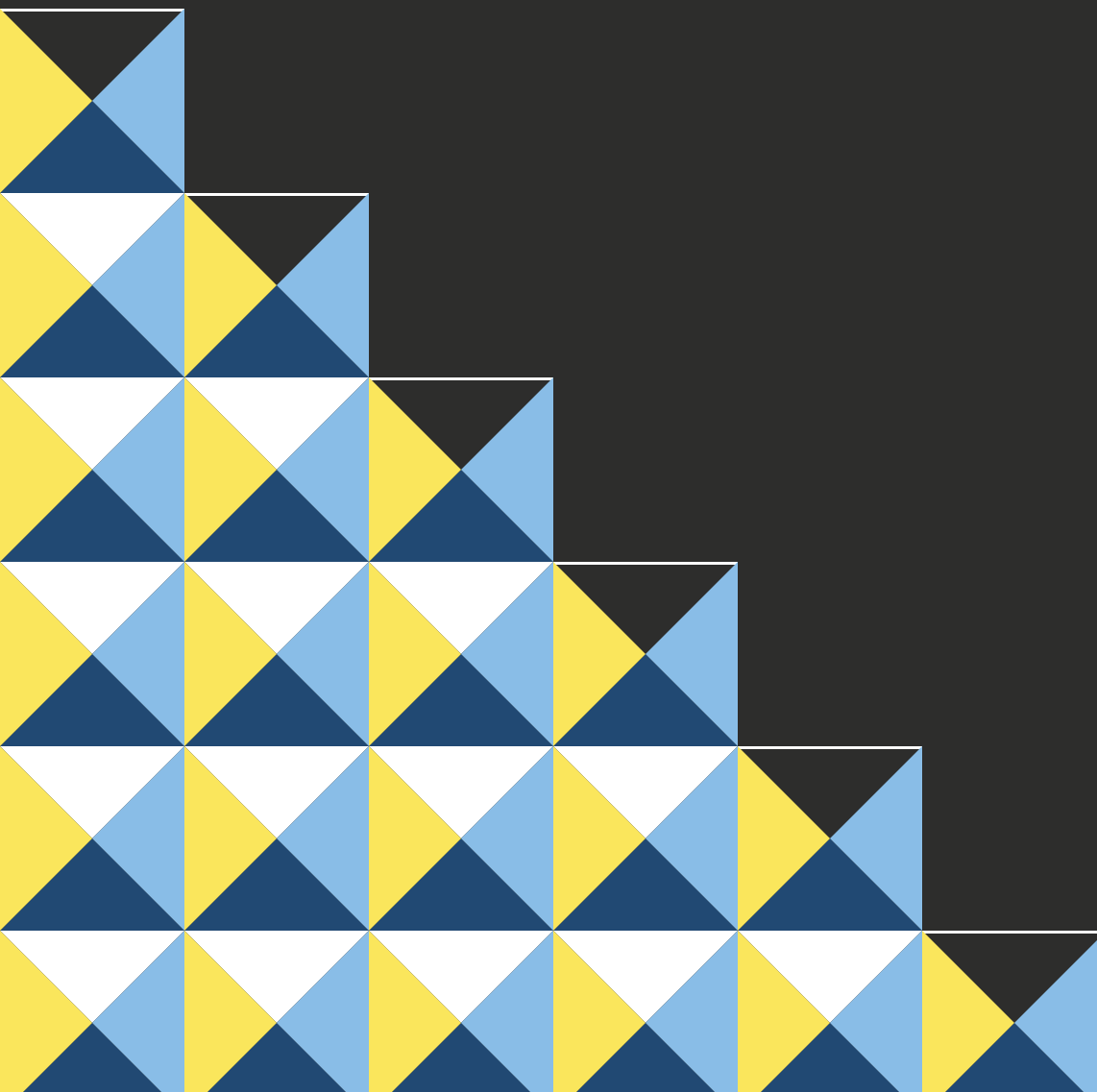




EJP HANDBOOK

(2025–2026)



Contents

I. Welcome to the Education Justice Project (EJP)	03
Welcome	04
Organizational Chart	05
Programs and Initiatives 2025–26	07
Key People 2025–26	10
Quick Guide to Connecting with EJP	12
EJP Story	13
What’s New with EJP?	16
Profiles: Celebrating EJP People	17
II. How Does EJP Operate?	18
Governance	19
EJP Values	22
DEI Committee Under Construction — Stay Tuned	23
Finances	24
III. EJP Programs	26
On-Site Programs	27
Off-Site Programs	30
Technical and Support Teams	35
IV. Growing in EJP	36
Growing in EJP	37
V. Appendices	39
EJP Group Commitments	40
EJP Policies	41
Research Policy	42
Alumni and Family Contact Policy	48
Conflict Resolution & Grievance Procedures	49
Strategic Objectives 2022–25	51
Partner Organizations	53

**Welcome to the
Education Justice
Project (EJP)**

Welcome

This handbook, which is available online on the [EJP website](#), is intended for outside EJP members (those who are not incarcerated). We ask members to read the updated handbook each year to help ensure that the approximately 200 individuals who work with EJP during a typical year share a common understanding of our purpose and enterprise. We are grateful that you are doing that now!

EJP students at Danville Correctional Center will receive a modified version of this handbook that does not include email addresses or photos of incarcerated individuals, and that must be approved by prison staff.

This handbook is not a training manual. If you're new to EJP, you will receive training information from your supervisor. Rather, this handbook is meant to give you a broad understanding of EJP's structure and policies, as well as a picture of the state of higher education in prison in Illinois and EJP's place within it. We hope this handbook will help you grasp the full breadth of EJP's activities and initiatives. We encourage all members to engage in our work outside of the singular role you have within the organization and to explore other opportunities for engagement and learning across EJP.

In particular, this handbook will:

- Show you EJP's organizational structure (**page 05**).
- Familiarize you with EJP's longstanding programs and new initiatives, including information on how you can get involved with them (**page 26**).
- Provide a "who's who" of key EJP staff and contact info (**page 10**).
- Provide updates on the expansion of our programming to other prisons in Illinois (**page 16**).

The 2025–26 academic year brings new challenges — an expansion of the "[already colossal](#)" US prison system, an acceleration of the deportation machine, and attacks on DEI programs. EJP remains steadfast in our commitment to demonstrate the value of higher education for incarcerated students, their communities, our campus, and society as a whole.

Welcome again to new and returning members! We are grateful you are part of the "EJP universe," a term coined by alumnus Edmund Buck. Thank you once more for taking the time to read this handbook. We hope the information makes your participation in EJP as meaningful as possible.

We need you and everyone if we are to re-make a world without prisons.

—Brian Dolinar, EJP Writer

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 people, their families, the neighborhoods from which they come, the host institution, and society as a whole.

Education Justice Project Organizational Chart

2025





Programs and Initiatives 2025–26

The following is a brief list of our current programs and initiatives. For more information, see the “EJP Programs” section of this handbook on **page 26** or visit our website at educationjustice.net/programs

1. College-in-Prison: Danville Correctional Center

- A For-Credit Courses**
EJP offers primarily upper-division (300- and 400-level). University of Illinois courses to men incarcerated at Danville.
- B Academic Advising**
Advisors support the academic needs and facilitate the success of EJP students through workshops and connections to important resources.
- C Writing and Math Partners (WAMP)**
Several times each week trained writing and math tutors from campus offer academic support to EJP students.
- D EJP Community Library**
Our library includes a collection of over 2,000 items. EJP students are trained, primarily by one another, in librarianship skills while maintaining the collection.
- E Business Workshops**
Our business workshops help students gain confidence in foundational skills and learn about a variety of business-related topics.
- F Writing Workshops**
Writing workshops seek to improve students’ writing abilities by offering guided instruction and practice in a wide variety of writing-related subjects.
- G STEM Workshops**
These not-for-credit workshops invite students to explore a range of topics in science, technology, engineering, and math.
- H Mindfulness Discussion Group (MDG)**
This group introduces students to research in the field of mindfulness and encourages students to develop a daily meditation practice.
- I Community Anti-Violence Education (CAVE)**
Trained EJP students facilitate biweekly mentoring and anti-violence education sessions with men aged 18–35 in the general population.
- J Guest Lecture Series**
This is a series of guest lectures, including an annual lecture co-hosted by EJP and the Illinois Humanities Institute. This year the speaker is TBD.

K **Language Partners (LP)**

Language Partners involves EJP students or “teaching partners” providing English as a second language (ESL) instruction to English language learners from the general population.

L **EJP Computer Lab and Computer Workshops**

The EJP Computer Lab at DCC consists of a server and 15 workstations that support EJP curricular and extracurricular activities. The lab is home to workshops that allow students to gain confidence in diverse aspects of computing.

M **Reading Groups**

Each spring EJP students and current instructors are invited to submit proposals for summer reading groups. Incoming EJP students must enroll in the New Student Reading Group, which prepares them for upper-division course work.

