



Introducing the Community Education Project! Two former EJP instructors, Andy Eisen and Pamela Cappas-Toro, have started a prison education program in Florida! CEP started offering academic programs at Tomoka Correctional Institution earlier this year. It's one of several prison education initiatives across the country launched by former EJP members. (Andy is second from left, Pamela second from right.)

The State of EJP

BY REBECCA GINSBURG, EJP DIRECTOR

Since 2008 the Education Justice Project has been offering postsecondary academic programs at Danville Correctional Center (DCC), a medium-security men's prison in Central Illinois. We recently underwent a 7-month suspension from the prison, from November 2014 to June 2015. We're delighted to be back in operation at DCC. However, we're uncertain of the future.

There's reason to feel discouraged about the future of higher education in prison in IL. Fortunately, wherever there is tumult and change, there's also space for hope.

I invite you to be part of the solution.

Is EJP Doing OK?

Absolutely. My concerns aren't based upon program weaknesses. EJP students are engaged, as ever, in high-level academic work in computer programming, math, linguistics, comparative literature, American

history, and more. Our Mindfulness, Anti-Violence Education, and English as a Second Language programs continue strong. We're planning a visit from State Representative Carol Ammons in the new year, and EJP students have made submissions to the IL Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform. They continue to impress as scholars and citizens.

In addition, as you'll see inside this newsletter, EJP's suspension from DCC allowed us to give renewed focus to our community-based initiatives. We created a Reentry Guide for the state of Illinois, formed a new Champaign-based program that lends support to incarcerated individuals and their families, and developed a series of workshops that support families' advocacy efforts on behalf of their loved ones in custody. In the process, we've strengthened ties with community partners and brought on wonderful new members.

The concerns I have are based on the implications of the current state budget impasse. The situation is creating challenging conditions at DCC and a difficult climate for prison higher education more generally.

Why Was EJP Suspended?

In Fall 2014 our on-site coordinator announced her decision to step down at the end of October. DCC's warden advised us that we would not be able to run programs at the prison while the position was vacant. This was disappointing, but understandable. We relied heavily on our on-site administrator for tasks like managing the movement of students from the cell blocks to the classroom building and getting academic materials approved to bring into the prison. With reluctance, we let EJP students know that we were temporarily halting programs until we had a new on-site administrator.

We started the job search, advertised the position, and began interviewing

applicants. Then, in mid-November 2014, a few weeks into our suspension, when the search was in full swing, I received an email from Shannis Stock, the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) administrator in charge of programs within IL state prisons. Her message came as a surprise. She stated her intention of terminating the Education Justice Project's programs at DCC as of the end of 2014. Her reason? "Absence of onsite supervision" and security concerns. It turned out that the latter related to incidents of fraternization between U of I instructors at the prison and incarcerated students. (Interestingly, the most recent had occurred six months prior.)

The term "fraternization" or "socialization" carries special weight in the prison context, where it refers to overly familiar relationships that threaten prison security. From our perspective as educators, such relationships can compromise student learning in multiple ways. For instance, they threaten students' confidence that their instructors are invested equally in everyone's success. The EJP handbook discusses this at length:

"Privileged, special and exclusive relationships between students and instructors easily make for situations where jealousy, envy, sense of unfairness, manipulation, betrayal, and guilt occur, all states of mind which do not tend to bring out the best in any of us, especially when also challenged by the prison environment.... Avoiding [fraternization] is less a matter of avoiding friendliness, warmth, and mutual interest—after all, those attitudes are present in all good teaching/learning relationships—and more a matter of vigilant discernment of motivations and intentions for participating in EJP, either as students or instructors. Participation in EJP requires maturity and seriousness of purpose."

The handbook also references the possible consequences of engaging in fraternization, including being locked out of the prison, i.e. an individual losing permission to enter the prison.

