



UNIVERSITY  
BEYOND BARS



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## Get Your Mind Right

By Jeremiah Bourgeois



Many people involved in prison education use words such as *transformative* to describe the effect education can have on our lives. After 20 years confined, I agree that education can transform

men. However, it is important to clearly define the type of education that is necessary to achieve this result. Take a look at three men I was imprisoned with, who were released over the last several years — you'll see from outcomes what is essential for transforming a man who has spent years confined.

“Devil” was about 20 years old when he was sentenced to 17 years’ confinement. He was a disciplinary problem and spent a lot of his term in isolation for violating countless rules. He was tenacious enough to pass three out of the five GED examinations. But after that, he learned nothing; when released, he had nothing. The next time I saw him was on *MSNBC Caught On Camera* wielding a knife and wrestling with a motel clerk in an attempted robbery. He got a new 10-year sentence.

“Fatty” was from my neighborhood. He spent a decade incarcerated, and in that time became a certified welder. When he was released, the construction industry was still booming, but Fatty had spent year fantasizing about driving Corvettes and living the life of a successful criminal. So instead of applying his skills and reintegrating into

society, he chose to sell cocaine. Fatty is now also serving a new 10-year sentence — this time in a federal penitentiary.

Finally, there is “Blue.” He was a 16 year old kid when he came to prison and a 36 year old man when he left. Like Devil, he spent years in isolation. He also completed vocational training like Fatty. The most importance difference between him and them is that he gained a love for knowledge. While Devil was stagnant, Blue was reading Plato’s *Dialogues*. While Fatty was enraptured by crime, Blue was fantasizing about college. Before Blue was released he was a University Beyond Bars student, and when he was freed he gained admission to the University of Washington.

Blue’s transformation was aided by his experience in the UBB. This program allows prisoners to gain a sense of accomplishment in an endeavor most never thought possible — completing college coursework. Once this is instilled, it opens a new set of horizons. And it is not just any kind of “education” but this awakening that truly transforms.

UBB relies on contributions from supporters like you to keep the program running and students in the classroom.

Your donations are what make college possible for our students. All donations are tax deductible.

**PLEASE SEND YOUR DONATION TO:**

**UNIVERSITY BEYOND BARS  
POST OFFICE BOX 1267  
POULSBO, WA 98370**

## Learning with the Stars: Two Takes on Astronomy Class

The circumference of the Earth is about 25,000 miles. I know because I looked it up. We can look up things like that. But... the circumference of the Earth was known, within 2%, by 200 BC. All it requires are two sticks.

Imagine two miniature toothpicks, each just a centimeter long. Now stick them in an orange like tiny flagpoles, two centimeters apart, sticking straight out. If one toothpick is facing straight at the sun – no shadow – then the other will cast a shadow whose length depends on how far around the orange it is. The length of that second shadow tells you the size of the ball you're on, even a ball the size of the Earth. Two sticks, and two cities of known distance – that's all you need. This method was used in Aswan and Alexandria, Egypt, in ancient times.

Or how about this? You're one mile from an imposing cliff face. Use echoes to calculate the speed of sound. You don't need lasers or particle accelerators.

These problems require ingenuity, sure, but what they really require is the realization that you can access truth directly. You don't have to look it up. You don't have to take anyone's word for it. You can figure it out yourself.

The 16th century's scientific revolution was society saying, "How come I have to believe Ptolemy, or the Roman Catholic Church? I'm going to look at the sky myself." We were emancipating ourselves from authority as a required conduit to truth. We were empowered, with the same nervous excitement we all feel when someone first says, "You're smart. You're good at math. You can draw." We are, and we can!

Despite its reputation otherwise, modern science is *not* so difficult and inaccessible that only a select few can understand it. The truth is that science is miraculously democratic. Science is not just the idea that a person can measure the world. It is also the audacious realization that you can, and all you need are two sticks.

UBB Astronomy teacher Jake Cooper



"Curiosity may be the most reliable characteristic of intelligence, and curiosity about the stars is a natural extension of our continual attempts to understand the world around us." So says my Astronomy textbook. I



enrolled in this course because I was indeed curious about the world around me, so my ego got a boost after I read this. After learning about the history of astronomy, however, I realized how truly intelligent ancient astronomers were, and how their curiosity about the stars led them to develop theories which would have never crossed my mind.

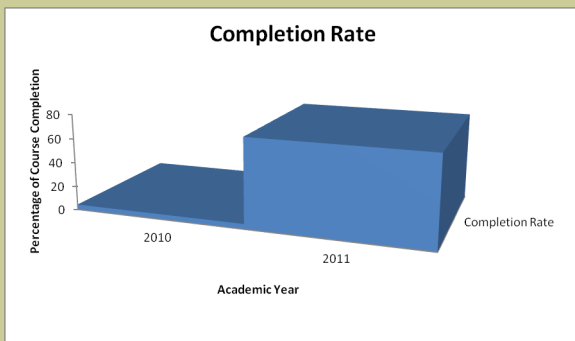
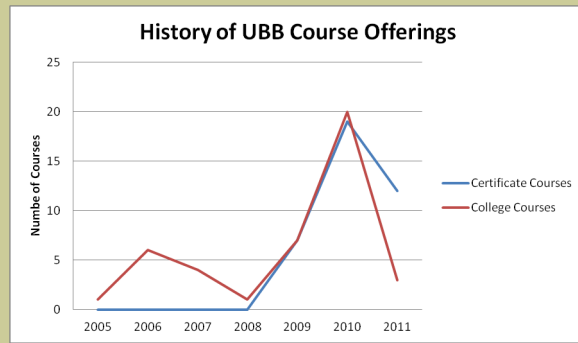
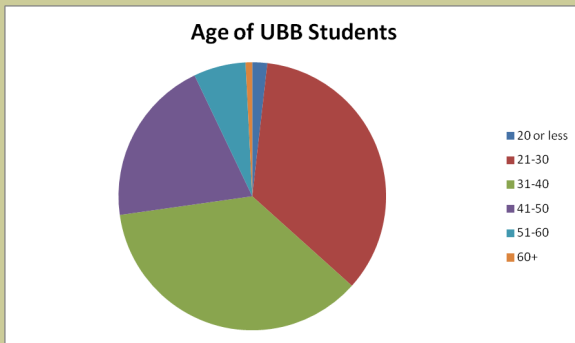
Claudius Ptolemy, for example, created a model of the universe whose purpose was to explain why the planets sometimes seemed to move backwards in the sky. Though his model was wrong, I am astounded that he spent so much time contemplating the problem that he was able to come up with a logical explanation – one that was so compelling it stood unchallenged for over a millennium. Ptolemy's theory was finally challenged by Nicolas Copernicus, who triggered a revolution in astronomy and science with his theory that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the universe.

