

CCS EXPRESS



Imprisoned Men

What does it mean to be a MAN in prison?

From Serving Our Country to Serving Time

Incarcerated Veterans and meaning in life

Prisons, PB & J, and Potential

How making the perfect sandwich can
inform on incarceration

Punishment Reimagined

Lessons to Move Forward

ASU Center for
Correctional
Solutions
Arizona State University

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Over the last year and a half we've all felt the effects of reduced social connection. We've all felt what it's like to be removed from the communities that are so critical to our identities. In the Center for Correctional Solutions, we've tried to learn from our personal experiences to inform on our mission to enhance the lives of people who live and work in our correctional system. We've pushed pause, we've reflected, and we've simplified. The potential of human beings has always been a common thread to our solutions and we've captured that in the phrase "Transformation through Human Investment." We wanted to produce an issue of The CCS Express that captures this positivity and potential, one that shows what can be accomplished when we provide opportunities to people by investing in them.



Our cover story describes an ASU graduate seminar titled Punishment Reimagined, where Madison Sutton details the power of conversation when we embrace the wisdom of lived experiences. In Imprisoned Men, Stephanie Morse shares her conversations with men in prison to show the complicated ways that expectations of masculinity can stifle personal growth. Shayla Evans writes of our innovative, peanut-butter-and-jelly-making exercise that highlights the importance of autonomy and communication in prison. Brice Terpstra makes the case that incarcerated Veterans can lead the way for finding transformation through embracing meaning in life, with Bruce Ward providing a powerful reflection on serving time after serving his country.

Zach Manuz was transformed through human investment. His conversation with Gen McKenzie shows how feeling human again was his first step toward a career of mentoring others.

Finally, I hope you will read about our PhD students on the job market. We've invested significantly in their potential over the last several years and they've returned on that investment with remarkable dedication to their work and to others. Their contributions to our community remind us of the power of social connection, and we're excited to see them thrive as part of new communities.

- Kevin Wright

The Center for Correctional Solutions

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Art
Bruce Ward





3 Imprisoned Men

Men in prison think that being a man can keep you from thriving as a person.

6 Conversations with the Community

Zach Manuz was feeling trapped in the streets and trapped in prison. Learn what freed his mind.

9 Punishment Reimagined

ASU graduate students tackle some big questions for the future with help from the community.

13 Alumni Spotlight

Sandy Moshi draws from her family's experience fleeing Iraq in the 90's to fuel her passion for helping others.

16 Prisons, PB & J, & Potential

Choices, resources, and communication are critical when a team sets out to make the perfect PB & J.

19 Student Highlight

Brice Terpstra wants you to know that Veterans in prison can help others there find meaning. Bruce Ward wants you to know that he's right.

23 Supporter Thank You

Join us to repair harm, empower people, and promote public safety.

24 Meet Our Students

Danielle, Caitlin, Stephanie, and Raven have helped build the CCS into what it is today.



*It's funny to say but it's like a **mental oppression**, you know, just the ideal of masculinity. It doesn't allow people to **be who they truly are**. It doesn't allow people to grow. It just stagnates their whole being. And I think that's the greatest joke that we've fallen victim to. Having someone tell us who we should be and then being that.*

Imprisoned Men

I sat down with five incarcerated men to find out how they defined what it means to "be a man." Their answers show masculinity expectations are part of the problem, but that they may also be a part of the solution...

By Stephanie Morse, M.S

What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a man in prison? And what do these answers mean for men trying to participate in prison programs?

These three questions guided my study conducted in the spring of 2017 that later would be accepted for publication in *Corrections: Policy, Practice and Research*. During this study I sat down with incarcerated members of the

Arizona Transformation Project (ATP) and interviewed them about their personal definitions of masculinity, their observations of masculinity in the prison setting, and their experiences with incarceration, with a particular emphasis on prison programming. Their thoughtful insights throughout the interviews painted a rich and complex picture of what it means to be a man in prison, with important implications for treatment programs.

Defining What it Means to be a Man

Traditional and stereotypical notions of masculinity prize assertiveness, courage, self-reliance, and confidence. Members of the ATP echoed many of these ideals when I asked them about their own ideas on what it means to be a

man. They defined a “real man” as being a provider, a protector, a leader, and as strong. But they also described a softer side of masculinity that isn’t always recognized. The men I interviewed felt that being compassionate, loving, selfless, and giving were also central and defining features of what it means to be a man.

*Growin’ up, you start to see, ‘Look man, **you don’t have to be a tough guy to be a man.**’ That men can actually show their emotions, and I think that **a man is just bein’ responsible.** A man is not having to be who other people are or expect you to be. **Being yourself,** you know? I do believe that a man should be strong, a man should be the leader of a household, but I don’t believe that a man should be dominant.*

These definitions are encouraging, but members of the ATP also emphasized that their definitions had changed over time. In fact, their prior definitions of what it meant to be a man reflected what a lot of masculinity research has told us before: the pursuit of the masculine ideal can be problematic and can promote harmful ideals. The men I interviewed described once believing that being a man was all about being tough, suppressing emotions, and using violence to command respect.

