



The Amplifier

Plug into news that informs and encourages

May 2017

Shouting at Air

An old sage traveled to a city in decline. He sought to show its inhabitants the Good. He hoped to change their ways. For years he shouted in the streets at passersby, pursuing a listening ear. But past him they walked. And they mocked him as they did. Decades went by, but still he shouted his message in the streets, until one day a small boy approached him, and said, "Sir, why do you bother? Can't you see they do not listen? Can't you see they do not care?" "Child," he replied, "When I came to this town, I yelled my message in the streets with the hope of changing their hearts. Now . . . I do so to keep them from changing mine."

Only a week after winning the Oscar for best picture, *Moonlight* appeared on our movie channel. Through the jagged jumble of card-table thumping and conversational static, someone yelled from their cell, "On that *Moonlight*!" Surprised was I by the eager anticipation many of the inmates held for this film. *How progressive*, I thought. *How willing to make that empathic leap, to step into another's skin for an hour or two. But had they read the reviews?* A half-hour later: "Off that *Moonlight*!" . . . I guess not . . . Shortly thereafter the deck was a chorus of overstated public rejections—everyone quick to make a performance of their revilement: "I can't believe they'd play that gay-ass shit," "Never catch me watching that, hell no!" And on and on and on, on, on. After a single playing, and a lot of outrage and complaint, the movie was quickly taken off.

Moonlight, in addition to being the first all-black production to win an Academy Award for Best Picture, explores issues of homosexuality and sexual awakening. So the general inmate reaction to the film wasn't that surprising. But it was disappointing. I look forward to seeing critically acclaimed films, and I relish the rare opportunities I get in this abyss of shallowness to plug into something with depth and nuance and poignancy. Yet once again my options were limited because we'd proven ourselves too immature to handle certain subjects. The film, from what I've been told, is set in a crime-ridden Miami neighborhood during the height of the war on drugs. It follows Chiron, a young African-American gay man, through three

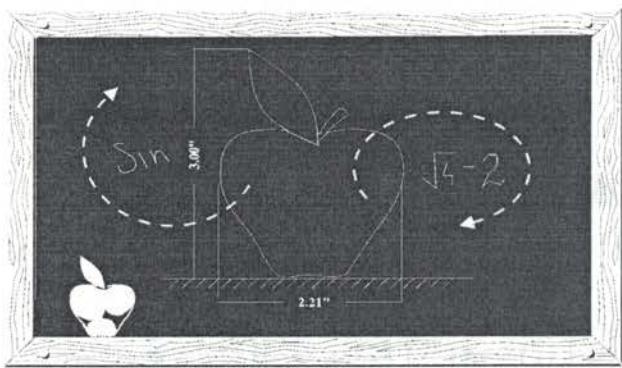
defining chapters in his life. And it deals with a number of themes many of us can relate to: the passage into manhood, the toxicity of coarse masculinity, and the difficulties of understanding and creating oneself in an unsympathetic, hostile world. I don't give a damn whether a movie deals with the black, white, gay, or straight experience. I care that the movie is good. I care that it's not another banal straight-to-video crime drama featuring a crusted-over Nicholas Cage.

So many have the most contorted standards for what they deem unacceptable for public view, especially on TV and in movies. Violence, fine—no one has a problem with vivid depictions of some murderous cartel terrorist decapitating a person—but never, *never* let a man be seen holding another man's hand. Isn't that odd? Think about it for a second or two. You find the most vicious forms of violence more acceptable than mere human intimacy.

Surely my fellow EJPers, those sword-of-social-justice wielding champions of the marginalized, those fetishists of Freire, would be just as indignant as I over the film's negative reception. Not exactly. And most of the criticisms I heard weren't based on political, philosophical, or even religious foundations—that at least would be putting brains to the subject, thinking about it critically. Tell me that depictions of homosexuality in the media lead to social decay through the erosion of traditional family structures and values. Tell me it's against God. Okay. Let's do what intellectuals are supposed to do and have an argument. Let's not have another limp exchange of the same puerile, sub-locker-room caliber remarks I can hear on the deck: "That's some gay-ass shit."

