



The Amplifier

Plug into news that informs and encourages

September 2016

Newsnotes

Progress in Post-Incarceration Education

Encouraging progress was recently made in the debate about whether colleges should reject applicants due to past criminal convictions. In June, the Obama administration along with leaders from a number of schools introduced the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge. The program encourages colleges and universities not to weigh criminal records during the early stages of the application process.

Attention to the issue arose following complaints from students who were turned away for minor offenses often committed when they were juveniles. The majority of schools were tossing out any application indicating a conviction, without considering either the nature of the crime or the applicant's attempts at rehabilitation. Under the new initiative, schools have committed to go "beyond the box" about convictions. So far twenty-five schools have taken the pledge. Arizona State University said, "We must remove barriers to success in education and employment for everyone, including individuals with criminal convictions, who have demonstrated a commitment to academic and professional success post-incarceration."

To Code or not to Code

Computers are used almost everywhere, by almost everyone, and for almost everything. And that's only going to increase. Today, smartphones, tablets, and laptops are the tools people use most to get things done. Soon, these tools will be eclipsed by new technologies such as wearables (fitness trackers), VR/AR/MR (Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Mixed Reality), and A.I.-equipped robotics. All these technologies need programs and apps to be useful, and those programs and apps must be written by computer programmers using a variety of computer programming languages (C, C++, Java, Lisp, Python, Ruby, Pearl, to name just a few). In the twenty-first century, computer programmers will have the most job security. One reason for this is the knowledge and skills required to become a computer programmer. And though the skills necessary to be a programmer can be learned as well as used in other contexts and for other professions, the knowledge cannot.

With the increasing demand for programmers in the workforce, coding is now being taught in primary and secondary schools. There are even programs in prisons such as San Quentin in California that teach inmates how to code and give them an opportunity to do contract coding for companies in Silicon Valley. Here at Danville, EJP is also starting to provide workshops to teach coding, and the computer lab has a few resources (paperback books, electronic books, sample programs, instructional videos) for those who want to try to learn how to code on their own or supplement the instruction received from a workshop.

Becoming a computer programmer takes a very particular set of skills. Programming requires an aptitude for logical thought and the ability to think about things in the abstract. It requires good—if not excellent—problem-solving skills. Programmers often encounter errors in their code and may have to spend hours or even days trying to find and fix them, so persistence is an indispensable quality. Though not necessarily required, a proficiency in mathematics certainly helps. Frequently, code can be simplified by using a formula—which the programmer usually must invent to fit the situation. Some programs, however, absolutely require a good understanding of specific mathematics (statistics, linear algebra). On top of all this, the learning curve for programming is not slight. It takes years to develop the skills, understanding, and experience needed to program professionally. For those willing to dedicate themselves to the pursuit, the payoff is worth the hard work.

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Most Popular Coding Languages of 2015

