



“Prior to taking the class, I had never been to prison and thought of it as a scary place for people that ‘weren’t like me.’ The class was a step out of my comfort zone, but I knew it was something that would be worthwhile. As a student in the class, I was given a life-changing experience that I never expected. I was humbled by what I saw at the unit and wanted to share the experience with others.”

—Allison Schlender

UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Like most volunteers, the PEP experience started for Professor John Watters, Director of the Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Dallas (UD), in prison.

After attending an event in the summer of 2006, John was encouraged to find that PEP offered its participants a top-notch business education along with an incredible network of re-entry support. The experience struck a chord within him – personally and professionally. He immediately started thinking about designing a class at UD that would both serve the PEP mission and provide an experiential learning opportunity for his MBA students. In the Spring of 2007, Dr. Watters began offering students the opportunity to serve as business plan advisors and mentors for PEP participants in prison and released PEP graduates in Dallas, all while earning credits toward their graduate degrees at the university.

Since inception, more than 60 UD students have worked side-by-side with seven PEP classes, sharing encouragement, hope and business skills with PEP’s aspiring entrepreneurs. Allison Schlender, Senior Sales Executive for Coca-Cola North America, was working on her MBA in 2007 when she signed up for the class, but admits she was tentative about visiting prison.

Through Allison’s experiences with PEP, her passion and commitment to PEP’s graduates grew. She began to co-instruct the class at UD in the fall of 2008. Under John and Allison’s direction, the 11 MBA students and five undergraduates in the current class have provided an in-depth market research library for PEP which is currently being used within the prison to facilitate the development of the PEP participants’ business plans. The class has also held book drives for the PEP prison library, hosted clothing drives for used casual and business clothing (collecting over 900 articles of clothing) and facilitated social events for volunteers at PEP’s transitional home in Dallas. Most recently, the UD class chose to sponsor a Class XI participant, donating \$750 dollars to cover PEP’s reintegration costs for the first few weeks of the graduate’s re-entry into the community.

John, Allison and the UD students embody what we strive to accomplish each day at PEP. You and other PEP volunteers, graduates, and supporters are the “WE” that make up our thriving community of transformation. With every volunteer opportunity and every dollar of financial support, we are working together as a community to provide our graduates with transformative life experiences and opportunities for bright futures.