

**BPI**  
BARD PRISON INITIATIVE

# ***THE FUTURE IS NOW***

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**2021 ANNUAL REPORT**



“We spent over two decades fighting so that college-in-prison **could be**....now we turn to the battle of what [it] **should be.**”

— MAX KENNER '01

Dear Friends,

**For BPI, the future is now.**

BPI aspires to a future of higher education in America that is tuition-free, full-time, and degree-granting; that reaches into every part of society engaging students when they're ready; and, to a version of college which honors the breadth and capacity of the imaginations of every American.

We spent over two decades fighting so that college-in-prison *could be*; with the historic victory restoring Pell Grant eligibility for people in prison, that fight has been won.

Now, we turn to the battle over what college-in-prison *should be*.

For all our progress, the terrain is challenging. COVID decimated this field for three semesters and continues to threaten people and programs. For-profits, tablet-based 'programs', and colleges that aspire to fit in — rather than transform — the prison landscape have emerged in this new environment of reliable government funding.

**That's why BPI's work is more important than ever.**

The moment calls for the rebuilding of our communities within the prisons and expanding its investments in alumni post-release; for growing the student body as well as our academic programs and the number of degrees we offer; and for doubling down on what we do best: in-person, full-time college that is as ambitious as the students it serves.

**This inaugural Annual Report shares some of how BPI is meeting this moment and leading by example. Please enjoy this update from this past, wild and unpredictable year. It would have been impossible without you.**

Here's to you, your support, and an extraordinary 2022.

Yours sincerely,



Max Kenner '01  
Executive Director



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# REAFFIRMING OUR VISION

The Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) envisions an American society where access to quality higher educational opportunity is fundamental to democracy. The work redefines the accessibility of college for the people who have been persistently underrepresented in higher education and overrepresented in prisons and communities of unequal resources. In doing so, we collectively disrupt systemic inequities and reimagine systems with experientially diverse leadership at the fore. Ultimately, BPI offers a pathway toward a more just, equitable and radically inclusive future.

## OUR CONTEXT

The persistence of unequal access to college is as old as American higher education itself. It continues to reveal itself as inextricably linked to the social mobility of people as the last year has made undeniable. With a history of a “dual education system”, higher education in America has typically been available to the most privileged, perpetuating racial hierarchies, while also being associated with unemployment, poverty, and mass criminalization. Those who have been directly impacted by this history are people of color, often from communities of resilience and unequal resources, and who are largely represented in BPI’s community of students and alumni.

BPI students and alumni are ambitious, intellectually curious, and actively engaged in their communities; they are first-generation college students and graduates, making a reverberating impact within their families and communities. They exemplify what is possible when **we reimagine who college is for and where it might lead.**



## WHAT WE DO

Beginning in 1999, BPI became a national leader in restoring college access within American prisons. Since then, its mission has expanded to engage students in new places — including community-based libraries, campuses, advocacy, educational and service organizations — demonstrating that access to ambitious, liberal arts education is a catalytic response to the social challenges we face regionally, nationally, and globally.

Every BPI program is tuition-free, full-time and degree-granting. Every student who has enrolled with BPI (through the college-in-prison, the microcolleges or BardBac) enters a community of alumni, who, together, create a life-long network of support to overcome challenges, actualize professional ambition, and offer a place of belonging.

The COVID pandemic intertwined with the movement for Black lives and racial justice has urged us as a society to rethink and reimagine every facet of American life. **For the Bard Prison Initiative, our commitment to investing in people, making genuine education more accessible, and reinventing institutions is renewed:** to the college continuity of our current students, the expansion of access to education to more students, and innovating reentry support to honor the aspirations of our alumni.



REFLECTIONS ON LAST YEAR

## MEETING THE MOMENT

In the last year, BPI rapidly adapted to the pandemic in a variety of ways.

BPI adapted its educational model to adhere to the public health need to social distance, accelerated its plans to expand its BA program, uplifted the public health leadership of its students and alumni who have been on the frontlines, provided direct assistance to members of its community, and joined advocates and colleagues in the field to advocate for clemency and medical furloughs within the prisons.

“I could feel that anxiety was running extra high. People were having a hard time focusing. (I was too.) And yet, they showed up. They allowed their classmates and me to see into their private spaces. They persevered.”

— SUSANNA KOHN  
BPI AND MICROCOLLEGE FACULTY

“We are Bard students. Dedicating ourselves to question, critique, and dream other realities and possibilities is a part of our course work. This identity and this task are shared between us. We may not know what the rest of the years hold, but we walk forward asking questions.”

— ARU APAZA '22

“At this moment, the voices of BPI alums, particularly those who have studied or are currently working in some public health capacity, have particular strength. Most Americans are likely to subscribe to the notion that a person in prison is isolated in a cell with almost no contact with anyone else. Put in other terms, there is a belief that to be incarcerated is almost exactly like what folks who are quarantined or in social isolation are going through now with COVID-19. The reality of being herded together throughout the day in a variety of settings for a variety of reasons is a reality of prison life that is unknown to the average American.”

— BOB FULLILOVE  
BPI SENIOR ADVISOR, PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM

“Marginalized communities are not receiving the same resources as those with high socio-economic status, and that concerned me.”

— VANESSA FIELDS '16





ALUMNI VOICES

PATHWAYS TO EQUITY

“My dedication to serving and protecting the health of the people in New York City began in a cramped classroom in Taconic Correctional Facility as prisoner 09G0379. Today, I am one in an army of public health advisers working to save the lives of our neighbors.

We are exhausted. Our floors aren’t getting vacuumed and we are living off frozen dinners and fast food, but reducing the number of COVID infections is worth it. Our work is largely invisible; success in public health is often what you don’t see. In the era of COVID, every empty ICU bed is an indication we are winning.

There were over 300 women in the prison where I received my education. Their pathway to prison was sewn into the fabric of their origins much the same way the pathway to college is stitched into middle and upper-class communities. Obtaining even a high school education was formidable when every day presents a struggle against homelessness, food insecurity, abuse and even technology knowledge gaps. Our failure to address the inequities in these communities contributes to incarceration.

Just 15 of those 300 women were able to attend BPI. Expanding funding for prison education ensures a prison compound can hold the same promise as a college campus. We can break the cycle of inequity and tap the potential of people in prison with a simple investment in college coursework.”

— **STACY BURNETT '20**

» Read her [full article on BPI's blog](#) or at New York Daily News



ALUMNI VOICES

A PLAN OF ACTION



“Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I worked with the Yonkers My Brother’s Keeper initiative as a Youth Mentor and Program Administrator as I began building and organizing my nonprofit corporation 914UNITED (pronounced 9-1-4). Life was moving in the right direction, and then COVID-19 hit New York. Everything changed. The streets were empty. The death toll spiked. Social distancing and quarantining became our new reality and life as we knew it, seemed to stop. I couldn’t sit passively watching my city suffer. I wanted to help and be proactive in the community. Since my best friend shared the same sentiment, we decided to leverage the relationships we had built through 914UNITED and organize a relief effort team. Together we provided support and appreciation for the essential workers serving on the front-line of this disruptive pandemic.

