

**OPEEP**  
THE OHIO PRISON EDUCATION  
EXCHANGE PROJECT

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**CAMPUS  
STUDENT  
HANDBOOK**

*2024-2025*



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

## Table of Contents

Introduction to OPEEP & OPEEP Course Structure .....	1
Transportation & PREA Policy .....	2
What to Expect upon Entering the Facility .....	3
Rules of the Facility & Rules of Contact .....	5
A Note on Language .....	8

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## Introduction to OPEEP

Welcome to the [Ohio State Prison Education Exchange Project \(OPEEP\)](#)! We ([the OPEEP team](#)) are thrilled that you have decided to enroll in one of our unique, collaborative, and transformational courses this semester. This handbook will introduce you to the project and help you prepare to attend classes inside an Ohio correctional facility.

Core to OPEEP's work is the belief that education is a practice of freedom, and our project commits to anti-racist, feminist, and decolonial teaching and learning as frameworks for that practice. We believe that quality education is a right regardless of one's background, identity, or status. We understand our work in expanding access to high-quality, social-justice oriented college coursework in correctional facilities as a key component of the collective effort to build safe, healthy, and liberated communities. At times, these learning settings are less than ideal, and you may feel discomfort at the everyday conditions of incarceration. Our collective work can counter these feelings and be a source of support, emotional relief, community-building, and mission-driven learning. OPEEP staff and instructors are here to support you as you navigate carceral spaces and engage in this transformational practice of collective knowledge production.

Learning in a prison facility is a unique experience and requires consistent forethought and preparation on your part. This helps ensure the following of protocols and the longevity of your class and the overall project. Each of us who enters a prison facility for an OPEEP course acts as a representative for both the project and The Ohio State University, so it is always important to keep collective goals in mind—respect, professionalism, and a dedication to learning and education are all essential components when engaging in any OPEEP course.

Please do not hesitate to ask your instructor or OPEEP staff members any questions you might have prior to or during the semester. Do not worry that a question might be too simple or the answer too obvious to ask; we want you to feel fully informed and confident in your ability to learn in an OPEEP class!

## OPEEP Course Structure

OPEEP courses bring incarcerated students and OSU campus students together in prison settings to teach and learn in innovative and collaborative ways. Courses are primarily based around collective knowledge production, and facilitated through activities like group discussions, rather than relying solely on faculty lectures. “Education Exchange” is included in our title because our courses are designed to be just that – an exchange of knowledge and experience. OPEEP is intentional about disrupting hierarchies in the classroom, meaning that you will learn not only from your instructor, but also from your own experiences and those of your incarcerated and campus classmates, just as your instructor will learn from their students. Sustained engagement with other co-learners and partners in knowledge-building means that all students get to explore the unique and personal effects of oppression in their own lives and the lives of others. Students will also experience the power of learning and developing ideas together through a shared understanding that knowledge can spur action for change. The challenging and transformative

nature of OPEEP courses illustrates the rewards of engaging in intellectual projects through empathy and a shared commitment to recognize the dignity of all people.

Another pillar of OPEEP's mission is the belief that access to quality education is a right, not a privilege; therefore, all students enrolled in OPEEP courses earn college credits. Experiential, collaborative, and equitable learning is foundational to course structure, so course enrollments are split evenly between incarcerated and campus students (or as closely as possible). Class meetings typically occur once per week inside the prison facility, aside from the very first-class meeting when campus students may meet at OSU to go through introductions and review important details about the course. All courses are taught by trained faculty members familiar with OPEEP policies and pedagogical values. Currently, OPEEP offers a growing number of courses across various academic disciplines, housed in five different OSU campuses, which take place in several central Ohio prison facilities. Many efforts to further expand course offerings are both already underway and planned for the near future.

Of course, each class is unique, so if you have additional questions or would like more details on your specific class, please refer to your syllabus or reach out to your instructor. For general inquiries about OPEEP, reach out to one of our program coordinators by e-mailing [opeep@osu.edu](mailto:opeep@osu.edu).

### Transportation & PREA Policy

All campus students are required to attend a PREA training session at the prison facility before they can participate in any OPEEP course. Established in 2003, the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) is designed to protect incarcerated individuals from further harm within prison environments.

Each class will meet for an in-person PREA training at the prison facility the first week of the semester. **This is a mandatory event and failure to attend means that you may not participate in your OPEEP course.** The prison facility works diligently to make their staff available to provide the training for OPEEP students, and we must respect their time and show up *on time* to complete it. The training is typically the hour before your first-class meeting, so be prepared to make yourself available outside of your first regularly scheduled class time for it. If you do not attend the prescheduled PREA training, you will have to drop the course.

