

REAP: Reforming Mass Incarceration and the Role of Business B8584 (Half Block Week Course)

Monday, 08/28/23: Full Day
Geffen 640

Tuesday, 08/29/23: Full Day
Geffen 640

Wednesday, 08/30/23: Half Day
Geffen 640

INSTRUCTOR

Damon J. Phillips (djphillips@columbia.edu) is a Senior Research Scholar with the Tamer Center at Columbia Business School, where he was also a full professor from 2011 till 2021. In 2015, he led the creation of CBS' ReEntry Acceleration Program (REAP). He is currently a Professor of Management at Wharton while continuing his work on REAP at Columbia. His research includes work on employment and entrepreneurship of formerly incarcerated people. Before academia he worked as an engineer, taught GED math, and helped to lead a family high tech manufacturing business whose employees included people with criminal records. He has a BS from Morehouse, master's degrees from MIT and Stanford, and a PhD from Stanford.

COURSE TA

Sandra Portocarrero (svp2118@columbia.edu) is a Postdoctoral Research Scholar in the Management Division at Columbia Business School. She is an organizational ethnographer and field researcher who studies the dynamics of diversity, equity, and inclusion in relation to the maintenance of exclusion and racial inequality.

COURSE OVERVIEW:

Monday, August 28: Full Day	Tuesday, August 29: Full Day	Wednesday, August 30: Half Day
Causes of Mass Incarceration & the Role of Poverty	Reentry: What is it Like When You Get Out of Prison?	Understanding Employer Mindsets and the Business Case for Hiring People with Criminal Records
Understanding the U.S. Criminal Justice System	Transitioning Back to Society Exploring Challenges and Solutions	How to Hire Someone with a Criminal Record
The Societal Cost of Mass Incarceration & the Role of Profit	Employment and Entrepreneurship as Potential Opportunities	

GRADING

	Weight	Notes
30% class participation	30%	Contributes to and improves the class discussion (both in-class and online through Canvas).
10% reading/class discussion questions	10%	A set of one paragraph answers to 5 class discussion questions.
30% personal reflections	30%	Two 1-page reflections.
30% final take home	30%	A 5-page plan written to your future (or current) employer about what they can do to help with mass incarceration and reentry. The plan should be realistic and specific to that employer.

Description of Monday, August 28: Full Day

This 1st day involves the most intensive preparation on your part as we cover material that sets the stage for the entire course. We begin with a deep dive into the causes of mass incarceration in the U.S. and its relationship to poverty and race. To prepare you will need to watch a documentary (“13th”), read the most cited book in this area (“Just Mercy”), consider a 4-page counter-argument (“Why Ending Mass Incarceration Means Locking Up Fewer Violent Criminals”), read a 6-page report (“Prisons of Poverty”), and read a 5-page guide on the best use of language when talking about people with criminal records. To facilitate a fuller understanding of our criminal justice system, we will also clarify the difference between jails and prisons, as well as distinguish between probation and parole. Each of these are important components of the criminal justice system. All of this is an investment that pays off: at the end of this first session you will be more informed than at least 90% of the country on this particular issue. But this is just the beginning.

The final session of the day, “The Societal Cost of Mass Incarceration and the Role of Profit,” continues by focusing on the financial and human cost of mass incarceration. This will give you a sense of why a growing coalition is forming around the problem of mass incarceration, including members of the business community. We will also get a sense of one of the challenges: the fact that mass incarceration is interwoven into our economy. As members of the business community, this session will help prepare us to consider how we can promote solutions.

Description of Tuesday, August 29: Full Day

On this day we focus on the transition back home from prison. The first session in the morning (“What is it like when you get out of prison?”), you will be put in the shoes of someone returning from prison to get a better sense of the complex challenges one can face. The early afternoon will give us time to explore “Transitioning Back to Society” through the video and readings that you will have read before class, as well as a panel of formerly incarcerated people and “reentry organizations” who play a critical role in helping with some of the challenges. We will also consider some of the unique challenges that women face. The pre-readings in this session focus on how these organizations work to help someone returning from prison get a job. The third session will serve as a transition to our last day with a discussion of employment and entrepreneurship for formerly incarcerated people. We will also discuss some of the research Kylie Hwang and I have done on how a criminal record influences entrepreneurship.

Description of Wednesday, August 30: Half Day

This last day focuses on employment. The two morning sessions are employer-focused. We begin with examining the perspectives that employers have around hiring formerly incarcerated people, as well as the business case for hiring from this talent pool. We follow this session with a workshop focused on how a hiring manager should evaluate candidates with criminal records. We will end with a wrap-up where we review the course, discuss the final assignment, and do personal reflections on what we have learned.