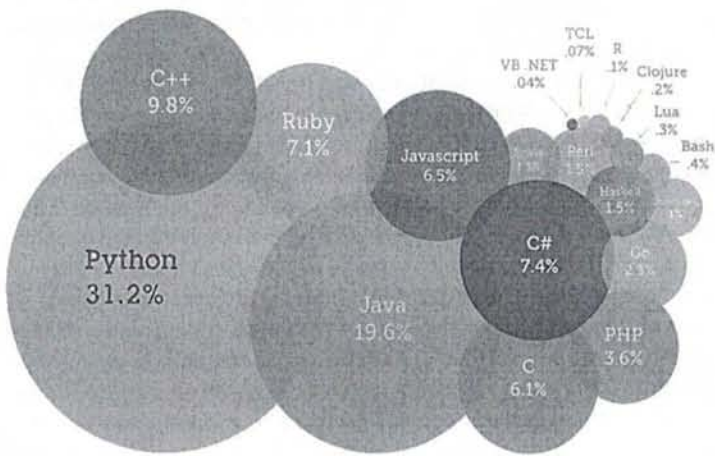


Chart from CodeEval

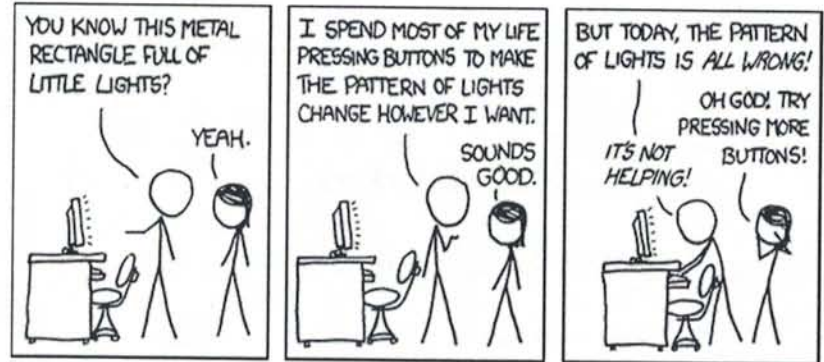
To Code or not to Code—cont. from previous page

For those new to computer programming, Python is one of the best languages to learn. It is easy to master, compared to other programming languages. It is also flexible and powerful; it can be used to create just about any program that any other language can, including those used in word processing, data analysis, games, systems programming, network scripting, Internet programming, graphics and animation, and whatever else a computer program might be made for. Its simplicity and flexibility allows programmers to quickly develop and test new programs, and that speed of implementation has proven to be Python's key to success.

Originally developed over twenty years ago, Python has gone through a number of updates and is now one of the top seven in-demand technologies by employers including Google, NASA, Pixar, Intel, JPMorgan Chase, and many others. It is also one of the top ten technologies in terms of potential salary; on average, Python programmers earn \$100,000 a year. If you want to make a career as a programmer, you will have to learn many other technologies (other programming languages, HTML, database SQL, etc.) in order to remain competitive, but Python is a great place to start.

If this has inspired you to try to learn how to code, check out the resources in the EJP computer lab. If you have family or friends who can send you books, *Learning Python, 5th Edition*, by Mark Lutz is a comprehensive guide to the Python core language written by a professor who has been teaching Python for almost as long as the language has been around. But ultimately, the only way to really learn is by doing: write your own code to modify existing programs or create new ones.

—Josh Walbert



from *Making Games With Python and Pygame*

Inheritance?

I have been incarcerated for over twenty years and in that time no institution has garnered such a mythical reputation for its collegiate programming as Danville Correctional Center. If the rumors were true, we could enroll in *The* University of Illinois, take actual upper division classes, and be fully immersed in an academic atmosphere. I transferred to Danville Correctional Center specifically to enroll in the University's Education Justice Project (EJP). To my surprise, the opportunity to engage in a challenging curriculum actually existed. I did not know an added benefit of the program lay in the opportunity to build new relationships as well as restore broken ones.

Computers have been an unfulfilled interest of mine for a long time, so I signed up for the Python computer-programming workshop that teaches marketable skills in computer coding. Learning about objects in Python, and how to code files to do an infinite amount of tasks fascinated me. One of the most intriguing concepts I learned about was how I could program a current file to inherit useful bits of code from an old file. I initially wondered how in the world a computer program could inherit from another program; I thought inheritance was a uniquely *living* characteristic. What does it mean to inherit? A programmer can format *new* code to inherit useful features from *existing* code and ignore those that are not needed for that particular application.

Offspring acquire characteristics from their parents through inherited genes. My mother has absolutely no interest in computers, technology, or anything that is controlled by buttons and chips. My father, on the other hand, was a database systems programmer for over twenty-five years. I did not find this out until very recently, because I was not raised in a two-parent household. I was raised by my mother with only the occasional visit and phone call from my father until my incarceration. Afterwards I did not hear from him until the month I was accepted into EJP.

Admittedly, after twenty years of silence I wanted nothing to do with him. But wiser people than I convinced me that the same forgiveness I so desperately desired from the people I have wronged must be given to the people that have wronged me, including my

father. We began corresponding and talking over the phone several times a week. My newfound access to computers and the Python computer-programming workshop gave us something to thaw the ice between us. My father is from a generation of computer programmers that learned a complicated way of doing things. These complicated ways work but are nonetheless overly complex. Closed platform computer programs that leave no room for user input or simplification are his preference. His position is that computer programming does not need to be easy—if it was, everyone would be doing it. He considers Python's programming language heresy and its simple syntax blasphemy.

