with disabilities are punished and isolated because they have this identity. I have worked with students labeled as 'difficult,' when in reality, they were overstimulated by blinking

lights in the classroom and had a hard time focusing on the lecture. I have met with students kicked out of the classroom because they were labeled as ‘disruptive’ from asking ‘too many’ questions from an instructor who only taught by speaking and not providing visuals to their lecture. The list goes on.

I believe in disability justice and defining disability with the social model in which we recognize the need to change the environment and remove barriers rather than the traditional medical model of disability in which we blame the person as being ‘the problem’ or someone we need to ‘fix.’

COMMUNITY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY FOR JUSTICE- SYSTEM IMPACTED STUDENTS

Here is my call to the California Community College system in creating a program for justice system involved students. ***Please approach it with a Community Responsive Pedagogy*** (Tintiango-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). It is a pedagogy that is rooted in culturally responsive pedagogy. Shifting from a

culturally relevant pedagogy to a community responsive pedagogy not only considers a students’ cultural background and experiences, but it also centralizes a *community’s context in education*. When creating a program for formerly incarcerated students, what may work for an institution in one part of the state may not necessarily work for another institution in another area.

Community Responsive Pedagogy		
Relationships	Relevance	Responsibility

Relationships

Relationships are vital to health and wellbeing. Relationships with justice-system impacted students can start when they transition from being justice system involved to justice system impacted and when they return to the community. There are different ways to think of building relationships around creating an academic program for justice-system impacted students.

Fostering relationships...	Beginning Stage (needs a program in place)	Established Stage (already have a program)
Between Justice-System Impacted Students	<p>Create a student club. Ask students if they would like to connect with others who have a shared experience. Clubs allows for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students to engage in a safe space • Students' voices to be heard • Stipends every semester so students can organize an event • A space to organize and fundraise • Bring formality and a creative way to have a stepping stone to more support 	<p>Create a mentorship program</p> <p>Connect students as they transition from incarceration to the community</p> <p>Student mentors can be those who are comfortable navigating the institution</p> <p>Mentors can connect students with other programs and services on campus such as EOPS, Tutoring, Financial Aid, and with Learning Communities</p>
With Institution faculty instructors and support staff	<p>Find a designated space where students can share similar stories</p> <p>Identify allies and co-conspirators on campus that support serving justice- system impacted students</p> <p>Identify staff in Admissions & Records to help (CCC) application</p> <p>Identify staff in Financial Aid who can assist with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)</p> <p>Identify instructors in academic spaces such as math, English, and Career Technical Education (CTE) courses with a humanizing approach and teaching style</p> <p>Identify academic counselors to help with the creation of education plans with a holistic approach</p>	<p>Create an Advisory Council otry program coordinator or director</p> <p>Identify people in important programs such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions and Records • Financial Aid • Basic Needs Center • Strategic Initiatives and Planning • Student Services • Distance Education • Academic Affairs <p>Hire formerly incarcerated and justice-system impacted Staff, Instructors, and Administrators</p> <p>Create policies and procedures in place so that employment barriers are eliminated</p> <p>Invite and encourage students to participate in committees such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring Committees • Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee • Curriculum Committee • Facilities Committee • Budget & Planning Committee
With Community Members	<p>Connect with organizations in the community to establish a partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Probation Department • County Youth Services Center • County Office of Education • County Behavioral Health and Rehabilitation Services 	<p>Connect students with organizations</p> <p>Appoint a specific contact that students can go to</p> <p>Consider establishing a dual enrollment relationship with community partners to establish a relationship and to make transition out of incarceration a lot smoother</p>

Relevance

This area addresses developing curriculum and pedagogy that center students' daily lives. This shouldn't be confused with multiculturalism. Center the justice-system impacted *student's* lives – this means their communities, their families, and their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic histories. When creating a curriculum or program for justice-system impacted students, please ask yourself as an institution to self-reflect on some questions. Relevance is creating processes where students actually see themselves in the institutions. Let's talk about their pain and struggle with celebrating their accomplishments.

