

INMATES

least some postsecondary education, compared to 51 percent of the general adult population. As the demand for higher education grows among employers, many newly released inmates find themselves without the necessary skills to find jobs in today's workforce.

Regine Criser, assistant professor of German, became involved in prison education by volunteering with the Education Justice Project, one of the nation's leading prison education programs, while studying at the University of Illinois. In the program, she taught inmates courses on American literature, examining works such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Native Son* and *Catch-22*.

"It was super interesting to discuss these major foundational texts with this specific U.S. population who had very strong feelings and insights," Criser said.

Part of the benefits of prison education programs lies in lowering the rates of recidivism, or the cycle of former inmates returning to prison once more, Criser said.

"We know if we start working with students on the inside with regard to giving them transferable college credit, the recidivism is so immensely reduced," Criser said. "It makes all the sense instead of continuing to set people up for failure or not giving them the chance to not fail. Why would we not do that? That was something that motivated me in the beginning to be like, 'Yes,

I want to do this work.'"

Professor of Mathematics and Honors Director Patrick Bahls said UNCA's involvement in prison education reflects the responsibility of the college to the community.

"I think our role as a university, especially as a public university, is at least to serve the community of which we're a part," Bahls said. "Because the knowledge, the skills, the ideas that we have here on campus are meaningless and useless if they aren't applied."

Bahls emphasized the classes provided by the upcoming program would demand the same level of effort and commitment as those offered at UNCA, rather than skill-based or trade-based courses.

"These are not just classes in prison. These are bona fide classes. These are honest-to-goodness college classes that are as rigorous and important and respectable as any others," Bahls said.

Despite the outreach from university faculty to bring college education inside prison walls, some faculty members worry about the scrutiny former inmates may encounter from university admissions policies after their release.

About 66 percent of colleges, including all UNC system schools, require criminal justice information during their application process, reports a 2010 study from the Center for Community Alternatives, an incarceration and policy advocacy group.

Dean of Students Jackie McHar-

gue belongs to a panel of administrators and faculty which reviews applicants with criminal backgrounds. McHargue emphasized how her team thoroughly evaluates each application on a case by case basis and has no hard, fast rule for denying or admitting students with past criminal convictions.

"We really do believe in that opportunity to not be defined by a single moment. I think we have to normally weigh what that means, but I think we're also not a campus that does flat denials. I think everyone deserves a shot at hope," McHargue said. "And we know education's life changing. And so we take that responsibility really seriously."

Senior Director of Admissions and Financial Aid Steve McKellips said he and others who review potential students plan to work with the incoming program to provide former inmates with a fair chance of admission.

"From what I have heard about it, our interpretation of the process falls directly in line with the way that they are trying to get the academic side," McKellips said. "In terms of what courses, what structure, I don't have any idea how those things are set up. But I do know that their intent is consistent with the way that we handle the applicants through this process. So, there's a nice synergy to what the students can be told will happen and what actually happens."

Currently, the program remains in its preliminary stages of develop-

ment, Walters said. Although funding remains a roadblock to providing credit bearing classes, Walters said he and other faculty members feel enthusiastic and ready to get started as early as spring 2018.

"We don't have funding for what we're doing right now, so I just volunteered to do next semester," Walters said. "It's not going to be a credit-bearing class. Normally, they would get three credits just like a regular college class that they could transfer to any institution that they wanted to transfer to. But we wanted to get going."

Meanwhile, Criser said the response from administrative leaders at UNCA has been encouraging.

"Provost Urgo has been very supportive. He has had higher education in prison programs on two previous campuses that he was involved in," Criser said. "It's really nice to be able to do this work with an administration that says, 'Yes, we want you to do this work.'"

Criser said she and others on campus hold high hopes for the program and look forward to helping rebuild the lives of current and former inmates.

"It doesn't always work out. We know that. But, the times it works out and the times we successfully reduce recidivism and the times that prison education and support outside has turned former convicts into law students, I mean, it happens," Criser said. "So, I think we should do that work definitely. Definitely."

BIKE DAY

increases the likelihood of me getting injured, so I am still a little afraid of doing it regularly," DaSilva said.

Bike riding to campus on a daily basis is not advisable because it increases the chance someone has to get hurt. The Bike Bonanza aimed to stress sustainability and bike safety with the help of Outdoor Programs and the SEC.

"The whole idea of the event is to focus on bicycle advocacy, safety and maintenance and encourage

people to get outside. Since it's in coordination with Greenfest, it's really cool because it's working on sustainable ways of transportation, and that's just something we're all about with Outdoor Programs," said Lauren Shell, a junior outdoor programs leader at UNCA.

Phil German, assistant director of outdoor programs, and the Student Environmental center, worked together to plan and arrange the event.

Ventrella, a project coordinator for the SEC, said the organization was there to support sustainable

energy.

"The Student Environmental Center is promoting sustainability through riding bikes," Ventrella said.

The recreation store Second Gear attended the event last Tuesday. Amelia Rosenberg, a senior art student and employee of Second Gear, said the shop sells second-hand items. Shopping for products secondhand is more sustainable because less materials are used. Rosenberg helped sign people up for a raffle for items from Second Gear as she talked passionately

about the west Asheville area.

Since west Asheville is home to Second Gear, Rosenberg has knowledge of the area's biking conditions.

"I think that biking in West Asheville is relatively accessible. So, I see a lot of people biking to work as well as just biking around," Rosenberg said.

Haywood Road houses many businesses and is located close to neighborhoods so workers can easily bike there. The street is lined by Biscuit Head, The Hop, Nine Mile, the Mothlight and Isis Music Hall.