



The Amplifier

Plug into news that informs and encourages

June 2018

Knock Knock

Knock, knock, knock. I must be dreaming; if I am, it's a nightmare. Who is waking me up so freaking early—it's a damn Saturday, I should be sleeping in—but no, some a**hole is beating on my front door. I roll over, burying my head under the pillow—hoping and praying that they will just get bored and leave—no such luck! I get up, walk to the door; with each step I'm thinking of how I am going to verbally eviscerate the person who dares to interrupt my precious sleep time. Without looking through the peephole, I fling open the door, ready to lay into the person. To my consternation there is no one there. I am greeted by an empty porch. "What the hell, am I being punked, is this some kid's twisted idea of a joke? When I get my hands on him, boy will he rue the day that he f**ked with me."

Finally, I say "To hell with it, I'm going back to sleep." I crawl back into bed, scooting down under the covers, trying to find that happy place. You know the place where the entire world feels right—where all of your troubles disappear—peace and serenity cuddle you in their loving arms. And then, just as I'm starting to nod off, the knock returns. Now I'm really miffed. I reach for my radio and ear buds—I refuse to get out of bed again. I'll drown out the interruption with a little music. How is it possible that while I am lying in bed listening to a random radio station play top 40, I can still hear the knocking?

I've come to the realization it can't be someone knocking. This in itself is intriguing. What else can it be? Is it something in my head trying to get out, or something trying to get my attention? Damn, now I know I'm not going back to sleep. WTF, I don't want to do this now, it's never a good thing when this happens. It overwhelms my life, I can't think about anything else. It's usually accompanied with bits of *Nausea* and a great deal of fear. I push past this and crack open the portion of my mind this thing has been fighting to get out of—I just want to peer in to see what is so persistently awaiting my attention. Oh great, it's a germ, the beginning of an idea, something not fully formed but large enough not to be ignored. Now I need to quickly close the door. Too late—it's free; now I'll have to deal with it. How can I handle this idea?

Many times in my life, rather than allowing my ideas to come to maturity, I chose to abort them—deeming them not worthy of consideration. It recently occurred to me that EJP is an environment that encourages the sharing of ideas. Ideas should not be summarily rejected without consideration and rebuttal. The ones I used to reject are no longer eradicated but instead are changed through exposure to alternate worldviews. This paradigm utilized by EJP is similar to "it takes a community to raise a child." The whole community participates in the rear-ing of the child; shaping the child's perception and worldview. This also holds true for ideas.

Ideas only come into maturity when they have been bounced off of varying ideologies and beliefs. This process allows people to carefully weigh the merits of their idea(s). Will it accomplish the goal that is intended? If not, what is it lacking? The idea can only mature after it has undergone the process of careful examination and reflection. Then it is ready to be shared with the world.

While writing this piece I started with an idea for a story that was to be cute and whimsical—about being awakened by an idea floating around in my head. As I let it roll in my mind, the story took on a life of its own. At first it was to be about the interaction that I had with my fellow students in the "Authenticity of Ethics" class. During the writing phase, which is mostly done in my head, I nixed that idea because I didn't think that anyone would be interested or understand what I was writing. The only people that might have understood were those lucky few that were in Ms. Anda's class. Self-doubt and insecurities surrounding my ability to write and the worthiness of my voice caused me to abort this story. However, the idea was not dead, it was still holding on firmly to a part of my mind. It continued to forage for sustenance in the creative part. Because of this constant pressure I continued to bounce potential ideas off of *Amplifier* writers, WAMP personnel, and my fellow students. Then in the middle of "The History of the Book" class, I had a **Eureka** moment; I saw exactly what I wanted to say and how to go about saying it. Now the idea was no longer banging on the door trying to get my attention. It was now persistently and aggressively fighting to be set free, to be released into the ethos as an article for mass consumption. The article now demands to infect other people's minds so that they too can take advantage of the Idea-promoting growth factory that is EJP.

