

• Department of *Philosophy* •

Newsletter Number 57

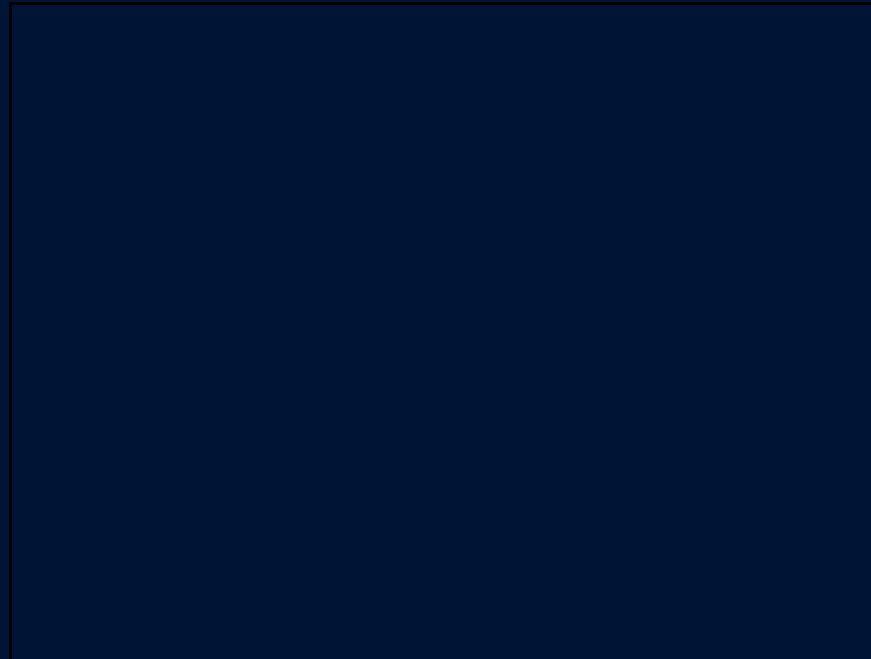
Spring 2024

• *letter from the chair's desk* •

departmental highlights

ROCHESTER EDUCATION JUSTICE INITIATIVE

By Sarah Mammen



Just beyond the brick-and-mortar walls, classes of incarcerated students are navigating their own unique set of academic aspirations and challenges across a broad range of humanities and STEM subjects. The Rochester Education Justice Initiative (REJI) program has provided an opportunity to pursue higher education for people incarcerated in the greater Western New York area and support community reintegration post-release. And from professors to students, the Philosophy Department at the University of Rochester has become embedded in this function.

Currently operating out of three sites including Attica, Groveland, and Wyoming correctional facilities, students enrolled in the program advance toward an Associate's degree through Genessee Community College. With related expenses like textbooks and tuition covered by REJI, students interested in participating must have a high school diploma or equivalent certification to be eligible and be accepted through a similar admissions process as those admitted to the program outside of prison. Starting this year, students at the Attica correctional facility may also choose to pursue a Bachelor's degree from the University of Rochester- the inception of this program securing Rochester's spot among the only six R1 universities to offer a Bachelor's degree to incarcerated people.

The range of courses taught from the University of Rochester and Genessee Community College's curricula try to operate as similarly as possible to how they might in an on-campus setting. Each course holds one, 3-hour class per week at the facility, usually in the evening, and students have limited access to their instructors outside of these hours. Students and educators in the program face certain challenges, including the lack of access to technology to complete assignments, limited extra-help opportunities, study

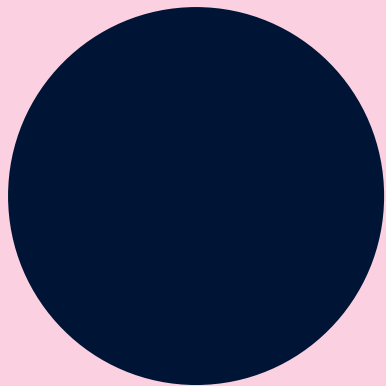
disruptions related to the prison environment, and limited materials and confiscations. With educators spanning many disciplines working creatively to teach their courses within the guidelines of each correctional facility, REJI's instructors maintain the content, format, and rigor level for incarcerated students as would be imposed upon a student taking such courses outside of prison, and their students remain steadfast in their pursuit of education.

Despite these key differences, when in the classroom, instructors find that classes feel much like they do on campus. Chair of Philosophy Alison Peterman, who directs REJI's BA program at Attica and teaches philosophy there, shares that students in the program are "eager, engaged, and insightful," as any other more typical student would be. She shares her experience further, saying, "One of the best parts of teaching philosophy is watching students learn from each other while they discuss deep, hard, and beautiful questions - questions that many people think about but don't get a chance to grapple with in a systematic way and as a shared project with others. Our students at Attica, Groveland, and Wyoming really embrace this project together, and they flourish in a classroom environment where everyone values each other's interests, insights, and perspectives. The impact of that in such a dehumanizing and difficult environment reminds us how humanizing this kind of inquiry is for all of us."

