

## ENG 5140: Community-Based Writing (Prison Education Project)

Dr. Alexandra J. Cavallaro || Spring 2021 || Thursdays, 5:30-8:15pm

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Office Hours: by appointment

### Course Description:

This class is offered in partnership with the Prison Education Project (<http://www.prisoneducationproject.org/index.html>) and is open to both graduate and undergraduate students. Students will work with Dr. Cavallaro to design and teach a course (“Writing for Social Change”) in a local prison. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, classes will be held online via Zoom. The class with the incarcerated students will run for 7 weeks during the semester. The rest of the semester will be devoted to preparation and research on mass incarceration, prison education, and writing in/from prisons. This class will combine independent inquiry and research with collaborative discussion and teaching. We are working with an institution that is capricious at best—this means that all students should be flexible and prepared to change plans when the Department of Corrections requires it.

Students will be able to choose from three different roles in the class based on their interests:

- *Researchers* will identify a question of interest surrounding prison education and will conduct a research based analytical or creative project throughout the semester.
- *Teachers* will help to design and lead class activities for incarcerated students
- *Writers* will complete reading and writing assignments based on the topic for the class

All students must complete a mandatory, three-hour orientation with the CDC on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2:00-5:00pm.

### Required Texts and Supplies

- A CSUSB e-mail address that you check regularly (“regularly” defined herein as *at least* once every 24 hours).
- Boochani, Behrouz. *No Friend But the Mountains*
- Vuong, Ocean. *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*
- All other reads are available on Blackboard.

### Grading

- Reading Responses (50pts each, total number TBD)
  - Together, we will read and respond to a variety of articles on prison education and mass incarceration.
- Participation (25pts per class session)
- Annotated Bibliography (300pts)

- Each student will produce an annotated bibliography on a theme of their choice related to prison education and/or mass incarceration.
- Portfolio (300pts)
  - Portfolios will collect your work that you have done throughout the course on your individual projects. For researchers and writers, this will include your final research paper or creative work. For teachers, this will include a collection of lesson plans and preparation for classes.
- Multimedia Public Presentation (300pts)
  - At the end of the term, I will ask each of you to create a public presentation on the theme “what I learned with the Prison Education Project.” Presentations will be shared at a public Zoom event with students and professors across campus.

More detailed grading criteria will come with each writing assignment.

**Scale used to determine letter grades:**

A	93-100%	A-	90-92%		
B+	87-89%	B	83-86%	B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%	C	73-76%	C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%	D	63-66%	D-	60-62%
F	Less than 60%				

**Course Policies**

**Dr. Cav’s Policy on Respect for Incarcerated Students:** In most cases, the incarcerated students we will work with have been traumatized by the conditions of their lives and their confinement. We will always treat them with the utmost respect and dignity, which means deeply listening to their contributions and treating them as intellectual equals. We have much to learn from their perspectives. CSUSB students are not allowed to solicit information about convictions and crimes from incarcerated students—sometimes they will volunteer this information, but you are prohibited from requesting it.

**California Department of Corrections Policies:** There are certain rules we must abide by during our classes at our facility:

- Video cameras must be turned on. Please ensure that you are in a place free from distractions, away from distracting decorations (e.g., posters that depict nudity, etc.), and with no other people on camera. Out of courtesy for our students who do not have free access to food and drink, please refrain for eating or drinking unless absolutely necessary.

- All participants must be dressed in a conservative manner. This means no cleavage, and no shirts with drug, alcohol, gang, or political slogans.
- Contact with incarcerated students outside of class time is strictly prohibited.
- You may not give our incarcerated students anything--supplies, notes, etc.--without prior approval.

**Learning Environment:** This course will operate under a spirit of nondiscrimination and equality. My goal is to create a safe and welcoming environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinions, while also respecting other class members. I want you to argue with, disagree with, and challenge each other, but I want it done with respect for both the writers whose work we read and your classmates. All participants in the course will abide by CSUSB policies and guidelines, including those governing discrimination, harassment, and academic honesty. Language or actions that are deemed discriminatory or harassing will not be tolerated. Repeated offenses will be dealt with as per school policies. In addition, should you ever feel that another student has made you uncomfortable in any way, please see me as soon as possible. I take harassment and discrimination very seriously. Following these guidelines will result in a better learning experience and environment for everyone.

**Gender Identity:** This course affirms people of all gender expressions and identities. If you prefer to be called a different name than is what on the class roster, please let me know. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records, and so I may call you by your true name and pronouns.

