

# EDUCATION FROM THE INSIDE, OUT:

THE MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF COLLEGE  
PROGRAMS IN PRISON

*A Report by the Correctional Association of New York  
January 2009*

Founded in 1844, The Correctional Association of New York is a nonprofit policy analysis, research, and advocacy organization that focuses on criminal justice issues. It is the only independent organization in New York State with legislative authority to inspect conditions in state prisons and report its findings to policymakers and the public.

The Correctional Association's Public Policy Project develops proposals for practical and meaningful reform on critical issues such as conditions of confinement inside prisons and policies affecting the use of prisons. The Project's key purpose is to educate the press, policymakers, and the public regarding ways to make the criminal justice system more, fair, efficient, and humane.

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Finally, we wish to extend our deep appreciation to the current inmates, formerly incarcerated people, criminal justice professionals, prison administrators, and college program practitioners who agreed to be interviewed for this report. Their observations and experiences were critical in shaping this paper and developing the Correctional Association's policy recommendations.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In September of 1994, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act which, among other “tough on crime” policies, prohibited awarding Pell Grants to individuals incarcerated in federal or state correctional facilities. This provision effectively left the responsibility to fund higher education programs in prison to the states.

In New York State, former Governor Mario Cuomo continued state funding for post-secondary correctional education through the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), which awards educational grants to low-income students. In 1995 however, the first year George Pataki took office as governor, New York banned inmates from receiving TAP grants.<sup>1</sup> Nationwide, nearly all the 350 postsecondary correctional education (PSCE) programs closed<sup>2</sup>—only four out of 70 remained open in New York—despite the widely held view among correction officials and experts in the field about the benefits of such programs.

The worth of in-prison college programs can be measured in several important ways, each having value for the criminal justice system and the larger community. Studies and conversations with formerly incarcerated people and program practitioners highlight the principal benefits of college programs in prison: reduced recidivism because of the enhanced problem-solving skills and greater opportunities for steady employment provided to inmates, safer and more manageable prison conditions, and a cost-effective option for improving public safety.

Statistical evidence from several highly regarded studies corroborates the Correctional Association’s position that college programming in prison is a highly effective tool in reducing recidivism. A 1991 study released by New York’s Department of Correctional Services found that inmates who earned a degree while incarcerated had a 26.4 percent recidivism rate whereas 44.6 percent of participants who did not earn a degree were returned to custody.<sup>3</sup> Another influential study, published in 2004, *Post-Secondary Correctional Education and Recidivism: A Meta-Analysis of Research Conducted 1990-1999*, found that “inmates who participated in PSCE

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<sup>1</sup> Correctional Association of New York & Justice Policy Institute. (1998). *New York State of Mind?: Higher Education vs. Prison Funding in the Empire State, 1988–1998*. New York: Gangi, R., Schiraldi, V., Ziedenberg, J, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Fine, M., Torre, M.E., Boudin, K., Bowen, I., Clark, J., Hylton, D., et al. (2001). *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum-Security Prison*. New York: The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 6.

<sup>3</sup> The DOCS 1991 report is available in hard copy from the Department, but has been scanned in full and posted online by the Prison Policy Initiative. [http://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/inmate\\_college\\_program.shtml](http://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/inmate_college_program.shtml).

recidivated 22 percent of the time and those not participating in PSCE had a recidivism rate of 41 percent.”<sup>4</sup>

Interviews and observations from program participants and practitioners attest to the importance of college programs in prison. The comments made by men and women who are earning a living and building good lives back in their communities demonstrate the real value in post-secondary correctional education programs. Christina Voight, a former participant in the College Bound Program at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison for women in Westchester, New York, said, “The people who got an education on the inside had the same problems when released as those who didn’t. But those without college kept falling while those who had an education got back up and kept going.”

Prison administrators, program practitioners, and incarcerated persons alike also recount the positive effects of college programs in prison: providing an incentive for good behavior; producing mature, well-spoken leadership who have a calming influence on other inmates and on correction officers; and, reducing the tension and violent interactions between inmates and staff and among inmates. Jamie Houston, Director of the Correctional Education Program at Indiana State University and former Assistant Warden in the Indiana Department of Correction, characterized inmates attending classes as the best-behaved population in a correctional facility, crediting college programs with creating an incentive to avoid conduct that will be written up as a disciplinary infraction.

In-prison college programs are also a cost-effective method of improving public safety. The cost differences in education versus incarceration in New York, plus the short- and long-term benefits of a better educated population, makes investment in higher education for incarcerated individuals and people in the community smart fiscal policy. One cost-benefit analysis found that the cost to the state per crime prevented by offering education to inmates is about \$1,600; the cost per crime prevented by extending prison sentences is \$2,800. In other words, “A \$1 million investment in incarceration will prevent about 350 crimes, while that same

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<sup>4</sup> Chapell, C.A. (2004). *Post-Secondary Correctional Education and Recidivism: A Meta-Analysis of Research Conducted 1990-1999*. Journal of Correctional Education, 55(2). Retrieved June 15, 2008, from New York University database, 157.

investment in education will prevent more than 600 crimes. Correctional education is almost twice as cost effective as incarceration.”<sup>5</sup>

The Correctional Association selected six in-prison college programs in New York State and across the United States to examine what seems to be working in post-secondary correctional education:

- In North Carolina, the Department of Correction has contracted with the University of North Carolina to use the United States Department of Education “Youth Offender” grant to fund all courses taught by UNC in correctional facilities. Classes offered by community colleges in correctional facilities are funded by the North Carolina Legislature, which provides a high appropriation per each full-time student attending a college within the statewide community college system and does not differentiate between incarcerated and non-incarcerated students.
- People incarcerated in Texas pursue post-secondary studies through the Windham School District (WSD), a legally recognized entity that receives funding from the Texas Department of Education. Inmates under the age of 25 and within five years of release are eligible to receive financial aid for tuition and materials associated with post-secondary education classes from the “Youth Offender” grant. WSD uses the money to cover the cost of the first three courses taken by eligible inmates. The fiscal year 2008 grant covered approximately 2,100 inmates.
- Offering curriculum in line with a traditional liberal arts college program, the Bard Prison Initiative offers classes to inmates in four New York correctional facilities identical to those taught at Bard College at Annandale-on-Hudson. As of February 2009, Bard will have conferred 70 Associate’s and 10 Bachelor’s degrees.
- Established in 1975 at Attica Correctional Facility, the Consortium of the Niagara Frontier is one of the oldest PSCE programs in New York State. Offering Associate’s

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

and Bachelor's degrees in Social Sciences or the Humanities, the Consortium consists of Niagara University, Canisius College, and Daemen College.

- The College Bound program at Bedford Hills was the subject of a well-known study, *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum Security Prison*. The study included a quantitative analysis on the rate of recidivism of 274 inmates that had participated in the college program and 2,031 female offenders released between 1985 and 1999. The study found that, 36 months after release, women in the college program had a 7.7 percent return-to-custody rate while the non-participants had a 29 percent return-to-custody rate.
- The Prison Education Program offered by Boston University at Bay State Correctional Facility, a medium-level security prison for men in Norfolk, Massachusetts, has conferred 284 Bachelor's degrees in Liberal Studies in Interdisciplinary Studies since its inception in 1972.

The Correctional Association also looked at College and Community Fellowship and The College Initiative, two well-regarded programs in New York City providing guidance and support to formerly incarcerated people about the college enrollment process. Many program participants say these support services were critical to their success.

The report concludes with substantive recommendations for action by New York State policymakers:

- **Restore and expand public funding for college programs in prison:**
  - **Enact TAP Legislation** that effectively lifts the ban on inmate eligibility for New York's Tuition Assistance Program grants and other public assistance grants for higher education.
  - **Expand the use of "Youth Offender"** grants in New York State correctional facilities.

