

# BEHIND THE WIRE

COLLEGE IN PRISON PROGRAM | WOMEN'S HURON VALLEY | February/March 2025

## CiP Cohort Values

### COMMUNITY | GROWTH | INTENTIONALITY | CHARACTER

"Our cohort values are a mixture of respect for one another and for ourselves as well as a common sense of values as we actively pursue our journey towards higher education and our resolve to become better people." - G. Bailey

"Our cohort values mean togetherness. We are a group of individuals who have come together to build an educational community. Therefore, we benefit from shared knowledge and wisdom, of learning, developing lifelong friendships and incorporating freedom of choice, a voice." - Shikea Tyler

"Our cohort values mean taking intentional steps towards transforming your character, it not only builds you community but keeps you in the process of growth." - Mercedes Kemp



## Picture Day

Author: HEATHER McKEE

The room was electric with anticipation as I took a step inside. All around me buzzed the happy chatter of students as they eagerly waited for picture day to begin. Mirrors were passed around for last minute touch ups and poses were being tried on like new clothes. Some were cast off with a laugh and others were given serious consideration. Words of encouragement and compliments floated on the air, the sentiment of community a living thing, gently touching each of us as it flowed through the room.

I quickly filled out my consent form and took my place in line for the individual photos. I watched those students ahead of me, one by one, take their seat in front of the Eastern banner. They each smiled their biggest smiles and my heart swelled with pride. This is my cohort, this is my school.

"Do I look ok?" a voice behind me asked tentatively. I turned around to see a fellow classmate, face bright with excitement, underlined with a shadow of uncertainty. I look beyond that to see what EMU sees in each and every one of us, unlimited potential just waiting to be nurtured. It was my turn to be touched by the spirit of community, so I sprinkled my own words of encouragement into the atmosphere. "Perfect! You look absolutely perfect!" I responded, and I meant every word.

My turn finally came and I settled into my chair, the EMU banner proudly displayed behind me. I flashed my brightest 1000 watt smile for the camera while Meg nodded with encouragement. "One more" she says, and I hold my smile while she moved slightly back and held the camera a little higher. That's the thing about Meg, not only does she meet us where we're at, but she will move however she needs to in order to pull the very best out of us.

The line moved quickly and before I knew it, it was time for the group photo. People started to scurry, trying to find their perfect place and I stiffened for a moment as I was pressed against the person next to me. Over a decade of NO TOUCHING!!! has been drilled into my head. Continue on pg. 2 [Picture Day]

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## Important Dates

MARCH 28, 2025  
**Undergraduate Research  
Symposium (Main Campus)**

END OF MARCH, 2025  
**Summer Course Registration**

APRIL 21-25  
**LAST WEEK OF CLASS/EXAMS**



## Editor Letter

Author: ANGELA FISHER

Hello Fellow Eagles,

This is an issue of firsts! At Behind the Wire, we succeed through shared leadership. This third issue is a compilation of the hard work and dedication each of us brings to the table, ever aware that there is always room at the table for everyone. This issue features the largest number of student contributors to date, and we're still growing.

Alongside our standing contributions of recipes from the inside, good books to follow up on and updates to club business, in this issue you'll hear from a "baby eagle" as she describes the photo day; while the staff spotlight highlights Dr. Brenna Breshears, as well as our debut in the EMU symposium 2025. I'm also honored to introduce our new special column, Helping Hands. H.H. is our simple way to wrap arms around each other, reminding us we're not alone.

I hope you see yourself and recognize peers on this platform. Thank you all for believing in this team and helping to create content we can all be proud of.

Namaste,  
Angela Fisher



## Class Impact

Author: Brandi Wentworth

I was asked what EMU class was the most impactful to me. It took me .0001 seconds to answer that question: Creative Writing with Professor Christine Hume. This class definitely changed my outlook on writing. Her class made me even consider writing short stories for publication, something I'd never dreamed of before.