Over the last year 914UNITED has grown with incredible momentum to meet ongoing and emerging needs across Yonkers. We have grown from a team of 2 to 13 people and are now on the frontlines of youth advocacy in Yonkers, focused on creating opportunities and connecting mentorships for young people in financial

literacy, civic engagement, education, personal and professional development. We’ve built a diverse team of professionals and community leaders who work to build skills, cultivate decision-making, expand pathways, and personal ambition of the young people in the community.

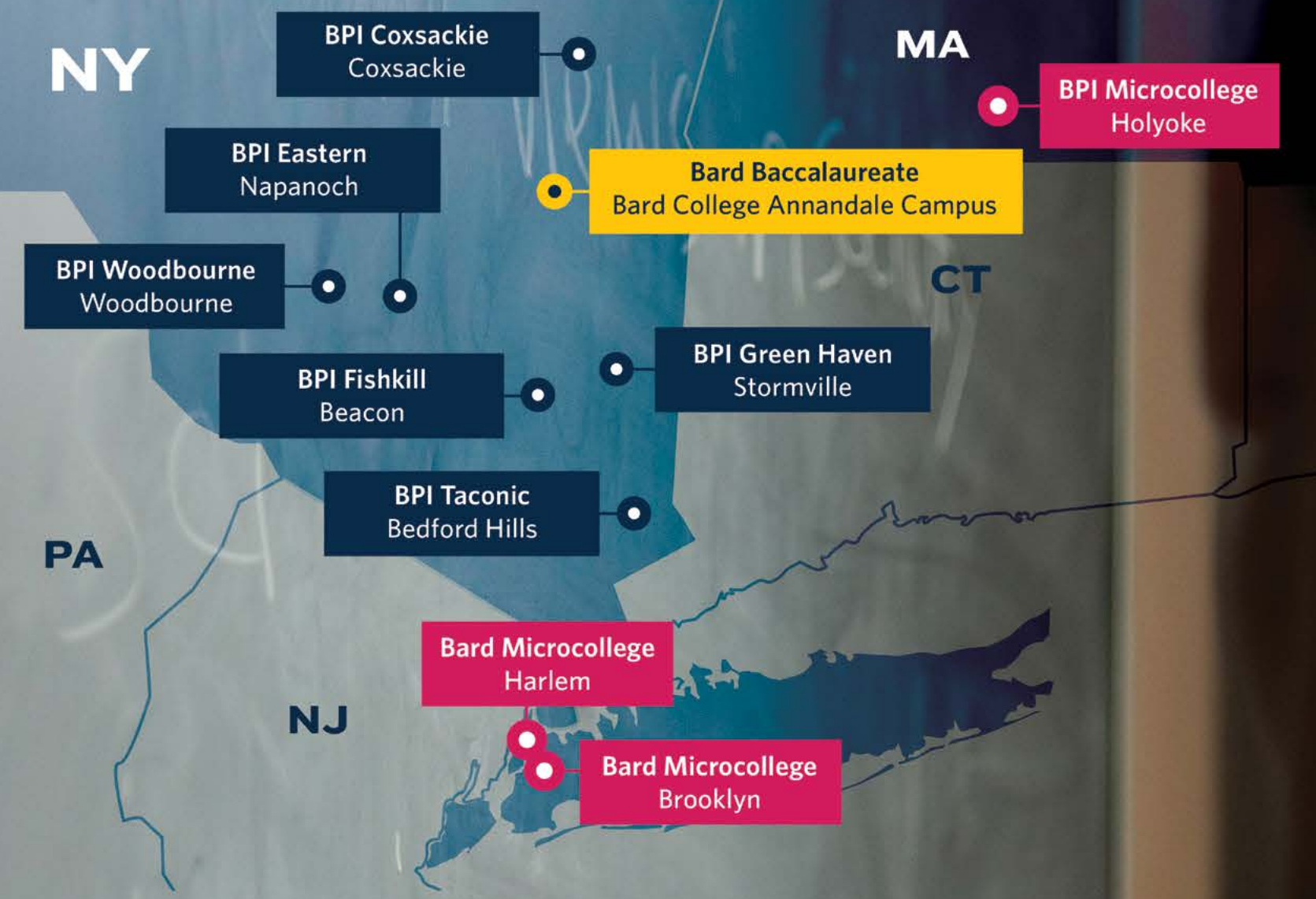
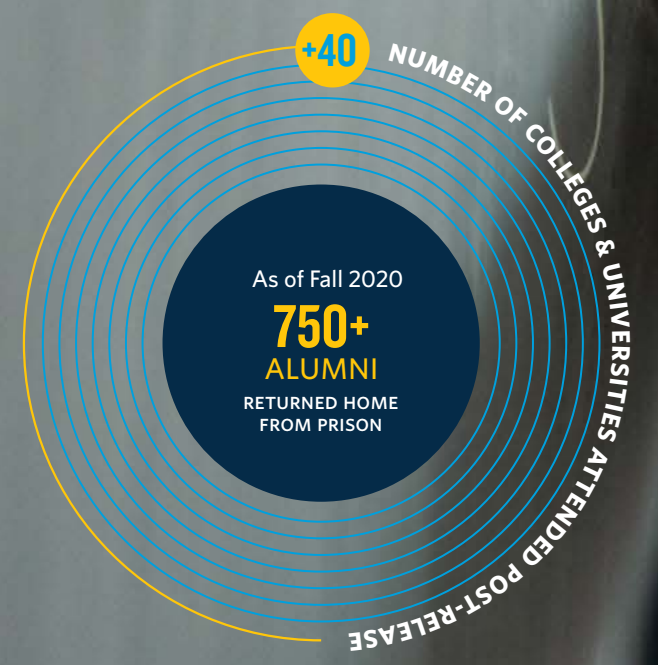
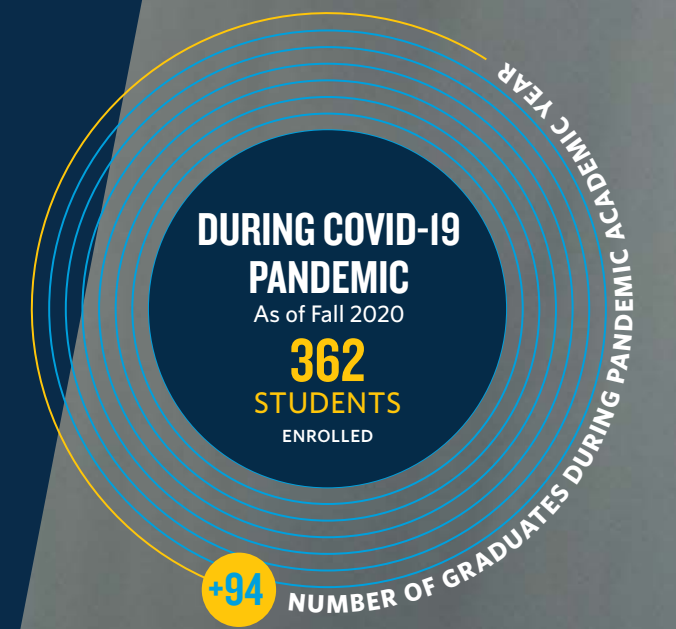
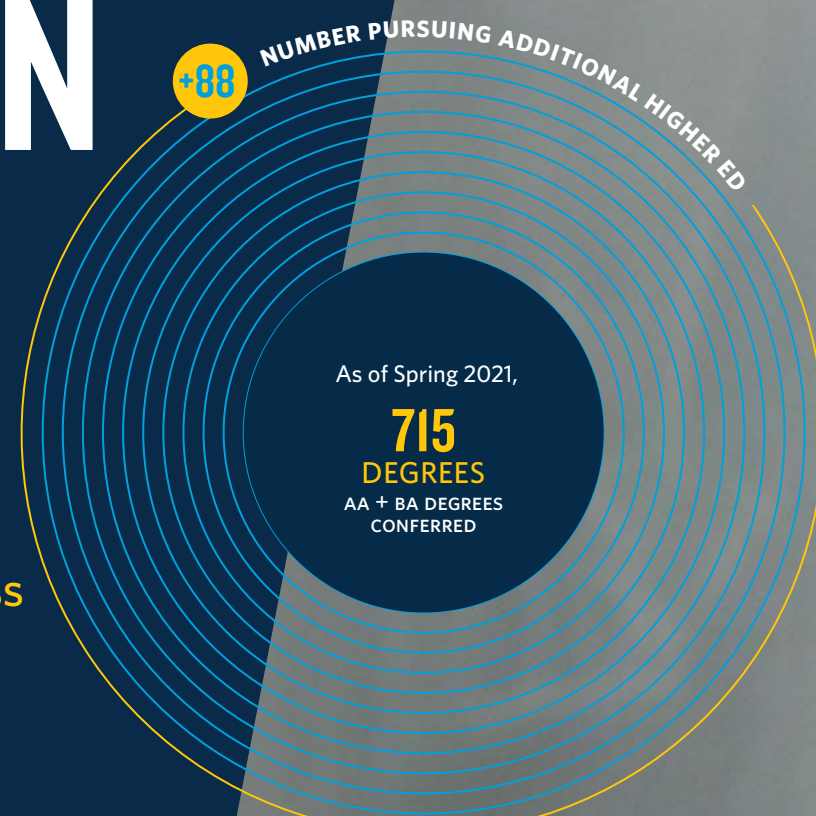
The momentum, positive reaction, and many offerings of opportunities that have come our way let me know I’m moving in the right direction. People in the community know my story, they resonate with my story of going to prison young, coming home with a B.A. degree and using that to impact change. That connection to my story helped launch 914UNITED but we are no longer just me and my co-founder/director, we’re a team, it feels great, we’re a growing organization. I’m trusting the process, doing the work through being present and consistent. It’s working out beautifully, life is, again, moving in the right direction.”

