

## Pen Project Internship

New Mexico Corrections Department –

Penitentiary of New Mexico, Santa Fe

### "Ur" Course

or Wellspring of Prison Education Programming (PEP)

at Arizona State University

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©Razor Heart

*the happy surprises*

*Volunteer Teachers receive Graduate and Undergraduate internship credit in a variety of subjects.*

### ASU Prison Education Programming (PEP)

- <https://english.clas.asu.edu/research/community-university-initiatives/prison-english-program>

### A New Frontier – Student Documentary

- <https://vimeo.com/128562114>
- PEP Prison Education News(letter) - [https://english.clas.asu.edu/sites/default/files/prison-education-news-summer-2016\\_1.pdf](https://english.clas.asu.edu/sites/default/files/prison-education-news-summer-2016_1.pdf)

### On-the-Ground Weekly Courses at ASPC-Florence and ASPC-Eyman

- Biology - Led by a Full Professor in Biology <https://asunow.asu.edu/content/life-sciences-graduate-brings-biology-arizona-state-prison>
- Creative Writing: Poetry, Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Journalism
- Shakespeare
- Drama – Playwriting
- Philosophy
- Psychology
- Chinese
  - <http://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/interview-asia-society-staffer-teaching-chinese-prisoners-demonstrated-power-education>
  - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/07/09/want-to-help-prisoners-stay-out-of-jail-teach-them-to-speak-chinese/?utm\\_term=.b6c5c252182e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/07/09/want-to-help-prisoners-stay-out-of-jail-teach-them-to-speak-chinese/?utm_term=.b6c5c252182e)
- Criminal Justice
- Drawing Project - Long-Distance Learning Based on the Pen Project
- Inside-Out – Social Justice
- Math: Literacy, GED Prep, and Pre-Calculus

### ASU Annual Prison Education Conferences on Vimeo

- <https://vimeo.com/channels/prison>

### KJZZ – NPR

- <http://theshow.kjzz.org/content/280500/arizona-state-university-conference-highlight-benefits-prison-education>

### Iron City Magazine

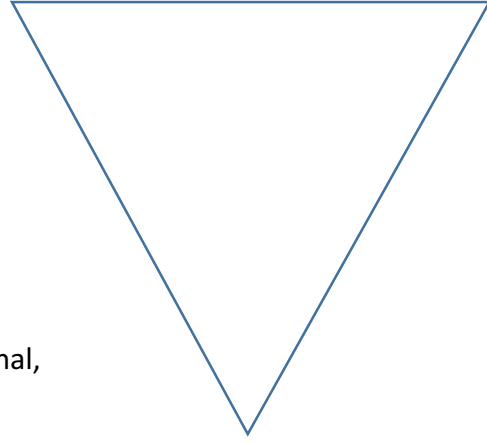
- <https://ironcity-magazine.squarespace.com/> or simply [ironcitymagazine.org](http://ironcitymagazine.org)
- <https://english.clas.asu.edu/news-events/newsletter/accents-english-spring-summer-2016/constructing-iron-city>