Unfortunately, such warnings and the trainings that EJP instructors receive

from the U of I and IDOC don't prevent such relationships from forming, as any director of a college-in-prison program can attest. Sometimes these are friendships, sometimes romantic relationships, and sometimes one-sided efforts to take advantage of another person's vulnerability.

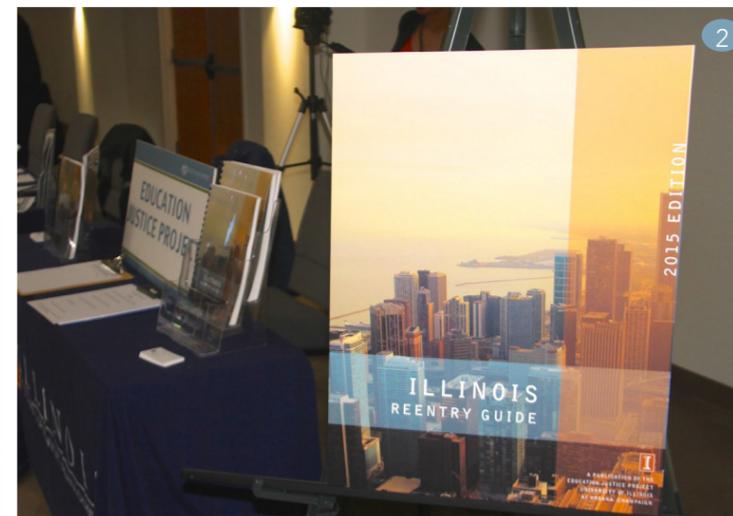
As many prison staff and administrators have told me over the years, "people will be people." Prison staff, volunteers, and contract workers are all susceptible to fraternization within prisons.

We responded to Ms. Stock's email with multiple efforts to better understand the basis of her concerns. Eventually, she agreed to withdraw the threat of termination. All parties agreed instead to await the outcome of a task force that would be convened by the Dean of the College of Education, Mary Kalantzis. Its charge was to "recalibrate" the relationship between the U of I and IDOC and set the basis for a healthier program climate moving forward. EJP representatives and individuals from IDOC participated on the task force, which was chaired by Jim Anderson, Head of Illinois' Department of Education Policy. In February 2015 it issued a set of recommended new guidelines for EJP. These were accepted by Gladys Taylor, then Assistant Director of the Department of Corrections and we were given the green light to resume our programs at DCC.

(The new guidelines, for the most part, we could happily accept. They echoed our long-standing requests for stronger communication between U of I and DCC, addressed communication between instructors and students, and the like.)

A initial re-start date of April 1 was moved back to May and then June 2015, as DCC administrators expressed a need for more time to prepare for our return. June 1 was a happy day, as we officially resumed our programs at Danville. We hoped that we were leaving months of uncertainty behind us.

Little did we know that things would become even less secure and stable before the end of the year.



1) Ripple Effect meetings bring together children and others who desire to "Reach Inside Prisons with Purpose and Love" by writing cards and letters to individuals behind bars. The group meets monthly in Champaign. 2) EJP launched an IL Reentry Guide in Chicago in October. It's the only reentry manual for our state that we know of. EJP alumni alerted us to the need. You can access it via the EJP website. 3) Ripple Effect also hosts occasional community forums, where individuals discuss their family's experiences with incarceration and consider ways to make a difference. 4) State Representative Carol Ammons (far right) joined facilitators at the Prison Family Workshop that EJP hosted with her. These workshops will be held quarterly next year, assisting family members who want to be better informed about how Illinois' prison systems work and how they can most effectively support their incarcerated loved ones.

Information about all EJP programs is available through our website or by contacting the EJP office.

Illinois Politics

Bruce Rauner was elected Illinois governor in November 2014. Right away we started to see changes. Before the task force had even completed its work (indeed, the day after he took office) Ms. Stock was terminated. After we resumed at DCC, the warden was re-assigned to another facility. Until today, many key positions within IDOC and DCC remain vacant or held by "acting" staff.