Defining What it Means to be a Man in Prison

ATP members shared that many men enter prison with the same exaggerated masculinity attitudes that they themselves once held. Then prison makes it worse. Outside of the prison setting, work, family, and recreational life all provide opportunities to express the prized masculinity traits in healthy ways. Inside prison, most of these opportunities are non-existent. On top of that, ATP members described a “prison code” that encourages violence and requires incarcerated men to keep to themselves and not show any weakness or vulnerability.

*You know, you grow up with the old attitude of, well, ‘Real men don’t cry. Big boys don’t cry,’ ... **it’s so untrue** ... and that’s damaging to a child, ‘cause I’ll tell ya, I’ve gone through some things in here where I wanted to cry. I lost my mother ... and we were like best friends. And, I mean, I shed a few tears but I wanted to like cry-cry, but it’s like this mental thing and **I don’t believe it’s wrong.** I never raised my children that way. But it’s like this really weird subconscious like block that I have.*

This matters—what it means to be a man in prison requires building a respected reputation through toughness and violence, suppressing emotions other than anger, and eliminating any displays of weakness or vulnerability. To complicate it all even further, members of the ATP emphasized that not all men in prison actually believe in this definition of masculinity.

Not all men endorse violence. Not all men believe that emotions are inherently weak. Not all men want to be seen as tough and assertive. But because the larger prison culture often calls for these behaviors, many men in prison struggle to reconcile the public expectations of how they should behave as men and how they privately feel they should behave as men.

Masculinity in the Prison Program Setting

The complexities of what it means to be a man in prison carry over into prison programs. Some of the men believed that participating in programs is openly perceived as weak by other men, which can act as a deterrent for participation. However, most of the impacts of masculinity on programming were indirect and extended past the initial decision to participate. Throughout the interviews, members of the ATP explained that masculinity expectations can impact how men actually engage in prison programs. The expectations that men in prison shouldn't express their emotions, discuss their pasts, or display any vulnerability was believed to prevent men from opening up to others during programs, addressing the roots of their problems, and getting help and support from others with similar experiences. The interviews revealed that these masculinity expectations can act as a barrier to meaningfully engaging in prison programs. How can we expect people to meaningfully engage with rehabilitative programs if they are punished by others for doing so?

*If a person is a drug addict, or a person's an alcoholic, and that person maybe was abused as a child, whether sexually, emotionally, or physically. For them to deal with those emotions, it's traumatizing 'cause you have to go back to that point and deal with it. But if you've been told all along you don't deal with emotions, you don't have feelings, feelings are for girls and things like that, **you got to break that barrier**, you got to, 'cause you have to go back there and say, 'Hey, this wasn't my fault, the person that hurt me was a bad person. **It didn't have to define me** though and, this is what it did to me.' And then I can **start moving forward and building upon that.***

Ultimately, this study re-affirmed a lot of what gender scholars have been saying for a while. Masculinities are complex. Different men have different notions of masculinity. Men also change, develop, and reassess their beliefs surrounding what it means to be a man over time, even during incarceration. But what this study ultimately showed, and what I hope is most evident, is that if we care about prison programs and their success, we also need to care about masculinities and the pressures they create for participants, too.

Stephanie is a doctoral student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and a research associate at the Center. Her work focuses on correctional rehabilitation and promoting resilience and positive outcomes with correctional populations.



Conversations with the Community

Each issue features a conversation between one of the CCS students and a community member. In this issue, we present a conversation with Genevieve McKenzie and Zach Manuz.

ZACH MANUZ

Zach Manuz is a trained peer support specialist for those who struggle with substance use. He was a student in the fall 2018 Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program class and, since his release from prison, has committed to using his experiences to help others who may be facing the same struggles he did.

Genevieve McKenzie is a master's student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at ASU and a graduate research assistant at the Center. Her work is inspired by the experiences she has had taking Inside-Out, hosting community art shows with art created by incarcerated artists, and working alongside people in prison.

GM: We were classmates together in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program a few years ago. What was the Inside-Out experience like for you?

ZM: Powerful. It wasn't like anything else I've ever been a part of, in prison especially. It showed me I was capable of being something in life and wasn't going to be trapped in the streets. I had a GED and no prior education so to go into that class and get A's gave me confidence that I could compete at a college level in the world. Hearing from all of the outside students, having those bonds, and feeling human once a week in that place... I needed that. You really just felt like you were with old friends there by the end of it.

You could feel the passion from everyone in the room about the outcome and what gets done. Everyone always seemed to bring their best to the table. I credit that class with a lot. It changed me, that's for sure.

GM: What do you remember most from the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program?

ZM: How quickly perceptions changed as we started to learn and how incorrect the perceptions were on both sides, especially the outside students' reflection of society's view of people in prison. The stereotypes we had of each other were nowhere close to the truth. The importance of having diversity of thought also stood out to me. You want people to disagree so that you have to actually work together to get to the best solution.

