

# Prison Education Saves States Dollars

Submission of the  
*Illinois Coalition of Higher Education Programs in Prison*<sup>1</sup>  
To the *Illinois Commission on Criminal Justice Reform*  
Springfield, Illinois  
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Higher education programs in prison are bi-partisan. What makes them attractive to both red and blue states is that they **work**; they save money for the state, reduce prison numbers, and help people reach their full economic and human potential.

## Introduction

Governor Rauner has asked the Illinois Commission on Criminal Justice Reform to suggest ways to reduce the Illinois prison population by 25% in the coming decade. The Illinois Coalition of Higher Education Programs in Prison is concerned, however, that no sub-committee of this group has been asked to look into the role education-in-prison programs have historically played in justice reform and **must** play in the future if the state is to meet its goals. As educators associated with college-level programs in prison, we find this to be a grievous oversight as research in this area is clear: education, especially higher education, is critical to the reduction of recidivism and to the re-integration of people who are incarcerated into society.

## What Research Shows

- 1) A 2013 RAND report reviewed 50 studies and 32 years of research on education-in-prison programs: the most comprehensive meta-analysis of such programs that exists. This study found lower rates of recidivism among individuals who received prison education than among those who did not<sup>A</sup>. Numbers from the studies surveyed include the following:
  - prison education reduces reincarceration rates by 13.8 %;
  - incarcerated individuals who receive education in prison are between 40-50% less likely to return to prison than those who do not;
  - prison education that engages college professors, uses whole class instruction, and has post-release components produces the most significant results;
  - incarcerated individuals who participate in prison education are 13% more likely to gain employment after release than individuals who have not participated.

While the various studies surveyed by Rand provided shifting numbers about the impact of education programs (depending on the populations studied, the methodology of each study, etc.), the overall trend was certain: education in prison helps combat recidivism.

- 2) An earlier meta-analysis (Gaes 2008) found that postsecondary prison education was the most effective of all forms of prison education, reducing recidivism from between 26-47%.<sup>B</sup>
- 3) The National Institute of Justice ranks Postsecondary Correctional Education (PSCE) as a “promising practice.”<sup>C</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Illinois Coalition of Higher Education Programs in Prison supports access to quality post-secondary education for people in prison and after release. This coalition includes representatives from DePaul University, Loyola University, North Park University, Northeastern Illinois University, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the Chicago Theological Seminary.

- 4) According to a comprehensive survey of all 50 states from the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), education in prison promotes better communication between inmates and correctional staff and better race relations in prison.
- 5) The IHEP report also notes that when incarcerated adults achieve academic success, they become strong role models for their children, some of whom may enter the system if cycles of poverty are not broken.<sup>D</sup>

### Working Models

The Vera Institute for Justice has funded thriving higher education programs in MI<sup>E</sup>, NJ<sup>F</sup>, and NC<sup>G</sup> prisons through its Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education Project. Texas and California may soon be included in this initiative. In 2014, NY decided to use state funds to make college education accessible to incarcerated individuals. Illinois needs to join this growing coalition for change and fiscal responsibility.

### What We Need to Find Out

While studies have been conducted on education programs in many states, no concrete studies have been done in Illinois. Justice reform should not move forward until we investigate research from other states and conduct our own study of the ways education-in-prison programs will benefit Illinois.

### What We Are Asking of the Commission

- 1) Give the Illinois Coalition of Higher Education Programs in Prison a place at the table so that we can help with item four of the Commission's charge: determining the "extent to which education, job training, and re-entry preparation programs can both facilitate the readiness of inmates to transition into the community and reduce recidivism."
- 2) Support bills such as HB3833, The Prisoner Entrepreneur Education Program Act, which offers education and opportunity to people who are incarcerated.
- 3) Work with Illinois colleges and universities to take advantage of possible Pell Grant opportunities to develop a network of college programs for incarcerated people.
- 4) Provide access to existing IDOC educational data so that academic, community, and other professionals can improve educational opportunities for the incarcerated in Illinois.
- 5) Pass legislation banning Illinois state college applications from asking applicants if they have been convicted of a crime.
- 6) Speak to experts in prison education, such as representatives of the New Jersey program, NJ-STEP (housed at Rutgers University), to learn more about how and why such programs are needed in difficult fiscal times. We can facilitate such a meeting.

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<sup>A</sup> [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9728/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9728/index1.html)

<sup>B</sup> Gaes, G. (2008). The Impact of Prison Education on Post-Release Outcomes. Reentry Roundtable on Education, New York: John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Available at: <http://www.ceanational.org/docs/Gaes.pdf>

<sup>C</sup> <http://www.crimesolutions.gov/practicedetails.aspx?id=23>

<sup>D</sup> <http://www.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/docs/pubs/learningreducerecidivism.pdf>

<sup>E</sup> <http://www.vera.org/news/michigan-joins-national-initiative-expand-access-higher-education-prison-and-after-release>

<sup>F</sup> <http://njstep.newark.rutgers.edu>

<sup>G</sup> <http://www.vera.org/news/north-carolina-joins-pioneering-initiative-expand-access-higher-education-people-prison>