Ivan Fyodorovitch is a man to whom the senseless suffering of innocents and the inherently evil nature of man is cause to reject the possibility for a harmonious world where people can find happiness and even for the possibility of the hope for it.

In Ivan’s poem “The Grand Inquisitor,” which he tells to his brother Alyosha, God’s plan for us is called into question and pronounced as flawed. It is part of God’s plan for millions of mankind to fail because of them not being “strong enough to manage their freedom.” (261) The grand inquisitor, in effect, says that free will is too powerful for humans to have possession of, and because of this we will never be happy. The only way we will even find happiness is to rid ourselves of it.

*The Brothers Karamazov* is a reply to the grand inquisitor. Dostoevsky tells us there is another way for us to obtain happiness. He argues, however, that this pathway to happiness is through a unity of mankind based on acceptance, by realizing that “verily each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone, and everything…” (289) “And if they knew it, the world would at once become paradise.” (298)

Dostoevsky agrees that man’s nature is inherently flawed. However, he shows us that we should therefore be unified in our acceptance of each other. Markel, the brother of the young Elder Zosima, and the character who the “…guilty before everyone, for everyone and everything…” statement originates from, also asks, “Why do we quarrel, boast before each other, remember each other’s offenses? Let us go to the garden, let us walk, and play and love and praise and kiss each other, and bless our life.” (289)

We are all inherently flawed, we are all guilty of all and before all. Our unity must be built through our responsibility for each other: we are guilty on behalf of all. Upon realizing this, we can “walk and play and love” and find happiness.

Mike, 2008
The Bullet

The passage from *The Brothers Karamazov* that I’ve chosen to write about strikes me as eerily familiar, and on an incredibly personal level. In this selection, Dmitri Karamazov has just recovered his pistols from Pyotr Ilyich, and is methodically loading them. Dostoevsky writes:

“What are you looking at the bullet for?” Pyotr Ilyich watched him [Dmitri] with uneasy curiosity.

“Just a whim. Now, if you had decided to blow your brains out, would you look at the bullet before you loaded the pistol, or not?”

“Why look at it?”

“It will go into my brain, so it’s interesting to see what it’s like…” (402)

This particular passage strikes me in a brutally personal way as, when I was nearly seventeen years old and feeling quite wearisome with life, I too examined a bullet (my wide eyes nearly bursting with morbid fascination) that, at the time, I was seriously contemplating firing into my own head. I remember thinking about trajectory and velocity, and wondering if such factors might cause the bullet to bounce around in my skull before becoming permanently lodged inside my brain, or if it would simply shoot straight through and carve a niche in the wall behind my corpse.

I stared at it, dumbstruck, a simple .22 caliber bullet, utterly in awe of its devastating potential, utterly engrossed in my morbid fantasy. I couldn’t help wondering if other “suicide-by-gunshot” fantasizers pondered the fundamental means of their potential suicide as deeply and peculiarly as was I (Dostoevsky perhaps?)

After reading this exquisite passage by the Russian master, I felt compelled to set the novel down and reflect on what I’d read. My mind explored the furthest reaches of my consciousness, and at one point I began comparing the tragic qualities that I embodied at seventeen to qualities that Dmitri Karamazov has evinced consistently throughout the novel. I concluded that I too was once shortsighted, impulsive, and passionate to the point of recklessness. I was living dangerously and consequently find myself where I believe Dmitri Karamazov is also headed (Siberia).

Dostoevsky has an amazing and uncanny ability to bring his characters to life in ways that allow his readers to relate to them on extremely intimate, personal terms. This passage is only one of many in which he’s accomplished this feat for me. I look forward to making many more intimate connections with his characters, and am saddened by the prospect that the novel must inevitably draw to an end.