GM: What are you doing now?

ZM: I do peer support services. Peer support is the best job because I didn't feel like I was coming to work every day. I was recognized for my work in that position and then sought out another opportunity to grow since I didn't have enough time under my belt yet to become a certified counselor. I then applied for a supervisor position and got it. I learned about the importance of purpose, meaning, mastery, and autonomy from the book *Drive* in our Inside-Out class and that's exactly what this career gives me.

...having diversity of thought also stood out to me. You want people to disagree so that you have to actually work together to get to the best solution.

GM: What drew you to that career?

ZM: Inside-Out. I realized that I wanted to be a substance abuse counselor and could use all of my negative experiences in life, almost all of which came from drugs. It was by chance that I ran into someone who did peer support and referred me to where I started working. I learned it takes a while to actually be a licensed counselor but that is still my goal. I probably wouldn't have ended up in this career had it not been for Inside-Out, which proved to me that I am capable.

GM: It sounds like you have taken on a kind of mentorship role as part of your job. Have you ever had an influential mentor in your life?

ZM: Yes, Shaun Mills. That's my mentor. Mentorship is key. I credit him with a lot of everything I do, every day. My success, this house, my girl being back in my life... None of that would be possible had Shaun not been there.

GM: What made him such a great mentor?

ZM: He's just a real person. He's from the streets like I am. He reminded me of some people I used to look up to that aren't around anymore. Those kind of people look at life differently, they're very intelligent, they stand up for everyone, and they may be quiet, but they command respect wherever they go. I identified with him, that's what made it powerful to me and that's what I do now in my job when I'm mentoring others.

GM: When you're not working, what do you like to do for fun?

ZM: Play video games, going to the lake, trying new foods, going on little staycations—we just went to the Plaza Scottsdale Resort and hung out in the hot tub—going camping, and going to places I've never been like Fossil Creek and Sedona.

GM: If you could give one piece of advice to your younger self, what would it be?

ZM: Don't be afraid to ask for help.

GM: At CCS we are focused on enhancing the lives of people who live and work in correctional settings. What should the general public know about people who work in corrections and those who live in correctional settings?

ZM: That they are human too. I think that society should be more concerned with what's occurring in prison, as far as the workers and what programs are being put into place (or a lack of programs) to ensure that better people are coming home to be their neighbors.

Read more about Zach's transformation [here](#)



Zach with students after having guest lectured in a class at ASU.

Punishment Reimagined

By Madison Sutton, M.S.

*I didn't know
what to expect
from my classes
this semester...*

The pandemic meant most classrooms were quiet, students and faculty were caring for loved ones and themselves, and I was feeling nervous about how successful my learning would be in an online format.

Despite technological advancements, the structure of your average graduate-level course looks the same now as it did 50 years ago. A professor lectures for one to three hours, students are required to complete assigned readings from a textbook, and, for the lucky few, there might even be some brief class discussion. Incarceration, like the classroom, has remained stagnant for a long time, too. Great strides have been made to reduce the pain felt by those who are in jails and prisons, but the overall structure of time spent behind bars largely remains unaltered, characterized by intense boredom and strict rules without many promising impacts.

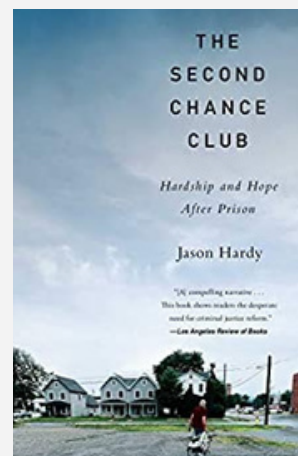
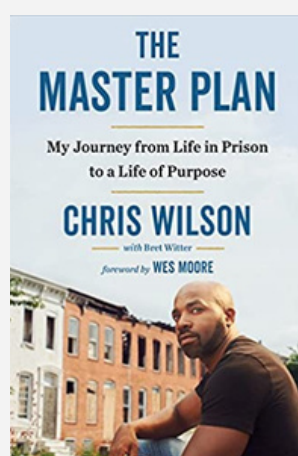
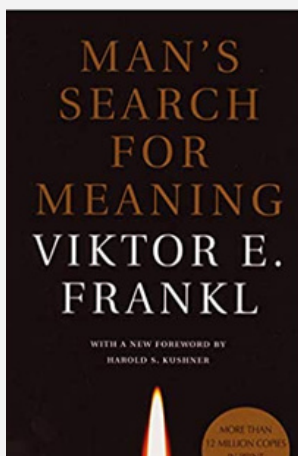
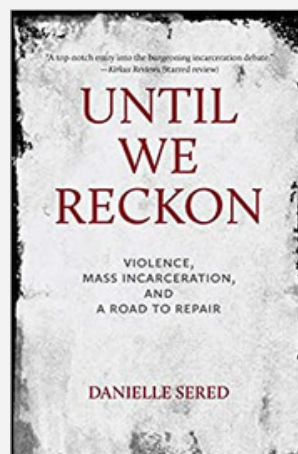
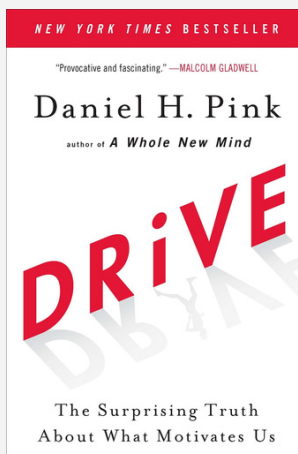
During the fall 2020 semester in Punishment Reimagined, we challenged all preconceived ideas about what a classroom and punishment should look like, in a virtual (COVID-19 dictated) capacity nonetheless. The main lessons taught in this weekly 3-hour course were conveyed in the material and the intentional structural design of the course itself. Three main messages stood out to me from the course.