After several months of conversing, he introduced me to a sibling I had never met who shares my interest in computers and programming. In my opinion, our shared interest can't be attributed to my father and inheritance. Or can it? Could I have inherited my interest in computers from a parent who did not expose me to the interest? Can someone have computer programming in his blood? What is inherited within programming is clear and logical while what a child inherits from a parent, other than physical characteristics, is opaque and confusing.

EJP has made a significant impact in my life in a short time. It has afforded me the long awaited opportunity to educate myself in an area of interest. My exposure to computer programming also aided in the reconciliation process between my father and me. Our frequent discussions have allowed me to see him for the man he is and not the man I imagined him to be. Doing this is something I need to continue practicing, as I also hope to be viewed as more than the sum of my past transgressions. My ongoing attempts to convince him of the benefits and viability of Python as a coding platform have improved our comfort level when we speak, but have proved fruitless so far. I am still a coding heretic in his professional opinion. *I am all right with that* because we have a relationship now that is more important to the both of us than my computer heresy.

—Nikia Perry

Breathing Space



The first installment of "Breathing Space" briefly introduced an informal contemplative breathing practice. Here another MDG member offers a more detailed set of instructions for a breath/body meditation.

INTENTION

Our intention is to notice the breath and its communication with the body, its manifestation within the body, and the feeling of its texture and composition in the body.

POSTURE

Sit erect, relaxing scalp, brow, mouth, tongue, and throat. Take a few deep breaths, opening and loosening the body's receptivity to the inhalation, and allowing a thoroughly cleansing exhalation, unhindered and with natural ease.

ATTENTION

Notice the breath entering the body, inviting itself into the body naturally.

Notice the breath passing through the nose and down the throat, expanding the chest and softening the abdomen. Allow it to set its own pace, effortlessly.

Notice the inhalation entering into the tops of the shoulders, front of the chest, sides of the torso, lower back and lumbar region, around the hips, expanding the belly and abdomen.

Notice the inhalation from tops of the shoulders tumbling down the upper arms, into the elbows and flowing outward through the upper arms into the fingertips.

Notice the inhalation from the chest, circulating around the waist and lower torso, streaming down the legs, through the ankles to the toes.

Notice as the inhalation brings a sense of spaciousness .

When thoughts come up, notice them and allow them to depart upon the exhalation.

Notice the space between inbreath and outbreath and between outbreath and inbreath.

Continue to experience the breath permeating and interacting with the entire body naturally

Rest with ease in this unfettered vastness allowing space within and around you to open with the inhalation and permitting thoughts to leave on the exhalation. . . .

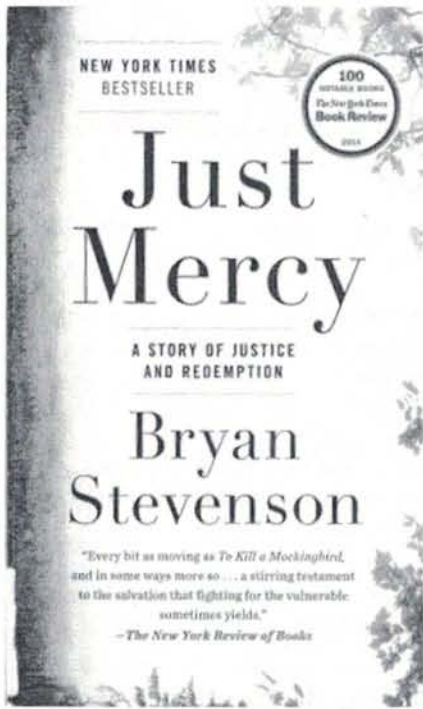
CLOSING

After twenty to forty minutes, close the meditation by taking a couple of centering breaths and wiggling fingers and toes to regain conscious contact with the room and the senses.

Throughout the day nurture the centered awareness you have cultivated during the meditation session.

