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The G. Allen Fleece Library Goes to Prison

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ABSTRACT

Preparing a library and setting up library services in a state prison setting presents some unique challenges for the planners. The librarians at the G. Allen Fleece Library at Columbia International University have recently faced such a challenge as they participated with other college officials in the Prison Initiative Program planning and preparation. Tools provided by the Association of Christian Librarians proved exceptionally helpful in the planning and preparation of the library, and in its usability once the program began.

The G. Allen Fleece Library at Columbia International University went to Prison on January 15, 2007, as a part of the new two-year Associate of Arts degree program of the CIU Prison Initiative Program (also known as the Kirkland Prison Initiative Program) at the South Carolina State Prison in Columbia.

The journey to the prison actually began in 2004 when the Director of the South Carolina Department of Corrections, John Ozmint, approached CIU officials with a vision and a request for assistance. Mr. Ozmint had been investigating the possibility of following the example set by Angola Prison in Louisiana to offer a college study program that would not only provide intellectual instruction, but moral instruction as well to “lifers” in the prison system.

Angola Prison was once said to be the bloodiest prison in the South but that reputation has changed drastically since 1995, when the Angola Prison Program was initiated by the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary as one of several programs initiated by Louisiana prison system officials. Hundreds of inmates have received degrees in those intervening years and in the process have seen remarkable, even miraculous changes in their lives.

John Ozmint believed that a similar impact could be made on the South Carolina inmate population if he could make a comparable program available to them. With that vision in mind, he approached Dr. David Osterlund, Professor Emeritus at CIU, and Dr. Junias Venugopal, Dean of the Seminary and Graduate School of Missions, with his idea.

Dr. Osterlund accepted the challenge and began his planning by appointing an advisory board to assist with the myriad details that would need to be addressed in order to begin such a program: curriculum planning, accrediting agency approvals, funding, facilities, faculty ... and a library. While the other details are numerous and interesting in the way they have unfolded, it is the planning of the library and

library services that is the focus of discussion in this paper.

Starting a college-level library collection from “scratch” is a challenge under the most ideal of circumstances. Which comes first, the facility or the collection? Just as the proverbial chicken and egg question, both aspects of the new library would have to be addressed simultaneously. The Prison Library would be considered a branch of the Fleece Library, funded by the Fleece Library budget and staffed by Fleece Library staff, although the program is being privately funded in other areas of operation.

The first task was to plan what needed to be done and how much the start-up would cost. Library staff visited the site of the new program to analyze how the site library could be arranged. The Prison officials were very supportive. They provided the space for a classroom, a computer lab, and a library at the Kirkland prison campus. They emptied the rooms and painted them in preparation for the program ... the rest was up to the University.

There were many lessons to be learned because of our naiveté as we began this planning. For example, we had unused library shelving stored in the Fleece Library basement and our first thought was to save money by using that shelving ... until we were reminded that metal shelving could not be used in a prison setting. Wooden shelving with unmovable shelves would have to be custom-built by the University’s Physical Plant personnel.

An appeal was sent out to current CIU faculty members to share their book collections with the new library. Faculty members responded generously. The library received almost 600 books, most of which were perfectly suited for the curriculum that was being planned, even though no specific direction was given to the faculty members as to what they could/should donate. The bibliographies supplied by the Association of Christian Librarian’s Bible College Section on the ACL website were very helpful in planning the remainder of the

beginning collection. *100 Basic Titles* is a list of Bible-, theology-, and church history-related items that could be considered classic items for a Bible college program, which is what the Prison Initiative Program is in essence. After adding the donated titles to the Prison Library database, the holdings were compared to the *Basic Title* list. How encouraging it was to find that many of the titles were among the donations, and what was not from the list was comparable in topic and value for the program. Additional donations plus a few purchases brought the collection up to almost 1000 titles by opening day in January.

Another bibliography we used from the Bible College Section page was the *Opening Day Periodicals* bibliography which is actually from *The Librarian's Manual*, also published by ACL. Although a number of the suggested titles on that list are not suitable for the Prison Initiative Program Library, such as titles about youth and/or children's ministry work, others would be good additions to the periodical section of the library. We chose 10 of the titles as our beginning subscription list. After researching other titles that could be especially helpful for prisoner students, we also subscribed to two periodicals published either by or for Christian prisoners to supplement the more scholarly items, making a total of twelve subscriptions representing various areas of study that the prisoner students would be addressing throughout their two-year study program.

