

January 18, 2023

Hello President Persons, Senators and guests,

I am proud to be a part of the Rising Scholars team. For many years, the Disability Resources Department has been providing support to our students in the Second Chance Club. When I recently learned that we now had students attending classes from the Juvenile Detention Centers in both Sonoma and Marin Counties, I was eager to reach out to see if these students needed DRD support.

In the last few months, I have begun meeting with students at the Sonoma County Juvenile Detention Center in person and via zoom and have discovered that they need to be able to access priority 1 registration. Students are in a classroom setting each weekday from roughly 8:30am to 12:30pm. This is the only time our students have access to their laptops, classwork, and learning materials. Occasionally, students are able to read from books when they are in their rooms but that is largely dependent on staffing coverage. Therefore, for the most part, our students only have access to their courses during these specific times and are expected to take a full load of 12 units. As you can imagine, this number of units and the limited hours for coursework would be extremely challenging for most students to find classes that work with their schedules, to attend all zoom sessions and fully complete assignments in this narrow time frame.

When I have met with the students at the facility both in person and via zoom, I have been struck by the level of noise during their school hours. While each unit has a small number of students at any given time (about 8), there can be numerous disruptions during class times including doors buzzing people in and out, phones ringing, students and staff talking, and presenters visiting. The students also shared with me that there can be unexpected lockdowns and alarms. I understand that sometimes the students can move into a quieter room on the unit but that is dependent on staffing and other facility needs that are out of the control of the individual. As such, it can be difficult for these individuals to attend classes, let alone complete schoolwork with these interruptions. As you might have guessed, many of these students are taking asynchronous online only classes, and/or can only take classes that have a live zoom when they have access to their physical classroom.

We know from the research that many teens and adults who are incarcerated are likely to have a history of trauma, neglect and abuse, learning needs that may or may not have been diagnosed or addressed in TK-12 grades, as well as other health conditions. Thus, many are coming to us with high ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences Scores) including undiagnosed and/or untreated health and learning concerns, and they may or may not be aware of or able to get medical documentation and support for these needs while incarcerated.

Thus, it is wise for us to consider providing additional support and services to these individuals, including disability advocacy. The catch is that many of these students may not be aware of resources to remove barriers to learning such as the Disability Resources Department, or perhaps may not feel safe to access these services (in terms of not wanting to be identified as needing DRD support), or may also be experiencing obstacles in obtaining medical verification for DRD services (which includes priority 1 registration access).

I would like to express my thanks to my department and Dean Kim Starke, who have helped us to problem solve and remove some of these barriers to DRD services so that we may get as many of these students in the door and begin providing immediate support. That being said, we cannot reach all of the students who may qualify or want our services with this method alone and it leaves many falling through the cracks and left in the prison pipeline without removing these obstacles for all of our students in the Rising Scholars program.

I would like to urge the Academic Senate to take action that would allow all of our Rising Scholars students access to priority 1 registration as a special population. For us to truly support these students, we need to

acknowledge that a majority are likely students with undiagnosed health and learning needs. We need to understand that our students may not be able to take classes at times that do not work for their limited access to a classroom while incarcerated. We also need to recognize that there are many systematic barriers impacting these individuals and this needs our attention.

I believe we can make a real difference in creating change by increasing access and retention for these students and our larger community by moving these students into priority 1 registration status.

Thank you,

Jocelyn Arild

Disability Specialist