
**Crossing Institutional Divides:
Services to Incarcerated Patrons as a Bridge Between Public Libraries
and Library and Information Science Education**

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&

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Schedule

- Introduction to services
- Demographics / Institutional racism
- Institutional culture
- Developing LIS Professionals
- Reference by Mail project
- Course planning
 - Process
 - Assess and revise
 - Strengths and weaknesses
- Next steps
- Q & A

Introduction

- Addressing the “gap” - theoretically informed library practice
- Utilizing distance across low- and high- information environments
- Diverse populations as a reality of service
- Critical lack of services (Drabinski and Rabina, 2015)

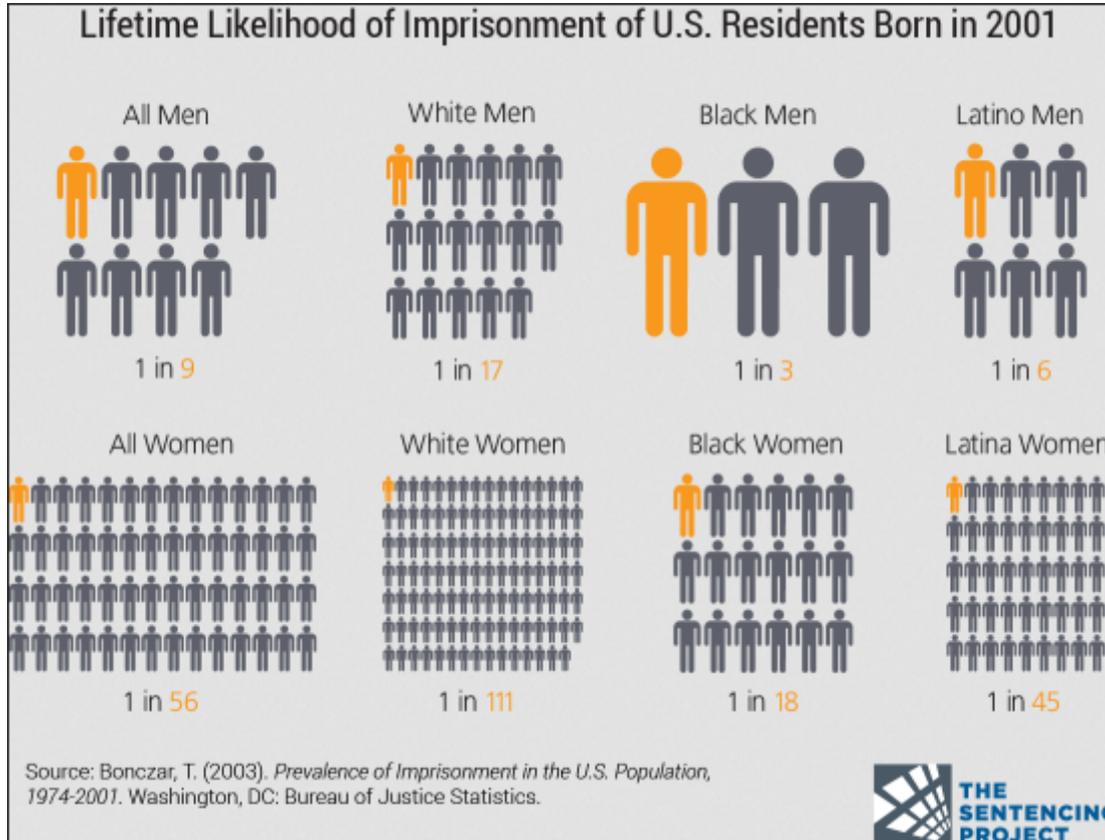
Relevant Literature

- Coyle. (1987). Libraries in Prison.
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- Lehmann & Locke. (2005). Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners (IFLA).
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- ALA. (2017). Prison Libraries LibGuide.
- Higgins. (2017). Get Inside: Responsible Jail and Prison Service.

Jail/Prison Library Services

- Similarities and differences between jails and prisons
 - Sentencing and size
 - Access
 - State and federal regulations
- Institutional formations and librarianship
 - Library standards
 - Differences between prisons and jails
- Information access
 - Limited to no internet access
 - Communications by mail or by telephone
 - All communications monitored

Demographics: Incarceration in the U.S.



Institutional Cultures

- Histories of racism and colonialism in the library
- Perpetuated in educational contexts
- Implicit bias and information disparities
- Cultural competency
- Staffing practices and microaggressions

Developing LIS Professionals

- Reference Tasks
 - Exposes students to variance in information requests
 - Introduces students to praxis of equity of access
 - Establishes innovation and continual learning as part of reference process
- Service Learning
 - Bridges online environments
 - Increases civic-mindedness
 - Facilitates cultural competency
 - Prepares student for patron interaction

