

JSRI

JESUIT SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

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JSRI Supporters,

This week students are already finishing mid-term exams so an update on our prison education program is perhaps overdue. As you may already know, in August, 2022, Loyola University New Orleans accepted the first class of twenty incarcerated students and fourteen correctional employees from Rayburn Correctional Center in Angie, LA. Incarcerated students and correctional employees are in two separate sections of a Development of Social Thought course taught weekly and in person at the prison by Dr. Marcus Kondkar.



Students are excited to engage with the material and challenge themselves. Incarcerated students have also supported each other by organizing a weekly study hall and recruiting a peer-tutor, who has a master's degree and works in the law library at the prison. I'm proud to report that our incarcerated students finished the first unit of the course with high grades on the unit exam, with most scoring in the 90's. For our students, tests and grades provide additional validation that they belong in our college community and are well qualified to be Loyola students.

Last week, Loyola University Interim President, Fr. Justin Daffron, S.J., visited Rayburn Correctional Center. The students introduced themselves and shared with him their thoughts about the course and program so far.

Mostly, they spoke of gratitude. One student noted that his Loyola education has become the focal point of his life. The same student recently wrote about his experience in more detail:

"Furthering my education during my incarceration has been almost from the beginning my hope and dream above all else, constantly in my prayers. My prior college experience constituted the happiest years of my life and I've deeply regretted not finishing. I must admit that when I received the acceptance letter, after reading it multiple times, I cried for sheer joy...One of the things that incarceration has done to me is compounded feelings of worthlessness and meaninglessness, which I've already struggled with most of my life because of my disability, but for the first time in a long time I feel once again in control of my own future and that good things could be just beyond the horizon."

Fr. Daffron shared that he was moved by the students' expressions of gratitude. He then provided an overview of the [Ignatian Examen](#) as an opportunity for them to incorporate gratitude and reflection into every day.

Another student shared that his favorite part about being in the Loyola program was that Loyola faculty and staff "do not treat him like a criminal."

Catholic Social Teaching implores us to recognize the dignity of every person and that nothing can separate us from the love of God ([Romans 8:37-39](#)). We are blessed to have the opportunity to walk with our brothers and sisters at Rayburn Correctional Center as they continue on their journey as Loyola students.



I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has donated to support our students, with a special thanks to the Order of St. Lazarus, which provided a grant to pay for orientation books! One Order of St. Lazarus member generously matched that grant to support our students! Order of St. Lazarus member, Loyola Alumna, and Loyola Board of Trustee member, Michie Bissell, donated \$2,857, the full program cost for one student for one year!

Michie issued a challenge to our supporters to fully fund the program. This will require 34 donors to give \$2,857/year or \$238/month for 12 months.

Please [donate online](#) or reach out to me if you are interested in sponsoring one of our students this year! We will have special programming and acknowledgment opportunities for prison education program sponsors!

Thank you for your support for prison education!

Best Wishes,

Dr. Annie Phoenix

**Executive Director
Jesuit Social Research Institute
Loyola University New Orleans**



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