10 Ways to Live Restoratively (Adapted from Howard Zehr)

1. Take relationships seriously, envisioning yourself in an interconnected web of people, institutions and the environment.
2. Try to be aware of the impact (potential as well as actual) of your actions on others and the environment.
3. When your actions negatively impact others, take responsibility by acknowledging them and seeking to repair the harm even when you could probably get away with avoiding or denying it.
4. Treat everyone respectfully, even those you don't expect to encounter again, even those you don't feel deserve it, even those who have harmed or offended you or others.
5. Involve those affected by the decision, as much as possible, in decision-making processes.
6. View the conflicts and harms in your life as opportunities.
7. Listen, deeply and compassionately, to others seeking to understand even if you don't agree with them. Think about who you want to be in the latter situation rather than just being right.
8. Engage in dialogue with others, even when what is being said is difficult, remaining open to learning from them and the encounter.
9. Be cautious about imposing your "truths" and views on other people and situations.
10. Sensitively expose everyday micro-aggressions including sexism, classism, and racism.



the racial history of this country casts a long shadow.” Through dedication and tenacity he clawed his way out of poverty and became one of very few African American men admitted to Harvard Law School. Initially, he was unsure of what exactly he wanted to do but knew it would involve helping the poor and oppressed whom he shared the playgrounds with as a child. During his second year of law school a unique opportunity caught his attention. He discovered that Harvard offered an unusual one-month course on race and poverty litigation which required students to intern with an organization doing criminal justice work. His assignment was to work with a small group of litigators called the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee (SPDC) in Atlanta, Georgia. Their mission was to provide assistance to men on death row who had no representation in the battle for their lives. These thirty days brought Stevenson to his calling. At the end of the month, he found within himself a steadfast dedication to helping these men and many others trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system.

“Proximity to the condemned and incarcerated makes the question of each person’s humanity more urgent and meaningful,” says Stevenson. In February, 1989, Stevenson and fellow attorney Eva Ansley opened a nonprofit law center in Alabama called the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). For thirty years they have provided free, quality legal services to condemned men and women throughout the US. Over the years Stevenson has argued in front of the Supreme Court four times, and he was directly involved in the May, 2010, decision banning life imprisonment for juveniles convicted of non-homicide crimes. (For years, we have been the **only country in the world** that condemns children to life imprisonment without parole: nearly three thousand juveniles have been sentenced to die in prison.)

Just Mercy, chosen as a gift for the University of Illinois president Timothy Killeen at the 2016 EJP Awards Convocation, brings us face to face with the harsh realities of a criminal justice system that traumatizes and victimizes people through unfair prosecutions, convictions, and sentences. Included with Mr. McMillian’s story are numerous other cases involving women, the mentally disabled, and children sentenced both to death and to life in prison. He recounts the mind-blowing cases of individuals such as George Stinney, a fourteen-year-old black youth executed by the state of South Carolina in 1944, and Ian Manuel who, after being sentenced to life at the age of thirteen, was kept in solitary confinement for eighteen years straight. As shocking and infuriating as it is to read these heartbreaking accounts of injustice, Stevenson’s refusal to back down even when faced with seemingly insurmountable odds conveys a message of hope to anyone pinned under the foot of our oppressive criminal justice system.

Mr. Stevenson sets each scene so compellingly that it is hard to believe this is the first book he has written. He deftly weaves together the issues of both criminal and racial injustice, giving insight into a side of our justice system seldom seen or acknowledged. He also provokes an overwhelming urge to demonstrate compassion for our fellow human beings by pointing out that the true measure of a society’s character comes not from how it treats the rich, powerful, and privileged, but rather from how it treats the poor, incarcerated, and disfavored. Stevenson’s work is a paean to humanity and an inspiring read. His conviction is contagious and reminds us that “each of us is more than the worst thing we have ever done.”

—C.J. Shea

Imagine being on death row knowing you will soon be executed for a crime you did not commit. Inconceivable? Well, it is exactly where young black business owner Walter McMillian found himself after being wrongfully convicted of murdering an eighteen-year-old white woman in Alabama. The year was 1986, a time when Alabama had no public defender system. Walter, like many others, sat for years with no legal representation of any kind, until one day he was visited by a young pro bono attorney named Bryan Stevenson. In *Just Mercy: A Story of Redemption and Mercy* (Spiegel & Grau, 2014), Stevenson shares with us the fight to save McMillian’s life. The case illuminates issues of gross racial bias and disturbing indifference to inaccurate testimony, which will light a fire of indignation in even the most docile reader.