— **JONATHAN ALVAREZ '19**

» Read his [full article on BPI's blog](#)

# REIMAGINING THE PLACE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Since 1999, BPI has worked to increase access to the life-affirming power of a liberal arts education. With the historic return of Pell funding for incarcerated students, BPI is well-positioned to expand its vision and define the future of access to higher education in America: in prisons, on campuses, and in communities.



## BPI PROGRAMMING IS ACTIVE...

- In Prisons
- On Campus
- In Communities



## OUR FOUNDATIONAL COLLEGE PROGRAM

BPI began its work by creating radical inroads of access and opportunity to higher learning in prisons, enrolling its inaugural cohort in 2001. Today, we enroll over 300 students annually across six New York State prisons, including Coxsackie, Green Haven, Taconic, Woodbourne, Eastern, and Fishkill Correctional Facilities.

### ACADEMICS

As they pursue Associate in Arts (A.A.) degrees, students enroll in courses seminal to a Bard education, such as First-Year Seminar and Citizen Science, as well as courses spanning all four academic divisions of the college including the arts, humanities, science, and social studies, and electives according to their interests.

After completing A.A. degrees, students have the opportunity to work toward Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)

degrees. As members of the upper college, they moderate into specific majors, participate in advanced B.A. seminars, and spend a year writing their senior thesis projects while finishing coursework.

BPI cultivates habits of inquiry, dialogue, and engagement through a distinctive writing-based curriculum. From Language & Thinking to Senior Project, Bard students learn to read closely and question carefully.

### AREAS OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT

While earning degrees and after they've graduated, students have opportunities to deepen their expertise in areas of career advancement. These specializations begin in prison and continue after students have returned home: through paid internships and fellowships, specialized training, and career guidance. These areas include:

#### PUBLIC HEALTH

The [Public Health](#) curricular specialization is designed to prepare students for careers in the rapidly changing fields of public health, healthcare, and community health. Students who complete the entire seven-course specialization become proficient in the core competencies of Public Health graduate programs, including research design and implementation.

#### URBAN FARMING AND SUSTAINABILITY

As part of the Public Health program, students can take courses in food justice, regional food systems, and sustainability. BPI maintains student-run organic gardens in Taconic, Woodbourne, and Fishkill Correctional Facilities.

#### COMPUTER SCIENCE

Students preparing for opportunities in the field of [computer science](#), or computer-based work in other fields, can pursue coursework in data structures, computer architecture, programming languages, web development, and media design.

#### TEACHING AND EDUCATION

While enrolled, many BPI students take a pedagogy course and put the skills they learn to use in peer tutoring and supporting other incarcerated people pursuing high school equivalency degrees. Five BPI alumni continued that work as paid Writing Fellows at the Bard Microcollege at Brooklyn Public Library, supported by pedagogical and career coaching from BPI staff.