It's curious how selective some of us can be with our political desires, clamoring for a just, equitable, and inclusive society, but only to the point where *our* group is included: *Fuck those other people*. We fail to realize the collective effect of exclusion. This tribalism, this fear of what doesn't conform, undergirds all prejudice: to reject one group on account of their sexual orientation, race, or gender reinforces a more general habit of exclusion extending to all groups. The rejection of others lends momentum to prejudicial worldviews that affect your own group. Put it like this: if you're a minority, you benefit from living in an inclusively minded society—that means wholesale inclusion, not just the inclusion of everyone you're comfortable with. A society that rejects *every* form of bigotry.

—David Hensley



Apt Tutor

In the zero-sum game that is too often our world, Eddie Viens's recent transfer to Centralia was a win for him but a loss for *The Amplifier*, EJP, and the larger DCC community. Regular readers at least know Ed as the titular brain behind "Eddie's Enigmas," and more recently as our resident book reviewer. Those even slightly familiar with him in person know Ed as a math wiz and punster, capable of solving equations or producing occasionally groanworthy political anagrams on the fly.

Ed's lack of patience for foolishness and the fools behind it sometimes obscures his kindness, his willingness to help just about anyone (even the fools) in just about any way he can. To those who've seen that side of him most clearly, Ed could almost be described as avuncular—yes, partly because of his age, 67, and the fact that he's been down more decades than many of us have seen, but mostly because of his open generosity.

His largesse is not limited to matters of the intellect, but that is where so much of his wealth lies. Eddie's contribution to EJP and to education in general has been enormous. So many of those entering EJP or earning their degrees from DACC over the past several years have Ed to thank for getting them through the required math courses, in his capacities both as a TA and as an informal tutor. Anyone living on a deck with him could expect to find Ed at any given dayroom period sitting raptly in front of a chess board. Unless, that is, someone had asked him for help with their math homework. Whoever that person was, and whatever games Ed might have lined up, teaching became his priority. And he was good at it.

It wasn't just the guys struggling with fractions and decimals that looked to Ed for his knowledge. While he is the first to own that he's a novice programmer, even the Python experts in EJP—no math chumps themselves—would come to him first for an algebraic or trigonometric assist. Rarely did they need to turn elsewhere.

And of course "Eddie's Enigmas" has been a staple of the EJP newsletter since before it was *The Amplifier*. Given his fondness for wordplay, it should not have been the surprise it was to find that Ed is also a gifted and careful writer. To see just how exacting he is, take a look at the book review in this issue, which upon his departure Ed felt might not be polished enough to print. (Sorry Ed, it's going in—it's at least as good as anything else we've got.) His punctilious eye meant he also made a great proofreader and supplementary copyeditor. On print day, he was always helping staple, fold, sort, label, and deliver the issues. If half of us, at *The Amplifier*, in EJP, in the world, gave half the willingness to be of service as Eddie Viens offered us . . . well, I'd like to do the math, but have no one to ask for help today.

Thanks Eddie.

—M. Sean Lawless

Dare to Be Different

I'm in the clothing room waiting for my work boots when a whirlwind comes rolling in: Terrance Hanson bustling through the door to drop off his blues, linen, and mattress. He's disheveled and flustered, his blue shirt saturated with the sweat pooling on his back and underarms. I can't believe I'm getting a chance to wish him well before he leaves. I can't say why that's important to me—maybe I'm just living vicariously through all those who are getting released. I ask him what he is feeling right now, knowing he is mere moments away from freedom. He responds by babbling incoherently, sputtering words like *electricity*, *buzzing*, and *current* in every direction. "What time did you wake up?" I ask him. "I've been up since two. I was jolted out of my sleep," he says as his eyes dance around behind his signature black frames. He tells me that he employed mindfulness breathing exercises just to calm down.

As I watch Terrance throw his blues, sheets, and blankets in the grey cart, I realize I don't remember when I first met him. I do remember when EJP had scheduled a "Brain Chat" workshop to be held in the chapel, and Terrance and I hadn't read our passes and came to the school building instead. We sat and talked for 45 minutes about family, social issues, writing, and what we wanted to accomplish in life. During that short time I realized that we interact with people all day long, but only superficially. We often think that our biggest resources are the books and the computers, but if we take time to excavate past that first layer we could discover far greater value in the individuals around us.

You have spent more than a decade away from the free world. A lot of things have changed. Do you feel ready to take on that challenge? Is there anything you are afraid of?

