

# Expanding Access to Postsecondary Education in Prison

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Fact Sheet

## Why it matters

- › **Public safety:** Incarcerated people who participate in prison education programs are **43 percent less likely to recidivate** than those who do not. Fewer crimes and less rule-breaking on post-release supervision lead to fewer crime victims and enable probation and parole agencies to concentrate their resources on their riskiest supervisees.<sup>1</sup>
- › **Facility safety:** Prisons with college programs have fewer violent incidents, creating safer working conditions for staff and safer living environments for incarcerated people.<sup>2</sup>
- › **Preparing for post-release jobs and successful reentry:** By 2020, 65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school.<sup>3</sup> However, only 11 percent of incarcerated people in state prisons and 24 percent of those in federal prisons have completed at least some postsecondary education.<sup>4</sup>
- › **Taxpayer savings/Return on investment:** Every dollar invested in prison-based education yields \$4 to \$5 of taxpayer savings in reduced incarceration costs.<sup>5</sup>
- › **Stronger families and communities:** When parents—including those who are incarcerated—complete college, their children are more likely to do so, thereby disrupting the typical cycle of poverty and incarceration.<sup>6</sup>

## How it works

- › **Funding sources:** There are only a handful of privately funded college-in-prison programs in the United States. Most colleges, working in partnership with corrections departments, rely on federal Pell Grant funding to provide postsecondary education and training to students in prison.
- › **Second Chance Pell Experiment:** Annually, this initiative of the U.S. Department of Education provides up to 12,000 incarcerated students in 28 states (AR, AL, CA, CT, FL, IA, IL, IN, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, NE, NJ, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, TX, VA, VT, WA, WI, and WV) with the opportunity to obtain postsecondary education and training in both academic and career-technical programs. These classes are provided by 67 different colleges and universities—most of which are community and technical colleges—in more than 100 state and federal prisons. The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance is supporting the Vera Institute of Justice's training for and technical assistance to participating corrections departments, colleges, and policymakers to ensure the programs are providing quality higher education in prison and post-release.
- › **How grants are issued:** Pell Grants are only used to pay for the tuition, fees, books, and supplies required by the student's education program. The U.S. Department of Education awards these funds to the colleges; they do not go directly to incarcerated individuals for their personal use.
- › **Eligibility:** Participating postsecondary education institutions can provide Pell Grant funding to qualified students who are incarcerated in state or federal prisons and eligible for release into the community, particularly if they are likely to be released within five years.
- › **Expands access to education without limiting others:** Making incarcerated people eligible for Second Chance Pell Grant funds does not take educational opportunities away from anyone else—Pell Grants have always been awarded based on income to anyone who qualifies. The Pell Experiment represents less than one-tenth of 1 percent of total Pell spending.
- › **Unmet needs/Strong national interest:** Over 200 schools from 46 states and Puerto Rico applied to be part of the Second Chance Pell Experiment. Many prisons with postsecondary education programs have waiting lists for enrollment.

## Additional background

- › Starting in 1994 with the passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, students in state and federal prisons were barred from accessing Pell Grants. The Second Chance Pell Experiment, which **started in July 2016**, is testing whether participation in educational opportunities increases after access to financial aid for incarcerated adults is expanded. It is also examining how waiving the restriction on providing Pell Grants to individuals incarcerated in federal or state prisons influences academic and life outcomes.
- › A grant, unlike a loan, does not have to be repaid. The maximum Pell Grant award for the 2015-2016 school year (July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016) was \$5,775. The amount depends on a student's financial need, cost to attend school, status as a full-time or part-time student, and plans to attend school for a full academic year or less.
- › The National Institute of Justice recently named postsecondary education an **evidence-based practice**.<sup>7</sup>

## About the Vera Institute of Justice

With support from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Vera Institute of Justice provides technical assistance to corrections departments, their college partners, and policymakers to support the expansion of quality postsecondary educational opportunities in prison and post-release, including Second Chance Pell sites. Through the Expanding Access to Postsecondary Education project, Vera facilitates implementation and scaling up of quality higher education programs in prisons and during reentry, and assists with the development of policies, procedures, and practices to increase the participation of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals in these programs. This initiative capitalizes on Vera's Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education project, a national demonstration project in three states (Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina) involving 14 prisons partnered with 15 colleges.

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### Endnotes

1. This finding came out of a landmark meta-analysis of correctional education programs, covering 30 years of research—the largest ever completed. Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles, *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), 32, <https://perma.cc/AVZ9-JZSG>
2. Correctional Association of New York, *Education from the Inside, Out: The Multiple Benefits of College Programs in Prison* (New York, NY: Correctional Association of New York, 2009), 8-9, <https://perma.cc/678G-979E>; Michelle Fine, Maria Elena Torre, Kathy Boudin, Iris Bowen, Judith Clark, Donna Hylton, Migdalia Martinez, “Missy,” Rosemarie A. Roberts, Pamela Smart, and Debora Upegui, *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum-Security Prison*, (New York: Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2001), 21-22, <https://perma.cc/5LX2-MQEG>; Laura Winterfield, Mark Coggeshall, Michelle Burke-Storer, Vanessa Correa, and Simon Tidd, *The Effects of Postsecondary Correctional Education* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2009), 8-10, <https://perma.cc/H4ZJ-7KTG>
3. Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2020* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2013), 15, <https://perma.cc/2RPN-8K6Q>
4. Caroline Wolf Harlow, “Education and Correctional Populations,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, January 2003) <https://perma.cc/NJ8Y-UCNU>
5. Lois M. Davis, Jennifer L. Steele, Robert Bozick, Malcolm V. Williams, Susan Turner, Jeremy N. V. Miles, Jessica Saunders, and Paul S. Steinberg, *How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here? The Results of a Comprehensive Evaluation* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 81, <https://perma.cc/Q4RQ-DMZW>
6. Correctional Association of New York, 2009, 3, <https://perma.cc/678G-979E>; James Conway and Edward Jones, *Seven out of Ten? Not Even Close*, (New Britain, CT: Central Connecticut State University, 2015), 10-14.
7. National Institute of Justice, “Postsecondary Correctional Education [PSCE],” <https://perma.cc/2FUQ-9SGY>

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### For more information

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The Vera Institute of Justice is a justice reform change agent. Vera produces ideas, analysis, and research that inspire change in the systems people rely upon for safety and justice, and works in close partnership with government and civic leaders to implement it. Vera is currently pursuing core priorities of ending the misuse of jails, transforming conditions of confinement, and ensuring that justice systems more effectively serve America's increasingly diverse communities.

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