

Fact Sheet: Restoring Pell Grant Eligibility in Prison

The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act dismantled higher education in prison by eliminating inmate eligibility for Pell Grants. Providing access to higher education has a ripple effect that extends far beyond the rehabilitation of incarcerated people. Higher education has a positive impact on society by reducing recidivism, increasing public safety and strengthening communities.

Incarceration Without Education is a Bad Investment

- Nationally, correctional costs consume \$68BNⁱ each year. One in every 31 people in the US is under some form of correctional supervision: jail, prison, probation or parole.ⁱⁱ More than 2/3 of incarcerated people are re-arrested for a new offense within three years of their release, a clear indication that current correctional policies are failing.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Increasing incarceration rates don't pay off. Despite the significant rise in the correctional population over the past 25 years, rising rates of imprisonment have not been shown to reduce crime or increase public safety.^{iv}
- Education is proven to lower recidivism, thus lowering incarceration costs. For every dollar invested in correctional education programs, two dollars are saved through prevented recidivism.^v

Increasing Access to Higher Education Pays Off

The value of higher education is clear.

Higher education:^{vi}

- **Decreases reliance on public assistance**
- **Increases the employment rates**
- **Improves physical and mental health**
- **Elevates quality of life for children**
- **Strengthens communities**

Postsecondary education in prison is *the* most successful and cost-effective method to prevent crime and increase public safety.^{vii}

Restoring Pell Grant Eligibility in Prison Will:

- **Reduce Recidivism**—In 1994, at its highest rate of usage, awards represented only **6/10 of 1%** of total grant awards^{viii}, making this program more cost-effective than re-incarceration. Many people leave prison unskilled and undereducated, both factors that correlate powerfully to recidivism rates, leaving them unprepared for life on the outside.
- **Strengthen Underserved Communities**—Formerly incarcerated people are frequently released to communities that have little to no capacity to provide them with productive

employment or reentry assistance.^{ix} With ever-increasing prison sentences and recidivism rates, incarcerated people are released without the essential tools necessary for reintegration to society.

- **Increase Employment**—Higher education for incarcerated people is valuable in a society where postsecondary credentials are increasingly necessary to gain access to living wage jobs.^x
- **Reduce Poverty**—Success in higher education in prison carries far beyond prison walls. More than 50% of incarcerated people have children.^{xi} When parents participate in postsecondary education the likelihood their children will go to college increases,^{xii} creating more opportunities for multiple generations to climb out of poverty.

ⁱ 1 in 31: *The Long Reach of American Corrections*. Pew Center on the States. March 2009. Page 11.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. Pages 1-2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Erisman, Wendy, and Jeanne Bayer Contardo. 2005. *Learning to Reduce Recidivism: A 50-state Analysis of Postsecondary Correctional Education Policy*. Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy. Page ix.

^{iv} 1 in 31: *The Long Reach of American Corrections*. Pew Center on the States. March 2009. Pages 1-2.

^v Karpowitz, Daniel, and Max Kenner. *Education as Crime Prevention: The Case for Reinstating Pell Grant Eligibility for the Incarcerated*. Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Bard Prison Initiative. Page 4.

^{vi} Cunningham, Alisa, et.al., *The Investment Payoff: A 50 State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education*. Institute for Higher Education Policy. February 2005. Page 4.

^{vii} Karpowitz, Daniel, and Max Kenner. *Education as Crime Prevention: The Case for Reinstating Pell Grant Eligibility for the Incarcerated*. Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Bard Prison Initiative. Page 3.

^{viii} U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education and the Office of Correctional Education. *Pell Grants for the Incarcerated*. 1994.

^{ix} Erisman, Wendy, and Jeanne Bayer Contardo. 2005. *Learning to Reduce Recidivism: A 50-state Analysis of Postsecondary Correctional Education Policy*. Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy. Page ix.

^x Ibid. Page x.

^{xi} Shirmer, Sarah, et al., *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children*. The Sentencing Project. February 2009. Page 2.

^{xii} Choy, Susan. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Students Whose Parents Did Not Go to College: Postsecondary Access, Persistence, and Attainment*. Washington, DC: 2001. Page 7.