

Notes from the Field

By Danny Murillo

In 2019, I began facilitating transfer workshops for formerly-incarcerated students from the College of the Redwoods. I am connecting with formerly incarcerated students from Riverside City College, as well as the University of California, Riverside. The purpose of these meetings is to learn how formerly incarcerated students are supporting other incarcerated students and promoting support service programs in their respective campuses.

College of the Redwoods invited me and a group of students from Project Rebound and the Underground Scholars Initiative to facilitate a transfer workshop for students enrolled in their Pelican Bay Scholars Program at Pelican Bay State Prison. It has been nearly ten years since my release from this prison. I returned to an environment I barely recognized. To see incarcerated men from diverse backgrounds, having conversations about Philosophy and Sociology, showed signs of radical change in the social and cultural dynamics of this prison institution.

The following week I attended the Transitioning Minds student club meeting at Riverside City College. Club members met with their advisor to discuss the Student Equity and Achievement Program, and the importance of organizing students to advocate for inclusion in support of their campus's equity plan. After meeting with Transitioning Minds, I attended an event hosted by the Underground Scholars Initiative at the University of California, Riverside. Students shared their stories about the barriers they encounter at UC Riverside and the lack of resources needed to complete their academic goals.

The ongoing advocacy and organizing work by formerly incarcerated student clubs is a critical component to develop a prison-to-school pipeline in California. Even though Transitioning Minds and the Underground Scholars Initiative are doing great work, my experience has shown that having a student club is not enough to meet the demand for supporting formerly incarcerated students. It is essential for these institutions to develop support service programs that provide necessary resources for these students to graduate and move on to the next chapter of their lives.