

# Education is a Right: My Internship with LPEC

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As an Anthropology major with a focus on cultural systems, the phenomenon of mass incarceration in the United States is of great interest to me. Here in the most incarcerated state in the most incarcerated country in the world, women are cycled through systems of institutional racial, economic and patriarchal oppression and subjected to punishments that follow them through incarceration and after reentry. Whether it's simple access to sanitary napkins or medical care for pregnant women in prisons, many of their fundamental needs are neglected or completely ignored, making conditions nearly unliveable. One need that too often goes unnoticed and

unfulfilled is the thirst for education and higher learning that incarcerated people are denied the tools to satisfy. Having the privilege to receive an education at Tulane University and working for two years as an Assistant Teacher in multiple New Orleans schools, I understand and feel deeply passionate about the importance of access to education. Basic and higher levels of education are vital not only for future employment opportunities and as a tool to break cycles of poverty, but for the sense of independence, pride and self-confidence that comes with achievement and self-fulfillment.

Education is a right that can and should be extended to all people, including those in the overextended prison system. That is why I 'm so excited to work with the Louisiana Prison Education Coalition, a new coalition of dedicated members who are committed to increasing educational opportunities to the 45,000 people in prison in Louisiana and to those directly impacted by the prison system. From early literacy through higher education, LPEC develops thoughtful programming for those who much of the country has chosen to forgot and ignore. They also seek to educate the public about prison and foster understanding for the real women and men whose lives should not be and are not defined by their mistakes. While LPEC works to develop programming for women and men, much of the work that co-founder Annie Freitas does involves currently and formerly incarcerated women. LPEC's goals are closely aligned with NCI's own mission, seeking to empower women through education and produce and disseminate knowledge about women and their achievements, rather than focusing on the mistakes that put them behind bars. While interning for LPEC, I hope to embody the Newcomb College legacy by engaging in the greater New Orleans community and participating in meaningful research that empowers women and helps provide the access to education that every person deserves.

Some of my learning objectives that I hope to achieve with this internship are...

1. To apply critical thinking, research analysis and synthesis skills in order to develop research that engages with prison reform activism
2. To develop a working knowledge of the methods of a non-profit organization that incorporates community engagement and grassroots activism
3. To learn about the LA state prison system and the effects and consequences of mass incarceration, with a focus on incarcerated women

4. To develop effective community engagement skills in order to meaningfully conduct work with varying populations

5. To improve independence, leadership and time management skills to foster productivity in professional settings

I can't wait to begin helping to make an impact in the Louisiana prison system and to learn from these women who deserve to have their voices and needs heard!