



10 Years of the Education Justice Project

BY REBECCA GINSBURG, EJP CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR

This academic year, we celebrate the Education Justice Project's 10th anniversary. Since 2008-09, we have sought to demonstrate what a quality, committed, comprehensive college-in-prison program can accomplish.

Several times, we have also shown what happens when a program pushes too hard against the sensibilities and policies of the prison system. EJP was locked out of the prison, Danville Correctional Center, for practically the entire 2014-15 academic year. This showed us, if any proof were needed, that it takes a village to sustain a program like ours. When instructors were unable to enter the prison, incarcerated EJP students kept the spirit of the program alive within the walls.

And you, our allies and supporters, have never let us down.

You attend our events on campus, volunteer to teach in the prison, and drop off new and used books for the EJP library. Individuals join EJP committees when I invite (or plead); spread the news about EJP in your churches, mosques, and temples; and send notes of encouragement.

Generous people on campus, in the community, and even from the Illinois Department of Corrections have provided feedback and criticism. We've grown smarter. Our focus has become sharper, as have our policies and procedures, and our critique.

We still aspire to a more just and compassionate world. We believe that higher education, especially one with generous doses of the humanities, is key to developing the foundation for such a world.

Open the pages of this special edition newsletter to see where EJP has been and where we plan to go.

WHAT'S NEXT ?

On EJP's horizon...

- Expansion of programming at Danville Correctional Center
- Expansion to Decatur Correctional Center
- Reentry guides for people being deported
- Reentry guides for juveniles
- Conferences to support EJP-inspired programs across the U.S.
- Expansion of EJP Scholarship program
- Enhanced EJP presence in Chicago
- Technical support to other programs and entities (including other nations)
- Launch of National Directory website
- Launch of new EJP website
- Launch of IL-CHEP website



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EJP Reading Group, Fall 2008



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Raylan Gilford and Tobias Thurman, 2018

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Why Don't We Post Our Recidivism Numbers?

Recidivism (or "falling back" into crime) is a slippery concept. There's little agreement about how to define or measure it.

At any event, recidivism reduction isn't a fitting goal for a university. The University of Illinois isn't a crime prevention program.

EJP students, most serving long sentences, are at low risk for recidivism, anyway. Individuals tend to "age out" of crime.

SPECIAL MOMENTS

What memories stand out from the past ten years? So many!

Clockwise, from top: EJP received the 2010 Campus Award for Public Engagement, with EJP alumni Quinton Neal and Kenny Johnson; family members celebrate with EJP student Chad Rand at the EJP 2011 Awards Convocation at Danville Correctional Center; Joseph Mapp and Orlando Mayorga were members of the first cohort of EJP students to receive Certificates in Education Studies (Michael Brawn, Luis Saucedo, and Cragg Hardaway were the other recipients); Tremain Leggans, the longest-enrolled EJP student to date, speaking at the 2017 EJP convocation.



WHAT'S NEXT? (continued)

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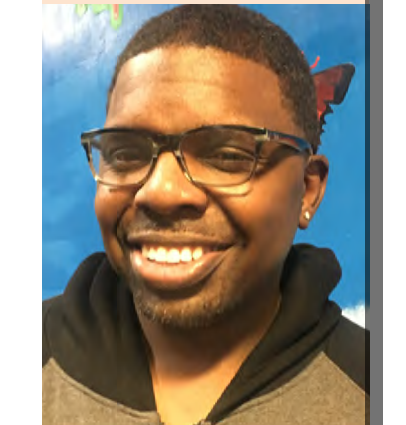


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Odell Whitehorn, Jr (released 2017) is an aspiring actor who writes and records music. During the day, he builds tractors at Caterpillar, and in the evening he's a bouncer. On New Year's Day 2019 he'll be doing security in the Willis Tower.



