

# UPEP Newsletter Fall 2019

Fall 2019

## Letter From the Co-Director: Dr. Erin L. Castro

There is so much to be thankful for this holiday season, and what a year it was for UPEP. We launched our first annual book drive in the spring and thanks to you, we were able to start two in-classroom libraries in Draper! We took in over 400 books and are looking for librarians to help the students design an internal cataloguing system. Thanks to a generous gift, we were also able to build two new networked computer labs in Timpanogos and Wasatch, and are eager to offer more computer classes. The students in the Lone Peak Book Club are celebrating their one-year anniversary alongside the inspiring Elliot Morris, and we look forward to increasing programming in that facility next year. We completed our first program evaluation in 2019 and while we continue to learn much from our students on the inside, we also found that our volunteers are deeply impacted by this work. UPEP simply would not exist without the time, energy, and unrelenting dedication of our volunteers, and I am continually moved by the many people from all walks of life who are drawn to this work. As I look ahead to 2020, I am in awe of the generosity and commitment of UPEP supporters, and I hope you will continue your work with UPEP. If you value this work, I invite you to join the us and the efforts to provide quality higher education in prison. We need you!

In gratitude,



Erin Castro, PhD; Co-Director/Founder; Assistant Professor, Higher Education, University of Utah

## Kick Off! Thursday Night Lecture Series

By London, a UPEP student in the Wasatch Facility

After a request from the students, UPEP Co-Director Dr. Erin Castro sent out an email 'blast' and was pleasantly surprised by an immediate and overwhelming response from University of Utah professors and volunteers who wanted to sign up for an evening to present, teach, and meet with UPEP students at the prison.

Our first visiting lecturer was Teneille Brown, Professor of Law at the University of Utah S.J. Quinney College of Law, who spoke on the importance of making legal preparation for health care wishes and goals for care. It was a very engaging subject driving a great deal of discussion and ideas. Professor Brown must have enjoyed the evening immensely, for when walking with the students back down the corridor after class, instead of turning with the other volunteers so as to leave the prison, she inadvertently continued walking with the guys towards their cells!

Lectures are currently being scheduled for spring. We look forward to meeting with an ever growing group of volunteers in our UPEP experience and express our gratitude to you all for joining in the fun.

## New Student Experience

By Zach, a UPEP student in the Wasatch Facility

I am a new student to UPEP, but not a new student to higher education (I was close to completing a Bachelor of Science in Philosophy before coming here). UPEP has been extremely positive for me for a number of reasons, but my primary reason is that I missed the classroom and being a part of a project that is looking toward the future.

Prisons are generally a place that is very rarely a positive experience, but with that there is often not a lot offered that can one day benefit a person's ability to be successful when they leave. Programs like UPEP allow inmates, that may not otherwise ever be exposed to university level education, to find out that they could be successful in obtaining advanced degrees when they leave prison.

When I heard about UPEP last Spring, I knew that this could be a project worth putting all of my efforts an energy into, and to better myself and the people around me.

## Law & Literature

Educators: Defense Attorney Kate Conyers, J.D. & Judge Clemens Landau, J.D.



Kate Conyers J.D.  
Defense Attorney

Teaching the course, Law & Literature in spring 2019, Kate joined the students at the Wasatch facility to review a wide variety of literature in a class where legal themes were featured and discussed. This was Kate's first experience volunteering in such a capacity. We wanted to know about her thoughts and feelings following this experience.

Kate Conyers: It is interesting to note that following her efforts with the UPEP students, Kate has become quite the advocate. The students enjoyed not only the course material and lively discussions, but also the refreshing and supportive attitude that Kate brought to the class experience. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

1. What were you most concerned or nervous about prior to your first class?

I was definitely nervous – not so much about the teaching part of it, or really the subject matter, but more about making sure we provided a high quality class that benefited the students. I was also quite concerned about the grading aspects of the course as well as assigning and grading writing assignments, as that isn't my forte.