**Your Well-Being:** I expect you to be participating fully and turning in all of your assignments on time. These acts maximize the learning that occurs in our class: You're giving yourself all possible opportunities to think and practice, you're enriching your peers' experiences, and you're keeping me on a schedule where I can provide you with productive feedback at an optimal time. Like any professor, I hope that my class can be a priority in your life. However, I know that life doesn't always cooperate to let you focus on your chosen priorities exactly when you need or want to. With this in mind, here is what you should know:

If you're having issues that are making you fall behind, I want you to email me or come talk to me. At minimum, we need to make sure that we both understand the status of your grade and that we have a plan to get you back on track before your grade is no longer salvageable. Good communication with me is the key to your success in this class, and I am willing to do everything in my power to help you. And if you're worried about how you're going to get back on track, or if you're concerned that something like a mental illness or learning disability is getting in the way of your ability to succeed in your classes, I definitely want you to reach out to someone—it doesn't have to be me, but *someone*. Professors, advisers, counselors, the deans of students, and others on campus can point you in the direction of excellent resources and provide you with

support and guidance. **Please don't talk yourself out of reaching out when needed.** We know you're full of smarts and effort, and you don't need to prove that by pretending to be perfect. You deserve support for any issue that threatens to interfere with your ability to complete your education.

**Office Hours:** My office hours are the time when I am available to give students more one-on-one attention. Please stop into our Zoom chat room to ask questions, discuss paper ideas or drafts, share concerns, or just have a chat and a snack. As a side note, I do not read drafts or give extensive feedback over e-mail, as I find that this does not allow me to have a good conversation with you about your work. If you would like to discuss a draft or revision, plan ahead to come to office hours.

**Participation** is essential for your success in this course. I ask that you engage thoughtfully with your classmates' work on Blackboard and contribute meaningfully to our online discussions via Zoom. This course is not a lecture-based course. Instead of being passive recipients of information that I ask you to memorize and reproduce, we will engage in an open and ongoing process of inquiry and collaborate to make knowledge over the course of the term. While I expect you to have completed the assigned reading and prepared notes, questions, observations, and objections, I *do not* expect you to completely understand each reading. We will work to come to terms with the readings as a community.

**Revisions:** Because I want to stress the importance of revision and writing as a process, you may revise your extending the conversation paper for a higher grade. That means that the grade you get on this project is only provisional. The due dates for this revision will be listed on the course schedule. You may meet with me throughout the term during office hours to discuss your revisions (I do not recommend leaving the revisions to the last minute). If you do choose to revise, *you must make substantial changes and use Microsoft Word's "track changes" (or other similar feature) so that I can see what you have changed.*

**Late Papers:** We are living in extraordinary times. Therefore, I have suspended my usual late policy. I ask that you try to stay on track and complete weekly assignments in a timely manner. Doing so will maximize the amount of feedback I am able to give you. If you do fall behind, please let me know. Teachers must be prepared to teach on their assigned weeks—there will be no makeups available for this.

**Disability Accommodations:** If you are in need of an accommodation for a disability in order to participate in this class, contact Services to Students with Disabilities at (909) 537-5238.

**Plagiarism Policy:** Over the course of the semester, we will discuss proper use and citation of sources. If I find evidence that you have committed any form of plagiarism, such as obtaining an online paper, having someone else write a paper for you, or copying/paraphrasing from an

outside source without acknowledging that source, you will be penalized according to university policy. This usually means a failing grade for the assignment or the class. Please keep this in mind as you do your work, and seek assistance if you have any questions.

**Additional Note:**

Please refer to the "General Regulations and Procedures" in the CSUSB Bulletin of Courses for the university's policies on course withdrawal, cheating, and plagiarism.

# ENG 5140: Community-Based Writing (Prison Education Project) Course Schedule

## Color Guide:

Everyone

Teaching Group A

Teaching Group B

Writers/Researchers

## **Week 1: Introduction to PEP (January 28th)**

- In class: syllabus review, orientation de-brief, and discussion of perceptions of policing and prisons

## **Week 2: The State of Prisons (February 4th)**

- Everyone read:** (these are short, so it's not as much reading as it looks like! These are *the most important* readings we will do this term)
  - The Underground Scholars Language Guide (on Blackboard)
  - "An Open Letter to Prison Educators" (on Blackboard)
  - "24 Hours in Prison": <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/07/12/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-prisoner?fbclid=IwAR3uOpBlfc3LVsGkuYf-zFDvxndx8M4DexkC0PsH6r3V9Zv8aDBtnaPauIA>
  - Ehlers, Anthony. "Letter from Stateville Prison": <https://files.constantcontact.com/5f669080301/3a2b6797-4be1-47a6-a2fe-a2a03cd8db0a.pdf>
- Everyone complete** Reading Response #1 (under "Discussions")
- Everyone** add your name to a research or teaching group: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jb1f-WpB5ZMKaipSGpND2VVqPE-QFi42YI8FC6PR4xs/edit?usp=sharing>