Stevenson was raised in what he describes as “a poor, rural, and racially segregated settlement in Delaware where

From *Just Mercy*:

- The prison population has increased from 300,000 in 1970 to 2.3 million people today
- Federal spending on jails and prisons has risen from 6.9 billion in 1980 to 80 billion today.
- Between 1990 and 2005 a new prison opened in the US every ten days.
- One in every three black male babies born this century is expected to be incarcerated.

Submission Guidelines

Comments and submissions may be addressed to *The Amplifier* and placed in the EJP suggestion box or handed to Ms. Cumpston or a member of *The Amplifier* editorial staff.

Submissions may be in any legible format.

Submissions will be selected for publication according to:

- 1) EJP values and standards as outlined in the EJP handbook
- 2) Editorial needs

Submissions will be edited for clarity, length, and technical issues, using the *Chicago Manual of Style* and AP guidelines as authoritative. When possible, editing will be done in cooperation with the author, and greater latitude will be given to creative/personal pieces.

The deadline for the November full issue is September 30.

The Amplifier is a publication by the students of the Education Justice Project, a unit of the University of Illinois, at Danville Correctional Center in Illinois.

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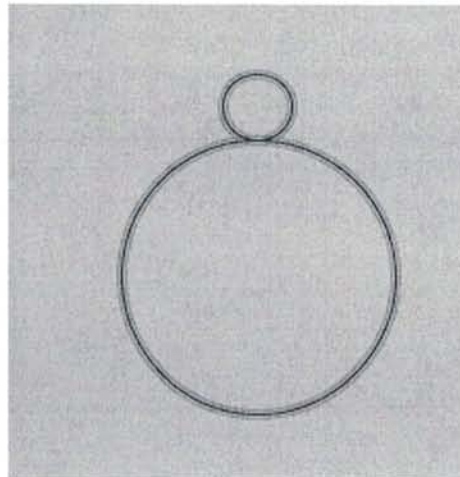
Eddie's Enigmas—ORBITING COIN

Two coins are represented in the diagram. The diameter of the large coin is four times the diameter of the smaller one. If the smaller coin is rolled completely around the larger coin one time, with the edges in contact and no slippage, how many times will the smaller coin rotate on its own center by the time it returns to its starting point? (This puzzle was suggested by Mr. Borum, an EJP volunteer.)

RATING = ●●●●○

—Edward Viens

Solutions to EDDIE'S ENIGMAS can be found on the bulletin boards in the Computer Lab and Resource Room 1.



