

THE WESLEYAN CENTER FOR PRISON EDUCATION

Fact Sheet: Education as Crime Prevention

The Center for Prison Education offers a high-caliber liberal arts education inside prison walls. In September of 2009 the Center enrolled its first students—nineteen men at Cheshire Correctional Institution. Over the past two years, these students have pursued a broad curricular sequence of Wesleyan courses in the humanities and the natural and social sciences. Now in its third year, the Center has doubled its student population, and plans to expand to a facility for women by 2012

By fostering innovative and collaborative learning, the Center for Prison Education offers a dynamic approach to reduce rates of reincarceration and democratize access to educational opportunity. The Center is an initiative of Wesleyan University and a member of the Consortium for the Liberal Arts in Prison at Bard College.

In 2007, Connecticut became one of four states in the nation to spend more tax dollars on corrections than on higher education. With the highest level of incarceration in the Northeast, and growth rates that often surpass regional and national averages, Connecticut must search for innovative solutions to reverse the state's overinvestment in incarceration. College-in-prison provides a highly cost-effective strategy to synergize our dual commitments to education and public safety.

An Evidence-Based Strategy to Reduce Recidivism: A robust body of evidence has established that higher education in prison consistently leads to remarkable reductions in rates of re-incarceration.

- A comprehensive analysis of fourteen different studies, completed by the Institute for Higher Education Policy on behalf of the Department of Justice, revealed that prisoners who *merely participated* in postsecondary education while in prison were *46% less likely* to recidivate than members of the general prison population.¹
- *The more education, the lower the recidivism rate:* The U.S. Department of Education found that the overall recidivism rate for degree holders leaving the Texas Department of Criminal Justice between September 1990 and 1991 was 15%, four times lower than the general recidivism rate of 60%. Moreover, there was an inverse relationship between the likelihood of recidivating and the type of college degree earned: Associate's (13.7%); Baccalaureate's (5.6%); Master's (0%).²
- More recent, randomized studies that account for age and self-selection variables have demonstrated equally compelling results. In a 2001 study of college-in-prison programs across three different states, for instance, the Correctional Education Association found a consistent recidivism reduction of 29%.³ Individual results from exemplary programs,

**“46%
reduction in
recidivism.”**

¹ Erisman and Contardo. *Learning to Reduce Recidivism: A 50-state Analysis of Postsecondary Correctional Education Policy*. (Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy, March 2005).

² Tracy and Johnson. *Review of Various Outcome Studies Relating Prison Education to Reduced Recidivism*. (State of Texas: Windham School System, June 1994).

³ Steurer, Smith, and Tracy. *Education Reduces Crime: Three-State Recidivism Study*. (Lanham, MD: Correctional Education Association, 2001).

collected in studies with similarly sophisticated methods, show reductions *as great as 62%*.⁴

“Society should recognize that the cost of college is really very insignificant when you compare the cost of the damage done by crime.”

-J Michael Quinlin, Former Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons

The U.S. Department of Education identifies college education as the single most successful method to reduce levels of incarceration. Yet federal funding for higher education behind bars was virtually eliminated as part of the “tough on crime” movement of the mid-1990’s. Recent policy developments, however, demonstrate a shift towards a more evidence-based and cost-efficient approach: in 2005, at least 46 states offered vocational or academic postsecondary education in at least some prison districts. In North Carolina and Texas, postsecondary education is an integral component of comprehensive efforts to curb prison expansion.

“Every \$1 invested in education inside prison returns \$2 to the taxpayer”

A Cost-Effective Way to Save Taxpayer Money and Increase Public Safety: The fifteen highest enrollment prison systems today account for 89% of inmates who participate in postsecondary programs. In two-thirds of these systems, at least half of the funding is provided by state appropriations, with impressive results.

prison, incarceration costs. Even more compelling is that \$1 million spent on incarceration prevents 350 crimes, whereas \$1 million spent on education programs prevents 600 crimes.⁵

- Ex-offenders who attend college in prison are far more likely to find sustained and well-paying employment and are less likely to rely on social services than with only a high school degree.⁶

- *The rehabilitative effects of college-in-prison extend far beyond recidivism rates.* Corrections officers attest that education facilitates improved relations between guards and inmates, promotes successful mentoring relationships among prisoners, reduces racial tension and decreases disciplinary infractions. A study of an Indiana college-in-prison program found that enrollees were *75% less likely to commit infractions*.⁷

- *Our program: 187 tickets to 0 tickets.* Whereas our cohort of 19 students had received a cumulative total of 187 disciplinary tickets for misbehavior in prison before beginning our program, not a single student has committed a single infraction for the duration of the program so far. Given the high costs of disciplinary measures within the prison, the savings to the department already due to our program are likely thus quite substantial.

The Center for Prison Education seeks to reinstitute post-secondary education throughout the Connecticut prison system. By equipping incarcerated individuals with the tools necessary for successful reintegration into society, college-in-prison functions powerfully

⁴ Batiuk, et al. *Disentangling the Effects of Correctional Education*. (Criminal Justice 5(1): 55-75., 2005).

⁵ Bazos, A., & Hausman, J. *Correctional Education as a Crime Control Program*. (Los Angeles, CA: University of California at Los Angeles School of Public Policy and Social Research, Department of Policy Studies, 2004), 10.

⁶ Erisman and Contardo, 8.

⁷ Ibid, 12.

to promote healthier and safer communities. We request your support and advocacy in working to fulfill this mission.

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