

SIMIODE Presentation

Creating Justice Through Differential Equations
(Prison Mathematics Project)

Walker Blackwell -Co-founder
Tim Pennings -Mentor/Calvin University Professor

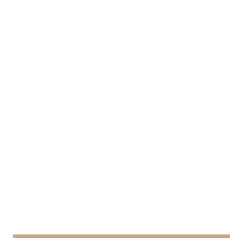
Part 1: Brief Intro

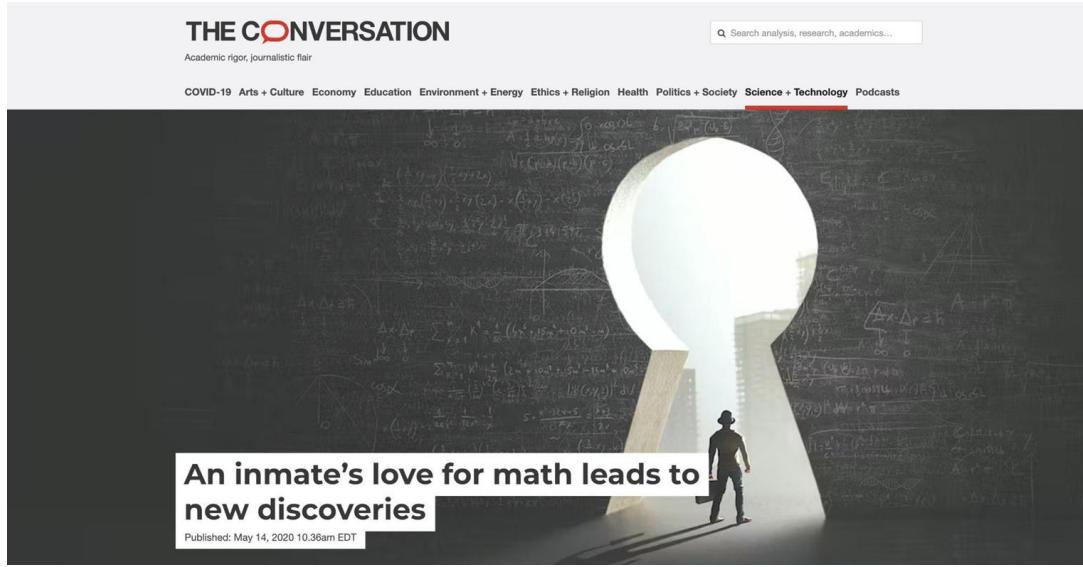
The Prison Mathematics Project (PMP) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization co-founded by Walker Blackwell, a high school student from Texas, and Christopher Havens, a current prisoner who was inspired to create an organization to replicate how mathematics transformed his life while in prison.



The Beginning...

How Christopher and I connected





Two years ago I read this article...

“AN INMATE’S LOVE FOR MATH LEADS TO NEW DISCOVERIES”



- Christopher Havens

“My parents sent him loads of books. However, the prison blocked them all as they did not come from an authorized vendor. Havens worked with the prison staff and started the Prison Mathematics Project, where he would explain mathematics to other inmates. In exchange they were allowed a library and a room to meet biweekly. It worked — the box of books got admitted to the prison.”

Interested in learning more Christopher's story, I researched.



*This wasn't difficult

He inspired me...

Came to prison without completing high-school level math - wanted to "fit in"

Lack of resources - teachers, textbooks, internet

Environment/expectations - Gangwars, solitary confinement

Goals - Publish original research.

“Mathematics was the first thing that was able to penetrate the falseness I wore in an effort to fit in.”

I reached out.

The Prison Mathematics Project (PMP) was born



Today we've expanded to help over **175 participants**

Are located in **27 states**

Have a team of nearly **500 volunteers**

Published original research



After almost three years of progress, the Prison Mathematics Project continues to expand.

Now let's learn how the PMP functions

Prospective prisoners (also called participants or mentees) submit via postal mail an interest form with an intro letter detailing their mathematical goals, as well as their interests and passions beyond mathematics.

Prospective mentors (who are math professionals, and/or advanced math students) choose which currently available participant they would like to be paired with, based on the intro letters.

The PMP then formally begins facilitating communication between the mentor / mentee by sending the mentee an intro letter back from the mentor.

The PMP protects all aspects of the mentor's personal information (such as email, address, last name, etc.), and acts as the middleman between the mentor / mentee.

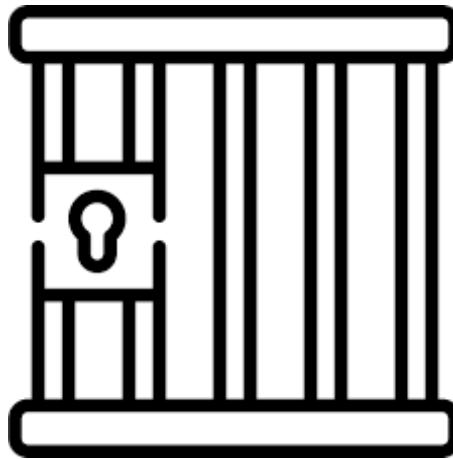
To summarize, PMP offers an invitation to all who seek to improve upon techniques in teaching and learning mathematics in highly restrictive environments.