2. Reentry Resource Program (RRP)

RRP produces an IL reentry guide, *Mapping Your Future: A Guide to Successful Reentry*, a national reentry guide, and a national deportation guide. It also provides technical assistance to organizations in the US and beyond that wish to produce local guides.

3. Prison-to-Gown Pathway

EJP’s Prison-to-Gown initiative provides support for University of Illinois and community college students who have interacted with the criminal justice system.

4. Research and Policy

A **Policy**

Members of this team conduct research and engage in policy analysis with the goal of enhancing education for incarcerated scholars and educational pathways in Illinois.

B **Research Group**

We host regular discussions on works-in-progress on topics related to incarceration and allied topics.

5. Internship Program

EJP interns have supported our office and programs for many years. The application deadline for spring 2026 interns is **November 15**. Student interns attend a weekly seminar and receive course credit.



Key People 2025-26

Rebecca Ginsburg: EJP Director, rginsbur@illinois.edu

Operations

Katie Fizdale: Assistant to the EJP Director and HR Liason, fizdale@illinois.edu

Mavis Nyatepe-Attipoe: Systems & Operations, mavisan2@illinois.edu

Ishan Joshi: Systems & Operations, ishanj3@illinois.edu

Grayson Hodson: Scheduling Assistant, ghodson2@illinois.edu

Office Manager: position unfilled

Crushion Stubbs: EJP In-Office Assistant, cstubbs3@illinois.edu

Advisory Council

Melissa Keeble: Chair, EJP Advisory Council, mrkeeble99@gmail.com

Greg Jahiel: Chair, Nominating Committee, g_jahiel@yahoo.com

Policy and Research

Ashton Klekamp: Policy & Research Director, ahoselto@illinois.edu

Prison to Gown

Chrissy Ferree: Prison-to-Gown Pathway Program Director, cferr3@illinois.edu

Reentry Resource Program (RRP)

Lee Ragsdale: Reentry Resource Program Director,
kragdsda2@illinois.edu

Chad Rand: Outreach & Distribution Coordinator,
rand2@illinois.edu

Josh Schriftman: Research & Writing Coordinator,
jns21@illinois.edu

Christy Cannon: Guide Production Coordinator,
ccannon5@illinois.edu

College-in-Prison Program

Shaelyn Smith: Academic Director,
shaelyn@illinois.edu

Amber Dunse: Language Partners Coordinator,
dunse2@illinois.edu

Jessica Thornton: Interim Academic Manager,
jat11@illinois.edu

Computer Lab Co-coordinator: position unfilled

Ma'at Husband-Ausar: On-Site Coordinator,
maathusbandausar@gmail.com

Jessica Augustson: Mindfulness Discussion Group
Coordinator, jaugust2@illinois.edu

Kelli McQueen: Co-coordinator EJP Community
Librarian, kamcquee@illinois.edu

Theresa Ann Saxton-Fox: WAMP Coordinator,
tsaxtonf@illinois.edu

Karen Hogenboom: Co-coordinator EJP Community
Librarian, klhogenboom@gmail.com

Laura Kalmes: CAVE Coordinator,
lkalmes@illinois.edu

Others

Erick Nava: Scholarship Coordinator and Emergency
Fund Administrator, ericknll2013@gmail.com

Jamarri Nix: Head, Graphic Design Team,
jnix2@illinois.edu

Brian Dolinar: EJP Writer, bdolinar@illinois.edu

Bharath Ganesh: Web Developer,
bganesh2@illinois.edu

Maddie Sneddon: Communications Coordinator,
maddies2@illinois.edu

Natalie Cline: Head, Social Media Team,
ncline2@illinois.edu

Alex Chapman: Events Coordinator,
ac110@illinois.edu

Sonia Navale: Head, Data Stewardship Team,
snavale2@illinois.edu

Quick Guide to Connecting with EJP

Website

educationjustice.net

Calendar

Our [online calendar](#) lists upcoming EJP events, both online and in person.

Digital Newsletter

EJP This Week is our digital newsletter. It comes out every Monday during the semester and includes announcements of upcoming EJP events and activities. You should automatically receive it if you're an active EJP member, but if not, sign up for the newsletter [here](#).

Member Announcements

These also come out every Monday and are geared towards the particular interests and concerns of active EJP members. You can access announcements at EJP This Week, and they will also be posted on BambooHR (see below for more information).

Lunches

EJP Lunches take place once a month. You can join us via Zoom or in person to meet other EJP members, learn about upcoming initiatives, and find out how you might get involved with EJP, if you're not already. Find out about lunches by signing up for our digital newsletter (see above).

Mango

Mango is an online platform where EJP communication has taken place (in addition to email and Teams). In response to "clunkiness" noted by members, we have researched alternatives and will retire Mango as of September 1, 2025.

BambooHR

We are making a transition to BambooHR, our new communication platform. Its features support communication, team management, and information sharing. EJP's Systems & Operations is trying to make the transition as smooth and collaborative as possible. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to Mavis at mavisan2@illinois.edu or Ishan at ishanj3@illinois.edu.

Social Media

Follow EJP on social media!

Facebook: [@educationjustice](#)

EJP Forum on Incarceration and Higher Education:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/487707641260257>

Instagram: [@ejp_at_il](#)

LinkedIn: [Education Justice Project | LinkedIn](#)

EJP Story

Higher education in prison in Illinois has a long tradition. The first higher education in prison (HEP) program in the US was in an Illinois state prison. It started in the 1950s with a partnership between Southern Illinois University and Menard Correctional Center. That campus soon spread its model to other prisons across the state. By the 1970s, over 1,000 individuals had taken college courses at Menard alone, and some had been hired by SIU upon their release. A few even returned to Menard as instructors.

Several factors contributed in rapid succession to the closure of SIU's programs and that of other campuses. First, in 1987 state legislators passed a law that blocked incarcerated students from receiving MAP grants, financial aid for low-income students to attend college. The following year, IDOC implemented a drug-testing requirement for all instructors. SIU closed its program of over thirty years rather than comply. In 1995, Congress disallowed the use of Pell grants for incarcerated students.

By 2008, when EJP offered our first programs at Danville Correctional Center, we were one of a small handful of HEP programs left in Illinois and the only one based at a four-year university.

EJP got its start in 2005 when Rebecca Ginsburg, then a new faculty member in the Department of Landscape Architecture, began to consider how to create a prison education program at the University of Illinois. She had taught at San Quentin State Prison while a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, and was excited about the possibility of starting a similar program at the University of Illinois. By fall 2006 she had formed

a working group of University of Illinois graduate students, faculty members, and community members, many of whom also had experience in prison education, though in other states. They tentatively called the initiative "Education Beyond Bars."

One of their first challenges was deciding which prison to partner with. They chose Danville Correctional Center based on its proximity to the Urbana campus and its large associate degree program (at that time, through Lake Land Community College), which would feed into the University of Illinois's upper-division program.

From 2006 to 2008, the group—made up of Tage Biswalo, Tracy Dace, Rebecca Ginsburg, Arturo Martinez, Sarah Ross, Rob Scott, and William Sullivan—visited prison education programs in California and New York, built alliances off and on campus, raised funds, and educated themselves about prison education.

A 2008 survey among potential students at Danville revealed a high level of interest in the program and convinced administrators at the University of Illinois of the value of a program. Attorneys for the University of Illinois and IDOC crafted a Memo of Understanding (MOU) that allowed the project, now called the Education Justice Project, to implement a semester-long pilot in spring 2009.

While the MOU was being approved, EJP offered two not-for-credit reading groups at the prison. The 38 incarcerated individuals who participated in the reading groups in 2008 make up our charter students. In January 2009, EJP's first for-credit

classes were offered at DCC. Fifty-four students enrolled in four courses.

Since then, EJP's offerings at the prison have expanded greatly in response to student and instructor interest. We currently have ten programs, in addition to for-credit courses. The Reentry Guide Initiative, now called the Reentry Resource Program, was started in 2015, around the time we started our internship program.

In 2022 we hired our first full-time policy and research director. EJP now also includes a significant number of technical support staff, including the data stewardship team, graphic design team, and communications team. Please find an organization chart on **page 05**.

Outside of the University of Illinois, EJP led efforts to develop the Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison and is a member of the Big 10 Coalition for Higher Education in Prison. We hosted the first National Conference for Higher Education in Prison (NCHEP) conference in 2010, and another one in 2014. We helped to organize the Freedom to Learn Campaign, a statewide coalition dedicated to advocating for college-in-prison programs, that we now house. We also host regular meetings of RIPPLE Effect, Reaching Inside Prisons with Purpose and Love, which supports local families that are impacted by incarceration.

As EJP has expanded, we have deepened our commitment to collaborative leadership, critical pedagogy, and self-reflection. At the same time, we continue to learn from peer programs and value the

network of educators, incarcerated students, formerly incarcerated people, family members, researchers, prison activists, and others who help to inform and guide our work. We have been thrilled to see this network grow significantly over the years, and to be able to help other HEP programs get off the ground. Yet, there is still much work to do.

