



**EDUCATION JUSTICE PROJECT**  
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## Resources @ EJP

# How should we measure success in prison higher education programs?

Traditionally, the post-prison lives of incarcerated people have been viewed through a lens that sees only two outcomes: whether they return to prison or not.

This reductive thinking infected higher education prison programs. The successes of programs were largely measured by rates of recidivism, a standard that views these programs as rehabilitative rather than educational, and the participants as potential social threats rather than students.

In the spring of 2018, we at the Education Justice Project hired Nicole Robinson to help us answer the question: How should we measure the success of a college-in-prison program? To find an answer, Nicole formed the EJP Evaluation Advisory Council, made up of nine EJP students and one EJP outside member. This group met for two years to discuss the value of a program like EJP from the perspective of its most important stakeholders: the students.

Their answers were surprising, and bore no relationship to the traditional measures of success for formerly incarcerated people or college students. The things the students valued most about their experiences were the ways the program changed them as people – how it developed their senses of dignity, humanity and critical transpersonal consciousness.