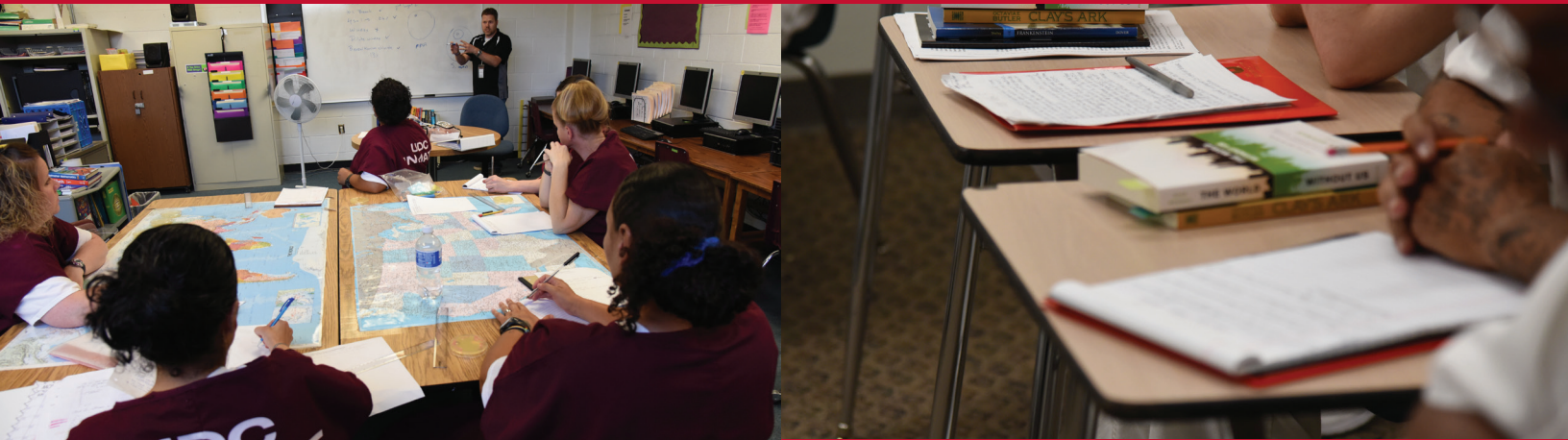


University of Utah Prison Education Project



Letter From the Director - We're Growing!

The 2018-2019 academic year stands to be a busy and exciting one for UPEP as we build off of the momentum from our first year of on-site programming. Our students are stretching their boundaries in the classroom and we're making strides to formally expand the organization, too. Dr. Cindy Fierros, Lecturer for the Department of Gender Studies, began her role as Co-Director this fall and Sarah Manley, who works for the Disability Law Center, took on the dynamic role of Program Coordinator. We've created additional undergraduate internships to support students and faculty at the prison and will be hosting our first series of events on campus to promote dialogue about transformative justice and the role of higher education in prison.

This summer our students took Introduction to Microbiology in Timpanogos and Creative Writing in Wasatch, the latter supported by a grant from the Utah Humanities Council. This semester our students are taking BIOL 2325 Introduction to Anatomy and Physiology in Timpanogos and ANTH 1010 Cultural Anthropology in Wasatch. The students continue to develop student advisory councils in each prison and we are slowly building up our libraries.

Earlier this year UPEP received a grant from the Sorenson Legacy Foundation to build two computer labs in the prison. I am happy to report that we are making great progress! We are still seeking volunteers to assist with technology and software, and looking for additional equipment for two Computer Literacy and Digital Media Labs. Please connect with us should you want to make a donation.

Many from the UPEP team will be attending the National Conference on Higher Education in Prison in November, sponsored by the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison. This is an opportunity to connect with peer college-in-prison programs across the country and learn more about vibrant prison-university partnerships. Stay tuned for pictures and reflections in the spring.

Finally, it is with enthusiasm that I share UPEP began implementing its first year evaluation. With support from the Office of Undergraduate Studies, UPEP sponsored Erin Feeley as an undergraduate researcher this summer to begin evaluation design and data collection. Keep a lookout for our evaluation report in the spring and as always, thank you for supporting our students.