EJP's 2025 directory, [*Higher Education in Prison Programs in Illinois*](#), identifies 14 higher education programs at eight different state prisons, out of twenty eight in the state. That means that only a small fraction of people incarcerated in Illinois state prisons can participate in HEP. Last year, the figure was around 2.6%.

Since EJP was founded, more than 500 individuals have passed through our program. Many have gone on to do amazing things inside and outside of prison, and to give back to their communities after they have been released. We are proud of them, and also proud of our alumni who live quieter lives, holding down steady jobs, enjoying time with their families, and staying in touch with us to share the joys and struggles of life on the outside. We treasure opportunities to get together and continue to build and deepen the EJP universe.

We are excited you are joining us on this journey of learning and growth. EJP is not only for the edification of those inside. Many of the educators and students on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus report that their lives have been transformed because they taught a class for EJP or engaged with the people of EJP.



What's New with EJP?

- **Shaelyn Smith** became EJP's new academic director in spring 2025. In this role, she will provide pedagogical and strategic oversight, supervise on-site coordinators, and set up systems to provide support for 50-60 members that work at the prison every semester.
- We have seen a significant increase in the number of people who have accessed our deportation guide, ***A New Path: A Guide to the Challenges and Opportunities After Deportation***, since the November election. About 4,000 electronic or hard copies of *A New Path* were accessed in the 12 weeks after November's election. In contrast, we received fewer than 100 requests in the preceding 12 weeks. We are working to get the guide into as many hands as possible.
- We held our first ever **blended course** in spring 2024 and are seeking permission from IDOC to offer a second in spring 2026. A blended course enrolls EJP students alongside UIUC students, who learn together. For now, our blended courses will be held over zoom, but we hope to bring outside students into Danville soon.
- We are still in discussions with IDOC to launch a program at **Decatur Correctional Center**, a minimum-security women's prison.
- IDOC has approved EJP's expansion to **Menard Correctional Center**, a maximum-security prison in southern Illinois. However, we are not allowed to begin programming until the Memo of Understanding between UIUC and IDOC is executed.
- In fall 2025, the **Mindfulness Discussion Group** will offer an MDG Mindfulness Certificate, an MDG Facilitator Certificate, and teaching experience for EJP's Certificate for Education Studies through The University of Illinois in order to expand the reach of mindfulness meditation throughout DCC and beyond.

Profiles: Celebrating EJP People



Shaelyn Smith

EJP is thrilled to welcome [Shaelyn Smith](#) as our new Academic Director! In this role, Shaelyn will lead all our college-in-prison programming. “I’m really excited to be here,” she says. “I’ve long-admired EJP’s dedication to its student-centered mission and abolitionist approach.” College-in-prison programming is EJP’s heart and soul. Shaelyn will ensure it continues to operate according to our high standards for critical, thoughtful intellectual engagement.

Ana Garcia

[Ana Garcia](#) is one of the recipients of an EJP Mexico Scholarship. She is now working on a law degree at Vizcaya University in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Due to her own experience, she wanted to become an attorney. “It is my way of fighting injustice,” she says, “especially for immigrants navigating the legal complexities of life in the US.” Education is her way of “building a future where justice is within reach for those who need it most.”



Jake Mullen

Jake Mullen is a dedicated member of the Graphic Design team at EJP. He has contributed to a diverse range of projects, including holiday cards, flyers, and social media graphics. Throughout his time with the team, Jake has gained valuable experience across various design disciplines and user experience practices. Jake shares, “I strive to brighten someone’s day with each of my designs. But if my work can also play a role—however small—in addressing injustice, that means the world to me.”

Natalie Cline

As a member of EJP’s Social Media Team, [Natalie Cline](#) gained hands-on experience and worked for an organization whose mission she believes in. While working for EJP, she learned that mass incarceration is a “big problem.” During the two years she worked for EJP, Natalie helped double the number of followers on EJP’s social media platforms. “It feels really good to be able to be involved with an organization that is focusing on a greater goal, for equality in the world overall,” Natalie says.



How Does EJP Operate?

Governance

Structure

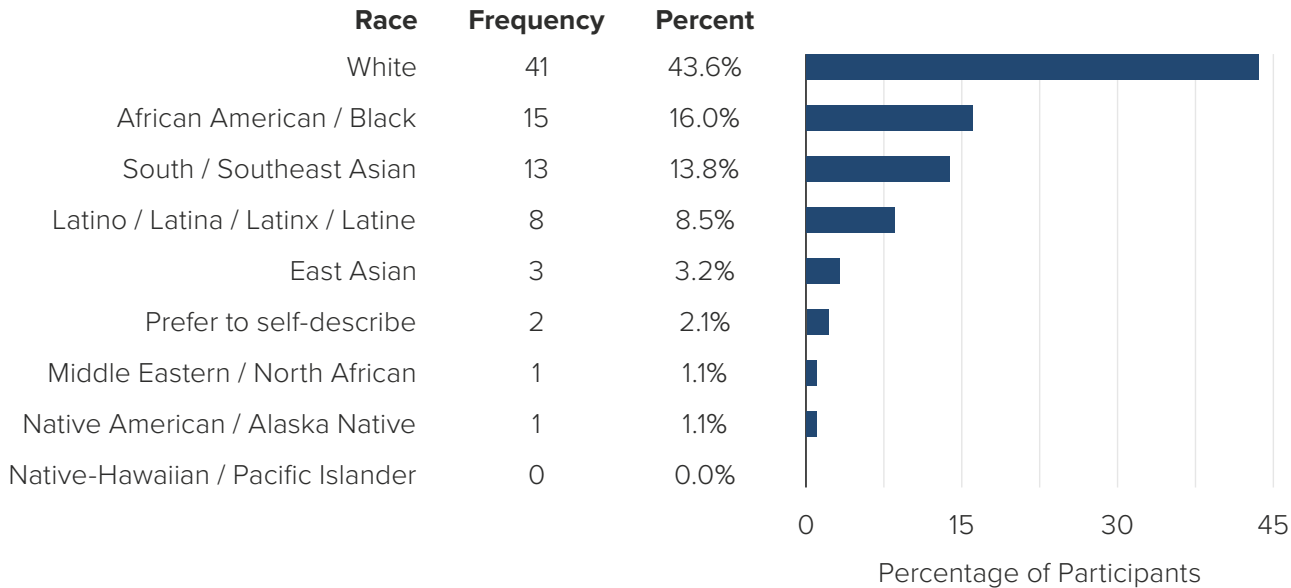
EJP is technically a research project of its director, Rebecca Ginsburg, an Illinois faculty member. However, EJP does not function like a typical research lab, nor are we treated like one. Within the College of Education, EJP is regarded as a unit within Centers and Strategic Initiatives. We have for many years planned to apply for center status. We hope to submit our formal center proposal in 2026 or early 2027. (You can attend regular updates on this process throughout the year).

For many of us involved with EJP, it is important not only to do socially important work within prisons and the community, but also to do it within a structure that avoids the most deleterious aspects of either academic or prison culture.

Accordingly, we aim to build a program with transparent, participatory governance in an open and inclusive spirit. This effort is represented by EJP’s [Inclusion Commitment](#).

In order to do this, we need members who are willing to do more than teach or take classes. We require members willing to participate in conversations about how we do what we do, and what policies, programs, and procedures best align with our mission and values.

One example of the emphasis we place upon developing a healthy organizational structure is our bi-annual membership survey, which helps us monitor our progress in creating a diverse EJP membership. Our first survey, in 2017, found that 8% of outside members were African-American and 87% were white. The [2024 survey](#) results are below.



Consensus

One of EJP's values is consensus, which is often misunderstood. Consensus does not mean that everyone needs to agree. Instead, it means that we value discussion, debate, and active listening, and that we want each member's voice to contribute to our evolving understanding on any given matter. Voting often has the effect of cutting debate short when it's clear that a majority on any given position exists. Seeking consensus on key decisions, which is EJP's practice, imposes the obligation to keep talking, which makes it more likely that minority positions will be aired and inform the discussion. At the same time, unanimity isn't required. Decisions can move forward when dissenters agree to step aside in the spirit of accepting the clear will of the group overall.

Prison Abolition Statement

EJP would not exist but for the hard and painful reality that our society incarcerates individuals. Through our programs and activities, EJP seeks to mitigate the impacts of incarceration today and to create conditions that support the creation of more humane and just responses to harm and violence.

The fact that we do these things by necessarily engaging with a system that many (not all) EJP members find abhorrent creates a tension that runs through just about everything we do.

How do we ensure that EJP partners effectively with prison staff and administrators, creating smooth-running programs that become part of the day-to-day

at Danville Correctional Center, without becoming part of the prison apparatus? How do we argue for expansion of higher education in prisons across the state, while at the same time insisting on the need to close prisons?

What does an abolitionist reentry guide look like? Or an abolitionist college-in-prison program? What would it look like for our host institution, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, to enact abolitionist values?

We are committed to continued interrogation of these and similar queries in a spirit of inclusion and critical reflection.

