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Resources @ EJP

Higher Education in Prison in Illinois Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT AND WHY

What is higher education in prison?

Higher education in prison (HEP), or college-in-prison, refers to the provision of academic, postsecondary education to incarcerated students. HEP programs provide courses by or in close partnership with a regionally accredited two- or four-year college or university (public, private, or nonprofit status). HEP can include credit and not-for-credit coursework, degree and nondegree granting pathways, and extracurricular activities.

Why is HEP important?

HEP has positive impacts upon incarcerated people, their families, the neighborhoods from which they come, the host institution, and society as a whole. Much of the existing research on education in prison narrowly focuses on recidivism; a recent meta-analysis of studies over a 37-year time period found reduced recidivism across studies and estimates that individuals who enroll in prison education programs generally are 28 to 32% less likely to recidivate.¹ Furthermore, research indicates that the higher the degree obtained, the lower the recidivism rate.²

Reducing recidivism is an important metric, but measuring recidivism alone sets a low bar for success and fails to capture the full myriad of benefits that HEP can offer. Recent research has developed a more expansive understanding of these benefits and their effects on individuals, families, communities, and systems. The following examples illustrate just a few of these effects:

- Correctional facilities offering HEP programs have fewer incidents of violence.³
- Children of individuals that participate in HEP are more likely to seek postsecondary education.⁴
- Students participating in HEP feel more empowered, experience increased self-confidence, and develop resilient dignity.⁵

To learn more about how one HEP program in Illinois, the Education Justice Project, measures success, click [here](#).

HEP in Illinois: Past and Present

What is the history of HEP in Illinois?

Illinois emerged early on as a national leader in HEP. Illinois was the first state to offer face-to-face HEP instruction and the first to launch a full-fledged college-in-prison program. In 1952, Southern Illinois University (SIU) was invited to offer

courses at Menard Correctional Center. SIU taught non-credit bearing courses for the first four years before introducing for-credit coursework in 1956 and a full-time, degree-granting college-in-prison program in 1962.

This successful partnership inspired a golden age of HEP in Illinois, characterized by new partnerships and increased energy applied to expanding existing programs. By 1992, every prison in the state of Illinois had 2-year college degree programs available, and 13 out of 24 adult facilities had 4-year college degree programs.

Unfortunately, the implementation of restrictions on state funding in 1989 and Federal Pell Grants in 1994 caused severe financial cuts to HEP programs and decreases in student enrollment that decimated what existed in IL. By the early 2000s, HEP programs collapsed and only began to reemerge in recent years. To read a more detailed account, click [here](#).

Which Illinois colleges and universities currently offer HEP?

There are 13 HEP programs in Illinois. Twelve are provided by colleges and universities and one is provided by a non-profit organization, the Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project, and involves faculty from several institutions of higher education. The 12 Illinois colleges and universities offering HEP programs are-

- Adler University
- Augustana College
- Benedictine University
- Danville Area Community College
- DePaul University
- Eastern Illinois University
- Kaskaskia College
- Milliken University
- North Park University
- Northeastern Illinois University
- Northwestern University
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

How is HEP similar to or different from the education that students receive in a university setting?

In general, HEP programs strive to provide coursework equivalent to that offered to students on campus. Incarcerated students receive the same rigorous instruction and are held to the same curricular requirements as non-incarcerated students.

There are, however, some realities of the prison environment that require modifications. For example, incarcerated students often lack access to computers and program delivery may differ slightly from other academic settings to account for this.

Offerings

What coursework is offered?

HEP programs offer a vast array of curricular offerings and support to students. Eight HEP programs offer degree-granting pathways; four of them confer bachelor's degrees, three confer associate degrees, and one confers a master's degree. Eleven HEP programs offer for-credit coursework in multiple academic disciplines, including art, applied psychology, Christian ministry, communications, creative writing, engineering, and much more. Two HEP programs offer non-credit courses in subjects ranging from printmaking and poetry to criminology and women's studies.

In addition to coursework, HEP programs in Illinois have developed in unique ways to provide various forms of additional

learning opportunities, academic support, and reentry resources to their students. These extracurriculars and support services provide students with a well-rounded, supportive higher education experience that allows them to succeed in their studies and beyond.

How are courses delivered?

There are three primary models for HEP program delivery: in-person, online, and through print correspondence. The vast majority of HEP programs in Illinois offer in-person instruction and recognize it as a crucial component of quality HEP. In recent years, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, several HEP programs had to convert their courses to distance learning. This was a good short-term solution, but research demonstrates that shifting to these models permanently would threaten the benefits that HEP provides. To learn more about the importance of in-person instruction, click [here](#).

Accessibility

Where are HEP programs available in Illinois?