Erin L. Castro, PhD
Director & Co-Founder, UPEP
Assistant Professor, Higher Education, University of Utah

New Co-Director, Cindy Fierros, PhD



Hi! I'm Cindy. I am originally from Whittier, CA and moved to Utah 8 years ago for the PhD. I became involved with UPEP after taking a class with Dr. Castro focused on education, gender, and prison. In my position as Co-Director, I design and implement programming, manage admissions, and supervise interns. UPEP is very important to me because I believe higher education in prison can be a transformative intellectual space that honors the humanity of incarcerated individuals. I envision a program that culminates in college degrees for our students, whether they receive those on the inside, or continue with their education once they are out. I also envision a space of engaged learning where students are not just changed in their academic credentials, but in their views of the world, their worlds, and their place in it. When I am not working, I can be found enjoying the Wasatch mountains with my family or running the roads and trails of Salt Lake City.

New Group at the Univ. of Utah: Students Against Mass Incarceration

Students Against Mass Incarceration (or SAMI) is a registered student group affiliated with the School for Social and Cultural Transformation at the University of Utah. The group was established in Spring 2018 to create a space for students to learn about the history and current state of prisons, mass incarceration, and the prison industrial complex in the United States. Collectively, SAMI seeks to engage in complex dialogues around imagining what a world beyond mass incarceration might look like. As the group grows, we hope to create alliances with other community and campus organizations working in this area and contribute to activism aimed at supporting currently and formerly incarcerated individuals and their families.

This semester, SAMI is hosting a reading group for *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander and will sponsor the University's first Week Against Prisons in March, 2019. This week will feature a series of events designed to inform our campus community about mass incarceration and its far-reaching impacts. If you would like to get involved or stay informed about SAMI events, email us at: SAMI.Transform.Utah@gmail.com. During Fall semester, we meet on Saturday mornings from 10 to 11 in the University of Utah Student Union Building.

Utah Humanities Sponsors Summer Course: Human to Post-Human



UTAH HUMANITIES

Ideas in Action



We are grateful to Utah Humanities for their generous funding of one of our inaugural summer micro-courses: ENGL 1010 *From Human to Post-Human*. The six week course was developed and taught by Adam Weinstein, a PhD candidate in Creative Writing and a Steffensen Cannon Fellow at the UU. Held in the Wasatch facility, Adam's course encouraged students to practice close-reading while discussing and thinking about cyborgs, post-humans, extraterrestrials, and interplanetary consciousness. Some key texts for the course included Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, and Octavia Butler's *Clay's Ark*. Forgive us, but the course was simply outta this world!

One student's feedback: "So I think this class helped me to develop a way of thinking that helps me be a better individual by simply asking questions instead of judging and to have more empathy even [in] areas that don't seem to affect me"





Who tracks UPEP donations? Responds to email and correspondence? Makes sure that our students are receiving all of the classroom supplies they need? Well, that would be Estefanie Aguilar Padilla, UPEP's fantastic Administrative Intern who has been with the Project since its inception. Estefanie is a fifth year student at the UU double majoring in Economics and Ethnic Studies. She is also a McNair Scholar and this summer she presented research on the use of prior criminal history questions in undergraduate university admissions that sponsor college-in-prison programs. She found that over one third of these institutions ask applicants about their criminal history, which creates barriers to higher education for justice involved individuals. Estefanie is currently applying to graduate school where she hopes to continue this line of inquiry. Her volunteerism with UPEP is driven by her belief that everyone deserves equitable opportunities to access quality higher education as she has witnessed the transformative role it can play in her own life and her family's.

Instructor Spotlight: Dustin Williams, PhD - Microbiology

This summer UPEP students in Timpanogos took their first Introduction to Microbiology course with Dustin Williams, a faculty member who teaches Bioengineering, Microbiology, and Orthopedics at the UU. In this short interview, we ask Dr. Williams about his experience.

1. Why did you decide to teach for UPEP?

I love teaching science. I regularly lecture at all levels of education, including the University and my kids' elementary and middle schools. When I saw the invitation to teach at the prison, it piqued not only my interest in community outreach, but another exciting opportunity to teach science. I was also interested in teaching a group of students who might not otherwise have such an opportunity.

2. Were you surprised by anything?

The most surprising thing to me was how quickly the students grasped the concepts that were being taught. I'd like to think it was my ability to teach, but credit goes to the students who had a genuine interest in understanding the information. I was also surprised to find how education-friendly the prison was. The room in which we met was just like a standard classroom.

