

BEHIND THE WIRE

COLLEGE IN PRISON PROGRAM | WOMEN'S HURON VALLEY | April/May 2025 | Issue 4

CiP Cohort Values

COMMUNITY | GROWTH | INTENTIONALITY | CHARACTER

From the perspective of cohort member Tonya Mathis:

Community: Checking in, making sure we're all doing well.

Growth: Caring about more than myself. Eastern is family.

Intention: Setting aside time for others that may need a hand or caring ear.

Character: Working hard to make our character on the inside match the outside - it matters.



Minds, Community & Public Safety: Terrible to Waste - Beautiful & Necessary to Invest in.

Author: TASHIENA COMBS

During a time of immense turmoil over how our government allocates money for education and programming all over the country, I want to acknowledge how very grateful I am for the privilege of a University educational experience in this prison environment. Not only am I in prison where they send the people who are deemed "bad," "criminal," and/or "mentally ill," but I am also serving a life sentence, which in effect has also labeled me "irredeemable."

To all of the navigators, educators, volunteers, and administrators who work tirelessly pouring into those of us in desperate need of rebuilding out sense of value, worth and viability, I say Thank You! To my fellow Eagles who welcomed me with open arms and offered me a new level of accountability as I continue on this path of learning and growing, I want to say I am proud of you and thank you too.

Twenty-five years ago, when I was initially sentenced to serve the remainder of my life in prison, I was told to focus on obtaining a degree during the time it would take to secure a victory appealing my case. Taking hold of this advice, I looked forward to learning and growing even through such adversity. Then, after arriving at Scott's Correctional Facility in the year 2000, I discovered that college classes would no longer be available to people in prison. Most every program offered at the time were designed to meet the needs of people within three years of their ERD (Earliest Release Date). Idleness seemed to be the trajectory. After a couple of trips to segregation and a year-long stint in level Five, I had three years served and had to ask myself if this was who I wanted to be and how I wanted to spend the remainder of my time here.

In the illuminating book, "The Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves," Shawn A. Ginwright discusses belonging as a human kinship. "Kinship is a bond and binding relationship that occurs without consent...Belonging is different because it requires mutual consent to matter to one another...Belonging provides us with an identity, sense of meaning, connection, and purpose." (pg. 94)

Institutional settings like prison, where people are forced to live together, have historically been a breeding ground for forming bonds of kinship and belonging based on the same antisocial behaviors which led many of us here. These kinds of social bonds wreak havoc on state resources spent on security and control measures which help to create idleness, coupled with nothing but time to continue cultivating "criminal mindsets," figuring out ways to outsmart those security measures and controls.

With a heart filled with curiosity and wonder, I sat down to discuss with Tonya Mathis, another first-year EMU student, her view on the expansion of education and programmatic opportunities at WHV. Tonya was sentenced to serve 18 years and arrived here to prison in 2014 without her GED and no meaningful path available to meet her need due to her sentence. "It was only after working hard to advocate for myself that I was able to be 'Fast-Tracked' and I got my GED on my first try," Tonya shared. Tonya went on to say, "thankfully there was only four years between me getting my GED and college becoming available to me so I didn't spend a whole lot of time idle."

Continue on pg. 2 [Minds, Community, & Public Safety]

Special Announcement:

Have a relaxing summer! BTW will be getting back to covering everything about our community with our next issue coming out with the beginning of the Fall semester! (August/September)

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Important Dates

May 6, 2025
Summer A Classes Begin

MAY 14, 2025
Symposium Watch-Party (participants Only)

June 12, 2025
Business Pitch Competition (ALL EMU students invited!)

June 23, 2025
Summer B Classes Begin

Mid-July 2025
New Student Orientation Begins

July 30, 2025
GRADUATION! 🎓 🎉



Editor's Letter

Author: AMBER MARTENS

Welcome to BTW Issue #4, covering our community for April/May. We've packed a lot in for you before a pause on our next issue until August. BTW is proud to highlight everything WHV Campus related - individual and collective accomplishments. We also try to highlight the wonderful EMU Staff that change all of our lives with their continued dedication.

We invite you to check out our newest columns including the Poetry Corner and the Preview/Review Flash Sections. As always, you'll also find student club updates, Good Reads, Recipes, CiP Highlights, Helping Hands, Staff Spotlight, and Class Impact written by a variety of students. We also collected many definitions of TRANSFORMATION and have longer articles covering topics from the English Department to a student's personal journey for access to education.

