

# The Landscape of Postsecondary Education in U.S. Prisons

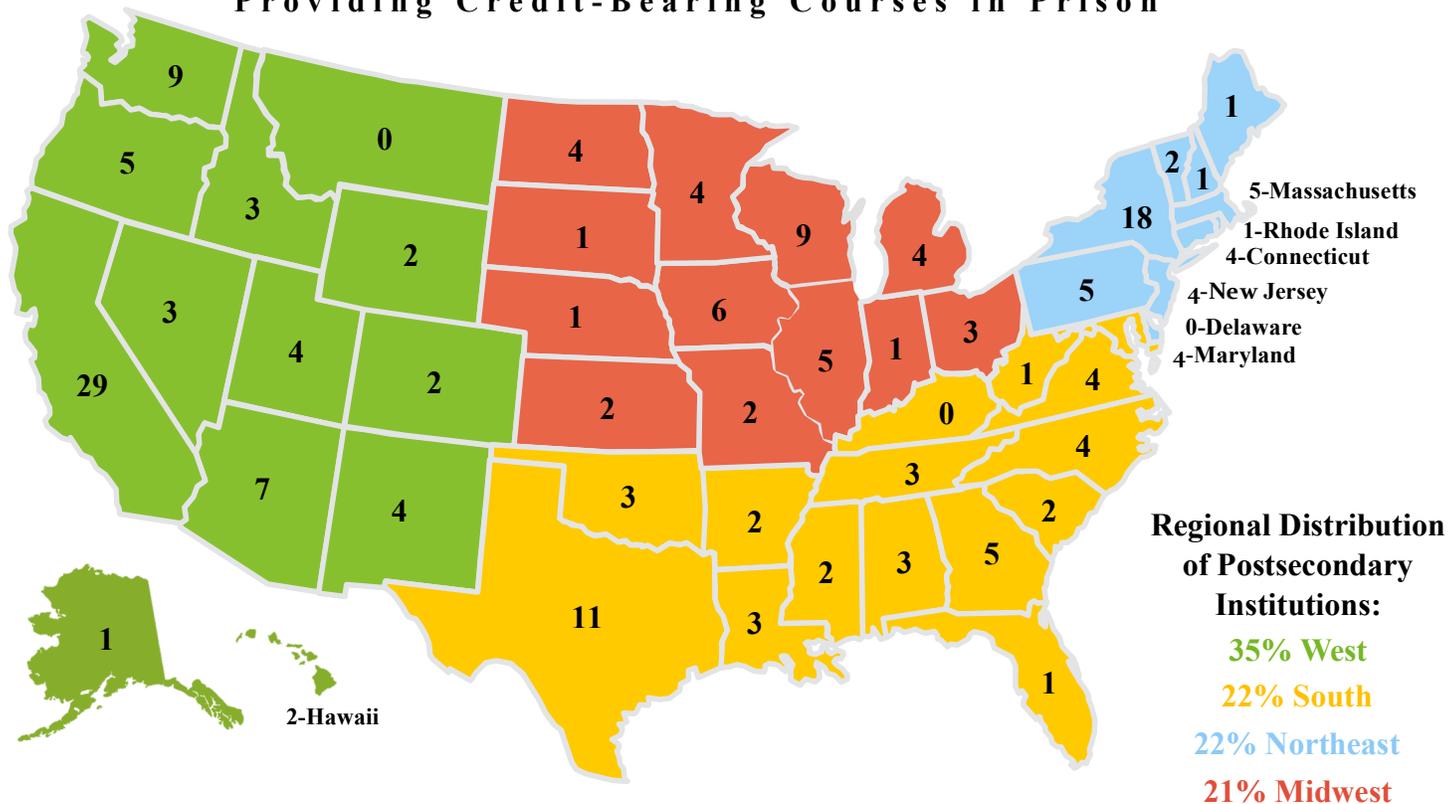
A Brief by the Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison

University of Utah

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At present, little is known about the scope of postsecondary education offered inside prisons across the U.S. In order to enable greater understanding of a rapidly changing terrain, our present study uses descriptive and critical analysis to define, analyze, and organize postsecondary education in prison. The present study uses the following inclusion criteria: Postsecondary efforts serving prisons must be formally affiliated with a college or university; the postsecondary institution must use a secondary credential as requirement for admission and; institutions must provide postsecondary education.\* This Research Brief highlights findings from our forthcoming manuscript in *The Prison Journal* titled, The landscape of postsecondary education in prison and the influence of Second Chance Pell: An analysis of transferability, credit-bearing status, and accreditation.

