



Celebrating 5 Years of EJP!

This special issue of the EJP Newsletter celebrates five years of learning, scholarship, and community at the Danville Correctional Center. EJP offered our first for-credit classes in 2009. See how far we've come! From offering a few classes at the prison, EJP now offers a campus-like slate of extracurricular learning opportunities and activities.

Join us in this tour of the years. As you read about some of the hundreds of EJP students, instructors, and alumni who have participated in the program, you'll note the threads that run through their narratives. EJP binds together a community whose ties are forged of courage, caring, dedication, hope, and rigor. Scholars and instructors think, work, relate, and create opportunities for newcomers—who, in turn, go on to initiate meaningful efforts of their own. EJP has expanded through the energies and visions of all our members.

We hope that readers of this newsletter feel proud of and connected to what you read in the following pages. We believe that each member of the "EJP universe," as we call it, can contribute to efforts to support educational justice--within prisons, on our campuses, and in our local communities.

Please take a minute to read the insert, too. EJP hosted a symposium on higher education in prison in October 2014. We're committed to reflection and scholarship on our work, to continually pursuing best practices and learning from other programs, and to building a national network around prison education.

We are excited to see what the next five years brings. We expect to develop a stronger system of support for EJP alumni and family members, in addition to introducing a degree program at the prison. All this, with your help! Thank you for your support.

-Rebecca Ginsburg, EJP Director

-Natalie Mesnard, EJP Writer and Editor



ROB GARITE

2009-10 Rob Garite

“Bigger than any one person”

“When EJP began,” says Rob Garite, “there was an incredible sense of community that permeated the entire student body. We all felt personally responsible for EJP’s success and we participated whole-heartedly in the program.” Rob, a founding EJP student who was released in August 2014 after twenty years, joined the program for many reasons. “No one in my family had ever attended a university before, and I thought about how cool it would be, despite my incarceration, to be the first Garite to go to college.”

Rob recalls his participation in Carol Symes’ course, HIST 396/THEA 399—*Shakespeare’s Worlds*. As part of their final project, Rob and the other students performed scenes from six Shakespeare plays. “With less than thirty hours of dedicated rehearsal time we memorized hundreds of lines, learned blocking and basic acting techniques, and dealt with numerous institutional constraints,” says Rob.

“But that was the easy part. The hard part was breaking free of the traditional prison roles that we had all internalized over the years. Carol kept reminding us that theatre is bigger than any one person and that a successful production isn’t about any one performance, but is rather about the process and coming together as a group.”



PAMELA CAPPAS - TORO

2010-11 Pamela Cappas-Toro

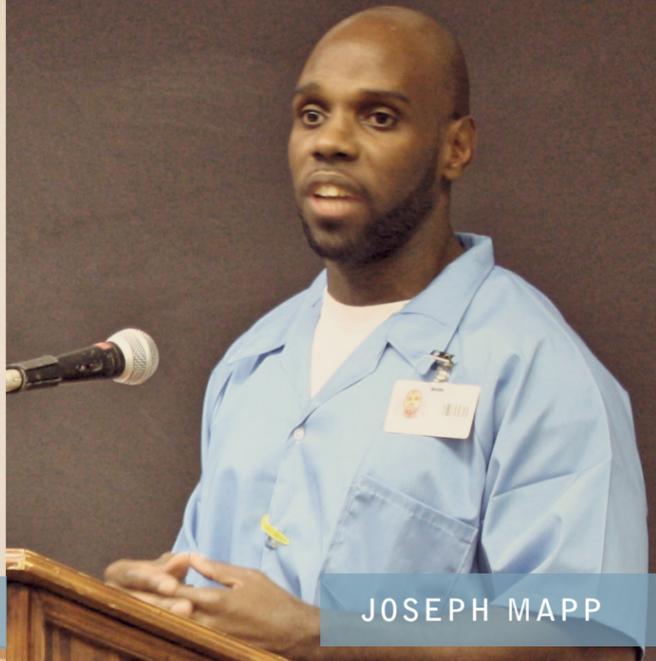
“A two-way process”

Pamela Cappas-Toro became involved in EJP in 2010, while pursuing her PhD in Spanish at the University of Illinois. “I needed to do something meaningful,” says Pamela. “There was no connection between what I was learning in the classroom and real community issues.”

After working as an EJP tutor, Pamela went on to help found EJP’s Language Partners program. Through this program, students are trained by Illinois faculty to provide ESL instruction to men from the general population at the prison. “It’s different from a lot of ESL programs,” Pamela says, “because the lesson plans talk about issues like migration, incarceration—topics that are taught in Latino Studies.”

For Pamela, the most important aspect of her time with EJP was how it placed her within a thriving community. “It transformed how I envisioned my future as a professor,” she says. “It’s a two-way process: bringing my knowledge to and learning from the community.”

Now an Assistant Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures at Stetson University, Pamela maintains an active connection with EJP. She presented a panel on prison education in July 2014 at the first International Latina/o Studies Conference in Chicago, and says she wishes “there could be an EJP in every prison.”



JOSEPH MAPP

2010-11 Joseph Mapp

“Growing beyond boundaries”

Joseph Mapp, an EJP student since 2010, joined the program after noticing the collegial environment among EJP students and instructors. “I was headed to the library one day and saw men who were incarcerated, just like me, working on laptop computers, sitting among outside guests.” He was eager to spend time in an environment that treated him, first and foremost, as a student.

