

# First Weeks with LPEC- House Bills, College Apps, and Advocacy

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**Louisiana First in the Nation to Ban the Box in College Admissions**

My first experiences with the Louisiana Prison Education Coalition have been an exciting taste of what is to come this summer. LPEC is a group of dedicated people with varying backgrounds in criminal justice reform advocacy that are committed to increasing the educational opportunities for the 45,000 people currently in prison in Louisiana and all those directly impacted by the prison system. Through their collective power, LPEC works to thoughtfully develop and implement programming

to ensure that individuals can achieve their educational goals from early literacy through higher education. In addition to providing education in prison, they also seek to educate the public about prison in order build support for prison education and understanding for the impact of this system on our communities, especially here in the most incarcerated state in the most incarcerated country in the world.

As a research and grant development intern, my responsibilities span a large range, from research behind a computer, to in person engagement with formerly incarcerated women at LPEC's education clinic, to joining my supervisor to see a bill signing in Baton Rouge. While public colleges in LA are now prohibited from asking about criminal history on admission applications as put forth by HB 688, my big project right now is to research which private colleges in Louisiana still ask these restricting questions.

Also involved in helping pass HB 688 was the organization VOTE (Voices of the Experienced), a criminal justice system reform advocacy group that I worked with last year through my Media and Criminal Justice class. At VOTE is where I met my LPEC supervisor Annie, and so I thank that class and the networking connections I made through the service learning component for helping me secure the amazing internship I have now. If I could give any tips for finding a rewarding internship, it would be to find something your genuinely passionate about and make as many contacts as you can in that field. Putting your name and interest out there can open so many doors.

My first week was a little hectic, with meetings having to be moved around and postponed at first. But when we finally did meet with all of my fellow interns and supervisor, the passion and excitement to begin working was palpable. I know the girls I will be working with, so I'm excited to continue building our relationships through this partnership with LPEC. I can't wait to learn more from Annie, whose trainings and depth of knowledge on criminal justice reform and the sociology of mass incarceration is so unique.

I expect to be working hard this summer to learn from the experiences of those who are currently and formerly incarcerated. I hope to learn how to effectively apply critical thinking, research analysis and synthesis skills in order to develop research that engages with prison reform activism and to develop a working knowledge of the methods of a non-profit organization that incorporates community engagement and educational advocacy. I also expect to develop effective community engagement skills in order to meaningfully conduct work with varying populations and to learn

about the LA state prison system and the effects and consequences of mass incarceration. All of this will come in time with effort, and I can't wait to truly get started.