Afraid?! I'm afraid of a lot of things. I'm afraid of being socially awkward. I'm afraid of taking too long to readjust to the pace of society. Most importantly, I'm afraid of letting down those that love me and care for me. I'm afraid of not living up to those expectations that are set for me.

How did you hear about EJP? What were your expectations coming into the program, and were they met?

I can't put my finger on how I exactly heard about EJP, but some of my closest friends were in EJP: guys like Anton Brown, Kenneth Davis, and Andra Slater. They would always tell me, "You need to hurry up and get 60 so you can sign up." My first experience with EJP was through CAVE. In 2014 we as CAVE members received invitations to the symposium on higher education in prison here at Danville. Seeing my fellow incarcerated brothers present papers and take questions from academics from all over the country inspired me to get involved. My expectations have been exceeded. Until I became a member, I had no knowledge of the impact on the community—that part still blows me away.

Give us your impression of the program. How will you explain to people what you were a part of?

The only way I can explain what I was a part of is to say that it is truly a transformative and redemptive entity that is tangible, with people and many moving parts. You can witness the change happening in real time on nights we have class and WAMP.

You claim to be a writer. What do you write about, and do you plan to continue writing when you go home?

I've been recently writing a lot about my lived experience and the different outside influences that change the way I treat people. In fact, in response to seeing this question I handed you something I'd recently started working on. I'll definitely continue writing when I'm released. Writing for me was a way to escape some of what I call the "real dangers" of prison life: complacency, mental atrophy, and muted creative expression. Every chance I get I try to encourage brothers to write. It can also be a healing tool. I believe everyone should keep a journal.

So what's the plan? What are you going to do when you go home?

My ideal plan is to get a transitional job to put money in my pocket while I finish my counseling credentials (CADC) and my bachelor's degree. I also plan on extending the CAVE program to my community through juvenile probation. But whether it is with my alcohol and drug counseling or through CAVE, I want to be helping people.

What's your definition of success? How will you know you made it?

If I have enough of everything that I need, and I'm then able to reach out and help others no matter the delivery system, I have succeeded.

After reading some of your work, I realize that you are not shy about revealing some deep personal issues. This goes completely against convict protocol that says, "The less people know about you the less they can use against you." You flipped that on its head by deciding to own your mistakes, trials, and misfortunes. Would you speak a little about that?

I believe truth is the ultimate people filter. What I mean is, we can only keep up the charade of sending our representative for so long. . . .

Wait, what does "sending your representative" mean?

Sending your representative is when you only show people the perfect and polite you. Eventually people will see you for who you are, and they will decide to either like you or want to be around you or they won't. The longer you make them wait to meet the real you, the more they resent you for making them wait. In short, being open and honest immediately tells you who is with you and filters all the rest out.

We often wonder why people do what they do. In this setting we usually assume the worst. What's your motivation? What drives Terrance Hanson?

To be totally honest with you, I'm motivated by love in all its unexplainable forms. I genuinely love people. I get a warm fuzzy feeling in my chest when I see people smile, and if I put that smile on your face I feel extra special.

The same goes for those dreary moods we find ourselves in. I recognize our interconnectedness. I find myself feeling the pain of others and I look for ways to get us out of those funks.

This is your last chance to drop some wisdom on your fellow students. What nuggets will you leave us with?

Be good to people. And dare to be different. We are always conscious of unwritten rules and the way we are expected to be. I just want to challenge everyone to be themselves and get out of the shadow of others' expectations.

"Dare to be different." These words seem fitting coming from one of the most unique individuals that has walked these halls at Danville. You might be tempted to toss Terrance in the same box with everybody else, but that would be a mistake. Terrance was

often judged harshly by the superciliously evolved—they have forgotten that we are all both profound and silly. Whether you esteemed Terrance or not, he taught us that we shouldn't censor who we are to satisfy others. Let us not only dare to be different; let us also dare to let others be different.

—Angel Pantoja

Know What I'm Tired Of?

The roommate who narrates everything that I do. I'm so fracking tired of this guy. He always has something slick to say. Do you know the one I'm talking about? If you're not sure, let's see if you can relate to this.

One day I brewed the most perfect pot of coffee ever. One coffee ground more or less would have given it an entirely different taste. And you might have seen me Husain-Bolting to Starbucks Gods for penitence.

The temperature was just right and my usual half-scoop of sugar dissolved exquisitely, giving it a taste that was not too sweet and not too bitter, but just right. Gently caressing my throat, it was Baby Bear's porridge to my Goldie Lox.

