

BEHIND THE WIRE

COLLEGE IN PRISON PROGRAM | WOMEN'S HURON VALLEY | October, 2024

EMU STUDENT VALUES AT WHV

The students enrolled for the 2024-2025 year at EMU's WHV Campus collaborated to create the tenets of our program. We chose Community, Growth, Intentionality, and Character, defined as:

COMMUNITY: Lifting each other up while celebrating our differences

GROWTH: A commitment to growing our internal and external skills to ensure that we do our best as we continue to evolve.

INTENTIONALITY: A mindset of creating a positive, empathetic, and compassionate presence - showing gratitude, flexibility, and open-mindedness within our environment.

CHARACTER: True character is guided by our moral compass - reflecting honesty, integrity, respect, trust, and dependability

A YEAR OF EXPANSION

Author: **ASHLEIGH SMITH**

College in Prison (CiP) programs are becoming more popular recently thanks to the expansion of the federal Pell grant program, but are often for Associate Degree programs and are also slow to grow. At Women's Huron Valley, the EMU program has shattered that model by implementing a Bachelor's degree, doubling enrollment numbers, forming student clubs, training veteran students to mentor incoming peers, establishing a resource library, and creating a comprehensive re-entry support program - all in just one year!

The hard work and dedication of EMU faculty is largely responsible for these considerable strides with CiP program director Meghan Lechner blazing the path forward. She gives the credit to the students in the cohort saying, "I have been absolutely delighted to see the dedication, enthusiasm, and creativity of our students. Whether it be advocating for their own student clubs, coming up with extra or co-curricular events for fellow students, or their interest in pursuing self-generated projects sparked by what they have learned in the classroom - it is a true gift to work alongside the minds and hearts of WHV EMU students."

With incarceration numbers swelling at alarming rates, the recidivism rates have grown as well with few proven disruptions to stop this (PPI, 2024). However, research shows there is a direct relationship between participation in higher education and lower recidivism rates; mainly the more education gained, the less likely the individual is to reoffend. Rates drop drastically from 55% to 13.7% with an Associate's Degree and drop even further to 5.6% with the completion of a Bachelor's Degree (AACL, 2024). Taking into consideration the possible budgetary savings this could have on a large scale proves the potential good CiP programs could have on a larger population. Although this is a solution that is generally ignored by policy makers (NPEP, 2024), for the students and faculty that take part in these programs, the effects are life changing.

EMU professor Elizabeth Sikkenga, who recently taught Introduction to Entrepreneurship at WHV, was asked what her experience teaching at WHV was like and her response was, "Teaching at WHV was a highlight of my teaching career. I always enjoy my classes and find most EMU students engaged and enthusiastic, but the students at WHV are at a delightful new level. They are so open minded and eager to learn. The students actively participated in my lectures, asking great questions, and contributed their knowledge - our topic discussions were phenomenal. I think I learned as much as I taught!" This gives credence to this being a monumental experience for more than just students. Her role as a faculty advisor to the student-led business club further illustrates how impactful teaching inside has been for her.

Professor Brenna Breshears, who taught a Trauma Informed Perspectives course at WHV has also taught in a carceral setting before - joining a growing list of professors who teach at WHV's campus as well as EMU's central campus. When asked what she thought individuals in this program would do with EMU's investment in them, Breshears responded, "my hope is that not only will students continue to invest in themselves as a by product of being supported by EMU admin and faculty, but that while incarcerated, they will use their experience to mentor and support their peers into pursuing EMU degrees. In addition, for those who are released, my hope is that they will continue to utilize EMU's services as alumni and remain connected with the academic community networks and/or build their own." Breshears also has continued her involvement with the WHV campus by serving as the faculty advisor for the Health & Wellness Club and by assisting with Mentor training.

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Important Dates

NOV 27-DEC 1, 2024
NO CLASS; THANKSGIVING

DEC 8, 2024
LAST DAY OF CLASS

DEC 9-13, 2024
EXAMS & FINALS DUE

JAN 6, 2025
WINTER SEMESTER BEGINS

Call for Submissions

Want to contribute to our next issue? Get in touch with Meghan Lechner (via JPay), Amber Martens, or Ashleigh Smith to join the team!

