



 **AUBURN UNIVERSITY**
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

 **ALABAMA
PRISON
ARTS +
EDUCATION
PROJECT**

THE ALABAMA PRISON ARTS + EDUCATION PROJECT



DEAR FRIENDS,

Every day, the Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project invests in people behind bars who want to learn. The space of the classroom creates opportunities for students to transcend a past, and work to create a better future. The classes stir in all of us, me, the teachers, the students, family, and many others, something deep and powerful. This year was no exception and in many ways offered more challenges and successes than we could have dreamed possible when first starting this amazing journey nearly 15 years ago.

In 2016, myself and colleagues from Auburn, as well as nationally, were invited to the White House on several occasions to participate in conversations and planning on the Fair Chance Education Pledge, the role of higher education in criminal justice reform, and another visit to DC in conjunction with selection as a Second Chance Pell site. Surrounded by my colleagues and university leaders from around the country, I continue to be inspired by the commitment and desire to improve the lives of incarcerated persons. And it's been impossible to not feel a certain synergy and pride in the long history of Auburn's land grant mission and its tradition of service and access.

I am the most excited for our students who want so desperately to learn and improve their lives. Many have come from areas where people don't get the opportunity to attend a big university like Auburn. . . .

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In reading the applications for the degree program that starts in 2017, so many have conveyed a deep desire to earn a degree for their families and their children. They see education as the key for their future.

The Interdisciplinary degree program will join Business and Human Development and Family Studies to offer students a degree with skills very much focused on successful re-entry to help open doors and provide opportunities that upon release, will allow these students to step back into society, become a part of their communities and provide for their families. It may have been best said by one of my colleagues in the Department of Corrections, "a degree from Auburn University would change everything for these guys".

The acceptance of our program into Second Chance Pell was by far the biggest move of the past year but the physical move of our program from the College of Human Sciences into the University College has been an exciting challenge as well. New administrators, colleagues and staff have made us feel welcome and engaged and hopeful for increased exposure and support in the years to come.

Each and every moment of the past year is the result of the hard work and dedication of APAEP staff, friends and supporters here in Alabama and around the country. As this year closes, I would like to express my very warm appreciation for your support. You have made this year important, meaningful, and possible.

With best wishes for the holidays and a happy new year.

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FACTS ABOUT THE SECOND CHANCE PELL GRANT

- The Obama administration has chosen 67 colleges and universities for a pilot program that will offer Pell Grants to incarcerated students.
- The program will enroll 12,000 prisoners at more than 100 correctional institutions across the country.
- The program is geared toward prisoners likely to be released within the next five years.
- APAEP has received 50 applications for 20 spots in the first year.
- Interdisciplinary Studies (IDSC) Degree will join Human Development and Family Studies and Business for the Bachelor's of Science program.
- Criteria of accepted students includes a GED or high school diploma, clear disciplinary record, and demonstration of an investment in education.

Kyes Selected as Woman Who Shapes the State



Kyes was joined by her family and colleagues from Auburn University. Pictured here are her nieces Sarah and Lauren and her mother, Mary.

In its second year, AL.com with partner Von Maur, selected a new class of Women Who Shape the State and APAEP Founder and Executive Director Kyes Stevens was among those chosen.

Honored at a luncheon in Birmingham on November 3 with special guest, Lilly Ledbetter the honorees were presented with framed photos recently published in Birmingham magazine. Kyes was chosen from more than 100 nominees ranging in professional experience and backgrounds in the sciences, tourism, education, and medical fields.

ANNE BLANKENSHIP

Annie Blankenship, has long believed that the human experience is complicated. Teaching anthropology in a prison has taught her just how true that is. Yet, her passion for her field of anthropology and knowledge that human beings are complicated and the human experience is not black and white has evolved into a meaningful experience teaching in four facilities over the past two years.



A native of Jasper, Alabama, Blankenship earned her bachelor's degree from Auburn University and master's at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Currently pursuing her PhD at the University of Tennessee, after returning to Auburn to work on her dissertation research she connected with a few current APAEP teachers, which led Blankenship to develop an introductory anthropology course that she implemented at Staton and Elmore the next year. This year, she extended the class to Bullock and the women's facility at Tutwiler.