- **Require New York’s Board of Parole to consider steady participation in college programs as a qualifying indicator for parole release.**
- **Increase resources to programs that provide access to higher education opportunities for formerly incarcerated people as a means of supporting successful re-entry and community well-being.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In September of 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (VCCLA), also known as the Clinton Crime Bill, into law. Marked by so-called “tough on crime” policies as promoted by the president and Congress at that time, the new law included an expansion of the federal death penalty and allocated \$9.7 billion for prison construction at the national and local levels.<sup>1</sup> A critical provision of the bill was the amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965, which had sanctioned the use of federally funded post-secondary education grants, more commonly known as Pell Grants, for inmates. The VCCLA prohibited the awarding of Pell Grants to individuals incarcerated in federal or state correctional facilities, effectively leaving the responsibility to fund higher education programs in prison to the states.

In New York, former Governor Mario Cuomo continued state funding for post-secondary correctional education (PSCE) through the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), which awards educational grants to low-income students. The Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC), the division of the state’s Department of Education which administers TAP grants, does not require either individual applicants to specify if they are incarcerated or college administrators to identify people as prisoners. The main criteria for TAP grants are based on income and whether a person is single or married and has dependents. In fiscal year 1994-1995,<sup>2</sup> HESC awarded \$631 million in grants to about 300,000 New York college students; approximately 3,000 of those students, or one percent, were inmates receiving TAP grants between \$1,750 and \$2,000.<sup>3</sup>

In 1995 however, the first year George Pataki took office as governor, New York banned inmates from receiving TAP grants.<sup>4</sup> Nationwide, nearly all the 350 PSCE programs closed<sup>5</sup>—only four out of 70 remained open in New York—despite the widely held view among correction officials and experts in the field about the multiple benefits of such programs.

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Justice Fact Sheet, Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. <http://www.ncjrs.gov/textfiles/billfs.txt>.

<sup>2</sup>New York State’s fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31.

<sup>3</sup>Higher Education Service Corporation estimates that the savings resulting from banning inmates from TAP eligibility was between \$5 and 6 million. Given that there were approximately 3,000 incarcerated students during FY 1994-1995, we can estimate that inmates received between \$1750 and \$2000 in TAP grants.

<sup>4</sup>Correctional Association of New York & Justice Policy Institute. (1998). *New York State of Mind?: Higher Education vs. Prison Funding in the Empire State, 1988–1998*. New York: Gangi, R., Schiraldi, V., Ziedenberg, J, 2.

<sup>5</sup>Fine, M., Torre, M.E., Boudin, K., Bowen, I., Clark, J., Hylton, D., et al. (2001). *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum-Security Prison*. New York: The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 6.

The purpose of this paper, its findings, and subsequent recommendations is to provide concrete rationales for policymakers, criminal justice professionals, interested journalists, and concerned citizens as to why public funding for college programs in prisons should be restored. Evidence from studies, produced by both government and private entities, and examples of successful model programs in New York and other jurisdictions corroborate the Correctional Association's position that college programming in prison is a highly effective tool in reducing recidivism and managing facilities safely.

## ***POST-SECONDARY CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION***

### **Research and Studies**

PSCE is widely cited as having a direct and measureable impact on reducing the rate at which people return to prison. In 1991, New York's Department of Correctional Services published *Analysis of Return Rates of the Inmate College Program Participants*, that tracked men and women who had earned a degree in the Inmate College Program during the 1986-1987 academic year and found the rate of return for degree-earners to be significantly lower than that of participants who did not earn a degree. Of those earning a degree, 26.4 percent had been returned to the Department's custody, whereas 44.6 percent of participants who did not earn a degree were returned to custody. Degree earning inmates also returned to prison at a lower rate than would be expected when compared to the overall male return rate. The Department concluded, "These findings suggest that earning a college degree while incarcerated is positively related to successful post-release adjustment as measured by return to the Department's custody."<sup>6</sup>

In 2001, The Correctional Education Association, a professional association for educators and administrators providing services for students in correctional settings, released a report that compared recidivism data across Ohio, Maryland, and Minnesota on 3,170 inmates released between late 1997 and early 1998. One of the more comprehensive analyses conducted on the subject, *The Three State Recidivism Study* found that the 1,373 inmates who had participated in college programs while incarcerated had significantly lower re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-

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<sup>6</sup> State of New York Department of Correctional Services. (1991). *Analysis of Return Rates of the Inmate College Program Participants*. New York: Clark, D.D., Executive Summary.

incarceration rates than non-participants.<sup>7</sup> Another influential study, published in 2004, *Post-Secondary Correctional Education and Recidivism: A Meta-Analysis of Research Conducted 1990-1999*, found that “inmates who participated in PSCE recidivated 22 percent of the time and those not participating in PSCE had a recidivism rate of 41 percent.”<sup>8</sup>

PSCE programs are also valuable in improving conditions inside the facilities: prison administrators, inmates, and correction officers all attest to the value of college programs because they provide an incentive for good behavior, help inmates develop a sense of self-esteem and responsibility, and produce a steady stream of mature leadership. *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum Security Prison*, a study and narrative released in September 2001 of the college program experience at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a maximum security women’s prison in Westchester, New York, included accounts from several correction officers citing fewer fights and better communication between inmates and officers as one of the program’s positive results. A paper published by the Correctional Association in 1998 had similar findings—college programs help maintain a calmer, more manageable environment in prison.<sup>9</sup>

A paper by Dr. Michelle Fine, *Evidence Based Analysis of Two Criminal Justice Policies Designed to Reduce Risk, Increase Public Safety and Lower Recarceration Rates*, presented in 2007 to the New York State Commission on Sentencing Reform, also found extremely strong evidence of the positive impact of in-prison college programs. Dr. Fine includes four findings in her testimony on the benefits of college in prison: reincarceration rates are reduced; there are considerable government savings due to fewer commitments and the reduction in the associated costs of incarcerating people; prisons are more peaceful and disciplined; and, the children of prisoners participating in in-prison college programs are encouraged to pursue education more seriously.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Correctional Education Association. (2001). *Three State Recidivism Study*. Lanham, Maryland: Steurer, S. J., Smith, L., & Tracy, L., 39.

<sup>8</sup> Chapell, C.A. (2004). *Post-Secondary Correctional Education and Recidivism: A Meta-Analysis of Research Conducted 1990-1999*. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 55(2). Retrieved June 15, 2008, from New York University database, 157.

<sup>9</sup> Correctional Association of New York. (1999). *Plan for Restoring College Programs to New York State Prisons*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> New York State Commission on Sentencing Reform. (2007). *Evidence Based Analysis of Two Criminal Justice Policies Designed to Reduce Risk, Increase Public Safety and Lower Recarceration Rates*. The Graduate Center City University of New York: Fine, M., 3-4.

## **Technical Trade or Academic Education**

For the purposes of this paper, technical trade (also known as vocational) and academic programs are treated as separate types of education programs, with most of the paper examining the benefits of post-secondary education. Practitioners and researchers debate the value of technical training versus traditional academic learning inside prison; some question the merits of teaching specialized skills to inmates, saying that the purpose of education should be to broaden minds about the wide range of professional careers available, not just to provide training for particular jobs. This argument may miss one of the main premises of PSCE programs: to improve a person's chances of staying out of prison by equipping him or her with the necessary skills to find, maintain, and be successful at work. In her 2008 paper, *Structure and Components of Successful Educational Programs*, Doris MacKenzie writes, "Systematic reviews and meta-analyses of vocational education programs indicate that these programs are successful in reducing the later criminal activities of participants."<sup>11</sup> Technical training has a proven impact in reducing recidivism and should be placed on an equal level as academic education. Allowing individual prisoners to choose a path best suited to him or her increases the chance of success during incarceration and post-release.

## ***THE MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF COLLEGE PROGRAMS IN PRISON***

The benefits of PSCE programs can be measured in several important ways, each having value for the criminal justice system and the larger community. Whether we take the perspective that PSCE is worthwhile because education reduces recidivism rates and college programs in prison create a calmer environment, or, that dollar for dollar, education is a more cost-effective crime fighting strategy than re-incarceration and longer sentences, college programs for inmates and the continuation of studies for formerly incarcerated people have indisputable merits for all concerned parties.