### PEAC - Prison Education Awareness Club

- <https://www.facebook.com/prisoneducationawarenessclub/>

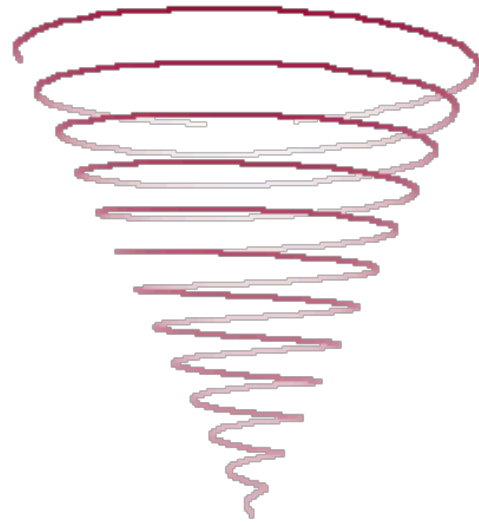


## Model of Pen Project as “Ur” Text



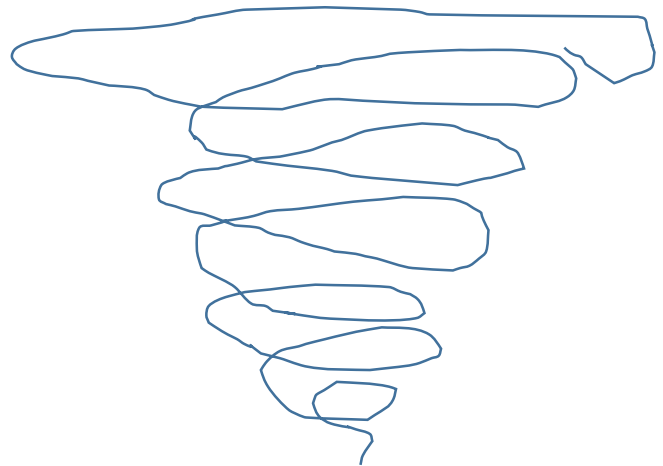
### Inverted Pyramid

- begins in solitary and moves upward and outward expanding its reach as it goes
- as a model, a bit contained & static & two-dimensional, but not a bad way to begin thinking about this



### Spiral

- better model, but a bit too geometric



### Freehand Spiral

- perhaps the best model, given that life is always a bit messy, the spring always sprung

Speaking *for* others never works – yes, we must speak *on behalf of* the incarcerated in our policies and procedures, but only toward the goal of providing avenues for the incarcerated to speak for and to express themselves: “...there is a spot the size of a shilling at the back of the head which one can never see for oneself. It is one of the good offices that sex can discharge for sex—to describe that spot....” Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). At some point, mass incarceration in America became so huge, the same principle that applies to the sexes now applies to inside and outside voices.

**Michelle Ribeiro** – She is formerly the Education Director at NMCD-PNM, Santa Fe. Although working from New Mexico, the sine qua non – without which not – of our group. She Designed, engineered, dreamt, conjured, the Pen Project to serve the needs of Maximum Security individuals in solitary confinement. She will tell you about this. [ribeiro8@yahoo.com](mailto:ribeiro8@yahoo.com)

**Cornelia “Corri” Wells** – Arizona State University, Director of Prison Education Programming (PEP) – Lecturer, Department of English. Editor-in-Chief, *Iron City Magazine*.  
[Cornelia.Wells@asu.edu](mailto:Cornelia.Wells@asu.edu).

**Jessica Fletcher** – double majored in English and Psychology, PEAC Pres., CLAS outstanding grad, Editor-in-Chief of the literary magazine *Superstition Review*... has taught psychology and creative writing at Florence State Prison... Fiction Editor for *Iron City Magazine*. [Jessica.M.Fletcher@asu.edu](mailto:Jessica.M.Fletcher@asu.edu)

**Hannah Good** is an undergraduate senior at Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University. She is studying to receive her Bachelor of Science in Political Science with a minor in Criminal Justice this coming May. Hannah started in the world of prison education during the 2014-2015 academic year as an intern with the Pen Project. Reading and responding to creative submissions from incarcerated writers quickly became her favorite assignments. In the spring of 2016, Hannah was selected to be the Legislative Intern for the Government Affairs Group at the Arizona Supreme Court. While there, she spent the majority of her time at the House of Representatives and Senate tracking bills. Returning to school after this semester off, Hannah was anxious to get back to one of her passions: prison education. Currently, she teaches a Political Science course to minimum security prisoners at the Florence State Prison in Arizona. [hrgood@asu.edu](mailto:hrgood@asu.edu).

## Accolades for the Pen Project

as excerpted from letters by former interns to Pen Project Prison Writers  
(Appearing on Pen Project Application)



### Doors Opening

©Cornelia Wells, Chaco Canyon

The most rewarding class I've ever taken.

—River

The Pen Project was a calling I answered at a time when I needed something outside of my routine, outside of myself. I ached for something that could fill my empty – anything – to be my excuse to break free of the monotony of simply going through the motions. I was so over feeling numb to too much for too long...

Whether I was led to it or it found me is secondary to the fact that it put me in contact with all of you. For the first time in longer than I could remember... I found myself in a position where I was able to give back... and I could do so with confidence because it was the first time I felt maybe... just maybe that which I could give back... might actually be worth something. Thank you, Gentlemen, for allowing me to feel I had – I have – something of value to give back.

*"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."*

—Anais Nin

—Athen

To All Pen Project Participants:

Thank you.

How can I truly express to you how honestly grateful I am to read your stories, poems, and essays? Could I ever explain to you how you have changed me?