Sit back, and spend some time learning all of the latest news about our program. Keep an eye out for our next call for submissions and enjoy the sunshine. See you in August!

Thank you & Enjoy,
Amber Martens
Co-Editor



Class Impact

Author: SHIRIKIANA DRAPER

For most of my adult life, I've been a self-conscious and shy individual. During the Fall 2024 semester, I had the privilege of enrolling in Improvisation (CTAR433) with Professor "Decky" Alexander. This class filled me with a confidence I wished I'd had twenty years ago. I prayed about how to bring this confidence to others.

The "The Table is Big Enough" community was born through a vision imparted to me by the Holy Spirit. With permission from the NLA (National Lifer's Association) Chapter 1014 President, I combined the Democratic concepts (discussed in SFCE 328W) with rules of Improvisation and walked into the Youth/Wise Group filled with trepidation as I felt completely out of my comfort zone. Fast forward four months...I'll keep doing this in part due to the impact it's having via their own words that follow: Tarae said, "This community has provided me with a fulfilling inner peace that has killed my craving for negativity. Every time I step foot in our circle there is a natural flow of love and joy but at the same time seriousness." Jordan's words moved me, "...life before this was drug-induced. This community inspires me to be a better version of myself. I'm so honored to have a seat at the table!"

EMU has given me knowledge and it's having far reaching effects within this community. A proverbial ripple in the water.

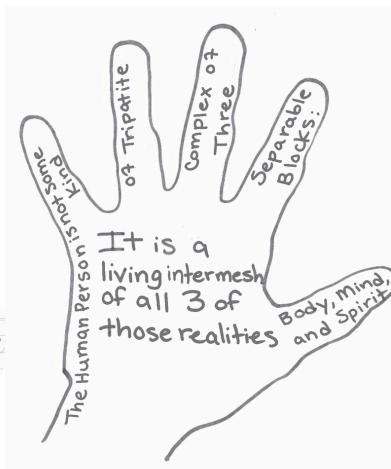
HELPING HANDS



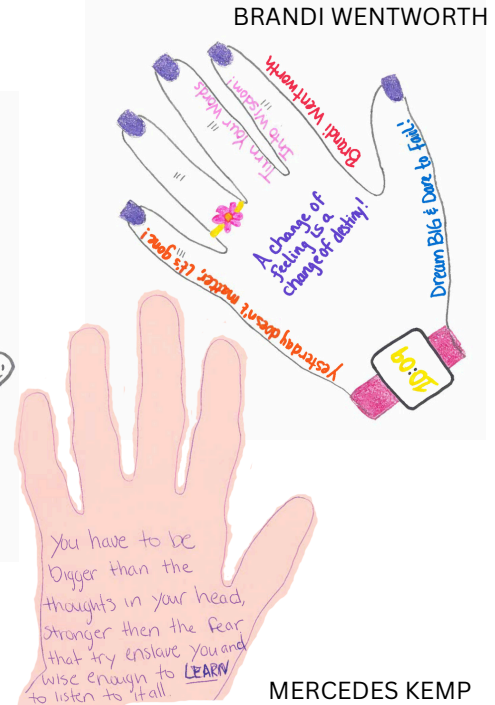
G.BAILEY



MORGAN ROWLEY



SHIKEA TYLER



MERCEDES KEMP

Minds, Community, & Public Safety...Con't

As Tonya described for me, we all have to make a choice to not allow our current reality to define who we can become. Today, there have been dramatic changes to MDOC policy. People serving life sentences are now eligible to participate in core programming and College in Prison opportunities. I am proud to say that I obtained an Associates Degree in Arts with Jackson College and I am currently enrolled with EMU pursuing my Bachelors in General Studies with a concentration in Interdisciplinary Writing. We now have access to the kind of belonging that empowers overall wellness and fuels the desire to give back for all that has been given to us. Exactly what Professor Breshears expressed she would like to see from EMU's investment: "My hope is that not only will students continue to invest in themselves as a byproduct of being supported by EMU administration and faculty, but that while incarcerated, they will use their experience to mentor and support their peers pursuing EMU degrees."

Now that is the kind of return that will lead to public safety policies that the government can rely on and should continue investing in.