HEP is offered in 8 of the 28 Illinois correctional centers: Big Muddy River, Centralia, Danville, Decatur, East Moline, Logan, Sheridan, and Stateville. Over 60% of Illinois' HEP programs (8 of 13) are concentrated in three of the state's 28 facilities.

Historically, HEP programs in Illinois have developed out of partnerships between specific colleges or universities and the nearest correctional center. As a result, programs are concentrated in correctional centers near the state's most populous cities, where there is also a concentration of higher education institutions. A coordinated effort is needed to encourage and support higher education institutions near facilities without HEP offerings to implement new programs. Given that there are well over 100 colleges and universities throughout Illinois, the opportunities are immense.

Who can access HEP in Illinois?

This varies by facility and program. Where HEP programs are offered, enrollment is limited by varying factors, including physical space, program design, faculty capacity, and IDOC restrictions on participation. Enrollment varies by program and ranges from 10 to 105, with an average of 40 seats per program. Total enrollment in 2021 was less than 500 students. At present, there are 27,897 people incarcerated in Illinois correctional centers. This means that HEP is available to less than 2% of people incarcerated in Illinois.

Do HEP programs have admission requirements?

Yes. Admission requirements vary by program. Most programs require a high school diploma or GED. Some programs require credit hours. For example, the Education Justice Project requires 40 credit hours of lower-division academic work.

Costs and Funding

What are the costs associated with offering HEP programs?

The correctional center bears the cost of hosting programs in their buildings, primarily costs related to space, utilities, and staffing. Program costs are borne by the university or program provider. Those costs may include staff salaries, instructional materials and supports, and travel reimbursements for instructors and volunteers. These costs vary significantly based on a given HEP program's size and offerings. In Illinois, program operating budgets range from less than \$10,000 to greater than \$500,000.

Do students pay tuition or other fees?

All 13 HEP programs in Illinois are offered at no cost to students.

How are HEP programs funded?

Over 75% of HEP programs in Illinois (10 of 13) are funded through a combination of support from higher education institutions, foundation grants, and individual donors. These programs receive no state or federal funding. The other three HEP programs in Illinois are partially funded through state contracts.

Illinois has yet to fully leverage federal funding streams, including Perkins funds, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds, and Pell funding. Furthermore, the Illinois Higher Education Student Assistance Act prevents HEP programs from receiving support from several existing state financial aid programs, including Illinois' primary need-based grant program, the Monetary Award Program. If Illinois were to address these challenges, additional HEP programs could benefit from federal and state aid.

Learn More and Get Involved

How can I learn more about HEP?

In recent years, there has been growing coverage of and dialogue about HEP. New programs, avenues of research, and opportunities for collaboration are advancing the field in important ways. To learn more about these efforts and innovations across the country, check out the Alliance for Higher in Prison [here](#). To learn more about what's happening in Illinois, check out the Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison [here](#). Both provide a wealth of resources and host frequent events related to HEP.

How can I support HEP in Illinois?

- **Donate.** As mentioned above, several HEP programs in Illinois depend on individual donors as a critical source of funding. The following eight HEP programs accept monetary donations: Augustana Prison Education Project, Benedictine Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, Eastern Illinois University, Milken University Shakespeare Corrected, North Park School of Restorative Arts, Northwestern Prison Education Program, the Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project, and the Education Justice Project. Check out a program's website to learn more about how to donate to the program of your choice. To donate to the Education Justice Project, click [here](#).
- **Participate.** Many HEP programs in Illinois welcome volunteers, interns, coordinators, and/or instructors. Contact the program you are interested in getting involved with to find out more about what opportunities are available. Those who want to support the Education Justice Project can visit our "Get Involved" page [here](#) to learn more about volunteer opportunities, internships, coordinator positions, and several other ways to join our work.
- **Advocate.** The Freedom to Learn Campaign (FTL) is an active Illinois campaign calling for specific outcomes that support free, quality, and equitable college-in-prison programs. You can learn more about FTL and how to join the campaign [here](#).

References:

¹ Robert Bozick, et al., Does providing inmates with education improve postrelease outcomes? A meta-analysis of correctional education programs in the United States, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-018-9334-6>

² Northwestern Prison Education Program, Benefits of Prison Education, <https://sites.northwestern.edu/npep/benefits-of-prison-education/>

³ Correctional Association of New York, Education from the Inside, Out: The Multiple Benefits of College Programs in Prison, <https://perma.cc/678G-979E>

⁴ Vera Institute, Making the Grade: Developing Quality Postsecondary Education Programs in Prison, <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/making-the-grade-postsecondary-education-programs-in-prison.pdf>

⁵ BPI Chicago, Higher Education in Prison: Understanding its Power and Fulfilling its Promise in Illinois, https://www.bpichicago.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/BPI-2022-HEP-Report_F_REV-3.pdf