I have to admit, the first day of class I had sweat dripping from my palms and my forehead was all clammy. What had I signed up for? Our first assignment was writing a poem about where we're from, I know nothing about poetry, let alone writing it. What the hell, I thought to myself, I'll give it my best shot.

Taking critiques from my classmates and Professor Hume allowed my writing to improve immensely over the semester. I was able to get out of my own way, instead of tripping over self doubt.

My writing improved so much that by the time I completed my final portfolio, Professor Hume suggested I submit a piece I'd worked really hard on for publication. Nah, that wasn't something I really wanted...until that first rejection rolled in. That lit a fire in me. I thought to myself, I'm going to make this happen. I applied to the undergraduate symposium and Professor Hume sponsored me for it, I'm going to showcase that piece while I wait for an answer from the second platform Professor Hume helped me submit my work to. I will continue to learn, write, and pursue my previously unknown dream of becoming a published author. All because EMU's Creative Writing Professor taught me to believe in my talent.



## Staff Spotlight

Author: AMBER MARTENS

Many of us met Dr. Brenna Breshears when she taught the Trauma Informed Perspectives class. Others met her when she started as the faculty advisor for Wellness Club. She has also helped with the mentor program and is currently teaching a Counseling class this semester. Brenna is always such a light in the room, she makes everyone feel heard and validated. She is dedicated to helping the incarcerated community which shows through her empathy, compassion, and years of service.

I asked Brenna what made her decide to get involved with the prison system. She got involved with the incarcerated community during her last year at Portland State. During a trip to the Columbia River Correctional Facility she states "I also came to understand that the rate of disability in prison is astronomical and often unnoticed or underserved." Seeing this helped her decide to pursue education in disabilities and counseling, already expanding on her natural talents.

I was able to ask Brenna about her perspective if she saw education as a privilege or a right? Her response speaks to the amount of humanity she sees in each of us stating, "education is a basic need, and all humans deserve to have their basic needs met." She is one of the many keys to helping us achieve those needs.

Brenna comes in here each and every time ready to work with us and help utilize any tools or resources she available. She describes students on the WHV campus as "have a perspective of power, privilege, and opportunity that I find unique. This translates into...respect for themselves and others that make our classroom communities exceptionally dynamic in their ability to facilitate change, learning, and discovery." This shows she understands our environment and the struggles we face each day. I myself look forward to further learning experiences with Dr. Brenna. Thank you to Brenna for her continued support, education, resources, and humanity!

## Picture Day Con't

I quickly brushed it off and let myself be truly present in this moment. With an arm draped over the shoulder of the person to my left, I press in even closer to make room for my classmates to squeeze in too.

After much jostling around we finally settled into our final positions, ready for this moment in our lives to be immortalized. I found myself in the back row, probably not the best place for someone as vertically challenged as myself, but I made due. I stood on my tip toes to make sure I was seen, then I put my hand on the back of the person in front of me and placed my head strategically between two heads in the row in front of me. Meg jumped up on a chair in the center of the room and started snapping pictures. My calves had started to cramp from holding my pose and I think to myself that this moment is the perfect analogy for my EMU experience. Sometimes it will be uncomfortable and maybe even a little painful, I might not always make the wisest decisions but there will be someone there to support me, just as I will lend my support to those who might need it.





# Introducing Your Student Voice Council

Author: TRACY LEIGH

Innovation is a strong word. Most people dream, several ignite their dreams with action, yet only a few individuals are ready and excited to go through doors of possibility when opportunity allows. The Student Voice Council (SVC) is a group that seeks to champion visionary ideas, leaders, and innovators within the college program community at Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility (WHV). Let's introduce the Council, share their purpose and goals, and explore their new ideas and paths within the college programs.