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<sup>11</sup> MacKenzie, D.L. (2008). *Structure and Components of Successful Educational Programs*. New York: The Prisoner Re-Entry Institute, 11.

## **Reduced Recidivism**

Successfully reintegrating into the community is often the most challenging task for formerly incarcerated men and women with few resources or support systems to depend on. College credits and/or a degree function as a “lifeline” through the daily difficulties and setbacks people with a criminal history often confront and must overcome to avoid returning to prison.

### *Opportunities for Employment*

A college education has become one of the most valuable assets in the US—it is now estimated that a Bachelor’s degree is worth more than \$1 million in lifetime earnings.<sup>12</sup> A person with a high school diploma or GED can expect to earn an average annual income of \$29,600,<sup>13</sup> only just above the poverty line (\$26,138 yearly average income for a family of four<sup>14</sup>) and hardly enough to support one person. The average annual income for a person who did not graduate from high-school or obtain a GED is \$19,915.<sup>15</sup> Not having an advanced degree greatly diminishes people’s capacity to earn a living wage, often forcing them to take two or three meaningless jobs to support themselves and their families. In many cases, particularly in economically depressed areas, people may turn to criminal activity simply as a means to survive.

Earning a degree or college credits while in prison can make a significant difference for formerly incarcerated men and women once they return to their communities and search for employment. At Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (BHCF), former inmate Christina Voight earned an Associate’s degree and began her Bachelor’s degree program. “The people who got an education on the inside had the same problems when released as those who didn’t,” she says now, “but those without college kept falling while those who had an education got back up and kept going.” Ms. Voight is currently an Open Society Institute Fellow and working on her Ph.D. in sociology.

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<sup>12</sup> The Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2004). *Investing in America’s Future: Why Student Aid Pays Off for Society and Individuals*. Washington, D.C.: Cunningham, A., 1.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2008). *The Condition of Education 2008* (NCES 2008–031), Indicator 20.

<sup>14</sup> Buckley, C. (2008, July 14.) City Refines Formula to Measure Poverty Rate. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/nyregion/14poverty.html?scp=4&sq=povertypercent20line&st=cse>.

<sup>15</sup> United States Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *Income, Earnings, and Poverty Data From the 2006 American Community Survey* (American Community Survey Reports, ACS-08). Washington, D.C.: Webster, B. H., Jr., & Bishaw, A., 16.

Cheryl Wilkins is an academic counselor for The College Initiative at Lehman College and a former member of the inmate committee at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility that helped reinstate the college program in that prison. Referring to formerly incarcerated men and women released from prison without having earned credits or a college degree, Ms. Wilkins says that, “Coming out of prison with a degree is no comparison to transitioning back into the community without one. No comparison.”

Aileen Baumgartner, director of the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility College Bound Program, says PSCE helps ex-offenders during their employment search, as they are better able to fill out an application and write a cover letter and resume. Furthermore, success in an academically rigorous environment provides a measure of accomplishment that carries over into employment. Selina Fulford, a formerly incarcerated woman currently pursuing her second Masters degree, echoes Ms. Baumgartner’s view that higher education is crucial for obtaining a good job and being successful enough to professionally advance. Ms. Fulford has been promoted three times, starting out as a Residential Aid at a homeless shelter and working her way up to Ombudsman, a position that requires a Masters degree. She credits her progress to her academic achievements, saying that, “Education gives you power to do good things.”

When back in their communities, formerly incarcerated people are at a dual disadvantage: they are chronically undereducated, which limits employment options, and are stigmatized as ex-offenders when filling out applications. Exposure to post-secondary education helps break the cycle of unemployment and incarceration. *The Investment Payoff*, a 2005 study released by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), a nonprofit organization advocating for increased access and greater success in postsecondary education, found that, “Individuals with a Bachelor’s degree reported lower levels of unemployment than individuals with a high school diploma.”<sup>16</sup> As Ms. Voight, the BHCF College Bound graduate, explained: “A degree signals to potential employers that a person is responsible and hard-working.”

Research and experience demonstrate that inmates who participate in higher education programs have a much better chance of remaining crime-free upon release. Considering that in New York, transitional services for inmates are generally inadequate and often amount to little

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<sup>16</sup>The Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2005). *The Investment Payoff: A 50-State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: Cunningham, A., Krichels, S., Merisotis, J., Daulton, C.R., Clinedinst, M., Hardge, L., 9.

more than a ride to the bus stop and \$40, a degree can provide the crucial support that re-entry services in the state are mostly lacking.

### *Improved Cognitive Skills*

Post-secondary education emphasizes learning how to rationally argue based on reason and logic and, in turn, the value of considering alternative opinions and points of view. The demands of college classes and the rewarding experience of academic success combined with schooling in a formal setting are considered critical for developing the ability to use and process information.<sup>17</sup> Higher education improves cognitive functions by helping to diminish the antisocial attitudes and behaviors associated with criminal activity.<sup>18</sup>

PSCE practitioners provide numerous anecdotes that demonstrate success in changing the antisocial behaviors of program participants. Aileen Baumgartner from the Bedford Hills program describes women offering positive support for each other in class and encouraging younger inmates to enroll in the college program. Ms. Baumgartner's experiences are echoed by Jamie Houston, a former assistant warden in the Indiana State Department of Corrections who recently began running the Indiana State University Correctional Education Program. Mr. Houston regularly sees inmates enrolled in college classes tutor new students, contributing to a positive atmosphere in an otherwise harsh setting.

A common thread running through the stories and experiences of practitioners and college program participants is how earning college credits and, in particular, a degree while incarcerated can have a significant psychological impact. Many people interviewed for this report described an increase in their sense of "self-efficacy," the knowledge that they have the ability to shape and steer their lives in a meaningful way. As a professor at the Bedford Hills College Program, Aileen Baumgartner observes the change in women over the course of a semester as they become more aware of their own capabilities. Earning college credits connects hard work and determination to measureable success. A woman named Barbara who was interviewed for the *Changing Minds* study said, "Being in college taught me about perseverance, I learned I can do what I put my mind to [...] I didn't know that before college."<sup>19</sup> Succeeding at

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<sup>17</sup> See Mackenzie (2008), 3

<sup>18</sup> For a more comprehensive treatment of the impact education has on the cognitive skills of inmates, see MacKenzie (2008), *Structure and Components of Successful Educational Programs*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> See Fine et al. (2001), 10

college in an adverse environment is evidence of strength, intelligence, and dedication, qualities critical to succeeding on the outside.

### **A Safe and Manageable Prison Environment**

Educating inmates and improving their cognitive skills produce benefits even before they are released. Practitioners interviewed often reported a behavioral sea change in inmates who took college courses. Dr. Robert Cadigan, director of the Boston University Prison Education Program that holds college courses at two Massachusetts state correctional facilities, sees disciplinary infractions go down among his students during the course of a semester. Aileen Baumgartner also described how inmates will self-police, or reprimand other inmates in class if they “act up,” out of fear of losing the program permanently. Jamie Houston from Indiana characterized inmates attending classes as the best-behaved population in a correctional facility, crediting college programs with creating an incentive to avoid conduct that will be written up as a disciplinary infraction. Changes in behavior can be attributed to improved cognitive capacity as well as to the incarcerated person having the opportunity to feel human again by engaging in an activity as commonplace as going to classes.

Incarceration is frequently a dehumanizing and alienating experience: verbal and physical harassment and abuse are a daily occurrence at some facilities and can contribute to a violent culture of social interaction between correction officers and inmates and among inmates. Inmates often report being “treated like criminals” by prison staff, which serves to impart feelings of hopelessness and a negative self-image. College professors, on the other hand, as reported by inmates and teachers alike, expect inmates to act as students and treat them accordingly. Classroom protocol has a positive effect on inmates and on the expectations they set for themselves regarding how and what they will do both in prison and upon release.