EJP Positions

EJP sometimes partners with progressive organizations and sometimes endorses causes whose values align with our own commitment to creating a more humane and just society. We recognize that EJP is made up of diverse individuals with unique, varied, and evolving opinions and ideas. We welcome discussion and dialogue and do not expect our members to agree on all matters. We encourage members of the EJP universe to make their voices heard both inside and outside EJP, if they so desire.

A Note About Confidentiality

Our shared desire for transparency and inclusive decision-making occasionally runs up against the need to protect the privacy of EJP instructors, students, prison security concerns, and the well-being of EJP itself. These have traditionally been stressful moments for EJP, when, after any given incident, some members' very human urges to learn the "whole story" are thwarted by others' efforts to contain information.

We continue to think through the healthiest way to approach these incidents, which can sometimes undermine the spirit of openness that we strive for. At the same time, these are opportunities to reflect on the nature of privilege (e.g., to information), power, authority, and humility. We serve our members best when we treat such moments of friction as chances for personal and institutional growth.



EJP Values

Consensus
Openness
Flexibility
Debate
Trying New Things
Social Justice
Gentleness
Unconventionality
Research-Driven
Critical Approach
Applying Our Moral Principles
Transparency
Food*
Compassion
Inclusivity
Participation
Creativity
Respect
Courage
En Lak'esh**
Community

EJP's **vision** is a more humane and just society, sustained through education and critical awareness.

*We regret that IDOC regulations do not allow us to live out our value of food within Danville Correctional Center.

**This is a Mayan expression meaning "I am you" or "You are me."

DEI Committee Under Construction – Stay Tuned



The work of building inclusive, people-centered communities within EJP is ongoing. As part of that work, we're currently reimagining this team—its purpose, values, mission, practices, and impact within and for EJP.

Initially launched in 2018, the DEI Committee emerged from EJP's commitment to equity and inclusion, grounded in the [EJP Inclusion Commitment](#), which includes:

“We recognize that in order to build a model college-in-prison program, we must honor the value and dignity of all EJP members. We commit to individual and organizational action to build respect, dignity, fairness, caring, equity, and self-esteem in our communities.”

While past initiatives such as Critical Conversations and the Book Club are currently on pause, this is not a retreat from our mission. Instead, we're using this moment to reflect and reimagine how this group can best function within and for EJP's evolving community. We're committed to sharing updates about this process during Fall 2025 and are determined to launch with new ideas early 2026.

We're actively inviting new members to help shape this process! If you're interested in contributing or learning more, reach out to Julia Spielmann at dei@educationjustice.net.

Critical Conversations

The topic for our Critical Conversations last year was “constructive disagreement.” The topic was selected by EJP students through a process of discussion and voting. We have decided not to have a formal Critical Conversation requirement this coming year.

Below is the list of short articles on constructive disagreement we read:

Seppälä, Emma & Bradley, Christina. “[Handling Negative Emotions in a Way that's Good for Your Team.](#)” *Harvard Business Review*. (Jun. 11, 2019).

Travers, Mark. “[3 Ways to Master the Art of Constructive Disagreement.](#)” *Psychology Today*, (Jun. 7, 2024).

University of Pittsburgh. “[Difficult Conversations: How to Agree to Disagree, According to a Pitt Communications Expert.](#)” (Mar. 27, 2024).

UC Santa Cruz. “[Addressing Critical Current Events and Holding Difficult Conversations in the Classroom – the Teaching & Learning Center.](#)” (n.d.).

Finances

The Education Justice Project receives funding from three main sources: the University of Illinois, foundations outside of the university, and private donations from individuals.

EJP's budget during our first ten years was achingly modest. For example, in 2016–17, our expenditures totaled less than \$110,000.

In 2017, we received a 3-year \$1 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. It was a game changer. Mellon funds allowed us to grow our programs, enhance our administrative infrastructure, and attract additional foundation and university support. We received our third 3-year, million dollar grant from Mellon in 2023.

Mellon funds support staff salaries, instructor and coordinator compensation, instructional materials, and professional development, among other things.

The annual budget of \$600k from the U of I provost's office primarily supports salaries and pays most of our rent at the YMCA.

The Joyce Foundation currently supports our policy work. Smaller grants from other foundations contribute to specific areas such as scholarships and alumni speaking stipends.

Grassroots fundraising is important to EJP, not just because we rely on the funds that individuals and local congregations provide EJP, but also because of the ethics around making ourselves accountable to people who support our work and are impacted by it. Donations from EJP students (yes, from currently incarcerated individuals) and family members who receive reentry guides from us are especially meaningful, for that reason. In the 2024-25 fiscal year, we raised approximately \$69,000 in grassroots donations.

No gift is too small. All donations make a difference, and we greatly value the contributions of individuals whose lives EJP touches.

In the 2025–26 fiscal year, our anticipated budget will be about \$1,400,000.



EJP Programs

A. On-Site Programs

1. College-in-Prison Program at Danville Correctional Center

Please note that the term “EJP instructor” refers to all nonincarcerated individuals who participate in our prison-based programs, including for-credit course instructors, workshop facilitators, WAMP tutors, and all others. For-credit course instructors are compensated or receive course releases. All other instructors are uncompensated.

● Why Become an EJP Instructor?

Becoming a member of a prison-based learning community allows you to grow as a teacher, learn about criminal justice and incarceration, make a difference in the lives of your students and their families, expand your professional network, and develop your leadership abilities. It allows you to engage in a meaningful way with a significant social issue: the incarceration of disproportionate numbers of people of color and economically disadvantaged people. Through this work, you are likely to feel challenged, engaged, and humbled.

Please be aware of what we ask from instructors. We ask that they be open to growth and learning, engage with and support other EJP members, follow through on commitments to the best of their abilities, and help our community to flourish and improve.

● Application and Selection Process

Admission into EJP is a selective and sometimes competitive process. All EJP programs require evidence of one’s seriousness of purpose and a demonstrated ability to engage in critical reflection about prison education and one’s role in that enterprise. In some cases, we also seek particular skill sets. For example, for-credit course instructors must be qualified to teach on the Urbana campus. Mindfulness Discussion Group members must have their own mindfulness practices.

Being an EJP instructor requires more than performing the particular task a person applies for — e.g., teaching a class or facilitating a workshop. We also ask members to invest time and energy in reflecting on your experience at the prison and supporting others’ efforts to do so. You will have a chance to learn more about our expectations during the application process. All EJP roles require submission of a CV and application form, a group interview, and a reference check. (For-credit course instructors must submit cover letters instead of application forms.) The group interview is a good opportunity to ask questions about the program you are interested in. You are welcome to apply to more than one program.

After an applicant has been offered and accepted a position with EJP, they begin two processes: orientation into EJP and clearance from IDOC. New instructors will receive a general orientation to EJP and a program-specific one. They'll also attend training from DCC and learn about prison policies and regulations.

The clearance process is a weeks-long procedure through which EJP seeks approval from IDOC to allow particular individuals to regularly enter the prison. As instructors go through the clearance process, we encourage them to start attending EJP events and getting to know the program.

After receiving clearance, instructors officially become "Education Justice Faculty Affiliates." This is a lifelong designation, in part because there are lifelong conditions that apply to having once received clearance from IDOC.

● Working at the Prison

Teaching incarcerated students can be rewarding, challenging, and transformative. It can also bring up a range of emotional responses, including anger, grief, and much more. We ask all EJP instructors, whatever form of teaching they engage in, to participate in activities that will help them process their experiences, make sense of the larger structural issues related to incarceration, and support others.

We encourage EJP instructors to discuss learning and pedagogy with one another. These discussions, within a community of teachers who care deeply about creating critical learning environments, can support professional growth and better teaching even outside of the prison.

● Conduct

The Education Justice Project operates at DCC with the permission of IDOC. All EJP instructors are asked to remember that we are guests at the prison.

DCC policies include observing the dress code (no scarves, pants only, modest attire); and restricting physical contact between instructors and students to handshakes.

EJP's policies for instructors require that they do not ask students what they are serving time for, do not receive written materials from students that are not academic in nature, and behave toward students and one another in a professional, respectful manner, bearing in mind EJP's Group Commitments (see **page 40**) as a guide.

EJP instructors have the right to participate in outside organizations, groups, and protests that align with their values. If anyone was ever banned from DCC for participation in another group, we would fight that decision and encourage the university to back us in that fight. To date, this has never happened.

● Reviews

At the end of each semester, each EJP instructor is asked to participate in a self-evaluation process. The review provides an opportunity for instructors to discuss challenges and receive coaching. It also allows them to consider whether they'd like to explore other opportunities within EJP.

It frequently happens that an EJP member will identify a need within EJP and offer to fill it. We welcome that sort of initiative. When the quality of an EJP instructor's work is in question, their coordinator will provide feedback, offer suggestions for growth, and explore transitioning from the program if that seems appropriate.

