

The Ohio Prison Education Exchange Project

TRANSFORMING EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

Grounded in a commitment to equity and radical inclusion, the **Ohio Prison Education Exchange Project** is underpinned by the belief that quality higher education is a right — regardless of one’s background, identity or status.

Directed by Mary Thomas (Associate Professor, Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies) and Tiyi Morris (Associate Professor, African and African American Studies), OPEEP emphasizes collaborative-learning opportunities for incarcerated students alongside campus students in several of central Ohio’s prison facilities. It is working to increase access to college classes for incarcerated and justice-involved individuals. Broadening experiences of learning in new and challenging contexts illustrates the rewards of engaging in intellectual projects through empathy and a shared commitment to recognize the dignity of all people.

In May 2021, OPEEP held its first inside-out training, which included 20 faculty and instructors from five Ohio State campuses, five colleges and fifteen unique disciplines. The project will administer two dozen unique courses which will be offered in the next three academic years. Working with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, along with the Ohio Reformatory for Women and the Southeastern Correctional Institution, OPEEP has four inside-out courses for the 2022 spring semester, and it has established the first ever learning community at ORW with incarcerated student leaders.

“OPEEP has made it possible for me to bear witness to the transformative process of collaborative learning and education as the practice of freedom in a more powerful and intimate way... Through my teaching, I attempt to empower students to use the knowledge gained about themselves and our society to challenge inequalities and injustices.”

TIYI MORRIS
Associate Professor of African and African American Studies-Newark

“[This program] has led to many alumni, both inside and out, to make career choices that will help to deter crime and help those who are involved in the criminal justice system, as well as helping to create other programs inside of prison that help with cognitive thinking. Thus, helping to lower the recidivism rate and make those who feel hopeless to think towards brighter futures.”

INSIDE ALUMNI

“Together, over a semester, we realize that more connects us than separates us. Yet, important differences between us exist. Only by holding our differences intact through shared respect can we forge futures not tethered to inequality and prejudice.”

MARY THOMAS
Associate Professor of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies

“What I learned from this class (and about myself) cannot be found in a traditional classroom setting; it is only something that can be taught to students who are fully immersed within the correctional setting. This course inspired me to attend graduate school and earn a clinical social work degree.”

OUTSIDE STUDENT