

PRISON: Inmates must pay for college classes themselves

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On Thursday morning, one of Matteson's colleagues, math instructor Jason Villers, taught nine inmates. Villers showed them how to calculate the circumference and area of a circle, projecting the calculations up on a screen at the front of the classroom. Then he worked backwards to figure out the diameter and radius. To an observer who squinted just a bit, it could appear as any other high school class, except all the pupils wore navy-blue shirts with Department of Corrections emblazoned on them in eye-popping orange. Villers turned the men loose with calculators, pencils and paper to work a similar problem. Two inmate tutors roamed the room to answer questions.

"How many radii are in one diameter?" tutor Eric Burnham asked two students who sat together at a round table.

"Two," they said, in unison.

Burnham pressed them further, asking how many radii in a circle. They hesitated, then Burnham informed them "there are infinite radii in a circle."

Convicted of murder at age 21, Burnham became attracted to education in prison. After earning his GED in 2002, he continued on, earning associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees. He is now working on his Ph.D. in counseling through Liberty University.

While GED classes are free to inmates, inmates must pay for college classes themselves. Burnham said his mother, using a settlement she received after a car accident, pays his tuition.

Now 40, he credits the GED program for showing him another path.

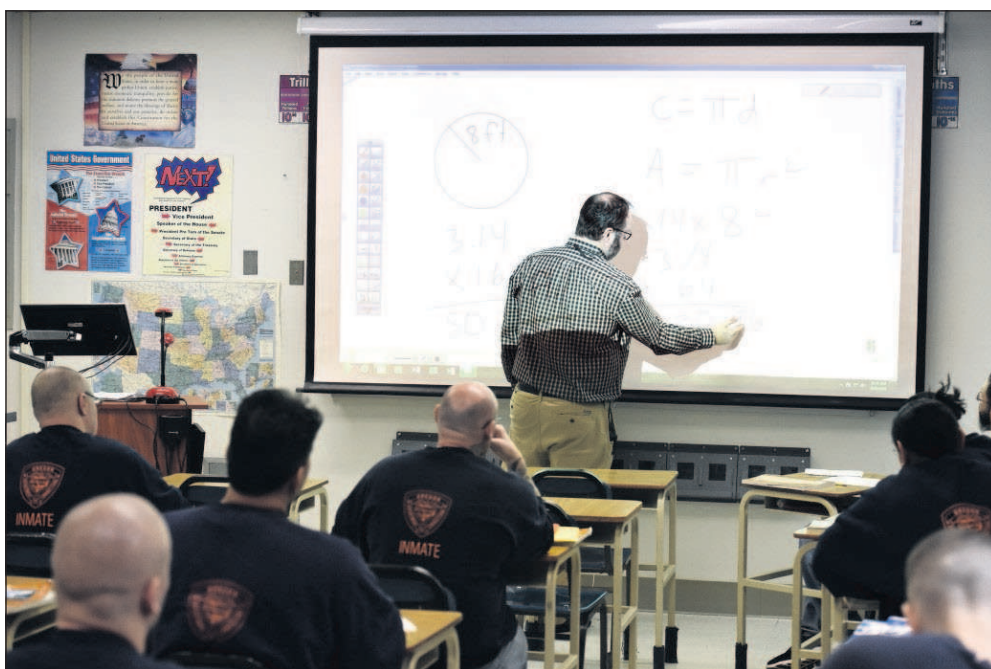
"I was a young kid without a lot of life experience," he said. "The teachers here are incredible. It was an opportunity to function in an environment that expects professionalism, which sharpens us and prepares us for life on the outside."

Research suggests Burnham's chances of staying out of prison after his 2026 release are good, said Matteson.

"The numbers are out



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Instructor Jason Villers helps inmate Trevor Kelly with a science assignment during a GED class at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution on Thursday in Pendleton.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Instructor Jason Villers teaches how to find the radius of a circle during a GED class at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution on Thursday in Pendleton.

there," she said. "The more education an incarcerated person receives, the less chance of recidivism."

John Thomas, BMCC's associated vice president of corrections education, smiles at the college's success in consistently graduating more GED students than any other corrections program in the state, though he insists, "It's not a compe-

tion."

"The marquee of this program is direct instruction," he said. "The teacher stands in front of the students. The students ask questions. Most of the other programs are computerized."

The test isn't easy, Thomas said, especially after changes in 2014.

"The rigor of the GED is

tremendous, compared with the old program," he said. "The rigor is great enough that if you score out at a

"It weighs on me that I was a drain on the community. The last third of my life, I'll have an opportunity to contribute something positive to society."

— Eric Burnham, inmate tutor

certain level, you can get college credit."

Since BMCC got the contract in 1985, 5,904 inmates earned GEDs in the three prisons the college services. Almost 500 prisoners participate in the program annually at EOIC, along with 300 at Powder River.