As I inhaled the delicious aroma of the best cup of coffee in the world and sipped away, I couldn't help getting lost in the thought of me being the lead protagonist in the hit movie *Kill Bill*. I think I would have looked much better in that tight yellow karate outfit than Uma Thurman. And before I knew it I was downing the last few drops. When I went back to the drawing board to recreate this Caffeine'ic-Picasso's Masterpiece, here comes this guy:

"Oh, you're having another cup of coffee? Boy you're really going to be up late tonight."

Why is this guy worried about how many cups of coffee I drink? I paid for it, so I can drink however many cups that I want. And why is he worried about how late I stay awake? We're not sleeping in the same bed.

Now this might seem trivial to some but when you tack on other examples of his narrative intrusions such as:

"That's a lot of water, Geeeshess save some for the fishes."

"More chips? Boy you sure do like your chips."

"Dances with Wolves again? You like that film."

"Gee another bathroom break, got a small bladder huh?"

"Up before the roosters, do you ever sleep?"

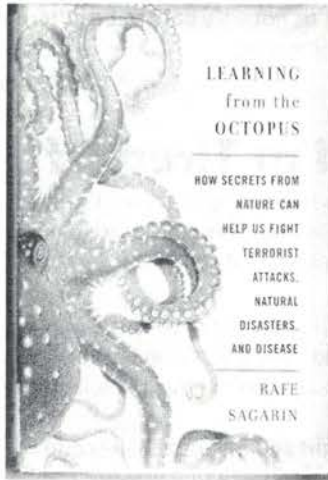
And on and on and on. What is wrong with this guy? If he gave half as much attention to creating teleportation, we'd be beaming around like Star Trek.

MIND YOUR BUSINESS!!

—Angry Aaron (R.G.)

PlusOneMe? PlusOneYou!

The PlusOneMe program is up and running! PlusOneMe is a tool for positive reinforcement and feedback, for giving accolades to people whenever they do good, interesting, or impressive things. Give someone electronic props or see who's given some to you by visiting the PlusOneMe shortcut in Public Documents.



In 2002, when memories of the 9/11 attacks and the anthrax mailings were fresh, tide-pool biologist Rafe Sagarin gathered an informal group of scientists and security experts to consider one question: “What can we learn about security in society from security in nature?” His answer is summarized in the prologue of *Learning from the Octopus*: “Taken together, the suggestions in this book . . . make up a system of ‘natural security’ applicable to any situation where risk is present and unpredictable.”

Sagarin notes that while we spend trillions of dollars “trying to plan for, predict, and perfect our responses” to threats, “natural adaptive systems don’t plan, they don’t predict, and they don’t perfect.” Instead, evolution waits for survival problems to arise and then solves them. It produces adaptable and decentralized organisms while human societies devise monolithic and dictatorial organizations that tend to override the innate adaptability of the individual.

For example, the Centers for Disease Control does a fine job of eradicating or neutralizing emerging diseases once news of the outbreak reaches its Atlanta headquarters. But those threats often arise in far-off, poor communities where hunters regularly come in contact with pathogens in their prey. A strain of Ebola might kill hundreds locally and ride carriers around the globe before CDC learns of the problem. To reduce that delay,

Nathan Wolfe recruits the hunters themselves to collect samples from their kills and immediately report any unusual symptoms to his forecasting network. Sagarin compares this decentralization to the octopus’s chromatophores which change the skin color with minimal input from the brain. Lesson learned.

One way that evolution resists outbreaks is by diversifying the genome of host species. Because squirrels have great genetic variety, only fifteen percent of them pass on Lyme disease after being bitten by infected ticks, thus diluting the population of the pathogen. We have not entirely absorbed *this* lesson. Our cornfields contain acre after acre of genetically identical clones just waiting to be wiped out by a single unfortunate mutation of a single pest.

With regard to natural disasters, Sagarin cites the tsunami that killed about 225,000 people in 2004. Less than an hour before the event, “animals across Asia and Africa were acting strangely,” either bolting for higher ground or refusing to go near the beach. A few humans saved their own lives by following their pets’ lead. Once the water receded, “state-of-the-art tsunami warning systems [were installed] across the region.” Though millions of dollars were spent on them, the systems produced so many false alarms that villagers in some provinces stoned them into silence. Sagarin states that the animals’ security systems had been “developed and fine-tuned over billions of years,” and concludes that “there is no technological solution that can prepare us for the risks of a highly variable and unpredictable world as well as the ancient natural process of adaptation.”