## Numbers of Postsecondary Education Institutions Providing Credit-Bearing Courses in Prison



### Quick Facts:

- Among the 4,627 degree-granting, postsecondary Title IV institutions in the U.S., *at least* 202 institutions, or 4%, offer credit-bearing postsecondary education in at least one prison.
- Over 55% of postsecondary institutions offering programming in prisons (n=113) are public two-year colleges.
- Of the 202 institutions of higher education providing credit-bearing coursework, 194 have regional accreditation and eight have national accreditation.
- Taken together, three states (California, New York, and Texas) account for over a quarter (29%) of all unique institutions conferring postsecondary credit for incarcerated students.
- Nine states have just one postsecondary institution conferring credit for incarcerated students, which means that roughly one in every five states has but a single institution offering credit-bearing postsecondary education to people in prisons.

\* Our dataset does not currently include efforts solely affiliated with the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program or postsecondary credits earned via CLEP testing. We were unable to confirm consistent program information for Inside-Out in two key areas: admission criteria and credit-bearing status at all sites. Because of the diversity of CLEP testing, additional research is needed to capture its breadth and utility regarding transferability, credit-bearing status, and accreditation. Please see the full manuscript for complete discussion of inclusion/exclusion criteria and limitations.

## What is Postsecondary Education in Prison?

Our research team defines postsecondary education in prison as it would in non-carceral contexts, in alignment with the National Center for Education Statistics and distinct from *correctional education*, which often includes an array of educational programming inside prisons. For purposes of the present study, we use the following definition:

Formal instruction provided to students who have earned or are concurrently earning a GED, high school diploma, or equivalent secondary credential. This includes programs whose purpose is academic, vocational, and continuing professional education, and excludes avocational, adult basic education, adult secondary instruction, and other formal programming efforts not affiliated with an institution of higher education.

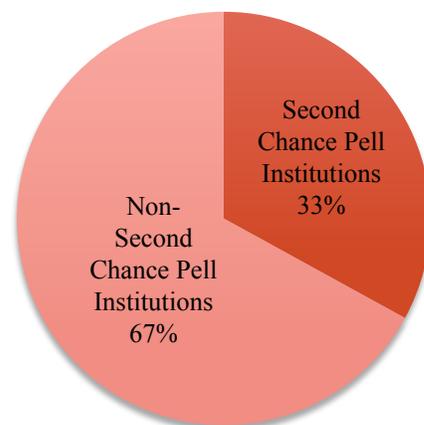
### The Influence of Second Chance Pell

The total number of unique institutions conferring postsecondary credit for incarcerated people is greatly influenced by the implementation of Second Chance Pell. The Experimental Sites Initiative temporarily lifts the ban on Pell Grant funding for incarcerated students at 67 institutions of higher education.

#### Quick Facts:

- One-third (n=67) of all current institutions providing credit-bearing coursework in prisons are funded at least in part through Second Chance Pell.
- Prior to the initiation of Second Chance Pell, *at least* 24 of the 194 postsecondary institutions were not providing credit-bearing coursework in prison.
- Second Chance Pell affiliated institutions account for 66 percent of all credit-bearing opportunities in prison in the Southern region of the U.S.
- Of the nine states with only one institution conferring credit for incarcerated students, two-thirds (n=6) are Second Chance Pell sites.

### Second Chance Pell Distribution (n=202)



- Second Chance Pell Institutions (n=67)
- Non Second Chance Pell Institutions (n=135)

Growth in the numbers of regionally accredited institutions providing credit-bearing postsecondary education in prisons is positive and it is necessary that as an emerging field, we learn more about these engagements. Overall, there are too few institutions providing credit-bearing coursework to incarcerated students. The percentage of current institutions providing credit-bearing postsecondary education in prison as part of the Experimental Sites Initiative is substantial and the longevity of these efforts is currently unknown. Ultimately, if we are concerned with issues of equity and quality in higher education in prison, then we will want to continue pursuing lines of empirical inquiry that document the key characteristics of institutions, including but not limited to: transferability, credit-bearing status, and accreditation.

A note from our Director:



Hello, and thank you for your interest and participation in this research. The Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison at the University of Utah is a collection of researchers enthusiastically studying the landscape of postsecondary education in prison throughout the U.S. We began our efforts in 2015 and work in collaboration with programs across the country to research the field and provide empirical recommendations for future growth and quality expansion. Our research is ongoing. Because of the changing nature of higher education in prison, we update data frequently as we learn new information and this brief should be read with this in mind; it is likely we are missing efforts. Yet, we are confident that what we have documented thus far is accurate for institutions with whom we've been able to connect. We are indebted to the individuals involved with postsecondary education in prison for making this research possible. Thank you for returning our communications and sharing accurate information about your current efforts. If you have updates or wish to connect with our research team, you can contact me at: [erin.castro@utah.edu](mailto:erin.castro@utah.edu).

Sincerely, 



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Prison Education Project