Transportation to the facility may vary across classes and locations, but in most cases, students will carpool. Carpool groups are typically arranged prior to the first week of class – just keep an eye out for messages from your professor regarding transportation logistics in the weeks prior to your first-class meeting at the prison. If a student does not have access to transportation, they can join a carpool. If students are attending from different campuses, carpool groups will be coordinated based on campus location.

## What to Expect upon Entering the Facility

When you arrive at the facility, students and faculty should enter the visiting area of the facility as a group. Pictures and communications are prohibited in the facility (and no photos should be taken in the parking lot), so be sure to **leave your phone in the car, and do not bring a tablet, laptop, or smartwatch with you**. After you have verified with staff that you have only permitted items (see list below), you **then must provide appropriate identification** (see list below), which ODRC staff may keep during the duration of your visit. Please note that your ID name must match the name that we provide to the facility for the gate pass. If you have changed your name in practice but not on paper, unfortunately you must sign into the visitor log on arrival with the name on your ID. You will receive a visitor's badge which **must always remain visibly on your person while inside the facility**. Your ID may be used as part of this badge worn around your neck or clipped onto your clothing.

After you have been checked in, you will then go through a metal detector. If you set the detector off, you may have to undergo additional wandling (hand-held metal detectors used for more focused screening). Once past the metal detector, depending on the facility, there is another security process which will either be to pass through a "crash gate" or to show your ID to a staff member. Then you will be escorted as a class to the building or room where your class will meet. As you progress through the semester, much of this will become second nature!

### Required items for entry:

- Valid government-issued ID/Driver's License (BuckIDs are NOT permitted)
- For international students: Passport or Permanent Resident Card

### Optional permitted items:

- OPEEP plastic bag to carry items
- CLEAR plastic water bottle
- Key fob/singular key (drivers only)
- Masks
- Menstrual products
- Pen and notebook paper
- Books/course readings

### Dress code:

Correctional facilities can deny entry to visitors if they do not meet dress code expectations. Admittance is at the discretion of facility staff, meaning that some may enforce the dress code more strictly than others. BIPOC, women, and LGBTQ+ folks are, unfortunately, likely to experience more policing regarding their dress and appearance, particularly when entering a men's facility (headwraps and hijabs are sometimes unfairly flagged and entail further scrutiny, for example). It may be helpful for drivers (and other students) to keep spare hoodies, oversized shirts, and non-underwire sports bras in their cars in case someone is denied admission due to dress. To ensure admittance, it is best to follow these guidelines:

- Remove any jewelry, smart watches, etc. prior to entry (jewelry may set off the metal detector so be prepared to either remove heavier items, like bangles or necklaces, or undergo further wandering).
- No open-toed shoes (sandals, flip-flops, etc.).
- No bandanas.
- Bras are required. We suggest wireless bras/sports bras if those are options for you. Underwires can sometimes set off metal detectors so be prepared for potential wandering.\*
  - \*The enforcement of this rule can vary widely due to different body types and breast sizes. We encourage and trust students to dress however they are most comfortable, but also ask that the possibility of this rule's enforcement is kept in mind.
- Dresses and skirts must fall past the knee and be loose in fit.
- No tight pants/leggings.
- No shorts.
- Shoulders must be covered.
- No low-cut or tight-fitting shirts.
- No rips/tatters in clothes, including ripped jeans.
- No sweatpants or sleepwear.

**Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) official visitation guidelines:**

1. All attire worn upon entry into the facility must be worn throughout the duration of the visit, with the exception of appropriate outerwear such as a coat and gloves.
2. Appropriate undergarments must be worn (i.e., bra, slip, and underwear).
3. No additional clothing is permitted to be carried into the facility.
4. No smartwatches or fitness monitors (such as fitbits).
5. Inappropriate attire includes, but is not limited to:
  - a. See-through clothing of any kind.
  - b. Tops or dresses that expose the midriff or have open backs or open sides (such as any sleeveless clothing such as halter tops, tube tops, cropped tops, tank tops, and muscle shirts).
  - c. Low-cut clothing cut in a manner that exposes the chest.
  - d. Any clothing that inappropriately exposes undergarments.
  - e. Skirts, dresses, shorts, skorts, or culottes with the hem or slit above the mid-knee.
  - f. Wrap-around skirts/dresses or break-away type pants.
  - g. Clothing with any gang related markings.
  - h. Clothing with obscene and/or offensive pictures, slogans, language and/or gestures.
  - i. Form-fitted clothing made from Spandex or Lycra or other similar knit material such as leotards, unitards, bicycle shorts, tight jeans, or tight pants.
  - j. Clothing with inappropriate holes/rips, including shoulder cut-outs.
6. Purses, handbags, backpacks, or similar items are not permitted.
7. All visitors must clear the metal detector. The following items may prevent clearance of the metal detector:
  - a. Hairpins

