



**Observations  
about the  
Second Chance  
Pell Experimental  
Sites Initiative**

*June 2021*

*GERARD ROBINSON*

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I next want to thank the eight people who contributed their time and expertise to this report:

- **Tracy Andrus**, Professor of Criminal Justice and Director of the Lee P. Brown Criminal Justice Institute at Wiley College (Texas).
- **Eric Barna**, Assistant Vice President of Instruction at Rappahannock Community College (Virginia).
- **Andrea Cantora**, Associate Professor in the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Baltimore (Maryland).
- **Anna Fellegly**, Vice President for Academic Affairs at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (Minnesota).
- **Jerome Green**, President of Shorter College (Arkansas).

- **Marcie Koetke**, former Director of Education at the State of Minnesota Department of Corrections, and National Director of Corrections Programs for C-Tech Associates, Inc.
- **Jennifer Sanders**, Superintendent of Schools at the Ohio Central School System in the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.
- **Josh Snavely**, Dean of the Langston University School of Business (Oklahoma).

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## —Gerard Robinson, Editor

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# INTRODUCTION

“Higher education is no longer a luxury, but a necessity,” said President Lyndon Johnson on January 12, 1965 during a special message he delivered to Congress titled “Toward Full Educational Opportunity.”<sup>1</sup> Ten months later Johnson signed the *Higher Education Act of 1965* (HEA) into law during a ceremony held at his alma mater, Southwest Texas State College. He used the event to articulate a national vision for higher education and the new role Washington leaders will play in it:

“The President’s signature upon this legislation passed by this Congress will swing open a new door for the young people of America. For them, and for this entire land of ours, it is the most important door that will ever open—the door to education. And this legislation is the key which unlocks it.”<sup>2</sup>

The enactment of HEA in 1965 is not our federal government’s first major investment in the higher education aspirations of working-age adults. Others include *The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944*, or the GI Bill of Rights, and the *National*

*Defense Act of 1958*. HEA is the first investment focused on making higher education affordable and accessible to millions of students who otherwise may not have pursued a college degree.

Most of the students whose door to higher education was unlocked by HEA used federal aid—known today as a Pell Grant—to enroll in a local college or university, or traveled across state lines to pursue a degree. Other students whose door to higher education was unlocked by HEA used a Pell Grant to pay for courses while incarcerated behind bars in American state and federal prisons.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1965 and 2020, the Pell Grant Program grew from 176,000 recipients in 1973-1974, to a high of 9.4 million recipients in 2011-2012, and to more than 6 million recipients in 2018.<sup>4</sup>

Today, the Pell Grant Program has matured through several amendments to become the largest postsecondary financial aid program in the nation that is targeted to lower-income undergraduate students enrolled in Title IV-participating public or private postsecondary institutions.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Lyndon B. Johnson (January 12, 1965). Special Message to the Congress: “Toward Full Educational Opportunity.” The American Presidency Project, the University of California Santa Barbara. Santa Barbara, CA, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-toward-full-educational-opportunity>.

2 Lyndon B. Johnson (November 8, 1965). “Remarks at Southwest Texas State College Upon Signing the Higher Education Act of 1965.” The American Presidency Project, the University of California Santa Barbara. Santa Barbara, CA, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-southwest-texas-state-college-upon-signing-the-higher-education-act-1965>.

3 The Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (BEOG) is the forerunner to the Pell Grant. The 1972 amendment to the Higher Education Act created BEOG, and it remained in place until Congress renamed it after U.S. Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island in 1980. To learn more about BEOG, see <https://www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-historical/hist-1.html>. To learn more about Senator Pell and his support of the program, see The Pell Institute (June 2013). *Reflections on Pell: Championing Social Justice through 40 Years of Educational Opportunity*. The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. Washington, D.C. [http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Reflections\\_on\\_Pell\\_June\\_2013.pdf](http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Reflections_on_Pell_June_2013.pdf).

4 Cassandra Dortch (November 28, 2018). *Federal Pell Grant Program of the Higher Education Act: A Primer*. Congressional Research Service. Washington, D.C. [pp. 1, 27-28], <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45418.pdf>; U.S. Department of Education (n.d.). *Federal Grant Program End-of-Year Report, 2017-18*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. Washington, D.C. <https://www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-data.html>; and Emma Kerr (February 3, 2021). “Everything You Need to Know About the Pell Grant.” U.S. News & World Report, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/articles/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-pell-grant>.

5 Cassandra Dortch (November 28, 2018). *Federal Pell Grant Program of the Higher Education Act: A Primer*. Congressional Research Service. Washington, D.C. [p. 1], <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45418.pdf>.

The U.S. Department of Education manages the Pell Program, and it determines the amount of aid a student qualifies for by calculating expected family contribution, full-time or part-time status, length of stay during an academic year, and cost of attendance, among other things. The maximum Pell Grant award is \$6,495 for the 2021-2022 academic year.<sup>6</sup>

Even though the spirit behind the Pell Grant Program is that all income-eligible undergraduate students receive financial aid to pursue a certificate or degree, not all income-eligible Pell students were treated equally during the 55-year history of the program. Incarcerated students are an example.

Between 1965 and 2020, our presidents, congress members, and education secretaries have repurposed the Pell Grant Program to reflect the policy and political priorities of the times as it relates to incarcerated students.<sup>7</sup>

### **1965 to 1980: *The Deserving Poor***

Incarcerated students and free-world students alike qualified for a Pell Grant because of their *income* status—not their *incarceration* status. With a 1972 amendment to the Higher Education Act, postsecondary enrollment increased during the 1970s. During the 1979-1980 academic year, approximately 11,000 incarcerated students (4% of

the state and federal prison population) used a Pell Grant to pay for a college education. The average Pell amount was \$700 per incarcerated student.<sup>8</sup>

Although some members of Congress and advocacy organizations raised legitimate questions about fraudulent payments or misuse of funds during this period of time, there was no systematic attempt to remove prisoners from the Pell Grant Program.

### **1980 to 1992: *The Undeserving Poor***

Forty-five states and the District of Columbia had 273,169 people in state prisons in 1981-1982. Only 8% (22,054) were enrolled in a postsecondary program, and of those 35% (7,693) used a Pell Grant to pay for it. The Pell award for incarcerated students ranged from \$120 to \$1,670.<sup>9</sup> Between 1988 and 1992, the number of incarcerated students that used a Pell Grant to pay for a college education increased to approximately 25,000.<sup>10</sup>

A “tough on crime” theme was popular in state legislatures and on Capitol Hill during this period of time. Incarcerated students were not spared from it. In March 1982, for example, Congressman William Whitehurst (R-VA) introduced H.R. 5993 to amend HEA of 1965 “to prohibit prisoners from being eligible for basic educational opportunity grants (“Pell Grants”).” The bill had bipartisan co-sponsorship, but was opposed by

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6 Federal Student Aid. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C. <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/pell>.

7 This overview of the Pell Grant Program between 1965 and 2020 is not meant to be exhaustive. Other sources provide a more in-depth analysis of the program and time period, some of which are referenced in this report.