Learning from the Octopus is worth reading if only for the vivid descriptions of how dozens of organisms, including humans, live and adapt in unpredictably changing environments. But Sagarin’s argument fails to convince. In fact, I believe this is a classic case of the hammer seeing every problem as a nail. While all decision-making organizations need more diverse opinions and fewer

yes-men, they do provide a communal memory of all of the attempted adaptations which have failed. Sagarin is justified in proposing the adaptive *modification* of these groups, but he too often chooses to advocate their *replacement*. In one anecdote from the 18th century, he praises the English Parliament for issuing a challenge to all comers in the problem of determining one’s longitude at sea. Adaptability was rewarded: although astronomers and sailors made contributions, it was a watchmaker who solved the puzzle by designing an extremely hardy and accurate timepiece. But Sagarin doesn’t tell us the rest of the story. After that lone genius did his part, it took the uncontested authority of the British Admiralty to order that every seagoing vessel carry a chronometer and an expert in its use and maintenance.

As Sagarin observes, evolution produces adaptations just good enough to allow individuals to live long enough to reproduce. Sometimes this process produces a salmon or mayfly, with a lifecycle that no human except a suicide bomber would envy. And Sagarin misses something else. He is right to admire the multiple adaptations of the octopus. Camouflage, ink-clouds, tool-collecting for future use, powerful bites augmented by deadly bacteria—these are just some of the attributes that have helped various species of octopi thrive. But in the class *Cephalopoda*, extant species are far outnumbered by extinct forms, which include many species of octopi. The fossils offer no proof that the adaptations developed by the extinct forms were any less wondrous than those we see today. Sagarin’s entire argument (that adaption alone is more effective than planning alone) is based in large part on the billions of years that octopi and other life forms have survived. But for the vast majority of species, adaptive evolution has already failed.

—Edward Viens

Learning from the Octopus: How Secrets from Nature Can Help Us Fight Terrorist Attacks, Natural Disasters, and Disease, by Rafe Sagarin (at 363.34 in EJP library)

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 **consideration** for the July issue is May 26.

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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Letters to the editor may be submitted within Danville to the Suggestion Box in the EJP library; or submitted by mail to EJP, 805 W. Pennsylvania Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801.

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PBS Programming in May

Tuesdays, May 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30, 7pm: *Victorian Slum House*

Modern-day Londoners recreate life in the East End slums of 1860-1900.

Wednesdays, May 3 and 10, 9pm: *Plants Behaving Badly*

Witness the world of deceit and treachery of carnivorous plants and orchids over two episodes, "Murder and Mayhem" and "Sex and Lies."

Tuesdays, May 16, 23, and 30, 8pm: *American Epic*

Produced by T. Bone Burnett, Robert Redford, and Jack White, *American Epic* traces the birth of modern music in the late 1920s.

Monday, May 22, 9pm: *Independent Lens "They Call Us Monsters"*

Examines the lives of inmates at the Compound, LA's facility for its most violent juvenile criminals.

Eddie's Enigmas— GEO-SPELLING

Which one of the fifty states in the U.S. has exactly as many letters in its name as it has states on its borders?

Bonus query: Name the three states which have exactly as many **words** in their names as states on their borders.

