



## **The Chillon Project at Life University** **August 2017**

The Chillon Project is a collaborative effort between Life University and the Georgia Department of Corrections to provide fully accredited university degrees to people who are incarcerated, returning citizens, and correctional facility staff in the state of Georgia. *Ours is the first accredited AA/BA degree program in a prison in the State of Georgia since 1994 when a ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated people was enacted.* It is one of only a handful of such programs in the southeast. Currently 30 incarcerated students are enrolled in the A.A. degree program and 5 correctional staff are enrolled through scholarships in degree programs at Life University. The Chillon Project was established by the Center for Compassion, Integrity and Secular Ethics at Life University.

### **The AA in PHDSC Degree**

***“Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.”***  
**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

Students in the program complete their Associate of Arts in Positive Human Development and Social Change, an innovative new degree that is also offered on Life’s main campus. The PHDSC program is an original, rigorous interdisciplinary degree focused on enabling students to create positive and sustainable social change. In addition to core liberal arts classes, students take courses in positive psychology, business and social entrepreneurship, peace studies and other disciplines. It includes lab components for the cultivation of inner values, emotional and social intelligence, and contemplative practice. Founded on the principles of social, emotional and ethical learning, the program takes students from learning inner values and social skills to systems-level critical analysis, with a strong emphasis on on-going collaborative learning, research, and teamwork projects for social good.

### **The Chillon Project**

In addition to the Associate of Arts degree program at Arrendale for incarcerated students, the Chillon Project provides scholarships for correctional staff, their families, and returning citizens. As of June 2017, we have provided five full scholarships to correctional staff at Arrendale to attend Life University’s main campus in Marietta. The Chillon Project also produces original research on higher education in prison, including a review article on the effects of higher education in prisons with a focus on women, and an on-going IRB-approved research study at Lee Arrendale State Prison to evaluate the impact of higher education, or the lack thereof, on women’s psychological, physical and social health. The research team includes researchers from a variety of disciplines and other universities, including Emory University. The Chillon Project is



funded by private donations and a grant from the Laughing Gull Foundation, and has received a letter of endorsement from the Dalai Lama.

### **The AA at Arrendale at a Glance**

The first class of fifteen students was admitted at Arrendale in June of 2016, after Arrendale was designated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as a site of Life University in May of that year. Students were admitted after a highly competitive application process that included composing essays and interviewing with faculty from Life University. These students have now completed their first year of classes as of June 15 and are currently “sophomores.”

When they were admitted, the students decided to make a commitment as a group to support each other to ensure that all of them would succeed. After their first year, they have kept this promise and have done extraordinarily well in their classes:

- **The cumulative GPA for the cohort is 3.95.**
- Students have taken eight classes:
  - Quarter 1: Compassion and Secular Ethics; Sociology 101
  - Quarter 2: Introduction to Peace Studies; Creativity and the Artful Life
  - Quarter 3: English 101; Psychology 101
  - Quarter 4: Positive Psychology; Spiritual Autobiography
- and two practice labs:
  - Creativity and the Artful Life
  - Compassion and Secular Ethics
- For their final projects for classes, students have completed significant group and individual projects, including...
  - ...creating educational modules incorporating social and emotional learning for elementary and high school students.
  - ...critically analyzing contemporary high-level research studies in psychology.
  - ...composing original spiritual autobiographies.
  - ...composing grants for funds to support original research and projects such as creating children’s books based on social and emotional learning.
  - ...carrying out creative projects such as composing original songs and sculptures.

The program admitted another class of fifteen students this June, after another highly competitive application process, and we look forward to beginning classes with them in July of this year.

The students report regularly that the program has had a powerful impact on their lives, and we received the following unsolicited email from one student:

The parameters of my mind have expanded so much so that I now see my prior view of the world was muted, the sounds drowned out by useless static and seen



at best through cataracts glossed over by idle time and a life lost. Everything is coming together now, as each class stacks wonderfully, complimenting the one before it. I never would've known the things that now occur to me so innocuously, were it not for this program. Now I see color; I see mechanisms and disciplines, science and beauty where before there was only shades of grey. Critical analysis and "aha" moments have become the norm in a mind where they were before unheard of. Not only have you facilitated discovery for me, but you've given me the means to become the discoverer. It is awesome in every sense of the word.

The student's statement reflects what we have found in our preliminary research on the program. The results from the first set of measures collected suggest that the program is having a positive impact on the students' physical, emotional, and social well-being. Students in the program scored higher than a control group in a number of measures. Preliminary analysis suggests that the degree program is having a particular impact in the following areas:

- a greater overall health, especially mental health.
- a greater sense of meaning, purpose and direction in life.
- a better ability to handle stress.
- feeling closer to others beyond one's immediate circle.
- a greater sense of having something important to contribute to society

### **Staff**

- Dr. Gerard Clum, Director, Center for Compassion, Integrity and Secular Ethics
- Dr. Thomas Fabisiak, on-site director for the A.A. at Lee Arrendale State Prison.
- Dr. Michael Karlin, Associate Director, Center for Compassion, Integrity and Secular Ethics
- Dr. Brendan Ozawa-de Silva, Associate Director, Center for Compassion, Integrity and Secular Ethics
- Tali Abraham, Program and Research Coordinator, Center for Compassion, Integrity and Secular Ethics

### **Contact Us**

For more information on the Associate of Arts degree program at Arrendale or Chillon Project, visit [compassion.life.edu](http://compassion.life.edu), contact Dr. Thomas Fabisiak at [thomas.fabisiak@life.edu](mailto:thomas.fabisiak@life.edu) or write to Life's Center for Compassion, Integrity, and Secular Ethics at [compassion@life.edu](http://compassion@life.edu). Dr. Fabisiak can also be reached at Arrendale at 706-776-4776.