Caleb, 2008

This Elaborate Lie

“These are the moments when one contemplates the awful terror of the criminal who already knows that all is lost but is still struggling, still, intends to struggle with you. These are the moments when all the instincts of self-preservation rise up in him at once, and, trying to save himself, he looks at you with a piercing eye, questioning and suffering, he catches you and studies you, your face, your thoughts, waiting to see from which side you will strike, and instantly creates thousands of plans in his tremulous mind, but is still afraid to speak, afraid he will let something slip. These humiliating moments of the human soul, this journey through torments, this human thirst for self-salvation, are terrible and sometimes evoke trepidation and commiseration even in an investigator.” (719)

It was almost the end of my trial. I could see that I was doomed. The D.A. had completely annihilated all my witnesses. I felt like I was going into shock. I told my attorney I needed a recess, that I was feeling sick. I kept looking at the D.A. His look was gleeful and triumphant. I went back to my cell and fabricated this elaborate lie, that the key witness against me had a motive to lie about me. That I had spurned her in love, and she was seeking justice. In my desperation for self-preservation, I could not see how pitiful and humiliating my last-ditch effort, my last try to save myself, appeared to the jury, and to the D.A. I could tell how eager he was though, to let me tell my story. He knew I was putting the last nail in my coffin. My story was so obviously a lie, though, that even he winced as I told it. It was one of my basest moments in my life. I can still remember several of the jurors shaking their heads, and looking down as they felt shame and probably disgust for me.

I relived that moment for many years, every time trying to come to terms with what I had done. Wishing I had just stood up, and admitted all, regained some of my integrity. That was my moment though, the one that changed me. I have been on a journey of truth and redemption since then. And I am a better man for it.

Ray, 2008
When Kolya Krasotkin was talking to Smurov about Dmitri Karamazov he said, “I could have made his acquaintance long ago, but I like to be proud in certain cases. Besides, I’ve formed an opinion of him that still has to be verified and explained.”(52) I would like to discuss and relate myself to this passage.

I noticed in my life that pride in most cases prevents me from being altruistic. I grew up in a circle of friends where pride is the #1 thing. I mean pride like “I’m better than you” or “You yield to me,” etc. I believe that this mentality binds one with invisible chains. One will miss out on getting to know people, go places and helping others.

When Kolya said, “Oh, I’ve formed an opinion about him” I thought, “That happens a lot,” and I caught myself doing it. One forms an opinion just by looking, or hearing about another person. He or she does not get the benefit of the doubt from others. It reminds me of what Levinas said about the face, how one should look beyond the features, not notice even the color of one’s eyes. The way I understand this is to let the other show one who he or she is, and not to judge by appearance.

I believe that if everyone will agree to put their pride aside, it will bring people together and we will grow in all spheres. I also think if one starts to practice love and compassion towards others it will put one’s pride in check. Ultimately, the world would be a better place to live.

Roman, 2008

“Invisible Chains

When Kolya Krasotkin was talking to Smurov about Dmitri Karamazov he said, “I could have made his acquaintance long ago, but I like to be proud in certain cases. Besides, I’ve formed an opinion of him that still has to be verified and explained.”(52) I would like to discuss and relate myself to this passage.

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Roman, 2008
An Encroaching Madness

“This do you know, Alexei Fyodorovich, just how one loses one’s mind? Ivan asked… And can one observe oneself losing one’s mind?” (599-600)

In Book XI, we find Ivan locked in a struggle against an encroaching madness, shaken to the core by the realization that he is being affected by forces he cannot rationalize or even comprehend. This struggle turns upon the question of his role in the death of his father, Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov. Ivan knows he did not bring about his father’s death in the literal sense; his was not the hand that shattered Fyodor’s skull. The question that consumes Ivan is as follows: regardless of whose hand wielded the murderous weapon, is his mind innocent of blood, and what does that imply for his responsibility towards his parent as a whole?

In contrast with his earlier studied self-sufficiency, Ivan suddenly finds himself unable to comprehend the nature and significance of his own thoughts and actions. Stopping Alyosha in the street over this as yet unarticulated torment, Ivan beseeches his brother to recall his impressions of several nights past. “Do you remember when Dmitri burst into the house after dinner and beat father, and I then said to you in the yard that I reserved ‘the right to wish’ for myself,” he asks. “Tell me, did you think then that I wished for father’s death?” (611) When Alyosha answers, full of dread, in the affirmative, Ivan hurries as if compelled towards the “lopsided little doghouse” of Smerdyakov. (612)