—James Wood

Waiting for the Bus

Today I practiced mindfulness for the first time in a very long time. I was already an hour late for work because of my futile attempts to get out of bed. I stood at the bus stop, knowing the fresh snow had slowed the westbound bus. Outside, it was so cold and still, all the water in the air was freezing into glitter. I shut my eyes against the brightness of the sun. I heard the wind gently moving through naked trees. I heard cars farther down the street—wet rubber, crunching salt. I heard a bird singing from the shelter of a shrub. I heard a dog bark; a door opened, then shut. I heard a neighbor scraping a shovel against his driveway. My attention turned back to the birdsong, and how

much I have missed the sound of birds. Then I remembered, “I should focus on my breathing. That’s how it’s done.” I breathed in . . . then out.

I heard a vehicle coming around the corner and opened an eye to see if it was the bus. It wasn’t. I shut my eyes again, relaxing the muscles in my face, and planting my feet deeper into the flattened snow. I breathed in. I breathed out. In again. I noticed my body, the chill on my skin, the animation inside almost imperceptible. I felt the soft pulse of the world around me and the passing of time, second per second, meaning nothing in particular—I boarded the bus.

—Millie Wright

My Introduction to Yoga

I awoke one morning losing a critical battle with my lower back. My poor aching back, it felt as if some invisible demon had tightly gripped it in a fit of rage and refused to set me free. I am a 300-pound man teetering on the verge of 41. I guess this is the beginning of experiencing the effects of age; the stiffening of my body has begun. Am I now to look forward to the popping of bones, aching of muscles, and fatigue that go along with old age? Am I dancing with andropause? Is Alzheimer’s next? Please do not judge me, as you can see I have a tendency to catastrophise, but the feeling of somatic betrayal is as real as the pain gripping me. Following the dictates of old age, I complain about my pain to anyone in earshot. I assume my complaints were beginning to be a pain in the ears of those that gave a moment to listen, which—I assume—sparked one of my victims to suggest that I try yoga. *Yoga, what the F**K?* Once again, I’m a 300-pound man on the verge of 41. Needless to say, my body is not designed to bend and twist into these weird positions.

My memories of observing yoga are not that sanitized. My interest has only gone as far as observing women, and it was not to fulfill a curiosity about the “medical benefits” that yoga offers. So from my perspective yoga consisted of nothing more than people stretching or learning to stretch their bodies for reasons I didn’t care to understand. I saw the process itself as feminine, and adding to that vision were the images of both men and women snuggled into skin-tight outfits while, once again, on the floor bending in such peculiar poses. This was not an acceptable mode of expression for me. Adding to the discomfort of this idea is the reality of my current location—I’m in prison! Yes prison, the big house, the clink, the one place on earth where a man bending and twisting into compromising configurations is not a good thing on many levels. A few of them are:

1. I have an image to uphold, and personal safety to be concerned about. That image of being a manly-man safeguards my security. In prison, perceived masculinity could be the difference between being an accepted and respected member of the community or a potential victim.
2. Where rigid codes of conduct dictate behavior, novelty may fall into the category of abnormality. The stereotypical prison profile is not one where adventuring into “exotic” modes of expression is the norm. In this realm of socially approved conduct, heterosexual men do not challenge the norm of gender conformity.

3. As I mentioned earlier, I have the tendency to catastrophise, so points one and two may be exaggerated, but they feel real to me.


My fallback position, after rejecting yoga as a possible solution, was my old-man stance; complain about the pain. Lo’ and behold, once again my complaints were weighing on the nerves of the kind people that gave ear to my concern. This time it was a nurse, who probably felt pressured to bestow her wisdom upon me. Guess what her solution was? Yoga! *What the F**K!!!?* Seeing the dismal look on my face, her nice demeanor changed to match mine—I hope this wouldn’t be what she defines as good bedside manner. After our brief exchange of opinions, mine focusing on my manly-manness, and hers focused on my ignorance, she made three statements, not so softly, that impacted me: One, “You are a grown man that needs to take responsibility for your own health.” Two, “Yoga offers a range of benefits that will potentially change the course of your physical, mental, and emotional life.” and Three, “Get over yourself.”