Editor Letter

Author: AMBER MARTENS

Welcome to the first edition of the WHV Campus CiP Newsletter, Behind the Wire. This is a collaborative effort highlighting students, clubs, and individuals in the CiP program. This newsletter allows students to tell their stories, use their voices, and shine a light on a unique program within the WHV complex. This newsletter will give an inside perspective, help students share their lives, and bring attention to the program alongside the often overlooked and forgotten.

In this issue, we celebrate the growth of the EMU CiP program, the business and wellness clubs, the newly formed mentor program, and highlight achievements of students. Recipes will be shared to get a look into how the students cook - not much different than a struggling college student on campus!

We invite you to stay awhile, gain insight into our lives, enjoy hearing from individuals sharing their stories, and see the growth of our amazing program - giving incarcerated women an opportunity to obtain a Bachelor's Degree.

Thank you for reading our newsletter!
-Amber Martens

CiP Highlights

STUDENT KUDOS

Elected Club Officers
Whole Me (Wellness Club)
President - Ashley Shade
VP - Lori Towle
Secretary - Angela Fisher

BOSS (Business Club)
President - Cara Moore
Secretary - Amber Martens

Winter 2024 Dean's List
Shirikiana Draper
Ashleigh Smith

Student Voice Council (SVC)
President - Quiana Lovett
VP - Cara Moore
Secretary - Carol Poole
Public Relations - Lorie Stuer
Rep. - Tracy Leigh
Rep. - Mercedes Kemp
Rep. - Jeneva Schaub

MiCHEP Student Representative
Katherine Woods

PERSONAL GOALS AND ACCOLADES

SHIRIKIANA DRAPER:
Participated in jogging a 5k! She also now holds the position of External State Director for the National Lifers Association (NLA).

TISH TOLBERT:
Completed her vocational trades course and successfully finished her Building Trades Program!

KATHERINE WOODS:
Became the FIRST female representative for the Michigan Consortium of Higher Education in Prison (MiCHEP) board!

MERCEDES KEMP:
Facilitated her first Domestic Violence Support Group!

ANGELA FISHER:
Contributed to the 29th annual PCAP Art Exhibition (also recorded an audio narrative for her piece). She also put on a Yoga Extravaganza Event that had a record breaking 51 people attend!

A Year of Expansion...cont'd

All parties interviewed for this article pointed to the same challenge most difficult to overcome: a lack of technology. In a world that is moving towards more dependency on technology faster than ever, prison systems are decades behind. Everything is handwritten, independent research is non-existent, and students may not have even used a laptop or cellphone. Thankfully we are able to pivot and adapt to still meet the requirements of each course and our degree program.

This program, although it has grown quickly, is nowhere near done. When asked what this program could look like 3-5 years from now, Meghan Lechner explained her vision: "My hope is that we have had at least 2-3 EMU graduation ceremonies held at WHV and that our WHV students remain active members of the EMU community that has been created there. I hope club participation is high and that our students are better collaborating with central campus clubs and organizations. I hope that our WHV students are happy with the quality of their EMU education and that they truly feel they are a part of the larger EMU community."

Sounds like the sky's the limit.

Making a Difference

Author: ASHLEIGH SMITH

Everybody familiar with EMU's WHV campus knows Meghan Lechner, aka Meg. She's the constant support, the behind the scenes stage director, and the authentically friendly face we've all become used to seeing. Did you ever wonder what karmic blessing you'd gotten to have her in your corner? Well, I've got the details.

I asked Meg if there was a driving force that caused her to choose this specific profession. She responded, "in my last year of graduate school, President Obama was discussing the idea of bringing back Pell grants for incarcerated people. While no policies had yet been put into trial phases (of which EMU would eventually become a part of) it certainly piqued my interest and I decided to dedicate my thesis research to the benefits and best practices of carceral education at the time. Through this research I noticed the opportunities that universities had to help fill a tremendous educational gap in this proven recidivism intervention. I believe access to a quality education is a fundamental human right and working with this population of students, who are so often neglected and overlooked, is truly my professional passion. I think incarcerated students have amazing stories to tell and a lot to offer our communities during their incarceration and most certainly after."

I know I speak for many of us when I say thank you for seeing each of us.

