



The Pen Project Internship

ENGLISH 484/584, Spring 2019

Credit hours: 3, Cap: 35

Prerequisite: ENG 102, 105, or 108 with C or better

Instructor: **Dr. Cornelia "Corri" Wells**

The Pen Project is an innovative distance learning program for maximum security and other incarcerated individuals at the New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD) in Santa Fe and the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) in Florence. Typically comprised of advanced English majors (though students in other majors may apply), Pen Project interns learn about U.S. prison systems and refine their own creative and critical writing skills by providing written feedback to essays, poems, short stories, song lyrics, and creative nonfiction (memoir) sent from the penitentiaries. This internship opportunity in prison writing and critical practice debuted in Fall 2010 and serves students who wish to gain pedagogical experience with this unique population, two thirds of whom did not receive a high school diploma (BJS.gov).

The internship is conducted mainly as an iCourse, with one mandatory in-person orientation the first Wednesday of the semester (Wednesday, January 9th, 6:00-9:00 p.m., Tempe Campus). If you cannot attend this orientation (in person), please do not apply for the internship for this semester.

All correspondence with incarcerated writers is moderated through the instructor via ASU/Blackboard. ADC staff provide writings gathered from participating prisoners. ASU interns respond with practical commentary and encouragement. Critical readings in writing pedagogy and the prison system itself, along with instructor feedback, inform pedagogical practice and online teaching skills. Regular Blackboard and in-person discussion among intern peers and instructor will also occur throughout the semester. Responses to prisoners' written work are typically organized into 4 or 5 two- to three-week cycles with sufficient flexibility to accommodate interns' personal schedules and prison lockdowns.

Primary Goals:

- at a pragmatic level, to reduce recidivism through education, fostering skills that provide alternatives to crime, the only approach that works, and
- at a more fundamental level, to foster education among a disenfranchised population—as a human right—acknowledging that lifelong learning constitutes an essential facet of human being.

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Requirements:

- Regular online discussion of prison literature, prison education, and other prison issues
- Extensive written feedback to prisoners on their writing

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Security:

Interns **must** adhere to a strict security protocol:

*All prison writers and ASU interns **remain anonymous** to each other. Incarcerated writers are identified by first name only while ASU interns use a one-word pseudonym known only to the instructor. Direct contact between incarcerated writers and ASU interns is prohibited. (You **will** interact with the other ASU interns, however.)*

This 3-credit hour internship involves approximately 150 hours of work over the course of the semester.

If interested, contact Dr. Cornelia "Corri" Wells at Cornelia.Wells@asu.edu for more information and/or submit the attached application to Dr. Wells via email. Applications are due no later than **midnight, Sunday, December 9th**. Applications will be considered on a rolling basis with the earliest received being earliest reviewed and earliest selected.

Accolades for the Pen Project

as excerpted from letters by former interns to Pen Project Prison Writers
followed by the application



Doors Opening

Chaco Canyon, NM, 2001

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 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. They tell 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 them. 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

PEN PROJECT APPLICATION – SPRING 2019

(1) Please submit your completed application along with (2) a copy of your unofficial transcript (available free via myASU) and (3) a writing sample of a rhetorical/literary analysis (preferred, but other analytical papers accepted – don't write anything new for this – we aim for a low-stress application process). Any supplemental materials, especially feedback you have provided to another writer, that you feel further demonstrates your ability as a writer and thinker are welcomed. All materials should be merged into this single Microsoft Word file (except the transcript, which downloads as a pdf) saved as your FirstNameLastNamePenProjectDate (e.g., AlexGarciaPenProject16Oct2018) in Word or RTF (Word preferred, RTF accepted). Submit both the application (with writing sample) and the transcript via email attachment to Cornelia.Wells@asu.edu by midnight, Sunday, December 9th. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling deadline in the order received; priority will be given to students who apply early.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name	
Student ID	
GPA	
Academic Major/Focus	
Credit hours completed in major	
Minor (if you have one)	
Credit hours completed in minor	
Street Address	
City, State, ZIP	
Phone	
E-Mail Address	

MANDATORY TRAINING

All interns **must** attend a three-hour, **in-person** orientation and training session the **first Wednesday of the semester (Wednesday, January 9th, from 6:00-9:00 p.m., Tempe Campus)**. **If you cannot attend the orientation, please do not apply for the internship at this time.** Initial this space to indicate that you **will** be available for the training/orientation session **in person**: _____. Regular assignments will be due online on Mondays and Fridays by midnight. Initial this space to indicate that you understand the **twice weekly iCourse/Online format**: _____.

INTERESTS

Please state why you are interested in participating in the Pen Project (limit 200 words)(try to evidence your tightest writing, i.e., be specific and make every word matter):

QUALIFICATIONS

Summarize qualifications you have acquired from course work, employment, previous volunteer work, or other activities, that make you eligible to work as an intern for the Pen Project (limit 200 words)(again, be specific and make every word matter):

PREVIOUS CRITICAL RESPONSE EXPERIENCE

Summarize your previous experience in providing critical feedback/review/revision suggestions. In addition, discuss any previous online courses you have taken and include your experience with Blackboard (limit 200 words)(as before, showcase your sense of *precision (specificity)* and *economy* in writing):

ACADEMIC/PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES (NOT FAMILY OR FRIENDS) X 2

Name	
Title	
How long have you known this reference and in what capacity?	
Street Address	
City, ST, ZIP	
Home Phone	
Work Phone	
E-Mail Address	

Name	
Title	
How long have you known this reference and in what capacity?	
Street Address	
City, ST, ZIP	
Home Phone	
Work Phone	
E-Mail Address	

WRITING SAMPLE

Attach a writing sample of a literary or rhetorical analysis or a creative prose sample.

UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

Attach your unofficial transcript, available for free via ASU website.

AGREEMENT AND SIGNATURE

By submitting this application, I affirm that the facts set forth in it are true and complete. *All interns are required to agree and adhere to a security protocol.* I understand if I am accepted as an intern, any false statements, omissions, misrepresentations, or breach of security agreement made by me will result in my immediate dismissal and a failing grade.

Name (printed or typed)	
Signature (if you know how to do this electronically – if not, you can sign in person if selected for an interview)	
Date	

OUR POLICY

The Pen Project internship policy is to provide equal opportunities without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual preference, age, or disability. Thank you for completing this application form and for your interest in participating in the internship project. You will be contacted via email or phone regarding your application status

DID YOU ATTACH YOUR WRITING SAMPLE AND TRANSCRIPT?