

## What Type of Person Do We Want To Be Released Into Society

The struggles of education oriented inmates in Texas

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Inmates should better themselves while in prison. This is a common expectancy of society and prison systems give merit to this expectation by providing rehabilitation programs available to inmates. In TDC there are several educational programs that give the inmate an opportunity to better themselves by seeking out a higher education and graduating various forms of schools and trainings. Inmates who choose to better themselves find all sorts of barriers in place that slow the progress and process down, often times to a complete halt. It is a struggle to better oneself in prison with so many factors working against them.

TDC has Windham, a state run school as well as different types of colleges. Here on Luther aspiring students have the opportunity to attend Windham trades or GED training. We also have Lee College vocational and degree programs. It seems logical to assume that society wants an educated, better equipped person to be released into free world after the inmate has served the prison term. But who gets to decide what kind of person gets released on parole and why? What kind of person would you want to be released?

Upon exploration of the enrollment process one would find that it is a tedious one. The amount of signatures on the applications and agreements rivals those of any University. This is a typical struggle experienced by would be students everywhere. However there is another struggle experienced by inmates, getting there.

There is a series of administration buildings on Luther.

They are seperated accordingly to the houseing areas where the inmates live. Needless to say we are locked up. We can't jsut ask to be let out. Yet there are times when inmates must leave the housing areas for various reasons. One of those reasons would be to enroll in school

When an inmate has an appointment anywhere outside the housing area we are given a "Lay in pass". This is much like a hall pass and it allows the inmateleave the housing area. We simply present it to the officer on duty and they are suppose to let us out. We simply present the lay-in to the officer on duty and the officer confirms our houseing, name and tdc number and matches it with the roster and lets us go to our appointment. Inmnames who have layin's appear on several rosters including those held by rank and the administration buildings. The redundancy of the roster system is to be able to schedule movement and activities, and to keep track of where inmates are at all times. But the most important function of the lay-in and what matters most to the inmate is to be let out of our holding area and be given passage to go to where we need to go, in this case college/school enrollment.

This is where the trouble lies. I have had several problems getting out of the dorm and have missed appointments or arrived late due to the ineffeciency of the lay-in process. TO my understanding there is no protocol for the lay-in process. No recognizable protocol at least, and non that has been enforced. Common examples of my lay-in experinces concerning education would be officers announcing for the lay-in holding inmates to "get ready", hours before the lay-in is set to be. The call out process may tranvers shifts so the arriving shift on duty have no awareness of what

has been called. Sometimes there are batches of lay-in called out for different times, and specific times may or may or may not be called out at all. There may be no warning to get ready leading to late arrivals or missing the appointment completely. Cancellations may occur and are sometimes not announced as well leading to inmates to wonder if they missed their way out of the housing area, often fearing a disciplinary case which may accompany any late arrival or no show. The consequences for missing or arriving late may delay the enrollment process further and all restrictions that may apply to such will have a negative impact on parole decisions. There have been many times I have been punished for trying my best to do the right thing. In the case of missing college enrollment, the delay may be up to 13 weeks, the next semester to apply again.

Then there is harassment factors. Some guards are very apposed to us pursuing a college education. Speculation leads to the belief that officers are jealous of our opportunity, or simply think we don't deserve this chance to go to school. As a Lee college student I have gotten use to the officers favorite comment to make when passing them with my school books. That comment being "you didn't go to school in the world, now all of a sudden you want to get educated." I most certainly went to college before my incarceration, but that's beside the point. The point is that there is nothing prohibiting officers acting any which way they want toward specific populations of inmates. They do what they want, and if they don't want to let me out to go enroll for my next semester, they simple ignore me and that's it on their part. I am then put in a position that I would have not been in if I were to just give up on school. If I decide to continue my education I am not left with many tools to hold officers

accountable for breaking the rules.

IN TDC we have a grievance process that we my use if an officer acts outside the scope of TDC policy, however the grievance process isw flawed as well. It may take months for the grievance to be processed. There is always fear of retaliation from said officers or their friends, (both officers and other inmates). Many times grievances may be returned with the common statement saying, "there is no evidence for your claim." The grievance process is designed in such way that most inmates choose not to employ it. There is also no outside oversight of the grievance process and all efforts to try to get one have been met with great resistance in the Texas Legislature.

There is also a sytamatic undertone of prejudice toward specific students seeking higher education. To be clear students may be classified loosely into two different types. The following are those types, Windham-which is GED and blue coller trades. This school is free to all inmates. Then there is College, "higher education" for those students seeking degrees in particular areas of interest, college is not free.

Windham students are given full time student status so they don't have jobs and can be fully dedicated to their studies. Their classrooms are air conditioned and heated during the appropriate seasons. This is a huge plus since TDC units are mostly not climate controlled. (efforts to accomplish this has also been met with resistance in the Legislature.) College students still have jobs and must manuever themselves through difficult avenues discussed earlier as well as the norms of prison. College classrooms may or may not be climate controlled.

Now one may easily argue that innocent "regular" people absent of criminal records and prison sentences experience the same struggles so why should inmates convicted of felonies be spared these common conditions. Some may even argue that inmates should be grateful we are receiving such opportunities. Some would even go as far to say we should not have access to these programs.

The opposite camp may be under the belief that inmates were sentenced to prison as punishment, not for punishment. Therefore if certain barriers can be removed with the intent of giving the would be student/ possible college graduate an easier softer way, why not.

It comes down to the question of "what kind of person do we want released into society." Most inmates will be released one day. There is many barriers put in front of an inmate seeking a college education. Few make it to the enrollment process, even fewer graduate. Most will be released either sooner or later. Will there be struggles upon release? Will these struggles both inside and outside amplify my character in a positive way? I am grateful for holding college credentials and proud of myself for accomplishing this in prison. I view my struggles as challenges to overcome. But is that the case for all or even most of my fellow inmate students. Will they be grateful? Will they view themselves as a beacon of creative positivity eager to contribute to society and start a new life, or will they be resentful at the establishment, holding bitter grudges and jealous feelings toward their neighbors, peers and family. What plans and goals have been formed in the mind of an intellectual convict that has been given formal college education? Most importantly will this person newly released from prison carry out those plans?

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