Relevance to System Impacted Students	Self-Reflection Questions		Opportunities for Institutions	
<p>Develop rigorous curriculum and pedagogy that connects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To students' daily lives • Their communities • Their families • Their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic histories • Space for both instructors and students to explore their cultural past • Restore power to cultures that have been marginalized or silenced 	<p>Can students safely share their experience of being formerly incarcerated?</p> <p>Can justice-system impacted students directly apply what they are learning in their lives and community?</p> <p>Do they see themselves in the curriculum presented?</p> <p>Are programs for Degrees (Associate & Transfer) and Career Technical Education relevant to justice-system impacted students?</p> <p>Will they be able to identify a time when their experience was talked about in the classroom?</p>	<p>Are resources offered useful to them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binders and note books vs laundry baskets and detergent • Book vouchers vs priority registration • Food vouchers vs kits from Basic Needs center to cook own food <p>Do justice-system impacted students see themselves in the people that serve them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors • Tutors • Staff • Instructors • Directors, Deans, and other Administrative roles <p>Does this aid to eliminate the stigma of incarceration?</p>	<p>Create curriculum that reflects the diverse identities of justice-system impacted students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books that centers Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color (BIPOC) • Talk about family dynamics that are 'out of the norm' • Multigenerational households • LGBTQIA+ family members • Family members with disabilities • Dual income households where both parents have to work at least one job • Ethnic Studies courses that are robust and gives options to students 	<p>Give students the opportunity to complete surveys and be interviewed about the resources they have</p> <p>Reflect on whether surveys are useful or not</p> <p>Give students a chance for them to see themselves in reports such as the Student Equity Plan in the Management Information System (MIS) Report</p>

Responsibility

Responsibility is understanding and responding to the wide range of needs (*social and academic*) of justice-system impacted students that we serve and serve with. What does wellness look like for *them*? What does *success* look like for *them*?

Responsibility is a Commitment to	Self-Reflection Questions		Opportunities for Institutions	
<p>Healing a student's wounds in the classroom, institution, and community</p> <p>Understanding and responding to the wide range of needs</p> <p>Prioritizing wellness for justice-system impacted students</p> <p>Impacting a student's capacity to be at their best</p> <p>Acknowledging and leveraging student strengths</p> <p>Creating a healthy micro-system</p> <p>Healing with students vs removing them from our institutions</p>	<p>Do students feel safe sharing their experiences?</p> <p>Do justice-system impacted students have discussions on wellness? Are they provided resources and options for mental health, academic, health, and physical health?</p> <p>Are there options of classes for students who need to care for family or who need to work?</p> <p>Are there resources to address technology needs of a student who is transitioning back to school?</p> <p>Are there opportunities for students to apply for student work or jobs on campus?</p>	<p>Are justice-system impacted students able to co-create in the classroom and within the campus through committees?</p> <p>Are students empowered to give suggestions?</p> <p>Are students confident in giving feedback?</p> <p>Do justice-system impacted students see themselves as a leader in the classroom, campus, or community?</p> <p>How do justice-system impacted students see themselves beyond the community college?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs • Transferring to a CSU or UC university 	<p>Use humane language in regard to students' experiences.</p> <p>Refer to Language Guide from Underground Scholars</p> <p>Provide a wellness center that incorporates wellness and health education</p> <p>Offer workshops or information seminars</p> <p>Provide low-cost healthcare resources such as medical care and dental care</p> <p>Provide justice-system impacted students classes with different modalities to meet their learning and personal needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person • Hybrid • Online synchronous • Asynchronous online courses 	<p>Have students lead workshops on serving justice-system impacted students</p> <p>Allow for students to present at academic senate</p> <p>Encourage students to join the student government</p> <p>Partner with justice-system impacted students for professional development</p> <p>Give students opportunities to talk about challenges that are unique to parole and probation</p> <p>Hold a celebration ceremony for justice system-impacted students for completion of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificates, Degrees, Transfers

CLOSING

As I sit here and write about this, the Rising Scholars Network is working with a budget via Senate Bill No. 129 given by the Governor for

on-going funds to support programs that will aid formerly incarcerated students. This is the first time the Rising Scholars Network is working with a budget. When we think about spending this money, let's think about how we can do it lovingly with a *Community Responsive Pedagogy* lens. bell hooks describes love as a concept and a guiding principle. Embracing a love ethic means that we utilize all the dimensions of love – “care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect and knowledge in our everyday lives (p. 39). Sustainable funding is what these programs have always deserved.

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