● Leaving

There are EJP faculty affiliates throughout the United States, as well as in Taiwan, India, Germany, England, Mexico, and other countries. We try to stay connected to former EJP instructors through periodic mailings, BambooHR, the EJP newsletter, the student newsletter, and fundraising activities. When an instructor leaves EJP, we invite them to dedicate a book of their choice to the EJP Community Library at DCC and to inscribe a bookplate that will be placed within the volume.

An instructor's status as an Education Justice Faculty Affiliate remains even after they step away from active work with EJP. This means all instructors must continue to honor the conditions associated with clearance. For example, instructors are unlikely to get permission to visit individuals incarcerated at DCC, though this restriction seems to be loosening.

● How You Can Get Involved in EJP's College-in-Prison Program

We are accepting applications until **November 15, 2025** from individuals who want to participate in any of what we call our "on-site" programs in 2026-27. You can access application forms on our [website](#).

2. College-in-Prison Program at Decatur Correctional Center

It is possible that we will be able to start programming at Decatur, a minimum security women's facility, during the 2025-26 academic year. We are still negotiating our agreement with the Illinois Department of Corrections. Stay tuned for possible opportunities to become involved at that location!



B. Off-Site Programs

1. Reentry Resource Program

The effects of incarceration do not end when someone leaves prison. This is reentry – the challenging, often frightening period of time when an incarcerated person is released and encounters the need to relearn or regain employment, housing, healthy relationships, technology, and more.

There is no set amount of time in which someone is considered to be “reentering” society. Some may take weeks to adjust, others months or years. The scars of incarceration can last a lifetime.

● Mission

The mission of the Reentry Resource Program (RRP) is to provide individuals and communities impacted by the trauma of incarceration with tools for self-empowerment, primarily through reentry guides. Our work is rooted in the experiences of currently and formerly incarcerated people. We believe that punitive incarceration damages our society, and that access to basic needs like housing, healthcare, and employment strengthens communities. As such, we assist in dismantling the carceral state by developing civic literacy for the formerly incarcerated and their support networks, and by advocating for change in the criminal legal system.

● Reentry Resources

RRP produces three yearly guides, two for people being released from prison and another for people facing deportation. All guides are published in English and Spanish, in print and [online](#).

Mapping Your Future: A Guide to Successful Reentry provides information and support for people returning to Illinois communities. We also produce a national reentry guide.

A New Path: A Guide to the Challenges and Opportunities after Deportation offers guidance and support for people facing deportation to Mexico and Central America. Like *Mapping Your Future*, it provides information on housing, employment, and relationships, but also addresses changes that people being deported will face, from the confusion of arriving in a new country to cultural encounters.

The RRP team also maintains a searchable reentry resources website at reentryillinois.net.

● Outreach

RRP’s work includes efforts to promote education about issues surrounding reentry and deportation in the community. The team has expanded its outreach efforts, working with organizations in other states to produce state-specific reentry resources and producing a national reentry guide.

● Organization

Members of RRP participate in the following tasks related to producing and distributing the guides:

- **Research:** Interviewing formerly incarcerated individuals and service providers, and researching laws and services.

- **Revision:** Writing new sections of the guides or updating, editing, and fact-checking existing ones.
 - **Evaluation:** Members identify priority areas for improvement, based on user feedback.
 - **Production and distribution:** Members in this role help design and print the guide before distributing it as widely as possible.
 - **Fundraising:** Since the guides are offered free of charge, fundraising and grant writing to secure funds for printing and distribution are essential.
- **How You Can Get Involved with RRP**
- RRP accepts applications from prospective members on a rolling basis. You can access the application form via our [website](#).

2. Prison-to-Gown Pathway

The Prison-to-Gown Pathway is EJP's newest initiative, launched in 2021. The program seeks to support students at the University of Illinois who have interacted with the criminal justice system in their path to graduating.

EJP was awarded a grant to start this program by the Joyce Foundation, a private foundation based in Chicago.

The initiative operates from an understanding that most institutions of higher education are not geared to address the specific challenges that formerly incarcerated students face. By taking specific measures to address those challenges, the program will increase formerly incarcerated students' ability to focus on coursework and improve their likelihood of completing a degree.

● Pathway Timeline

In its first year, the program focused on learning and research, identifying the challenges and struggles formerly incarcerated people experience at U of I and exploring ways of supporting them. Taking the lead from other university campuses with similar programs, and by soliciting feedback from people with first-hand experience, members of the Prison-to-Gown Program have identified several major areas of concern, including housing, technology, campus culture, academic assistance, and counseling.

Now, in its fourth year, we expect to pilot services to a small group of students. Those services might include peer support, targeted programming, and/or a monthly stipend.

● How You Can Get Involved with PGP

The Prison-to-Gown Pathway is not accepting members at this time. If you would like more information, email pathway@educationjustice.net.

3. Policy & Research Team

EJP is housed within the University of Illinois, a top-tier research university and a public land grant institution. Our campus is committed to promoting equity, providing access, and contributing to the public good through research activity. In line with these commitments, EJP seeks to be a valued thought leader and active contributor in policy and research discussions related to higher education in prison, reentry, and equity on college campuses.

● Mission & Theory of Change

The mission of EJP's Policy and Research Division is to educate and equip our students, members, campus, and community with knowledge, skills, and resources to produce research and practice civic engagement that promotes a more humane and just society. By doing so, we aim to support the development, implementation, and monitoring of policies that are:

- Evidence-based and equitable;
- Informed by individuals and communities impacted by incarceration;
- Related to higher education in prison, reentry, and other relevant issues.

Because we believe that punitive incarceration damages our society, we seek to promote policies, practices, and dialogues that:

- Challenge the dominant narrative around incarceration;
- Mitigate the impacts of incarceration;
- Support the creation of more humane and just responses to harm and violence;
- Allow HEP programs to flourish only as long as prisons exist.

● Policy

There are several components of EJP's policy work, including local (on-site and off-site), statewide, and national initiatives. As we build out this work, we aim to:

- Educate around the need for policy change in Illinois and at the University of Illinois;
- Produce materials and host events to support policy makers' understanding of the role and value of higher education in prison;
- Create models and toolkits for other states and universities that want to support systems-involved individuals.

● Policy Discussion Group

EJP's Policy and Research Director meets monthly with EJP students to educate them on legislative and other policy making processes while providing them with resources and opportunities to conduct in-depth research and policy analysis on a wide range of policy areas. We invite legislators, policy makers, and other state officials to meet with the group, thus centering student perspectives and giving legislators the valuable opportunity to expand their understanding of criminal justice issues.

● Campus Scan Research

The campus scan is an examination of the policies and practices of units and offices on the UIUC campus with which formerly incarcerated individuals are likely to have contact. EJP is conducting this audit to identify the challenges systems-involved people face when pursuing higher education and/or employment opportunities at our university. This research will determine where supports exist and identify how EJP can best support our campus to be inclusive and welcoming.

● Freedom to Learn

Founded by EJP in 2019, Freedom to Learn (IL) is a statewide campaign that calls for clear and fair policies that allow incarcerated individuals to pursue their studies free from undue interference or interruption of academic and intellectual pursuits.

● Research and Scholarship

We encourage EJP members to produce scholarship that supports our mission and otherwise serves the interests of the program, our students, and society. Scholarship can take a variety of forms: presenting at conferences; writing articles in peer-reviewed journals; producing pieces for Urbana-Champaign-Danville newspapers; writing for the EJP blog; publishing poetry and fiction; editing and producing EJP collections, etc.

The ethics of creating and disseminating knowledge that incorporates the voices of incarcerated individuals are not straightforward. Some of the issues are addressed in EJP's Research Policy, which you can find in the Appendix of this handbook on **page 42**. We strongly encourage non-incarcerated EJP members to reflect on the potential for exploitation in such writing, and to consider co-authoring scholarship with interested EJP students as one way of mitigating such problems.

● Research Group

EJP's Research Group meets monthly via zoom and provides a supportive and encouraging forum for non-incarcerated members to share works in progress. This group is open to members and non-members of EJP.

● EJP Publications

EJP maintains a bibliography of EJP publications and presentations to share knowledge around incarceration and reentry. If you have previously published or presented work that relates to or grows out of your experience with EJP, please let us know, we would like to help share news of your publication.

● How You Can Get Involved in Policy & Research

Approximately 15 team members contribute to our team's work in various ways, depending on their interests and skills. Examples include:

- Serving as an EJP representative to relevant coalitions and campaigns (e.g., the Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison and the Freedom to Learn Campaign).
- Participating in the design and implementation of tools and trainings to support EJP's policy initiatives.
- Monitoring legislation and policy developments that impact EJP's work.
- Collecting and analyzing data/research related to ongoing examination of policies and practices that impact formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Serving as a Policy & Research intern. Interns have the opportunity to visit Springfield to visit the legislature and, hopefully, to visit Danville Correctional Center.

For more information about the team and to explore becoming involved, please contact EJP Policy and Research Director, Ashton Klekamp at policy@educationjustice.net



C. Technical and Support Teams

● Data Stewardship Team

EJP's data stewardship team uses a range of methods and approaches to ensure the organization's data is accessible, usable, trustworthy, and secure.