First some history: Spring of 2022, a new door opened with Jackson College (JC), the only college inside WHV at the time. Several JC students were asked by Bobby Beauchamp (the former Director of the Jackson College Education Program), to consider forming a Student Voice Council in collaboration with Vera Institute of Justice's representatives from the California, Washington, and New York locations. The Council began with six students - a few of these founding members have gone home or resigned - the remaining members from the original cohort are K.Woods, J.Moore, T.Camburn, and Q.Lovett. These members met bi-weekly and hosted monthly meetings with the Executive team. This first year, the Council was trained, questioned, listened to, encouraged, and then were set-up with a team of WHV facility, college staff, and Lansing staff for further collaboration.

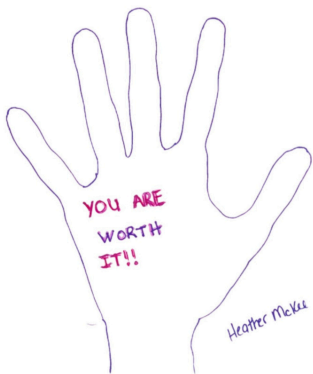
Shortly after, several topics were discussed or implemented by the Council which include: the implementation of Education Boards inside the college units for information updates and postings, arrangements for earlier meal times to accommodate the college schedule, the purchase of college materials and encyclopedias for study rooms, college program inclusion of all-weather bags to protect student work, and inquiries towards increased tutoring and a tutoring lab. The Council also assisted (and continues to assist) with Jackson College (and now EMU) registration and book distributions - this assistance has led to significantly lessened wait times and fewer clogged hallways at the school building.

Once the EMU College in Prison program was implemented, the SVC's vision expanded. Bi-Laws (Council rules and standards) were constructed as guidelines for future Council generations and selections to fill seat vacancies left by members who had returned home or resigned were conducted shortly after. The Council also replaced Ms. K. Woods who took a position with the Michigan Consortium for Higher Education in Prison (MiCHEP) as WHV's student representative.

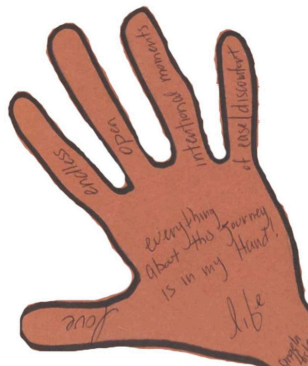
January 2024 opened with a new Council. The new members included: C.Poole, L.Stuer, J.Schaub, and M.Kemp making a total of eight (8) representatives to get the job done. The year's topics discussed or implemented were: study room materials, tutors and tutor labs, the Road to Restoration Program program assistance with vital release documents, college re-entry programs, and job fairs. The Council brainstormed ways to type and post meeting minutes, realistic measures for addressing major misconducts, smoother college procedures, and updating technology with Secure Books. Similarly, the Council attended a two-day Zoom conference that inspired possibilities for more juvenile programming and obtaining prison jobs with college/university financial support. Council member Carol Poole had this to say about the mission of the Council: "The Student Voice Council's role is one of encouragement by collectively advocating for Jackson College and Eastern Michigan University students. Our highest priority is to assist our peers in attaining their goal of a college education and this is accomplished through meetings with M.D.O.C., Jackson College, and EMU staff, participating in book fairs, class registrations, student graduations and round table discussions with members of the Michigan Consortium for Higher Education in Prison."

Once again, January 2025 finds the SVC replacing members stepping down due to release or ending their two-year terms. New member E.Riley shared: "Being part of S.V.C. for me means advocating for the changes we want to see and showing ourselves and society that being incarcerated does not change the value we hold; we have value beyond what they [society] recognize." As the waiting lists grow for both JC and EMU, new issues surface while current ones still need to be resolved. WHV's SVC welcomes E.Riley, M.Stroud, and J.Beckman to the Council, wondering what new ideas they will incite. The Student Voice Council wants you to know that the SVC is YOUR VOICE. Each member is willing to take YOUR concerns or approvals seriously. The goal is to work toward a majority staff/student compromise to make the college experience as enjoyably smooth as possible. These efforts are meant to prepare students for successful reentry into society while achieving their personal or professional dreams. The Council hopes that by equipping students with life tools for success, WHV's college graduates will reflect lower recidivism rates while igniting prepared professionals to contribute positive growth within their communities, leaving lives of crime behind forever.

