Piper Kerman Dishes on Jail Time, Prison Reform

‘Orange Is the New Black’ Event Draws Big Crowd

If anyone can get people excited about the not-so-sexy topic of prison reform, it’s Piper Kerman.

Years after she carried a suitcase full of drug money from Chicago to Brussels for her then-lover, Kerman spent a year locked up at the federal correctional facility in Danbury, Conn. Her recollections of her experiences as a prisoner have earned worldwide audiences through her New York Times bestselling memoir “Orange Is the New Black” and a blockbuster Netflix adaptation.

More than 500 people showed up at University Crossing on a rainy Tuesday night in October to hear her speak. In a frank discussion about her unlikely incarceration—she was raised in a middle-class family in Brookline and graduated from Smith College—Kerman described the horror of being arrested 10 years after her infraction.

Kerman said she is “eternally grateful” that she had the means to hire a good attorney (she said 80 percent of defendants can’t afford one) and for his skill in negotiating a reasonable sentence. During her talk, she addressed the critical faults in the country’s corrections system, which she has spent the last few years challenging through nationwide speeches and advocacy work. She cited an 800 percent increase in incarceration of women in the past 30 years, and noted that two-thirds of them are mothers.

The current system simply is not working, Kerman said, noting that “who gets locked up does not correlate to who does the crime.”

Kerman recommends that the country “front-load” strategies to address the problem, especially through increased investment in public education.
Learning with Purpose

Twenty percent of new principals leave their positions within one or two years, disrupting the learning environment for both teachers and students, according to research studies. As public schools fall under greater scrutiny to receive federal and state funding, the need to improve the leadership skills of school administrators has never been more important.

Graduate School of Education (GSE) faculty members Stacy Szczesiul and Phitsamay Uy received a $512,000 grant from the federal Race to the Top education initiative to establish a leadership pipeline for principals in the area. Sixteen professionals from Methuen, Lowell and Billerica public schools were admitted into the Project Lead program that includes GSE’s rigorous M.Ed. in administration coursework, a leadership academy and extensive school-based mentoring. Successful completion of the two-year program will result in participants receiving a M.Ed. in administration and state administrator licensure.

“Through the program, aspiring principals develop the critical knowledge and skills needed to satisfy the demands of the role,” says Szczesiul.

Project Lead is designed to foster effective principal leadership practice in each district, working primarily with future school leaders while also broadening the training of current school administrators.

It’s Not Easy Being a School Principal

New Program Offers Leadership Education

Asst. Prof. Phitsamay Uy teaches a workshop for aspiring principals.

Richard Lemoine, director of environmental and emergency management, gives Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner David Cash a tour of the university’s composting operations.

Waste Not, Want Not

Campus Composting Program Lauded by State

UMass Lowell’s food composting program was praised as a prime example of an innovative solution for handling food waste by Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner David Cash.

The university launched its food-composting program at Fox Hall’s University Dining Commons 15 months ago. The project was the result of a collaboration involving students, staff, Dining Services and Casella Waste Systems, the university’s solid waste contractor. Earlier this year, the composting program was expanded to all dining halls and food operations on campus. During the first eight months of operation, an estimated 184,000 pounds of food waste was composted.

Cash’s visit coincided with the Oct. 1 introduction of new state regulations covering disposal of commercial food waste. Under the new rules, businesses and institutions that produce more than a ton of food waste per week cannot send the material to landfills. The ban, the most sweeping of its kind in the country, is intended to help the state reach its goal of cutting the waste stream by 30 percent by 2020.

“The composting program is part of our efforts to be a leader in sustainability and energy conservation,” says Richard Lemoine, director of environmental and emergency management.

In addition to the composting program, the university has also launched an initiative to donate excess prepared food from campus dining operations to local non-profits.

Students Play Instrumental Role in Donation Drive

Collected Instruments will Benefit Schools

Over two days in September, UMass Lowell music students and members of the popular, university-rooted Party Band collected more than two dozen instruments, making it possible for budding young Lowell musicians to practice and play.

In collaboration with the university’s chapter of the National Association for Music Educators, 30 donated instruments were collected, cleaned, repaired and readied for distribution to students in Lowell public schools.

“We were incredibly successful,” says event organizer and Party Band percussionist Savannah Marshall ’13, now a graduate student studying community music.

Eighteen of the orchestral instruments, including trumpets, trombones, a French horn and clarinet will be distributed to Lowell schools “to afford many students access to a musical path for years to come,” says Marshall.

Instruments such as guitar, electric bass, drums and a keyboard will head to the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lowell, whose Lowell Music Clubhouse is co-directed by Seth Bailin ’06, also leader of Party Band.

Two orchestral instruments will be donated to the UMass Lowell String Project, and the rest will be used as repair projects for UMass Lowell undergraduate music classes. University Music donated cleaning and instrument maintenance supplies.

Faculty member Blair Bettencourt and students Savannah Marshall, Kelsey Olden and Patricia Langenberg display some of the instruments collected during a donation drive for local schools.
Does Heavy Lifting Increase Risk of Retinal Detachment?

Kriebel Receives $1.4M Grant for Vision Disorder Research

Retinal detachment—when the retina pulls away from blood vessels—ranks as one of the most common ophthalmologic emergencies, often leading to irreversible vision damage. Prof. David Kriebel of the Department of Work Environment recently received a $1.4 million grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to study the role of preventable factors in developing the condition.

Until recently, only a small portion of retinal detachment cases was considered avoidable. Emerging research identifies a strong association between retinal detachment and preventable factors such as heavy lifting.

“If the findings of this study confirm the association between heavy lifting and retinal detachment, our research team will be able to recommend strategies for preventing this dangerous ophthalmologic emergency,” says Kriebel. “Many jobs in manufacturing, shipping and even health care that involve heavy lifting can be modified to use mechanical lifting devices.”

Experts Sound the Alarm on Climate Change

Over 600 Students Participate in Annual Teach-in

Climate change is real and dangerous, MIT Prof. John Sterman told a packed audience on campus during the recent Climate Change Teach-in.

The business-as-usual attitude of industry is carrying us “toward a future that is about 9 degrees Fahrenheit warmer by the year 2100,” said Sterman, who is a leading expert in system dynamics of climate change.

As global temperatures continue to climb, rising sea levels from melting glaciers and polar ice sheets, coupled with storm surges generated by super typhoons and hurricanes, will severely increase flooding impacts in low-lying islands and cities, he said.

Biology Assoc. Prof. and Climate Change Initiative Director Juliette Rooney-Varga described the university’s growing resources dedicated to the issue.

“We now have 30 faculty members from across 13 academic departments involved with the Climate Change Initiative and the Student Environmental Alliance, and we’re still growing,” she said.
Photos Shared on Instagram Showcase Campus in Autumnal Splendor

The UMass Lowell campus provides a spectacular canvas for the colors of fall. These photos—a sampling of the dozens submitted in a “campus beauty” campaign—show why.

UMass Lowell is striking in ways both large and small: It straddles the Merrimack River; is dotted with trees, curving walkways, gleaming new buildings and outdoor sculpture; and is nestled between the red brick Lowell cityscape and the mountains of New Hampshire.

The photos were taken by students throughout the fall and shared on Instagram using #UMLCampusBeauty. (To see them all, go to www.uml.edu/campus-beauty.)

Then we asked students to vote on their favorites. With a whopping 1,690 votes, first prize goes to Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution graduate student Mehmet Yavuz. See which you like best!