Contact: Sonia Navale, Head of the Data Steward Team, snavale2@illinois.edu

● Graphic Design Team

EJP's graphic design team is responsible for the important task of making the information related to EJP accessible and easy to understand. The team takes text and photographs and arranges them with an eye toward aesthetics and strong organization. The result is EJP documents that are informative, visually pleasing, and easy to navigate.

Contact: Jamarri Nix, Head of the Graphic Design Team, jnix2@illinois.edu.

● Communications

Our communications division includes EJP's social media team, which works to share EJP news and stories to a wider audience around the country and around the world. The team's posts on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn provide social media followers with important updates such as EJP job postings, new programs, collaborations, and calls for entry, as well as information about incarceration and its impacts on individuals and society.

Contact: Maddie Sneddon, Communications Coordinator, maddies2@illinois.edu

● How You Can Get Involved with Our Technical and Support Teams

We post position announcements on our website, EJP this Week, and the student job board when there are part-time openings on our technical teams.

Growing in EJP

Growing in EJP

If you're currently a member of EJP, we encourage you to deepen and enrich your involvement by participating in the activities below. Events are listed in the EJP Calendar, EJP this Week, Member Announcements, and BambooHR.

Attend EJP Lunches

EJP typically hosts weekday lunches in our office. Check our monthly newsletter or EJP calendar for information on when and where. All EJP members are welcome, as are interested friends. Lunches are a good way to meet other people involved with EJP, engage in stimulating conversation about criminal justice, and find out about happenings within the various EJP programs.

Participate in Town Hall Meetings

These gatherings allow us to discuss matters of governance and administration. Questions, comments, and concerns about EJP can be brought to these meetings. (Questions or concerns regarding a particular program should be raised first with the coordinator(s) of that program.) The meetings offer opportunities to learn about ways to become involved with EJP governance, e.g. by joining a committee.

Sign up for Leadership Training

Attending leadership training events is a great way to develop skills that can be applied to other activities you're involved with. We provide such opportunities to enhance the quality of EJP programs and governance, and as a way of thanking our members for all they do for EJP. Leadership training opportunities will be posted on Member Announcements and BambooHR.

Attend or Volunteer for Campus and Community Events

EJP frequently hosts public events (e.g., speakers, workshops, films, and conferences). We strongly encourage EJP members to attend such events because we believe that a deeper understanding of incarceration and reentry will enrich your involvement with EJP, and perhaps prompt you to want to get involved in other initiatives around justice and equity. Go to the EJP calendar, accessible on the homepage of the EJP website, to find event times, dates and locations. Events are also advertised on "EJP This Week," our weekly electronic newsletter.

Coordinate an EJP Program

Most EJP programs are directed by a coordinator, who is responsible for scheduling, training members, overseeing program evaluation, and promoting the program. Coordinators play an essential role within EJP, and serving as a coordinator is a valued way to contribute to our work while developing your leadership skills.

Open coordinator positions are listed on the EJP website and over BambooHR.

Join the Advisory Council

You can learn more about the current Advisory Council members on our [website](#). We accept nominations for this body each Fall. The current nominations chair is Greg Jahiel: g_jahiel@yahoo.com.

Follow Us Online!

Website: educationjustice.net

Instagram: [@ejp_at_il](https://www.instagram.com/ejp_at_il)

Facebook: [@educationjustice](https://www.facebook.com/educationjustice)

LinkedIn: [Education Justice Project | LinkedIn](#)

Travel Award

Twice each year, EJP issues five awards of up to \$500 each for EJP members to attend conferences on topics related to EJP's mission. Ashton Klekamp, our Policy & Research Director, coordinates this funding opportunity. It is not necessary to present a paper to receive an award. For more information, please contact Ashton Klekamp at ahoselto@illinois.edu.

Donate

The Education Justice Project depends mightily on individual donors. Please consider supporting our work through a financial contribution



Appendices

EJP Group Commitments

To create a healthy climate for teaching, learning, and growing, we ask EJP members to observe the following group commitments, or to use them as a basis for developing your own occasion-specific group commitments.

1. Respect individuals' opinions and feelings and their willingness to share them.
2. Use "I" statements, e.g., "I think..." or "I believe..."
3. Realize that everyone's experiences differ and try meeting other people where they are.
4. Practice active listening. Listen for understanding, not for judgment.
5. Speak only for yourself and not as a representative of a particular group, e.g., "Latinos believe..."
6. Avoid absolute language, e.g., "All Black men know..." or "It always happens that..." or "everyone knows..."
7. Keep the content of confidential discussions confidential.
8. Don't be afraid to remind others of these group commitments.
9. Disagreements and conflicts are okay.
10. Don't attack speakers for their beliefs or opinions.
11. Asking questions is highly encouraged.
12. Be honest.
13. You have the right not to answer questions or to not offer your opinion.
14. Ask "Are there any additional group commitments we should implement?"

EJP Policies

Language

It is EJP's policy to refer to EJP students as students. Other acceptable terms include: incarcerated people, incarcerated individuals, people, EJP students, and Illinois undergrads.

It's our policy to ask members to say "correctional officer" (CO) rather than "prison guard" when referring to prison security staff, since that's what many of them prefer.

We appreciate that for people who are accustomed to using other words to describe people in prison, it can be hard to adjust to using new terms. If you refer to

EJP students as "inmates," "convicts," or the like, it will likely elicit disapproving looks or surprise from other EJP members. That can be uncomfortable. If this happens, please know that we're not trying to silence you or condemn you; it's simply that within EJP it's unusual to hear those terms.

A healthy way of handling such situations is to address them when they happen. It's fine to stop a conversation and ask, "Did I use the preferred term?" or "I can't remember what the handbook says about this...." We realize we're all still learning.

Avoid Titles

We respectfully request that instructors not ask students to address them as "Dr." Not all EJP instructors have a PhD. We want to avoid creating a sense of hierarchy among our instructors.

"Professor" is also an appropriate title for instructors, as it is gender-neutral and does not imply the attainment of any particular qualification.

Accessibility

Please consider using the following language, or language like it, when you advertise activities and events related to EJP.

"If you will need disability-related accommodations in order to participate in this program/event, or have special dietary needs, please contact [insert appropriate name here]. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs. ADA-accessible doors are located on the west side

of the building. We are reachable by the Yellow, Navy, Blue, Silver, Brown, and Illini bus lines. Our nearby bus stops are Transit Plaza, Wright & Chalmers, and Armory & Wright."

You may also consider adding the following language to your email signature when conducting EJP business: "If you need any accommodations to fully participate in meetings or events with me, please email me at [enter your email address here]."

1. Research Policy

Note: This policy was written by members of the Research Group in March 2014 and revised in July 2014. Further revisions, proposed by EJP alumni, were approved by a group of EJP alumni at their regular meeting on August 9, 2015.

EJP's mission is to build a model college-in-prison program that demonstrates the positive impacts of higher education upon incarcerated people, their families, the communities from which they come, the host institution, and society as a whole. In pursuit of this mission, EJP members are encouraged to produce scholarship about EJP.

Given the power dynamics inherent in the researcher-participant relationship, this policy aims to protect EJP students and the integrity of the program. It does so by outlining protocols for the approval of research projects and promoting best practices for ethical, reflective, and participatory research.

● Who is this policy for?

This policy is for any EJP member, including those with clearance who work inside the prison, those without clearance who work our FACE programs, and incarcerated EJP students.

● Who can access EJP students for research purposes?

EJP members (instructors, students, and others engaged in our work) are encouraged to produce scholarship for both public and scholarly forums. EJP does not provide access to Danville Correctional Center or EJP students to those who are not already involved in EJP.

We encourage prospective researchers to consider how the restrictions and isolation of the prison context might challenge their ability to build relationships based upon professionalism, integrity, and trust. We view research that enlists incarcerated individuals merely as interviewees and respondents to be further isolating. For this reason, we encourage instructors and other on-site members to create opportunities for EJP students to be co-authors in research and writing projects. Such work could include co-authoring a text, giving students opportunities to author individual papers or particular sections of a larger project, and creating opportunities for students to provide feedback on the scholarship at hand.

● What should I do first?

If you are (or are about to start) researching and writing about EJP, you should inform Ashton Klekamp, the Policy & Research Director, who can connect you with others who are doing similar work, schedule opportunities for you to share your work with the Research Group, promote your work by adding any citations to EJP's Online list of publications and presentations, and, if you are interested in co-authoring with students, arrange for call passes and meeting space at DCC.

In addition, if you are preparing a proposal for the Institutional Review Board, please see VI, VII, and VIII below. Before you submit it, share your proposal with the EJP director and with the research coordinator before you submit it so they can provide feedback. Once your IRB is approved, please email a copy to the research coordinator.

Please note that you will not be able to gain IRB approval to work on an EJP-related project without the support (and, ultimately, the signature) of the EJP director.