8 U.S. Government Accounting Office (July 22, 1982). *Prisoners Receiving Social Security and Other Federal Retirement, Disability, and Education Benefits*. Washington, D.C. [p. 15], <https://www.gao.gov/assets/hrd-82-43.pdf>.

9 Osa D. Coffey and Bernard B. O’Hayre (February 4, 1982). *Use of Pell Grant by Incarcerated Inmate Students*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C. [p. 1], <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/85968NCJRS.pdf>. Note: One assumption is that all incarcerated students go to college “for free” because they use a Pell Grant. This was not true for all incarcerated Pell Grant students in 1981. According to Coffey and O’Hayre, “In 30 of these states[,] inmates use Pell Grants; in 19 of these, costs not covered by Pell Grants are paid variously by the department of corrections, the inmate, or a combination. In the other 11 states tuition costs not covered by Pell Grants are waived by the educational institution.”

10 U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (October 27-28, 1993). *Abuses in Federal Student Grant Programs*. Washington, D.C. [p. 346].

organizations such as the Correctional Education Association.<sup>11</sup>

The bill did not become law, but it did represent an ideological break in how some Congress members viewed which low-income undergraduates deserved federal aid and which ones did not deserve federal aid.

### **1992 to 1993: *The Undeserving Lifer***

The “tough on crime” theme in Congress won its first victory against incarcerated Pell students with the *Higher Education Amendment of 1992*, which was signed into law by President George H. W. Bush. The statutory change reads as follows:

“[N]o basic grant shall be awarded to any incarcerated student serving under sentence of death or any life sentence without eligibility for parole or release.”<sup>12</sup>

The 1992 amendment not only denied a Pell Grant to an individual with a life sentence without parole eligibility, or a person on death row, but it also made all incarcerated people ineligible to receive an education loan from the federal government regardless of the length of his or her prison sentence. At the same time, any college or university that had “a student enrollment in which more than 25 percent of the students are incarcerated” was prohibited from receiving federal financial aid—unless given a waiver by the Secretary of Education.<sup>13</sup>

Even though the 1992 amendment did not ban all prisoners from receiving a Pell Grant, it identified a segment of the prison population that some lawmakers considered undeserving of it. But a “tough on crime” theme did not stop with this law—it continued to gain momentum on Capitol Hill.<sup>14</sup>

### **1994 to 2015: *The Undeserving Criminal***

In 1994, members of Congress on both sides of the political aisle used “tough on crime” language to draw a line of demarcation between law-abiding Pell Grant students, and criminals who forfeited their access to a Pell Grant by committing a crime.

For example, during a 1994 speech Representative Jack Fields (R-TX) said, “Every dollar in Pell Grant funds obtained by prisoners means that fewer law-abiding students are eligible for that assistance. It also means that law-abiding students that meet eligibility criteria receive smaller annual grants.” On a similar theme, Representative Bart Gordon (D-TN) said, “Just because one blind hog may occasionally find an acorn doesn’t mean many other blind hogs will. The same principle applies to giving federal Pell Grants to prisoners. Certainly there is an occasional success story, but when virtually every prisoner in America is eligible for the Pell Grants, national priorities and taxpayers lose.”<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, the “tough on crime” theme in Congress won its second victory against incarcerated Pell students with the enactment of the *Violent*

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11 H.R. 5993, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/97th-congress/house-bill/5993?r=79&s=1>; and Correctional Education Association Executive Committee (June 1982). “Pell Grant Programs Need Support.” 33 *Journal of Correctional Education* No. 2 [pp. 4-6].

12 *Higher Education Amendment of 1992* (P.L. No:102-325) [p. 481], <https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/senate-bill/1150>.

13 Letter from Linda G. Morra to Senator Harris Wofford (August 5, 1994). General Accounting Office. Washington, D.C. [p. 2], <https://www.gao.gov/assets/hehs-94-224r.pdf>; and *Higher Education Amendment of 1992* (P.L. No:102-325) [pp. 610, 615], <https://www.congress.gov/102/statute/STATUTE-106/STATUTE-106-Pg448.pdf>.

14 See generally Joshua Page (2004). “Eliminating the Enemy: The Import of Denying Prisoners Access to Higher Education in Clinton’s America.” 6 *Punishment & Society* No. 4 [pp. 357-378].

15 Clint Smith (March 11, 2021). “Restoring Pell Grants—And Possibilities—for Prisoners.” *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/03/restoring-pell-grantsand-possibilitiesfor-prisoners/618256/>.

*Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994*, which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton. It went a step further than the 1992 Higher Education Amendment—it banned *all* incarcerated people from Pell Grants. According to the law:

**“SEC. 20411. Awards of Pell Grants to Prisoners Prohibited.** (a) In General—Section 401(b)(8) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070a(b)(8)) is amended to read as follows:”(8) No basic grant shall be awarded under this subpart to any individual who is incarcerated in any Federal or State penal institution.”<sup>16</sup>

Before the ban’s enactment, approximately 23,000 incarcerated students used the Pell Grant to pay for a college education at the cost of \$35 million in 1993-1994. As for the types of postsecondary schools that educated incarcerated Pell students, 53% were public (most of them two-year colleges), 38% were private, and 9% were for-profit.<sup>17</sup> After the ban went into effect, many college-in-prison programs of all types closed due to the lack of support from Pell Grants.<sup>18</sup>

The decision to disqualify an incarcerated student from a needs-based federal aid program solely because of his or her incarceration status—rather than income status—was a major shift in congressional intent. This decision also disproportionate-

ly impacted populations the original HEA of 1965 was intended to help: first-generation college students, people of color, as well as adults from lower-income households of all races.

The “tough on crime” theme won a third victory with the enactment of the *Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008*, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush. Unlike the previous two federal laws that banned people from getting a Pell Grant while in prison, this law targeted a segment of people *after* they left prison. According to the 2008 law, a person who is convicted of a forceable or nonforcible sexual offense, and upon release from prison is subject to an involuntary civil commitment, is ineligible to receive a Pell Grant.<sup>19</sup>

Incarcerated students remained banned from the Pell Grant Program throughout the Clinton and Bush administrations despite efforts by some advocates to change it. Prospects for incarcerated students began to improve with President Barack Obama.

### **2015 to 2020: *The Deserving Second Chance Student***

On July 16, 2015, Obama became the first sitting president to visit a federal prison when he spoke with staff and incarcerated men at the El Reno Federal Correctional Institution located outside of Oklahoma City. While there he highlighted

16 *Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994* (P.L. 103-322). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/3355/text>.

17 Letter from Linda G. Morra to Senator Harris Wofford (August 5, 1994). General Accounting Office. Washington, D.C. [pp. 1-3], <https://www.gao.gov/assets/hehs-94-224r.pdf>; and Gerard Robinson and Elizabeth English (September 2017). *The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program: A Historical Overview*. The American Enterprise Institute. Washington, D.C. [p. 2]. Note: In footnote 12 the figures on page 2 are listed in 2015-2016 inflation-adjusted dollars according to the CPI Inflation Calculator, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-Second-Chance-Pell-Pilot-Program.pdf?x91208>.