The presence of academic programs in a facility can have significant influence on the entire population, even on prisoners not directly involved in PSCE. Robert Cadigan describes this effect as a “rising tide lifting all boats.” Cheryl Wilkins reported how the entire culture of Bedford Hills changed after the college program was reestablished. Instead of supporting the system of mores, norms, and traditions that mandate avoidance of “self-improvement” programs

and discourage cooperation with correction officials, PSCE contravenes the adoption of this counterproductive “prisoner code” by encouraging positive and thoughtful human interaction.<sup>20</sup>

The improved behavior of inmates participating in classes results in a substantially safer environment within correctional facilities. In the study *Changing Minds*, researchers found that college programs served as a “positive management tool” at Bedford Hills.<sup>21</sup> An officer interviewed for the report stated, “We don’t have to worry about stabbings, the fighting within the facility. College gives them something else to occupy their time and [...] their minds. The more educated the women are, the better they can express themselves and the easier it is to manage them.”<sup>22</sup> College classes provide a tangible goal for inmates to focus on while incarcerated. Serena Alfieri, a woman formerly incarcerated at Bedford Hills who took classes through the college program, stated: “You can ignore all that bad stuff during the day if you know at six o’clock p.m., you’re going to class.” Another inmate participating in the program said, “When I first came to Bedford Hills, I was a chronic disciplinary problem, getting tickets back to back. I had a very poor attitude as well, I was rude and obnoxious for no reason, I did not care about anything or anyone. Then I became motivated to participate in a number of the programs, one of which was college. I started to care about getting in trouble and became conscious of the attitude I had that influenced my negative behaviors.”<sup>23</sup>

A consistent finding from the regular institutional monitoring visits conducted by the Correctional Association’s Prison Visiting Project is relevant to this question. At the end of the day of the visit, Correctional Association representatives meet with the facility’s superintendent and his or her executive team and often ask them about possible measures to improve conditions inside the prison. The prison officials have often recommended reinstating college programs because of their multiple benign effects: providing an incentive for good behavior; producing mature, well-spoken leadership who have a calming influence on other inmates and on correction officers; and, communicating the message that society has sufficient respect for the human potential of incarcerated people.

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<sup>20</sup> Peat, B.T. & Winfree, L.T., Jr. (1992). Reducing the Intra-Institutional Effects of “Prisonization.” *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 19(2). Retrieved August 9, 2008, from New York University database, 209.

<sup>21</sup> See Fine et al. (2001), 21.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 21

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 21

### **A Cost-effective Method of Improving Public Safety**

A better educated population means a more productive population. An Institute for Higher Education (IHEP) study, *The Investment Payoff*, advocates for increased investment in higher education, stating: “Going to college has broad and quantifiable national impacts, from higher salaries to improved health to increased volunteerism to a reduced reliance on welfare and other social support programs.”<sup>24</sup> The study reports that: “Nationally [...] less than one-half percent of those with a Bachelor’s degree received some form of public assistance in 2003.”<sup>25</sup> Formerly incarcerated people are more likely than other groups to rely on public assistance programs such as welfare and Medicaid, giving policymakers more incentive to direct public funds to PSCE programs.

Another report by IHEP, *Investing in America’s Future*, found that focusing student aid on low-income students maximizes the return on investment made into increasing access to college. The study notes: “The failure to invest in college access for all students not only results in diminished personal economic opportunities for low-income students but also weakens the fabric of society and risks costing the nation more in the long-term.”<sup>26</sup>

New York has a history of lopsided spending on incarceration versus education: the current average cost of incarcerating a person is \$44,000 per year,<sup>27</sup> while the State University of New York annually spends \$7,645 on instructional expenditures per full-time student.<sup>28</sup> The cost differences in education versus incarceration in New York, plus the short- and long-term benefits of a better educated population, makes investment in higher education for incarcerated individuals and people in the community smart fiscal policy.

*Correctional Education as Crime Control*, a study by the Department of Policy Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles, sought to answer the question, “If a state has a million dollars to invest in crime control, which method will prevent more crimes—educating inmates or keeping them imprisoned longer?”<sup>29</sup> The study used data from the previously cited and comprehensive *Three State Recidivism Study* (see page 2), plus additional data on education

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<sup>24</sup> See The Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2005). *The Investment Payoff*, 3

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 11

<sup>26</sup> See The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2004), 7.

<sup>27</sup> See Legal Action Center. (2008). *Drug Law Reform 2008—Dramatic Cost Savings for New York State*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> See State University of New York. (2007). *SUNY Chancellor John Ryan’s Testimony to Joint Legislative Hearing of the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee*. <http://www.suny.edu/sunyNews/News.cfm?filename=2007-02-08RyanBudgetTestimony.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Bazos, A., & Hausman, J. (2004). *Correctional Education as a Crime Control Program*. University of California at Los Angeles School of Public Policy and Social Research, Department of Policy Studies, 8.

costs and crime rates from the three states in the study—Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio. The report found that the cost to the state per crime prevented by offering education to inmates is about \$1,600; the cost per crime prevented by extending prison sentences is \$2,800.<sup>30</sup> Translated into the terms of its guiding question, the study concluded, “A \$1 million investment in incarceration will prevent about 350 crimes, while that same investment in education will prevent more than 600 crimes. Correctional education is almost twice as cost effective as incarceration.”<sup>31</sup>

### ***MODEL PROGRAMS IN NEW YORK AND THE UNITED STATES***

Despite the termination of federally funded PSCE programs through Pell Grants in 1994, several programs in different parts of the US remained in operation through the creative use of other federal grants, state appropriations, and/or private funding. Currently, thousands of inmates in several states participate in successful state- and privately-funded PSCE programs. The following section reviews programs that seem to improve the lives of people during incarceration and post-release. While it is difficult to precisely assess college programs’ effectiveness if the recidivism rate of the participants has not been determined or if programs have not been formally evaluated by an independent monitor, it is possible to judge a program’s value on other bases, such as degrees conferred, cost to the state, and number of participants. Below we present several examples, noteworthy for their efficient use of funds and/or high academic standards. Those successful funding models should be of particular interest to New York policymakers in light of the state’s current fiscal difficulties.

#### **North Carolina and Correctional Education**

North Carolina’s correctional education program is often cited as a model because of its wide-ranging presence in correctional facilities (even after the elimination of Pell Grants), the high rate of participation in programs, and its innovative funding methods.

In 2006, the average monthly enrollment in all academic programs offered by the Division of Education Services within the North Carolina Department of Correction was 10,516 inmates out of a total population of 37,725. Several community colleges from the North

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 9

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

Carolina Community College System, the University of North Carolina, and Shaw University, a private liberal arts university in Raleigh, North Carolina, contract with the Department of Correction's Division of Education Services to offer all levels of academic and technical programs in North Carolina correctional facilities.<sup>32</sup>

Two- and four-year college programs are less widely available than technical, ABE (Adult Basic Education—basic reading, writing, and mathematic instruction for adult learners), or GED courses; out of 78 correctional facilities, college credit courses are available in 25 institutions and of those, only 12 offer on-site instruction.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, in the 2006-2007 academic year, the North Carolina Community College System and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill awarded inmates 47 Associate's and 39 Bachelor's degrees.<sup>34</sup> The following are brief descriptions of each of the programs offered by the Division of Education Services.

#### *North Carolina Community College System*

Created in 1987 by legislative order, the North Carolina Interagency Partnership brings together the North Carolina Department of Correction and the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges to oversee and maintain a comprehensive plan for the state's inmate population enrolled in technical trade and college programs, as well as GED and ABE courses.<sup>35</sup> Community colleges have historically expanded access to education for non-traditional students and underserved and/or low-income populations. Additionally, courses at community colleges generally cost less than those offered at larger public or private institutions and provide wider course options and scheduling flexibility, making them a particularly sound option for correctional facilities.<sup>36</sup> While the courses taught by the North Carolina Community College System (CCS) are primarily trade-oriented, the system is able to provide academic and technical programs at most correctional facilities in the state and some courses for college credits at a limited number of facilities.