The director is unlikely to approve any projects that

do not:

- a. Employ research methods that provide EJP students an opportunity to participate at some level in research design, data-gathering, and analysis of data.
- b. Demonstrate commitment to scrutinizing power relationships at all stages of the research.
- c. Demonstrate value to incarcerated EJP students or incarcerated individuals more generally.

● **Can I contact EJP alumni for research purposes?**

You will not need the signature of the EJP director to contact individuals who have been released, as would be required for interviewing EJP students. However, we ask that researchers not seek to interview released individuals simply to circumvent this requirement.

Please be aware that our alumni ask that prospective researchers be clear about the following:

- a. In whose interest is the research being undertaken? Can the researcher demonstrate how the research will have value to the individuals being interviewed or otherwise support their interests?
- b. Are researchers' relationships with their proposed respondents of a parasitic nature? Are they building their professional careers on the backs of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people's lives?
- c. Is the researcher taking active steps to minimize power imbalances between researcher and respondents?

● **Will EJP screen or censor my writing?**

No.

However, we recommend that you share your writing with the Research Group in order to get feedback. The Research Group offers people who are writing about EJP or related topics (e.g., prison education, mass incarceration, violence, crime, prison reform) an opportunity to get feedback on their work from interested peers in a variety of disciplines and areas. Presenters and group members meet monthly over dinner to discuss drafts of conference papers, strategize responses to reviewer suggestions, brainstorm ideas for dissertations, etc. New members are always welcome to present or give feedback. We also ask that you allow relevant EJP personnel to fact check your piece.

However, the director or research coordinator will not screen or censor your writing. We do ask that you go into the research and publication process with your eyes open. If you write something critical of DCC or the Department of Corrections and a state official reads it, there is always a chance that it may affect your status at the prison or EJP's standing with DCC. This statement is not meant to silence you; it is just a reminder to be aware of the potential impacts of publication.

● **What kind of scholarship might I produce?**

Scholarship on EJP includes the following:

- Reflections on your own experiences with EJP (e.g., Agnieszka Tuszynska’s blog post for IPRH; Ramon Cabrales’ article for the Illinois TESOL newsletter; instructors’ talks for the “What I’ve Learned from Teaching in a Prison” panels at IPRH)
- Collaborative research and writing with EJP students (e.g., Anke Pinkert’s “Radical Teacher” article with EJP students Michael Brawn, Jose Cabrales, and Gregory Donatelli; the conference paper by Maggie Kainulainen and three students, Emmett Sanders, C.R. Hardaway, and Robert Becker, that theorizes EJP’s writing center initiative).
- Interpretive, qualitative, and/or quantitative data collection and analyses (see, e.g., Patrick Berry’s article in the journal *Pedagogy*; the evaluation team’s survey of EJP students).

See #7 for guidance on whether your project will need to be approved by the Institutional Review Board.

● **What is the Institutional Review Board (IRB)?**

Approval from UIUC’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a requirement for institutions receiving federal funding. More specifically, the IRB must approve any research involving living humans from whom “(1) data “through intervention or interaction with the individual or (2) identifiable private information” (“Human Subject,” IRB Glossary) are obtained.

This applies to research that is “conducted by any faculty, staff, student, employee or agent of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), or otherwise conducted at or sponsored by the UIUC” (IRB Investigator Handbook Part 1a).

To receive IRB approval, researchers must complete a protocol describing their study (including how participants are recruited and selected, consent obtained, and data collected and secured). The IRB is ultimately concerned with the three key ethical principles of the 1979 Belmont Report: “respect for persons” (participants must give informed consent, and additional safeguards must in place to protect people like those who are incarcerated), “beneficence” (researchers must seek to maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms, and effort is made to protect the privacy of participants and confidentiality of data), and “justice” (selection of participants needs to be equitable, and the “burdens and benefits of research are equitably distributed,” Bailey, n.p.).

● Do I need to get my project approved by the IRB?

- a. If you are engaged in a project that involves collecting data from living people, such as through observations and field notes, surveys, or interviews, you do need approval from the IRB.
- b. If you are reflecting on your own experiences with EJP, you do not need approval from the IRB.
- c. Creative works and community outreach, like poetry, blog posts, and journalism (e.g. an Amplifier article) do not require IRB if they do not involve data collection.
- d. Simply co-authoring with EJP students or instructors does not require IRB approval, when all authors are reflecting on, and representing, their own experiences. For an example of this, see "[Prisoners Teaching ESL](#)," an article by thirteen students and instructors involved in Language Partners. IRB approval was not necessary for this scholarship.

● How do I get IRB approval?

You are responsible for getting approval from the IRB.

If you need IRB approval, you have three options:

- Conduct research under EJP's current IRB
- Submit an addendum to EJP's IRB
- Submit your own IRB proposal

To discuss your options, contact Rebecca Ginsburg, EJP director. Graduate students should work closely with their own advisors. Whichever option you choose, you will need to complete Online training modules required by the IRB.

● What are best practices of researching people involved in EJP?

Anonymity v. Authorship: Students and instructors have a right to be anonymous as well as to claim authorship for their experiences. For qualitative research that includes students' stories, you may want to include language on the consent form that allows students to elect that their real names be used instead of automatically granting pseudonyms.

If students wish to remain anonymous, but might be identifiable to those who live or work at DCC, you will not be able to bring your work to the prison to share. For instance, one EJP member gave all EJP students pseudonyms but then was unable to share the fruits of the research inside DCC because the students, even with pseudonyms, were still identifiable.

Language to Describe EJP Students: We ask that researchers be thoughtful about how incarcerated students are described (e.g., convict v. inmate v. student or incarcerated student). (See the EJP Style Guide for more detail.)

Resources on Participatory Action Research in Prison. PDFs are available.

Fine, M., Roberts, R. A., Torre, M. E., & Upegui, D. (2001). "Participatory Action Research Behind Bars." *Critical Psychology*, 2, 145–157.

Jewkes, Y. (2012). "Autoethnography and Emotion as Intellectual Resources." *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(1), 63–75.

Torre, M. E., Fine, M., Boudin, K., Bowen, I., Clark, J., Hylton, D., ... Upegui, D. (2001). "A Space for Co-constructing Counter Stories Under Surveillance." *Critical Psychology*, 4, 149–166.

Other Recommended Resources

Brydon-Miller, M. (2012). "Addressing the ethical challenges of community-based research." *Teaching Ethics*, 12(2), 157–162.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, L. S. (Eds.) (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (4th ed)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Kirsch, G. E. (1997). "Multi-vocal texts and interpretive responsibility." *College English*, 59(2), 191–202.
("Multi-vocal texts, then, can easily reassert, however unwittingly, old forms of domination, such as speaking for and despite others" (p. 184).)

Kirsch, G. E. (2005). "Friendship, friendliness, and feminist inquiry." *Signs*, 30, 2163–2172. ("[R]esearchers who strive for the benefits of close, interactive relations with participants must accept the concomitant risks" (p. 2163).

Mertens, D. M., & Ginsberg, P. E. (Eds.) (2009). *The Handbook of Social Research Ethics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Mortensen, P., & Kirsch, G. (1996). *Ethics and representation in qualitative studies of literacy*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Paris, D., & Fisher, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

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Bailey, L. R. (n.d.). History and ethical principles. CITI Training Module. [https:// www.citiprogram.org/](https://www.citiprogram.org/)

Shakespeare, T. (1996) "Rules of Engagement: Doing Disability Research." *Disability and Society*, 11, 1, 115–21.



2. Alumni and Family Contact Policy

While these guidelines are written from the perspective of outside EJP members, we ask that everyone involved with EJP please take responsibility for following and upholding them. They are especially relevant for EJP instructors and EJP alumni. They apply with special force to individuals on parole. EJP's ability to continue working with IDOC depends on strict observation of these guidelines. Thank you.

"Alumni" refers to formerly incarcerated EJP students who have been released. "Family members" refers to family members of active EJP students. "Friends" refers to close friends of active EJP students. "EJP member" refers to non-incarcerated EJP staff and personnel, whether paid or unpaid, irrespective of their clearance status.

