

# Marquette University: Receives two grants to expand Education Preparedness Program supporting those impacted by incarceration to succeed in higher education

Posted on Wednesday, Dec 7, 2022

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MILWAUKEE — The Center for Urban Research, Teaching, and Outreach (CURTO) at Marquette University has received two grants for the [Education Preparedness Program \(EPP\)](#), which supports Marquette classes that bring together full-time degree-seeking and criminal legal system-impacted students, including \$750,000 from the U.S. Department of Education.

The EPP also received an award from the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters Ministry Fund to support three current program students to transition into a degree program and pursue their bachelor's degree at Marquette beginning January 2023. The amount of this award is not publicly available.

“Formerly incarcerated students face significant barriers to educational opportunities, namely the challenges of reentry while pursuing a college education,” said [Dr. Darren Wheelock](#), associate professor of social and cultural sciences and principal investigator on the Department of Education award. “When EPP began, the primary goal of the program was to offer free classes to system-impacted students and connect those students with local reentry wrap-around support when they were released from a correctional institution. What these awards represent are opportunities—opportunities though expand offerings and, for three students, to take that next life-changing step in their education journey.”

The EPP has three components, each intended to prepare and support current and formerly incarcerated students or system-impacted students by creating a prison-to-school pipeline. This includes offering high-impact educational experiences for both EPP and degree-seeking students, developing a consortium of local colleges and universities to build four-year degree pathways, and offering support services to promote the successful reentry of returning citizens. These three programmatic components enable EPP to realize its guiding principle to foster transformative learning spaces for all student populations, teachers, staff, and the broader Marquette and Milwaukee communities.

Funds from the U.S. Department of Education will address the need for additional staff to sustain its current programming and help support a spring 2023 expansion of EPP—the program will nearly double to 12 courses. The federal grant will also provide funds to continue on-going program evaluation efforts that adopt innovative ways to assess the impact of prison education programs in the reentry process. The program was established in 2018 to provide educational opportunities for system-impacted students. It began with one philosophy course and recently expanded to seven courses offered in spring 2022 at three sites, including four in correctional institutions and three on the Marquette campus.

“We are grateful for the resources offered in these awards from the U.S. Department of Education and Wheaton Franciscan Sisters,” said Dr. Heidi Bostic, dean of the Klinger College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Education. “The Educational Preparedness Program is a great example of Marquette’s Catholic, Jesuit values in action. At the heart of the program is Marquette’s most basic mission: providing access to a transformational educational experience. Whether at Marquette or another institution, reducing barriers and providing a pathway to a college education creates a tremendous opportunity for EPP participants to forge a better life for themselves and their families.”

In addition to staffing, research and course expansion, the leadership team is looking to further develop and refine robust and comprehensive wraparound support for formerly incarcerated student populations, which typically includes support for childcare, computing, housing, travel and other forms of direct financial support.

The grant from the U.S. Department of Education was funded through Community Funding Project/Congressionally Directed Spending requests by U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore and U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin in the fiscal year 2022 budget appropriations

signed by President Joe Biden earlier this year.

“The Education Preparedness Program provides a valuable second chance to those emerging from incarceration to turn their life around and forge a positive future for themselves and their families,” Moore said. “It’s why I worked to secure federal funding for this life-changing program. We need to continue creating these opportunities to reshape justice-impacted individuals’ futures and offer a path forward.”

“Every person emerging from incarceration deserves the opportunity to succeed,” Baldwin said. “An education helps individuals provide for their family, explore new employment opportunities, and reduces the rate of recidivism. I was proud to support this investment for EPP to help formerly incarcerated and system-impacted students take the first step toward a successful future with the support they need.”

Wheelock is joined on the EPP Leadership Team by [Dr. Robert Smith](#), director of CURTO and Harry G. John Professor of History; [Dr. Theresa Tobin](#), associate professor of philosophy and principal investigator on the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters award; and Shar-Ron Buie, associate director of student success and recruitment for the EPP.

The Education Preparedness Program is committed to developing, strengthening and providing educational opportunities to formerly and currently incarcerated populations, thereby expanding traditional boundaries of higher education by emphasizing collaboration across the Milwaukee community. EPP seeks to extend educational resources to an otherwise underserved population in methods which exemplify Marquette’s Catholic, Jesuit values. The program’s guiding principles include promoting Milwaukee and racial justice, fostering CFI leadership, introducing a blended course model that follows humanistic pedagogy, and providing wraparound services.

### **About Marquette University**

Marquette University is a Catholic, Jesuit university located near the heart of downtown Milwaukee that offers a comprehensive range of majors in 11 nationally and internationally recognized colleges and schools. Through the formation of hearts and minds, Marquette prepares our 11,100 undergraduate, graduate, doctoral and professional students to lead, excel and serve as agents of positive change. And, we deliver results. Ranked in the top 20% of national universities,

Marquette is recognized for its undergraduate teaching, innovation and career preparation as the sixth-best university in the country for job placement. Our focus on student success and immersive, personalized learning experiences encourages students to think critically and engage with the world around them. When students graduate with a Marquette degree, they are truly prepared and called to Be The Difference.