Question All Assumptions

Each class began with a lecture that highlighted some of the main ideas from our assigned readings, perhaps the only part of the seminar that was like a typical course. However, these readings were not your

average textbook fillers and instead included accounts from a Holocaust survivor on finding meaning despite suffering, popular psychology books about motivation and solving problems before they occur, as well as a few traditional research articles focused on new approaches to the field of corrections. Similar to challenging the assumption that textbooks are the most beneficial sources for classroom learning, these atypical readings (pictured below) also challenged assumptions about valuable research topics.

Oftentimes, criminologists try to predict crime and they then seek to learn more about those who fulfill this prediction. One major theme of this course was the value of outliers.



What can we learn from people who might be expected to commit crime given their circumstances, but do not? Or people who experience the damaging impacts of incarceration, yet emerge with unexpectedly greater well-being? The readings in this course challenged my core assumptions about what types of information hold value, in the classroom and in the field.

Prioritize Conversation

Each week we were joined by a guest speaker who shared a new perspective. A prison warden, a parole officer, an applied anthropologist, formerly incarcerated men and women now giving back to others, and one man released two months ago after having served 25 years in prison all enriched our learning experience. Through these conversations, our guests breathed life and nuance into everything from the role of 'rock bottom' in motivating change to recent enhancements in parole and probation supervision. Learning directly from those living and working in correctional spaces emphasized the overlooked value of lived experience.

The power of conversation was further highlighted during the last third of the class: small group discussions. These discussions allowed us to dig deeper into the lessons of the course, such as the ethics of prison labor, and helped me gain confidence in the value of my own ideas.

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Courses are not often set up to value the ideas of students. But, in this course, student knowledge was just as central to our learning as that of experts in the field. These components of the course structure reflected one of the most important lessons from the material: prioritize conversations with others, especially those who will be impacted by the changes I desire to make.

Realize Opportunities in Unexpected Places

Earning a grade is a requirement for all college courses. However, sometimes this can impede learning by making students too focused on a grade rather than authentically engaging with the course material. Relying on the lessons from our readings, Punishment Reimagined found a way to use assignments to enhance engagement rather than impede it.

I had the autonomy to choose what passages from required readings to write reflections on, as well as in choosing the topic for my final products. The purpose of professional development was evident in the final product assignments of writing an op-ed and delivering an elevator pitch about my research topic. The autonomy and purpose in the design of our assignments helped me avoid intense burnout and be more engaged with the assignments, making it easier to internalize the lessons from the course.

This seminar transformed the confinements of grade requirement while teaching us to look at incarceration in a similar way. The use of incarceration as a justice solution will not go away overnight, but we can reimagine it as an opportunity to help those who need it most and who may have been overlooked early on in their lives.

Even in the most unexpected of learning environments during a global pandemic, Punishment Reimagined showed that it's possible to design a course with care to enhance learning. And, the same approaches to transforming the classroom experience apply to reimagining justice solutions for all.

If I'm being honest, I strongly considered dropping out and continuing my education once normal conditions could be resumed. But, I'm glad I didn't. I had the opportunity to see firsthand that "the flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all."

Madison earned her M.S. in Criminology and Criminal Justice. She currently works as Program Coordinator in the ASU Office of Applied Innovation helping to improve access to economic and education opportunities through application of the latest developments in policy, technology and design.



Punishment Reimagined was a graduate level seminar taught by Kevin Wright in the fall of 2020.

The American Society of Criminology named Kevin their 2020 Teaching Award winner.



Alumni Spotlight

Each issue checks in with a former student of the Center to learn what they've been up to since graduating. In this issue, we catch up with Sandy Moshi, who was a student in the Center through 2020.

SANDY MOSHI

Sandy Moshi is an ASU alumna who graduated with a degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice and a minor in Public Policy and Public Service. Sandy is a first generation Assyrian American and college graduate who currently works in Washington, D.C. as an Executive Assistant and Scheduler with the U.S. House of Representatives. In her free time, she enjoys reading and cooking random recipes YouTube recommends.