2. How were you treated by the students?

The students were really great—they were professional, eager to learn, and thankful for the opportunity. I enjoyed getting to know them through our various conversations we had.

3. If you were given a miracle opportunity to do or change absolutely anything in the US/State justice system, what would be your wish?

Wow—so many things! If I could change one thing, it would be focusing on, financing, and providing defendants with effective and realistic treatment (of any kind they need) opportunities in lieu of incarceration.

4. Words of advice for potential UPEP volunteers/teachers?

Do your best to prepare a lesson plan and assignments in advance; do your own readings in advance. Time passes quickly; the students will be prepared and they expect you will be, as well.



Judge Clemens  
Landau J.D.

Clemens Landau: Innocent until proven guilty...did you know that at the start of his trials, and in his advice to the jury, Judge Clemens Landau (known as Clem to the students) will walk over and shake hands with the accused? Calling the accused by their first name, and introducing them to the jury, Clem would drive home the point that this person is a human being and is to be assumed innocent until proven otherwise. As such, they deserve all courtesy and every effort in working through the legal process. This set a wonderful tone as Clem worked with the students. He listened. He promoted insightful discussion. He valued opinions. We all thought it was remarkable when we heard that he had been having some of his staff and convicted defendants read some of the creative writing assignments submitted by UPEP students.

1. What were you most concerned or nervous about prior to your first class?

I was nervous about teaching. I don't have substantial teaching experience, and I was worried that I would not be able to get through the material in an effective way.

2. What was your most unexpected experience?

The level of comfort the students had with me and vice versa was unexpected. I thought that the inherent difference in our perspectives would hamper our ability to connect on a human level. It didn't.

3. Are there any perceived myths you would like to debunk?

To the extent anyone believes that my students were something other than students during the time they spent in this class—I'd like to debunk that as a myth. Our class time was spent having high-level conversations about law, justice, innocence, eye witnesses, bias in all its forms, punishment, and fate. The students were well-prepared and engaged. We left our respective roles as judge and incarcerated persons at the door of the classroom, and had wonderful exchanges about the literature we were reading, and the literature the students were creating.

## Class Review: Law & Literature

### PRISON TERMINOLOGY:

House -  
A person's cell

By Ramón, a UPEP student in the Wasatch Facility

Last semester I was fortunate enough to take a class offered by the University of Utah Prison Education Project that was taught by an active judge and a practicing defense attorney. Law in Literature was easily my favorite class over the past couple of years. The book selected by the instructors was perfect; it consisted of insightful and clever short stories written by renowned authors and philosophers across the globe and throughout history. Discussions centered on the legal, moral, and historical context, as well as current parallels for each story. The experience was priceless.

## Summitting New Heights Lecture Series: Dr Robert Durán



By UPEP students in Wasatch.

On October 1st, UPEP students and a wider group of inmates, UDC staff, and volunteers at the men's prison in Draper, had the opportunity to attend a lecture with guest speaker and Texas A&M sociology professor, Dr. Robert Durán. The focus was Dr. Durán's published text *Gang Life in Two Cities: An Insider's Journey*. The following is a student review of the event:

Congratulations and gratitude to the University of Utah and the UPEP volunteers for bringing Dr. Robert Durán to speak to us. Likewise, a big thanks to Sgt. Dunford and all of those who made it all come together, resulting in an emotional and stirring conversation.

Over the years of 'doing time' I feel that the loss of being part of the larger community grows deeper. For a little while this evening, I felt the unreality of this place fade away and a sense of potential and hope return. With the end of Professor Durán's presentation the audience seemed to search for a firmer connection to the writer and his advocacy. By the end of the evening the previously charged atmosphere mellowed while Professor Durán autographed books and spoke individually with attendees. The evening was far more than I expected and I was sorry to see it end.

## New Student Spotlight: Will



Will  
UPEP Student-

It is our pleasure to introduce you to one of our new UPEP students: Will. Joining fellow students for the Gender Studies class, Will has thrown himself wholeheartedly into the effort. We would like to include a brief Q&A with our esteemed colleague:

Q. OK Will, let's not beat around the bush...you are a man of mature years. What motivated you to join UPEP and get into the classroom?