18 See generally Kenneth Parker (2014). “The Saint Louis University Prison Program: An Ancient Mission, A New Beginning.” 33 *Saint Louis University Public Law Review* No. 2 [pp. 377-399], [https://scholarship.law.slu.edu/plr/vol33/iss2/11/?utm\\_source=scholarship.law.slu.edu%2Fplr%2Fvol33%2Fiss2%2F11&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://scholarship.law.slu.edu/plr/vol33/iss2/11/?utm_source=scholarship.law.slu.edu%2Fplr%2Fvol33%2Fiss2%2F11&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages); Jon Marc Taylor (March 2005). “Alternative Funding Options for Post-Secondary Correctional Education (Part One).” 56 *Journal of Correctional Education* No. 1 [pp. 6-17], <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/23282780.pdf>; and Max Kenner (2019). “The Long History of College in Prison,” in Gerard Robinson and Elizabeth English Smith (eds.), *Education for Liberation: The Politics of Promise and Reform Inside and Beyond America’s Prisons*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

19 *Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008* (P.L. 110-315), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/4137>.

the importance of education and job training programs for incarcerated people.<sup>20</sup> Research from the RAND Corporation supported President Obama's claims. For example, researchers at RAND conducted the largest analysis of correctional education programs—covering 30 years—and they identified that incarcerated people who participate in correctional education have a 43 percent lower likelihood of returning to prison than peers who did not participate in a program, and that a \$1 investment in correctional education reduces incarceration costs by \$4 to \$5 during the first three years of post-release.<sup>21</sup>

Two weeks later, his administration announced the launch of a program to allow partnerships between prisons and postsecondary institutions to offer certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees to incarcerated students in subjects ranging from business to the social sciences.<sup>22</sup>

On August 3, 2015, the U.S. Department of Education released a notice to invite postsecondary institutions to apply to participate in an experimental initiative focused on giving a segment of the prison population access to a Pell Grant.

According to the department, this experiment “is intended to test whether participation in high-quality educational opportunities increases after access to financial aid for incarcerated adults is expanded.”<sup>23</sup> More than 200 postsecondary institutions applied.

On June 24, 2016, Secretary of Education John King announced the 67 two- and four-year colleges and universities that were granted an opportunity to educate approximately 12,000 men and women in the Obama administration's \$30 million Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCPESI).<sup>24</sup>

In the cohort were two- and four-year public and private postsecondary institutions, including three Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Although this executive decision did not reverse the 1994 ban, it did provide a Pell Grant to a segment of eligible incarcerated students for the first time in nearly 20 years. But it came with a caveat: men and women serving a life sentence without parole, or a death sentence, were ineligible to participate in SCPESI; and priority for

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20 The White House (July 16, 2015). “President Obama Visits the El Reno Federal Correctional Institution.” Washington, D.C. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/photos-and-video/video/2015/07/16/president-obama-visits-el-reno-federal-correctional-institution>.

21 Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles (2013). *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults*. The RAND Corporation. Santa Monica, CA [pp. 57-59], [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html); and see generally Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Lois M. Davis, and Susan Turner (2018). “Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Post-Release Outcomes? A Meta-Analysis of Correctional Education Programs in the United States,” 14 *Journal of Experimental Criminology* No. 3 [pp. 389-428], [https://www.rand.org/pubs/external\\_publications/EP67650.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP67650.html).

22 Press Release from the U.S. Department of Education (July 31, 2015). “U.S. Department of Education Launches Second Chance Pell Pilot Program for Incarcerated Individuals.” U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.

23 Federal Register (August 3, 2015). “Notice Inviting Postsecondary Educational Institutions To Participate in Experiments Under the Experimental Sites Initiative; Federal Student Financial Assistance Programs Under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as Amended.” National Archives. Washington, D.C. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2015/08/03/2015-18994/notice-inviting-postsecondary-educational-institutions-to-participate-in-experiments-under-the>.

24 Press Release from the U.S. Department of Education (June 24, 2016). “12,000 Incarcerated Students to Enroll in Postsecondary Educational and Training Programs Through Education Department's New Second Chance Pell Pilot Program.” U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.; and U.S. Department of Education (September 2015). “Second Chance Pell: Pell for Students Who are Incarcerated.” U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.



enrollment in SCPESEI was given to incarcerated students who were within five years of release.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, SCPESEI was a victory for students, prisons, and the postsecondary institutions that joined the experiment.

On April 21, 2020, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos announced a new cohort of 67 postsecondary institutions to join SCPESEI. This expanded the program to include 130 colleges and universities in 42 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>26</sup> Prior to this decision, Secretary DeVos visited correctional facilities in Indiana, Maryland, and Oklahoma to observe education programs in action. Overall, she supported the mission of SCPESEI and its results.

As for results, what was accomplished in four years?

According to research published by the Vera Institute of Justice, a total of 22,117 unique—or “unduplicated”—students enrolled in a postsecondary education program during the first four years of SCPESEI, and more than 7,000 students have earned either a bachelor’s degree, associate degree,

or a career and technical certificate or diploma. In 2020, student demographics for SCPESEI included the following: 52% white; 34% black; 11% Hispanic; and 14% other.<sup>27</sup> What is striking about the 34% black enrollment in SCPESEI is that black enrollment in U.S. colleges was only 13% in 2018.

In the end, four years of results from SCPESEI, coupled with advocacy from a wide range of law enforcement, civil rights, business, faith-based and center-right organizations—as well as formerly incarcerated students—accelerated bipartisan support in the House and Senate to lift the Pell Grant ban.<sup>28</sup> President Donald Trump signed a pandemic relief bill into law in December 2020, which included language that repealed the Pell Grant ban for incarcerated students for the first time in a quarter of a century.<sup>29</sup> While the statute allows the U.S. Department of Education to implement this reform earlier, it is not required to do so until the 2023-2024 academic year.

## **2021: The Road Ahead**

The election of Joseph Biden as President, and his appointment of Miguel Cardona as Secretary of

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25 Allan Wachendorfer and Michael Budke (April 2020). *Lessons from Second Chance Pell*. The Vera Institute of Justice. New York, NY. [p. 11], <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/lessons-from-second-chance-pell-toolkit.pdf>. For an analysis of how the five-year restriction denies access to some incarcerated people, see Monique O. Ositelu (January 2020). *How Would a 5-Year Restriction on Pell Eligibility Impact Incarcerated Adults if the Pell Ban is Lifted?* New America. Washington, D.C. [https://s3.amazonaws.com/newamericadotorg/documents/EPP\\_Pell\\_Ban-6\\_page\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/newamericadotorg/documents/EPP_Pell_Ban-6_page_FINAL_web.pdf).

26 Press Release from the U.S. Department of Education (April 24, 2020). “Secretary DeVos Expands Second Chance Pell Experiment, More than Doubling Opportunities for Incarcerated Students to Gain Job Skills and Earn Postsecondary Credentials.” U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.