Where are you now?

Physically, Washington, D.C. I graduated from ASU in 2020 as a first-generation college student and have been working in a Congressman's office for almost two years through an impeachment and now a pandemic.

What are you working on?

A lot of my life is keeping up with an intense work schedule and consuming the news like water to stay on top of current issues. I'm involved in almost all functions of my office from administrative tasks such as managing our D.C. office's operations to researching legislation to respond to our constituents' concerns and now primarily managing the Congressman's schedule.

While fast paced and sometimes exhausting, being able to help someone communicate with their representative or resolve an issue that has impacted their life for years is an incredible experience that I think also restores people's confidence in our government. More recently, I've been focused on law school where I hope to be in the next year or two.

How has your time in the Center influenced your work?

Two words: applying research! I've always enjoyed learning new things, but working with the Center took that up a few notches and taught me how to find and apply information in a meaningful way. When the Center connected me with an opportunity to facilitate creative arts and recreational therapy classes at the Maricopa Reentry Center, I used what I learned while taking Inside-Out the year before to understand the needs of people reintegrating to society. This helped me connect more with residents and make their experiences in my class more humanizing and impactful. In my current job, research is the cornerstone of my work. I'm constantly having to learn new things like how to fix a printer, how to design a project to evaluate the effectiveness of something, or even learn about tax incentives for organizations that produce energy through anaerobic digestion methods. Understanding how to get to that information and use it deepened my appreciation for research and the way we can connect it to the real world and everyday life.

Sandy played the saxophone
for two years.

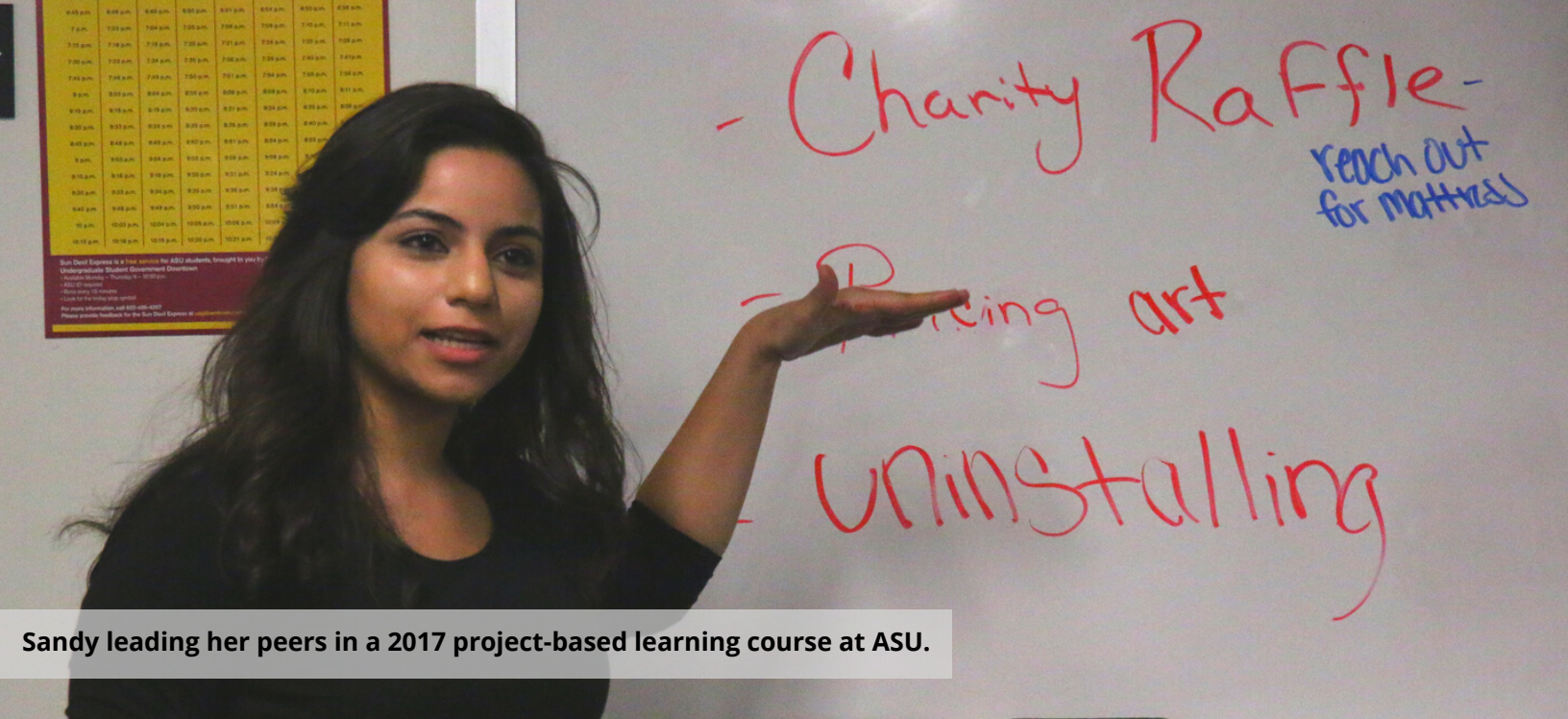
...whether she was any good at it is a
different story!

