As the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) is part way through its second year, we have much to celebrate. We have 41 students across two cohorts, who are each taking three courses this quarter at Stateville Correctional Center in areas such as chemistry, math, television writing, and legal studies. In addition to this full course load, we have weekly study halls at the prison where graduate and undergraduate students from Evanston participate in peer tutoring opportunities, as well as quarterly workshops at Stateville focusing on a variety of skills, such as active listening and academic success. Our NPEP students frequently work in groups on homework assignments or mentor one another while they are in the education building, so there is a strong sense of community growing.

We recently formalized NPEP’s partnership with Oakton Community College so that the Northwestern credits that our students receive will count toward the conferral of an Associate of General Studies from Oakton. We also have 9 students who moved to Stateville from medium-security facilities throughout Illinois, and some of these students will be going home within the next few years. We are confident that having an Associate degree in hand will help students make this transition with greater success and confidence.

We also continue to partner with the Cook County Department of Corrections so that graduate students can teach their own mini-courses across different divisions of the jail. We’ve offered everything from biology to public speaking to poetry, and our graduate students often report that their Cook County teaching is among the most formative pedagogical experiences of their time at Northwestern.

A highlight of the quarter was a visit with Northwestern’s Provost, Jonathan Holloway, to discuss his book, Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America Since 1940. NPEP students each received a copy of the book through fundraising efforts from the Northwestern graduate and undergraduate students, and they were able to spend nearly three hours at Stateville asking Provost Holloway questions about his research and his own personal history. We are now looking forward to a visit in March from Northwestern’s President, Morton Schapiro, and Saul Morson, Professor Slavic Languages and Literature, to discuss their book, Cents and Sensibility.

To learn more about NPEP and stay updated, please visit our website. And if you are able, please make a tax-deductible donation to NPEP -- every little bit counts.

Best wishes,
Jennifer Lackey
When I asked NPEP students Robert Boyd and Shareaf Fleming about their experience in Prof. Sheila Bedi's law course this past Fall Quarter, one of the first things they mentioned was that, in many ways, their experience at Stateville has already given them an extensive education in the law. "We've done this already, it's consistent with what we're going through," Robert exclaimed, with Shareaf adding pointedly, "It's law and I'm locked up." But in Prof Bedi's class, they explained, they have a unique opportunity to discuss the complexities of the criminal justice system with students from Northwestern's law school, who are taking the course alongside NPEP students. Taking the class with Northwestern law students "helps the law students to remove bias before they get there — we get to influence future lawyers who may someday be state's attorneys," Shareaf explained. "When we all read certain cases together, and everyone sees it is wrong, but there is still a ruling that violates rights, we have an opportunity to change their perspective by talking about these injustices," he continued. They also mentioned that although they have a lot of first hand experience with the law, the course provides them with the opportunity to sharpen their legal knowledge, which in turn helps them establish themselves as a "credible and reliable source."

As for Prof. Bedi, she knew from the time she first guest lectured at Stateville that she wanted to teach for NPEP. As a Clinical Professor of Law at Northwestern and an attorney with Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center, Bedi has a distinguished career of defending people caught up in the criminal and juvenile justice system and is a prominent advocate for ending mass incarceration. As she puts it, she already knew that "many truly brilliant people lived behind bars in this country." But she remembers how during her guest lecture, she encountered the "kind of engagement, rigor, and debate that every teacher hopes for" and was "pushed by the students in that class to think about issues of justice and fairness, issues of race and democracy" in entirely new ways. Inspired, Bedi wanted to continue that experience and "build bridges between NPEP and the law school," prompting her to develop a legal studies course for NPEP.