27 Kelsie Chesnut and Allan Wachendorfer (April 2021). *Second Chance Pell: Four Years of Expanding Access to Education in Prison*. Vera Institute of Justice. New York, NY, [p. 2] <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/second-chance-pell-four-years-of-expanding-access-to-education-in-prison.pdf>. See page one for an explanation of “unduplicated” students. In addition to technical work Vera offers to states and colleges, it has created a Corrections Education Leadership Academy to help correctional education and college-in-prison leaders. The Vera Institute of Justice’s Corrections Education Leadership Academy. Vera Institute of Justice. New York, NY, <https://www.vera.org/projects/college-in-prison/cela>.

28 Gerard Robinson (ed.) (March 2021). *A Story to Tell: The Importance of Education during Incarceration as Told by 22 Men and Women Who Know Firsthand*. Advanced Studies in Culture Foundation. Charlottesville, VA [pp. 12-13], [https://advanced-studiesinculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/a-story-to-tell\\_gerard\\_robinson4.pdf](https://advanced-studiesinculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/a-story-to-tell_gerard_robinson4.pdf).

29 The Editorial Board (January 20, 2021). “Prisoners Are Again Eligible for Pell Grants. It’s About Time.” *The Washington Post*. Washington, D.C. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/prisoners-are-again-eligible-for-pell-grants-its-about-time/2021/01/10/e3d8712c-4edd-11eb-83e3-322644d82356\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/prisoners-are-again-eligible-for-pell-grants-its-about-time/2021/01/10/e3d8712c-4edd-11eb-83e3-322644d82356_story.html); and Andrea Cantora (December 23, 2020). “Congress Lifts Long-Standing Ban on Pell Grants to People in Prison.” *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/congress-lifts-long-standing-ban-on-pell-grants-to-people-in-prison-152428>.

Education, provides a new era for the education of incarcerated people. Within his first 100 days in the White House, Biden signed a proclamation to celebrate April 2021 as “Second Chance Month.” The goal of the month, which was launched in 2017 with support from Prison Fellowship, is to help the more than 70 million people reach their potential after paying their debt to society.<sup>30</sup> One sentence in particular provides some insight into what the Biden Administration thinks about the education of incarcerated people:

“Supporting second chances means... providing quality job training and educational opportunities during incarceration to prepare individuals for the 21st century economy.”<sup>31</sup>

With the Pell Grant ban for incarcerated students lifted, we can reimagine new ways to deliver teaching and learning to adult learners: be it face-to-face, virtual, or hybrid. And as Washington officials work on the next steps of a new Pell Grant Program, the people who worked on the front-line of SCPEI between 2016 and 2021 are one source for ideas about what has worked, what could work, what to avoid, and what to recalibrate for existing SCPEI schools, or for new colleges that want to use federal dollars for post-secondary correctional education in the future.

This report includes responses to five questions gathered from eight people who have a working relationship with SCPEI. All of them have experience working for a state department or postsecondary institution that the U.S. Department of Education approved for participation in SCPEI in 2016.<sup>32</sup>

Each person brings to this topic personal stories and professional experience in the fields of education, criminal justice, or both that influenced her or his decision to participate in SCPEI.

**Tracy Andrus**, Professor of Criminal Justice and Director of the Lee P. Brown Criminal Justice Institute at Wiley College (Texas).

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**Josh Snavely**, Dean of the Langston University School of Business (Oklahoma).

Here is a demographic snapshot about the eight interviewees and their relationship to SCPEI:

- 8 stakeholders—4 are women and 4 are men;
- 6 stakeholders work for a public institution that supports SCPEI, be it a corrections

30 See generally Prison Fellowship launched “Second Chance Month” in April 2017 to raise awareness about helping people with criminal records create a new pathway forward. <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/2017/04/u-s-senate-declares-april-sec-ond-chance-month/>; and Prison Fellowship (April 2021). “April is Second Chance Month.” <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/about/justicereform/second-chance-month/>.

31 The White House (March 31, 2021). “A Proclamation for Second Chance Month, 2021.” Washington, D.C. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/03/31/a-proclamation-on-second-chance-month-2021/>.

32 U.S. Department of Education (July 7, 2016). “Institutions Selected for Participation in the Second Chance Pell Experiment in the 2016-2017 Award Year.” Washington, D.C. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/sec-ond-chance-pell-institutions.pdf>.

department or a postsecondary institution, and 2 stakeholders work for a private institution that supports SCPESE;

- 5 institutions provided an education to incarcerated students prior to the rollout of SCPESE in 2016, and 3 institutions offer an education to incarcerated students for the first time with support from SCPESE;
- 3 stakeholders work for a community college—two are public (Minnesota and Virginia) and one is a private faith-based HBCU (Arkansas);
- 2 stakeholders have experience working for a state department of corrections—Minnesota and Ohio;
- 2 stakeholders work for a public university—one in Maryland and a public HBCU in Oklahoma; and
- 1 SCPESE stakeholder works for a private faith-based HBCU in Texas.

# Responses to Five Guiding Questions

## **QUESTION 1: Why did your Department of Corrections or Postsecondary Institution Join the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative?**

**Tracy Andrus:** We decided to apply for the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCPESI) because we believe helping people in need is part of our college's mission. Wiley College, a private black college located in Marshall, Texas, was created to train teachers in 1873. For 148 years, Wiley College has provided access to students who otherwise would not have attended college. In many ways we are a "first" or "second" chance college for thousands of students. We believe SCPESI will offer the same opportunity to incarcerated students, too.

Unlike other colleges and universities, Wiley was not involved in prison education prior to SCPESI. Even though Wiley did not have a track record of working with incarcerated students, we do have a successful track record of graduating non-traditional adult learners. Wiley College also has a sizeable number of criminal justice students and faculty, so we believe we can use this to our advantage.

With this in mind, we visited James M. Le Blanc, Secretary of Corrections for Louisiana, to pitch our idea to provide an A.A. and B.A. degree to adults incarcerated in Louisiana prisons. He liked the idea and signed us up to work with his prisons. With the support of the secretary and key higher education officials in Louisiana, we applied to SCPESI, and the U.S. Department of Education selected Wiley into the inaugural class of 2016.

People ask me why Wiley College didn't open a SCPESI program inside a Texas prison. My answer is twofold. Personally, I am much more familiar with the Louisiana prison system. At one time I was incarcerated in one of the prisons where I work today. Professionally, Wiley already had a college program in Shreveport, Louisiana.

**Eric Barna:** Rappahannock Community College (RCC) has been working with the Haynesville Correctional Facility in eastern Virginia since 2008 thanks to a grant from The Sunshine Lady Foundation. This grant allowed us to provide college courses to incarcerated men. We offer one broad degree to incarcerated students—an Associate of Arts and Sciences for transfer purposes to a four-year college in Virginia or elsewhere. We created an Associate of Applied Science in Business, but it never got off the ground. The Laughing Gull Foundation in North Carolina picked up the cost for our in-prison program when The Sunshine Lady grant was over.