Share your best ASU memory.

That's tough, but the one memory that keeps coming to mind is putting together the first incarcerated prison art show in 2017. I still remember Kevin telling our freshman class we were going to host the show and instantly thought the idea was crazy (spoiler alert: the show was awesome.). Helping to plan the show and seeing its impact in our community is what inspired me to take on more community projects since then. It taught me I was already in a position to create change and doing so just needed a team that cared about the cause and shared a common purpose to set everything in motion.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Definitely having graduated from law school and working with an international nonprofit advocating for human rights. My parents had to flee their home in northern Iraq in the early 90s to avoid the political unrest and growing terrorist threats in the Middle East. They lived in a refugee camp in Syria for five years where my two older sisters were born before



Sandy leading her peers in a 2017 project-based learning course at ASU.

they moved to Chicago and had me. Their story is unfortunately not an anomaly and happens daily which is why I want to get involved in protecting vulnerable populations globally. I do also see myself working more closely with the criminal justice system again because that's what first got me interested in policies—learning how they were often implemented out of fear and a lack of research, which led to devastating consequences such as mass incarceration.

If you could be anyone for a day, past or present, who would it be and why?

Like everyone's first pick, I'd be the Librarian of Congress. It involves acquiring thousands of new items every day to add to collections and overseeing education and research programs. I think it would also be cool to have unlimited access to the world's largest library and manage the research arm of Congress. (Fun fact: you can check out books from the Library and read in the Main Reading Room!).

This experience has helped me improve skills in a variety of areas, such as communication and organization, while networking with other professionals.

--Sandy speaking on her 2018 internship experience at the Maricopa Reentry Center



Prisons, PB & J, and Potential

It's hard to show people what it's like to serve time in prison. So we brought prison a little closer to home. Learn what peanut butter and jelly can tell us about how we can make time served in prison more productive.

By Shayla Evans, B.S.

In the spring of 2019, the Center was invited to present at ASU President Michael Crow's Presidential Retreat. This retreat featured presentations from faculty and students within the Watts College who are changemakers in their respective communities. Center Director Kevin Wright tasked PhD student Stephanie Morse and undergrad Center members, Madison Sutton

and myself to create an original, interactive activity to convey the ways in which the Center's solutions address the complex aspects of incarceration.

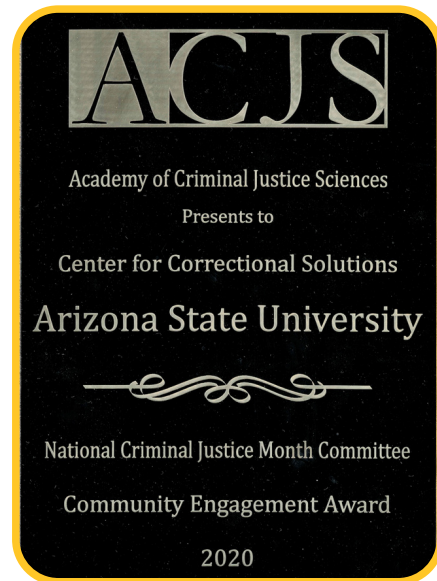
Many brainstorming sessions and white board scribbles later, Stephanie Morse suggested we go back to the basics – peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. PB & J sandwiches are a staple in most childhoods; however, this simple lunch in prison can be unrecognizable due to a lack of resources. Collectively, we agreed that a competition requiring groups to make the best PB & J, under different conditions, would be the best way to deliver our message.

Prison Chopped was born.

The activity included four small groups – two 'prisoner' groups and two 'community' groups. The prisoner group was given a plastic bag containing a light brown, gooey substance supposedly containing the perfect swirl of both peanut butter and jelly, along with one slice of white bread and no utensils. Their instructions were to win over the judges with the perfect PB & J constructed with these subpar ingredients and no spreading device. Oh, and they were instructed that they could not talk during the activity.

The community group was provided with the finest ingredients. Fresh strawberry jam, dried coconut chips, a perfectly ripe banana, an unopened container of Justin's peanut butter, two slices of sourdough, a plate for presentation purposes, and a knife to create the perfect design. The four members of this group were allowed to discuss their sandwich strategy freely and collaborate on the presentation style.

The prisoner group, one of which included President Crow, opened their paper bags horrified to find the brown concoction and daunted with the reality they might have to use their fingers to spread it. The community group, however, was delighted to try out all the ingredients and hotly debated the most aesthetically pleasing presentation. After 10 minutes expired, judges Maddie and I gave critiques on the creations from all groups (and yes, sampled them all!).



