

# THE COMMITTED CLASS



## **VIOLENT. DANGEROUS. UNPREDICTABLE.**

That's how many people would describe prison inmates. But not Heath Hoffmann or his students who join him in prison for class.

"Inmates are not what is narrowly portrayed in media on shows like HBO's *Oz* and MSNBC's *Lockup*," Hoffmann says. "Interacting with these inmates will probably change the students' perceptions about criminals."

For the past semester, Hoffmann, an assistant professor of sociology, has been teaching a sociology class inside prison at the Coastal Pre-Release Center in Charleston County. Starting in the fall, he'll bring freshman students with him

in the First Year Seminar "Altered States: The Culture of Alcohol and Drug Use in America." The college students and inmates will work together on a project looking at the themes and messages related to alcohol and drug use.

"These college students will likely have grown up in a much different environment than the inmates – one in which they weren't afraid of being shot every day or being exposed to drug buys," Hoffmann notes. "I think the opportunity for interaction will be much more educational than seeing something on TV."

So, how would Hoffmann describe his inmate students? "They are more similar to many of us not in prison than they are different. In three words? Eager. Hopeful. Committed." 📸