Whole ME

Author: LORI TOWLE - VICE PRESIDENT

The Whole Me Health and Wellness Club is located on the WHV campus and was established May 21, 2024.

Whole Me stands for:

W - Well-being
H - Health
O - Open-Mindedness
L - Love
E - Emotion
M - Mental
E - Energy

Our goal is to cultivate a thriving community that promotes holistic well-being through embracing health, open-mindedness, love, emotions, and mental energy among students.

The club meets bi-weekly; each meeting a member gives a presentation of something meaningful to them that they can teach to the rest of the club. Currently, every second meeting is used to discuss chapters from the Compassionate Mind Workbook and every third meeting our faculty advisor, Brenna Breshears, gives a presentation on a topic requested from the club members such as Flash, holistic healing, energy work, holding/releasing anger, and touch points.

In July, members created personal mission statements and shared them with other club members. Each meeting opens with a feelings check-in from the "feelings wheel" by each club member and ends with a grounding exercise facilitated by the member doing the presentation.

This student club is centered on holistic well-being! We are passionate about fostering a supportive environment where every member can explore and enhance their health, cultivate open-mindedness, nurture love and emotional well-being, and boost mental energy. Through workshops, discussions, activities, and accountability challenges, we aim to empower students to prioritize their overall well-being, build meaningful connections, and develop lifelong skills for a balanced and fulfilling life. Our club is focused on moving forward from the past by embracing and nurturing our whole selves in the present and we are committed to a shared leadership model to promote and honor diverse points of view and abilities.

B.O.S.S Business Club

Author: CARA MOORE - PRESIDENT

In the summer of 2024, Eastern Michigan University students at the Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility campus created its first business club - called BOSS. The acronym stands for: Businesses of Successful Students. The purpose of the club is to provide students with the space and resources to create individualized master plans to execute personal business endeavors. Many club members have an Associates degree in Business Administration and/or a draft of a business plan.

We previously lacked the additional resources needed to strengthen our chances of being a successful business owner. This club has provided us the space to meet twice per month with like-minded peers that want to achieve the same goal. We are supported by our club advisor, Elizabeth Sikkenga, who is an Eastern Michigan University part-time lecturer. She provides us with relevant research information, given that we don't have access to the much needed technology to do research ourselves. We also use material from previous classes to assist us in formulating a solid business plan; some of our material came from the Intro to Entrepreneurship course that Elizabeth taught here at the WHV campus. Although we live in a non-traditional college environment, we utilize all resources afforded to us to achieve our goals. As the Presidents of the BOSS club, I motivate all members to visualize themselves as a business owner. We challenge each other to piece together the puzzle to make our visualizations a reality.

To learn more about the BOSS club please check out this article in [EMU Today](#).

Mentor Program

From the perspective of a Mentor [Angela Fisher]...

It is a privilege to be an EMU Peer Mentor to incoming students during the Fall 2024 semester. Being a peer mentor is a soft introduction into the complex equation known as post-secondary education while incarcerated. Having someone who truly relates to this unique experience come alongside you to offer support and encouragement on the days you doubt yourself - its priceless. Mentoring incoming students is an honor and a privilege I wouldn't trade. There will be challenges we face and I stand firm in my conviction that together we can accomplish great things. I believe peer support is the first rung on the ladder to success. The people who use this time well will one day leap from this hard place and find a soft landing welcomed back into society as a brand new, elevated, and educated person. That why I am so thankful to be a part of this journey.

And her Mentees [Keta James & Jaime Rieger]...

Having a Mentor helps me to focus on more than just school. She gives me support on my daily life skills. I've begun to feel like I am not alone with this possibility of friendship. [KJ]

Since I joined the EMU cohort I was blessed with an awesome Mentor. She has helped me above my expectations through problems I have gotten myself into - she has not given up on me (even through my selfishness) and has become a true friend. I am truly blessed to have her in my life. The program works if you keep it honest and engage to the best of your ability. [JR]

What Does TIME Mean to You?

We asked students to tell us what "TIME" meant to them. The responses were often longer than we'd initially planned for, but the words were so impactful we've included them all:

"Time as we know is complex - it can be for better or worse. Time is powerful, it'll make your every move matter. Time will have you asking yourself what would you like the time to do? Time will let you stand firm in who you are, allowing you to capture your strengths and release your fears. Time allows you to accomplish many goals and give yourself the compliment of a job well done. So embrace your time to evolve and move forward in time.