## Creative Prompt: "HELPING HANDS"



HEATHER MCKEE



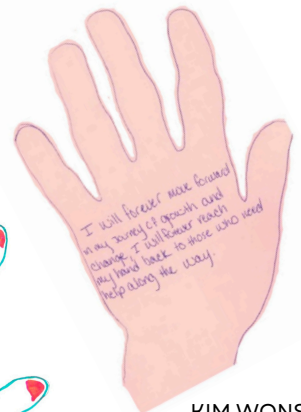
ANGELA FISHER



KEYA JONES



JAIME RIEGER



KIM WONSEY



# EMU WHV Campus Clubs & Programs



## W.H.O.L.E. M.E. (Wellness Club)

Author: MORGAN ROWLEY

Since being a part of the W.H.O.L.E. M.E. wellness club I've felt a sense of community. I love the fact that we can all have different opinions and thoughts and still come together to share and bounce ideas off of one another. I will say that there's been some challenges with consistency in dealing with our circumstances, but when we do come together our time has become so much more special and valued.

You never know what new tools you'll walk away from a meeting with. I personally remember one topic we discussed, acupuncture, and I wasn't too interested in it before hand. I walked away that day thinking to myself wow that's something I want to learn more about and try when I get out. I think that is what this club is all about, introducing new tools into your life and figuring out what works best for you in your own wellness journey. I'm always looking forward to our next meeting and whatever that might bring. I hope to see some of you there in the coming semester!



## BOSS (Business Club)

Author: QUIANA LOVETT

As a member of the Businesses of Successful Students (BOSS) club, I am fortunate to work with like minded future entrepreneurs. Our club has three new members we'd like to announce and welcome: Kim Staton, LaDora Snell and Kimberly Wonsey. We continue to meet with our Eastern Michigan University faculty advisor, Professor Elizabeth Sikkenga. As always, we are so thankful for the resources and opportunities presented to us, by her and by EMU.

We are hoping to be able to facilitate an Executive Summary/ Elevator Pitch contest to the entire Eastern WHV campus cohort in the very near future. We will be posting information as we get it in the coming weeks, so make sure to keep an eye on your study room's information boards so you can participate.

If interested in joining BOSS, please reach out to a member or Meg!



## Another Program First

Author: ASHLEIGH SMITH

One great thing about Eastern Michigan's program here at WHV is their determination to ensure each student gets everything needed for their specific degree program. Cara Moore's experience with taking an independent study this semester is a great example of the lengths EMU goes to, even in this setting.

Cara explains "My independent study is in addition to the Social Injustice of the Juvenile Justice System course I'm currently enrolled in this semester. The independent study focuses on ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences), specifically evaluating how negative life experiences of young people who identify in the LGBTQIA+ community influence the trajectory of their future behaviors." For the curious, independent studies are actually not the norm for an undergraduate program, they are for cases where a specific gap needs to be filled, either educational or credit wise. Its just really great to see the CiP program going above and beyond to ensure that even when something may not be necessary for all the students, if its helpful to one or just a few people, they're still going to make sure we are given the opportunity and support to excel.

I asked Cara about support, specifically if she felt that the support EMU provides for this program helps her to do her best. She responded "The support EMU provides for this program definitely equips me to strive to do my absolute best. My instructor for the I.S. provides me with plenty of material to make a decision on exactly what I want to focus on, giving me an opportunity to have a voice and a choice in what I'm learning."

Its great to see as this program grows and continues to evolve that the core mission of mirroring on campus student's experience remains at the forefront of the EMU faculty's everyday actions.