## EXTRACURRICULAR COLLEGE LIFE

### DEBATE

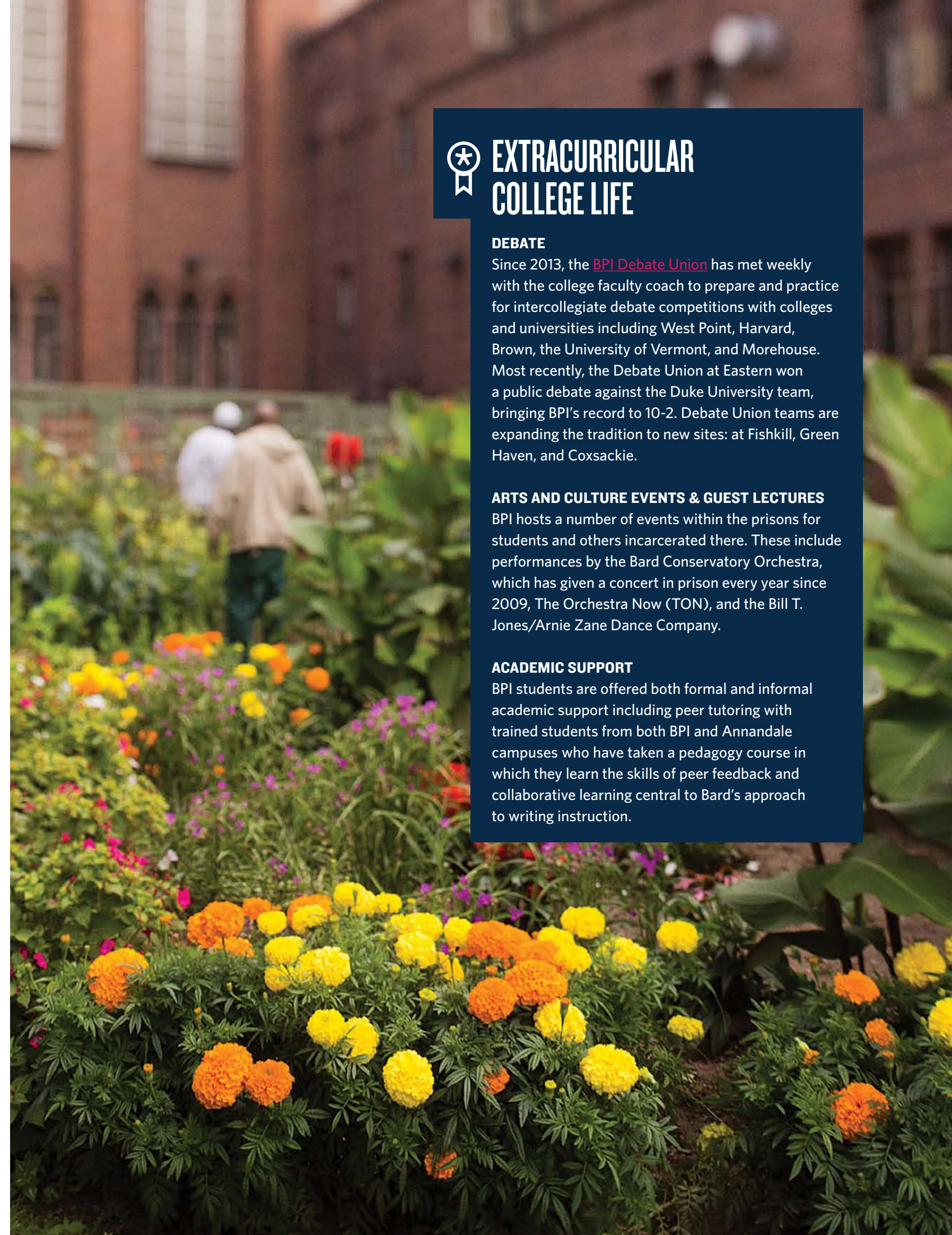
Since 2013, the [BPI Debate Union](#) has met weekly with the college faculty coach to prepare and practice for intercollegiate debate competitions with colleges and universities including West Point, Harvard, Brown, the University of Vermont, and Morehouse. Most recently, the Debate Union at Eastern won a public debate against the Duke University team, bringing BPI's record to 10-2. Debate Union teams are expanding the tradition to new sites: at Fishkill, Green Haven, and Coxsackie.

### ARTS AND CULTURE EVENTS & GUEST LECTURES

BPI hosts a number of events within the prisons for students and others incarcerated there. These include performances by the Bard Conservatory Orchestra, which has given a concert in prison every year since 2009, The Orchestra Now (TON), and the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company.

### ACADEMIC SUPPORT

BPI students are offered both formal and informal academic support including peer tutoring with trained students from both BPI and Annandale campuses who have taken a pedagogy course in which they learn the skills of peer feedback and collaborative learning central to Bard's approach to writing instruction.



ALUMNI VOICES

## A CLEAR CHOICE



“Believing that incarcerated citizens constitute a separate and distinct population can give the country only a false sense of comfort and security. No matter how hard we try, no matter how justified we feel, America cannot amputate more than 2.2 million people from the social body. Ninety-five percent of us will return; if nothing changes, most of us will return ill-prepared to make meaningful contributions to society.

There is a clear choice.

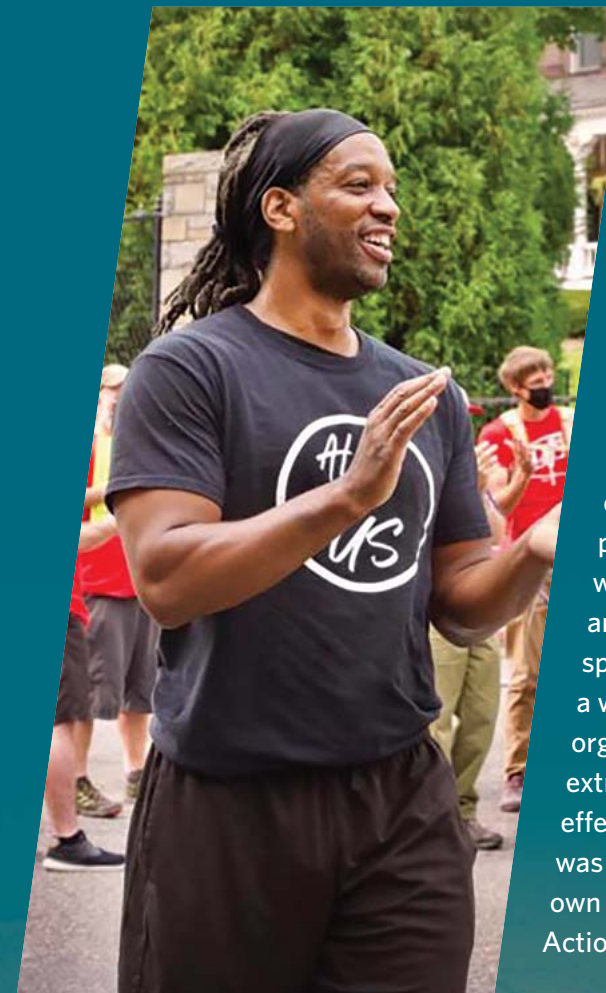
America can have wastelands of discarded human potential, and all of the “success” that produces—high incarceration rates, more crime, and more hurt people—or institutions that promote intellectual growth and civic engagement. We cannot have both.”

— **RODNEY SPIVEY-JONES '17**

» Listen to the [full podcast interview](#) in The Appeal

ALUMNI VOICES

## CHALLENGES & CHANGES



“In 2019, I came home to the Capital District committed to being a positive force in my community. Within a blink of an eye, I was speaking publicly to a room full of people at the NYS Capitol about my experiences, calling for justice. Then I was interviewing to be an organizer for a statewide organization and was ultimately hired to begin in January 2020.

Like many others, I did not see what would come in 2020— the challenges and changes, the pain of increased televised police brutality, and a global pandemic that would highlight the systems of oppression and harm that so many among us have been speaking about for lifetimes. I needed to find a way to be an advocate, an activist, and an organizer during crisis and pandemic, during extreme tragedy and pain. I was able to do that effectively by transitioning from the position I was hired for into being the co-founder of my own organization, All Of Us Community Action Group.”

— **SHAWN YOUNG '19**

» Read his [full article](#) on BPI's blog

IN PRISONS **IN COMMUNITIES** ON CAMPUS

## THE BARD MICROCOLLEGES

In 2016, BPI reimagined its foundational college program through the launch of Bard Microcollege, a tuition-free college education offered in partnership with community-based institutions: The Care Center in Holyoke, MA and the Brooklyn Public Library at Grand Army Plaza.

