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STETSON UNIVERSITY

Stetson University Receives \$210,000 Grant for Prison Education Project

Funding will help grow Daytona Beach initiative

DELAND, Florida, June 23, 2018 -- The Stetson University Community Education Project has been awarded a \$210,000 grant, which will be used to expand classes for incarcerated men in Tomoka Correctional Institution, as well as begin offering college credit for courses this fall.

The [Laughing Gull Foundation](#) approved a grant for \$70,000 a year for three years for the Community Education Project (CEP), which has offered classes in the Daytona Beach prison since 2015, said Pamela Cappas-Toro, Ph.D., assistant professor of World Languages and Cultures (Spanish) at Stetson.

Beginning this fall, the project will offer one course each semester for non-degree-bearing college credit. Twenty students are expected to enroll this fall and that number will grow to 30 next fall.

The grant will pay to hire a project coordinator, who will tutor incarcerated students and serve as a liaison with the state Department of Corrections, Cappas-Toro said. The grant also will provide textbooks and school supplies, support students' emerging scholarship and creative course projects, and add a computer lab for the students, who currently do the coursework by hand.

"This is going to mean an expansion of our program at Tomoka," said Andrew Eisen, Ph.D., adjunct professor of history at Stetson and one of the founders of the program. "It will be small, incremental growth to ensure the quality of our program."

Eisen and Cappas-Toro were involved in a similar prison-education program at the University of Illinois when they were graduate students there. After the married couple arrived at Stetson, they started the program at Tomoka Correctional Institution with Jelena Petrovic, Ph.D., Stetson assistant professor of Communication and Media Studies. The following year, Melinda Hall, Ph.D., assistant professor of philosophy at Stetson, joined the effort. Currently, the four professors co-direct the project.

Since then, more than 25 Stetson professors have taught classes, led workshops and provided guest lectures to the students in the prison. Subjects have included history, Spanish, philosophy, mathematics, communication, computer science and English. They have been supported in part by the Nina B. Hollis Institute for Educational Reform and its Research Impact Award.

“Teaching at the Tomoka Correctional Institution fits squarely into our mission,” said Stetson President Wendy B. Libby, Ph.D., who has been a guest lecturer at the prison. “That our faculty have been so enormously supportive underscores how clearly this work aligns with Stetson’s values.”

Stetson’s undergraduate students do not visit the prison but have been involved in the program, interning in the CEP office on the DeLand campus.

The Laughing Gull Foundation provides grants to increase access to credit-bearing college courses for incarcerated students, primarily in the South, according to its website. The Foundation awarded the grant to Stetson’s Community Education Project after visiting the DeLand campus and the prison classroom in February.

“We are very excited to partner with Stetson University and we appreciate the inspiring work of the Community Education Program,” wrote Hez Norton, interim executive director of the Laughing Gull Foundation, in an email announcing the grant.

“We’re able to draw on the expertise and the willingness and dedication of faculty members who have from day one helped us build this program, all as volunteers,” Eisen said.

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About Stetson University

Founded in 1883, [Stetson University](#) is the oldest private university in Central Florida, providing a transforming education in the liberal arts tradition. Stetson stresses academic excellence and community-engaged learning, and consistently earns high marks in national rankings. Stetson encourages its students to go beyond success to significance in their lives, the lives of others and their communities. [Stay connected](#) with Stetson on social media.