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<sup>32</sup> Shaw University is a private institution that also offers college classes to inmates in North Carolina but is not addressed in this paper due to the limited information available.

<sup>33</sup> University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. (2007). *Correctional Education*. Retrieved August 8, 2008, from <http://www.fridaycenter.unc.edu/cp/correctional.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> North Carolina Department of Correction, Education Services. (2007). *Education Services Annual Report, Calendar Year 2006*. <http://www.doc.state.nc.us/dop/education/index.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Contardao, J, & Tolbert, M. (2008). *Prison Postsecondary Education: Bridging Learning from Incarceration to the Community*. Available from the Prisoner Reentry Institute website: <http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/centersinstitutes/pri/publications.asp>, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 4

The North Carolina General Assembly provides a high appropriation per each full-time student attending a college within the statewide community college system and does not differentiate between incarcerated and non-incarcerated students—appropriations are the same for both.

*University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill: The Friday Center's Correctional Education Program*

Persons incarcerated in North Carolina facilities may also apply for on-site or correspondence classes offered through the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill. As a top educational institution in the U.S., UNC-Chapel Hill offers inmates a unique opportunity to earn college credits from an esteemed university and is strict in its enrollment and academic performance requirements. Inmates enrolling in courses must meet specific academic criteria prior to being accepted and must maintain a 2.0 grade point average throughout the semester.

UNC courses are funded entirely by the U.S. Department of Education “Workplace and Community Transition Training for Incarcerated Youth Offenders” grant, also known as the “Youth Offender” grant, via the North Carolina Department of Correction. Using the \$1,500 grant awarded per inmate 25 years of age and younger and within five years of release, in 2006, UNC was able to offer 63 on-site post-secondary classes in 12 facilities<sup>37</sup> (recent federal legislation expanded eligibility criteria for the “Youth Offender” grant to include inmates under the age of 35 and within seven years of release and increased the grant to \$3,300<sup>38</sup>).

### **The Windham School District in Texas**

A second distinctive example of PSCE programming is the Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s (TDCJ) Windham School District (WSD). Recognizing the value education has in a correctional setting, the TDCJ was the first government agency in the United States to set up a statewide prison education system. New Mexico currently provides post-secondary education programming in all state correctional facilities, although the courses are offered through the University of New Mexico via long distance learning using camera feeds from

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<sup>37</sup>J. Ross, personal communication, September 30, 2008.

<sup>38</sup>United States House of Representatives. (2008). *Sec/ 931. Repeals. (House Report 110-803–Higher Education Opportunity Act)*. Retrieved December 19, 2008: [http://www.congress.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/?&sid=cp110xPuQA&refer=&r\\_n=hr803.110&db\\_id=110&item=&sel=TOC\\_1277915&](http://www.congress.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/?&sid=cp110xPuQA&refer=&r_n=hr803.110&db_id=110&item=&sel=TOC_1277915&)

traditional classrooms to prisons. WSD's specific goals are to: "Reduce recidivism; reduce the cost of confinement or imprisonment; increase the success of former inmates in obtaining and maintaining employment; and provide incentives to inmates to behave in positive ways during confinement or imprisonment."<sup>39</sup>

During the academic year 2007-2008, a total of 5,995 inmates participated in two- and four-year college and graduate level courses. That year, WSD awarded 509 Associate's, 56 Bachelor's, and 92 Masters Degrees.<sup>40</sup>

Accredited by the Texas Education Agency, an administrative entity that monitors activities and programs related to public education in Texas, WSD offers several levels of education, including post-secondary programs through contracts with colleges and universities in the same geographic regions as correctional facilities. TDCJ requires every inmate who wishes to enroll in classes to be assessed by a "treatment department professional," who will develop an Individualized Treatment Program depending on an inmate's specific programming needs. The ITP "outlines programmatic activities for an offender, and prioritizes his/her participation in recommended programs based on the offender's needs, program availability, and projected release date."<sup>41</sup> Inmates must also meet the admission criteria of the college or university they apply to.<sup>42</sup>

WSD is recognized as a legal school district separate from the Department of Criminal Justice, and therefore eligible for public funding. In 2008, WSD received \$59,425,745 from the Texas Department of Education (DOE) for all academic, trade, and vocational programs.<sup>43</sup> Most of this financial support, however, is used to cover the 22,452 inmates (as of September 2008) enrolled in Windham's basic and remedial academic and lifestyle programs, like literacy, special education, English as a Second Language, and parenting classes. The college program receives \$2.3 million from the Texas DOE, as well as through out-of-pocket charges to inmates. Currently, inmates enrolled in WSD under the age of 25 and within five years of release are eligible to receive financial aid for tuition and materials associated with post-secondary education classes from the US Department of Education's "Youth Offender" grant (as mentioned on page 13, effective fiscal year 2009, the criteria for financial aid will expand to include inmates

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<sup>39</sup> *Windham School District. (2003). Overview. <http://www.windhamschooldistrict.org/csd/policy/4.00.pdf>.*

<sup>40</sup> Texas Department of Criminal Justice. (2008). *Division of Continuing Education, Performance Report 2007-2008*. Draft version.

<sup>41</sup> See Windham School District. (2003).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>43</sup> J. Ross, personal communication, October 23, 2008.

35 years of age and under and within seven years of release). WSD uses the grant money to cover the cost of the first three courses taken by eligible inmates; inmates must pay their own way for subsequent courses. The FY 2008 grant covered approximately 2,100 inmates.<sup>44</sup> For inmates over the age of 35, Windham will pay for one class each semester; if inmates choose to take additional classes, they are required to pay for the cost of those classes (moderately lower than the cost of taking classes on a traditional campus) upon release from prison as a condition of parole. Nonpayment is considered a violation of parole, although according to WSD administrators, this violation is not enforced as the sole reason to return a person to prison. In fiscal year 2008, WSD recovered \$650,000 from formerly incarcerated people—the highest amount since the payment policy began in 1998.

Requiring inmates to pay for their college education has raised concern among some program practitioners and academics, specifically about whether the cost of fees will deter people from taking classes. One WSD administrator said that the cost might discourage some people from taking classes because “they don’t want to come out of prison in debt.” However, given that nearly 6,000 inmates have enrolled in college programs in WSD, this policy doesn’t seem to be a disincentive. WSD does work with some colleges to reduce the fees inmates have to pay, recognizing that the financial burdens faced by many formerly incarcerated people are greater than those without a criminal history.

Unfortunately, no independent studies have been conducted of the impact college courses offered through WSD have on recidivism, making it difficult to accurately assess the effectiveness of the program. Still, Texas’s efforts to provide a statewide educational system seem to be working—the number of inmates receiving post-secondary education degrees is impressive and is growing every year.

### **Bard Prison Initiative**

The Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) is an upstate New York-based program that provides college programming in Eastern Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison for men in Ulster County, Woodbourne Correctional Facility, a medium security prison for men in Sullivan County, Elmira Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison for men in Chemung County, and Bayview Correctional Facility, a medium security prison for women in New York City.

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<sup>44</sup> J. Ross, personal communication, October 22, 2008.

Founded in 1999 by former Bard student Max Kenner, BPI gives men and women the opportunity to earn a degree from Bard College, a highly regarded private liberal arts university. Providing curriculum in line with a traditional liberal arts program, BPI offers Associate's and Bachelor's degrees and holds classes identical to those taught at Bard College at Annandale-on-Hudson. Admission to the Associate's program is competitive: inmates must have a GED or high school diploma and program administrators cap admission at 15 spots each year. The admissions office on Bard's traditional campus makes decisions about acceptance into the Bachelor's program based on an inmate's perceived preparedness and regardless of class size at the correctional facility. Inmates are required to have a Bard Associate's degree before they can apply to the Bachelor's degree program. According to Mr. Kenner, classes are kept small to maintain the academic quality of the program and because of limited financial resources. As of February 2009, Bard will have conferred 70 Associate's and ten Bachelor's degrees. The Bard Prison Initiative is privately funded by money raised specifically for the program by Mr. Kenner and Bard College.

