

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/first-class-post-secondary-education-in-prison>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

In April 2020, the U.S. Department of Education expanded the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative, adding 67 new higher education institutions to the programs already operating 63 colleges offering postsecondary education programs in prison. Starting a college program in prison is a significant undertaking that will profoundly affect the lives of students, faculty, and staff. The prison environment presents administrators with norms and rules for operating wholly unlike those of a typical college. Vera created this guide for colleges and corrections departments seeking to set up new programs to help program coordinators launch a college-in-prison program from the decision to undertake this work to the first day of class.

Because postsecondary education in prison combines two very different worlds, bureaucracies, sets of policies, and practices, colleges and corrections agencies new to this field will find that melding these two systems takes time, patience, creativity, and tenacity.

Successful in-prison postsecondary education programs affirm incarcerated students human dignity and allow them to identify career paths beyond the carceral system.

Colleges and correctional institutions seeking to build successful postsecondary education programs in prison must ensure that in-prison educational quality is comparable to that on campus.

Navigating the academic system from inside prison, where security mandates can impede access to study materials and the financial aid process, requires help from both corrections and college staff.

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