I have a cousin. He's been to jail. He's a distant cousin. He is distant because we don't really associate with THAT part of the family. Until now. Because of you.

For me, not all people who go to jail are bad. And that's because of you. Because you showed me, you told me with your pen, I know that people on the inside are just like people on the outside. I learned that mistakes can lead you to jail. I learned that they are only mistakes. People are not mistakes. All of you showed me that.

So when I say thank you, don't shrug it off. Don't think I mean that I am thankful that I received college credit while reading your letters. Know that I am thankful that YOU taught me. YOU gave me hope...

—Sabrina

Dear Pen Project Participants,

The Pen Project has been the highlight of my college career. Please continue to write. And don't stop. Don't ever stop.

—Harrison

Dear Prison Writers,

Thank you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. It's not often that I get to interact with and be surrounded by a group of people who are so passionate about learning. At ASU, sometimes it feels like everyone (myself included) is so burnt out that we forget why we are here. We forget that the most important thing we have in this life is human connection. We forget that we (most of us, not all) are extremely privileged. I think mostly though, we just forget to stop and pay attention to the world, and people, around us. Thank you for helping me regain a grip on what is important.

After piles of college homework, there's not a lot that I remember at the end of the year. I still, however, remember entire lines and passages from your Pen Project submissions. I do not cry easily but there were a few times (more than I would like to admit) that I was typing through tears. The honesty in your work was something I have never experienced before. It encouraged me to grow in my writing and my life – to become more honest. It encouraged me to grow as a person. I want to encourage you all to keep writing. You make a difference in people's lives as well as in your own when you write.

—Penny Lane

Dear Pen Participants,

It is hard to believe that this internship has come to an end. This has been the most rewarding and inspiring thing that I have ever been a part of. I had no idea what to expect going into this internship. I thought it would be a fun or a "neat" experience, but it went above and beyond all that. I was able to learn more about the prison system and help aspiring writers strive for more.

I was truly amazed at the hard work that everyone put into the writing sent to us interns. I was moved to tears by a lot of the pieces. You all are truly great writers, and should be so proud of yourselves for all of the heart and soul that went into submitting your work.

—Leanna

Dear Pen Project Writers,

Thank you so much for participating in the Pen Project.

We live in a society that undervalues writing, but loves storytelling. Sometimes it seems like we forget that we can all be storytellers – and that it is our individual stories that make us who we are. Writing down and telling our individual stories is the truest way to make connections and to break down barriers.

Public opinion about prison, prison life, and prisoners is shaped (for the most part) by the news, television, and movies. It tells us a single story of good guys versus bad guys, cops and robbers. Americans who are far removed from prisons try not to think about it. The idea of the monotony and limitations of prison is terrifying. We are so consumed by that fear that we distance ourselves from the people inside those prisons. We tell ourselves that they are nothing like us, that they are different and that they are there, not due to any problem with the society in which we live, but due to a problem inside of them. People in prison deserve to be there, they are the bad guys, the good guys would have exonerated them if they weren't.

Only people who have had their own brushes with the prison system know that they are not essentially different from people on the outside. They know that they made mistakes, but they also know that everyone makes mistakes. What truly sets them apart is not that they are the bad guys, but that they know first hand that one bad choice (or a series of bad choices) can change everything. Sharing our personal histories and our ideas is the only way to eliminate apathy and create empathy.

I hope that my contributions have had a positive impact on your life; I know that your writing has had a positive influence on mine. During my internship with the Pen Project I have read true stories about fatherhood, family vacations, and addiction. Fictional stories set in amazingly creative settings with personified planets, humanized gods, and good hearted desperados. I've read beautiful songs about finding love, acceptance, and guidance, and I've read poetry full of anxiety, fear, and pride. I've read essays written by people pushing through educational barriers and bettering themselves. I've read powerful, empathetic, humanizing stories that prove, without a doubt, that we are not different. We are all beautiful, flawed, and remarkably human.

—Trillian

## *The Pen Project:* Something Much Greater amid Shocking Realities

Having recently completed my fourth consecutive semester with the Pen Project, I can't help but reflect on how much I have grown as a person, thinker, and writer as a result. I joined the Pen Project in my third semester of college after taking Corri Wells' Honors Freshman English class, where we briefly discussed the U.S. justice system and some of its shortcomings. While the topic fascinated me, I could never have expected how enlightening this internship would be.