Representatives from the Correctional Association visited Eastern Correctional Facility in October 2008 and had the opportunity to sit in on two classes taught by Bard college professors. The level of scholastic aptitude was on par with, and perhaps exceeded, what one would have expected to find in a classroom of a small, elite liberal arts college. Students were engaged and eager to learn and the professors were equally committed to the advanced material. After our visits to the classes, we met with a group of students, academically accomplished men who shared their thoughts on the importance of education in correctional settings. One man said that the influence of other people in the Bard college program encouraged him to be more mature and gave him a new sense of confidence. Another participant, Wes Caines, told us: "Prison culture is an extension of street culture. You must consciously withdraw from prison culture, street culture, and negative culture that is detrimental to progress. Bard [college] is a way to disengage from the prison mentality."

At Eastern, BPI is considered a prestigious opportunity for inmates and perhaps one of the few paths for a better life during incarceration and post-release. Once accepted into the program, inmates move up in status and often take on leadership roles in the facility. Mr. Caines and another inmate, Salih Israel, told us some general population inmates see BPI students as positive representatives of Eastern prisoners and are proud of their academic achievements.

BPI strictly adheres to the pedagogical values that govern the educational principles at Bard College. Reflecting the program's commitment to providing a true liberal arts degree, courses like *Human Genetics* and *Transcendentalist Nature & Justice* are part of the curriculum. Furthermore, Mr. Kenner focuses on "ensuring that each member of the faculty is clear in his/her belief that what they are doing is not charity... [and that they] honestly and totally approach their coursework with BPI in the same way they would on campus or in any classroom of private school students."

### **Consortium of the Niagara Frontier**

Established in 1975 at Attica Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison for men in Wyoming County, New York, the Consortium of the Niagara Frontier is one of the oldest PSCE programs in New York State. Offering Associate's and Bachelor's degrees in Social Sciences or Humanities, the Consortium consists of Niagara University, Canisius College, and Daemen College. Since its inception, the Consortium has conferred 426 Associate's and 292 Bachelor's degrees. In 2001, the Consortium left Attica and now operates only at Wyoming Correctional Facility, a medium security prison for men also located in the town of Attica. In the years before the elimination of Pell and TAP grants for inmates, the Consortium employed 17 full-time staff and 80 part-time teachers. Now, Robert Hausrath, director of the Niagara Consortium, is one of two people running the program.

The Consortium still maintains a rigorous academic program. Inmates must have a GED or a high school diploma and must pass a basics skills exam to be accepted into the program. While enrolled, inmates must maintain a 2.0 GPA in their courses to continue to participate in the program. Mr. Hausrath considers the Niagara Consortium "a model for what is possible in bringing the opportunity of higher education to the prison environment," and says that "the Consortium has been a witness to the ideal that education can be a vital experience that can genuinely change the way a person views himself and the world."<sup>45</sup> Mr. Hausrath believes that students learn the skills and values necessary to be successfully employed upon release and be contributing members of their community.

Affirming Mr. Hausrath's belief in the positive benefits of PSCE is a statement by Gerald Elmore, former deputy superintendent of programs at Wyoming Correctional Facility. Speaking

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<sup>45</sup> Consortium of the Niagara Frontier. (2006). *Fact Sheet*. New York: Hausrath, R.

in 1998, as the Niagara program was struggling to continue operations, Mr. Elmore said, “I’ve got two kids in college but I don’t want to see [the Niagara Consortium] program disappear. Speaking as a taxpayer I’m also looking at the \$24,000 a year it costs to keep inmates in jail. We need the college program. It pays big dividends.”<sup>46</sup>

The Niagara Consortium is funded by line item grants included in the New York State annual budget that are supported by Assemblymember Jeffrion L. Aubry, Chair of the Committee on Corrections, and Senator Dale M. Volker, Chair of the Committee on Codes.

### **Bedford Hills College Program**

The Bedford Hills College Program at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison for women in Bedford Hills, New York, is another well-known PSCE program. Thirteen New York colleges and universities administered the program for nearly ten years before Governor George Pataki eliminated funding for it and other college programs in March 1995. A year later, a task force was organized by representatives from the local Westchester community, local college administrators, academicians, Bedford Hills administrators, and inmates in leadership positions to reestablish the college program. As a result of the task force’s efforts, the Bedford Hills College Program, reinstated as College Bound, commenced in the spring of 1997, with a group of colleges and universities joining to offer courses independent of state and federal funding. Marymount Manhattan College is the degree-granting institution and five other schools in downstate New York contribute faculty, resources, and other support to maintain the program.<sup>47</sup> The consortium awards an Associate’s Degree in Social Sciences or a Bachelor’s in Sociology. Since 1997, the college program has awarded 72 Associate’s and 42 Bachelor’s degrees.<sup>48</sup>

The College Bound program at Bedford Hills was also the subject of the 2001 study, *Changing Minds* (see page 3). The study included a quantitative analysis on the rate of recidivism of the 274 inmates that had participated in the Mercy College program (Mercy College was the degree-granting institution prior to 1995) and 2,031 female offenders released between 1985 and 1999. The study found that, 36 months after release, the women in the Mercy

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<sup>46</sup> Coeyman, M. (1998, June 30). *Maximum-Security College*. *The Christian Science Monitor*, pp B1, B6.

<sup>47</sup> See Fine et al. (2001), 6.

<sup>48</sup> J. Ross, personal communication, August 28, 2008.

College program had a 7.7 percent return-to-custody rate while the non-participants had a 29 percent return-to-custody rate.<sup>49</sup>

According to Aileen Baumgartner, director of College Bound, instructors and professors maintain strict academic requirements for inmates: new students in the college program may take only two classes per semester until they have accumulated 30 credits and have a GPA of 3.2 or higher. Students at that point may add a third class to their schedule and they must maintain a GPA of 2.0 for the remainder of their studies. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated and will result in suspension from the program for up to a year. Christina Voight (see page 5) described the teachers as “really having to teach” and said that students were “forced to think,” even more so in the absence of internet access and specific books (certain books are banned in correctional facilities) that are available to traditional students.

*Changing Minds* also credited the program’s success to “the active involvement and support of prison administrators, community members and University Presidents; a powerful inmate-centered community of programs, and a rigorous and creative inventory of community assets in all forms.”<sup>50</sup> The Correctional Association has also found evidence in conversations with correction officers, inmates, and high-level prison officials that progressive prison administrators are a valuable asset to developing and maintaining good college programs.

### **Boston University Prison Education Program**

The Prison Education Program (PEP) offered by Boston University (BU) at Bay State Correctional Facility, a medium-level security prison for men in Norfolk, Massachusetts, is similar to the Bard Prison Initiative in its commitment to recreating the traditional college classroom experience for inmates. To be eligible for classes, inmates who have never taken college level courses must pass a competitive placement exam and maintain a 2.0 GPA throughout their studies. Inmates with college experience also sit for the admissions exam, but their scores are used solely to determine academic ability and appropriate course level. Since its inception in 1972, BU’s Prison Education Program has conferred 284 Bachelor’s degrees in Liberal Studies in Interdisciplinary Studies. The program is supported entirely by Boston University which is, like Bard, a privately funded institution.

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<sup>49</sup> See Fine et al. (2001), 9.

<sup>50</sup> See Fine et al. (2001), 42.

Dr. Robert Cadigan, PEP's director, describes the level of academics as on par with courses offered at Boston University's regular campuses. He believes that maintaining the integrity of the course and grading process is necessary if higher education is to have the intended positive cognitive impact on inmates.

### **College and Community Fellowship and The College Initiative**

The recent focus in New York and the nation on re-entry issues has highlighted the lack of adequate services for formerly incarcerated people returning home to their communities. For people who earned college credits while incarcerated, continuing their education is important to their staying out of prison, but navigating college applications and applying for federal loans are daunting processes. College and Community Fellowship (CCF) and The College Initiative (CI) are two well-regarded programs in New York City providing guidance and support to formerly incarcerated people about the college enrollment process, support services that many program participants say were critical to their success.