EMU's English Department Rolls Out the Red Carpet at WHV Campus

Author: AMBER MARTENS & ASHLEIGH SMITH

L to R
Bonnie Jo Campbell &
Noor Hindi



During the tail end of our Winter '25 semester, the English Department has spoiled many of the students in the WHV cohort. Anyone who took LIT309W, LIT480W, CRWT201 and members of the student writing club all had an opportunity to get up close and personal with an author who's text we previously studied. Another round of thanks to Professor's Cunningham and Hume as well as CPC Taylor for making this a reality for us inside here. We'd also like to convey our extreme gratitude to writers Bonnie Jo Campbell and Noor Hindi for spending some time with our students.

In the Fall '24 semester, Dr. Cunningham taught our program's first Literature course, and having took that course we can tell you that it was challenging, but in the best way. We read many text's from a variety of authors and spent each class dissecting each theme and nuance of the previous week's reading. In the end it taught us how to critically analyze much more effectively, throughout the semester Charles pushed us to look at the work on the subjective and objective level and our discussions often tied to other story's themes. A favorite book of our class was Bonnie Jo Campbell's Once Upon A River. (rec. in issue 1 of BTW Good Reads) As we began our section on this reading, Charles mentioned to our group his ongoing attempt to get Bonnie Jo Campbell involved with our class to do an interview of some sort. As Charles puts it "Bonnie is deeply committed to working with incarcerated students."

This was not as easily carried out as originally thought. Because of policies and protocols that MDOC has regarding any video recordings being used in our classes, Bonnie and Charles had to think outside the box. Charles explains it well "The solution Bonnie offered was for me to interview her on zoom, record it, and then show it to the class on a video... scheduling conflicts delayed our meeting until December...and with our LIT480W students covering readings out of her collection American Salvage...we (both classes) ended up watching it with the help of Ms Taylor in April."

Mary Lemons (LIT309W student) said of the experience "Being included to experience something like this literary interview after the class was completed was amazing and I hope these types of opportunities will be available in the future." Having the opportunity to submit questions for the interview was another privilege, and Bonnie welcomed them with a great attitude and thoughtfully answered them. The whole portion of it being prerecorded and over zoom didn't detract from the experience of being in conversation with an author talking about literature. It really was a special experience.

Students from CRWT201 and the writing club had the opportunity to meet in person poet Noor Hindi on April 18th. Professor Christine Hume was asked if she thought the students here would have as impactful of an experience as her on campus students would and she answered "Hindi came to my class last year and I witnessed first hand how powerful an experience it was for my main campus stuents. I know she will engage with you in the same intimate, attentive, smart, and responsive ways. She will read some of her poetry answer questions and then give you a prompt an ask you to share your writing." Unfortunately, processing Hindi in took a large chunk of our meeting time, but we are lucky enough to get to host her again for the rest of our workshop on May 23rd! How awesome is it that she is willing to come back inside and be in community with us? Huge thanks to EMU staff for facilitating these types of experiences.

Thinking towards the future, we asked Christine if she had any workshops or special events like this planned in the future and her response "By guest writers? Yes, I want to make this a regular part of writing club. I've got a lot of ideas and contacts but I'm taking suggestions and want to follow the interests of our members. In the fall I'll be bringing in creative writing grad student writers as well."

Regarding his opinion on the CiP students interest in interacting with an author they've studied, Charles answered "CiP students seemed especially receptive...Her characters seem to resonate with the students, many of whom see similarities in their backgrounds. She believes everyone has "a core of platinum", which could be a motto for the program!"



Staff Spotlight

Author: ANGELA FISHER

On a chilly spring afternoon, I had the opportunity to sit down with professor Staley - those who were in her first Fundamentals of Public Speaking course know her as "Suzie." While chatting, she shared with me her excitement upon entering class that first night. I recall her smile brightened the whole room putting us all at ease. She remembers feeling immediately welcome in what she calls "our space." As the last student came in, Suzie told her, with a smile, "last one in sits in the middle." The student said okay and took the seat offered. Suzie tells me that moment in time allowed her to "check her privilege," knowing that she was the authority in the room but wanting to share in this experience more than to lead it.

I asked what was her biggest take-away and she explained there is great value placed on "authenticity and openness" relaying that she felt both here at WHV. Suzie went on to tell me, "I've taught this class for 24 years, and that first class here is my favorite class EVER." She attributed this to our strong community engagement .This is but one of many examples we talked about of how Suzie enjoyed the community that exists here. Being in this pace allowed her to "be present" without distractions of phones and emails. How we thrive in spite of our lack of technology, Suzie found "encouraging."