Reference by Mail

New York Public Library -

Correctional Services

San Francisco Public Library -

Jail and Reentry Services

Library Offers Prisoners a Key to

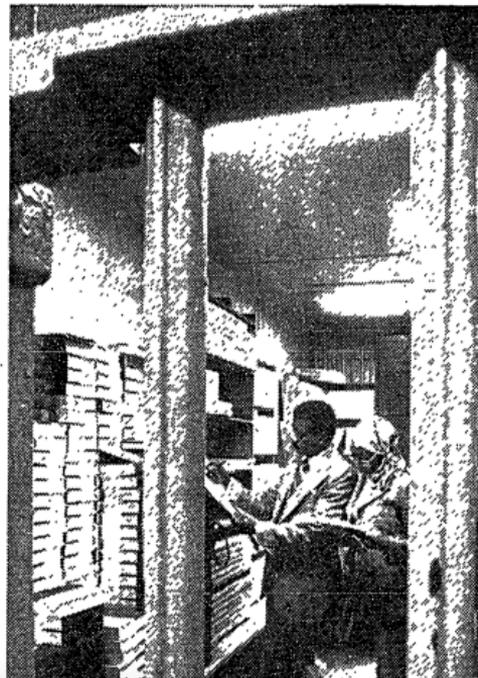
*Books, Films and Advice
Are Available to Those
Who Appeal for Help*

By FRANK J. PRIAL

Recently, a prisoner in the Bronx House of Detention wanted to submit some of his poetry for publication but had no idea of how to go about it. Another inmate needed newspaper weather reports for the day on which he allegedly committed an armed robbery. He wanted to appeal his conviction.

The New York Public Library provided the first man with guides to publishing concerns and literary magazines and put him in touch with an ex-convict who publishes the work of other convicts. So far the prisoner has published two books of poetry and has two novels in the works. The second man got his newspapers and is now working on his appeal.

Needless to say, neither man went to the library for help. The library came to them. For four years, the New York Public Library has been reaching out to prisoners in 10 city institutions in three boroughs, bringing them not only books, but films, research materials and sometimes just simple advice.



The New York Times - 1978

Course Planning

Learning Objectives:

- intellectual freedom and equitable access to information.
- Locate retrieve, evaluate, and synthesize information from diverse sources to meet users' information needs.
- Explain and apply the concepts, principles, theories, philosophies, and techniques of reference and user services in providing diverse individuals and groups with access to relevant and accurate recorded knowledge and information.
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills.
- Analyze and apply legal and ethical principles within which libraries and information agencies operate.
- Communicate effectively to a range of audiences using written, oral, and digital media

Training

- SFPL Librarians meet with LIS students for an initial training
 - Review rules and regulations!
 - Streamline question and answer process
- Critical Thinking: Challenge students to think about critical reference pedagogies and the big picture of the carceral state
- Metacognitive reflections:
 - What do students know about systems of incarceration?
- Group work: Create contracts, organize, helps streamline process for SFPL

Process Between Patrons, the Library and LIS Program

Incarcerated patron mails in question →

SFPL librarians review questions →

Questions sent to students (anonymized) →

Students work together to answer question within rules and regulations
(up to 20 pages)

Answer sent to SFPL & reviewed →

Answer bounced back or sent sent back to patron →

Students reflect in group about process and service to this patron group

Assess and Revise

- Shared goals: Jail and Reentry Services (JARS) & Reference Outcomes
 - Students will develop culturally-competent readiness skills
 - Patrons will receive reliable and desirable information
- Group work
 - Students collectively reflect and share their reflections with instructor and SFPL
 - Students hold one-another accountable for providing thorough and professional responses
- Administrator Reflections
 - Incorporate understandings of racialization with unseen patrons
 - Continuing a humanizing project - patrons are not just a set of tasks
 - Recognizing that, despite whiteness of profession, students may have intimate or tense relationships with incarceration
 - Encouraging feedback for improvement on process
 - Engaging in ongoing dialog

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- Experiential Learning about both reference and incarceration
- One on one work with a SFPL Librarian
- Real reference encounters (as opposed to practice)
- Raising awareness of services to people who are incarcerated (giving people context)

Weaknesses

- Limited number of letters (address through group work)
- Potential stereotype affirmation from previous assumptions

Sample Questions and Responses

- What are publishers that take free submissions of prisoners writings through the mail? Does *Kludge* take submissions by mail?
- May I please have images and information about the Korean drama Devilish Joy along with a one-page image of the promotional poster if it is available?
- I'm getting out in six months and looking for housing for people with a sex offender conviction in the areas surrounding Tucson, AZ.
- Please send me SOB x RBE "Anti" lyrics.
- I am starting a cruelty-free cosmetics wholesale company when I am released. Please send me any and all information on what is required to start this company.

Start Your Own Reference by Mail

Institutional Needs

- Point person/group who receive and distribute letters
- Group of respondents - students, librarians, interns, volunteers
- 5-10 hours a week for review or answering letters
- A way to promote your service - in jails, during jail family visits, at probation or courts
- Scanner and post-its

Resources

- Books 2 Prisoners groups
- Prison Activist Resource Center - <https://www.prisonactivist.org/resources>
- PEN America - Prison Writing Program - <https://pen.org/prison-writing/>
- SFPL creating form response templates
- SFPL Rules & Regulations

Conclusions: Crossing Institutional Divides

Jails and prisons- Public libraries- and LIS education

- Theoretical versus practical (in education)
- Mutually increasing awareness (word gets out to patrons)
- Humanizing reference questions
- Mentorship
- Group work: students learn from each other

Q&A

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