CCF participants are formerly incarcerated women seeking assistance to continue their college studies post-release. Any woman who has earned 12 college credits and maintained a 2.5 GPA (before, during, or after incarceration) can become a CCF Fellow, entitling her to a \$600 grant per semester to help pay for tuition and academic supplies. CCF Fellows interviewed for this paper reported that the grant was extremely useful in easing the financial burden college courses pose, but that even more helpful was the support from counselors and other women participating in CCF. Selina Fulford (see page 6), a CCF Fellow, said that attending CCF meetings gave her the incentive to finish her undergraduate degree, and encouraged her to continue studying at the graduate level. CCF's diverse services such as tutoring, mentoring, academic counseling, resource referrals, and support groups are instrumental in helping formerly incarcerated people succeed in their academic careers.

The College Initiative is a re-entry education program open to all men and women in the New York City metropolitan area who want to begin or continue their higher education after release from prison or jail, during probation or parole, or while fulfilling alternative-to-incarceration commitments.<sup>51</sup> Offering a comprehensive program for men and women, CI

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<sup>51</sup> The College Initiative. *Services*. Retrieved November 3, 2008: [http://www.collegeinitiative.org/ci/services/serv\\_descrip/](http://www.collegeinitiative.org/ci/services/serv_descrip/).

conducts outreach to inmates to begin the process of enrolling in college before they are released. CI's offices host orientations for new participants, once they are back in the community, providing such services as: coaching for placement exams, direct links to information about financial aid packages for City University of New York schools, and stipends to help cover school-related expenses.

### ***SUMMING UP***

The policy of most states and the federal government of locking up thousands of people each year, some for disproportionately long sentences, some for the second and third time, is a questionable crime-reduction strategy. In fact, it can be said that the converse is true: that this practice is criminogenic, that it leads in many cases to people returning to the community more dangerous and violence-prone. This paper points government leaders and concerned citizens in a different direction, providing evidence that increased access to higher education is one of the most effective strategies available in improving public safety.

People with a criminal history are significantly more employable with a college degree than without. The basis for this conclusion comes from credible research on the issue, statements by respected practitioners in the field and testimony from formerly incarcerated people who have found that their in-prison college education opens doors that would otherwise be tightly shut. Giving inmates and formerly incarcerated people the tools needed to be “marketable” to employers is a proven way to ease the transition back into the community.

From a humanistic standpoint, broadening minds through higher education is beneficial no matter what the practical outcome. PSCE is highly valuable because it bolsters men and women who are among the most underserved in our society and critically in need of a college education and degree. Educators and program participants attest to the power of college level learning in prison to decrease anti-social behaviors and increase self-efficacy among inmates. The pride found in earning recognition for successfully completing a rigorous and challenging academic program or learning how to have an argument that does not end in violence are meaningful benefits of PSCE, which carry over into the community once people have returned home. Furthermore, college programs lead to a safer environment in prison with fewer inmate

disciplinary infractions, improved inmate leadership, and better relations between correction officers and inmates.

Finally, public funding for college programs in prison makes good economic sense. The excessive use of incarceration costs more money in the long-term than the relatively minimal short-term investment in college classes for inmates and formerly incarcerated people. A well-educated population has benefits that our society will continue to realize for generations to come; failure to provide college access to currently and formerly incarcerated people will exact too high a cost for our state and our nation in human and fiscal terms.

## ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

Based on the findings in this paper, the Correctional Association has prepared the following recommendations for current and future state leaders that aim to restore public funding for college programs in prison and expand resources for post-release college programs.

### **1) Restore and Expand Public Funding for College Programs in Prison.**

New York policymakers should heed the personal accounts of formerly incarcerated people and practitioners and the hard facts from numerous studies that credit post-secondary correctional education with providing multiple related benefits to the criminal justice system and society at large. Higher education helps break the destructive cycle of educational failures, joblessness, drug abuse, and incarceration that especially afflicts our inner-city communities. In a speech given at the 2007 Bard Prison Initiative graduation at Eastern State Correctional Facility, New York State Department of Correctional Services Commissioner Brian Fischer said, “Given the opportunity, inmates can, and will, step forward on their own and make significant changes in their lives [...] prisons can be places of education, personal growth and commitment on the part of those society chooses to forget about. It is critical for our society to support higher education, both inside and outside the prison environment.” If New York State is committed to improving public safety and serious about increasing access to higher education, policymakers should adopt measures that reinstate public funding for college programs in prison.

**a) Enact TAP Legislation.**

The Correctional Association urges New York State to restore inmate eligibility for Tuition Assistance Program grants, thus establishing and expanding college programs in correctional facilities throughout the state. Although such a step would call for an initial outlay of government funds of approximately \$5 to \$10 million, research and practical experience indicate that such an investment would result in mid- to long-term benefits—in terms of reduced recidivism, increased number of tax-paying citizens, and fewer dependents on public assistance—far outweighing this short-term cost.

College and Community Fellowship is proposing legislation in Albany that will amend the New York State Education Law to allow students incarcerated in federal, state, or other penal institutions to be eligible for any general or academic performance award. The Correctional Association recommends that both houses of the New York State Legislature pass this bill and that Governor David Paterson sign it into law.

**b) Expand the Use of “Youth Offender” Grants.**

Currently, Windham School District in Texas makes good use of federal funding for incarcerated men and women under the age of 25. WSD uses the US Department of Education’s “Youth Offender” \$1,500 per person grant to cover the cost of the first three college courses taken by eligible inmates; students continuing to take classes after the first three must cover costs out-of-pocket. Following this policy, the “Youth Offender” grant was able to pay for courses for approximately 2,100 inmates in FY 2008. WSD does contract with universities to offer classes at a reduced tuition rate, helping to make the cost to inmates manageable. While requiring inmates to pay for their college education may not be the most fair or judicious criminal justice policy, it should indicate that states have discretion in using the “Youth Offender” grant.

The Correctional Association recommends that New York State prison administrators prepare for the changes in the eligibility requirements of the “Youth Offender” grant. Federal lawmakers recently amended title VIII of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998, expanding “Youth Offender” grant eligibility to include inmates 35 years of age or younger and within seven years of release date. Title VIII will provide \$3,000 for each student annually for tuition,

books, and essential materials and \$300 annually for related services. These changes become effective in 2009, meaning that New York should take steps now to enable the greatest number of eligible inmates to make use of the new funding stream.

**2) Require New York’s Board of Parole to Consider Steady Participation in College Programs as a Qualifying Indicator for Parole Release.**

The Correctional Association recommends that the New York State Board of Parole consider consistent and long-term participation in college courses as a mark of good behavior and “rehabilitation.” Correctional facilities do not present ideal conditions for advanced academic study, yet many inmates become engaged with the material and persevere to complete assignments. Salih Israel, a participant in the Bard Prison Initiative, said that inmates’ level of mental and emotional commitment to doing well in class and working towards their degree indicates their readiness for parole. Stating that parole decisions have a strong impact on student morale, Max Kenner, director of BPI, described inmates who have spent several years studying through Bard and then been rejected by the Board of Parole as experiencing a “spiritual collapse.” Many inmates enrolled in post-secondary correctional education programs participate because it will improve their chances of finding a job and staying straight on the outside. As a matter of public policy, it makes no sense to effectively discourage inmates from pursuing a college degree by repeatedly declining parole release for responsible program participants.

**3) Increase Resources to Programs that Provide Access to Higher Education Opportunities for Formerly Incarcerated People as a Means of Supporting Successful Re-entry and Community Well-being.**

Formerly incarcerated people returning to their communities often have limited access to college education. In the New York City area, there are only two well-established programs (College and Community Fellowship and The College Initiative, described on pages 20-21) that help formerly incarcerated people start or continue their college education. The State can improve access to education for inmates, a traditionally underserved population, by employing

“college counselors” at correctional facilities to help inmates apply for college before release and by integrating information about academic opportunities into state-run re-entry programs.