[Annessa McClinton]

"Time...its the only thing that never stops, and something you can't get back."
[Angela Fisher]

T - Teamwork
I - Integrity
M - Mentoring
E - Efficiency
[Jaime Rieger]

Time
this breath
until the next breath
from birth to death and beyond

This moment
in my quiet room
from mom into night's rest
and every moment after - infinity
[Tracy Leigh]

"Managing my life to its fullest potential."
[Keta James]

It's a funny thing, the concept of time, always moving forwards never backward. Ooohhh, how I wish that I could rewind the time

Back to a certain place, back to a moment in time, to a mistake, I would give anything to erase.

As I sit here in this place serving time for my mistakes I cannot help but to applaud the cold cruel hands of fate.

You see, 15 years is their going rate for the mistakes that a stupid kid deemed to make

So young and dumb I was making these mistakes not realizing

that I was cashing in the precious time that I'd give ANYTHING to rewind.

Seeing the world through my youthful eyes, I thought I had all the time, in spades, to live, to laugh, to love, to want, to OPEN my mouth and tell the world, all of the many things that I had to say.

All it took was one night, to make one mistake to squander away 15 years of time I thought I had in spades

As I finish up this time gone to waste

I have to acknowledge, the many lessons, I have learned along the way. The fact that I am a better person today, I just hope the world is ready for me to come tell it ALL I HAVE TO SAY

Because I have learned from my mistakes, I will utilize my time in much better ways, I will live, I will laugh, I will love, I will want, I will open my mouth and tell the world ALL that I am dying to say And I will NEVER again waste a single moment of time gifted my way.
[Kimberly Wonsey]

"Time for me has become a deliberate setting aside by God for the expressed purpose of providing an atmosphere free of distractions to facilitate my evolution into the woman He created me to be.

[Shirikiana Draper]

Good Reads

ONCE UPON A RIVER BONNIE JO CAMPBELL

Follow a young woman to find her place in the world. After her mother left and her father dies, Margo is left with nothing but an Annie Oakley biography. Margo sets out on the river to find her mother. Takes place in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Currently being read in Development of American Literature (LITR 309W)

7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE STEPHEN R. COVEY

Self-Help | Growth
Help become the best version of yourself.
Personal effectiveness - guide to happiness.

FOREVER NEVER LUCY SCORE

Guilty Pleasure | Romance
Based on Mackinac Island. When Remi returns home she runs into Brick Callan, a man with a loyal heart. Brick tries to find out what brought Remi home after all these years - but what will finding out cost them?

Recipes

BUFFALO CHICKEN DIP

ANNESSA MCCLINTON

1 pk Chicken
1 pk Jalapeno Cream Cheese
2 spoons Sharp Cheddar Cheese Spread
1 single serving Hot Sauce pack
1 pk Ranch
1 bag Velveeta Cheesy Refried Beans and Rice

Combine all ingredients except ranch in a microwave safe bowl. Add water until mixture is covered, stir.

Place in microwave for 5 minutes, stopping to stir 2-3 times. Remove and let stand for 5 minutes. Drizzle ranch on top and serve with Doritos or snack crackers of your choice. You can also top with chopped bell peppers, onions, bacon crumbles, and shredded cheese for an extra twist.

COLD CHICKEN RANCH NACHOS

TRACY LEIGH

1 pk. Chicken
1 Velveeta Cheesy Rice
1 Tropical Mix
2 pk. Ranch Dressing
1 Apple (diced)
1 tub Cheddar Cheese & squirt of Cream Cheese (for sauce)
1 bag Peanuts
1 large bag Cool Ranch Doritos

Fix Velveeta Cheese Rice according to instructions and let stand while you prep remaining ingredients. In 2 bowls, layer 1/4 of ingredients. Layer 1: chips, rice, chicken - then drizzle with cheese sauce
Layer 2: tropical mix, peanuts, and apples - drizzle with ranch dressing. Repeat layering of all ingredients and enjoy.
You may do only 1 layer in bowls and make 3 bowls instead of 2, but why? Enjoy! (Bacon bits also optional).