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THANK YOU

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Community Foundation of East Central Illinois, Palgrave Macmillan, W.W. Norton, The New Press, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Junior League of Urbana-Champaign, Marajen Stevek Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities (two separate grants), Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting, Unitarian Universalist Church of Urbana-Champaign, Arte Publico Press, W.W. Norton, Front Forty Press, Harvard University Press, ReDirect, The New Press, ReThinking Schools Publishers, Pearson Press, Champaign West Rotary, Laughing Gull Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Mansfield Family Foundation, Rosecrans Champaign/Urbana, 57th Street Quaker Meeting, First Presbyterian Church of Champaign, Seasons Retreat, Illinois Humanities Council, Bedford/St. Martin's Press, Dover Publications,



Our First Ten Years

Our first name was “Education Beyond Bars.” A small group of faculty, graduate students, and community members met regularly to discuss building a new higher education in prison program in Illinois, and talked with Illinois Department of Corrections officials and university administrators to set the groundwork. One of the first challenges was deciding which prison to partner with. They decided on Danville Correctional Center based on its proximity to the Urbana campus and its large, active Associates degree program, which would feed into the University of Illinois’ upper-division program.

By summer 2008, two and a half years into the planning, things were ready. Attorneys for the University of Illinois and IDOC crafted a Memo of Understanding (MOU) that allowed the initiative, now called the Education Justice Project, to pilot in Spring 2009.

While the MOU was being approved and circulated for signatures, in Fall 2008, EJP offered two not-for-credit reading groups at the prison. In January 2009, we launched our first for-credit classes. Fifty-four men enrolled in four courses.

Since then, EJP’s offerings have expanded greatly. We added writing workshops in the fall of 2009, math and science workshops in 2011, and the Mindfulness Discussion Group in 2012. In 2013 we started the EJP Scholarship program, providing modest funding for formerly incarcerated individuals and for family members to attend college. By 2014, we had hosted our second national symposium on higher education in prison.

EJP currently has over 80 alumni (formerly incarcerated students) and almost 250 current and former instructors. At least six of them have started developing college-in-prison programs at their new academic institutions.

As EJP has expanded, we have deepened our commitment to critical pedagogy and trauma-informed practices. We are venturing into advocacy, leading efforts to build Illinois’ new statewide coalition of higher education in prison programs, IL-CHEP. We value the network of educators, incarcerated scholars, formerly incarcerated individuals, family members, researchers, prison activists, and others who inform and guide our work. We look forward to deepening our engagement at Danville Correctional Center and creating pathways that will make it easier for EJP alumni and others to continue their education upon release.

EJP PROGRAMS, 2008 - 2018 (in order of introduction)

Reading groups, For-credit courses, Guest lectures, Writing workshops, FACE Open Houses, Language Partners, EJP Scholarships, Computer workshops, Resource Room worker program, Mindfulness Discussion Group, Science workshops, Chicago /Community Anti-Violence Education, Book-in-Common, Theater Initiative, Yearbook, Productive Prison Landscapes, Student Newsletter, Education Justice Radio, Business Workshops, Pit Crew, RIPPLE Effect, EJP Expo, Illinois Reentry Guide, Writing and Math Partners, Library Workers, Academic Advising, The Amplifier, Returning Home Reentry Guide

Introducing Debbie Morgan, EJP’s New Director of Donor Relations



As a Fundraiser, I am often asked if I enjoy my job. Let’s be honest, fundraising is not always comfortable, but neither is life. What matters to me is the belief in what I do and why I do it. When I heard about the Education Justice Project (EJP), I researched what they were doing, how they were accomplishing their mission and who they serve—it captured my heart.

Higher education provides spaces for critical thinking and provides the opportunity to build a sense of personhood. All of us at the Education Justice Project are thankful for your belief in our students. The impact of your kindness has inspired hope, renewal, value and affirmation to the students of EJP. Your generosity opens the door to freedom by providing them a window with a different view.

This year, the Education Justice Project is celebrating its 10-year anniversary of delivering model college-in-prison programs. These programs continue to demonstrate the positive impacts of higher education upon incarcerated people, their families and communities. This celebration would not be possible without your belief and support. Being a Fundraiser allows me to be a voice for the dreams of others.

Wilma Rudolph said it best: “Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all

the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us”. Quite simply, I enjoy my job and I am honored to have the opportunity to share with you (our donors) how we can strengthen the capacity to change lives together.

As the Director of Donor Relations, and on behalf of our staff, student volunteers and the EJP students we serve, thank you, for all you have done and continue to do.

Have a Happy Holiday!

Debbie
Deborah Morgan



EDUCATION JUSTICE PROJECT

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