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Education Justice Project at the University of Illinois receives \$1 million grant from the Andrew W.

Mellon Foundation

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CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — The [Education Justice Project](#) at the [University of Illinois](#) is expanding its academic programs for men in prison with the support of a three-year, \$1 million grant from the [Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#).

Based in the [College of Education](#), EJP offers education programs to men incarcerated at the Danville Correctional Center, a state prison in Danville, Illinois. The comprehensive college-in-prison program, which has served students at Danville since 2008, includes upper-division college courses taught by Illinois faculty members and advanced graduate students, educational workshops, and extracurricular activities such as an anti-violence group, an ESL program, a guest lecturer series, reading groups and tutoring.

The funding from the Mellon Foundation will enable EJP to expand the number of courses at Danville so that incarcerated students can take two courses each semester and progress more quickly toward certificates, said Rebecca Ginsburg, director of EJP.

Ginsburg is an associate professor of education policy, organization and leadership, and of landscape architecture at the university.

EJP currently offers eight to ten courses at the prison each year and anticipates increasing that number to 16 courses during 2018, and to 24 courses annually by 2020, Ginsburg said.

“This growth is made possible because the Mellon grant will enable us to pay course instructors, who until now have taught on a volunteer basis,” said Ginsburg, who has been honored by the NAACP of Champaign County and other organizations for her work.

EJP currently is recruiting a full-time director of academic programming, who will be based at the Danville correctional center and oversee academic and student affairs. The director position will serve as the main point of contact between EJP instructors who teach at Danville Correctional Center and prison staff.

A portion of the grant is supporting a pilot project involving development of an educational channel for the prison’s TV system. EJP will use the channel to broadcast educational films, documentaries, videos and lectures relevant to students’ coursework and other interests, including dance, music, and theatre programming . EJP staff members are collaborating with the correctional center’s leisure time services officer on the project and expect to launch the channel in spring 2018.

If successful, the channel may be implemented at other correctional facilities in Illinois, Ginsburg said.

“Although EJP will have primary responsibility for maintaining this channel, we will work with other educators at the prison and with the principal in selecting content that supports all of the facility’s educational initiatives,” she said.

EJP’s guest lecturer series at the prison is being enhanced as well. The grant provides funding for EJP to bring in one outside speaker per semester, representing arts and humanities disciplines, in keeping with the Mellon Foundation’s mission. The first lecture is expected to be held next spring.

The grant allows EJP to expand its library for students at the correctional center and upgrade the technology in its computer lab. About 1,000 books and DVDs will be added to the library’s permanent circulating collection.

In conjunction with other college-in-prison programs and allies such as the Illinois Department of Corrections, Ginsburg is exploring development of a statewide higher education program that would enable colleges and universities to offer degree programs to incarcerated students. A portion of the Mellon grant will support quarterly meetings of this group, which is called the Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison.

The award-winning EJP also provides support and services for individuals as they leave prison and reenter society and for family members of individuals who are incarcerated.

EJP is using a portion of the Mellon funding to develop an evaluation protocol for documenting and assessing its programs' long-term impact. Next January, Nicole Robinson of NNR Evaluation Planning and Research, an external evaluator located in Wisconsin, will begin the evaluation process, which is expected to continue through December 2020.

The grant also supports the production of two new promotional videos about EJP's programs. The videos, which are being produced by photographers and videographers from the creative services department on campus, will be available for viewing on EJP's website and will be shown to audiences at events on campus and in the community. "We're committed to representing incarcerated scholars in ways that undercut dominant narratives of people in prison as scary and threatening. We hope through these videos to encourage viewers to develop more complex understandings of our students and of incarcerated people generally."

Rebecca Ginsburg states that she expects the investment in the EJP program to produce multiple positive impacts for incarcerated EJP students and for others across the country. “We anticipate even stronger academic outcomes for our incarcerated scholars in Danville, and also to help strengthen efforts to develop high-quality college-in-prison programs nationwide, through the generation of resources such as those connected to the EJP evaluation and a forthcoming book on pedagogy in prison, which is also being produced with Mellon support.” She adds that she is deeply grateful for the support of the Andrew H. Mellon Foundation. “Gifts like this raise positive awareness of our friends, neighbors, and family members who are incarcerated, and shine a light on ways in which arts and the humanities can contribute to their wellbeing, and to building a healthier, more equitable society.”

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