

Quinnipiac University awarded \$100K grant by New England Prison Education Collaborative

By **MADELYN DURKE**
Contributing Writer

The New England Prison Education Collaborative (NEPEC) awarded Quinnipiac University a \$100,000 grant to fund the Prison Education and Community Engagement program. Quinnipiac is one of five schools to receive this grant.

Quinnipiac has a long history of working with correctional facilities through inside-out classes and the Prison Project, made up of both incarcerated and Quinnipiac students. These programs have offered some higher education for incarcerated individuals, but it is not enough.

“There is a need so how can Quinnipiac come in and provide?” Professor of Social Work Amber Kelly said.

The Needs Assessment of Higher Education in Connecticut Correctional Facilities report, published on March 28, analyzed the unmet educational needs of the incarcerated population across all correctional facilities in Connecticut.

The report classified individuals who have completed at least one college course or a verified high school diploma as currently college-ready. Individuals who self report as testing at a 9-12 grade level are classified as potentially college-ready.

Limiting factors for the incarcerated student population are also taken into consideration,

including the length of sentence, severity and nature of the offense.

The report estimates that as of Oct. 1, 2024, the sentenced population includes 3,023 individuals who are currently college-ready and 3,032 individuals who are potentially college-ready. Combined, that makes up about 56% of the total incarcerated population.

Many studies have shown that education has been proven to reduce the risk of recidivism for offenders. Providing quality higher education for incarcerated students would positively impact them and their communities upon release.

“To recognize how all of us are impacted by mass incarceration,” Kelly said. By supporting higher education of these marginalized people, “we are supporting a healthier community for all.”

She applied for the NEPEC grant last spring and is honored that Quinnipiac is one of the first recipients of the grant this fall. This puts the university at the forefront of higher education in prison.

NEPEC is an initiative that was launched by the New England Board of Higher Education in Feb. 2024 with help from the Ascendium Education Group who funded the launch with a five-year grant. It is based on the recommendations of the 2023 New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison, which was created to prepare for the reinstatement of federal Pell

Grants for incarcerated students.

Its website states, “Through this initiative, NEBHE seeks to accelerate, support, and collaborate to help create a future where every incarcerated person in New England has access to high-quality, workforce-aligned, equitable postsecondary opportunities with a diverse range of educational pathways.”

Quinnipiac offers programs in partnership with Trinity College and through the Prison Project, but “we are hoping to expand these programs in the future,” Kelly said.

This grant will be used to implement the next steps for expanding Quinnipiac’s programs and creating something that goes beyond what is offered by other institutions: the Prison Education and Community Engagement program.

The money will be used for various stipends and to pay for the time of professors leading programs. The grant has also enabled Quinnipiac to hire a Community Coordinator for the program, Shakur Collins.

Collins, who was formerly incarcerated, is looking to use his lived experiences to build this program into an effective tool to help others in similar situations.

Mass incarceration is a problem within the country that has an effect on everyone, even if we don’t realize it.

“Socially it has an impact, economically it has

an impact,” Collins said. Education is an effective tool to help prevent re-offenses and allow formerly incarcerated individuals to make a positive impact in their community.

“This is just one part of it, one step towards a larger goal.” Collins said. His goal is “making pathways to higher education accessible to everybody” to help incarcerated individuals use the lessons learned in the classroom to benefit them as they return to the community.

The program’s next steps include applying to become an institution that can offer degree-granting programs for incarcerated individuals. This would allow Quinnipiac to offer a bachelor’s degree program in facilities that lack a four-year college option.

Kelly stated that informal polling is being conducted to see what kinds of programs incarcerated students are looking for. The results reveal that they are looking to “be leaders in their community when they come home,” she said.

She and Collins will be hosting an open house in the next few weeks to highlight and discuss the Prison Education and Community Engagement program. They encourage all students to stop by.

“(It’s) an invitation to participate,” Collins said. “Take the first step and come see what it is about.”

Healthcheck on Constitutional Governance addresses political violence

By **VIVIAN GAGE**
Copy Editor

At the Healthcheck on Constitutional Governance event in Quinnipiac University’s Carl Hansen Student Center Piazza, political violence and how to avoid it was the main topic of discussion.