As we presently learn, it is Smerdyakov who has nurtured the seed of self-doubt in Ivan, who equates rational self-control with a state of sanctity. As Smerdyakov repeatedly assures him, Ivan is fully responsible for the death of his father in that he gave the “lackey” tacit consent to kill by removing himself from the scene. “You killed him, you are the main killer,” Smerdyakov proclaims, “... and I was just your minion... I performed the deed according to your word.” (623) Here, Ivan feels himself threatened by the demise of what his rational mind has held to be the natural, seemingly incontestable separation between the intellect and the physical body (a dichotomy which Dostoevsky reinforces by distinguishing between Ivan the intellectual and Dmitri the sensualist). “If it was not Dmitri but Smerdyakov who killed father, then, of course, I am solidary with him, because I put him up to it,” Ivan muses, following his second visit to the lackey’s cottage. “Whether I did put him up to it—I don’t know yet. But if it was he who killed him, and not Dmitri, then, of course, I am a murderer too.” (617)

Anonymous, 2008
Human Suffering

Dostoevsky: “And if the suffering of children goes to make up the sum of suffering needed to buy truth, then I assert beforehand that the whole of truth is not worth such a price.” (245)

I read parts of The Brothers Karamazov during my sophomore year in college, and until reading it again this year, I had forgotten the extent to which it informed and formed my understanding of the world. I cannot but agree with Ivan’s fundamental assertion: suffering is irrecoverable. True human suffering—that is, suffering which rightly bears the name (torture, death, a life of pain, etc)—cannot be justified. As Ivan himself intimates, perhaps this is an atheistic notion insofar as it disallows the possibility of any entity being able to “make up for” suffering. Furthermore, perhaps this is a prideful notion, for it marks human suffering as an endpoint which cannot be traversed; it disallows the possibility of placing any value higher than that of human suffering, be it human freedom itself. Ivan is smart enough to know that this argument accords with people in a much stronger way if children comprise the prime examples. Indeed, they have not bitten from the apple, so what possible basis could there be for the justification of their suffering? “None,” he confidently declares. The problem, of course, is that in refusing even human freedom above human suffering one thereby refuses humanness itself. For without “human freedom” the human is not merely not free, but not human—not an easy pill to swallow.

Yet, human suffering and human freedom cannot be discussed without speaking of human worth as well. Alyosha asks Ivan, “Can it be that any man has the right to decide about the rest of mankind, who is worthy to live and who is more unworthy?” He responds, “But why bring worth into it? The question is most often decided in the hearts of men not at all on the basis of worth, but for quite different reasons, much more natural ones.” (143)

The insight of this comment is rich, for if we look at the way the world works (especially today, but really at any time) the idea of the “worth” of the human plays, at best, an ideal role and at worst, hardly any role whatsoever. The way in which we treat other people (this applies to animals, the environment, etc.) is so often in terms of utility (means to an end) or in simple indifference. It, in my experience, is rarely based upon some ground of fundamental or intrinsic worth.

Imagine if that were the case? Could we allow the amazingly disparate economic inequalities to continue? Could we allow people to die of starvation when there is enough produce (and production capabilities) to feed everyone on earth? If we took the notion of human worth seriously, would not the world be far different than it is now? To connect this to the initial quotation, is not human suffering so atrocious precisely because, as humans, we recognize the intrinsic worth of human beings? Thus, the freedom with which humans are able to inflict cruel and unimaginable suffering is precisely the very freedom with which we can affirm and work to protect human worth: Human worth and human suffering are the opposing faces of human freedom.

In the end, Ivan is right: Whatever one makes of God, one must either deny “his” world (deny humans as they are in their freedom) and renounce the possibility of suffering or deny suffering and affirm the possibility of human worth. I, for one would rather live—truly live—and suffer, then not suffer and not live. Perhaps I should be warned though, for wasn’t it precisely the devil who said, “... suffering is life.”? (642)

Joel, 2008
I Am My Brother’s Keeper

“We are guilty of all, before all, and on behalf of all.”

Is that not a fantastical concept?! I mean “fantastical” as in the “imaginary, unreal” definition as defined by Merriam-Webster. In The Brothers Karamazov, Markel’s mother hits the nail on the head. In response to her son’s ardent declaration that we are indeed guilty of all, she asks him, “How can you be more guilty than murderers and robbers?”