Echoing the sentiments of Shareaf and Robert, Bedi stresses the centrality of co-learning between undergrad students and law students. "While the law students are smart and dedicated, the undergrad students (while also smart and dedicated) have a perspective and lived experience that adds so much to the classroom. Often we will be discussing an issue and an undergrad student will cite a case and explain a holding that they have read while working on their own case. Those moments are so powerful and really drive home to my law students how the law affects people's lives and how different it is to study the law as an abstraction—as opposed to being forced to study the law because you are fighting for your life." (continued on page 6)
Monologue by Quayshaun Bailey

HAILE

This is perfect. There couldn't be a better way for this day to end. But you know what? I'm not even going to let it get to me. This just shows that I've gotten too comfortable at this level. This didn't happen to break my spirit. This is meant to inspire hope that there is something much greater out there for me. Maybe greater than I can even imagine. I mean, hope would be useless if everything went my way. So thanks, God, I got your message. (slight sarcasm) I got your message. (more serious) I just hope I'm hearing you correctly because I can't take much more of this. All I want is a good career, to be a good CEO. Is that too much to ask? If I'm given that, the rest will come. Material things, a wife and family I can support, all that will come... All I know is something has to give – and fast. 'Cause I refuse to continue my life like this. It has to get better for me.

Here Stood This Guy
by Lester Carroll

Jenny, a woman in her 30s, addresses the audience.

JENNY

When I was in my high school English class, I used to sit in the front row closest to the door, which was rarely closed, allowing me to see everyone who walked past the classroom. Because English was a subject that bored me to no end, I spent a lot of time staring out into the hall. Each day, Monday through Friday, I would see this guy stop in the doorway and look in at me as if he wanted to speak to me. But whenever I would look directly at him, or he would see my English teacher, Mr. Thorn-In-My-Side, he would bolt like a rabbit. My schedule was different from this guy's, so we never had any classes together, and we ran in a different social group. Our school also had this weird, H-shape design to it, so whenever we were in one of the hallways, there were like five hundred other students rushing to get to their next class – usually on the opposite side of the H. This fluid wall of students acted like a barrier that always prevented my path from running into this guy's path.

I really don't know why this particular guy stuck out to me in the crowd. I didn't find his long-hair, metal-head image appealing. And that god-forsaken green army jacket he wore all the time with the Led Zeppelin patch on the back was off-putting. Yuck!

Maybe I was intrigued by what I perceived as his shyness. Or maybe it was the intuition I always seemed to have when I saw him that he really wanted to talk to me, but unseen forces always prevented it. Maybe I was curious to hear what he wanted to say ...

Until this morning, ten years later when this same guy, minus the long hair, along with another man – both dressed in military uniform – appeared at my door. They were there to inform me that my husband, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Thomas, was killed in action.

Here stood this guy, and once again he looked like he wanted to talk to me, but the circumstances prevented it.
How long have you been volunteering with NPEP? I began volunteering at Stateville study hall this past quarter.

What made you want to volunteer with NPEP? I heard about the program through GSAC members Anne and Andrea in passing, but a chance meeting with GSAC member Jonas at the Weinberg New TA reception was what convinced me to get involved. You can only TA four quarters in Chemistry and I had maxed that out and was looking for more teaching opportunities. Jonas mentioned that the students at Stateville were taking Chemistry courses this quarter and so I jumped at the opportunity. I’m so glad I did, and am thankful I am able to volunteer with NPEP!

What has your experience been like? It’s been really amazing. What’s been especially impactful is the ability to work with such a small group of students at one time, which I’ve never been able to do before, and it’s been really moving to have these one-on-one experiences with students. They are so curious and committed to understanding why something is the way it is — when they see a trend on the periodic table, they immediately ask “but why?” They have this true desire to learn everything they can despite their resources being extremely limited. My goal as a tutor is to try, through helping them comprehend their chemistry assignments, to get them to smile. I often say “I know you’re frustrated, but I’m gonna sit here until you smile and it makes sense to you. If you’re not smiling, I know it doesn’t make sense.” It’s always really profound to see the “Aha!” moments when you’re an educator, but it’s even more powerful at Stateville, where I know that students lack access to internet and office hours.