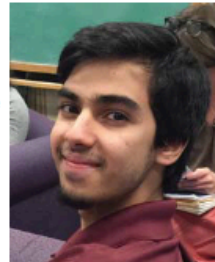
I remember sitting at my first Pen Project orientation as we discussed prison statistics and reviewed guidelines about how to respond to the writings we would receive. I was eager to give my feedback to the first cycle, but for

selfish reasons—the novelty of attaining unfettered access to the thoughts of maximum-security prisoners while concurrently sharpening my writing skills. But during my first reviews and the many that would follow, the Pen Project evolved into something much greater.

Though the initiative serves in part to open interns' eyes to the shocking realities of the U.S. justice system (and it certainly does—did you know that America houses 25% of the world's prisoners but only 5% of the global population?), the Pen Project's true value is the undeniable humanizing effect it has for the prisoners who submit their work to it. Reading their stories and poems for two years makes you realize that murderers, rapists, and drug

dealers—people society works so hard to demonize—are humans with insecurities, dreams, fears, memories, and families.

I am often met with bewilderment when I express this opinion to others because they think I am condoning the horrible acts committed by the individuals who send their work to us. Though I, like most reasonable people, believe that



Rohan Murty

SUMMER 2016

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## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

...[continued from page 2]

killers and robbers should be met with appropriate consequences, the Pen Project has allowed me to see that all humans, even those society deems worthless, have value. This realization has completely changed my mind about the death penalty, mandatory minimum sentencing laws, and several other issues I ignorantly held extremely strong views on for a long time.

Perhaps just as important, this internship has given me keen insights into the nature and causes of crime. While it ultimately takes the will of a person to commit a deplorable act,

crime is a complex function based on the variables of one's socioeconomic status, family life, education level,

**“The Pen Project has allowed me to see that all humans, even those society deems worthless, have value.”**

and surroundings. Gaining a deeper understanding of why so many Americans end up incarcerated has shown me the futility of making punishment our primary aim rather than rehabilitation.

I am forever indebted to Wells, the other interns, Pen Project facilitators, and the incarcerated writers of the NMCD and ACD for increasing my humanity and broadening my worldview. If more Americans shared my experiences at this internship, this country would have a vastly different view of crime, punishment, and prisoners in general. There is undoubtedly a need for change in our system, and educating yourself is the first step towards achieving this goal.

—ROHAN MURTY  
Senior, Chemical Engineering



## Honors Contract Reflection on Globe Teaching Experience – November 4, 2016

My nervous expectations made the trip to Globe stressful. It felt like thousands of different questions flew through my head with each second. “Would they like my teaching style? Will I they like my jokes? Is my voice too shrill? Do I speak clearly? Will they understand my material? Do I understand my material? What will they look like? Am I dress[ed] provocatively? Will I seem privileged? Am I even qualified for this?” I wasn’t worried about my safety; I was worried that the inmates would find me annoying or inaudible or boring. In retrospect, these thoughts seem ridiculous.

Entering the prison felt surreal. The inmates roamed freely, wearing neon orange jumpsuits and dirty, white sneakers. It looked like a movie set—barbed wire lined the campus and the inmates played basketball, ran on the field, or kicked dirt trying to pass time. Each was intimidating and held his own ground, but not one seemed unkind, hostile, or even criminal.

I expected an unfriendly classroom with metal bars, tiny desks, broken pencils, flickering lights, and bulky, cross men. I could not [have] be[en] more wrong! The classroom nurtured learning: colorful posters, spacious desks, comfy chairs, pencils and paper, and smiling, motivated, participatory students filled the area. If not for the orange jumpsuits, barbed wire, and the security tag clipped to my pants, the classroom could [have] belong[ed] to my high school.

I was the last to teach, which made me a little anxious, but the lighthearted jokes and the cheerful students helped calm me down. By the time I started teaching, I knew the drill. The other lessons identified three simple rules: be clear, be laidback, and be yourself. During my lesson, the inmates were engaged, kind, quizzical, comical, intelligent, grateful, and welcoming. When I finished my lesson, I felt disappointed. I wanted to continue teaching and learning alongside them! However, now I can look forward to the many similar opportunities The Pen Project affords me. Namely, I’m excited to meeting more inmates, who first and foremost are students.

—Pooja Sangha