I’m not in here for murder, but I’m a murderer. True, no one died, but as Dmitri admits he was capable of murder, and is therefore responsible for it, I must be doubly responsible. The man almost died, and by a miracle he lived. I am also a robber. There are no extenuating circumstances. I robbed.

So from this standpoint, within these walls, the concept seems less fantastical. It is clear as day for me to see that I am guilty of all. What more would I need to be guilty of to be the guiltiest? I am also absolutely guilty before all. I plead “guilty” at my sentencing before a judge and jury of my peers, and am currently a resident of a state penitentiary. That last part, “on behalf of all,” however, is still a bit fantastic. How can I be guilty for your sins? I have enough to atone for as it is.

It hurts me to compare myself to the lackey Smerdyakov (really, my throat constricts) but I do liken myself to him. Whether Ivan sincerely believes in his theory that everything is permitted, Smerdyakov, in his lesser intelligence, buys into it hook, line and sinker, as I buy into Dostoevsky’s message, namely the “guilty of all, before all, and on behalf of all” bit.

So now I expose myself as a believer of the fantastical, and with this exposure I cannot help but expose myself also as a hypocrite. For hypocrisy is a risk you take in believing the fantastical. I believe that I am guilty on behalf of all, because I believe that I am responsible for all. As I am my brother’s keeper, I am keeper of all, for I believe in the brotherhood of mankind.

Yet, maybe from recognition of my own duplicity, another loud message of this book is that belief and application and participation in that belief are leagues away from each other. I feel what I believe, but acting in accordance to it is… something I obviously need to sort out.

If one day, one of you, my “inside” classmates, hear me singing hymns to God, then rejoice for me, that at least I am no longer duplicitous, and I am living my own convictions.

This class, to me, was a miracle. That there would be a class on the in-depth study of my favorite book, The Brothers Karamazov, offered here was a miracle in itself. But the experience of this class, and what I took from it is the miracle I talk of. The enthusiasm and insight of everyone, both inside and out, was inspiring. Collectively, we created an environment most conducive to learning about this crazy, crazy book, and most importantly an environment conducive to learning about myself. I received from this class the miracle of reflection. Thank you.

Mike, 2008

“A Scene from Russia” by Joel, 2009
**The Idea of God**

A person’s need to believe in something more or higher than himself has always made me curious. Since the beginning of time, many people have worshiped and believed in many gods. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky has insight into this when he writes, “And man has, indeed, invented God. And the strange thing, the wonder would not be that God really exists, the wonder is that such a notion—the notion of the necessity of God—could creep into the head of such a wild and wicked animal as man—so holy, so moving, so wise a notion, which does man such a great honor.” (234-235)

I think it says a lot for humans as a whole that they create an idea of God. It says that we wanted more for ourselves in the way of morality, we wanted more than the life of here and now. Those who created this idea put forth all they thought to be good and just. But Dostoevsky also writes about the other side of man, the side that contradicts the idea of God. “People speak sometimes about the ‘animal’ cruelty of man, but this is terribly unjust and offensive to animals, no animal could ever be so cruel as a man, so artfully, so artistically cruel.” (238)

You would think that if a good and just god did exist, he/she would not want his/her children killing each other in his or her name I believe that man is a being of excuses. When we want a piece of property, someone else’s oil, or anything in between we will come up with reasons and excuses why we should take it. Maybe, what one day will redeem us with our larger-than-life egos is that we can conceive of something better and more than what we can ever be.

Amos, 2008

**Wickedness in Like**

“Gentlemen of the jury, we shall condemn him, and then he will say to himself: ‘These people did nothing for my destiny, my upbringing, my education, nothing to make me better, to make a man of me. These people did not give me to eat, they did not give me to drink, I lay naked in prison and they did not visit me, and now they have exiled me to penal servitude. I am quits, I owe them nothing now, and I owe nothing to anyone unto ages of ages. They are wicked, and I shall be wicked. They are cruel, and I shall be cruel.” *(747)*

This profound statement by Mitya’s defense attorney spoke loudly to me. It is precisely the idea I’ve had of those responsible for imprisonment, my own as well as others’, for quite some time. The fact that this idea and the consequences it alludes to are still alive and well today speaks to the entrenchment of punishment as the main purpose of any sentence imposed on a criminal. In nearly all aspects of life, if there is a problem, people work towards fixing it. If oil is disappearing, we work towards alternative forms of energy. If people can’t afford food and health care, we develop forms of public welfare. If our pet dogs are disobedient, we do not cage them for a time and then just expect them to have changed when we release them… we show them the error of their ways, teach them better ways of acting and reward them for doing so.