## COMMUNITY PROMPT

### "What does HOME mean to you?"

Safety + Compassion x Love ÷ Forgiveness = Home

- Angela Fisher

My two sons and three granddaughters! :)

- Lori Towle

To me, the word home means tucking my children into their beds and reading them a bedtime story. - Keya Jones

Comfortability, safety and home cooked chicken.  
- Mercedes Kemp

Home to me is a feeling rather than a physical space. It can be anytime or anywhere I feel acceptance, peace, love and kindness. - G. Bailey

A safe, happy place that gives me comfort and love. - Nicole Fetterman

Its where the heart is, its taking a stroll on the beach, watching the waves and tide roll in. This is where I have my most peaceful moments. - Quiana Lovett

My comfort, my rock, my safe place at all times, my oasis in the desert, my shelter in the storm.  
- Kimberly Wonsey

My children and their children, where ever they are is home to me. I live in 5 block, but home is where my heart is and that is with them.  
- Keisha Killoran

Home means to me peace, shelter, togetherness and oneness to family, friends and loved ones.  
- Julia Catlett

Home is my Mom, Dad and brother! -  
Jamie Rieger

# CiP Highlights

## Student Kudos

- Undergraduate Research Symposium Participants: SHIRIKIANA DRAPER, ANGELA FISHER, MEGAN GREEN, MERCEDES KEMP, QUIANA LOVETT, AMBER MARTENS, JACARA MOORE, MORGAN ROWLEY, JENEVA SCHAUB, ASHLEIGH SMITH, LORIE STUER, & BRANDI WENTWORTH
- ASHLEIGH SMITH: Recipient of EMU's Undergraduate Research Stimulus Award.
- Newest WHOLE ME Club officers: TASHIENA COMBS (President), ANDREA BRACY (Vice President, ANGELA FISHER (Secretary).

## Personal Goals & Accolades

- MORGAN ROWLEY: Participated in the 2025 PCAP Art Show.
- LADORA SNELL: Began mentoring for Parenting Inside Out; Elected as Unit Rep for DB and as chairperson for the Warden's Forum.
- NANCY ABERNATHY: "I am a disabled 73yo great grandmother who is only 45 credits shy of my Bachelor's Degree!"
- MICHELLE JESSUP: "I am proud to be an Army veteran, mother of 4, grandmother to 3, and a wife!"



## The Equitable College Experience

Author: SHIRIKIANA DRAPER

On December 20th, EMU students received an email detailing protocol involved in applying to participate in the 45th Annual Undergraduate Research Symposium. The Symposium is a conference hosted by EMU's College of Arts & Sciences that showcases the exceptional research and creative projects/activities of students.

With trepidation, several CiP students decided to brave the arduous task of the application process despite the many challenges and obstacles inherent with being "behind the wire." The greatest challenge resting in limited to no access to the technology needed for in-depth research. The completion of current statistical data rests solely upon the shoulders of our professors.

In spite of the challenges, which created feelings of inadequacy for some, all of the applicants received the cherished and honored acceptance letters and schedules verifying the opportunity to present their work.

The journey of meeting both collectively and individually to devise creative avenues to highlight the many ways we've implemented our expanded knowledge and wisdom practically in our everyday lives has been a humbling experience. The faculty advisors - Decky Alexander, Christine Hume, and Rachel Robbins-Whited - have tirelessly encouraged, motivated, and pushed us to dig deep within ourselves to the untapped resources stored within us. Resources awaiting us in the untouched landscape of our hearts and minds. Resources we can, have, and will utilize for the benefit of others and ourselves.

The acquisition of newly discovered determination has created within us many feelings. Jacara Moore told this writer, "it feels like an honor to be allowed to submit my work in the Symposium. Although I am incarcerated, I feel liberated. I feel that my voice matters." A powerful declaration from this young student whose current residence encourages silence and oppression.

This writer then asked what Moore hoped the audience would receive from her work. She confidently responded, "I hope that the audience walks away with a full understanding of the power of improvisation and how it can be utilized in real life situations to enhance experiences in a meaningful way."

Some CiP students, having been afforded this amazing opportunity to present at the Symposium, express feelings of awe as they work through feelings of disbelief. It isn't always easy to fully grasp the depth of who we are and/or who we can be while looking over the expanse of electrified barbed wire fences.