Policymakers can also increase grants and/or public funding for organizations that connect formerly incarcerated people to colleges in their local communities. College and Community Fellowship and The College Initiative are important resources not only because they provide a moderate amount of financial aid to cover the cost of tuition and books, but also because of the role the programs play in creating a support system for participants. The Correctional Association urges New York to increase public funding for College and Community Fellowship and The College Initiative and to take steps to establish similar programs in other regions of the state, so that a greater number of formerly incarcerated people can receive these important services.

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**APPENDIX A: POST-SECONDARY CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION FACT SHEET**

**COLLEGE PROGRAMS FOR INCARCERATED AND  
FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE**

*Did you know...*

**New York used to have 70 college programs in correctional facilities...**

In September of 1994, President Bill Clinton signed a law that prohibited the awarding of Pell Grants to individuals incarcerated in federal or state correctional facilities, effectively leaving the choice to fund higher education programs in prison to the states.

In New York, former Governor Mario Cuomo continued state funding for post-secondary correctional education (PSCE) grants for the last year he was in office. In 1995 however, the first year George Pataki took office as governor, New York State eliminated inmate eligibility for Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) grants that had been the main source of revenue for the state's in-prison college programs.<sup>1</sup> Out of about 300,000 students receiving TAP grants in fiscal year 1994-1995, about 3,000 students, or one percent, were inmates. Nationwide, nearly all the 350 PSCE programs closed<sup>2</sup>—only four out of 70 remained open in New York—despite the widely held view among correction officials and experts in the field about the benefits of such programs.

**New York spends more on incarceration than education...**

New York has a history of lopsided spending on education versus incarceration: the current average yearly cost of incarcerating a person is \$44,000,<sup>3</sup> while the State University of New York spends \$7,645 per year on instructional expenditures for each full-time student.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, New York public spending on higher education pales in comparison to other states: for each full-time enrolled student, the University of Illinois spends \$9,531, the University of North Carolina \$11,660, the University of Texas system \$13,510, and the University of California \$14,692.<sup>5</sup>

**Studies show that correctional education programs and, in particular, college programs, significantly reduce recidivism rates...**

Several studies have compared recidivism rates of formerly incarcerated people who participated in college programs in prison with inmates who did not. In 1991, New York's Department of Correctional Services published *Analysis of Return Rates of the Inmate College Program Participants* that tracked men and women who had earned a degree in the Inmate College Program during the 1986-1987 academic year, finding the rate of return for degree-

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<sup>1</sup> Correctional Association of New York & Justice Policy Institute. (1998). *New York State of Mind?: Higher Education vs. Prison Funding in the Empire State, 1988-1998*. New York: Gangi, R., Schiraldi, V., Ziedenberg, J., 2.

<sup>2</sup> Fine, M., Torre, M.E., Boudin, K., Bowen, I., Clark, J., Hylton, D., et al. (2001). *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum-Security Prison*. New York: The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Legal Action Center. (2008). *Drug Law Reform 2008-Dramatic Cost Savings for New York State*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> State University of New York. (2007). *SUNY Chancellor John Ryan's Testimony to Joint Legislative Hearing of the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee*. Available <http://www.suny.edu/sunyNews/News.cfm?filename=2007-02-08RyanBudgetTestimony.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

earners to be significantly lower than that of participants who did not earn a degree. Of those earning a degree, 26.4 percent had been returned to the Department's custody, whereas 44.6 percent of those participants who did not earn a degree were returned to custody. Degree earning participants also returned to prison at a lower rate than would be expected when compared to the overall male return rate. The Department concluded, "These findings suggest that earning a college degree while incarcerated is positively related to successful post-release adjustment as measured by return to the Department's custody."<sup>6</sup>

In 2001, The Correctional Education Association released the *Three State Recidivism Study* comparing recidivism data across Ohio, Maryland, and Minnesota on 3,170 inmates released between late 1997 and early 1998. One of the more comprehensive studies conducted on the subject, the *Three State Recidivism Study* found that the 1,373 inmates who had participated in college programs while incarcerated had significantly lower re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration rates than non-participants.<sup>7</sup>

A third noteworthy report, *Post-Secondary Correctional Education and Recidivism*, collected 15 separate studies conducted between 1990 and 1999 and analyzed the recidivism rates of over 7,320 inmates. As with nearly all other studies examining the issue, the report found that post-secondary correctional education is correlated with lower rates of recidivism.

### **Correctional facilities that offer college programs are safer for inmates and staff alike...**

PSCE programs are particularly valuable in improving conditions inside the facilities. Prison administrators, inmates, and correction officers all attest to the value of college programs because they provide an incentive for good behavior, help inmates develop a sense of self-esteem and responsibility, and produce a steady stream of mature leadership. The September 2001 study and narrative of the college program experience at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Westchester, New York, *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum Security Prison*, included accounts from several correction officers citing fewer fights and better communication between inmates and officers as one of the program's positive results. A paper published by the Correctional Association in 1998 had similar findings—college programs help maintain a calmer, more manageable environment in prison.<sup>8</sup>

### **College programs are more cost-effective in improving public safety than incarceration...**

*Correctional Education as Crime Control*, a study by the University of California, Los Angeles Department of Policy Studies, sought to answer the question, "If a state has a million dollars to invest in crime control, which method will prevent more crimes—educating inmates or keeping them imprisoned longer?"<sup>9</sup> The study used data from the widely-cited and comprehensive *Three State Recidivism Study*, plus additional data on education costs and crime rates from the three states in the study—Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio. The report found that the cost to the state per crime prevented by offering education to inmates is about \$1,600; the cost to the state per crime prevented by extending prison sentences is \$2,800.<sup>10</sup> Translated into

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<sup>6</sup> State of New York Department of Correctional Services. (1991). *Analysis of Return Rates of the Inmate College Program Participants*. New York: Clark, D.D.

<sup>7</sup> See Correctional Education Association (1999), 39.

<sup>8</sup> Correctional Association of New York. (1999). Plan for Restoring College Programs to New York State Prisons, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Bazos, A., & Hausman, J. (2004). *Correctional Education as a Crime Control Program*. University of California at Los Angeles School of Public Policy and Social Research, Department of Policy Studies. Available from National Institute of Corrections: <http://www.nicic.org/Library/019685>, 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

the terms of its guiding question, the study concluded, “A \$1 million investment in incarceration will prevent about 350 crimes, while that same investment in education will prevent more than 600 crimes. Correctional education is almost twice as cost effective as incarceration.”<sup>11</sup>

**Increasing access to higher education has benefits for both the individual *and* society...**

*The Investment Payoff*, a 2005 study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, on the public and private benefits of higher education, found that, “Individuals with a Bachelor’s degree reported lower levels of unemployment than individuals with a high school diploma.”<sup>12</sup> The study also noted, “Going to college has broad and quantifiable national impacts, from higher salaries to improved health to increased volunteerism to a reduced reliance on welfare and other social support programs.”<sup>13</sup>

**Academic programs in prison are more important than ever...**

According to a study by the U.S. Department of Education, “Incarcerated adults have among the lowest academic attainment and highest illiteracy and disability rates of virtually any segment of the population.”<sup>14</sup> A college education has become one of the most valuable assets in the US—it is now estimated that a Bachelor’s degree is worth more than \$1 million in lifetime earnings.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> The Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2005). *The Investment Payoff: A 50-State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: Cunningham, A., Krichels, S., Merisotis, J., Daulton, C.R., Clinedinst, M., Hardge, L., 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> United States Department of Education. (2004). *Correctional Education: Assessing the Status of Prison Programs and Information Needs*. Maryland: Klein, S., Bugarin, Tolbert, M., R., Cataldi, E.F., & Tauschek, G., 6.

<sup>15</sup> The Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2004). *Investing in America’s Future: Why Student Aid Pays Off for Society and Individuals*. Washington, D.C.: Cunningham, A., 1.

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