We treat our dogs this way, but often we don’t even award our fellow human beings this luxury. Therefore, how can we expect them to leave the kennel after their punishment is completed and not act wickedly, according to the way they’ve been treated?

I argue that this type of treatment is a major cause of the high recidivism rates we have today. That is why I am so thankful to have the opportunity to be in this Inside-Out program and be able to better myself and see others do the same. I hope the cycle is broken, finally, and that we are the very cogs in the machine of its demise.

Josh, 2008
Bringing Dostoevsky’s Lessons to Life

“Remember especially that you cannot be the judge of anyone,” Zosima tells those who gather around him during his final hours. “For there can be no judge of a criminal on earth until the judge knows that he, too, is a criminal, exactly the same as the one who stands before him, and that he is perhaps most guilty of all for the crime of the one standing before him. When he understands this, then he will be able to be a judge.” (320-21)

Zosima’s message that we cannot be the judge of others is woven throughout The Brothers Karamazov, and intimately connected to two other themes: responsibility for the Other, and the idea of punishment and redemption. Responsibility for the Other is important for both sides of judgment. First, in accepting responsibility for the criminal before us, we will be able to see the criminal’s actions in a new light, especially in terms of our own connectedness to the crime. On the other side of the judgment, if the criminal realizes his responsibility for others as it relates to his crime, he will ultimately be more aware of his guilt and go through a deeper process of suffering, which the novel shows to be the best punishment and path to redemption. Thus, we also should not judge the other because the best thing for the criminal and society as a whole is for the criminal to accept his own guilt and responsibility. Rather than condemning criminals, we should show them mercy and love because through love, the criminal can be repentant. In showing him love, rather than judging him, we are fostering the best punishment and allowing him to find redemption. In this way, we are not only helping him to become a better person, we are also contributing to a better society as a whole.

In many ways, the experiences of this Inside-Out course have helped to bring these messages of judgment, responsibility and punishment to life for me. I have realized that the stereotypes and prejudices about criminals and jail inmates that we have in this country often prevent us from seeing them as individuals and as humans. We tend to judge them based on their crime, rather than looking beyond to see who they really are as a person. Our criminal justice system does just what Dostoevsky implores people not to do: we condemn people and punish them with the exile of prison. However, according to the messages of The Brothers Karamazov, we should, instead, show them love and support because the punishment imposed by one’s own conscience is far more powerful than that imposed by the state; and in showing love and support we will encourage reformation. In demonstrating love and support, we would be conveying that it is possible for society to be good, whereas currently, we simply use a criminal justice and punishment system that show a very negative side of society. In this way, every one of us is also responsible for their crime, because we did not support them beforehand, and we are not supporting them afterwards in a way that will improve both the individual and society. For me, the personal strength and determination our inside classmates demonstrate should show us the potential of the conscience to reform. Rather than squashing this process of personal guilt, suffering, and redemption with our criminal justice system, we should foster it.

The men in this class have taught me more than I could have imagined. I will never be able to find the words to thank them enough.

Alison F., 2008
Letter to the 2008 Class

This class has shown me how similar I am to many of the Outside students. What we all share is life. Our lives take sharp turns, travel up and downhill, and take us through various highs and lows. I am a person, not unlike that of the U of O students.

All the Outside students were very open and non-judgmental. They perhaps learned how easily they could be in a similar situation as myself given certain situations. I think that is very important. Dostoevsky talked about how no one should judge another until they realize they too are just as “criminal.” I agree with this to a certain extent, in that we all see people for who they are and try to see ourselves in others.

I really enjoy watching the transformation of the Outside students when they realize how similar we are, and that we are not so “criminal” as they may have previously assumed. Many Outside students encouraged me to pursue my academic goals. After all, we are all college students in this class.