Sluggishly acting upon her advice, I sought information on the philosophy and practice of yoga. Eventually provoked by the continual pain in my back and the growing stiffness in other parts of my body, I expedited the process. What I found actually surprised me; once again my ignorance found challenge. The word yoga actually means “to unite or to join.” This union refers to the vertical bond between body and soul that exists in all people. Although not a religion, yoga has a philosophy similar to my views on spirituality, and my growing interest in developing internal peace. It is also a physical practice that helps relax and bring blood-flow to the muscles, which aids in strengthening, easing tension, and easing pain. As a way of life yoga is a tradition that teaches participants how to respect and understand the mind-body relationship. What I observed as femininity should not have been seen as a challenge to masculinity. I recognize the balance between grace and power embraced by this philosophy and expressed through movement of the body.

My first attempt, bending into the not-so-weird introduction positions (sun salutation), was disastrous—I felt bulky, stiff, and uncoordinated. A lack of confidence motivated the certainty of an imminent collision between the floor and my face, and once again my old nemesis, catastrophising, began to creep back into my mind. With a few deep breaths, inhaled deep through the nose and exhaled exhaustedly through the mouth, catastrophising began to wane, and the stiffness gave way. Although the bulky feeling stubbornly continued, confidence in my coordination eventually found anchor, along with the hope that I have found a solution to the back pain.

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, yoga is described as an accurate and concrete metaphysical method to develop and create clarity in the way we perceive and experience ourselves. Initially, reading that definition did nothing to neither clear up my confusion, satisfy my curiosity, or convince me to embark on this journey. Only by experiencing it did I find the wisdom in entertaining novelty, the reward in chances, and the joy in discovery. All is well in the kingdom of the lower vertebrae, relief was granted, the invisible demon vanquished, and comfort restored.

—Raphel Jackson



CALL the WAAAHMBULANCE

Does your life feel like it's becoming a multi-car pileup? Do your affairs of the heart seem more like cardiac arrest? Are you choking on whatever's stuck in your craw? Then dial up the Waaahmbulance. Our ace paramedics will be on scene to mend that broken heart, help vent your spleen, and dislodge the foot that keeps finding its way into your mouth—not to mention the stick that wound up elsewhere.

Dear Waahmbulance,

I'm currently housed with a cellmate who's just way too socially needy. I don't mind a little conversation here and there in the cell about something we're both interested in, but this situation is just too much. If he's got drama going on with an inmate from dayroom or chow time, he wants to chat about it. If he gets a letter or makes a phone call, he wants to chat about it, or worse if he doesn't get the letter or call. He wants to talk about what he's watching on his TV or mine. If my television is off and a book or a pen is in my hand, that's an invitation to chat. I find myself praying that he doesn't get bored with whatever he's watching. The worst part is that he likes to lean over from the top bunk to look at me sometimes when he talks to me. Repeated gentle corrections don't seem to work. How can I get my own time back?

All Talked Out No Place To Go

All Talked Out,

There are a couple of ways that you can handle this cold-blooded vocal intruder. First of all you can fight fire with fire, and every time he attempts to talk to you about his problems, rudely interrupt him and start sharing your own issues. But if you don't want to open up that Pandora's Box, then make something up.

For instance, when he comes into the room complaining about a dayroom incident, cut him off midsentence and say, "My ass has been itching a lot lately and I can't understand why?"

Together, y'all can unpack that issue, and if he attempts to move on, return to your ass-scratching issue.

"Yea that's fine, but I'm still trying to figure out why my ass keeps itching; I mean it might be the laundry detergent or the Dial soap; what do you think? . . ."

And every time he attempts to move on to something else, you go right back to your ass itching, burning, and leaking—then repeat. Eventually he'll catch on that his voice is the real cause of all the pain in your ass.

Or just grow a backbone and politely explain to this free-time terrorist that you do not want to rap. Your inability to communicate your boundaries is as problematic as the excessive chattiness. If you truly desire your free time, establish some healthy boundaries that the both of you understand and appreciate. If not, prepare to have free-time Osama Bin Laden blow your shit up whenever he feels like it. My alternate suggestion is to don your very own intrusive suicide vest and get all up in his green zone. Maybe he is a light sleeper and you decide 2 a. m. is an appropriate time to manscape your chest, back, and pubic hair with a set of very loud trimmers.