When it was time to apply to participate in the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCPESI), we believed RCC had a good foundation to expand our work in prison education, but we knew we had to create a broader working relationship with a lot of Virginia stakeholders. For example, we worked very closely with the faculty and staff at Southside Virginia Community College because they had a larger college-in-prison program than ours. We also worked with the principal at Haynesville prison, and staff at the Division of Education in the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) to create our Memorandum of Agreement. Once we had buy in from the DOC and the prison, two RCC deans—Dean Patricia Mullins and Dr. David Keel (Dean of Student Development)—wrote the application.

We applied for SCPESI, and the U.S. Department of Education approved us, and Danville Community College, for membership in the 2016 SCPESI cohort. We opened our doors to our first cohort of students in 2016.

As the program progressed, we realized we had to build better relations with the prisons. So, part of my responsibility when I was hired in July 2018 was to support the project. At the same time, a new warden and assistant warden had

come on board. They both liked our program. You have to get “the right people involved” in education and DOC to make this work.

**Andrea Cantora:** The University of Baltimore (UB) had several faculty providing non-credit college courses to incarcerated people before the start of the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCPESI). Our public university’s mission is to be engaged with the community and improve the city. Working inside a prison supports this mission because we work with a lot of non-traditional adult learners. For example, I taught inside a Maryland prison before SCPESI, and now I direct a program inside a prison with SCPESI support.

When the U.S. Department of Education released a request for proposals for the Pell program in 2015, some colleagues and I sought approval from the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to have a prison listed as a “second location” (off-site) to offer UB courses. After a few years of operating, our program received approval from MHEC and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to offer a full degree program. Our partnership with education and prison officials in Maryland resulted in UB becoming a member of the SCPESI class of 2016.

We fund our prison education program with Pell Grants. In addition to Pell Grants, UB receives donations from individual donors that go towards our program. UB also waives student fees for our incarcerated population. A prison provides us the space to operate the program at no-cost, and provides us with an officer for that space.

**Anna Fellegy:** As a 1994 tribal college land grant institution, the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCPESI) was of interest to the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (FDLTCC) leadership team. The mission of SCPESI is consistent with our emphasis on serving the community, particularly American Indians. FDLTCC’s original intent was to offer

its Associate of Arts transfer degree in American Indian Studies at the Shakopee women’s facility, which has a large population of American Indian women. After almost a year and a half of discussions and challenges, ranging from possible redundancy of offerings between other higher education programs at the facility, to very few women being eligible to participate in a new offering, everyone decided that the Moose Lake correctional facility would be a better place to begin. It is an all-male prison located only twenty minutes from the FDLTCC campus.

At the Moose Lake correctional facility, FDLTCC has focused on offering a two-semester certificate in clean energy technology. This enables the men to complete the certificate in a more easily managed time frame than spending two years pursuing an associate degree. Completing the clean energy technology certificate also sets them up for post-incarceration studies. If they choose to do so, they could complete the Building Performance Institute’s national certification at FDLTCC, and they are also a quarter of the way through the college’s Associate of Applied Science in Electrical Utility Technology.

**Jerome Green:** Shorter College is a private two-year college that was founded by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1886. As president of Shorter, I believe the mission of our institution is to provide grace and second chances to all people. This includes incarcerated people. Right now, the United States currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world with over 2 million people behind bars. Research shows that incarcerated individuals who participate in correctional education were over 40 percent less likely to return to prison within three years than prisoners who did not participate in any correctional education programs. The research also shows that investments made in correctional education save money on correctional costs in the long run because the chances of recidivism are lessened.

Prior to the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) release of a request for proposals for the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCPE-SI), Shorter College was involved in educating students in the juvenile justice system. We had some success with young people. The Pell program would allow us to work with incarcerated adults. This is why we applied to SCPE-SI. We were excited ED chose us to join this experiment in 2016.

**Marcie Koetke:** The Minnesota Department of Corrections (MNDOC) provided academic and workforce education to incarcerated men and women long before the start of the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCPE-SI). Programs include Adult Basic Education/G.E.D., Career Technical Education, and postsecondary options. The programs are funded through a mix of federal, state and philanthropic sources. The MNDOC had an Associate of Arts degree program in all of its prisons prior to the start of SCPE-SI. This was made possible by utilizing profits from the prison industry program. Overall, the MNDOC has always demonstrated a strong commitment to education.

Once SCPE-SI was announced, the department was very supportive of partnering with colleges to bring new programs to eligible participants.

**Jennifer Sanders:** The Ohio Central School System believes that educating incarcerated people is important. This is one reason we participated in the Pell program prior to the 1994 ban. Before the ban, Ohio enrolled 3,793 incarcerated students with Pell support—more than any other state in the nation. Although Pell Grants left us, we did not go away from college programs. We just focused on career certifications rather than just a college degree. We have used this approach for decades.

Once the U.S. Department of Education opened the door for states to apply to rejoin the Pell program, we did. Fortunately, we were one of the states selected to participate in the SCPE-SI class

of 2016, and one of the states to partner with Ashland University to reach our incarcerated students. At the same time, it is also worth noting that during my first year in this role in 2019, we decided all of our Ohio prisons should offer a postsecondary degree with or without Pell.

On a personal note, I was a high school diploma option teacher inside a correctional facility. I literally chose to do so. I went straight from college to correctional teaching. I also lived in a prison town in London, Ohio. This is why I support education for incarcerated students.

**Josh Snavely:** Langston University is a public four-year higher education institution located in Langston, Oklahoma. Langston is one of America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the western-most HBCU in the nation. For over 100 years, our university has delivered educational opportunities to all students and sought to solve our state's most serious challenges.

The state of Oklahoma has one of the highest per-capita incarceration rates in the nation, and the highest incarceration rate for women. Rather than talk about this problem, Langston seeks to solve it. Our mission includes serving these incarcerated citizens. As a result, Langston sought the distinction of being the only public HBCU to be a member of the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCPE-SI) class of 2016. Langston believes that this initiative not only serves these students, but our society.

Prior to this program, Langston University had not worked with incarcerated students. So, we began our SCPE-SI work by partnering with Tulsa Community College around the following goals: (1) increase enrollment; (2) make a positive impact; (3) increase retention; (4) meet employers' needs; and (5) impact future generations of students and families through degree attainment. To ensure the success of SCPE-SI, Langston understands that all of the following stakeholders are critical to this effort: local and state legislators; businesses; the Oklahoma Department of Correc-

tions; incarcerated students and their families; and all Oklahomans.

## **QUESTION 2. Which Prison(s) Participate in Your Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative?**

**Tracy Andrus:** Wiley College provides an education to men in three Louisiana state prisons: Raymond Laborde Correctional Center, David Wade Correctional Center, and Riverbend Detention Center. We use tablets to provide an education to our students through a partnership with the American Data Prison System. Each prison gives us a room to meet with our students. We were originally set to go to the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women. Unfortunately, a flood swept through that part of the state and this changed our plans.

We have enrolled 58 students since the opening of the SCPEESI program: 11 have graduated—10 with an A.A. degree and 1 with a B.A. in criminal justice.