I ended our time together asking what she learned from us, her response left each of us a little teary eyed, "you each carry your whole self wherever you go."



WHV Campus Club & Program Updates



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

Author: ANGELA FISHER

This past month we've come alongside our new club members and shared some really cool ideas and concepts on wellness for the whole body-mind experience.

Dr. Breshears shared about EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing). EMDR, when practiced by a professional, allows you to experience REM type of sleep during waking hours of your day. It is also used for treatment of PTSD, anxiety, grief/loss, pain, and helps in many other areas.

President Tashiena Combs presented the "My Principles Guided Journal" by Ray Dalio - each member received their own copy (shout out to AFSC for the donation!) As a club we will begin to develop our own principles for a productive life. Examples we discussed: "We won't win at everything," recognizing patterns of people we engage with; "Oh, this is one of those," and how to shift from it and replacing self-defeating thoughts.

We continue to grow through "The Compassionate Mind Workbook," developing deeper compassion for ourselves and those around us. WholeMe Wellness Club is a great space to cultivate meaningful relationships, plant and water our seeds of growth, and get on track to a healthier, happier, more productive YOU! If you are interested in joining this club or would like more information about it you can always ask President Tashiena Combs, VP Drea Bracy, or Secretary Angela Fisher. We would love to share our club with YOU!



WRITING CLUB

Author: BRANDI WENTWORTH

Whether you want to write about your experience as an incarcerated person, write as a form of therapy, write for publication, or you just want to dip your toe in the water and see what it's all about, EMU's Writing Club is a wonderful place to collaborate with like-minded folks.

At the club meetings you can get feedback on your work - you get to decide what type of feedback you want. Do you only want to hear positive feedback? That's what you'll get. Do you want to know how to improve a piece? That's what you'll hear. The pen is in your hand.

Professor Christine Hume currently meets with the members of the Writing Club once a month. She will provide writing prompts to get your creative juices flowing if that's what you need. She will let us know about writing contests and will even help us submit our entries. She will arrange author meet and greets as well.

Noor Hindi, a Palestinian-American poet and reporter visited on April 18, 2025 for a question and answer session featuring her debut collection of poems titled, "Dear God, Dear Bones, Dear Yellow."

If the writing club piques your interest, please reach out to Meg to join. We'd love to hear/read what you've written or help you get started.

COMMUNITY PROMPT

What does TRANSFORMATION mean to you?

Noticing the changing seasons got us thinking so we asked for personal definitions of TRANSFORMATION. The answers are, as always, varied and original.

"Becoming the woman I strived to become!" -Keta Bailey

"Much like Optimus Prime, many incarcerated individuals are transforming into stronger machines mentally through education. I'd say that's one of the greatest transformations of all!" -Jeneva Schaub

"A positive change for mind, body, or spirit!!" -Carol Poole

"Someone or something changing into a 'new person' or a 'new thing;' Being made new. Leaving your old self behind and changing into something totally different and unrecognizable from what you were before." -Jaime Rieger

"Transformation is essentially an evolution of character that is displayed by one's actions." -G.Bailey

"The process of growth!" -Ashley Shade

"Being better than yesterday. Doing better tomorrow. Becoming different. Striving for greatness. 360 degree transformation." -Nicole Fetterman

"When I feel the urge to backslide into my old ways, I think of what God has blessed me with during my trials and tribulations. Transformation isn't easy but its worth it when you reach your full potential." -Andrea Bracy

"Getting rid of the old me so I can go home as the new and improved me. From criminal to compassionate!" -Keshia Killoran

POETRY CORNER

April is National Poetry Month! But here at BTW, no matter what time of year, if you write any poetry, we've got a space to share it! Please consider submitting a poem to a future Issue - we'd love to celebrate your creativity. Enjoy!

COLD CUTS by Tracy Leigh

Zipper is down on my refrigerator.
I witnessed a hamburger rolled
into a hot dog bun. I ate

because I could taste her
perfume all day at work. She
is my skirt tucked Into

the back of my panty hose,
drinking a cup of steaming
mad lava. She wears

flip flops in the winter and
makes snowmen on the
beach and then arrogantly

calls me twisted. I'll braid
the spaghetti in my stuck
zipper as If attached

to the top of my sanity and
perhaps tomorrow...

