

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH PRISON EDUCATION PROJECT



NOTE FROM OUTGOING DIRECTOR

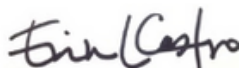
As we find ourselves in the midst of another pandemic-impacted semester, I am relieved to report that overall COVID cases at the prison have dropped. You can see updated numbers [here](#). Despite recurring lockdowns and staff shortage-related interruptions at the prison, UPEP programming is going strong; we are engaging coursework in Timpanogos, Promontory, Olympus, Oquirrh, and Uinta. We are also preparing for many transitions, both with the new prison relocation and on-campus.

On January 1, 2022, I became the Associate Dean for Access and Community Engagement with the Office of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Utah. With this move, UPEP will also transition into the Office of Undergraduate Studies and join a robust portfolio of community engagement initiatives, including the STEM Community Alliance (STEMCAP) and INSPIRE program. Together, these three programs will comprise our efforts to engage with incarcerated adults and youth-in-custody throughout the state.

I am perhaps most excited to share that we are hiring our very first paid Director of Prison Education this spring. It has taken six years and the work and volunteerism of so many to arrive at this point. I am particularly proud of our students who have stayed with us and believed that we could get here. We are on the cusp of expanding our credit-bearing courses, partnering with BYU faculty and students, and looking forward to state legislation that will bring coordination and resources to this space.

As we prepare for the new prison relocation, I am optimistic about the future because of the strong relationships we have built over the last six years. I am hopeful that with the relocation there will be new opportunities to introduce synchronous and asynchronous classes and to continue recruiting institutional partners in this work. The efforts to engage high-quality postsecondary education during incarceration are best implemented when we all work together; I invite you to reach out to us to help expand the work.

Sincerely,



INSPIRE, STEMCAP, AND UPEP JOIN FORCES

This semester the Initiative to bring Science Programs to the Incarcerated (INSPIRE) is partnering with the Utah Prison Education Project (UPEP) to bring a Science Right Now 3000-level course to incarcerated men at the Utah State Prison in Draper. This 16-week class is a collaborative effort consisting of bi-weekly guest lectures from academic scientists augmented by in-class activity sections led by the Teaching and Learning Assistant, Serena Kim – a graduate student at Westminster College. The course focuses on various scientific research projects that are underway right now. Throughout the course, students will discover ways that research impacts and is impacted by society and local community needs and interests. In addition to scientist lectures, Serena draws on science-oriented Ted Talks and film documentaries and explores scientists' research topics through group activities. She helps students draw connections between different sectors of STEM research and highlights how collaboration across scientific disciplines can promote discovery and innovation and tackle real-world problems.



UPEP is also connecting with the **STEM Community Alliance Program (STEMCAP)**, a USBE-funded program that provides hands-on scientist-led STEM programming for Youth-In-Custody (incarcerated and in-treatment youth). STEMCAP provides workshops that focus on a wide range of STEM disciplines and intertwines the arts and humanities into STEM workshops to provide interdisciplinary learning experiences. In addition to educational workshops, STEMCAP provides conservation projects that allow youth to contribute to ongoing projects in the community, such as raising milkweed plants to support Monarch butterfly populations as they migrate through the Salt Lake Valley. STEMCAP has hired a new Conservation Project Coordinator, Chloe Joesten, to help expand opportunities for Youth-In-Custody to participate in conservation projects that benefit local ecosystems and communities.