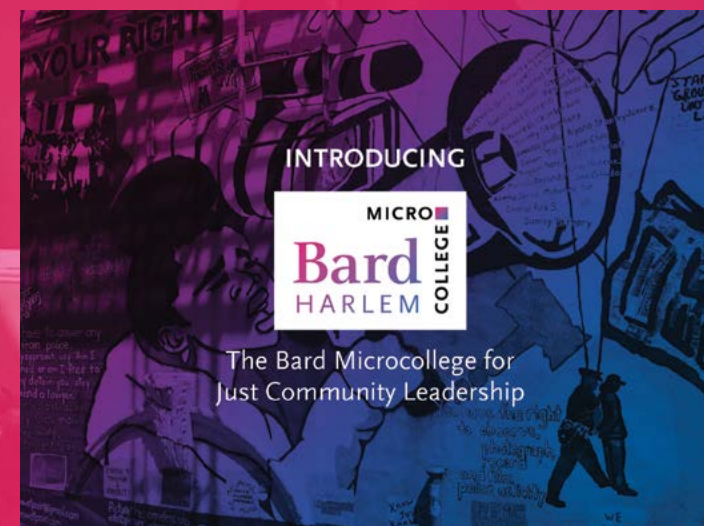
BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

**“I came to the Microcollege to get back something I thought I had lost; however, I ended up embracing a wild transformation of how I relate to the world as well as the ideas and people in it.”**

—MARS IKEDA '21



**ABOVE:** 2019 Holyoke Microcollege cohort  
**TOP LEFT:** 2019 Brooklyn Microcollege cohort  
**LEFT:** Introducing Bard Microcollege Harlem



At the microcolleges, we work to replicate the successes of small-scale, high-intensity liberal arts school that we have learned at the in-prison campuses, while also learning new lessons about what it takes to pursue this kind of intense college work while navigating the realities of American life including financial hardship, full-time employment, family obligations, chronic illness, etc.

To date, 66 microcollege students have earned Bard College degrees and have gone onto fulfilling careers and pursuit of BA programs at colleges and universities such as Smith College, Mount Holyoke, and Bard College.

In the summer of 2021, we opened the nation's first tuition-free college dedicated to advocacy, arts, and sciences: the Microcollege for Just Community Leadership. A partnership with JustLeadershipUSA and College & Community Fellowship, this microcollege will be based in Harlem and primarily enroll people directly impacted by the criminal legal system.

AS OF FALL 2020

**100**  
STUDENTS ENROLLED  
ACROSS THE BARD  
MICROCOLLEGES

## BARD BACCALAUREATE

Most recently, in 2020, in response to the onset of mass unemployment precipitated by COVID-19, BPI launched the BardBac, a unique, full-scholarship pathway for adults to complete bachelor's degrees from Bard College.

[The Bard Bacculaureate](#) (BardBac) brings BPI's 20+ years of learning home. The BardBac is a new full-scholarship BA program on the Bard College's main campus in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. Launched in the summer of 2020, the first cohort of 36 Bac students are now finishing their second semester.

Like BPI and microcollege students, BardBac students pay nothing for tuition, fees, and books while they pursue their BA on the main Bard campus. They study together as a cohort for one class per semester, and the rest of their classes are individually chosen, based on their own academic interests. The program comes out of a wish to respond to the unemployment crisis sparked by COVID-19, but it is also premised on reaching students in the Bard region who have been excluded from higher education because of structural racism and other forms of discrimination.



**ABOVE:** Students at Olafur Eliasson's *Parliament of Reality* on Bard's main campus in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.





BPI's work represents what democratizing college access looks like: tuitions-free, full-time, degree-granting college and community.

# REVERBERATING IMPACT

BPI's work to redefine college access is reverberating: within the alumni community, across institutions, and through narrative change. Serving as a national leader, BPI has created a supportive community for students and alumni to actualize professional ambition and cultivate leadership, building national engagement by inspiring colleges and universities to establish college-in-prison programs of their own, collaborated with colleagues in the field to advocate for Pell restoration, and leveraged national attention to amplify alumni voices.



**CONSORTIUM CONVENING:** Alumni Sylvester Reddick '10 and Ornell Caesar '16 take part in the Convening of the Consortium held at Notre Dame in 2018.

## CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP: REENTRY AND ALUMNI AFFAIRS

Across New York City and beyond, BPI alumni have been vital public voices — community leaders, activists, and professionals — using their distinctive combination of experience and expertise. From roles at public agencies and social service organizations; in philanthropy and criminal justice; and inside businesses; BPI alumni are reclaiming power and leadership, determining what comes next.

BPI's New York City Programs serve more than 700 alumni as they pursue their chosen paths — college, career, and beyond — to improve their local and city-at-large communities and ultimately contribute to creating and sustaining a more just world. To assist alumni in achieving their goals, a student and alumni-centered approach is used by the NYC reentry and alumni affairs team. Comprehensive support is provided in the areas of continuing education (e.g., undergraduate, graduate, and/or professional schools), housing, technology, and wellness. In addition, as extensions of the curricular specialization within the college program, fellowships programs in public health, as business associates at the Ford Foundation, and in education prepare alumni to serve their communities in these specific sectors.

To meet the growing needs of our alumni community, BPI's reentry team of eight has recently expanded, and now includes a NYC Director of Programs, Director of Reentry, and alumni heading continuing education, housing, wellness, and transitional support portfolios. In addition, BPI has created the Transitional Workshops, designed to provide comprehensive support, including a stipend, for alumni who have recently returned home. The Workshop curriculum covers a broad array of topics of interest to BPI alumni including continuing education, housing support and wellness, technology support, career advising and more. Participants learn the basics of banking and building credit, mobile technology, and learn about key forms of civic engagement. The Workshop further supports transition beyond the curriculum through conversations with BPI alumni who have been home some time, other members of BPI staff, outside guests and supportive open dialogues among cohort participants.

Since launching as a pilot in November 2020 and now in its fifth cohort, the majority of alumni who have returned home in the last year have participated in these workshops.

**DARREN MACK '13** ▶  
Co-Director,  
Freedom Agenda

◀ **ERIKA MATEO '11**  
Deputy Senior  
Campaigns Director,  
Color of Change

**ANIBAL CORTES '08** ▶  
Research Associate,  
Bureau for the Health Promotion  
of Justice Impacted Populations,  
NYC Department of Health

◀ **DERRICK STROUD '13**  
Trauma Therapist,  
Exodus Community Inc.

**TAMIKA GRAHAM '17** ▶  
Community & Criminal  
Justice Reform  
Advocate

**24+**  
**DISTINCT FIELDS  
OF EMPLOYMENT  
POST-RELEASE**

including business and government, real estate development, public health, philanthropy, technology, and across the advocacy and non-profit sector.

**4**  
**FELLOWSHIP  
PROGRAMS  
FOR ALUMNI IN  
NEW YORK CITY**

including BPI fellowships in public health, education, community engagement and sustainability and as business associate fellows at the Ford Foundation.

**ADVOCATING  
ACROSS NY TO  
#TURNONTHETAP,  
#CLOSERIKERS,  
#HALTSOLITARY**

**“I came home thinking I was prepared and ready. I wasn't. I had been away for 17 years and was caught off guard by the overwhelming reality of returning to society. But BPI's transitional workshop helped guide me through it and gave me a support group of great people. I will always be grateful for the experience.”**

— PARTICIPANT OF TRANSITIONAL WORKSHOP

## BUILDING NATIONAL ENGAGEMENT



Convening of the Consortium for Liberal Arts in Prison

### CONSORTIUM FOR THE LIBERAL ARTS IN PRISON

For more than a decade, through the [Consortium for the Liberal Arts in Prison](#) (Consortium), BPI collaborated with **14 colleges and universities** as they launched sustainable college-in-prison programs of their own across the country. Together, these leading institutions are redefining inclusive excellence while challenging expectations of success for people in and returning home from prison.

