**UConn Students Bridge Community Reading Programs**

**Laurie Wolfley**

The University of Connecticut

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**ABSTRACT**

**UConnReads Meets “One Book, One Region”: Integrating The New Jim Crow and Just Mercy**

Spring 2016 saw several UConn Avery Point professors collaborating to integrate two annual book programs—UConnReads and Southeastern Connecticut’s One Book, One Region—across the campus. Both programs took a months-long look at their chosen text, offering book talks and other programming aimed at creating a discourse community around the books’ topics. Avery Point offered film viewings and discussions on campus, as well as panel presentations open to the campus and greater community. Many courses directly integrated the books into their curriculum, and several students and faculty members attended related community events at libraries and campuses across the state. Even UConn Early College Experience classes (offering UConn courses in the high school curriculum) and several students and faculty members attended related community events at libraries and campuses across the state. Even UConn Early College Experience classes (offering UConn courses in the high school curriculum) got in on the act.

**THE BOOKS**

This year’s UConnReads book choice, The New Jim Crow, by civil rights lawyer and legal scholar Michelle Alexander, “challenges the idea that race-based discrimination...ended with the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Arguing that the War on Drugs – which began in the 1970s – disproportionately targets men of color and has given rise to a growing ‘racial caste system,’ Alexander calls for a new way of seeing mass incarceration not as a criminal issue but rather as a crisis of racial justice and civil rights.”

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**IN LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS**

Laurie Wolfley, coordinator of American Studies Early College Experience—a program that brings UConn courses to high school classrooms—helped local high schools join in on the collaboration. Thanks to a grant Connecticut College received, Laurie was able to deliver books for each student in three UConn ECE American Studies classes, and she shared parts of her curriculum and even worked with several students in one high school.

**AN EMPASSIONED CALL TO ACTION**

Laurie Wolfley was tired of reading, grading, and then discarding her students’ work; she wanted her technical writing students’ products to represent more than simply a means to a grade. When she discovered that the UConnReads and One Book, One Region topics were similar—and both were relevant and interesting to her students—she decided to focus her course on bridging the programs and sharing their common message with the campus and beyond. Her students researched controversial topics and created brochures to distribute in the area, posters to present at a community poster session, and in-depth reports to be sent to individuals throughout the area. With an authentic audience, these products held more meaning than they might have in a typical classroom—to both Laurie’s students and the community at large.

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**IN UCONN AVERY POINT CLASSROOMS**

Avery Point’s faculty and staff are committed to engaging students in their communities, and many professors integrated one or both books into their curriculum: Richard Cole, political science; Jamie Kleinman, psychology; Margaret Robinson, history; Nancy Parent, anthropology; Christine Green, biology; Renee Winchester, English; and more.

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**UConnReads Meets “One Book, One Region”: Integrating The New Jim Crow and Just Mercy**

**Panel Discussion**

**Criminal Justice in Connecticut, Past and Present**

A panel discussion

Wednesday, March 23, 6:00-8:00 p.m.

UConn Avery Point, Marine Sciences Bldg., Room 103

**Free and Open to the Public**

- “Is the Death Penalty on Life Support?”—Constitutional law specialist Dr. Richard Cole discussed indications that the death penalty will soon be taken up by the Supreme Court.
- “The Solemn Sentence of Death”—Debate penalty expert Dr. Lawrence Goodheart discussed major Turning points in the 400-year history of the death penalty in Connecticut.
- “For Mischief Done”—Author Jan Schenk Grosskopf discussed the background, sources and ethics in her work on a case in which a mixed-race child was hanged for a crime in 18th-century New London, Connecticut.

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**COLLABORATION SPONSORS**

- UConnReads
- One Book, One Region
- The Avery Point Global Café Learning Community
- UConn’s Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning
- The Avery Point Director’s Office
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