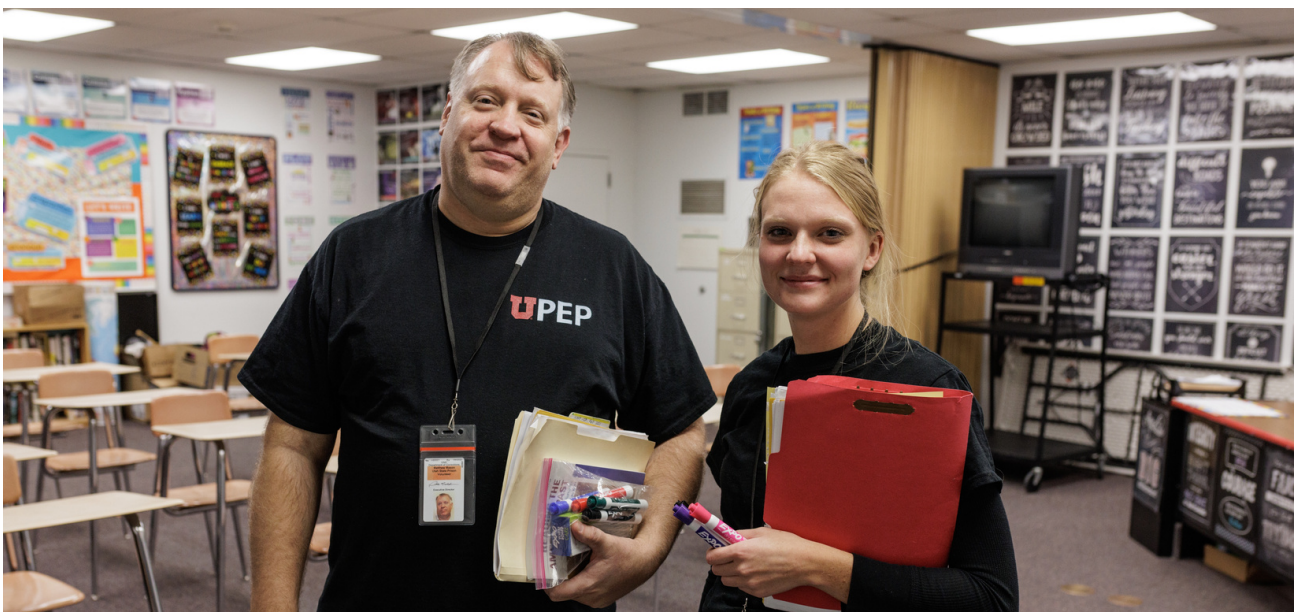


Featured above are scenes from STEMCAP's hands-on workshops, as well as Serena Kim, Teaching and Learning Assistant for INSPIRE's Science Right Now course.

CREDIT-BEARING COURSES

UPEP offers first credit-bearing courses with new BYU collaboration

Dr. Matthew Mason, a Professor of History at Brigham Young University, is currently teaching his third semester with UPEP. He began teaching in the Timpanogos facility and has since taught for two semesters in the Oquirrh facility. Last semester, his “US History to 1877” course taught students about the most important developments during the first three centuries of American history. This semester, Dr. Mason is building on what his students have learned by teaching “Civil War Era,” a class that investigates the roots and legacies of the American Civil War and Reconstruction. These two classes are among UPEP’s first-ever credit-bearing courses, thanks to a generous donor who covered tuition. Dr. Mason is assisted by several University of Utah and BYU students who volunteer as Teaching and Learning Assistants (TLAs) for the course, offering academic support and intellectual engagement for UPEP students. Dr. Mason had this to say about the semester thus far: “We have been having a great semester examining the causes of the Civil War. As usual, the students’ questions and comments are lively and pointed, very often linking what we’re learning about in history to contemporary issues. Both I and my TLAs have been reminded more than once that flexibility and patience are necessary to teach in the prison, but it’s always worth it when we can meet in class.”



Photos courtesy of Brad Slade (Fall 2021)

UPEP SPEAKS

An Interview with Assistant Professor Chris Mead and U Honors Student Emalee Egelund

Christopher Mead, Assistant Professor, University of Utah

1. Why did you decide to teach for UPEP? I was motivated by my certainty that education is a human right. If education is a human right, the environment that tests that right is the prison which is a place where people are forgotten and educational opportunities are limited. My secondary motivation is to keep my teaching fresh. I teach in the Honors College and my students are more or less the same age or at a similar place in life. It was interesting to teach a different population of students.

2. What did you enjoy most about UPEP? That's easy. What I enjoyed most was seeing the Honors students and the UPEP students interact. It brought me pleasure and it required no work on my part. I was curious as to how they would interact and how the mingling would go or if some encouragement would be needed. However, the students lead the charge and it was such a pleasure to see intellectual connections, collaborations, and friendships naturally develop.

3. Did you face any challenges teaching in regards to COVID-19? There were tons of challenges. We had students in quarantine for multiple weeks and had to cancel our last class. We did make it through the semester though. We faced challenges just like any other traditional classroom but the challenges are more pressing in the facility because of the close quarters.

4. How does a traditional classroom compare to UPEP's? It's more or less the same. One of the interesting things for me was that a lot of the structures of incarceration sort of melt away once you are in a classroom: a whiteboard is a whiteboard, handouts are handouts, and students are students.

Emalee Egelund, Honors Student, University of Utah

1. What surprised you most about UPEP? How much UPEP offers, not just for education but for day-to-day dignities. Beyond advocating for educational rights, UPEP ensures that every student has supplies that people on the outside take for granted. UPEP is solely driven by the wants of the students and doesn't dictate what the organization thinks is best for them. They constantly remind students that UPEP works for and with them, not above them. UPEP acknowledges that all students are more than their educational accolades; they are humans in need of complete wellness support in order to succeed. UPEP is present, and I love that.