“When I joined EJP,” says Joseph, “there was an exciting energy among the students and instructors/volunteers alike—a type of newness about being part of something different, where we were able to have a say in the direction of our education.” Joseph has gone on to participate in many EJP programs, including Language Partners, Education Justice Radio, and the new Chicago Anti-Violence Education (CAVE) program. He cites EJP instructors Martha Webber, Hugh Bishop, and Nicole Brown, among others, as being instrumental in his education, and his growing sense that people exist who “really care, and can see more than just a convicted criminal.”

In Joseph’s mind, EJP is important because it’s “more than a program.” He says, “EJP permits both students and instructors to grow beyond their own cultural boundaries by socializing and learning from each other.”



EDMUND BUCK

2011-12 Edmund Buck

“A growing organism”

Edmund Buck is an EJP alumnus who recently celebrated the one-year anniversary of his release from Danville Correctional Center after twenty years of imprisonment. “For so long,” says Edmund, “so many people in prison have been beaten down by actions and words and made to feel inhuman. It’s an abnormal environment. [EJP] woke people up. It woke me up. I realized that there were actually a lot of people who cared about guys in our position.”

Through EJP, Edmund also woke up to a new-found relationship with the natural world. He cites his studies in Bill Sullivan’s course, LA 370, as being particularly influential. The course, *Environmental Sustainability—A Global Perspective*, challenged students to create a more sustainable world.

“I’m always more conscious of nature now,” says Edmund. “There’s only so much one person can do, but I want to plant a garden so I can take some pressure off the food system.” Though Edmund sees himself as “just a regular guy,” he’s also a full-time personal aide who provides elder care for a member of his Chicago community, and spends his free time writing and performing poetry. Says Edmund, “EJP is a growing organism. It’s alive. The more we nurture it and care for it, the stronger it will become.”

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ejp mission

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



PAT GILL



IGOR KAZAKOVS

2012-13

Pat Gill

“Everyone learns”

Pat Gill, an Associate Professor in the Departments of Communication and Gender and Women’s Studies at the U of I, was “flabbergasted and exhilarated” when she was invited to watch the Shakespeare performance put on by Carol Symes’ students in early 2012. These “deeply moving” performances transformed Pat’s understanding of incarcerated people. Says Pat, “I learned how easy it is to be thoughtless, to adopt disparaging, hurtful categorizations. That was pretty darn transformative for someone whose teaching, research, and written work have been informed by the concerns of race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality.” After the performance concluded, Pat knew she wanted to become involved with EJP.

Since 2012, she has taught two EJP courses, most recently concluding a section of CMN 496— *Pop Goes the Culture: Race, Class and Gender in Popular Media*. Pat says students came to class “well-prepared, ready and eager to discuss the assignments.” In CMN496, students write summaries of weekly readings and engage in discussions and critiques of new media and related readings. “Through their education in prison, their considerable intelligence, and their determination,” says Pat, “my students have come to test and, I believe, to revise certain earlier ways of thinking, and they certainly test and revise mine.”

2013-2014

Igor Kazakovs

“A vision and a goal”

Though he joined EJP simply to further his education, Igor Kazakovs now believes EJP is “so much more than just an educational outlet.” Igor, who has been a student with EJP for close to a year, says “it was the consideration and professionalism of the instructors that first caught my attention. The level of their involvement with our class materials was so profound that I couldn’t help but start regarding my education as something much more consuming than just simple passing grades.”

Igor’s first course with EJP was EIL 489, *Theoretical Foundations of Second Language Acquisition*. “It occurred to me,” Igor says, “that there’s so much passion and dedication to be found in any given field of study, and that all I needed was to find my own.” Igor has since become a member of EJP’s Language Partners program. As a multilingual ESL teacher, he hopes to provide new students with the same devotion he found in his own teachers.

“I can say without any exaggeration,” says Igor, “that this program has transformed me into a more mature individual, an individual with a vision and a goal. I’m proud to be part of EJP, and I hope that this program keeps changing people in the same profound way as it changed me.”

OCT 9-12, 2014

Presented by the
Education Justice Project
of the University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign

SYMPOSIUM ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON

The Education Justice Project was honored to host this multi-day event that brought together over one hundred scholars, teachers, activists, formerly incarcerated students, family members of the incarcerated, university administrators, prison librarians, and others from across the country. We met for critical reflection about our efforts to bring higher education to incarcerated men and women, and to consider the relationship between our work and larger socioeconomic forces and struggles.

Among topics discussed:

- *Politics and Ethics of Higher Education in Prison
- *Critical Perspectives on What sGets Taught in Prison
- *Peer Instruction in the Prison Classroom
- *Incarceration's Impact on Family and Communities
- *Re-entry
- *Social Justice Workshop

It was important to EJP to convene this national gathering, our second in 5 years. We believe in the value of rigorous reflection around our work, in producing scholarship on higher education in prison, and in helping to build a national movement that can promote positive change in the realms of incarceration and higher education both.





One of the highlights of the symposium was the engagement of currently and formerly incarcerated men and women, especially EJP students. They presented papers, moderated sessions, and participated actively in discussions throughout the three and a half days of panels and presentations, some of which were held at the prison.

We need the input of incarcerated scholars to build thoughtful, bold prison education programs that have integrity and vision. Their participation also kept us mindful of the need to connect prison education work to other social struggles, including the challenges facing returning citizens and working with youth.

You can view several symposium talks and see more photos of the event on the EJP website:

www.educationjustice.net

EJP plans to publish several of the key symposium presentations.

THANK YOU TO SYMPOSIUM SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

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