

Prison Research Meets Practice: A Conversation on Postsecondary Education in Prison

Speaker Biographies



Terrell A. Blount is a motivational speaker and mentor for people impacted by the legal system as well as an activist for justice reform. He is known for speaking on increasing or creating pathways to higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, reentry needs for people leaving prison, and public policies that affect the population. He is a co-founder and the founding Executive Director of the Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network (FICGN), a national nonprofit that works to help system-impacted people reach career and higher education success in prison and reentry. Terrell holds a Bachelor of the Arts in Communication and a Masters in Public Administration, both from Rutgers University.



Dr. Erin L. Castro, serves as Associate Dean for Access and Community Engagement for Undergraduate Education and is an Associate Professor of Higher Education at the University of Utah. Her research seeks to improve policy and practice toward greater equity and access to higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated people. In 2016, she co-founded the University of Utah Prison Education Project and in 2017 launched the Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison. She consults with various states and organizations in their efforts to draft policy that improves college-going pathways for incarcerated people. Her latest project is a planning grant to launch a national center dedicated to prison higher education research. A widely published scholar, Dr. Castro is a founding editor for the *Journal of Higher Education in Prison*. Her work has been published in journals such as *Harvard Educational Review* and

Journal of College Student Development and funded by organizations such as Ascendium Philanthropy and Lumina Foundation.



David Pitts, is a senior research fellow in the Justice Policy Center and director of the Prison Research and Innovation Initiative, a multiyear project that leverages research to promote transparency, innovation, and well-being in US prisons. Pitts uses evidence-based strategies to promote prison reform that benefits both incarcerated people and correctional staff, and toward that end, he has partnered with an array of advocacy organizations, nonprofit service providers, and departments of corrections. His work has addressed a variety of topics in this area, including restrictive housing, prison education, visitation, and correctional staff well-being. In addition to his criminal legal system research, Pitts has written extensively on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in public policy. He has consulted for government organizations at all levels, from

small cities to federal agencies, and has taught a variety of courses to graduate students in public policy and criminal justice programs. He is currently an adjunct professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, and he spent a decade in academia as a tenure-track and tenured professor prior to his work in applied criminal legal research. A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Pitts earned a bachelor's degree from Birmingham-Southern College; master's degrees from Indiana University and the University of California, Irvine; and a PhD from the University of Georgia.