The Prison Initiative Program Library is presently limited only due to the newness of the program. Accrediting associations' expectation that adequate resources be made available both on-site and from other sources created another challenge for this program. These students cannot leave their campus to visit other libraries, nor do they have access to the Internet, and thus to other library websites. However, the Fleece Library uses The Library Corporation's PAC 2000 program for its catalog, which is produced monthly by TLC on a CD-ROM. A copy of that CD-ROM would be installed on a Prison Program computer, making the Fleece Library catalog instantly available to the prisoner students along with the Prison Library catalog, currently in a

searchable Access database.

Another big challenge the Fleece Library staff faced was to find the best way possible to assist the students in their research. Because of the Internet restriction on the students, they cannot access electronic databases to which other CIU students have access through the Fleece Library website, yet the students will be required to do research for papers and other assignments just as the more traditional CIU students would be doing. Nor would they have easy access to interlibrary loan privileges due to those restrictions. To resolve these issues for the students, the Fleece Library reference staff created a special research worksheet for the prisoner students to use. The worksheet gives the student a way to create searches that he would do if he were to have access to tools other than what he has at the Prison Initiative Library. The reference staff brings the worksheet back to the Fleece Library, performs the search as described by the student and reports back to the student with the findings. Together, they refine the search, and proceed until the student has found the information he needed.

Prison Initiative Program Research Worksheet

Creating a search strategy

1. Write your research question here.
2. Circle the two or three most important concepts in the question above.
3. Start each column with one of the concepts.
4. Think of terms that mean nearly the same thing and list them below.

Concept 1		Concept 2		Concept 3
	and		and	
or		or		or
	and		and	
or		or		or
	and		and	

5. Use these terms to create your search strategy for the library's online databases and catalog.

Hundreds of inmates have received degrees in those intervening years and in the process have seen remarkable, even miraculous changes in their lives.

The students are like sponges, soaking up all they can learn, not only about computers but also about studying and research. It is a joy to be able to help such eager students.

Although this is time-consuming and somewhat labor-intensive for the librarians, it seems to be working quite well, and the students have used the method happily since being introduced to it at the orientation session at the beginning of the program. Plans are to continue to revise this worksheet as the Program continues and specific weaknesses are identified.

Policies and procedures had to be established before the Prison Initiative Program Library was ready for business. Because of the uniqueness of the Program not all of the Fleece Library policies would be adequate for the needs of the Prison Program, so a Library mission and goal statement had to be written along with a collection development policy, a circulation policy and procedure statement. The Prison Initiative Director, Dr. Osterlund, and various other CIU deans and administrators approved the mission and goals, and all the policies were submitted as part of the Library data for accrediting agency program approval. The Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) have approved the Prison Initiative Program.

Library mission statement:

The Kirkland Library supports the Kirkland Program academic needs by providing information resources that will enhance ministry preparation and develop lifelong research and ministry skills for program participants.

Library goals:

- 1. Library resources will adequately support each course in the Kirkland Program.*
- 2. Library resources will be accessible and adequately utilized by the students.*
- 3. Bibliographic instruction will be made available to the students in the program.*
- 4. Adequate and appropriate statistics will be kept for assessment of the Library and its use.*

Note: The Prison Initiative Program is locally known as the Kirkland Prison Program because of its current location.

After two years of planning, CIU advertised the program throughout the South Carolina prison system. Fifty-five men (the program is only open for men at this time, although plans are to expand it to include women eventually) applied to CIU. Each was asked to write his testimony, including why he was interested in the program. Thirty-two men were selected for interviews in December 2006. From this group, 15 men were accepted into the program for its inaugural session.

Along with the library, the students have a fully equipped classroom and a computer lab which provides access to word processing software and the *Christian Periodical Index*. The Prison Library catalog and the Fleece Library catalog are installed on a dedicated computer in the library. Using computers for any purpose is a challenge for some of the students because their incarceration began so long ago that they have had no knowledge of, or access to, computers. They are literally starting “from scratch” in learning to type on the keyboards. They are eagerly learning such skills. The Fleece Library staff who work with them at the Prison Library regularly report that the students are like sponges, soaking up all they can learn, not only about computers but also about studying and research. It is a joy to be able to help such eager students. It is our challenge to continue to find ways to enhance their learning experience as we participate in helping prepare these students for a future ministry within their own world of the South Carolina prison system. God willing, we will see miraculous results within the South Carolina prison system just as has been noted in the Louisiana prison system since 1995. And the Fleece Library will have had a part in making the difference. †