

## Ohio: Postsecondary Education in Prison

By more fully engaging its rich network of colleges and universities, Ohio can increase public safety and economic opportunity for its citizens by increasing access to postsecondary education in prison.

### Why Postsecondary Education in Prison Matters

**Safer Institutions and Communities:** Studies in Ohio have demonstrated that prisons with postsecondary education programs also have fewer violent incidents, creating a safer work environment for corrections employees.<sup>1</sup> Also, incarcerated people who participate in prison education programs are 43 percent less likely to recidivate than those who do not, and the odds of recidivism decrease as higher levels of education are achieved.<sup>2</sup> A reduction in crime and technical violations during post-release supervision leads to fewer crime victims and enables probation and parole agencies to concentrate their resources on their riskiest supervisees.<sup>3</sup>

**Job Readiness:** By 2020, 65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school.<sup>4</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>5</sup>

**Taxpayer savings/Return on investment:** Ohio incarcerates nearly 51,000 people yearly.<sup>6</sup> Nationally, approximately 95 percent of incarcerated people will eventually be released and about two of every five return within three years.<sup>7</sup> Investing in prison-based education can help to curb this trend. Every dollar invested in prison-based education yields \$4 to \$5 of taxpayer savings in reduced incarceration costs.<sup>8</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>9</sup>

**Increasing employment rates:** Removing barriers to postsecondary education in prison is estimated to increase employment rates among formerly incarcerated people across the U.S. by 10 percent on average. In addition, offering higher education in prison will provide employers with a larger pool of skilled workers to hire.<sup>10</sup>

### Postsecondary Education in Ohio's Prisons

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC) relies on a network of postsecondary education institutions to provide educational and vocational programming in Ohio prisons. In 1975, this group—known as the Ohio Penal Education Consortium (OPEC)—was established and in collaboration with ODRC, promotes information-sharing among member institutions and develops common procedures to ensure the quality of higher education provided in Ohio's correctional institutions. Currently, there are six colleges and universities that provide postsecondary education opportunities in 26 of the 28 prisons: Ashland University (private four-year), Marion Technical College (public two-year), The Ohio University, Sinclair Community College (public two-year), Urbana University, and Youngstown State University. Currently, these programs are funded through the Advanced Job Training (AJT) program by the ODRC. However, credentials students can earn are limited to one-year certificate programs that do not offer transferrable core general education credits.<sup>11</sup>

## Second Chance Pell

Ashland University (AU) has over 50 years of experience as one of the nation's longest operating correctional postsecondary educational programs. In 2016, the university was selected to participate in the Second Chance Pell Pilot program, an Experimental Sites Initiative run by the U.S. Department of Education to allow postsecondary education institutions to provide education to people incarcerated in state and federal prisons. Through Fall of 2017, AU has taught over 250 students using Pell grants, offering programs such as the Business Management Certificate, Office Management Certificate, Associate of Arts Degree in General Studies, and a Bachelor of Science Multidisciplinary Studies.<sup>12</sup> To date, Ashland University has conferred 150 AA degrees and 8 BA degrees through its Second Chance Pell program.<sup>13</sup>

## Opportunities to Improve Reentry Outcomes in Ohio

Despite the fact that the majority of incarcerated people are academically eligible for postsecondary-level courses and have an interest in enrolling, but many are not able to gain access to programs. This points to an opportunity to increase access to postsecondary education in order to take full advantage of the benefits it offers.

**Expand Career Pathways:** The 3,000 students enrolled in postsecondary education in Ohio through the AJT program are currently limited to certificate programs. These terminal degrees prepare students for specific jobs but can include credits that are not transferrable to other academic programs nor build toward more advanced credentials, such as an Associate of Science, Associate of Arts, Associate of General Education, or a bachelor's degree. Providing postsecondary programs where participants earn transferrable credentials in prison would allow students to adapt more readily to the employment opportunities available to them when they leave prison. For example, a student could "stack" credentials by completing an employment-oriented certificate in prison, then later transfer those credits to continue their education in prison or after to an associate's or bachelor's degree in a high-demand field in their community. Higher levels of education are associated with higher earnings among people released from prison and lower levels of recidivism.<sup>14</sup>

**Expand Programming to be Evidence-Based:** Programs funded by AJT are currently limited to people residing in prisons classified as lower security – Levels 1 and 2. Evidence-based practices in corrections are based on engaging people at the highest risk of recidivism in the most comprehensive set of social and behavioral programs and pro-social activities.<sup>15</sup> Postsecondary education is an evidence-based practice, recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice in its compendium of research-backed corrections programs at [www.crimesolutions.gov](http://www.crimesolutions.gov). In Ohio, people in prison classified as Level 3 and 4 are at the highest security levels. Expanding postsecondary programming to people living in these facilities has the potential to reduce recidivism among those at highest risk of return to prison, putting Ohio on track for safer communities and a stronger workforce.

## About the Vera Institute of Justice

Founded in 1961, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) is a justice reform change agent working to advance a vision of a more humane justice system that respects the dignity of every person and safeguards justice for everyone. Vera has developed a reputation as a leader in the field of postsecondary education in prison since launching the *Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education Project* in 2012, a five-year three-state initiative that involved 14 prisons in partnership with 15 colleges that enrolled over 1,200 students. Vera provided on-the-ground technical assistance with planning, program improvement and innovation, and cross-site peer learning and networking.

Vera also provided significant planning and technical assistance support to the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice in the development and launch of the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative. In 2016, the Department of Justice selected Vera to be the national technical assistance provider to Second Chance Pell. This initiative includes 65 colleges in 27 states that enroll over 5,000 students per semester who pay for their educations using Pell Grants. Over 1,000 students in prison have completed postsecondary credentials behind bars through Second Chance Pell.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Latessa, M. Lugo, A. Pompoco, C. Sullivan, and J. Wooldredge *Evaluation of Ohio's Prison Programs* (Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute, School of Criminal Justice, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> 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>; Bozick, R., Steele, J., Davis, L., & Turner, S., "Does providing inmates with education improve postrelease outcomes? A meta-analysis of correctional education programs in the United States," *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 14, no. 3 (2018), 389-428.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Delaney, Ram Subramanian, and Fred Patrick, *Making the Grade: Developing Quality Postsecondary Education Programs in Prison*. (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>5</sup> 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>

<sup>6</sup> Alexi Jones, *Correctional Control 2018: Incarceration and Supervision by State* (Washington, DC: Prison Policy Initiative, December 2018), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OH.html>

<sup>7</sup> T. Hughes and D. J. Wilson, *Reentry Trends in the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/reentry.pdf>; Pew Center on States, *State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of America's Prisons* (Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2011), [https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs\\_assets/2011/pewstateofrecidivismpdf.pdf](https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2011/pewstateofrecidivismpdf.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> L. Davis, et. al, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Oakford, Cara Brumfield, Casey Goldvale, Laura Tatum, Margaret diZerega, and Fred Patrick, *Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Information on credentials that are not stackable or credits that are non-transferrable was provided by OPEC member colleges.

<sup>12</sup> Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative Update (New York: The Vera Institute of Justice, June 2018)

<sup>13</sup> Completion numbers retrieved from email forwarded by Denise Justice at Ashland University (February 2019)

<sup>14</sup> E. Latessa, et. al, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Grant Duwe, *The Use and Impact of Correctional Programming for Inmates on Pre- and Post-Release Outcomes* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, 2017), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250476.pdf>