## **Week 3: Higher Education in Prison (February 11th)**

- Everyone read:**
  - Cavallaro, Alexandra, et al. "Inside Voices: Collaborative Writing in a Prison Environment."
  - Ahmed, et al. "Cons and Pros: Prison Education Through the Eyes of the Prison Educated."
  - Narratives from "Prison Writing Networks" (<http://prisonwritingnetworks.com/>): Garite, Rand, Jones, Rosas, Becker, Sanders
- Everyone complete** Reading Response #2
- Researchers/Writers:** submit proposal via Blackboard (under "Discussions").

**Optional Event, February 12th, 6pm:** "Angee's Journey" is a highly recommended event featuring Ernst Fenelon's story about his mother's trips to visit him in prison. Ernst is one of PEP's coordinators, and a wonderful man. It is a free event. REGISTER AT: [www.eventbrite.com/e/angees-journey-tickets-136897440931](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/angees-journey-tickets-136897440931)

**Week 4: PEP, Session 1 (February 18th)--Dr. Cav leads (Topic: “The Hill We Climb”)**

- Teaching Group A: Attend PEP class and prep for session 2
- Teaching Group B: Attend PEP class and prep for session 3
- Researchers/Writers: work on annotated bibliographies independently (attend class at 7:35pm)
- Everyone (who attends class): please complete a post-session report here: <https://www.pepforms.org/pep-session-reports>

**Week 5: PEP, Session 2 (February 25th)--Teaching Group A leads (Topic: Speeches)**

- Everyone: attend PEP class!
- Teaching Group B: Prep for session 3
- Researchers/Writers: work on annotated bibliographies
- Everyone: please complete a post-session report here: <https://www.pepforms.org/pep-session-reports>

**Week 6: PEP, Session 3 (March 4th)--Teaching Group B leads (Topic: Spoken Word)**

- Everyone: attend PEP class!
- Teaching Group A: Prep for session 4
- Researchers/Writers: work on annotated bibliographies
- Everyone: complete Reading Response #3
- Everyone: please complete a post-session report here: <https://www.pepforms.org/pep-session-reports>

**Week 7: PEP, Session 4 (March 11th)--Teaching Group A leads (Topic: PEN Poems)**

- Everyone: attend PEP class!
- Teaching Group B: Prep for session 5
- Researchers/Writers: work on annotated bibliographies
- Everyone: please complete a post-session report here: <https://www.pepforms.org/pep-session-reports>

**Week 8: PEP, Session 5 (March 18th)--Teaching Group B leads (Topic: Memories of Education)**

- Annotated Bibliographies due for **RESEARCHERS ONLY**
- Everyone: attend PEP class and read:
  - Baca, “Coming Into Language”
  - Malcolm X, “Learning to Read”
- Teaching Group A: prep for session 6
- Researchers/Writers: work on portfolio projects

- Everyone:** please complete a post-session report here: <https://www.pepforms.org/pep-session-reports>

### **Week 9: PEP, Session 6 (March 25th)--Teaching Group A leads**

- Everyone:** attend PEP class!
- Teaching Group B:** prep for session 7
- Everyone:** please complete a post-session report here: <https://www.pepforms.org/pep-session-reports>

### **PEP, Session 7 (April 1st)--Teaching Group B leads\* (Topic: *No Friend But the Mountains*)**

\*This is spring break. We will discuss who will take this class given those circumstances.

- Everyone:** please complete a post-session report here: <https://www.pepforms.org/pep-session-reports>

### **Week 10: PEP Debrief + Reflection (April 8th)**

- Annotated bibliographies due for TEACHERS ONLY**

Come prepared to talk about your PEP experience and learn about our final project for the class. Special guest: Marisol Rivera, former PEP volunteer and current tutor with Chaffey College's prison education program.

### **Week 11: The Language of Recidivism + Inside-Out Pedagogy (April 15th)**

- **Everyone:** Reading Response #4 Due

**EVERYONE:** Portfolios due Friday, April 16th, by midnight

### **Week 12: Presentation Workshop (April 22nd)**

### **Week 13: Are Prisons Obsolete? (April 29th)**

- **Everyone:** Reading Response #5 Due

### **Week 14: Public Presentation Workshop + Voting (May 6th)**

### **Week 15: Public Presentations + Celebration (May 13th)**