The Center was awarded the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences National Criminal Justice Month Community Engagement Award for *Prison Chopped*.

Although the prison groups were able to find creative solutions with limited resources, both of the community groups fared far better and one took home the win.

Maddie and I went on to explain the rationale behind Prison Chopped in three ways. First, prisoners are expected to experience personal growth while incarcerated, but they are stripped of opportunities for autonomy and creativity—important components of the journey towards change. And, when released into the community, many prisoners struggle to adapt because they are accustomed to every decision being made for them. The sharp demand in decision-making upon their release can be overwhelming and stressful for ex-prisoners when these opportunities do not exist in prison. Our prison group felt a significant level of frustration and lack of opportunity for decision making due to limited options.

Second, the resources provided in prison are extremely limited and are often insufficient to support robust programming, healthcare services, or educational classes. Our prison group was further challenged by having limited options and their chance for success in Prison Chopped was drastically reduced when only given one slice of bread and an unrecognizable substance.

Finally, barriers to communication in prison are plentiful and damaging to a rehabilitative environment. Racial divides can dictate paths of communication, hypermasculinity drives a lack of vulnerability in communication, and mistrust between prisoners and correctional officers inhibits empathetic communication. Our prison group frequently broke the "no communication" rule and struggled mightily to collaborate in silence.

The Presidential Trip participants, many of whom are leaders in the business community, embraced our message with intriguing questions and comments of concern. Participants felt an increased level of awareness regarding the shortfalls of our prison system and the impact that it has on our society. Prison Chopped has since been modeled for the McCain Institute with the 2019 and 2020 Next Generation Leaders comprised of social changemakers from around the world.

Sharing the thoughts, feelings and ideas of those incarcerated is my way of giving back to the men who have taught me some of my most valuable lessons...

This activity was personally rewarding to me because we were able to unite a group of community leaders who might not have previously given thought to incarceration through giving voice to men on the inside. Sharing the thoughts, feelings and ideas of those incarcerated is my way of giving back to the men who have taught me some of my most valuable lessons throughout my many semesters of research and learning alongside them.

Next time you make a PB & J... I hope you are reminded that a simple task to some could mean a world of opportunity to others.

Shayla is a recent graduate from ASU earning a degree in Finance and a Certificate in Correctional Studies. She was an Undergraduate Research Fellow for CCS for 3 years and will be moving to Dallas for a job in banking this summer.



Student Highlight

Each issue provides the opportunity for a student member of CCS to contribute a piece of writing. In this issue, Brice Terpstra shares an op-ed written as part of his final product for the ASU graduate seminar Punishment Reimagined.

FROM SERVING OUR COUNTRY TO SERVING TIME:

INCARCERATED VETERANS AND MEANING IN LIFE

BY BRICE TERPSTRA

In the United States, military Veterans are considered heroes. We celebrate national holidays in their honor, stand and cheer for them at sporting events, and we have all (probably) shed a tear while watching Veteran homecoming videos on the internet. As a society, we love our Veterans... but that love ends when their struggles begin.

An estimated 8%—roughly 200,000 people—of the entire prison and jail population in the United States are military Veterans.¹ In an attempt to reduce these numbers, Veteran-specific programs have been introduced in correctional settings to lower the odds that Veterans will return to prison after their release.

These programs provide treatment designed to reduce negative attitudes and behaviors that can lead to crime.

But, by focusing solely on negative behavior reduction, are we really providing these men and women with all of the essential tools needed to create meaningful change?

After spending the last few years conducting research with, and for, Veterans in the criminal justice system and the Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system, my answer is "No." I believe that a way to create meaningful change in the well-being of our nation's incarcerated Veterans is to restore their meaning in life.

During military service, meaning in life is often found through a sense of purpose, comradery, pride, and service to others.^{2,3} This meaning can be lost when individuals transition from active-duty military to Veteran status.⁴ For some, when they leave the military, they may not return to environments where similar values are as present. Through this transition, their military identity² can be challenged, and Veterans can lose their sense of purpose, comradery, and pride.⁵ As a result, Veterans who return as civilians may struggle to make sense of their life and that struggle may lead to behaviors that are destructive to their well-being.

Meaning in life is important for well-being, and there is an association between meaning in life

and positive outcomes for Veterans. Veterans who rediscover meaning in life have been shown to experience less severe mental and behavioral health issues⁶ as well as increased life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism.⁷ In order to bolster the well-being of Veterans, it is necessary to understand ways in which rediscovering meaning in life happens. For incarcerated Veterans, Veteran-specific prison programming should be the first place we look.

Veteran-specific prison programming may be a suitable environment to reintroduce factors associated with well-being for incarcerated Veterans. Designed to restore honor, pride, comradery, and service to others, these programs may provide opportunity for restoration of meaning in life that these men and women had once experienced. Designed by Veterans, for Veterans, these programs address root causes of criminal behavior as well as provide an environment for rehabilitation and personal growth. Further exploring how incarcerated Veterans assess meaning in life and how these programs aid in meaning making is important for ensuring individuals have the necessary tools in order to lower the odds that they will return to prison after their release.