The true learning that took place in this class was in the conversations we had about life. How I could see myself in the Outside students’ shoes and how they could see themselves in mine. We are all caring, breathing, and feeling people. We all love. We all dream. We all have families and friends. We all want to be happy. We share so much and yet live in completely different atmospheres.

It is quite a compelling situation. I think what I got most out of this class was the common bond we all share. I only hope to have imparted the reality that there are indeed good people behind these walls.

Sam, 2008

My favorite quote...

“You must know that there is nothing higher, or stronger, or sounder, or more useful afterwards in life, than some good memory… You hear a lot said about your education, yet some such beautiful, sacred, memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education. If a man stores up many such memories to take into life, then he is saved for his whole life. And even if only one good memory remains with us in our hearts, that alone may serve some day for our salvation.” (774)

It goes without saying: Thank goodness for these memories. I hope never to forget.

Katy P., 2008
To bring together a group of inmates and some students, what’s at stake?
When you break down all the barriers for a while, what’s at stake?
When you encourage the cultivation of ideas, what’s at stake?
And who really understands it when two humans can relate?

When two souls get face to face and open up to one another
Even if only to the extent that we recognize the same in one another
When we feel that spark which our Buddhist friends call namaste
to which we’ve been exposed by Levinas as responsibility

But it’s a feeling that we’ve truly understood for all our lives
A deeper human connection, that soulful click
For which we strive
And we’re surprised, like when we listen to the speech of Mikhin
But in truth what he shows us is a truth for which we’re wishing.

We all come to this experience from different paths and yet they cross
So whoever doesn’t learn from one another it’s their loss
Because the bars become hypothetical when we all sit down in this room
Recognizing that we’re all just human, we all ponder the same moon.
Dear Inside-Out class,

I wanted to write a letter for our class because I feel like I have so much to say, but of course I don’t know where to begin. Rather than getting all mushy and telling you how amazing and wonderful you all are and how eye-opening and life-engaging this class has been (not that that isn’t the truth), I thought I’d leave you on a more philosophical note—something that I’ve been thinking about a lot lately—that I’ll pass on to you.

This has been an insanely crazy term for me. First, obviously, there is this class. My perspectives on people in general have changed entirely. I am now more aware than ever of the many labels like “prisoner” or “honors college students” I use to define people. These labels do describe a part of us, but they do not even begin to accurately describe who we are.

After this class, there is a part of me that just wants to throw myself entirely into working on the criminal justice system, human rights…just any sort of humanitarian work. I know that wasn’t the goal of the class, but I think it’s an obvious repercussion. I want to spread what I’ve learned to as many people as possible. I want to change how they think, in the same way that this experience has changed how I think.

I used to be an education major, so this pull towards social responsibility is not a new feeling for me. I’ve had a lot of classes that have opened my eyes to the enormous amount of need there is in the world, and so I studied to be a teacher in the hopes of making a difference, as cliché as that sounds, because I felt like it was my responsibility. As someone coming from a privileged position, I had to give something back.

I also performed in one of my first plays this term, as I know you all heard me stress about. A very stressful, but also amazing experience. For me, the adrenaline rush of being on stage is like none other, and I get an overwhelming sense of satisfaction. The theater is where my heart is, and where I always want to be. Where I am lost is in deciding what is most important. How will I ever know that I am doing what’s best? How will I ever escape the feeling that there is something more I could do to make a life, even my own life, somewhat better? And should I do what fulfills me, theater, even if I don’t think it’s providing as great of a service to others (all my Others, as Levinas would say) as I am capable of?

I am forced to remember a line from The Brothers Karamazov. I swear I didn’t start out this letter intending to relate it to the text, but that darn book just applies to everything. (I guess it better if it’s going to be nearly 800 pages long!) Dostoevsky writes: “…there can be no judge of a criminal on earth until the judge knows that he, too, is a criminal, exactly the same as the one who stands before him, and that he is perhaps most guilty of all for the crime of the one standing before him… For if I myself were righteous, perhaps there would be no criminal standing before me now.” (320-321) See, the thing is, I just always have this overwhelming feeling that there is more that I could be doing. That’s not meant egotistically, as if I could change the entire world, but small things matter too, and I am capable of doing more.

And yet, amidst such great confusion, I am happy. Even though these questions are constant sources of real confusion for me, this is where I’m meant to be. There is so much possibility. Thank you all for everything you’ve taught me this term, purposefully or unintentionally. I have learned so much.