I am astounded by the fact that neither of these men was aided by telescopes or other modern scientific instruments. Though I have lived on earth almost as long as Ptolemy had when he came up with his theory, I never gave a thought to the most basic astronomical questions, from what causes the phases of the moon to why the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, before this course. As for Copernicus' heliocentric conception of the universe, it seems obvious to me, but I realize that believing that everything revolves around the earth once seemed reasonable to people much smarter than I am.

I am only halfway into this course, but I am even more curious about the stars than when I began. And my ego is still boosted by the idea that this is a mark of my intelligence.

UBB Astronomy student Michael Bassett

### University Beyond Bars Student Data



Even though our students' ages vary widely, UBB is the first contact with college for 69% of our students. Few of them believed they were "college material." We are proud that as UBB has grown and developed, our students' success rate has increased dramatically. The sharp reduction in the number of classes we offered in 2011 is the result of a lack of funding for tuition, not a decrease in the enthusiasm of UBB students. We continue to have more students interested in UBB than we can accommodate.

Dear Friends and Supporters,

We are proud of all UBB has accomplished in the last decade and immensely proud of the students who have demonstrated unwavering determination and talent as they earn college credits and degrees. We find ourselves in a difficult financial chapter and despite all of your generous donations over the last year and the sincere efforts to maintain UBB at its highest level of service, we are faced with some hard decisions. Providing higher education to the men at WSR has been and continues to be our highest priority. The board decided to let go of 1.5 staff positions and return to a solely volunteer based organization to balance the budget. This was not a light decision for the board, but we have absolute faith in our dedicated volunteers and feel UBB is stronger than ever. Thank you for your continued support!

-Mike Katell, UBB Board Chair

### UBB Student Accomplishments

- ◆ **Orlando Ames** and **Anthony Wright** were awarded Associates Degrees from Ohio University
- ◆ **Atif Rafay** won the 2012 PEN Prison Writing Contest.

### WHERE DOES YOUR CONTRIBUTION GO?

**\$360** = Tuition for a 5 credit course. On average, students take 2-3 courses per semester.

**\$300** = General supplies for 165 students. Includes a folder, notepad, pencils, and pens.

**\$180** = Annual textbook costs per student

**\$40** = One used graphing calculator

**\$25** = Admission fee to Ohio University

## A Letter of Thanks

To: UBB

I would like to thank you for all that you've done for me. Not just in the academic sense. I can honestly say the UBB provided me with an eye-opening look at the world. Whether it's the sponsors who volunteer their time or Ms. Carol or Ms. Stacey who dedicate their lives to help people like myself keep a sense of hope.

They've showed me that there are people in the world who want to see you succeed. My teachers and classmates constantly pushed me to be a better person, a quick thinker, one who makes respectable decisions. ...

I'll be taking these tools along with the drive and life I received from all of those who've seen my potential. I will not fail, just because I left older brothers and uncles behind, and it would break their hearts.

Until later, Trevor Hogans  
Proud UBB Advisory Board Member  
and Future Success Story



Panel discussion at the TEBB prison conference (November 2011). Left to right: Atif Rafay, Kimonti Carter, Trevor Hogans, Noel Caldellis, Anthony Wright, and Arthur Longworth.

## Transformative Education Behind Bars

The Transformative Education Behind Bars (TEBB) collective is in its second year, funded once again by the Simpson Center for the Humanities at the University of Washington. This group of regional educators has been working to expand the partnership among University of Washington faculty and graduate students across different departments, schools, and campuses and educators at other non-profit organizations and educational institutions. In November 2011, the TEBB collective hosted a national conference that brought together college-in-prison program directors to discuss the successes and challenges of their work. UBB's Carol Estes was among the featured speakers at this conference. The TEBB collective also is exploring the feasibility of Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program classes at UW that would bring students enrolled on campus and those enrolled through UBB together in classrooms focused on collaborative higher education.

## Monthly UBB Happy Hour

Get together with other UBB teachers and volunteers on the first Sunday of every month, 5PM at Smith, 15th Ave. on Capitol Hill ([www.smithseattle.com](http://www.smithseattle.com)). Join us for an informal opportunity to trade experiences and insights. Folks interested in volunteering are also welcome to come meet current volunteers and learn about UBB.

University Beyond Bars  
PO Box 1267  
Poulsbo, Washington 98370