

Dear JSTOR,

I am writing to you to submit an essay on the subject of how education has influenced my sense of purpose, relationships, or world views. I also have enclosed a brief bio.

Bio:

My name is Shane Bell #10443 and I am in prison doing a life sentence for 2nd degree murder. I have been imprisoned for about 16 years in the South Dakota Department of Corrections. I currently reside at Mike Dufree State Prison, 1412 Wood Street, Springfield SD 57062. I would like my submission published under my name Shane Bell.

James Monroe in his first inaugural address on March 4, 1817 said, "Let us by all wise and constitutional measures promote ~~the~~ intelligence among the people as the best means of preserving our liberties." I have found that education is very important in life and that all people should strive to get as much education and experience they can in their lifetime. I think all prisoners should strive to get as much education as they can while imprisoned.

While I have been imprisoned, I started to read and learn about the law. South Dakota really doesn't have any education beyond a person getting a G.E.D. or as we have labeled it, a Good Enough Diploma.

When my constitutional rights were being violated in regards to the practice of Buddhism, having Buddhist magazines be denied as being "sexually explicit" when they were NOT, they are religious magazines about Buddhism, and other violations of First Amendment rights, I started learning the law, court practices, and procedures.

I started by reading self-help books such as: 'Battling The Administration, An Inmate's Guide to a Successful Lawsuit', 'Protecting Your Health and Safety, A Litigation Guide for Inmates', and other books. I learned by trial and error, my first lawsuit I used as a learning experience.

Learning the law from books, getting experience in actually filing lawsuit and doing briefs and motions gave me a sense of purpose, a sense of direction and doing something good, positive, and promoted needed changes in the prison.

My last 2 lawsuits I have filed resulted in settlement agreements that had positive effects in the South Dakota Department of Corrections by

changing prison policies that resulted in my Buddhist magazines being allowed to be delivered to me. Prison policy was also changed to once again allow free, donated, soft-cover only books from religious organizations and Books to Prisoners programs to be allowed to be delivered to prisoners.

While in prison, I have completed an accredited course of Legal Assistant/Paralegal from Blackstone Career Institute by completing exams by mail. I received my certificate with distinction on January 2nd 2024 with a grade point average of 97.25%.

I felt a sense of accomplishment that has help me discover whom I really am. This has changed my view of the world around me in that I have been able to promote a positive change in prison policy to allow more books and reading materials to be allowed into the prison and helped protect prisoners First Amendment rights. I also have a sense of purpose in helping other prisoners with their legal questions and can explain to them how to protect and exercise their legal rights in court and in the prison.

I am currently taking an advanced paralegal course in the field of Personal Injury and the Law of Torts for Paralegals offered by Blackstone Career

Institute. The course by mail has 6 exams, of which I have already had one graded by mail with a 100% grade on first exam.

The education that I have gotten in prison, that I paid for myself, has really given me a purpose in my life ~~and~~ sentence here in prison. I have learned I can actually promote a positive change and help fellow prisoners whom don't know the law and give them hope.

In South Dakota prisons, or any prison actually, so often prisoners Constitutional rights are violated, their due process and trials are done haphazardly, with many issues not addressed and have ineffective assistance of Counsel. Sometimes I can help remedy that, giving them hope.

I firmly believe that Knowledge is power and power is ~~knowledge~~ Knowledge, which shows that all prisoners need to have educational opportunities available to them to help them succeed in their lives. ~~and~~ If the purpose of prison is to supposedly rehabilitate prisoners so they can become productive, responsible citizens when they leave prison, then there is a great need to get as much education available to them as possible before they are released. I will never leave prison, but at least I can put my education to use to help those whom will have a second chance