Waahmbulance Responder

Inmate Twitter



it

"What's that smell?"

Excuse me.

#beansforlunch

Perspiration and Ben Gay.

#over40gymlinecomingin

Butter popcorn.

#buildingblockrules

A really bad "Inmate Twitter" prompt.

#disgruntlededitor



Next month's question: "What is the most serious problem facing the world?"

Poetry Wanted!

The Amplifier will be printing a special poetry-only issue, helmed by editor James Wood, in Fall 2018. If you would like to see your versification in print, please send your submissions to the EJP office, or place them in the EJP suggestion box. Include your name, number and cell location. Please send copies, as submissions might not be returned.

Deadline for submissions is July 15.

Spring 2018 Semester Reviews

UI for-Credit Courses

Contracts for Business

Mr. Guma hails from Kampala, Uganda. During the spring of 2018 our esteemed Corporate and Finance Law Professor taught a 199 level *Contracts for Business* course on site at the University of Illinois Danville Campus.

Do not let that meager course number fool you—this class was tough. At times I felt like I was trying to learn Kryptonian Math without having a full grasp on basic Algebra.

Fortunately Mr. Guma used his brainpower and real-world experiences to break down the mind-numbing legal perspectives and technical aspects of a wide range of variables which constitute and affect the many dynamics involved with business contracts.

Practicality... yeah, that's the word I'm looking for. Ten lucky men from the EJP student body learned that 75% of all American comforts start with a business contract. Your mortgage, rent, cell-phone bill, light bill, magazine subscription, even something as minute as grabbing a soda pop from a convenience store refrigerator, are technically governed by an implied contract.

On a more personal note, I've learned how to successfully read and comprehend a business contract. I feel no one in their right mind wants to work hard for their money only to be fleeced out of millions of dollars—like TLC, Mike Tyson, or Lil Wayne—due to a financially exploitative and legally binding business contract. Among many other things, I've also attained the knowledge of how to successfully write a business contract in the best interest of my financial objectives.

So, if you ever want to learn the ins and outs of a binding business contract, holler at me on the low, or sign up the next time the Master of Business Law, Mr. Guma, unleashes his magnificent legal mind upon our beloved campus.

—Raylan Gilford

Precalculus

$$g(x) = \sin(\cos^{-1}(4x)) + \cos(\sin^{-1}(5x))$$

This is an example of one of our homework equations we had to find the domain for and simplify. If you can do this correctly, then you might have what it takes to participate in Calculus 1 during the fall. The class in general was mind-numbing, but still managed to inform us and keep us interested by challenging our mathematics knowledge. For those who think math is not for you, I highly suggest you rethink it. Teach yourself if you are unable to attend a math course or ask someone who knows what they're doing to help you learn the basics. Trust me, math will help you get places when you get out. The answer, by the way, is:

$$g(x) = \sqrt{1 - 16x^2} + \sqrt{1 - 25x^2} \quad \text{Domain} = \left(-\frac{1}{5}, \frac{1}{5}\right)$$

—M. Rubio

Pushkin and His Russian and American Echoes

Sara Feldman shared her appreciation for Alexander Pushkin with those of us who had remarkably never heard of him. Feldman exposed us to the similarities between America's historical use of slavery and Russia's moral burden of serfdom.

As a Russian nationalist, poet Pushkin used his position to be more than just an entertainer; he was a voice for change in his beloved country. He has been credited with giving status and nobility to the Russian language and commemorated with countless statues all over Russia. His work is memorized by all Russian patriots. Knowledge of this has somehow escaped being included in the education of most Americans. Thanks to Professor Feldman, we are no longer counted among those unaware of Russia's greatest author.

—C. Lane

History of the Book

What defines a book? Its form? Its content? Its function, materials, methods of production? It turns out it can be any or all of these, depending on the purposes and emphasis of a given academic or discipline.

Medieval-art historian Charlotte Bauer introduced her class to the millenia-long story of the hard-to-define but world-defining object we call "the book." One highlight of the course was our opportunity to handle antique parchment pages from a large—24"x16"—Spanish antiphony (choirbook) from the 17th century, and from a much smaller and more delicate 15th century illuminated Book of Hours.