- EJP members should meet with EJP alumni, family members, and friends, whether face-to-face or by phone, for professional purposes only. Examples of such purposes include: organizing EJP-sponsored events and activities, attending educational programs (e.g. a campus lecture), and interactions that form part of the EJP members' professional responsibilities (e.g. writing a letter of recommendation for an EJP alumnus).
- If contact beyond the above occurs, the EJP member should inform the EJP office immediately.
- The EJP office offers some reentry support services, such as setting up an email account, accessing U of I transcripts, and helping with college applications. Please do not offer to assist individual alumni upon their release. Instead, refer them to the EJP office. If you have information or connections that might be of particular use to a specific EJP alumnus, you are welcome to work with the EJP office in helping that alumnus access

those resources. This policy is motivated by several concerns. We want:

- all EJP alumni to receive similar reentry support in a fair and transparent manner
 - to ensure that EJP members do not feel any pressure to assist with reentry
 - to make sure that alumni get the best possible reentry support, from experienced staff
 - importantly, to comply with IDOC restrictions against fraternization.
 - no loaning or taking money, cars, subleasing houses, commercial ventures, etc., between EJP alumni, family members, friends of current EJP students, family members of EJP alumni, or friends of EJP alumni and EJP members.
- For those with DCC clearance, do not engage in casual sharing of family news at the prison or in any other behavior that might give the impression that EJP alumni-member interactions are not controlled and professional. Also, please respect EJP student privacy.
 - Don't share information about specific, identifiable family members with EJP students, non-EJP friends or colleagues, campus students, or anyone else without permission from the family member.
 - Do not engage in personal (i.e. not professional) written correspondence with family members or alumni. This applies to all forms of correspondence, including email, texting, postal mail, and other. If you receive a personal letter, please report it to the EJP office immediately.
 - Do not 'friend' EJP students on Facebook. Please be aware that IDOC staff patrol social media accounts.

3. Conflict Resolution & Grievance Procedures

Below is the draft policy as of **3/23/2016**. Please consider it binding until further notice.

● Brief Overview

The Education Justice Project encourages a culture of mutual care and support for all members. “Members” in this context includes incarcerated EJP students, EJP staff, instructors, program volunteers, and all who have applied to and been accepted to EJP programs. In addition, individuals who have not gone through a formal admission process but who are involved with EJP are covered by this policy. It is not necessary to be employed by the University of Illinois or a student at the University of Illinois to be covered.

As a unit of the Department of Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership (EPOL) within the College of Education (COE) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, EJP members are covered by the University of Illinois’ College of Education’s Grievance Policy as detailed by the College of Education Bylaws.

As a reflection of EJP’s mission and values relating to gentleness, openness, and En Lak’esh (mutual respect and recognition), EJP members may also make use of restorative circle processes to address grievances and conflict among themselves.

Apart from the COE Grievance Policy and restorative processes for addressing grievances, we encourage members to make use of additional resources available through the University of Illinois and outlined in this document. Wherever possible, EJP encourages members to share any concerns or grievances with their coordinators, who have direct responsibility for managing each EJP program, as a first step.

● Reporting a Grievance

The Education Justice Project’s Grievance Committee is a resource available to all EJP members. Grievances can be reported directly to EJP Grievance Committee member Adi Kuchibhotla at akuchibh@uga.edu. Please note that members can bring concerns to their coordinator, their coordinator’s supervisor, and the EJP director.

While EJP promotes a restorative approach where possible, some grievances or conflicts may warrant different kinds of support.

Members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the resources outlined here to assist with resolving a conflict or addressing a grievance and select the pathway that they deem most appropriate or desirable. The following outlines procedures for accessing the COE Grievance Policy, restorative processes, and additional resources accessible to members. If you have additional questions, please contact the EJP Grievance Committee. Obviously, those subject to IDOC must employ prison procedures.

● COE Grievance Policy

EJP members can report a grievance to the College of Education's College Grievance Committee as outlined by the COE Bylaws. The College Grievance Committee receives reports of grievances and keeps a record of the committee's investigations, deliberations, and recommendations to be forwarded to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Any matter coming before the CGC shall be held confidential unless the grievant and the committee agree otherwise. To file a grievance, the student shall submit a letter to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs stating the reasons for the grievance and the remedy that is sought.

● Restorative Circles

Restorative circles are dialogic processes that bring together those who have been affected by conflict or an incident and are usually held in a circle format, providing every person with an opportunity to be heard and express feelings in a safe environment. All participants engage in dialogue with the aim of mutual understanding, community accountability, and repairing any harm that has been done. All those impacted by the harm have the choice of participating voluntarily. All participants will have initial meetings with the circle facilitator(s) to understand the process before a circle takes place. To request a restorative circle, contact the EJP Grievance Committee to make arrangements.

Additional Resources

EPOL Department Head

EJP members can address concerns directly to Lisa Monda-Amaya, Office of Strategic Initiatives by written letter.

Lisa Monda-Amaya
College of Education
1310 S. 6th St., Champaign, IL 61820

Office for Access and Equity

The Office for Access and Equity is a campus unit that facilitates compliance in the areas of diversity, equity, and access. To submit a report of discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct, or to inquire about a reasonable accommodation,

Contact the Office for Access & Equity at
614 E. Daniel Street, Suite 303
Champaign, Illinois 61820

Strategic Objectives 2022–25

Every three years, EJP’s Strategic Planning Committee, a subcommittee of the EJP Advisory Council, develops our next set of strategic objectives. In between, it assesses our progress and determines whether any changes should be made.

The Strategic Planning Committee met in May 2022 with external facilitator Jen Knapp. After considering our previous strategic objectives, the current needs and interests of the program, and the larger context for EJP’s work, it set the following four objectives.

We intend for these objectives to drive our decision-making and resource-allocation over the next three years. This process will be successful if all EJP members are aware of the objectives and leaders are made accountable for their fulfillment.

1. Continue Excellence in College-in-Prison Programming

Building on the success of our college-in-prison program, we will continue to evolve and deliver an exceptional higher education program at Danville Correctional Center. This includes strategic development of each of our 12 programs at the prison, responding to the evolving needs of EJP students. We will build strong relationships with other educational institutions at Danville, centering the needs of students in these collaborations. We will continue to offer support to students transitioning out of prison, in order to assist their continued success in college and life, and commit to exploring innovative ways of supporting them. Through ongoing reflection and systematic evaluation among its stakeholders, EJP will ensure that our educational programming meets the needs of students and serves as an exemplar of quality prison higher education.

2. Develop a Continuum of Post-Release Resources and Initiatives

In recognition of the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals who seek to pursue their educational goals and build healthy lives upon release, we will continue to develop reentry resources and initiatives that fill existing gaps in the reentry landscape and that grow out of our engagement with incarcerated scholars. These include the Prison-to-Gown Initiative that provides pathways to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, an expanded scholarship program, and a strong reentry resource website. Acknowledging that deportation constitutes part of the American carceral system, we will continue to develop our deportation guide and turn it into a national resource. We will explore the feasibility of developing or supporting others’ efforts to create a reentry warmline. We will advocate for best practices in reentry guide production and support other jurisdictions’ efforts to create excellent guides. We will continue to explore what it means to produce reentry resources in an abolitionist spirit.

3. Design and Become a Campus Center

Institutional stability, greater visibility, and a secure funding stream will support EJP's short- and long-term planning and, accordingly, our ability to act proactively and ambitiously. To that end, we will maintain our efforts to become a campus center. This step will also put us in a strong position to expand EJP's impact on campus, especially on undergraduate education. We will continue to develop strong relationships with a range of external funders who will become committed partners of EJP's work. We will strive to become a model center: mission-driven, committed to inclusion, racial equity, and justice, and dedicated to building a sense of community and purpose.

4. Provide Support and Assistance at National Scale

EJP seeks to be a valued partner and thought leader for higher education in prison, reentry resources, and other aspects of our work. We will seed other programs, be a driver in policy work at the state level, provide technical assistance, host convenings, and develop and share evaluation protocols. In doing so, we will continue to amplify the voices of EJP scholars and alumni. EJP has a role to play in the current discussions around prison higher education, reentry, and equity on college campuses. Our students, alumni, and instructors can offer critical, powerful perspectives on these matters. They are in an ideal position to generate scholarship that adds critical nuance and hard data. This is an important time to be active contributors to the national conversation about the value of education for incarcerated individuals and how it benefits our society.

Partner Organizations

EJP engages in research and policy that supports the implementation of thoughtful, evidence-based, ethical policies related to higher education in prison, reentry, and related matters. Much of this ever-expanding work, which we anticipate will create more opportunities for EJP members to engage, is conducted in partnership with other Illinois-based and national initiatives, such as the following:

A **Illinois Coalition of Higher Education in Prison (IL-CHEP)**

Founded in 2016, IL-CHEP is a coalition made up of educators, students, activists, universities, and others who work toward bringing higher education to Illinois prisons and jails as well as a safer, more just society.

B **Freedom to Learn Campaign of Illinois (FTL)**

Founded by EJP in 2019, FTL is now a part of IL-CHEP. It advocates for statewide policies that support higher education in prison programs and keep them free from interference, censorship, and interruption.

C **The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison**

The Alliance is a national organization that advocates for the expansion of higher education in prison by supporting instructors, programs, and students. The Alliance operates a prison education ListServ that you can join by filling out this form.

D **Illinois Justice Project (ILJP)**

The ILJP advances policies and practices that reduce violence, decrease prison recidivism, and make the justice system more equitable.

E **Illinois Prison Project**

Through education, advocacy, and direct representation of people incarcerated in Illinois prisons, the Illinois Prison Project works for incarcerated people and their families and helps to create a more humane, just world.

F **Restore Justice Illinois**

Restore Justice Illinois engages in direct legislative advocacy around sentencing, prison conditions, and related issues in Illinois.



Education Justice Project
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217.300.5150