Rating = ●●○○○

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

Seeking Intellectual Polemists

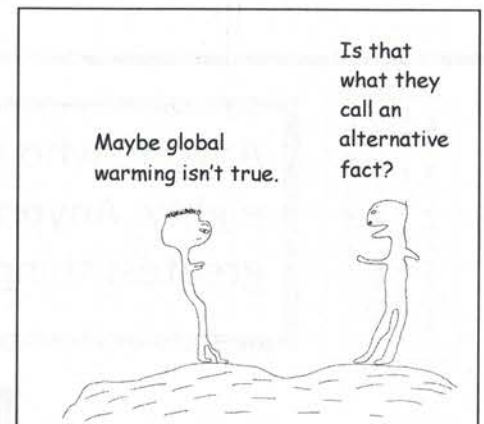
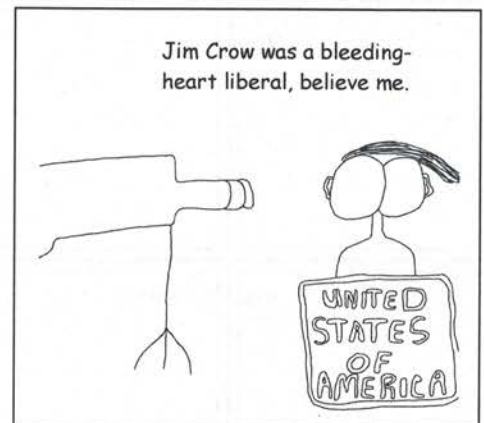
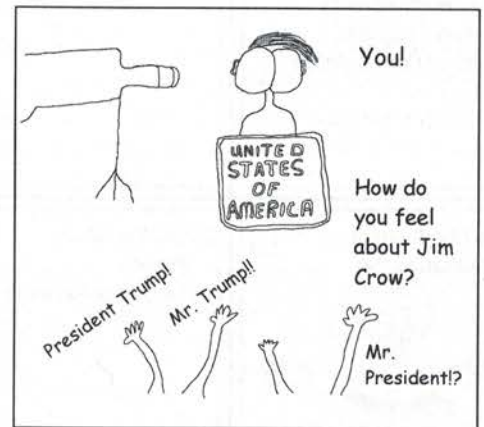
Our Academic environment at EJP seems to be inundated with opinionated students. Encountering ideas and opinions they don't agree with presents them with opportunities. The chance to verbally spar with men capable of artfully defending opposing positions is not easily found on the wings and yard.

Do not conflate the weekend antagonist with the EJP polemist. The weekend antagonist wanders clumsily into a military conflict thinking he may prevail using toothpicks and duct tape as premises. He is usually seeking to oppose anyone or anything even if he doesn't actually believe his assertions. The EJP polemist, however, artfully wades into shark-infested waters, wearing smoked-ham swim trunks, fully intending to intellectually fight his way back to shore. He does not do so merely to be contentious. He seeks to champion thoughts and ideas. He awaits some unsuspecting great white shark to devour.


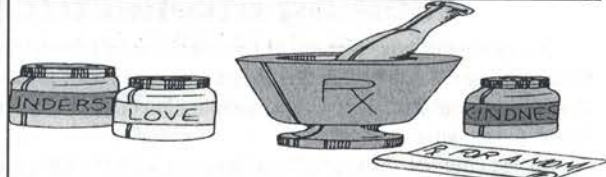
If you are an EJP polemist who wants to try his hand at some prepared topics in a room full of other capable men, "*The Gathering*" is the place for you. However, if you are a weekend antagonist attempting to advance positions with raised voice and little evidence or intellect, stay on the shore where it's safe.

"*The Gathering*" will be held Wednesday, May 17. Look for opportunities to sign up soon. Possible topics might include "Islam: a Violent Religion?" and "What Is Critical Pedagogy and Do We Really Care?"

Erk and Jerk By Raylan Gilford



MAY

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
5p WAMP 1	11:30a SRR 2 5p Language Partners 5p WAMP 6p Academic Advising	5p Workshop: Illinois Politics 3	11:30a Workshop: Gameplay Dynamics 4 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness	9a Newsletter 5 9a CAVE 5p For-credit courses: 396 Russian Revolution 350 Intro to African Art 420 Journalism 486 Linguistics
9:30a Language Partners 8 6p Academic Advising 6p Library Program: Cultural Conversation	5p Language Partners 9	5p Workshop: Bioinformatics 10	Workshop: Antimicrobial 11 11:30a Workshop: Python 5p Language Partners 5p Mindfulness	9a Newsletter 12 9a CAVE
8:30a Mindfulness: Meditation Day 15 	8:30a Workshop: Python 16 5p Language Partners	6p Library Program: The Gathering 17	5p Mindfulness 18	9a Newsletter 19 9a CAVE 5p For-credit course: 396 Russian Revolution
22	23	24	8:30a Awards Convocation 25 5p Mindfulness	9a Newsletter 26
29	5p WAMP 30	31	Prescription for Mom on Mother's Day 	

GEO-SPELLING HINT:
The first state is quite close to Illinois, and the bonus states are on the east coast.

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing you can do is keep your mind young.
Mark Twain (1835 - 1910)