

Public Information Office

5204 Bernard Drive
Roanoke, Virginia 24018
(540) 772-2010



News Release

For Immediate Release

Amy Whittaker, Public Information Officer: (540) 772-2010, awhittaker@roanokecountyva.gov

Roanoke County Earns Virginia Association of Counties Award

August 11, 2023 – Roanoke County’s Sheriff’s Office has been recognized with an Achievement Award from the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo). The award celebrates the partnership between the Sheriff’s Office and Roanoke College to provide the Inside-Out Prison Exchange, an international program designed to teach inmates and college students issues pertaining to justice.

The Inside-Out program provides inmates an opportunity to further their education and receive free-of-charge college credits if they complete the course. This program provides an avenue for advanced educational opportunities, hopefully increasing post release employment opportunities and reducing rates of recidivism.

The mission of the program is to create an environment of critical thinking and respectful dialogue regarding a variety of topics, with the goal of seeing that we are all more than the sum of a few bad choices. It is important for college students from the “outside” to come inside the facility and see what life is like, which gives them the opportunity to share with their communities what they have learned.

“The Inside-Out program has proven to be a great partnership, between Roanoke College and the Roanoke County Sheriff’s Office,” said Eric Orange, Roanoke County Sheriff. “This program allows outsiders a view into the criminal justice/corrections system, that they may not otherwise experience prior to entering the workforce, while providing insiders with the opportunity to further their education and give promise to the opportunities that exist post release.”

The most recent class met once a week during the fall 2022 semester in the Roanoke County Jail where Dr. Melanie Trexler, Associate Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Roanoke College, and students were brought into a secure location for class to be held face-to-face with inmates. The class met in a room monitored by a Roanoke County deputy. For 13 weeks, the students facilitated an inclusive environment and safe space for everyone to learn from each other.

“We live together in society and have the responsibility to all learn together,” said Trexler.

Since the program’s inception four years ago, the Sheriff’s Office has completed three semesters with 23 inmates successfully completing the course.



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“Inside-Out has been an eye-opening experience for many involved and helped to open the door for other possible programs and partnerships,” said Orange. “I am grateful to Roanoke College for their willingness to partner with us on this endeavor and for all of the participants, that have helped to make this program a success.”

2023 marks the 21st year of the VACo Achievement Awards.

“We are pleased the County is recognized for its innovative work and collaboration within the community,” said Richard Caywood, Roanoke County Administrator. “Thanks to the partnership between the Sheriff’s Office and Roanoke College, the Inside-Out program will surely leave a lasting impact on many college students and inmates.”

For the link to the Inside-Out submission, click [here](#).

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