On a personal note, I spent three years of my life in the David Wade Correctional Center, so I know this place and its people well. I know the warden. He had another job when I was there. Some of the inmates who knew me are still there. I am also the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in juvenile justice from Prairie View A&M University.

**Jerome Green:** Shorter College is delivering entrepreneurship courses to students in eight prisons located throughout Arkansas: three state prisons (Wrightsville, Pine Bluff, and Ouachita River/Malvern) and five state Community Corrections units (Fayetteville, Little Rock, Osceola, Texarkana, and West Memphis). We delivered all of our courses in person prior to Covid-19. In June 2020, we received approval from the U.S. Department of Education to work with our incarcerated students through distance learning.

At our graduation ceremony in November 2018, I told those in attendance that our mission is to cre-

ate a bridge, moving people from impossibility to possibility. On that day 23 men, 2 women, 1 Latino, and 12 blacks and whites earned an associate degree in entrepreneurship from Shorter College. Governor Asa Hutchinson delivered remarks.

As of March 2021, there are nearly 400 incarcerated individuals enrolled in the Shorter College Pell program. There have been many graduates since the inception of SCPEESI, and there will be many more. There are also more than 20 released individuals attending classes on the Shorter College main campus, and many more who have opted for the distance learning modality to complete their studies. Thus far, 57 students have graduated from our program.

**Marcie Koetke:** When SCPEESI was launched in 2015, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) selected three of our community colleges to participate in the inaugural SCPEESI class of 2016: Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College offers Green Energy at Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF) Moose Lake; Pine Technical and Community College initially offered Production Technologies and now offers Entrepreneurship at MCF's Moose Lake and Rush City; and South Central College offers Mechatronics to students at MCF Faribault.

During the second round of ED decisions in 2020, Inver Hills Community College became our fourth SCPEESI partner. The program is still in the planning phase. It is worth noting, prior to SCPEESI, Inver Hills Community College was offering an A.A. degree program to people in five MN DOCs.

**Jennifer Sanders:** College in general is so ingrained into the culture of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. It is for our incarcerated population as well. Eleven prisons participate in SCPEESI using dollars through a partnership with Ashland University. Marion Technical College was approved by the U.S. Department of Education to join SCPEESI in 2020, so two more prisons will be added this year.

But we have more people in our care that are eligible for Pell than we can serve. Although some of us want to serve more students, the community at large does not understand why we do this. People have a misunderstanding of the criminal justice system. We do not punish you perpetually. They do not deserve it. This is why we call education an investment.

**Josh Snavely:** Langston University offers three baccalaureate degrees—business administration, liberal education, and rehabilitation services—to approximately 125 students in three Oklahoma correctional centers: Dick Conner (men), Kate Barnard (women), and Oklahoma City Community (women). Our programs continue to experience significant growth every semester since our initial class of seven students four years ago. Langston anticipates additional enrollment of nearly 20 to 25 students per semester in the coming year. Based on student demand and increasing post-incarceration employment opportunities, Langston places emphasis on business and entrepreneurship education.

In particular, our program in business has seen exponential growth and incredible demand at our all-female centers. These business-savvy students have an entrepreneurial spirit and seek opportunities to build and grow businesses for their families. As a result, it is our vision that SCPESE—with the necessary resources and support—will not only benefit the lives and families of the students, but will positively impact the economies of the local communities fortunate to welcome and be served by our graduates.

### **QUESTION 3. What are some of the “wins” for your Department of Corrections or Postsecondary Institution?**

**Eric Barna:** Rappahannock Community College (RCC) is proud of several wins. For our incarcerated students, our SCPESE program improves their self-worth because they realize they can ac-

complish academic success. Most of these guys have never experienced much success in schools, be it K-12 or elsewhere. Their participation in our program breaks the cycle of being unacademic—and not just for themselves. They can talk to their children about school. I believe if we can break the cycle for 30 guys we are really doing it for 30 families. A lot of the guys are from the area where the prison is located, so our program will improve the surrounding communities.

Since 2016, we have graduated 27 students with a transferable degree, and two did transfer. The Laughing Gull Foundation funds help us pay for transfer advising. This past fall we were on track to have 60 students. We are estimating 40 students for fall 2021 as the program has been on hold during the Covid-19 pandemic. We have Pell money for 70 students, but we do not have enough space in the prison to accommodate that number.

For our faculty, some were “yes” to the idea of teaching in prison, but we had to work with others on this idea. Recruiting faculty has not been an issue because the word gets out that our prison students are hungry to learn. Some of our incarcerated students are our best RCC students. One instructor who actually teaches on campus and inside prison said, “I do not want to teach on campus anymore. These guys do their homework and reading.” He was making a point. Other RCC instructors mentioned that no cell phone distraction is a plus for the teaching and learning environment.

Overall, our program has a very positive reputation in our college and community. We have great buy in from our RCC board and president.

**Andrea Cantora:** Our incarcerated University of Baltimore (UB) students are doing well. They are happy to have this opportunity. For those released from prison, they can continue their education on our UB campus. Our faculty said the experience is new and rewarding to them as well. Some of our faculty had never been inside a prison prior to SCPESE. They spread the



word to other faculty and students, and in the Baltimore community too. This helps with donations. For instance, someone donated \$1,000 to support our college-in-prison program because of a speech a student speaker delivered at a national event.

Overall, our program keeps our guys engaged with something positive. To date, 96 students have attended for at least one semester. Some do not stay in the program due to a transfer to another prison. We had 52 students enrolled in fall 2020. We tend to have 50 to 60 students on average. Since 2018, over 20 students returned home, and as of fall 2020, 6 are enrolled with us on campus. A group of 15 is scheduled to graduate inside a prison by May 2022, but Covid-19 impacted it. No one has completed the degree yet. Either December 2021, or May 2022, we expect our first on campus graduates.

**Anna Fellegly:** One win is for our Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College faculty. The faculty of the program, at first hesitant, are champions for SCPEI and for their students.

The second win is for the program focus. The clean energy technology certificate is not an easy program to offer from a security standpoint, so the initial set-up was very time consuming. That time was well worth it. The students in the program are solid. Some are very impressive in the knowledge they bring into the classroom regarding some of the content, such as engineering or electrical work. The cohort is a great example of a learning community—students helping each other solve problems. They are good communicators and good cheerleaders for each other.

The third win is working with the Moose Lake facility. They have been great to work with. We can offer the program in person, which is a terrific benefit to the students and builds a good learning community in the classes. The facility has an outstanding staff, reasonable library hours for college students, and other training programs of possible future interest in FDLTCC's relationship with the facility.

**Jerome Green:** The wins for Shorter College to date include every student who signs up to start their lives on a better path, even while incarcerated. The wins include every instructor who takes the time to teach individuals who don't have the means to physically come to a campus. The wins include the federal government offering this program and seeing the benefit in educating incarcerated individuals and decreasing their likelihood of recidivism. The wins also include released individuals who want to continue their education after release. There are so many wins that we could talk about, but these are a few of the most important.