"I love teaching, and my classes in the facilities have been some of the best I've ever taught. There is an enthusiasm to be there, and the resiliency and discipline by the students to make the effort and attend the classes continues to impress me," Blankenship says.

As an anthropologist, Blankenship strives to connect with the students and engage in lessons about human evolution, race, gender, ideology, and class – some of which they may not have been exposed to in their traditional early education. Reaching and teaching people through content that develops critical thinking skills and better cross-cultural learning is a goal for each of her courses.

"I know that it makes me a better teacher when I am able to reach students from diverse walks of life, and my APAEP students have helped me find a purpose in my teaching again and allow me to contribute something back to our greater society."



GOVERNOR TOURS LIMESTONE

In September, Governor Bentley and leadership from the State of Alabama, the U.S. Department of Education, and Auburn University toured the Limestone Correctional Facility after three programs in Alabama were chosen to participate in the Second Chance Pell grant program.

During the visit, Bentley said to a group of current inmates that his goal was to improve facilities so that training can take place. He went on to say that he wanted Alabama's system to go from the worst to the best.

Students currently attending classes in horticulture, botany, welding, and drafting were interviewed.

Those included on the tour included DOC Commissioner Jeff Dunn, U.S. Secretary of Education John King, Broderick Johnson, Assistant to the President and Cabinet Secretary in charge of My Brother's Keeper initiative, Dr. Timothy Boosinger, Provost from Auburn, Kyes Stevens and one current APAEP student.

To see the full video, visit:

[Governor Tours Limestone](#)



APAEP Intern Taylor Patterson holds our newest anthology *A Map I Might Have Drawn*. Please contact our office if you are interested in purchasing a copy.

PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEW PROGRAM COORDINATOR, SHAELYN SMITH

Shaelyn Smith is a program coordinator for the Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project at Auburn University. Shaelyn grew up in northern Michigan and holds an MFA in creative nonfiction. She moved south in 2012 after a brief stint in New York City and began teaching composition at the University of Alabama and creative writing workshops at a girls' detention center. She first taught with APAEP in Spring of 2016, before moving into an administrative role.



I come to this work as an educator first, and administrative personnel second, so my primary goals and passions lie in access to education, and arts education in particular. And, as a creative person, I enjoy the multiple depths and layers to working with this program on both the administrative and teaching side.

- Shaelyn Smith, Program Coordinator

WHAT SOIL DO YOU GROW IN?

Earlier this year Paul Brody, a former Alabama resident currently living and working abroad in Germany, came home in hopes of finding out what APAEP does and what education looks like inside prison facilities across the state. Kyes Stevens took Brody to Elmore Correctional Facility and Tutwiler Prison for Women where he visited a poetry class and viewed the mural project. Not only did Brody listen, but he was also able to participate in class with the students. Brody interviewed APAEP staff, instructors, and students for a podcast which explores the effects of learning the humanities and practicing creative writing has on an incarcerated population. The experience and subsequent interview are both deeply moving and offer a unique look at the work being done by the students of APAEP. Please take a moment to listen using the link provided below.

[APAEP Podcast](#)

WE WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY

to thank our funders over the past year. The Laughing Gull Foundation has generously granted us \$150,000 over the next three years to support our STEM programming and credit initiative. One of the missions of Laughing Gull is to address broken systems that have created inequality and harmed our planet.

Mike and Gillian Goodrich Foundation supports the transfer of innovative ideas to create a vibrant and healthy community in certain specific areas of focus. Their grant of \$75,000 over the next three years will help support tuition for the credit program.

We would not be able to continue our programs without the help of these and all our generous donors.



HELP US BRING EDUCATION TO THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST.

DONATE NOW

Your vital support of APAEP helps our staff and teachers create meaningful educational opportunities for incarcerated men and women around the state. Thanks to a generous grant from the Laughing Gull Foundation, we've developed STEM classes in facilities. But we need your help to bring more classes and programs to life.

Your tax-deductible contribution is an investment in our success. We are deeply grateful for your continued support.

To give follow the link here and click "Donate"

[apaep.auburn.edu](#)

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