(inspired by Lorine Niedecker's "New Goose")

CiP Highlights

- **Liberate!** contributing writers: Shirikiana Draper, Carol Poole, Quiana Lovett, Mary Lemons, Katherine Woods, Michelle Jessup, and Ashleigh Smith
- **Cellar Roots** contributing writers: Lorie Stuer*, Jeneva Schaub, Brandi Wentworth, and Ashleigh Smith* (*Awarded the Jury's Choice Honor)
- **Business Pitch Competition Finalists:** Quiana Lovett, Mercedes Kemp, Cara Moore, Kim Wonsey, Jessica Hansen, and Brandi Wentworth
- A review and interview by Quiana Lovett and Ashleigh Smith will be published in the upcoming issue of **The American Book Review**.
- **Newly elected Representatives for EMU on the WHV Student Voice Council (SVC):** Carol Poole - Vice President, Mercedes Kemp - Secretary, Lorie Stuer and Jeneva Schaub Public Relations

GOOD LUCK ON THE NEXT STEP OF YOUR JOURNEY

CARA MOORE, ASHLEY SHADE, & KELLY CHRISTNER

(and any other EMU cohort members leaving before the Fall Semester begins!)



The Resource Center aka Jenelle

Author: HEATHER MCKEE

I left class excited. I'd just been assigned my first major research paper. During my walk back to the unit anxiety slowly began to overshadow my excitement. The whole purpose of a research paper is...research - and although our professor had given us some articles to begin, I knew I was going to need more. Without access to the internet or an academic library I worried about how I was going to get the materials I needed.

I relayed my fears to my roomie (and fellow Eagle) Angela Fisher, and she quickly and confidently told me not to worry because EMU had me covered. Still anxious, I peppered her with questions that she patiently answered while walking me through getting in touch with the Resource Center (Jenelle).

Before I requested more articles, I read the ones my professor had provided to focus in better on what areas I'd need more material on. Then I sent Jenelle a JPay with specifics: Class name, professor, topic of research, and the information I was requesting. I hit send feeling accomplished. Soon my anxiety came rushing back. This was my first semester, everything was new to me, I wanted to do well, NO!, I needed to do well, I owed it to honor this opportunity, I had to earn my Bachelor's degree - all of these thoughts were bouncing around my head. Then I received my requested materials.

The sheer volume of information I received led to another discussion with Angela. I wasn't worried about research anymore, now I was curious to know how did Jenelle find the time to get all of this done for us? Well, get this done and still have a life? Jenelle's response to these questions were honest and illuminating: "Time management is one of the most essential tools in juggling a busy life. It is important to prioritize responsibilities and allocate appropriate time to each. This allows you to create a balance between responsibility and enjoyment and create the ability to do both with purpose and intention...compiling research material for CiP students isn't just a task I have to complete, it's an opportunity to provide knowledge and information to individuals in an environment that can stifle intellectual growth due to its limitations, and that's something I'm honored to be able to assist with."

I would encourage everyone to use the Resource Center when needed. EMU fully supports us and wants to see us succeed; we're investments in the future.

REVIEW

Undergraduate Research Symposium

By: Mercedes Kemp

Phone calls home to loved ones often bring about the task of personifying our experiences in here so that our loved ones can feel a connection to what goes on in our daily lives. It's difficult to convey the immense effort we put into anything above the status quo, and how the challenges increase as we reach higher. The undergraduate research symposium not only showcased our work, but gave our families and loved ones something tangible to appreciate, admire and celebrate. I am very proud of my own accomplishments, but hearing my mother's "your work is impeccable" lights a flame in me that only my mother's words can fuel. Being able to participate in the symposium reminded me that not only am I loved, but I also will never be forgotten. I was honored to have my mother there to experience my poetry, it is an experience neither of us will ever forget.



PREVIEW

Generations United Conference

By: Quiana Lovett

In Louisville, Kentucky; June 25-27, the 23rd Global Intergenerational Conference is taking place. Cara Moore and myself will be attending via zoom to speak about a positive perspective within our prison system. Of course, leave it to the EMU faculty to find a way to showcase and highlight the lemonade we make out of lemons. Professor Decky tapped us to present our workshop on The Power of Limits: How Prison May Provide a Framework for Intergenerational Relationships. We were chosen as two individuals that are 20 years apart in age but interact and collaborate effectively in classroom settings. I'm inspired and excited to represent EMU and WHV at this event.

