“Prison Reform Project” is the first in a new line of courses in the Department of Government (designated as GOVX) that follow a non-traditional structure and format, based on different methods and schedules of instruction and learning.

The course is also designated as a Doyle Seminar, part of the Doyle Engaging Difference Program, a new campus-wide curricular initiative that gives faculty the opportunity to enhance the student research component of upper-level seminars that address questions of national, social, cultural, religious, moral, and other forms of difference. The Doyle seminars are intended to deepen student learning about diversity and difference through enhanced research opportunities, interaction with thought leaders, and dialogue with the Georgetown community and beyond.

The Spring 2016 version of “Prison Reform Project” represents an experiment in prison education, and many of the details will be worked out—with student engagement and feedback—as the semester unfolds.

Our class sessions will not be held every week, though when we do meet it will be on Friday afternoons. The exact schedule is still TBD, but at a minimum the class will take place at Georgetown, in ICC 112, on January 15, February 19, and April 1, 12:30-3:00 p.m. We will also meet approximately five times at the Jessup Correctional Institution, also on Friday afternoons (dates still TBD), alongside approximately 10-15 Jessup students. In addition, Georgetown students will be meeting within smaller working groups, and consulting independently with both Professor Howard and TA Meir Walters, on a regular basis throughout the semester.

Students will divide into several smaller groups—both Georgetown and Jessup students together—to work on a specific reform proposal (which could address such topics as policing, sentencing policy, prison conditions, solitary confinement, prison rehabilitation, parole, or societal reentry). The groups will be formed based on students’ own interests, which we will discuss at the January 15 class meeting.
Note that there are no predetermined assigned readings for this class. However, students are expected to undertake a great deal of independent reading and analysis related to their chosen topic and project. Specific readings will emerge from conversations with the professor, TA, and fellow students. Students within a particular group will work collaboratively (via Google Drive/Docs or a similar platform) throughout the semester.

The main assignment for the class will be for each group to produce a final project that is of the highest quality in terms of both content and design. The projects can be in various formats, ranging from a report to a multi-media presentation. At the beginning of the semester we will review a range of possible “models” that students can aspire to emulate. In terms of content, students should prepare reform proposals that demonstrate a firm grasp of the history and realities of American mass incarceration, while also putting forward concrete and realistic suggestions for changing it.

Students will have the opportunity to present their final projects at a public event hosted by Georgetown’s Prisons and Justice Initiative towards the end of the semester.

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Tentative Meeting Dates at Jessup:

Jan 29
Feb 12
Feb 26 or March 4
March 18
April 8 or April 15