It is in these moments, a clarity of purpose and passion pushes all EMU students forward with a fierce determination to surprise ourselves yet again. To reach for the distant afar with confidence that not only can we reach it but that we will know how to shape our lives more solidly for a better tomorrow. From this foundation we can and will influence the lives of those around us.

We take this opportunity to offer our heartfelt gratitude to EMU's staff for their commitment and dedication "to mirror the experiences of main campus students (Meghan Lechner)." You All have given us space to be vulnerable enough to discover and embrace the best version of ourselves.

EMU's 44th Annual Undergraduate Research Symposium will take place on campus on March 28, 2025. We invite all who are able to join us to celebrate the 12 CiP students, 1 former CiP student, and our CiP Intern (Jenelle) who will be presenting! Recordings of our current CiP students will be shown during Sessions C & D (1:45-4:15) In the EMU Student Art Gallery! These recordings will also be made available on our website after the Symposium. Congratulations to all of our CiP presenters!

## THE WOMAN CODE

SOPHIA NELSON

This is a self-help book that serves as a guide to how every woman should see themselves. If you feel like there were certain lessons you weren't able to receive during your childhood, this is the way to get the knowledge you deserve.

### SELF-HELP

(Recommender: LaDora Snell & Mercedes Kemp)

## THE WINNER

DAVID BALDACCI

This novel will suck you in and have your constantly wondering which direction the story will go in. A young woman is propositioned to leave her life of poverty by winning the lottery and becoming one of the richest people in the world. The only catch? She's running from her past.

### FICTION

(Recommender: Morgan Rowley)

# RECIPES

## STRAWBERRY BANANA ICE CREAM SANDWICH

BY: KEYA JONES (THE COOK UP)

### Ingredients

1 banana  
1 bag of dry creamer  
1/2 strawberry flavored drink stick  
2 spoons of Country Time Lemonade  
2 packs of Chocolate Chip Grandma's Cookies  
(or other similar type)

### Directions

1. Put creamer, drink stick, and lemonade together in bowl and mix while dry.
2. In separate bowl, mash banana until its mashed.
3. Add to dry bowl.
4. Add a spoon full of hot water at a time while whipping mixture, until it is smooth and creamy and thick enough not to fall off of spoon.
5. Add mixture to one side of each cookie and then make into sandwiches.
6. Set in cool place for at least 10 minutes and enjoy!

## PAD THAI (NOODLES WITH PEANUT SAUCE)

BY: CAROL POOLE

### Ingredients

Spicy Ramen Noodles or Rice Noodle  
Peanut Butter  
Soy Sauce  
(optional) jalapenos, peanuts - hot or salted,  
garlic powder, seasoning salt.

### Directions

1. Mix 2-3 spoons of peanut butter with a few dashes of soy sauce and hot water for a liquid consistency.
2. Add seasoning pack from noodle and any other optional seasonings.
3. Add sauce to uncooked noodles and a bit of water to cook.
4. If wanted, add jalapenos or peanuts

## HOW TO SUBMIT A COLUMN CONTRIBUTION, SPECIAL INTEREST ARTICLE, OR FEATURE ARTICLE TO BTW:

- Consult the posted deadlines on the Call for Submissions flyer posted in your Unit.
- Give your completed SUBMISSION FORM to either Angela Fisher, Amber Martens, or Ashleigh Smith.
- All submissions will be reviewed by the editing team and you will be notified either way if your submission will be used for an upcoming Issue. Editors will provide direction and feedback on your submission idea at this time.
- The editing process is an opportunity for learning and enhancing our collective publishing/writing/editorial skills. RESOURCE & JOURNALISM WRITING GUIDES ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.
- Submission Forms can be picked up from Angela, Amber, or Ashleigh. Forms will also be included in future BTW Issues.

\*The Community Prompt for the April/May Issue is: "What does TRANSFORMATION mean to you?"