Restoring meaning in life won't rid these men and women of the challenges they already face when entering the criminal justice system. The need for programming and treatment is evident with this population and finding meaning in

prison is meant to supplement these needs. It is also important to note that not all Veterans lose their meaning in life and most individuals who do lose meaning in life often find it in other ways, such as through education, pro-social relationships, and religious faith.^{4,5,8}

While prison is often viewed as a place for punishment, there is opportunity to create meaningful change by adding positive behaviors and traits back into individuals' lives during incarceration. It is the responsibility of academics, practitioners, policy makers, and the public to work alongside Veterans to discover ways in which meaning in life can be introduced back into the lives of individuals who are incarcerated in order to support meaningful change.

Veterans are not the only people that can benefit from finding meaning in prison and what is learned in this context may prove to be useful to other incarcerated populations as well. Starting with Veterans may, however, prove to be particularly beneficial because of the known impact that meaning in life has on the well-being of these men and women.

If meaning in life can empower Veterans to risk their lives for our country, imagine what it can do for them as they try to get their life back on track.

Brice is a doctoral student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice with an interest in the intersection of mental illness and the criminal justice system, policy, problem-solving courts, and justice-involved Veterans.



Welcome Home By Bruce Ward

You can purchase Bruce's work [here](#) and look to the next page to read his reflection on this article.



OUTSIDE REFLECTIONS ON THE INSIDE

BEFORE SERVING TIME

**BRUCE WARD SERVED HIS
COUNTRY...**

Victor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* is a necessary read during a long incarceration. Meaning in life, is the story we tell ourselves while struggling against an unbearable adversity. It is the cornerstone of rebuilding a shattered life.

Brice's op-ed reminded me of Veteran's Day 2013. The Veterans on my yard were invited to visitation. There were mixed reviews on why we were invited as we filled the room and began to socialize. I did not realize there were so many Veterans living as my neighbors. A Veteran approached the podium and elaborated on his service record. He had retired after 30 years in the Navy.

"Gentlemen, we are here to share our service history with one another and to be reminded of strengths. As Veterans we have hope, we have the strength necessary for personal growth. We may choose to once again be that best version of ourselves," he said.

We introduced ourselves and were given a slice of cake. The Veterans I met that day bonded immediately. Not just with each other, but with our old identity and all the positive attributes of our military service. We met once a month with a renewed sense of pride and a new community, **we held each other to a higher standard.**

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Meet Our Students on the Job Market

Danielle Haverkate



Danielle's research reflects an interest in what happens to people and their families when they come into contact with the correctional system. Her dissertation examines how women's identities as mothers structure their reentry experiences prior to and after release from prison, with a focus on how correctional and public policy can better support people returning to their communities. Danielle values collaborative work with students and stakeholders, including state agencies, community organizations, and people who are incarcerated.

Committee: Kevin Wright, Stacia Stolzenberg, Abbie Henson, Sara Wakefield (outside reader)

Learn more about Danielle [here](#).

Caitlin is a fourth year PhD student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice. She has six years of experience teaching in correctional institutions, including the Inside-Out Prison Exchange program and the Impact of Crime on Victims and Communities class. Her current dissertation research focuses on the conceptualization of prison in research and practice, stemming from her work as a project manager on NIJ sponsored work on restrictive housing.

Committee: Kevin Wright, Jacob Young, Cody Telep, Greg Fizer (outside reader)

Learn more about Caitlin [here](#).

Caitlin Matekel



Stephanie Morse



Stephanie is committed to engaging in research, teaching, and service that is strengths-based, inclusive, and uplifts others. Her work is focused on prison life and prison social organization, with a particular emphasis on rehabilitation and promoting resilience and positive outcomes with correctional populations. Currently, she is working on her dissertation that critically examines and unpacks who is doing well in prison, what it means to do well in prison, and how the prison experience impacts reflections on purpose and meaning in life.

Committee: Kevin Wright, Jacob Young, Cody Telep, Shadd Maruna (outside reader)

Learn more about Stephanie [here](#).

Raven's research interests center around corrections and reentry, with an emphasis on how social support can be leveraged for successful reentry outcomes. Her dissertation uses social network analysis to examine the relational structure of social support during reentry. Her research aims to show the value of the supportive actions made by others and offer tangible solutions for how this can be enhanced.

Committee: Jacob Young, Kevin Wright, Mike Reisig, Frank Cullen (outside reader)

Learn more about Raven [here](#).

Raven Simonds



Our {INK}arcerated program brings art created by incarcerated artists outside of prison walls for community members to view and purchase. This art brings awareness about prison programming and raises money for local charity organizations. Art from past shows like this one is available for you to purchase by clicking

<https://ccj.asu.edu/ccs/art-inside>

Proceeds benefit the Arizona Cancer Foundation for Children.