With love and gratitude,

Katy P., 2008
THE FREEDOM TO WITNESS DREAMS BEING ACHIEVED THROUGH EYES
WHICH SEE LITTLE FREEDOM—
YET UNSHACKLED IS MY SOUL AND MIND—SO I ALLOW YOUR DREAMS TO
BECOME MINE—AND I FIND—MY FREEDOM BEING DEFINED—
SEE, ALTHOUGH OUR PATHS ARE CONVERGING—
FINDING COMMON SPACE, THROUGH NOVELS OF DIVERSE TASTE;
MY MIND IS STILL SEARCHING—

FOR HIDDEN JEWELS—BENEATH THE SURFACE AND RULES
I FIND MY HEART ACHING—

TO SIFT THROUGH ROOTS STILL CONNECTED—
CONCRETE SLABS SKY-HIGH, YET FACES STILL REFLECTED—
MY HEARTS LIPS NAKED AND STILL RESPECTED—

SO I SEE NO STRANGERS HERE
I SEE TREES THAT TOUCH THE MOONLIGHT THAT WE BOTH OBSERVE—
WHERE YOU AND I EXCEED EXPECTATION, MINGLING FREELY WITHOUT
SEPARATION, NEVER FORGETTING THE ABSENCE OF WORDS—

I SEE CHILDREN GROWN—
I SEE PAST MISTAKES FADING IN THE SHADE OF A NEW HOME—
I SEE OPEN ROAD, WHERE ARGENTINA BECKONES—
AND PEACE IS AN OPEN DOOR AVAILABLE TO ALL,

AM I THE IDIOT—OR DOES MY FREEDOM REALLY EXIST?
AM I A MADMAN FOR HOLDING TOMORROW’S DAY AT THE RIVER
WITH WOMAN, AND NOVEL, AND DOG—
AS TODAY’S REASONING: FOR SMILES, AND LAUGHTER, AND GOD?

MAYBE SO... YET I ROLL THE DICE AND BELIEVE IN THIS FREEDOM
WILL I SHATTER WITH FEAR AND LET THESE
WALLS BREAK ME—OR SHAPE ME—
MY FREEDOM STILL BREATHES ALTHOUGH CONFUSED—
CHAIN ME, ISOLATE ME, FORGET ME, AND STILL I CLIMB—

“The Freedom to Witness Dreams” by Sam, 2009
Classmates, 
Thank you. This has certainly been a unique experience, and it will always stand out in my mind. I want to let you all know that you guys have been really instrumental in my recent decision to change my major in the hopes of becoming a teacher someday. This class has helped me realize how much I enjoy learning and discussing with others, but most especially, I've really appreciated the genuine person-to-person interaction that occurs on a weekly basis. I hope that I can pass on what I've learned about acceptance and kindness to my own classroom of kids someday.

Inside students: You guys have been so nice to all of us “outsiders.” I tried coming into this class with no expectations, but I was still blown away by your hospitality, sense of humor and acceptance of us dorky kids. I really respect you all.

Outside students: I love our van-rides and attempts at group dinners. I appreciate our conversations and your great insights. You people remind me why I love the Honors College, and I wish you all luck on your upcoming adventures!

Michelle, 2008

To the 2008 Class

Since I've become involved with the Inside-Out class, I've been very inspired by the courage and dedication of the outside students. They have shown me that it’s never too late to go back to school and learn. This class has given me a great sense of accomplishment within myself. Prisons are the fastest growing business in the United States while our schools languish for want of teachers, facilities, and resources that might, if given the chance, make the prisons unnecessary. I must examine carefully and regularly the things in life that I have chosen to be bound to, so that I can choose all of them again—with new purpose, new joy, new freedom.

When we get stuck in life, we lose the possibility of living it to the fullest. It's no disgrace to start all over. It is usually an opportunity.

Rich, 2008
Angst

I approach each meeting with a light fluttery heart. Thinking up to the last minute, that I will turn around. But as I step through the threshold, and all I feel is welcoming, accepting, warmth, I am incredibly happy and glad that I came, eager for a new experience with these young fresh minds.

Ray, 2007