The road to a GED isn't a cookie-cutter process. There are three levels leading to

the diploma: Adult Basic Education, Pre-GED and GED. Some students don't speak much English. Matteson opened a cabinet and revealed dozens of dictionaries from Spanish to Chinese, Russian to Hmong that instructors have used to facilitate communication.

Tutors such as Burnham and Ryan Huebner say the positive experience with education has given them hope to resurrect themselves after mulling up their lives and the lives of others.

"It weighs on me that I was a drain on the community," said Burnham, who hopes to use his counseling education when he gets out help others avoid his mistakes. "The last third of my life, I'll have an opportunity to contribute something positive to society."

Both tutors said their love of education and their newfound work ethic became apparent to other inmates. Out in the yard, other inmates often ask questions about education.

"They look at us a role models but not authority figures," said Huebner, of Hermiston. "The tutors wear blue just like them."

The length of time needed to earn a GED varies.

"There are guys who come in and do it in a month," said Villers, the math teacher. "Some come in illiterate and take five years. It takes a while to go from 0 to 60."

At the most recent graduation in December, Matteson got goosebumps again as 25 EOIC inmates accepted diplomas in a ceremony witnessed by their families.

"It's so emotional to achieve this goal and do something parents and wives and children are proud of," she said. "That's what rehabilitation is all about — to have a chance at a new life and a new way of thinking."

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LAWSUIT: Claims he was shot 'assassination style'

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his inner jacket pocket.

The investigation also found that an FBI agent at the scene failed to disclose that he fired two rounds that missed Finicum. The agent, W. Joseph Astarita, has pleaded not guilty to federal charges of making false statements and obstruction of justice. He is listed as a defendant in the lawsuit.

The complaint compares the shooting of Finicum to the high-profile shooting of a North Korean defector in November 2017. It notes that the North Korean man survived and made it across the border to a friendlier government on the other side.

"The story was captivating, because in the American psyche, the idea of being

shot in the back by your own government for trying to cross a border is unthinkable," the lawsuit said.

It claims Finicum was shot "assassination style" while trying to cross from Harney County into Grant County for a meeting with a sheriff who was sympathetic to the ranchers' cause.

Dozens of people took over the remote refuge in southeastern Oregon from Jan. 2 to Feb. 11, 2016. They were allowed to come and go for several weeks as authorities tried to avoid bloodshed seen in past standoffs at Waco, Texas, and Ruby Ridge, Idaho.

But authorities moved in Jan. 26 when key standoff leaders left the refuge for a community meeting in neighboring Grant County,

pulling over two vehicles and arresting the occupiers inside.

Finicum, 54, was driving one vehicle. Video taken by a passenger showed the occupants panicking after authorities stopped the truck.

With his window rolled down, Finicum shouted at officers: "Shoot me, just shoot me! Put the bullet through me."

Finicum then sped off, coming to a roadblock and plowing into a snowbank.

The complaint says more than a dozen current and former Arizona officials wrote a letter to Oregon's governor, asking her to conduct a more transparent investigation into what happened next.

"Defendant has refused," according to the lawsuit.

WATER: 'Smart meters' for electricity being installed

Continued from 1A

Morgan said the app can also help people spot potential leaks — if they notice all of the sudden they are using three gallons of water per hour even when they are asleep or not home, for example. Customers can set up their account to alert them to possible leaks or a pipe bursting, and city staff will also keep an eye out for irregularities and can potentially contact customers if it looks like something is wrong.

"It can't hurt to have more data," he said.

Morgan said some people might feel like their bill has gone up since their new meter was installed, but that is because the new meters chart usage 12 months out of the year. Under the old system, where meters had to be read by hand instead of the meter sending data remotely, the city just estimated water

usage for winter months and then once the meter was read in the spring added any extra usage on to the next bill. Anyone who feels like their December bill was higher than last December's will likely have a smaller March or April bill than usual, he said.

To view their detailed water usage information, customers can create a login on eyeonwater.com after inputting the account number found on their bill.

Hermiston Energy Services customers will be able to keep closer track of their electricity usage soon, too. Allegiant Energy Services, on behalf of HES, is installing new "smart" meters between now and the end of March. Once a customer receives a new meter, their SmartHub payment portal they now use to pay bills and check their monthly usage will feature

new data including usage by the day and by the hour.

HES general manager Nate Rivera said people will be able to spot patterns about what times of day their home uses the most electricity, although temperature outside does tend to have a large impact by determining how much the heating system or air conditioning runs.

Information has been sent out to HES customers about installation, and Rivera said when meters are installed in a neighborhood someone will go door to door to explain the installation to residents, and that there will be a few minutes without power during the switch.

Customers with questions about the new electrical meters can call 541-289-2000.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

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