In the 2019–2020 academic year, BPI supported the launch of a new college-in-prison program in partnership with Boston College and the BPI-led Women’s College Partnership (WCP) at the Indiana Women’s Prison hired its full-time program director. Four WCP alumnae have returned home, starting professional jobs and continuing their educations with reentry support from BPI.



WashU PEP graduation.



Freedom Education Project Puget Sound science class

### THE SUMMER RESIDENCY

Moving into a new phase of program-building support and technical assistance for college-in-prison, BPI launched a Summer Residency program in 2019 for emerging practitioners and new leaders in the field. Through the Residency, BPI leverages more than twenty years of experience to support developing programs across the country and supports peers in building sustainable, high-quality college opportunities. The Summer Residency admits an annual cohort for practice-based workshops on Bard’s main campus. This two-week program supports the professional growth of college-in-prison program directors in all areas of program design and implementation including admission, academics, student support, Pell and FAFSA information, relationships with corrections, administration, and reentry. Moving into a community of practice that extends well beyond the summer and beyond the cohort, residents and their teams have access to ongoing individualized technical assistance, webinars, and convenings.



Residents at the 2019 retreat at Bard College.

### THE HISTORIC RETURN OF PELL

In December 2020, the insidious provision of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act that revoked federal student aid eligibility from incarcerated people and eviscerated college-in-prison was reversed.

Since the 1994 crime bill, restoration of Pell eligibility has been the North Star for our field. The new legislation creates again the possibility of wide-spread access to college-in-prison nationally. It is a victory decades in the making, and we have educators, advocates, religious communities, and primarily incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people themselves to credit.

Even as the legislative victory ensures a certain level of sustainability and certainty for college-in-prison, the return of Pell Grants won’t restore college in every prison, nor will it make college-in-prison everything it needs to be. Incarcerated students become ever-more vulnerable to exploitative practices, profiteering, and cynicism about what incarceration people are capable

of. There will surely be educational providers that rush substandard programs into the field, taking advantage of the new funding. In this new era of college-in-prison, there will remain the need for blended funding streams of philanthropic, local and state investment alongside the return of Pell — just as there was in states across the country before 1994. BPI will still need your support. As a recipient of the experimental Second Chance Pell initiative launched in 2016, BPI has been among a handful of colleges that were already eligible for Pell Grants. While little will change for BPI’s funding streams, the new law represents a seachange in the field. What the return of Pell does is make college-in-prison possible everywhere.

The politics of punishment and the public’s understanding of the value of college-in-prison has shifted dramatically since BPI’s founding in the late 1990s. Indeed, Pell Grant eligibility was restored by bi-partisan coalition in an era that sees little political consensus. After 20 years of BPI, we are no longer a political pariah or even an outlier. With returned public funding, college-in-prison will once again be the new normal. Now, it is our job to define what that means. Through direct policy advocacy on the local, state, and national levels, as well as providing technical assistance and program building support, BPI remains at the fore of ensuring the integrity of what comes next.





ALUMNI VOICES

## CREATING PURPOSE AND COMMUNITY



"In 2001, I was one of over 70,000 people in what was then called the New York State Department of Correctional Services. This was six years after the 1994 Crime Bill ended Pell Grant eligibility for people in prison. One year later, New York followed suit, ending the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for incarcerated students.

Before the federal ban, 772 programs were operating in 1,287 correctional facilities across the nation. By 1997 it is estimated that just eight college-in-prison programs existed.

After a series of transfers, I was lucky enough to land in a facility that had college-in-prison programming. The difference in experience between those two worlds is profound. One cradled hopelessness by nurturing darkness through loneliness and idle time while the other created purpose and community through education and self-reflection."

— **GEORGE CHOCHOS '10**  
» from his article in City Limits

WITHIN ALUMNI COMMUNITY ACROSS INSTITUTIONS THROUGH NARRATIVE CHANGE

## LEVERAGING NATIONAL EXPOSURE

### FIVE YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF DEBATE UNION VS HARVARD

In September 2015, BPI's college in prison first entered the national spotlight when its [Debate Union defeated Harvard](#) in an intercollegiate debate. Too often, the story of Harvard students losing to Bard students in prison got lost under memes and headlines such as the Associated Press headline "Harvard's prestigious debate team loses to New York prison inmates," which was picked by the Guardian and many other outlets.

But at its best, the story's notoriety reflected a growing awareness of the crisis of mass incarceration and the untapped and often ignored the potential of people in prison. As Eddie Ellis famously asserted in the early 1990s and scores of academic researchers have since

echoed, for 40 years mass incarceration has been deeply geographically concentrated in poor Black communities that are hyper-policed and overlap with the fewest resources and educational opportunities and the highest health disparities and unemployment rates.

The celebration of the BPI Debate Union's win was, in many cases, a recognition of societal failures stemming from the systemic criminalization of BIPOC youth and the school-to-prison pipeline. It was a celebration of hope and education over cynicism and punishment. It was a recognition of how widely distributed capacity is across society, even as opportunity is distributed in no such way.



DAILY NEWS  
**NEW YORK PRISON DEBATE TEAM DEFEATS HARVARD COLLEGE TEAM**

The Guardian  
**HARVARD'S PRESTIGIOUS DEBATE TEAM LOSES TO NEW YORK PRISON INMATES**



NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF EDUCATION

KEN BURNS PRESENTS

# COLLEGE BEHIND BARS

A FILM BY LYNN NOVICK  
PRODUCED BY SARAH BOTSTEIN

MON NOV 25 9/8c  
TUNE IN OR STREAM



BehindBarsPBS  
collegebehindbars



## A YEAR WITH *COLLEGE BEHIND BARS*

In November 2019, [College Behind Bars](#) premiered on PBS, and subsequently began streaming on Netflix and Amazon Prime, generating unprecedented public and critical response for BPI and the field of college-in-prison more broadly.

While the film was six years in the making, promotion for *College Behind Bars* arrived in step with a cultural moment reflecting a readiness for these conversations across America and momentum building to address the systemic inequity at the core of American systems of punishment and higher education. With the historic passing of legislation restoring Pell funding for incarcerated students in December 2020, the COVID pandemic and the renewed urgency around racialized police violence and inhumane and dangerous conditions in prisons and jails presented an unprecedented opportunity to use *College Behind Bars* to introduce the public to who is in prison and what is possible when we use college to invest in the capacity and talent of incarcerated people.

LEFT: *College Behind Bars* screening at Malcom X College.

“Being present as these men and women experienced the enormous power of education was life-altering for me in ways I never could have anticipated. Their stories, their lived experiences, revealed many dimensions of the grievous intersections of race, class, poverty and criminal justice in America, but they also taught me a great deal about resilience, determination and the joy of learning.”

— DIRECTOR LYNN NOVICK

“College Behind Bars is perhaps one of the best documentaries that I’ve seen about criminal justice in the past 5 years. I thought it was incredibly well done in all ways.”

— DERAY MCKESSON  
Activist and Organizer

“What you see at the end is a testament to the power of education, and why it remains such a dangerous and underrated weapon against a racially and economically unjust status quo in this nation.”

— ROLLING STONE

BPI alumni and staff participated as panelists at dozens of screening events nationwide in diverse communities and venues. Some highlights: at San Quentin State Prison, alumni joined the filmmakers to screen and discuss the film and college in prison with incarcerated men. On Capitol Hill, the Congressional Black Caucus commemorated the 25th anniversary of the passage of the 1994 Crime Bill by screening *College Behind Bars* and discussing the film with BPI alumnus Wesley Caines '09, Max Kenner '01, Ken Burns, Lynn Novick, JustLeadershipUSA's Deanna Hoskins, and hosted by Congressman Bobby Rush of Chicago.