2. How has your learning experience with UPEP benefited you? I can't speak enough about the cultural humility and education I gained. I feel any nontraditional classroom or student has a lot to bring to the college experience. Especially in social science settings, it's easy to enter a robotic mindset; even if we are taught to think fluidly there are still expectations and repetitive parameters we fall into. This class breaks down what you think you know by working with people from a variety of spatiotemporal and educational backgrounds. It's refreshing. Working with my classmates made me lose my rigid, almost elitist thought processes and find joy in the ongoing pursuit of epistemological pluralism.

3. What is the importance of UPEP for incarcerated students? A university is a place of immense privilege. If an institution's goal is to provide and expand access to education, there shouldn't be limitations to that. UPEP students are in a circumstance of immense disadvantage, and yet are vocal about their desire for more educational opportunities. UPEP students' circumstances leave them at the mercy of others to dictate if they deserve education or not. That should not be anyone's place to decide but theirs. UPEP is providing a channel through which their voices can be heard. UPEP empowers its members not just educationally but by preserving their human dignity. Students are students. Students of all backgrounds deserve support and UPEP provides holistic support and a platform for students to have a voice.



THE PRO BONO INITIATIVE

In November, Dr. Caisa Royer started a new position as Director of the Pro Bono Initiative at S.J. Quinney College of Law at the University of Utah. Caisa was formerly a postdoctoral fellow with the Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison and will continue to stay involved with UPEP as the Associate Director. The **Pro Bono Initiative** (PBI) provides opportunities for law students to build practical and professional legal skills while serving the community through brief legal consultation programs throughout Utah. These programs cover legal issues like criminal expungement, family law, employment, immigration, and more. PBI is staffed by volunteer law students and attorneys, and the initiative is dedicated to developing commitment to public service within the legal profession. If you are in need of legal advice, you can learn more about the free services offered by PBI [here](#).

This change creates the opportunity for UPEP to partner with PBI to provide more types of programming at the prison. Law students have the opportunity to receive pro bono service hours through volunteering with UPEP. Both UPEP and PBI are committed to advancing this partnership and expanding access to both education and justice for those incarcerated at Utah State Prison.

STUDENT VOICES

Mariposa

by Anthony J. Valdez

Mi mariposa – when I found you, you were so weak and frail – you didn’t have the strength to carry yourself... so I picked you up and placed you in my palm – I whispered to you, “I will make you better,” and I took you home. I cared for you for four long days. I gave you honey water and tended to your needs... everyday you fluttered your wings showing signs of improvement... letting me know it won’t be long before you can do it – fly high off into the sky all on your own. Then, on the fourth day, I walked with you outta my cell you flew up and away so happy to soar – flapping your wings like never before. Up to the sky you went – but it was the wrong way – It was only the skylight – no way out. So I held out my hand and you fluttered back down, landed in my hand. I walked you outside, extended my arm telling you good-bye...you finally flew up and away over the wall on a new journey. You went out into the world. I wish you well and maybe we’ll meet again in another lifetime outside of the pen – Until then, mi mariposa, please know it was a blessing to share a part of my life with yours.



UPEP ADVOCACY

In March, Drs. Hodson (BYU) and Castro (UU) were invited to testify at the Utah State Capitol regarding House Bill 226: Higher Education and Corrections Council. The bill establishes a multi-stakeholder council to advise and provide recommendations to the state legislature regarding postsecondary education for incarcerated people in Utah. The bill passed favorably out of the committee and unanimously in both the House and Senate. The legislation will assist in bringing coordination, leadership, and resources to prison higher education in Utah.

RECENT OP-ED

BYU professors Christopher Hodson and Matthew Mason penned an op-ed for the *Deseret News* about the role of prison education programs. They pull from their own experience as UPEP volunteers to describe the impact higher education has on incarcerated students.

"As volunteers with the University of Utah Prison Education Project (UPEP), we have each taught semester-long, university-level courses to incarcerated men and women at the Utah State Prison in Draper...These have been among the most challenging and meaningful experiences of our careers, and have impressed on us the critical need for state government and private institutions to invest in higher education for incarcerated people in Utah."

Read their full op-ed [here](#).

BRINGING BOOKS TO GUNNISON

In preparation for relocation to the new prison, UPEP is donating 3,000+ books to the Central Utah Correctional Facility in Gunnison. For more info, please contact Elliot Morris, Book Club Coordinator, at elliott.m.morris@gmail.com.



GET INVOLVED

This program would not be possible without our amazing volunteers and generous donors. If you would like to donate to UPEP, you can do so by helping us provide supplies to students through our [Amazon Wish List](#). If you would like to make a cash donation, you can do so through our online donation system found here: [Support UPEP](#).

Interested in volunteering with UPEP? Check out our [New Volunteer FAQ](#) and apply [here](#).



UPEP Intern Carter Hall, Undergraduate Student, Anthropology and Criminology