The PMP sees a world where desistance can be achieved through a community based system of restorative justice through giving back via mathematics, so that cognitive changes and the restructuring of one's lifestyle occur as a result of mentor/mentee dynamics.

Why we take this approach:

Purpose of Prison?

- Vengeance for victims?
- Punish criminals?
- Keep public communities safe?
- Profits?
- Deter from future crimes?



Purpose of Prison?

- Vengeance for victims?
- Punish criminals?
- Keep public communities safe?
- Profits?
- Deter from future crimes?
- **Rehabilitate**

*Our stance



We believe that the **purpose of prison** should be to ensure that a prisoners live a life of **desistance** (free of crime) post-incarceration.

How do we accomplish this?

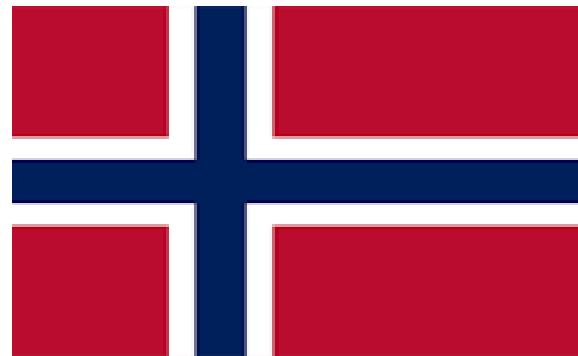


Let's examine Norway's approach

Statistics/effectiveness of systems:



Incarcerated individuals per 100,000 ppl: **655**
Recidivism rate: **76.6%**



Incarcerated individuals per 100,000 ppl: **60**
Recidivism rate: **20%**

Norwegian Prison System:



Main differences: Focuses on normalcy and integration.

Normalcy:

- Known as “most humane prison”
- Guards must go through 2 years of schooling
- Higher quality facilities

Integration:

- Norwegian Education Act
- All prisons have education programs through secondary schooling
- Emphasizes vocational training

System promotes **human interaction** and promote **education**.

Impact of Education:

- Those who participate in prison education programs have a 43% recidivism rate. This is **33% less** than the national average
- Those who were enrolled in college classes committed **75% fewer infractions** than incarcerated people who were not enrolled.

PMP Emphasises Similar Techniques to those in Norway's System Proven Methodology

- Emotional Rehabilitation
 - Mentorship connects with people outside prison
 - Provide culture/reintegration
- Education
 - Connect prisoners with mathematical resources
 - Provide mathematical training tailored to skill level
 - Look for advanced mathematicians to publish research



The PMP mission is oriented within the framework of current research on criminal justice reform (we will briefly discuss a review paper by Bushway et al who is a leading researcher on this subject).

- **Voluntary** learning programs such as the PMP are the best methods to identify which individuals in prison are desisting, and undergoing positive identity change. A prisoner who is making the choice to engage in education is displaying genuine positive change.

A harder task is to spark a prisoner to make a transition towards a new positive identity. There are three critical components:

1. Facilitating an environment of respect
2. Creating opportunities for learning
3. Developing new relationships with role models who exemplify positive identities

The PMP hits the mark on all of these items!

To conclude:

This is longstanding PMP participant, John Baran



In April of 2022, we received the following letter:

“

PMP Team,

”

“

I am writing you today to explain what the Prison Mathematics Project means to me.

I am a 36-year-old autistic male confined in a Washington State prison.

”

“

From the age of seven I was in the foster care system. I moved through **38 foster homes**, mental institutions and group homes. When I came to prison six years ago I had **no way of continuing my math education**, so it began to slip out of my head.

”

“

When I heard about the Prison Mathematics Project I was very skeptical. I have tried to get in contact with other education places before. So when I found out about the PMP I didn't have much hope...

...but I sent a request on J-pay and got a response back within 24 hours. I started to feel very hopeful. This was because I had found a place where people thought about math like I did.

”

“

If you asked me what the Prison Mathematics Project means to me I would tell you *hope*. Hope that I can make something of myself. Hope that I am not a lost cause. Hope that with help and understanding, through something that I love, I will never set foot in a prison again. I have hope.

”

“

This is what the Prison Mathematics Project
means to me.

- John Baran DOC 353800

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The Prison Mathematics Project is changing
lives.

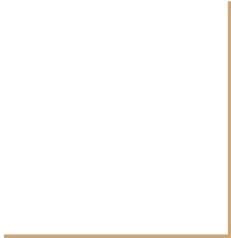
Mathematics = Reduced Recidivism

Part 2: Tim Pennings





Part 3: Questions



Thank you for your time!

Contacts: Walker@pmathp.org,

Prisonmathproject.org



<https://harvardpolitics.com/recidivism-american-progress/#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20has%20one%20of,are%20rearrested%20within%20five%20years>

<https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/the-link-between-education-and-incarceration-the-naacp-report>

<https://www.prainc.com/gains-correctional-education/#:~:text=According%20to%20Northwestern%20University's%20Prison,incarcerated%20want%20opportunities%20to%20learn>

<https://apnews.com/article/e299f76a31a3497eb9ff085694ce7723>

Bushway, Shawn. "Reentry, Desistance, and Identity Achievement," American Enterprise Institute, May 2021.