—M.S. Lawless

Workshops and Groups

Language Partners

Language Partners, EJP's English as a Second Language (ESL) program has been using this past semester to train new ESL instructors (EJP students) and select a new student cohort. The courageous men who volunteered to become instructors are Andres Beltran, Francisco Chan, Marcelo Dejesus, Pablo Mendoza, and Victor Ramos. They have been participating in ESL teacher training and curriculum development. Teacher training has consisted of studying academic second-language acquisition studies and engaging in mock teaching sessions. Curriculum development has required the men to develop lessons from day one of teaching low-to-intermediate beginning ESL students.

Selection of the new students started with applicants taking a series of tests. They took a written test (one part in English, one part in Spanish) and an oral interview in their second language (English). This allowed us to assess each applicant's ability, which allowed us to select a more cohesive group.

This June we will begin the new group's class meetings every Tuesday and Thursday night (5-8 pm) for eighteen months.

—Michael Tafolla

Integral Calculus Workshop

We walked into Mr. Wen's calculus workshop with a great deal of excitement and interest. Five minutes into the class we were beginning to wonder; *Why did we sign up for this? Are we secretly masochists?* Mr. Wen is a very patient and under-

standing teacher, who embarked on the seemingly impossible task of teaching a foreign language to people who don't have a common language to start from.

The best way to describe a typical session of calculus would be to envision the jet.com commercial where the tops of heads are exploding. Every time I come to class, I am prepared to leave a great deal of my brain cells plastered on the walls. As challenging as the workshop has been, it was rewarding and a lot of fun. If anyone asks me to figure out the growth rate of the rabbit population in Danville, I will feel supremely confident in my ability to answer their question. Or at least I know someone who can tell them; be prepared to have your mind blown.

—James Wood

Introduction to Python Workshop

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python_group = ["Today it seems as if everything is controlled by a computer.\nAs a result, the demand for computer programmers is growing exponentially.", "For a person who has been living as an involuntary Luddite for decades, learning everything that you can about computers seems a matter of survival; not to mention economically resourceful.", "With these thoughts foremost in my mind, I signed up to learn about Python.", "I realized going in that this would be akin to learning a foreign language such as Chinese or Greek.\nI didn't realize that it was going to be even harder than I thought.", "Learning computer programming is not just learning a language of what, where, and when to type a command to get a desired result; it requires a new way of thinking.", "\nMr. Rennie and Mr. Borum did an outstanding job supervising the student teachers who were tasked with pulling the computer illiterate into the information age one line at a time.", "The student teachers, Larry Barrett, Michael Lawless, Bryan Dean, and Nikia Perry, demonstrated a great degree of patience and understanding answering the seemingly endless amount of questions.", "\nProgramming is not something that can be learned or taught in three-hour chunks; it requires a dedication and a desire to learn even when the computer is not in front of you.", "Unfortunately, as the saying goes, \"the body is willing but the mind is weak. Or something like that.\""]
print python_group
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—James Wood

The Amplifier

With the May 2018 issue of *The Amplifier*, we reached a full two years of publication for this incarnation of the EJP newsletter. The team has persevered through academic pressures, the ins and outs of the computer lab, stuttering toner cartridges, and the various arrivals and departures on the editorial board. We hold our hats high to Andy Borum for a much-improved printer.

With this semester's issues there are some notable developments. *Inmate Twitter* launched in the December 2017 issue, giving a much-needed forum for burgeoning hashtags on such conundrums as "What is your favorite meal?" and "What is the meaning of life?" in 140 characters. With the launch of its advice column, *Call the Waaaahmbulance*, the editors now bring Danville's wisest sages to untangle the most vexing issues.

With the pressures of a doubled academic load this semester, *The Amplifier* has adjusted to bi-monthly editorial issues, with the calendar and Mr. Perry's one-page inspirations on alternate months.

A number of new writers have seen their names in print: Keiahty Jones, Eric Vann, Dana Dixon, and Francisco Valdez.

Circulation has been expanded to include 80 new subscribers from the Danville general population. The brilliance of Graphics Editor James Wood devised a mail-merge so that each newsletter is printed with its subscriber's name and address – no more hours of painstaking hand labor.