- b. Bras with metal underwires
- c. Certain boots and shoes
- d. Clothing with multiple zippers
- e. Excessive jewelry

**Don't hesitate to contact your instructor if you are uncomfortable with or have questions about any of these stipulations. Instructors are here to provide support and assistance!**

## Rules of the Facility

Given that prisons are highly regulated facilities, we must adhere to rules and policies to help ensure a smooth admissions process for each class meeting and to remain compliant with facility expectations in the classroom. You must always follow ODRC staff instructions, even if the reason may not be apparent at that moment and even if you personally disagree with their instructions. For example, if a prison lockdown occurs, outsiders may have to promptly exit the facility as directed by staff, even if class has not been completed. OPEEP courses are a privilege granted to us by these facilities, so it is important that students and faculty maintain a positive relationship with staff and do not intervene in their attempts to uphold facility safety.

**Face masks are optional, but please wear a mask if it makes you more comfortable.**

With so many people living in close quarters, prisons are by nature at greater risk of spreading COVID-19. One positive COVID case can result in the quarantining of an entire unit for up to 2 weeks. This is damaging to the mental and physical health of incarcerated people and can also result in the disruption of class meetings until the quarantine is lifted. Hopefully, at this stage in the pandemic this is less likely to become an issue, however, please take COVID-related incidents and resulting precautions seriously.

## Rules of Contact

One of the most heavily emphasized rules within the correctional setting is that incarcerated and campus students must maintain appropriate relationships. This rule is in place to avoid the potential victimization of incarcerated students as dictated by the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), but also to prevent any victimization or exploitation of campus students. These rules are also intended to maintain the confidentiality of inside students and in particular, the details of their incarceration, which is a vital practice for challenging the dehumanization of incarcerated people. As mentioned earlier, all OPEEP students, instructors, and staff represent OPEEP, The Ohio State University, and perhaps even prison education at large in the eyes of some correctional staff. Failure to adhere to the rules of the prison facility, and the rules of contact especially, risks the continuance of your individual course along with the sustainability of the project as a whole. Keep in mind that OPEEP rules fall under [OSU's Code of Student Conduct](#).

It is our hope and belief that students will understand the significance and seriousness of rules compliance. Beyond the protection of the project, we also see your participation in an OPEEP course as a learning opportunity for you to further develop important skills and values such as

professionalism, academic integrity, and maintaining appropriate boundaries with your peers and instructor. Thus, following the rules is also an act of self-respect and a personal dedication to professional growth.

**The rules are as follows and are the same for incarcerated and campus students. Failure to abide by OPEEP rules will result in removal from the course and may result in a failing grade. PLEASE NOTE that the prison facility will be notified of removal from the course and the reason for removal for incarcerated students.**

- **Use first names only:** Using first names allows both you and your peers to maintain privacy, and it prevents campus students from searching your offense history. In OPEEP courses we believe you should be viewed based only on your interactions while in class and not for your past. Further, using first names only prevents students from contacting each other after completing the class. Do not provide your last name to others and do not ask others for their last names. Do not try to find out someone else's last name, ever.
- **No contact:** Incarcerated students may not have contact with campus students, and vice versa, outside of class, not during the semester and not after the semester ends. Interactions between students should remain only within the learning environment during the semester. Never examine or explore another student's personal history. Incarcerated students are not permitted to follow any campus student on social media or ask an outside person to follow a campus student on social media.
- **No gift giving or accepting:** We recognize that prisons are resource-deprived places, and we strive to do all that we can to provide you with the materials you need to succeed in class. You may not ask any other student to bring anything into the facility for you or ask them to contact anyone on your behalf. Campus students are not permitted to bring in anything for incarcerated students, and you are not allowed to gift anything to others. Examples include but are not limited to the following: pens, paper, books, suggested readings, personal notes or drawings, food, drinks, toiletries, etc. If you have suggestions for other readings relevant to course content, share those in class discussions.
- **No giving or receiving letters or notes:** All non-class, non-academic relationships or interactions between incarcerated and campus students are inappropriate and strictly prohibited. Exchanging notes, letters, social media accounts, or poems is prohibited to maintain respectful, professional relationships and the safety of all parties. If sharing written material between students is required for the course (for example, peer review of written assignments), the written material must first pass through the instructor of the course.
- **No physical contact while in class:** You may not physically interact with any of your peers while in class at any time, unless your instructor has informed you that the prison where your course is taking place allows handshakes. **Absolutely no hugging is permitted at any time.**



- **No exchanging personal information:** This includes (but is not limited to) last names, personal addresses, telephone numbers, prison ID numbers, case numbers, social media, or any other contact information.
- **No inappropriate language and no flirtation:** No sexually explicit or sexually suggestive language or gestures are allowed. You should never make comments or discuss students' looks, bodies, or physical appearances, even if you think you are giving a compliment. Commenting on another person's body is often a gesture of gender or sexual impropriety and is usually unwanted by the other person. Never ask another student to read a book or magazine or watch a film, TV show, or music video (in other words, ANYTHING) with romantic or sexual material, or you will be removed from the class. This act is an unwelcome flirtation and can even constitute gender or sexual harassment or "establishment" at the prison. As a violation of OSU's non-discrimination policy, we take this rule very seriously, and you will be removed from class immediately and the infraction will be reported to all appropriate offices, including the prison facility.

