



2021-2022 DU PAI ARTS-BASED COURSES EVALUATION SUMMARY

Course Overview

Over the 2021-2022 program year, 10 different arts-based courses were facilitated at 11 different facilities throughout the Colorado Department of Corrections across two program periods (Fall, Winter/Spring), some of which were offered more than once, totaling 19 courses. These courses ranged across artistic disciplines of theatre, visual art, journalism, movement/dance, creative writing, improvisation and more.

Students from various artistic and educational backgrounds applied to take part in the arts-based courses and, once accepted, began attending class once a week for about 12-14 weeks. Each class was comprised of anywhere from 15-25 students and facilitated by a member of DU PAI's affiliate faculty -- all prominent artists and educators in the Colorado community. Students experienced rigorous academic dialogue and text, engaging arts-based projects and activities, and supported one another through development of final projects and performances.

The courses taking place throughout the duration of 2021-2022 were as follows:

- Introduction to Art Making Practices
- Collective Care: Finding Freedom and Joy Through Movement
- Creating (In) Place: A Visual Arts & Writing Workshop
- To Rhyme or Not to Rhyme: A Poetry Workshop
- Introduction to Improvisation
- Foundations of Performance and Public Speaking
- Introduction to Journalism
- Moving Meditations: Introduction to Dance & Choreography
- The Right to Speak: Finding Your True Voice
- Building Blocks of Musical Theatre

Program Evaluation Methods

At the beginning and end of each course, participants were given a survey at the beginning (pretest) and end (posttest) of their course participation. These surveys include 22 quantitative questions, and 2 qualitative open-ended questions. 256 arts-based course participants responded to pre and/or post surveys distributed at the beginning and end of courses. All surveys were entered and analyzed, though pre- to post- comparisons were only able to be generated in cases where participants completed both data collection points.

Summary of Findings

Overall, participants report increases in artistic identity and practice, sense of purpose, feelings of community, leadership, and the ability to positively impact others, among other promising socio-emotional outcomes. As found in prior DU PAI courses, participants continue to find the DU PAI courses an opportunity to open up vulnerably, grow and learn new things, and to authentically express oneself.

Changes from Pretest to Posttest (Quantitative Findings)

About 75 participants' data was able to be matched pretest to posttest for most of the quantitative questions (meaning that they filled out both pre and posttests, and we could match those surveys to the same person), allowing us to conduct statistical analyses around change in responses after the course. All available matched responses are reported for each item.

Below, we list items showing significant change (likely not due to chance), items which show positive change (potentially due to the course, but less statistically significant), items showing no change (scores before and after the course were the same), and items which show non-significant negative change (responses were lower after the course, but potentially due to chance).

Items showing significant positive change:

- *How close do you feel to other people in the workshop? (Note: Only 24 surveys could be matched for this question, meaning many participants left this question blank at one or both survey points).*
- *I consider myself an artist.*
- *I feel like I have a sense of purpose in my day-to-day life.*
- *People in this prison see me as more than my crime.*
- *I feel like a community member of this institution.*
- *I feel like a community member of DU PAI.*
- *I feel comfortable speaking in front of a group.*
- *When things don't go as planned, I am able to problem solve.*
- *I consider myself a leader in this facility.*
- *I affect other people in positive ways.*
- *I can imagine what COs must be thinking and feeling.*
- *I feel heard by other residents.*
- *I feel heard by COs.*
- *I use art to process and express what I am thinking and feeling.*

Items showing non-significant positive change:

- *Other people put their trust in me.*
- *I have ways to process what I am thinking and feeling.*
- *My life has meaning to others.*
- *I am deserving of other peoples' trust.*
- *I am confident in my ability to deal with conflict in a healthy way.*
- *I have a sense of hope for the future.*

Items showing no change:

- *I can imagine what other residents here must be thinking and feeling.*

Items showing non-significant negative change:

- *I am skilled at working with others to accomplish a goal.*

Participant Reflections on the Course (Qualitative Findings)

Hopes and Fears Prior to the Course (Pretest Reflections)

In their pretest surveys, 239 participants responded to two open-ended questions: (1) *What are your **hopes** for this DU PAI workshop?* (2) *What are your **concerns or fears** about this DU PAI workshop?*

Hopes

When discussing their hopes for the DU PAI course, participants expressed a hope for **growth and learning** – both through gained skills and through self-improvement and meaningful new perspective. Participants hoped to *“find my voice, words, me...!”* and *“learn more about [my]self and others.”* Participants also described a hope for **fun and joy** and **connection and community** through participating in the course. Participants hoped to *“build community”* and *“become [an] asset to community.”* One participant simply expressed a desire to *“have a good time”* - another hoped to *“dance and have fun”* - an experience that can be and feel rare in prison.

Concerns or fears

When describing their concerns or fears about the course, participants were **concerned about the program end** – either ending due to unforeseen DOC circumstances, or being unable to complete the program if one’s status changed, such as a fear that *“COVID will shut [the program] down,”* or *“that it will get cancelled,”* or even *“that I get out before it’s over.”* Finally, a handful of participants expressed **concern over feeling self-conscious or unprepared** for the skills the program required, such as feeling *“stage fright”* , *“stepping out of [my] comfort zone”* or that I *“won’t be good at it.”*



Sterling Correctional Facility

Reactions to and Observations about the Course (Posttest Reflections)

In posttest surveys, 86 participants responded to two open-ended questions: 1) *What was your **experience like** in this DU PAI program in comparison to other programs or places at this institution?* (2) *What did you observe about **how people interacted** in this workshop in comparison to other programs or places at this institution?*

Experiences in the Workshops

When describing their experiences in the DU PAI courses in comparison to other programs/places, participants described **joyful, freeing interactions** in DU PAI workshops, describing the workshop as *"the time of my life"* and helping one participant *"let go of COVID."* Participants also felt **encouraged to be themselves** – one participant describes feeling *"cared for, accepted, wanted."* Finally, participants described how **new** the experience in the course felt – participants described it as *"one of a kind!"* and that it was *"unique; [I am a] better person for it."*

How People Interacted

Participants described that people were **vulnerable and authentic** in DU PAI courses in comparison to other programs/places in CDOC – that participants were *"open and real"* and that *"people put their guard down"* with one another. Participants also felt the experience was **connective** – even (and especially) for those who didn't know one another before. As one participant stated, *"strangers became friends"* – another shared, *"everyone came together."* Finally, participants felt their **humanity** honored in DU PAI workshops – one participant shared how they *"felt treated like students, not inmates."*



La Vista Correctional Facility

Quantitative Findings- Graphed



**indicates statistically significant change between pretest to posttest*

For more information about the DU Prison Arts Initiative & our Art-Based Courses, visit our website: <https://liberalarts.du.edu/prison-arts>

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