



## News Release

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## **Lipscomb University establishes liberal arts associate's degree for students at the Tennessee Prison for Women**

NASHVILLE (Nov. 7, 2011) – Lipscomb University has established this fall its first Associate of Arts degree program to be offered exclusively for inmates at the Tennessee Prison for Women (TPFW) in Nashville who participate in Lipscomb's almost five-year-old LIFE Program. The Lipscomb associate's degree is the only college degree in the region, and one of the few in the nation, offered to prison inmates.

“While there are a few programs across the nation that offer associate's degree within the prisons, most are correspondence courses. A trademark of the LIFE Program is face-to-face instruction and the opportunity for inmates to study side-by-side with traditional college students,” said Richard Goode, creator of the LIFE Program and associate professor of history at Lipscomb. “This instruction format not only helps the inmate advance their intellect, but they also build self-esteem and enhance their relational skills through the relationships they make with the students and teachers.”

Lipscomb's Associate of Arts degree will follow the Tennessee Board of Regents general education requirement of 63 credit hours. The first LIFE cohort of 15 has now earned 42 credit hours toward an associate's degree. Two additional cohorts are following the same path.

Established in 2007, Lipscomb's LIFE Program introduced an innovative education format that brought Lipscomb's traditional students out to the prison each week to study with the inmates in for-credit classes. Faculty also travel to the prison to teach inmates face-to-face.

The LIFE Program strives to enhance the lives of the TPFW inmates – both in prison and when they are released – by helping them develop better self-confidence, expanded life experience and good study habits. Lipscomb's traditional students are afforded an eye-opening experience to get to know and befriend the inmates, an encounter that many students say has affected their life choices well after completing the class.

“One of the things that tends to happen in our criminal justice system is that the inmates become dehumanized,” said Goode. “We never see the inmates in daily life, so we develop certain perceptions about them, most of which are false. When we all get in a room together, it humanizes our relationships.”

The program began by offering an 18-credit hour slate of courses in the liberal arts arena. TPFW students have studied judicial process, art history, Christian ethics, negotiation and conflict management. In the last four years, LIFE inmate students have compiled three literary journals, held a theatrical production in the prison and are by far among the faculty’s most dedicated students.

When the first cohort of 15 students completed the 18-hour program, they were so eager to keep learning that Goode decided to continue offering programming for them, including the literary journal and theater production offerings. Now those formerly extracurricular activities can be counted toward the Associate of Arts degree. Two additional 15-student cohorts were established in 2009 and 2011 and are also working toward the degree.

“For those inmates who will be released from prison, this degree will certainly make them more marketable. It shows employers that they can work toward a goal and complete it. Practically, it also allows them to pursue a bachelor’s degree at any Tennessee public college or university, if they wish,” Goode said. “We already have a couple of parolees who have pursued higher education upon release.”

“Ninety-seven percent of all inmates in state custody will return home one day,” said TPFW Warden Debra Johnson. “While the Tennessee Department of Correction is committed to operating safe and secure prisons, we also want to make sure the offenders leave in better shape than they were when they came to us. Our partnership with Lipscomb University gives them the opportunity to lead successful lives upon release.”

Studies have shown that the percentage of prison inmates who return to prison with a new charge drops dramatically when the inmate has some college education, and drops to almost none if the inmate has a complete bachelor’s or master’s degree, Goode said.

“For those inmates who will not be released, this program provides a sense of purpose and a boost of self-confidence. Many correctional officers and fellow inmates have noticed the positive influence the women in our program have become in the prison. The LIFE Program has become a program that many of the non-participating inmates ask about and want to be a part of,” he said.

Other education courses at TPFW provide vocational training such as cosmetology and culinary arts, high school level courses for GED prep or adult basic education, but the Lipscomb program is the only one currently offering on-site college credit and a degree to corrections inmates.

For more information on the LIFE Program and how to sponsor an inmate or support the program, contact Goode at 615.966.5748 or log on to [life.lipscomb.edu](http://life.lipscomb.edu).