A. I was reluctant, but I wanted to be around people who would stimulate my thinking.

Q. Gender Studies is an interesting first class. So far, what has surprised you most about the class or the student experience?

A. The depth of dedication and sharing of ideas and philosophies along with the individuals involved in the class (students and tutors). I love the sharing of ideas and debating of topics.

Q. How do you think your learning experience might help you both now and in the future?

A. It makes me more tolerant of those who have different lifestyles and philosophies. I am more aware of what others go through and experience in life.

Q. Words of wisdom for other potential students and/or UPEP volunteers?

A. Education brings light to the darkness of one's mind. It shows more productive ways of approaching problems in the world and within ourselves.

## Class Review: Anatomy, Microbiology, & Neuroscience

By Tisha, a UPEP student in the Timpanogos Facility

I've never liked or appreciated Science, and in the last year I've had the opportunity to have three classes in this area. Needless to say, I've changed my mind.

Having an opportunity to have higher learning in such a difficult place has been amazing and I am very grateful for the program. From learning how to memorize bones and grow bacteria on petri dishes to being able to identify an action potential in my own muscle has opened my mind to how interesting our world really is. I even got to hold a fake skull and hook up electrodes to a cockroach!

Many people have asked me why I go to college classes if I'm not getting credit for it. They miss the point and greatly underestimate the importance of higher education. I just smile and tell them it makes me better at Jeopardy. (Shout out to Marta, Dustin, and Ali: the teachers that have volunteered their time for these classes. We appreciate you!)

### PRISON TERMINOLOGY:

Fish -  
A new  
incarcerated  
person

## Lone Peak Reading Group



UPEP is sponsoring a facilitated Reading Group in Lone Peak. This reading group is facilitated by Elliot Morris, MA. The goal of the group is to facilitate critical thought and discussion while building community. The reading groups are centered around a theme chosen by the students. So far those themes have been "Classic Models, Contemporary Novels," "Rereading the Past," and "Political Science Fiction." Members of the group will pick a book that they would like to lead the class discussion. The group has voted to read "World Building Narratives" starting in January. We started with 3 readers last January and now have 12 signed up for January 2020! Our group is passionate, insightful, and hungry to read and discuss ideas. If you would like to purchase a book to support the reading group, please check out the UPEP [Book Wish List](#).

## UPEP Receives 2019 Beacons of Excellence Award

Following several nominations from University of Utah student volunteers, UPEP was recognized as a 2019 recipient for the University of Utah Beacons of Excellence Award! UPEP student volunteers described UPEP as "an absolutely transformative educational experience" that will continue to impact the lives of non-incarcerated student interns, faculty, staff, and volunteers well beyond their involvement in our program. Thank you to our nominees and the awards committee.

## A Note From Our Students

We honestly can't believe that anyone would want to help us. You see, for years most of us have been forgotten and pushed aside by family, friends, and by society. We understand...we have caused this. Yet, here comes a small army of volunteers who enthusiastically remind us that we have value, that we have worth. Do you know how much this lifts us? How this restores humanity to a world that we thought was void of such? One of our volunteers, a student himself, can barely afford to pay for a university healthcare visit, yet for two years now has sacrificed and chosen to buy fuel and visit us every week instead of caring for his own needs.

Each one of us in our little group sees this, and while we have no funds to reciprocate, he has earned respect, friendship, and a lifetime of gratitude. To each of you who gives, so that we can progress, whether you give pennies or something more significant, THANK YOU. You see, in this total institution where we are not even provided deodorant or shampoo, we value every single piece of paper, every eraser, every textbook.

### Student Poetry Corner

#### *ON SUCCESS*

by Sam, a UPEP student in the Wasatch facility

Sweet, sweet honey sweetness  
The synaptic delirium of wantonness  
Nectarous serum for happiness  
Whether minute or magnificent  
Success is a rewarding event  
Failure fails, as success prevails