**Jennifer Sanders:** This is a big win for the incarcerated students because Pell allows us—the Ohio Central School System in the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction—to serve more of them. We can also educate people beyond just a high school level.

My department knows firsthand that Ohio's incarcerated populations want access to an affordable college education, be it face-to-face interaction or through a tablet or Chromebook. In fact, we are developing our own student wireless network for the department as an education tool for our students prior to graduation and after it. This is available to all of our incarcerated students, not just our postsecondary students.

Colleges benefit from participation in SCPEI. Faculty enjoy it. It keeps people inside prison safe. As a former deputy warden of a prison, keeping people busy was important to me then—and it remains important to prison leadership today. Why? Management of facilities are safer and better when education programs are in place.

As for funding, we assume the cost for all our college programs and not just the Pell sites. We provide the overhead, operational cost, and rooms. Ash-land University assumes the rest of the amount.

On a similar note, we are working with Sinclair College to have our career training programs, apprentice-

ship programs, and Ohio Penal Industries assessed so that upon completion our incarcerated people will have prior learning credits applied to them.

#### **QUESTION 4. What are some of the “challenges” for your Department of Corrections or Postsecondary Institution?**

**Tracy Andrus:** Space is a challenge for us. At two prisons we have no dedicated rooms, although Riverbend provides us a special room to meet with our students. This was pre-Covid-19. We will get the room back once it is safe to return. These are general rooms like gyms and visitation areas. These are not rooms that are designated as exclusive rooms for Wiley College.

Staffing is another challenge. For example, staff for our SCPESE program work for the prison, not for Wiley College. This is not the case at other prisons. The program assistants that Wiley College pays a stipend to are considered a part of our staff, but in reality they also work for the prisons. But things are changing. Wiley College has hired one person outside of the prison at Raymond Laborde Correctional Center.

Wiley College does not have the appropriate staff to operate the SCPESE program at full capacity. We need one person from financial aid, one in the office of the registrar, and one in admissions who are totally dedicated to SCPESE alone. If we had these positions, we could reach approximately 800 students in prison.

Obtaining transcripts for students, and identification of Selective Service completion, are very time consuming.

**Eric Barna:** One challenge for us is technology. The guys still handwrite their papers for each course. The prison bureaucracy is slow to get things like computers or a printer. Speaking of bureaucracy, navigating two of them—the college and the state DOC—is a challenge. We operate a time intensive program, but everything moves slower than we would like.

Another challenge, and not in a bad way, is that you have to build relationships within the facility (all the way down to the correctional officers), administration (warden and assistant warden at least), the principal, as well as at the state level with the regional education supervisor, college liaison, and superintendent. The learning curve for all stakeholders is steep.

Accreditation is something college-in-prison programs must deal with. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requirements for off-site programs are also a big consideration. SACSCOC requirements, in a nutshell, hold the program to the same standards as if it was offered on campus. This is a good thing because it ensures the quality of the program. When a student graduates from our program, his degree is equivalent to one that was completed on our campus.

Staff turnover at the prison can impact a program. Ultimately, we have been successful since I have been involved because we had a warden and assistant warden who were 100% engaged. The downside is that they change regularly. Since March 2020, we have a new warden and assistant warden, and the principal and regional education supervisor have retired. Fortunately, those positions have been filled by Dr. Jeffrey Scales (principal) and Dr. Darlene Maddy. So far, they have been very positive and engaged with the program.

Lastly, we need to do a better job to help incarcerated Rappahannock Community College students transfer to a four-year school. I think finding a four-year partner to bring a B.A. or B.S. program to the Haynesville Correctional Center can help with this challenge. Now that Pell will be restored to four-year colleges beyond the existing SCPESE cohorts, I am hopeful we will have more success with locating a partner.

**Andrea Cantora:** Our in-prison students do not have the same staff support offered to our on-campus students. For instance, our University of Baltimore (UB) faculty cannot contact in-pris-

on students—but they can contact our on-campus students. UB faculty who teach in the prison can only communicate with students on the day they are there to teach.

Our in-prison students cannot do their own internet research. Laptops are allowed, but are not connected to the internet. We are working to implement a server at the prison to allow students to submit and retrieve assignments. Eventually we plan to implement an off-line database for the students to search for academic research articles. Our students cannot have a laptop or handheld device inside a cell.

Access to tutors is another challenge. We bring math and writing tutors to work face-to-face with our students, but our students cannot get that on a weekend. They only get help when we are there. Lastly, our faculty has to rely a lot on prison staff for support. Escorting us to our classroom is one example.

**Anna Fellegy:** Retention and completion rates are problems impacting traditional, free-world students. We have graduated two classes—65% for each cohort, which just goes to show that retention and completion can be challenges no matter the postsecondary setting. Covid-19 has complicated retention and enrollment because our in-person programming is temporarily on hold, and the content is such that remote forms of delivery aren't ideal for student learning.

Another challenge is the one I hear from some people outside the prison community: “Those prisoners go to college for free.” The cost of recidivism is much greater than the cost of educating a student in prison. It costs approximately \$2,400 in Pell funds per student to complete our certificate at the Moose Lake facility. A student who leaves prison thereafter and is able to be employed by a utility or construction company, for example, pays that back and more in income taxes in the first year of their employment!

Moreover, that former student/inmate becomes, more broadly, a contributor of taxes to our coun-

ty and state, the benefits of which we all share. Rather than being dependent on the system, they become agents of support, and because of their unique life experience, they can help build a better system, if they choose to engage in that way.

**Marcie Koetke:** The SCPEI students have been engaged and appreciate the programs they are participating in. Faculty enjoy working with this population because the students truly want to be there. The leadership at each prison is very supportive. For example, they don't transfer a student from one prison to another if the student is enrolled in a program.

At the same time there will always be challenges. Some materials are difficult to bring in or not allowed at all. Security and Minnesota DOC education staff do a great job monitoring what is brought into the prison from the colleges, but this can be time consuming.

Another challenge is the process used to get the college faculty into the prison. This process is necessary to ensure safety for professors as well as prison staff and students, but a more streamlined process would be beneficial.

Lastly, it takes a lot of work to gather all information necessary to complete the FAFSA application for students. Some of them have holds on their accounts. Some are in default, and some did not complete the Selective Service document. As time goes by, efficiencies should be recognized with this too.

**Josh Snavely:** The challenges our incarcerated Langston University students face typically surround the processes of higher education. This includes, but is not limited to, the following: gaining access to past records and fees; access to the internet to search for documents necessary for participation in the program; restrictions on time available to spend on gathering pertinent admissions paperwork and materials; determining tax status and submitting FAFSA paperwork; tracking down records and transcripts; securing time

with advisors and success coaches; meeting with faculty; accessing books and course materials; and accessing technology or the necessary tools for success. In addition, as our first incarcerated students begin to emerge from correctional centers, we now face steep curves in re-teaching all the above processes (because they vary outside of SCPEI) while also helping our students enter and integrate into our communities.