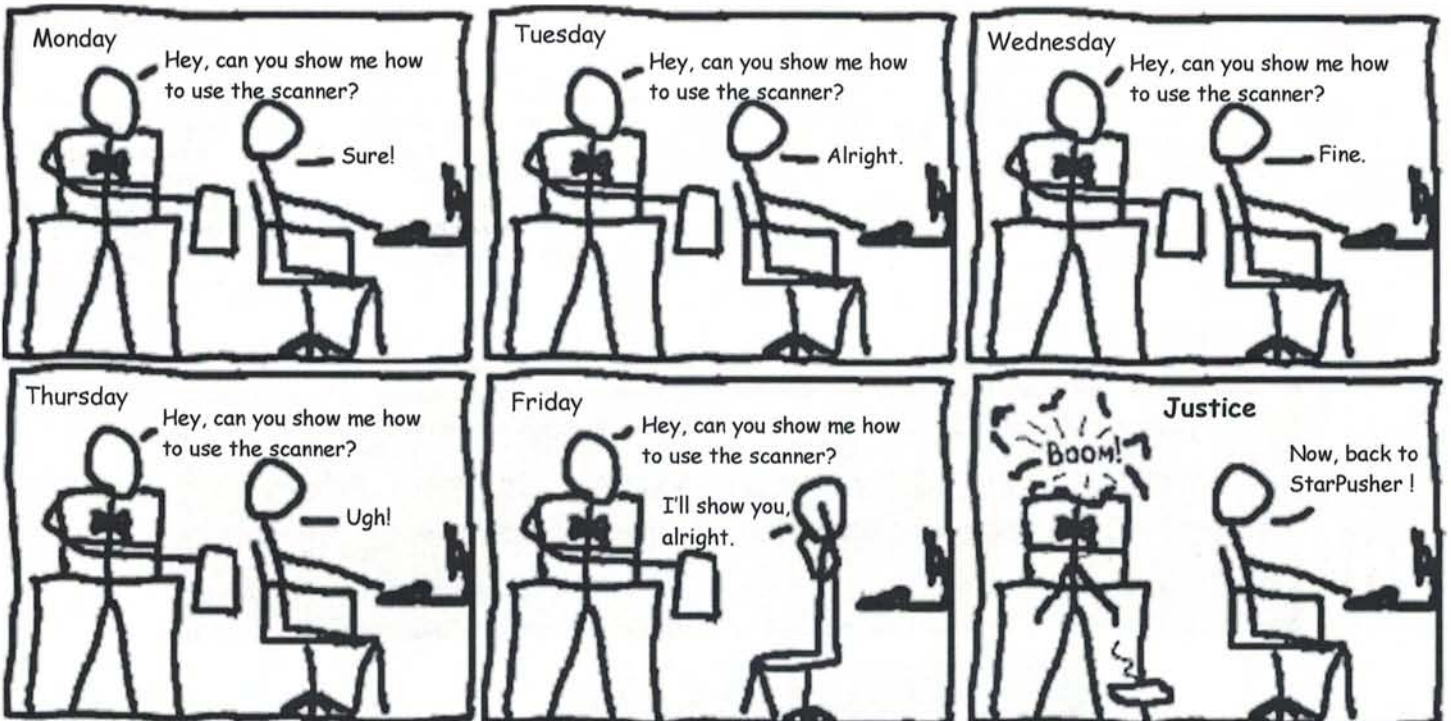
The Amplifier would like to thank the following for their help in publishing this issue:

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Scanners by Josh Walbert



Updates to the calendar may be found in the EJP public documents September calendar!

September

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
			8:30a Workshop: <i>Computer</i> 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness	1 9a Newsletter Meeting 5p For-credit courses: Finance II 199 Teaching & Learning 446 Ethical Theories 421 Environ Sustainability 370 New Student Reading Group
5	5p WAMP 5p Language Partners 6p Academic Advising	6 11:30a Pit Crew Meeting 5p Workshop: <i>Bio-information</i>	7 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness	8 9a Newsletter Meeting 9a CAVE 5p For-credit courses: Finance II 199 Teaching & Learning 446 Ethical Theories 421 Environ Sustainability 370 New Student Reading Group
5p WAMP	12 5p Language Partners 5p WAMP	13 9a CAVE 6p Library Work	14 8:30a Workshop: <i>Health</i> 12p Workshop: <i>Python</i> 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness	15 9a Newsletter Meeting 5p For-credit courses: Finance II 199 Teaching & Learning 446 Ethical Theories 421 Environ Sustainability 370 New Student Reading Group
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11:30a Computer Lab Policy Meeting 5p WAMP	26 5p Language Partners 5p WAMP 6p Academic Advising	27 9a CAVE 5p Workshop: <i>Small Business</i>	28 8:30a Workshop: <i>Bio-information</i> 11:30a Workshop: <i>Computer</i> 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness	29 9a Newsletter Meeting 5p For-credit courses: Finance II 199 Teaching & Learning 446 Ethical Theories 421 Environ Sustainability 370 New Student Reading Group
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ORBITTING COIN Hint: As a step toward your solution, consider what would happen if the smaller coin were rolled on a straight, horizontal line of the same length as the circumference of the larger coin.

An education is not how much you have committed to memory, or even how much you know. It is being able to differentiate between what you do know and what you do not.

Anatole France (1844 - 1924)



ILLINOIS
EDUCATION JUSTICE PROJECT