Alumni brought their truths and stories through the film to PBS stations, an event with the NFL Players Coalition, churches and synagogues, and schools, colleges and universities nationwide.

**BACKGROUND:** Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation, watches a screening of *College Behind Bars*.





Sebastian Yoon '17 speaks at the *College Behind Bars* screening at The Apollo with NFL player Malcom Jenkins.

BPI and the film were featured in newspaper articles; opinion pieces in national, regional, and local press; TV news broadcasts; radio and podcast interviews; dozens of screening events; and our work was promoted by high-profile activists, scholars, actors, and media personalities across social media. With the advent of the pandemic, the events shifted to virtual screenings and a digital strategy to ensure the momentum continued.

In response to *College Behind Bars* and related promotion, we welcomed more than 2,000 new donors and subscribers to BPI's communications and social media audiences tripled. Most importantly, BPI's alumni featured in the film, such as Jule Hall '11, Sebastian Yoon '17, and Dyjuan Tatro '18, were recognized as leaders and representatives of social and criminal legal reform. We are grateful to be able to leverage national attention to inspire change nationally.

**60+**  
SCREENING  
EVENTS IN  
ADVANCE OF  
BROADCAST

**500**  
COPIES OF THE FILM  
DISTRIBUTED TO  
PRISON EDUCATION  
PROGRAMS

**28**  
BPI ALUMNI  
PARTICIPATED IN  
EVENT PANELS

**+200%**  
INCREASE IN  
SUPPORTERS  
SINCE BROADCAST

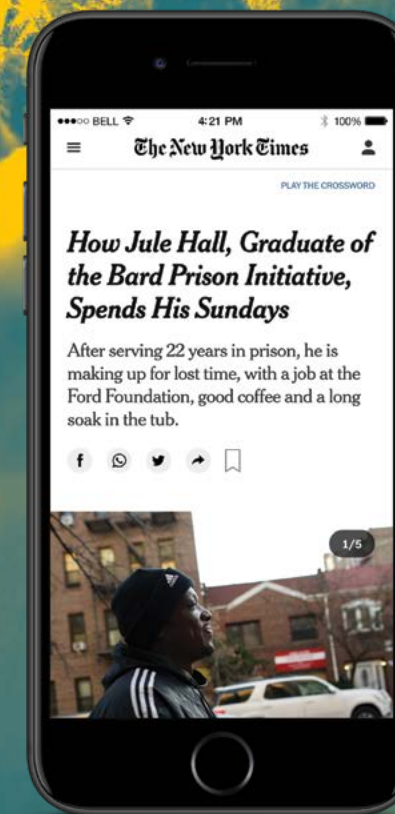
ALUMNI VOICES

A CONSEQUENTIAL MYTH

"Race is a fictive idea that holds real-life consequences. As a black man, who has a six-foot-and-three-inch-tall presence, I am intimately familiar with the tangibility of the myth. Although many anthropologists and geneticists have disproved any biological basis to race, the idea still manifests as the seat next to me that remains empty even though the train is crowded. It shows up with the overly helpful and attentive store cleric when I shop at department stores. Its scope is illustrated by the shocking statistics that black people are five times more likely to be incarcerated in this country than whites."

— JULE HALL '11

» Read the [full article](#) in *Philanthropy New York*



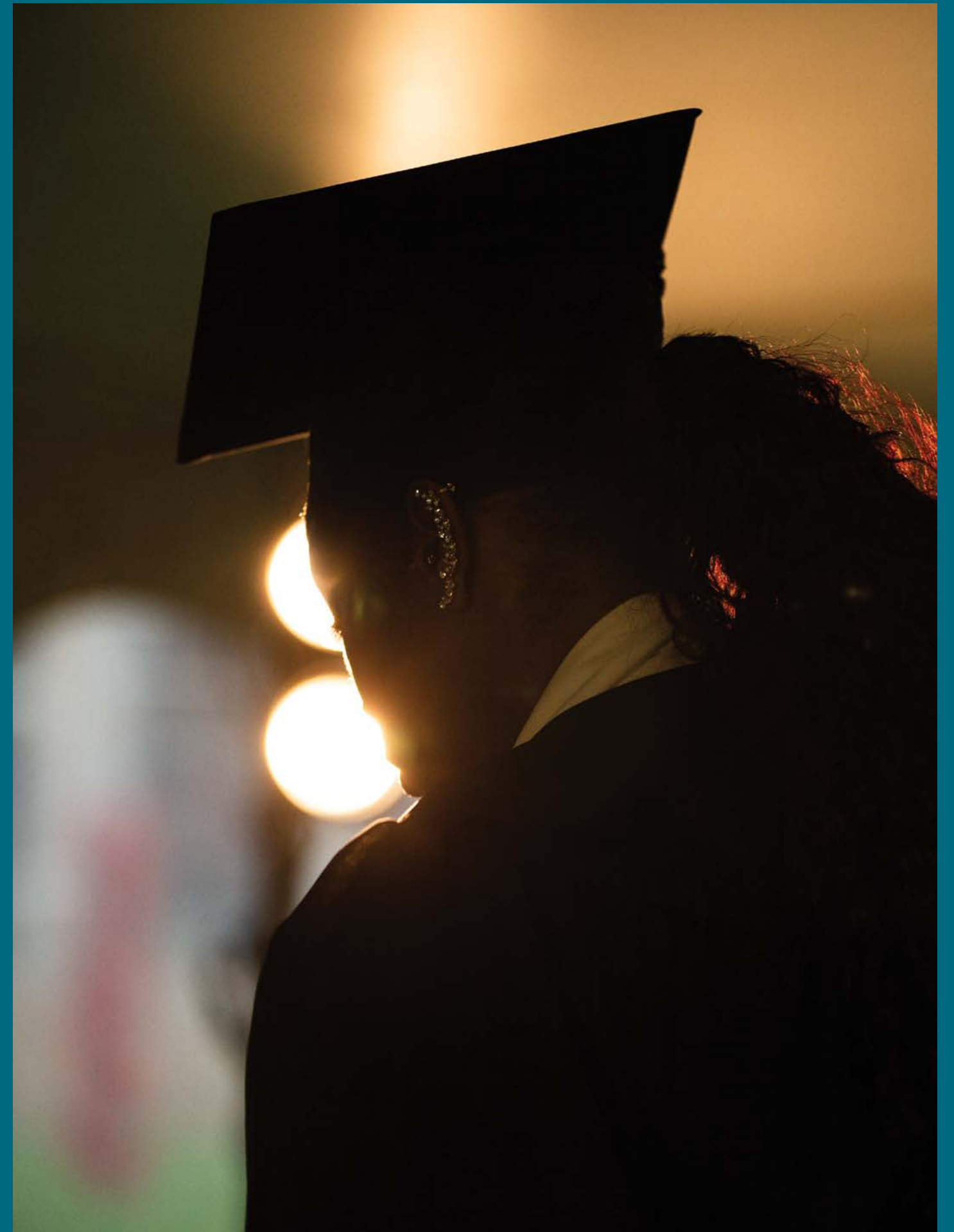
LEFT: Jule Hall '11 featured in *The New York Times* Sunday Routine