How has volunteering with NPEP shaped your own research or experience at Northwestern? Before NPEP, I was trying to get out of graduate school as soon as possible. But the determination of NPEP students has helped me change my perspective; when I feel like I am banging my head against the wall with my own research, I remember the passion and commitment of the students and think, if they can do this despite all of the barriers they face in their lives, then I can muster some of their courage and finish my program. Plus, being able to tutor once a week has made it worth sticking around — if I can volunteer once a week until I finish, then I will definitely be able to make it through.

What, in your words, is the value of prison education? One really powerful aspect of prison education is it demonstrates that you can have everything taken away from you, but no one can take away your education and hunger to learn. I’ve also seen how prison education has helped many students connect with their families — many students talk to their kids, cousins, siblings, etc. about the importance of education, which has a clear positive impact. Just the other day, one of the students mentioned that his family had gotten him a Chemistry for Dummies book — that he had asked his family for it and they had sent it, and that it has helped him a lot. It made my heart really full to hear that. One of the students, Benard, also said something about prison education that really resonated with me. He said that education gives incarcerated students inspiration and motivation which is a far greater deterrent than punishment.
Robert and Shareaf also offered another benefit of the course, which they also apply to the weekly study halls with graduate and undergraduate students from Northwestern's Evanston campus: the opportunity to interact with and build community with their Northwestern peers as equals. "It gives you more self worth, self esteem, and credibility," Robert stated. "I'd rather be known by my Northwestern ID number than my IDOC number," Shareaf remarked, "and this class gives us the opportunity to be recognized for that." Prof. Bedi also remarked on the transformative community built in the classroom. She recounts that, "for the first few minutes of every class I find myself repeatedly needing to assert that we need to get started while the students greet each other. It's those moments that I have to remind myself that building community and co-learning is just as important as whatever is on my syllabus for that week."

In reflecting on her experience in NPEP and the program's importance more broadly, Bedi not only stressed the importance of NPEP to the Illinois prison system and students at Stateville, but also to the broader Northwestern community. "I am certain that every faculty member has been challenged to become a better teacher as a result of teaching in this program," she stated, "and it allows the Northwestern community to make tangible contributions to the state." She continued, explaining that programs like NPEP push institutions like Northwestern "to bear witness to the realities of mass imprisonment... Each of us has a moral obligation to reckon with that—and to find our own ways to take action."
SUPPORT NPEP & GET INVOLVED

To get involved with NPEP, please email us at nep@northwestern.edu.

OPPORTUNITIES:

● **Faculty members:**
  All Northwestern faculty members who are not on leave are eligible to teach in the Northwestern Prison Education Program. Courses offered in NPEP follow Northwestern’s academic calendar. Faculty members receive a modest stipend, funds for course supplies, and reimbursement for reasonable travel expenses.

● **Graduate students:**
  Graduate students can volunteer in NPEP in various ways, including organizing and participating in reading groups at Stateville, providing one-on-one tutoring to NPEP students, and offering support for individual courses, as needed. In addition, there are opportunities for advanced graduate students to teach their own courses at the Cook County Department of Corrections (CCDOC). Find more information about volunteer trainings and applications for CCDOC teaching opportunities at our website.

● **Undergraduate students:**
  Undergraduate students can volunteer with NPEP in a number of ways. They can provide one-on-one tutoring to NPEP students at Stateville and participate in reading groups or other special events Stateville. Undergraduates can also participate in the Undergraduate Prison Education Partnership (see page two for details!).

● **Community supporters:**
  One of the biggest ways community supporters can help NPEP is by making a donation. Incarcerated students in NPEP are not charged for tuition or any course-related expenses. NPEP is grateful to have major support from Northwestern and from community partnerships, but your donations will help NPEP to expand its transformative educational programming and better meet the needs of an underserved prison population in Illinois. No matter how big or small, every donation helps, from funding books for quarterly book clubs, to helping purchase of essential materials for NPEP students, to aiding in NPEP’s expansion to other Illinois correctional facilities. You can make a donation here: www.sites.northwestern.edu/npep