The lack of a state budget partly explains the instability. I'll avoid a long discussion about Illinois' budget woes. It's sufficient to note that many state vendors haven't been paid since last summer. Unfortunately, that includes the community colleges that provide postsecondary

academic and vocational education within Illinois prisons. Consequently, as of this writing, all of them have suspended their operations in Illinois prisons, pending resolution of the budget crisis.

This means that, only months after returning to Danville Correctional Center, while still navigating new guidelines and becoming acquainted with new administrators, EJP finds ourselves poised to be the only postsecondary educational option for incarcerated individuals in Illinois, at least in the near future.

Changes and Opportunities

No one knows when the budget impasse will be resolved, or how. Fortunately, EJP's minimal reliance upon state funds allows us to continue operating, even while community colleges cannot. We are firmly committed to moving forward, as focused and dedicated as ever to the imperative of providing quality, humane education to incarcerated individuals.

We also feel the necessity of being poised to take on more, should circumstances require it.

We need your help to do that. Please keep reading to learn about why the Education Justice Project is asking for your assistance now.

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS*

EXTERNAL FUNDERS

- Arte Publico Press
- Front Forty Press
- Harvard University Press
- Marajen Stevek Foundation
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- Palgrave Macmillan
- ReDirect
- The New Press
- Unitarian Universalist Church of Urbana-Champaign
- Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting
- W.W. Norton

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SUPPORTERS

- College of Education
- Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities
- Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
- Office of the Provost
- Office of Public Engagement

OUR INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Thank you!

*Have contributed within the past year or provided long-term support

ejp mission

The mission of the Education Justice project is to create a model college-in-prison program that demonstrates the positive impacts of higher education upon incarcerated people, their families, the neighborhoods from which they come, the host institution, and society as a whole.



From left: EJP alumnus Johnny Page made the case for postsecondary prison programs at the National Conference on Higher Education in Prison in Pittsburgh in November 2015. He's currently completing his Bachelors degree in Psychology at Governors State University. Sean Spates, a new EJP alumnus, was released this summer. Mr. Page, EJP, and the Center for Innovation in Learning and Teaching organized a visit of youth with justice-involved family members to the Illinois campus in August 2015.

How Can You Support the Education Justice Project?

EJP accomplishes surprisingly much with relatively little.

Comparable programs have annual budgets of a million dollars and more. EJP's anticipated expenditures for the current fiscal year are around \$220,000. Why the difference? EJP relies on volunteer instructors, has a razor-thin staff (equivalent to two full-time employees), and embraces an entrepreneurial ethic of frugality and creativity.

Even so, our budget continues to rise. In response to the many demands of the moment--to assist the transition of released students, support family members struggling with the incarceration of a loved one, produce research around best prison education practices, and strengthen the capacity of our instructors and leadership team,

to name just a few--we continue to innovate and be a national leader.

If state funding continues to be held up, pending resolution of the budget crisis, we can expect EJP to take on even more.

**Between one-third and
two-thirds of EJP's income
each year comes from
individuals like you!**

EJP relies entirely on "soft money." That means that there are no funds that we can count on receiving year-to-year. (The exception is the College of Education's generous commitment to providing Rebecca Ginsburg "release

time" from her job as a tenured faculty member to direct EJP on a half-time basis.) We've placed our trust in university units, foundations, and individuals who support our work. Even a \$5 check makes a difference. And it demonstrates that the larger community cares about the work that EJP does.

Readers of this newsletter always come through. Individual donations amount to 1/3 to 2/3 of EJP's income each year. (Please see "EJP Donor FAQs" on the EJP website for more about our budget.) The need is greater now, to prepare us for what 2016 may bring.

Please send in your support in the enclosed envelope or through our website at www.educationjustice.net.

Thank you, and happy holidays from EJP.

Education Justice Project
College of Education
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
217.300.5150 | www.educationjustice.net
info@educationjustice.net

New street address as of Jan 2016!
403 E. Healey Ave.
Champaign, IL 61820