

WHAT ARE THE ECONOMICS OF PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM PROVISION?

WHAT RESOURCES SUPPORT INSTITUTIONAL PROVISION OF POSTSECONDARY PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

There are four predominant resources that support incarcerated students in paying tuition behind bars and funding institutional provision of higher education programs: Pell grants, philanthropy or grant funding, funding provided from the program's parent higher education institution, and federal funds and state appropriations. **However, the actual cost of prison education program provision consistently exceeds available resources.** This Commission must work to understand how additional funding can be appropriated to both entities, or in tandem to support high-quality education behind the wall.

1. PELL GRANTS

In 2015, the Obama administration announced the Second Chance Experimental Sites Initiative (ESI) authorizing select colleges to administer Pell grants to otherwise eligible incarcerated students for the first time since Congress revoked eligibility for these need-based grants. According to a Vera Institute of Justice report published in 2021 by Commission member Ruth Delaney, over 22,000 incarcerated students have enrolled in over 200 participating institutions by qualifying for a Pell grant since the start of the initiative. Under the ESI, students can use grants to pay for tuition and fees. Student eligibility is need-based and identical to eligibility for students who are not incarcerated.

In December 2020, Congress voted to reinstate eligibility for Pell grants for all otherwise eligible incarcerated students by July, 2023. Once reinstatement takes effect, incarcerated students will be treated as any other student applying for a Pell Grant. As with Second Chance Pell, higher education institutions can charge incarcerated students only for tuition and fees. To account for a different set of costs for incarcerated students, colleges can adjust their Cost of Attendance for the prison location. Every student who qualifies for a need-based Pell grant, including incarcerated students, receives a lifetime maximum of 6 years or 600% of their scheduled award (Lifetime Eligibility Used) to be used towards a first baccalaureate degree or one or more sub-baccalaureate credentials. The maximum Federal Pell Grant award is \$6,895 for the 2022–23 award year (July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023), *placing some tuition out of reach if no other means of payment or financial aid is available to the student.* In some states, incarcerated students qualify for state need-based grants **There is a significant need for additional resources to cover full educational provision costs.**

2. PHILANTHROPY, GRANT FUNDING & IN KIND SUPPORT

Some higher education institutions (HEIs) that run prison education programs do so with the help of donors and grant funding. Grants and philanthropic donations help subsidize programmatic costs as well as provide tuition assistance to students, depending on the grant.

Securing grant funding is a laborious and time-intensive process for institutional directors and administrators of prison education programs. A common misconception is that prison education programs (PEP) at private institutions are all subsidized by their parent institution. This misconception makes it harder for prison education programs to receive grant funding, especially at institutions that have large endowments. Additionally, some postsecondary institutions and faculty donate time and provide needed program support behind the wall.

IN NEW ENGLAND, EXAMPLES OF PRIVATELY FUNDED PROGRAMS INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Tufts
- MIT
- Boston College
- Emerson
- Yale
- Amherst
- Brandeis
- Wesleyan
- Harvard
- University of Maine at Augusta has some access to OSHER scholarships



3. HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONAL FUNDING

Some parent institutions provide full funding for their prison education programs, although such funding systems are few in number. Such programs often pay full tuition to students through scholarships. In New England examples of these programs include **Wesleyan** and **Boston University**.

4. FEDERAL AND STATE GRANTS AND APPROPRIATIONS

In New England, an example of federal appropriations supporting prison education program costs is a 2022 grant provided through Senator Bernie Sanders of \$4.5 million to the Community College of Vermont to support postsecondary prison education programming at all six correctional facilities in the state. It will be used to cover administrative and support costs, staffing, tuition support and technology. Vermont also works with the state financial aid authority scholarship organizations to subsidize student tuition. Community College of Vermont pairs with the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) to cover all additional costs not covered by Second Chance Pell.

The University of Maine at Augusta receives state grant funding to help support some tuition and administrative costs that are not covered by Second Chance Pell funding.

WHAT EXPENSES AND RESOURCE NEEDS ARE REQUIRED FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAM PROVISION?

DOC NEEDS

Program space: One of the most common needs of DOCs is adequate space to run programs behind the wall. Because life in correctional facilities is constantly in flux, there is oftentimes not dedicated space in which these programs could operate.

Personnel to supervise: Across the United States, nearly one third of correctional staff left their positions following the coronavirus pandemic, and staffing shortages continue. **As security coverage is the number one priority** for DOC's to support postsecondary education programs behind the wall, it is essential to have adequate staff to supervise education program activities. . If there are not enough (correctional officers) CO's to supervise, prison education programs can't function.

Technology resources: In order for incarcerated students to be competitive in tomorrow's job market, it is imperative that they are versed in modern technology. Many DOCs are working to expand technology in their facilities to support education programs. Yet, there is need for additional funding to ensure it is secure, adequate and periodically updated.

Other DOC resource needs include: staff for adequate documentation of program participation by incarcerated students, instructional equipment, and portable equipment or space.

SHARED DOC/HEI NEEDS:

Conversations with DOC staff and directors of postsecondary programs in the region revealed a common need for administrators who can work to facilitate student needs behind the wall.

This administrator could work to help inside students with things like loan defaults, financial aid and Pell forms, applications, credit transfer, and things like career advising. This person would work within most correctional facilities in the state and would potentially be a state hire who had knowledge of both higher education and corrections. Our Commission could recommend that state governments look into the feasibility of hiring an employee who is able to work within Departments of Correction in each state, and who could serve as a liaison between incarcerated students and the variety of postsecondary education programs that currently exist in New England.

HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM NEEDS

Funding to supplement Pell Grant revenues:

The release of Pell funds for incarcerated students is a step towards further equity for incarcerated learners.

However, Pell Grant revenues are not adequate to support high-quality postsecondary education behind bars. There are many additional costs that programs must address.

These include: adequate faculty and program support staff, financial aid administration and advising, other program support, advising and tutoring

Utilizing state appropriations to cover FTE student costs: The Rising Scholars Network in California provides associate degrees to incarcerated students through their network of all of the California community colleges. ***Tuition at community colleges for incarcerated students is 100% subsidized by state appropriations, as long as they fill out the one page financial aid application.***

Another key tenet of this program that assists incarcerated students is the ease of credit transfer. The community college system in California is connected, and therefore most credit transfer between schools. ***If an incarcerated student is transferred to another facility with a different higher education provider, they will still be able to work towards their associate degree due to transferability inherent in the system.***

While four community colleges in the community college system of California were accepted to be Second Chance Pell recipients, none choose to use these funds because the state appropriations are easier to manage, the application process is simpler for students, and Pell Grants would ultimately cause more administrative work. ***However, there is a need for Pell outside of the community college system should students want to work towards a bachelor's degree.***

OTHER FAST FACTS ABOUT THE RISING SCHOLAR NETWORK

- Of the 10,500 incarcerated students enrolled in a postsecondary education program in California, 10,300 of them are enrolled in a community college.
- California also incentivizes students to enroll in postsecondary programming, *because a week is taken off an incarcerated student's sentence for every course they complete.*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The cost of PEP programs exceeds available resources.**
 - **Only four states (ME, RI, NH & VT) in New England allow incarcerated students to access state financial aid.**
- **There is a need for additional state or federal funding to subsidize student's tuition, cover administrative costs for both HEIs and DOC, and fund further initiatives that work toward proliferation of transferable and stackable credentials.**