3. What did you most enjoy about teaching for UPEP?

It's cliché to say everything. It's also my honest answer! I looked forward to every class session and may or may have not shed some tears as I drove away the last night of class. My goal as a teacher is to make sure that students enjoy learning the principles being taught. I hope to open their minds to think a little differently, but to also understand more of the microscopic world and its macroscopic effect on our lives. I felt like this was accomplished in the prison class.

4. What were some of the biggest challenges of teaching for UPEP?

The biggest challenge was having enough time to cover the material in lecture and labs. You have to be flexible, and so do the students. When count would get delayed, our class would often start 1-2 hours late. One night, we only had 20 minutes for a 2-hour lecture.

5. What advice do you have to offer future UPEP instructors?

It seems natural to have nerves going into a prison. I did. Within the first 2 minutes of sitting down in the classroom and meeting the students, all my nerves went away. The students were incredibly respectful, engaged, and genuinely interested in learning about me and the topic at hand. I never treated a student differently than I would have on a University campus. I held the same standard of teaching, grading and content that I would have elsewhere. After you get over any nerves or misconceptions, my recommendation would be to approach a class session as you would wherever else you might teach.



Student Voices

Student Voices is a new addition to our newsletter and features creative works submitted by UPEP students. The first submission is from Tisha, titled Labels:

When we were little, we were taught not to call people names. It hurts feelings. It makes it so you don't have friends. It's not nice.

As we grow older, we forget about these basic principles and begin to assign people into categories. I'm not sure why or how it happens, and while there are likely many theories behind it, these new names gain a name of their own. Race. Gender. Sex. Religion. Stereotype. Label.

A label isn't always a bad thing. When we pull a can off a shelf (which most of us haven't done in years), we need to know what's inside. We accept at face value that this label is correct because we have past experience that we've received that item before. We have learned to trust it. Brand loyalty, if you will. Advertisers soak this up, but labels can be misleading, and human beings are not cans of food.

Society has given us many labels throughout our lives. Some have a positive connotation. Daughter. Mother. Sister. Friend. Others are not so positive. Bully. Racist. Psycho. Perhaps the most troubling, however, are the current labels we hold. Felon. Prisoner. Inmate. Once you're given a label, it's hard to convince someone reading it that there is more inside. Secret ingredients that the company isn't able (or willing) to identify.

Recently, we were given the opportunity to try the new label of college student. We were excited and nervous. My greatest concern was how the professors and aides were going to act around us knowing some of the labels we'd been given. Thief. Drug addict. Killer. Sociopath. Monster. We were afraid it wouldn't be the same.

My first class proved not to be the case. No one was afraid. No one was worried to shake my hand. We were fine to sit in the same room and discuss things. It felt normal. For the first time in months, the people I was meeting didn't ask about my crime, or even seem to care. They wanted to teach. I wanted to learn. And thus, the label of student took precedence above all others.

We thank you for this chance. We thank you for this opportunity to expand our brains and think about something beyond the drama and stigma with prison. We are very grateful. We thank you for our new U of U brand on our can. We vow not to taint it, not to take it for granted, or to mix it with ingredients that no longer belong.

And thank you for labeling us "people."

Donations & Volunteers

Want to donate to UPEP? Our Amazon Wish List is the most up-to-date request of materials approved for clearance in the prison: [Amazon Wish List](#) As a reminder, UPEP provides all necessary supplies for students to participate in the program. Want to make a cash donation? Please visit our new online donation system, which can be found here: [Support UPEP](#)

UPEP takes applications for volunteers on an on-going basis and our work would not be possible without the dedicated talent of so many people. Our active volunteers include UU undergraduate and graduate students, UU campus and medical staff, and a number of community members. Thank you to our current volunteers: ♦ Ali Wolpern ♦ Amerique Phillips ♦ Anna Garcia ♦ Blanca Yagüe ♦ Bryn Dayton ♦ Doug Nagie ♦ Elliot Morris ♦ Erin Feeley ♦ Estefanie Aguilar Padilla ♦ Francesca Wearsch ♦ Grayson Hull ♦ Hans Liu ♦ Jessenia Monago ♦ Julie Olaf ♦ Lauren Castro ♦ Ludovica Farese ♦ Matthew Holman ♦ Tyler Brothers ♦ Whitney Hills ♦ Yulia Goff

Contact Us and Learn More!

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter and please share this with anyone you think would be interested. If you would like to volunteer, head over to our website to "GET INVOLVED" or email us at upep@utah.edu.

upep.utah.edu



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