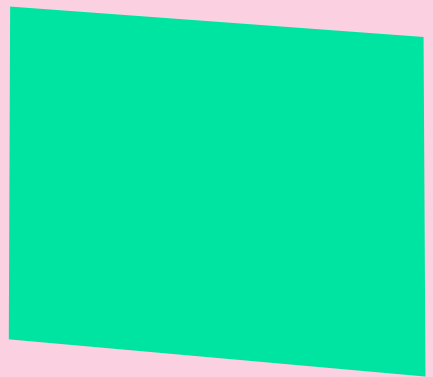
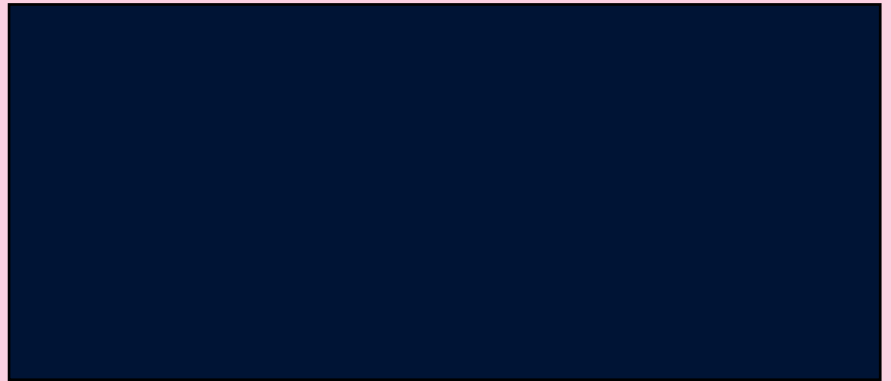
Tessa Brunnenmeyer, one of two philosophy PhD candidates teaching with the program, co-teaches a writing practicum and shares her experience witnessing growth in her students through REJI. She says, "We're seeing growth in their writing and academic performance, and they're seeing growth in their own academic performance, so I think it's been a good confidence boost for students, that they feel like some

Randall Curren

Fall 2023 was, remarkably, the first semester of my academic career in which I was pretty much all and only a philosophy professor, not also chairing the department or also actively being incrementally a professor somewhere else. How cool has it been to have a great office at a safe distance from the department office, you ask? Way cool. And I love having our department service dog Abby guard me while I work. I did get away now and then as usual, with talks at a conference in Mundelein, IL in October, Magdalen College, Oxford (UK) in January 2023.



Jens Kipper





with the heretofore unknown phenomenal experience of grape jelly meatballs. Thanks to Ellise who took on social rep duties, organizing much needed casual nights out for the grad students. Thanks also to Xinlu for hosting powerpoint night! Thanks to Rosa who started RationaliTea, which lets anyone in our community stick their heads in to say hello and I'm sorry that I've been too busy to stay for the whole of one yet! I wanted to say a very personal thank you to Rafa, Nick, Kevin and Vincent, our first four GRADTALKS speakers. Volunteering yourselves helped start us on, I hope, a tradition of finding more ways for our grads to share their research and ideas, practice public speaking and build our community. Thanks to everyone who attended those talks in person and by zoom for making them a success. Thanks to Cheryl, who as always

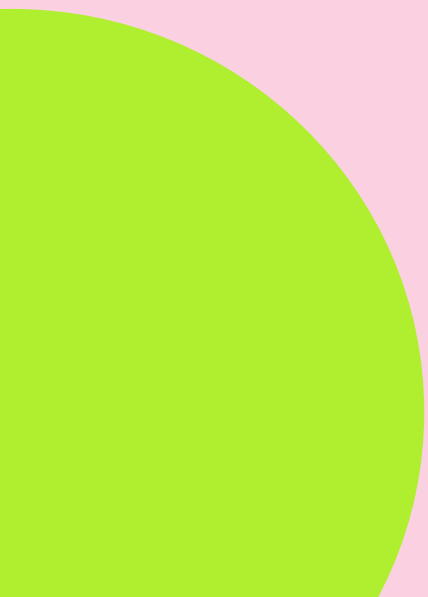
**Charles Cardwell,
PhD 1972**

Splitting firewood is good for the body and soul. I've been doing a fair amount of that since I was promoted to Emeritus Faculty and signed a post-retirement contract to teach three classes a year. I continue to serve as Secretary/Webmaster for the Tennessee Philosophical Association and provided commentary for a paper at the 2023 Meetings.

**Eileen Daly-Boas,
MA 2000 and
forever ABD**

Hello from Rush Rhees Library! I'm still the Philosophy librarian here at UR. Last summer, I

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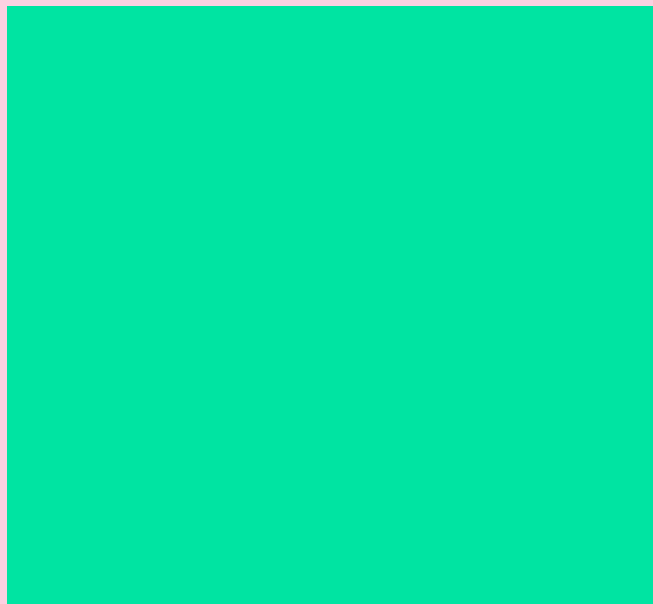
Zeynep Soysal

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(2023). A Metalinguistic and Computational Approach to the Problem of Mathematical Omniscience. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 106, 455–474.





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