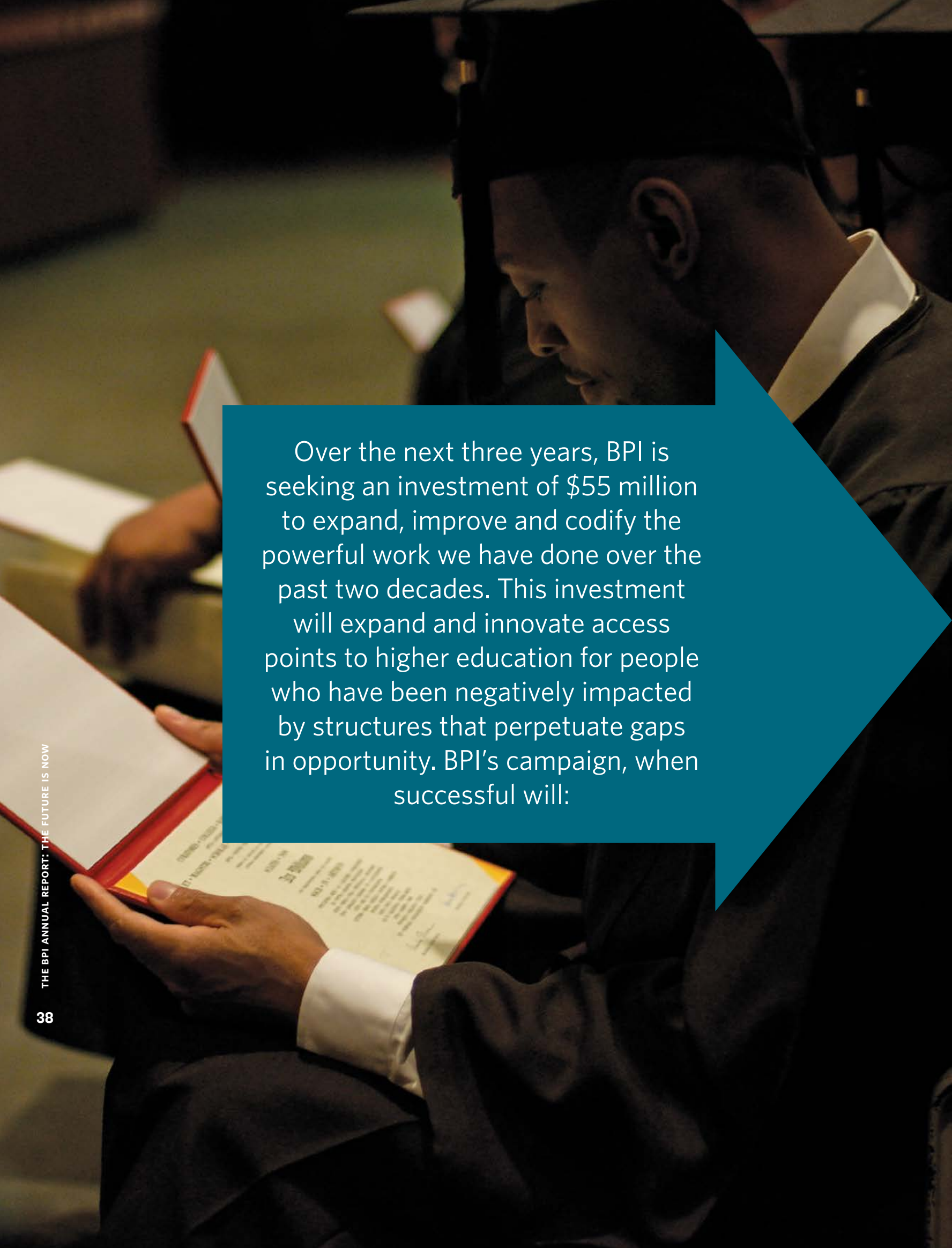
# RESHAPING THE FUTURE: WHAT COMES NEXT

In March 2021, Bard College announced a transformational \$500 million endowment pledge from George Soros. This challenge grant — among the largest ever made to higher education in the United States — sets the stage for a \$1 billion endowment drive at Bard College, which will sustain and strengthen the college in these uncertain times. For BPI, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to secure the future.


For every dollar we raise now to endow BPI the donor will match one-to-one. For endowment gifts designated to BPI, the donor's match will be designated to BPI as well.

Now is the time to make a catalytic gift to ensure BPI's work carries into the future. For details, please contact Kate Cox: [kcox@bard.edu](mailto:kcox@bard.edu).



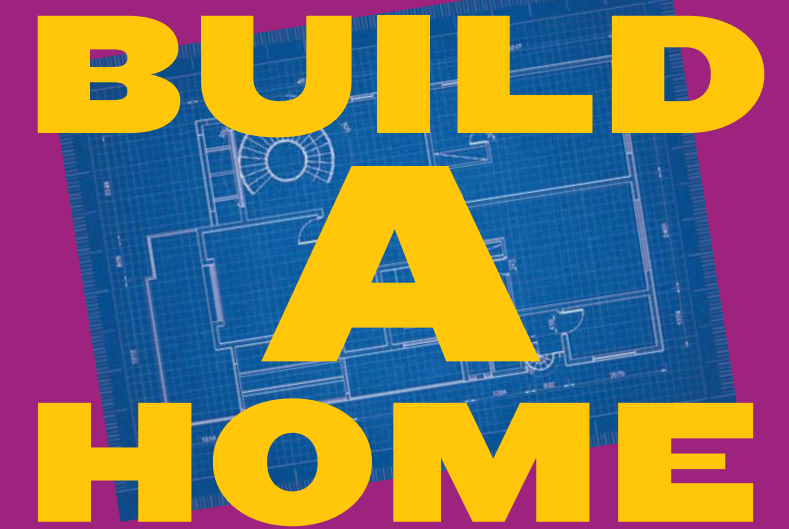


Over the next three years, BPI is seeking an investment of \$55 million to expand, improve and codify the powerful work we have done over the past two decades. This investment will expand and innovate access points to higher education for people who have been negatively impacted by structures that perpetuate gaps in opportunity. BPI's campaign, when successful will:



## DEMOCRATIZE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Expand the college in prison, microcolleges and alumni reentry programs in New York State.



## BUILD A HOME

Build a state of the art headquarters on Bard College's main campus in Annandale, NY and create a central office to anchor BPI's Microcolleges, reentry programs and alumni engagement in New York City.



## AMPLIFY NATIONAL IMPACT

Support peer programs across the country and advocate for high-quality college opportunity and reducing the harms of mass incarceration through: The Residency, National Advocacy and Engagement Strategy focused on Narrative Change.



## ESTABLISH AN ENDOWMENT FOR BPI'S FUTURE

An endowment for BPI at Bard College will provide long-term sustainability as well as the fiscal infrastructure required for flexibility and response to opportunities for impact. Every dollar of pledges to the larger Bard College endowment designated to BPI will be matched one-to-one.



**VISIT OUR OTHER WEBSITES:**

Bard Microcollege: [microcollege.bard.edu](https://microcollege.bard.edu)

Bard Baccalaureate: [bac.bard.edu](https://bac.bard.edu)

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**SUPPORT US:**