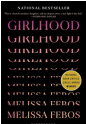
GOOD READS

**AMERICAN INMATE**

JUSTIN ROVILLOS MONSON

POETRY

This powerful collection of poems pulls at familiar strings from the first page. The dedication: "This isn't for the shook ones. It's for my dogs in lockup, who have lived these words with me," reminds the reader of the ties of community those of us inside share. Be prepared to redefine what poetry means in this writers highly entertaining and meaningful collection.

**GIRLHOOD**

MELISSA FEBOS

MEMOIR

A caustic and hilarious perspective on the twisted constructs that dictate/bind women's lives. Febos masterfully braids together snippets of mythology, critical political ideologies, and her own lived experiences in an absorbing book you'll find yourself speeding through only to be disappointed the story has concluded.

THE ECHO WIFE

SARAH GAILEY

SUSPENSE / SCIENCE-FICTION

What would you do if the perfected human-cloning process you created suddenly had a huge problem – as in the clones began to override their programming? Deception and obsession fuel this page-turner throughout, keeping readers on the edge of their seat as the story's characters enact their clashing agendas in a battle for authority.

JOIN THE CIP SUMMER BOOK CLUB!!!

Theme: Navigating Menopause

Books: *The New Menopause* by Dr. Mary Claire Haver; and *Menopause Ain't No Joke* by Angela Verges

Commitment: 1. Read the Books (provided by EMU);

2. Attend the Book Club Meetings (2 - 1 per book)

Meeting Dates TBD

We hear you! Menopause is ROUGH! Join EMU female-identifying faculty members as we gather to discuss these two great books that will hopefully help everyone understand their bodies and find some understanding from the experiences of others!

To sign up: JPay Meg ASAP! Books will be distributed mid June.

All Good Reads selections in this Issue came from BTW editors! We would love to hear what YOU are reading! Don't forget to send in your Good Reads suggestions!

RECIPES

GRAVEYARD CAKE

BY: MERCEDES KEMP / BENZO'S SNACKS

Ingredients

1 Hot Chocolate Packet
Cookies 12 pk. (Chocolate or Duplex)
Regular Creamer
Plain M&Ms
1 Snickers Bar

Directions

1. Remove cream from all but 6 cookies. Place 6 FULL cookies and all wafers in one bowl; cream filling in separate bowl.
2. Add Snickers bar, two shakes of both Hot Cocoa mix and dry creamer and enough water to mix lightly together to the bowl of cookies/wafers.
3. Microwave in 30 sec. intervals, rotating the bowl each time it stops.

FOR FROSTING:

1. Add two spoons of both creamer and hot cocoa, plain M&Ms and a "sip" of hot water to the bowl with the cookie cream.
2. Microwave for 40 sec. then stir until mixed well.
3. When cake has cooled, add frosting.

*Remember! Cooking is meant to be enjoyed!

MACARONI & CHEESE BOWL

BY: KETA BAILEY

Ingredients

1 Mac & Cheese
1 Bag Sour Cream & Onion Chips
1 Tub of Cheese
(optional)
1 Salami Stick
1 Pickle
Jalapeños

Directions

1. Crush and wet chips and form to the bowl, microwaving to the desired consistency
2. In separate bowl, prepare mac & cheese, then layer on top of chips
3. (optional) Dice salami, cook, and add to bowl.
4. (optional) Add sliced jalapeños and pickles.
5. Make sauce with tub of cheese and drizzle over entire creation.
6. Enjoy!

HEAVENLY DELIGHT

BY: MICHELLE JESSUP

Ingredients

Giant Chocolate Chip Cookie
2 pks. Maple Brown Sugar Oatmeal
1 spoon Peanut Butter
2 pks. Cream Cheese
1 French Vanilla Creamer
1 Butterfinger

Directions

1. Mix French Vanilla Creamer and 2 cream cheese into "fluff."
2. Crush cookie and dry stir 2 packs of oatmeal. Add peanut butter and 4 tsp of water - mix and mold into bowl.
3. Mix ¾ of Butterfinger into fluff then layer over cookie/oatmeal mix.
4. Sprinkle remainder of Butterfinger on top, chill for 2 hours.
5. Enjoy!