On Sept. 16 from 12:30-1:45 p.m., a board of three panelists and one moderator answered constitution-related questions that students had submitted in advance, as well as questions asked on the spot. According to political science Professor and moderator for the event Scott McLean, the event was meant to serve as “an opportunity to raise our concerns about the U.S. Constitution.”

The event fell on National Voter Registration Day, and at the back of the piazza, there was a table where students could register to vote and pick up a free, pocket-sized Constitution.

Students from a variety of majors attended the event, excited to learn more and hear from the panelists.

“I think it’s important for students who are not immersed in majors like legal studies, or law in society or criminal justice or anything like that,” sophomore criminal justice major Anastasia Souikidis said before the speakers began. “It’s (important) to get (students) more aware of things that do affect them.”

The discussion started with an introduction of the panelists from McLean and an outline of the ground rules. He asked the audience not to make generalizations, to avoid judging people’s questions and to give each other time to speak to build a safe space.

He ended his introduction with an acknowledgment of recent violent events. He said all of the panelists “soundly and vocally reject” all forms of political violence, before passing the mic to the panelists to introduce their goals for the discussion.

Visiting Assistant Professor of political science Candice Travis was the first panelist to speak, giving a brief summary

of how the Constitution came to be and its many imperfections.

“So the result is a compromise,” she said when explaining debates between federalists and anti-federalists surrounding the ratification of the Constitution.

This idea of the Constitution being imperfect and contradictory due to the compromises within it came up frequently for the rest of the “Healthcheck.”

Panelist and Professor of political science Genevieve Quinn explained how she focuses more specifically on issues around the Second Amendment and discussed the difficulty of making new amendments in general.

Connecticut Senator and Associate Professor of legal studies Sujata Gadkar-Wilcox stressed the importance of separating “policy, partisan debates from other kinds of foundational, constitutional debates.”

She expressed her belief that parties should be able to disagree, but thinks a line should be drawn when it comes to constitutional violations.

“It’s okay to talk about the violation of due process,” she said, “because we should have a loyalty as elected officials...to (The Constitution). Not to the party first, to the document.”

The first question asked if the recent increase in political violence worried speakers about where the country is headed, setting the tone for the rest of the discussion. Travis answered first, highlighting “the connection between language and violence,” and pointing out how lots of recent language is stereotypical and misrepresents the truth of our polarization.

“There’s no place in the democracy for political violence. It eradicates the possibility of the very conversation you need to have in order to do politics,” she added.

Gadkar-Wilcox brought up how violence is risky because it makes people afraid to get involved in politics, while McLean talked about how the current constitutional system promotes two major political parties that “thrive on fueling antagonism towards the other side.”

He went on to reference a 2024 Marist University poll in which 20% of the national sample agreed that we may have to resort to violence to get the country back on track. He condemned this line of thinking.

“Party leaders should be speaking out against agitators of their own party, as well, and not excuse them cause they’re on our side,” McLean said.

The next question asked how the Constitution should adapt to modern issues, and Quinn answered first by tying the question to debates around the Second Amendment.

“If we’re going to deal with the root issues of gun violence, the Constitution and the Second Amendment (are) not going to be the answer, even if we amend it,” Quinn said. “This is going to require social movements and activism beyond what we’ve seen.”

Gadkar-Wilcox agreed, adding, “We need to start thinking more creatively about how we work around those structures, because just

saying ‘we can amend the constitution to do that’ is not really an option.”

McLean suggested adjusting the traditional two senators for every state rule, allowing states with larger populations to get an extra senator, as a solution for “unlocking a lot of opportunities to change” within the government.

The rest of the discussion focused on the effectiveness of political action, the opportunities for change allowed by the Constitution, separation of powers, political language, being critical of social media and of course, political violence. A point pressed often was the necessity of citizens to hold their government accountable.

“It’s not just up to the other branches,” Gadkar-Wilcox said. “What we are doing here is what holds all three branches accountable, because it’s public and social movements that constrain the federal executive, plus your congressional representatives, state representatives, the governor...it’s up to grassroots movements.”



Speakers at the Healthcheck on Constitutional Governance: (top left) Associate Professor of Legal Studies Sujata Gadkar-Wilcox, (bottom left) Professor of Political Science Candice Travis, (right) Professor of Political Science Scott McLean.

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