

Education

Founded by The Evergreen State College
& Washington State Department of Corrections



Education Programs in Prisons

The Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) integrates education into every one of our programs. In a richly collaborative environment, all partners learn from each other and gain technical and conceptual understanding. Through SPP, corrections has gladly received an influx of scientists, students, and educational programming. Inmates have welcomed knowledge and skills that will improve their prospects post-release.

Education as Rehabilitation

Many inmates come from the least advantaged and least educated social groups. For many inmate-students and technicians, SPP programs are their first formal experience with science, environmental issues, and research. They rise to the challenge of learning new skills and improving our programs, and have shown themselves to be capable, often exceptional students.

Incarcerated men and women are eager for more educational offerings, particularly those that advance academic and career goals. Meeting their need is our primary goal. We believe that academic and vocational experience are our most valuable offerings. A considerable body of research has shown that education is an effective means for reducing recidivism; once released, those who gained education while incarcerated are much less likely to commit crimes and return to prison.

Programs

SPP provides education through academic and vocational programs, and in sustainability jobs such as composting, horticulture, aquaculture, and raising endangered species. Education programs are initiated and supported by partners including corrections staff, community colleges, four-year colleges, scientists, and community organizations. We aim to provide diverse, complementary educational offerings.

Science & Sustainability Lecture Series

Guest experts visit prisons to share perspectives on topics such as plant and wildlife ecology, sustainable agriculture, alternative energy, and environmental justice. The lecture series has inspired improvements in prison sustainability and connected participants to the larger world of scientific research and conservation. From our surveys of lecture series students, we have seen environmental attitudes steadily grow more positive. Students of the lecture series regularly share their appreciation of the program:

I LOVE ALL THE LETURE DONT CHANGE NOTHING I AM ONE TO ASK ALOT OF QUESTIONS AND THEY ALWAYS GET ANSWERD I LOOK FORWARD TO ATTENDING MORE I CANT WAIT FOR THE OWLS THEY ARE MY FAVOIT AND THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THE LOVE AND THOUGHT YOU PUT INTO THIS THANK YOU



From 2009-2015, SPP has facilitated:

- Science and sustainability lectures attendance by more than 2000 student-inmates
- More than 160 lectures in six prisons, presented by approximately 155 scientists and practitioners from 60 agencies, businesses, and schools

Roots of Success

We offer Roots of Success, an environmental literacy curriculum, in most Washington State prisons. Roots covers vital environmental topics and issues, and challenges students to posit solutions. The program also emphasizes job readiness and re-entry skills; graduates are equipped for work in the green economy. In the first twenty months of the program:

- 33 inmates were certified as Roots of Success instructors
- 372 inmate-students graduated from the program

Roots is taught by inmate-instructors, and the peer-led classrooms are exceptionally productive and inclusive. From one of the instructors:

“This is real education—student-centered learning in an environment where ‘Each One, Teach One’ is our mantra. The students are inspired to ‘be more’ simply because they are involved in the process of their own learning.”

Sustainability Job Education

From the start, our conservation, vermicomposting, and composting programs have had a strong academic focus. Frequent contact with topic experts and scientists has informed cutting-edge research and trials. We aim to increase the academic focus of every sustainable operations program, and to formalize educational curricula. In the past two years, SPP has renewed efforts to offer certificates to program technicians. Certificates recognize specific skills, experience, and academic knowledge; they also recommend an equivalency for academic credit that could transfer to a university post-release.

Community College Vocational Programs

Several Washington State prisons have dedicated community college teachers. Their horticultural and green building programs provide valuable vocational and green jobs training. Faculty have collaborated with SPP staff to align offerings and opportunities. Students benefit from the co-action of vocational education with other SPP offerings.

Photos: Jaal Mann (front), Tiffany Webb (1st), Cyril Ruoso (2nd) Joslyn Rose Trivett (3rd and 5th), and Rosemarie Padovano (4th)

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