

Prison and the Liberal Arts

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My Quantitative Reasoning professor largely emphasized asking compelling questions that invite thoughtful contemplation and possibly provide answers to issues plaguing our world. He felt it was a skill necessary not only for mathematics, but any discipline, so he gave us an assignment to ask and answer a question we found interesting. This happened to be assigned right after I began visiting the Twin Rivers Unit of the Monroe Correctional Facility, where I was helping teach a class on Mindfulness.

TRU exclusively houses sex offenders and interestingly, one of the preconceived notions I had before going in to the prison was that sex offenders were "incurable." However, when I met the men in TRU and spent time with them in small groups, I realized that these men were far from "incurable." I was in awe as I had thoughtful conversations with them and saw the strong desire to learn our concepts in their eyes when they asked questions. Even when we were laughing as we acted out different roles in the "drama triangle" (victim, rescuer, and persecutor) I was overcome with shared humanity.

In light of this realization I decided to write my paper for Quantitative Reasoning on pharmacological treatments for sex offenders. What I discovered coincidentally aligned with the material we were discussing in my psychology and humanities courses. From a humane point of view, if we chemically castrate a man--is that ethical? The treatment that showed the most promise was the use of Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, which I learned about in psychology. Suddenly I began to view the issue through several lenses: ethically, psychologically, and quantitatively as I explored the statistics and effectiveness of treatments. Because I am living and breathing a liberal arts education each quarter, I had knowledge and experience to draw from when considering the issue at hand and was thus able to have a more thorough grasp on the research. It is incredibly important to me to keep pursuing holistic research on neuro-criminology and treatments for mental illnesses so that we are truly fulfilling the missions of our prisons. It is not called the Department of Corrections; it is the Department of Corrections *and* Rehabilitation. We must remember how important rehabilitation is in our criminal justice system. We are already housing human beings who have fallen through the cracks of society and with recidivism rates upwards of 60%, we are doing our communities an extreme injustice if we allow those formerly incarcerated people to be released before they are given the services and treatments necessary to lead healthy, safe lives.

My pharmacological treatment essay could have easily been a set of figures spewed onto a piece of paper, but instead it was an incredible way for me to deeply understand sex offender psychology, mental health medication ethics, and gain insight into a field of research I previously had not known existed. What might have been nothing more than another assignment, turned out to be the spark that ignited my passion for Justice System Reform.