**PLEASE NOTE:** This list is by no means exhaustive! Students should communicate any questions or concerns **directly and immediately** to their course instructor. Above all, OPEEP prioritizes the safety and wellbeing of all students. The rules listed above are designed to ensure a productive, enriching learning environment for all OPEEP students, staff, and instructors.

You will be provided with this list of rules again at the beginning of each semester, and you will be asked to sign an agreement stating your intention to fully comply. If you refuse to sign the agreement, you may not participate and will need to unenroll from the course. If you violate any rules, you will be removed from the course, and you will not be able to enroll in another OPEEP course for at least two semesters after the rule violation.

When an incarcerated student is removed from a course, OPEEP must notify prison staff, who may file an incident report concerning the rule violation. Thus, a rule violation will result in not only your immediate removal from the course but may also elicit an additional punitive response from the prison. OPEEP encourages campus students to reflect on the institutional power dynamics between campus and incarcerated students. Incarcerated students may be subject to disciplinary action due to campus student's rule violations, and the effect of a rule violation may result in incarcerated students being transferred to another facility, subject to solitary confinement, and/or other punishments. Please be mindful of how student's behaviors can affect all participants in an OPEEP course.

- **Remember, all students enrolled in OPEEP courses must also abide by the OSU Code of Student Conduct. Please review OSU's [Prohibited Conduct here.](#)**

## A Note on Language

Few of us are untouched by the carceral state, its prison systems, and policing practices that can lead to criminalization. Some of us may have currently or formerly incarcerated family members or family members who work in prisons and jails, and some of us may have experience with racial profiling, arrest, and/or incarceration ourselves. Punishment systems in schooling have shaped all of us, too. To push back against the far-reaching impacts of the carceral state and the internalization of its practices, OPEEP values and centers the use of humanizing language. We emphasize counternarratives about incarceration as a practice to reshape common perceptions about people who have been touched by the US criminal justice system.

Demeaning labels can be extremely detrimental to an incarcerated person's well-being, often resulting in feelings of dehumanization and loss of identity. We ask students to pay attention to the collectively internalized language and norms around punishment and policing to challenge these notions and resist the spread of dehumanizing language. You can offer your peers new, positive identities when addressing them with person-first language, which can greatly impact their ability to reimagine themselves, even in dehumanizing contexts. For example, we refer to all students as students, and when we need to qualify their location, we use the phrases "campus students" and "incarcerated students" / "ODRC students." We also refer to students as "insiders" and "outsiders." While attending classes, trainings, or events inside prison facilities, you will most commonly hear staff (and sometimes, incarcerated people) use the terms "inmates" or "offenders." We encourage you to avoid using these terms and to learn more about the use of such language from the perspectives of incarcerated people.

### Other terms to know:

- *ODRC* (or *DRC* for short) stands for the [Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction](#). ODRC supervises adults in Ohio who have been convicted of a felony or felonies and who are sentenced to more than six months in a prison facility.
- *Wardens* are the executive managers of adult correctional institutions. Each facility Warden must grant permission and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the facility and OSU for a course to be planned and held.
- *COs* are Corrections Officers, often colloquially referred to as "guards." Security staff who wear white shirts are Sergeants, Captains, or Majors.
- *Escorts* are prison staff, often COs, Sergeants, or unit case managers, who will take your instructor and campus classmates to your classroom. In most facilities, you will enter through a "crash gate" which holds five to ten people maximum, so you will likely be escorted in two or more groups.
- *Count* is a scheduled time during the day when all incarcerated people in a facility must be in a designated place to be counted. Most facilities have count five times per day. OPEEP courses typically must meet before or after count times.

- *Lockdown* refers to a period during which incarcerated people’s movement is restricted, often in response to concerns around security, weather, public health, or staffing shortages. During lockdowns, incarcerated individuals are confined to their bunks or cells, and typically, entrance to the facility is limited to employees only. The expected lengths of lockdowns are often difficult to impossible to determine.
- *Reentry* denotes the transition between incarceration and returning to community life. “Returned citizens” are formerly incarcerated people who now live in their home communities.