The editors formalized the process of submissions and revisions, with a transmittal sheet available on *The Amplifier* shelf in the computer lab. First drafts go through a table read by the editorial board. Pieces accepted for publication are sent with the author for a WAMP consultation and then assigned to one editor as liaison to the writer through revisions.

In December we held a retreat with English grad student Sam Plasencia, brainstorming the higher aspirations of publishing, content, and writing styles. Some particularly incisive spontaneous writing compared favorite breakfast foods in the styles of Virginia Woolf and Tom Robbins.

We value your voice; submissions are welcome. Rumor has it that Mr. Wood is planning a summer poetry edition, and fiction may follow.

Summer 2018 will be rubber-to-the-road workshop mode, with instruction and exercises, by members of the editorial board and visiting faculty, to sharpen our creative inspiration and build a bank of articles before academics resume the focus in the fall. Any EJP student interested in writing and participating is welcome; get word to me through a member of the editorial board for inclusion in summer sessions.

—Copenhaver Cumpston

Answers to April's Eddie's Enigma and May's Mario's Mystery:

Ordered Vowels (April): The word is "facetious."

Dog at the Crossroads (May): It's daytime.

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.

Managing editor: Michael Lawless

Assistant managing editor: James Wood

Copy editor: Mario Rubio

Calendar Editor: Nikia Perry

Staff writers: Raylan Gilford, Chad Lane

EJP advisor: Copenhaver Cumpston

Letters to the editor may be submitted within Danville to the Suggestion Box in the EJP library; or submitted by mail to EJP, 1001 S. Wright St., Champaign, IL 61820.

**Web link: www.educationjustice.net/home/resources/amplifier
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Attention Danville Residents

If you are not a member of EJP, but would like to receive *The Amplifier* each month, send a request to the EJP office with your name, number and housing location. Thanks for your interest.

Submissions are welcome!

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

JUNE

10:27am Chow Hall-
"I'd really like to lick
this hot sauce off of my
fingers but this guy across
from me..."

3

12pm CAVE
5pm WAMP

4

5pm WAMP
5pm Language Partners
5pm Reading Group:
Anatomy of Poetry

5

12pm Python

6

8:30am Evaluation
Committee
9am Reading Group:
New Student, Multimodal
5pm Language Partners,
Mindfulness

7

8:30am Amplifier,
CAVE
5pm Reading Group:
Review for Calculus

8

12:42pm On the weight
pile-
"How do I tell my
very large friend I don't want
any more hugs?"

2

10

12pm CAVE
5pm WAMP

11

12pm Reading Group:
Science, Medicine, &
Power
5pm WAMP
5pm Reading Group:
Anatomy of Poetry

13

9am Reading Group:
New Student
12pm Reading Group:
Sociological Understanding
5pm Language Partners,
Mindfulness

15

8:30am Amplifier,
CAVE
5pm Reading Group:
Review for Calculus

16

2:56pm Visit-
"Should I be happy
about my daughter
having bad breath, she
shouldn't be popular with
the fellas?"

17

12pm CAVE
5pm WAMP

18

12pm Reading Group:
Science, Medicine, &
Power
5pm Reading Group:
Upside Down World,
Anatomy of Poetry
5pm Language Partners,
WAMP

20

8:30am Evaluation
Committee
9am Reading Group:
New Student
Multimodal
5pm Language Partners,
Mindfulness

22

8:30am Amplifier,
CAVE
5pm Reading Group:
Review for Calculus

23

24

12pm CAVE
5pm WAMP

25

12pm Work Shop:
Stacy Garrop
5pm Reading Group:
Upside Down World,
Anatomy of Poetry
5pm Language Partners,
WAMP

27

9am Reading Group:
New Student
5pm Language Partners,
Mindfulness

29

8:20pm In the cell-
"Who knew feet
and corn chips smelled sooo
much alike?"

30



ILLINOIS

EDUCATION JUSTICE PROJECT

We learn by example and by direct experience
because there are real limits to the adequacy of verbal
instruction.

Malcolm Gladwell