

FIRST STATE, **FIRST CHANCE**: UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE PRISON EDUCATION RESEARCH REVIEW

Attention: UD Anti-Racist Initiative

Submitted by: Jules Lowman ('23) in partnership with the following
Dr. Chrysanthi Leon, Deputy Dean of the Honors College
Lawson Schultz ('23)
Maggie Buckridge ('23)

Special thanks to:

Professor Shaul Cohen (University of Oregon)
Dr. Todd Clear (Rutgers University)
Professor Paul Draus (University of Michigan-Dearborn)
Dr. Jenny E. Greene (Princeton University)
Professor Keramet Reiter (University of California, Irvine)

Research into the prison education programs began during the Winter 2021 academic session, with my team reaching out to over 10 prominent institutions with established prison education programs. We focused on how the various programs receive funding, work in conjunction with other state entities, and maintain positive working relationships with correctional institutions. Considerations from this research will help inform our program at UD, and hopefully increase its efficiency and reach.

Current Program:

The University of Delaware (UD) has a growing prison education program that currently serves about 75 incarcerated students in a typical year. Partnerships with Howard R. Young Correctional Institution (HRYCI), Baylor Women's Correctional Institution (BWCI), and the Plummer Center allow UD to offer a variety of Inside-Out and inside only (university student) courses. The program's latest endeavor is creating an Associate in Arts Degree pathway for incarcerated students.

Program Funding:

Prison education programs often face issues related to funding, which require creative solutions in the form of grants, donations, and more. At the University of California-Irvine (UC), tuition is funded by a university-specific grant program called "Blue and Gold". Professor Keramet Reiter describes the program as a "UC-Based Pell program, but more robust". Additional funds are raised privately, similar to many universities we contacted. Private donors and grants cannot always cover costs, however. At the University of Oregon, when incarcerated students register through the Continuing and Professional Education program, they pay a \$50 fee for undergraduate courses and a \$70 fee for graduate courses. Though this is a relatively low cost, many incarcerated students are not able to pay this amount. Many universities emphasized the benefits of the newly applicable Second Chance Pell grants. These grants can be beneficial for UD going forward, while acknowledging the significant barriers incarcerated students may face when applying.[1]

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University of Oregon emphasized the importance of their program's steering committee, which seeks support from the university and applies for various grants. There are a number of prominent partnering organizations that offer significant funding for prison education programs, including the Vera Institute of Justice (benefitting NJ-STEPS) and the Bard Prison Initiative (Villanova University, Wesleyan University, etc.). Research into these programs is ongoing, as it may be beneficial to consider partners for UD's prison education program.

State-wide organization:

Prison Education programs vary from state to state. New Jersey has an organized New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons (NJ-STEP) program. With four educational institutions and "7 of 10 accessible [correctional] facilities" across NJ participating, the NJ-STEP program allows for student transfers within an organized AA and BA degree program. Dr. Todd Clear at the NJ-STEP affiliated Rutgers-Mountainview program explains that they coordinate a statewide effort among multiple schools, with 500-600 students and about 70 classes per term (pre-COVID). The program also provides reentry support to students at any stage in the program.

The size of the University of Delaware makes this kind of state-wide program a plausible goal for the future, as our outreach grows, and we are able to integrate more institutions into our efforts. Many programs (UC-Irvine, UO, etc.) work in conjunction with community colleges that offer AA degree programs for incarcerated students. UD is not unique in offering an AA degree, but as the prison education program grows, it would be beneficial to incorporate the resources of local institutions like Delaware Technical Community College.

Maintaining Positive Relationships with DOCs:

At the University of Oregon (UO), the staff has worked tirelessly to maintain a positive relationship with the prisons in their program. In addition to following appropriate rules, they also provide the prisons with incentives to continue working with the university. Professor Shaul Cohen emphasized that they give the prisons "credit" when they communicate with state legislators and support general funding for the DOJ. UO goes to great lengths to emphasize the reciprocal nature of prison education, seeing both prisons and the university as beneficiaries. The university also takes a personal approach, praising specific correctional officers and making small symbolic efforts like providing course textbooks to interested staff or helping connect staff to university resources.

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Other Considerations and Final Thoughts:

COVID-19 has introduced difficulties to many programs. The majority of institutions we spoke with were currently struggling to implement a virtual classroom and correspondent course resources in the prisons they work with. The changing technology required to keep up with virtual learning has been a significant barrier for many courses, but more established programs have been able to adapt effectively.

The academic community was incredibly welcoming in my research endeavors. I was encouraged by the unifying impact of prison education. I am confident that the program at UD will be able to grow, as we continue to research and plan in order to create the most impactful program possible. The University must recognize prison education as crucial anti-racist work that can be accomplished with its support.

References:

Royer, C. E., Castro, E. L., Aguilar Padilla, E., & Hurtado, T. (2020). Leveraging the Power of Pell in prison: Equity challenges in scaling the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative. Salt Lake City, UT: Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison.

[1] Royer, C. E., Castro, E. L., Aguilar Padilla, E., & Hurtado, T. (2020). Leveraging the Power of Pell in prison: Equity challenges in scaling the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative details the multitude of barriers incarcerated individuals face when applying to Second Chance Pell Grants, including lack of access to technology and difficulty obtaining necessary tax documents.