**QUESTION 5. What are three things you recommend your department of corrections, your state legislature, higher education institutions, the U.S. Department of Education (ED), or a combination thereof, can do to improve the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative for 2021?**

**Tracy Andrus:** One recommendation is that every prison that participates in SCPEI, or prisons that will join the new Pell program now that Congress has lifted the 1994 ban for incarcerated students, designate one room for use by college staff.

Having face-to-face education is key. Although I support using technology to deliver an education to incarcerated students virtually, I also support students engaging face-to-face with their professors to build better relationships between the students and the institutions providing the education.

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education should consider providing “seed money” to the institutions it approves for participation in the current and future Pell-in-prison programs that is “outside of the financial aid portion for students” so the college can hire staff to run the program.

Canvas Corrections is a learning management platform where all of our syllabi and assignments are uploaded for students to review and submit their assignments. The platform is working out well for us, and it may be an option for others.

**Eric Barna:** Make technology available to incarcerated students at Haynesville—really in all

Virginia prisons. Open the Pell Grant to everyone in prison. Find a way to address innovation. We totally understand the importance of security and do not downplay that at all. However, we are lagging behind many states when it comes to improving prison education. We have great examples of initiatives (mostly around technology) that other states are successfully implementing without security breaches. Can you imagine being in prison since 2000 and coming out now with no exposure to the online world and how to navigate and maintain your personal cybersecurity? We have to do better.

**Andrea Cantora:** The state has to be more flexible when it comes to technology access. We can better facilitate the teaching and learning experience for students and faculty alike if it did. However, even if we gain more access to technology, it solves one problem but leaves another one unchecked—access to seats. The University of Baltimore can really only serve around 60 students per semester. I think we can serve 80 to 100 students, but the prison has other programs that operate at the same time as ours, so space becomes an issue.

Time is another challenge. We operate our program between a 3:30-8:30 PM window Monday through Friday. We don’t have access to weekend hours due to lower levels of correctional staff to oversee our program. Expanding our program to offering courses on weekends (if staff at the prison were available for this) would allow us to serve more people.

In regard to the U.S. Department of Education, the original SCPEI eligibility rules forbid us from serving people with long sentences. People have to be within 5 years of release for us to enroll them into our program. We have to turn people away often.

**Anna Fellegly:** We need to do a better job with developmental education in prisons. This is specifically true for those potential students who have attained the lower tier of skills in math and English, but who still fall short of college-level place-

ment into math and English. Our college uses a co-requisite model in English and in math, so even if the student's skill level falls short, they are enrolled in the college-level course while engaging in a skill-building section alongside it. In fact, it is well demonstrated that students get stranded in developmental education courses, and it is unnecessary. It is time to take an enlightened approach to developmental education.

At least here in Minnesota, there should be a focus on access to technology in the prison system. It is obviously a complicated security issue; however, without access to learning how to use even basic aspects of computer technology, the people leaving prisons will find the workplace an extreme challenge—and an immediate hardship in an already challenging situation for them.

It would be useful for education programs in prisons to work with disaggregated data related to student success, as well as access to postsecondary programs in prisons. What can we learn about course and program retention and completion, for example, from student populations housed in prisons? Does a culturally-responsive curriculum make a difference in student success rates, for instance? What are the demographics of the participants in prison postsecondary education programs? What are the factors that tend to impede access to education programs in prison, and are any of those factors able to be changed? How do we begin to take “the equity lens” to postsecondary education in prisons?

**Jerome Green:** One of the things the U.S. Department of Education can do to improve SCPE-SI, even during the interim phase as it prepares to open Pell Grants up to more incarcerated students across the nation, is to increase the use of technology for teaching courses. While we understand that the individuals are incarcerated and are serving time behind bars to pay for a crime committed, we also want to fully prepare the individuals for a life outside of prison once they are released. We want to give them as close as pos-

sible the same instruction as their counterparts attending traditional classes. It is going to require a little more access to the technology for teaching to ensure that they can transition upon their release. Other than that, I feel like everything else is in place.

As for Congress, it should appropriate money to support incarcerated students' educational needs beyond college tuition and fees alone. We need money for wrap-around services. Our program gives each incarcerated student a success coach. We also offer them programs that expose them to a bigger world. Congress should fund that too.

**Marcie Koetke:** If a state only has two-year colleges in SCPE-SI, allow the two-year college to partner with a four-year institution that has not been selected by the U.S. Department of Education to participate in a consortium model. This would allow students to continue onto a four-year degree program and allow the four-year partner to receive the Pell Grant for these students. This is a roundabout way to allow a four-year partnership to happen. Even though Congress has lifted the ban on Pell Grants, which will open the program to postsecondary schools beyond the current SCPE-SI, states can use this interim phase to establish partnerships. Many four-year institutions may not apply to become a Pell school, but they can still support it by a partnership with existing SCPE-SI and future Pell schools.

Another recommendation is to allow DOC to set up Zoom or online classrooms so the college classes can continue when faculty are not allowed inside the prison.

Lastly, colleges should increase their on-site contact with students while inside prison throughout the semester by meeting with students as needed for advising and counseling. For example, Ashland University hires site directors who are located at each site where its program exists. Maybe the existing and future Pell colleges in each state could partner to form one position that could serve as a student services liaison for all of them. This would

also help encourage students to continue their education upon release.

**Jennifer Sanders:** There are opportunities for funding we miss. The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), for example, permits states to use money for incarcerated people, but it does not require it. Indiana uses WIOA for colleges, but I cannot in Ohio. All the federal departments, not just the U.S. Department of Education (ED), strongly include incarcerated people. “You shall”—this term incentivizes expenditure of funds to those who are incarcerated. Indiana’s Perkins language may be specific. Ohio’s language is not. For instance, Perkins V said states must allocate 1% for corrections and may go up to 2%. The “you may” language is an issue, because they are not always doing it.

ED should rethink how it’s request for proposals (RFP) is written to support the education of incarcerated students. The way the RFP is written right now asks our schools to make a great new widget. We are at our core about people, not widgets. Widget programs may work with some, not all. So, I’d like to see ED rewrite the RFP to make it less widget focused.

Lastly, we need to figure out how to use federal special education funds for the incarcerated.

**Josh Snavely:** First, one of the themes of the challenges identified earlier centers on the additional manual processes created by this program. As a result, institutions involved in SCPESEI required additional funding or resources to perform the processes necessary to properly serve our incarcerated students. Langston seeks to hire

a dedicated academic advisor and success coach for our incarcerated students (a position and key mentor for all University students). This critical investment would also serve these students as they transition from incarceration to local Langston communities.

Second, all stakeholders in SCPESEI should authorize the integration of academic technology into these partnerships. By integrating more (and in some cases, any) technology into SCPESEI, processes can be streamlined, and incarcerated students can have access to more courses, faculty, and program resources that will better ensure their academic success. This integration can be pursuant to, and in partnership with, correction center and state authority guidelines and protocols in order to prevent unauthorized or inappropriate use.

Lastly, all the current stakeholders of SCPESEI should seek additional constituents for support, especially re-entry and business partners. Without a pathway to employment or entrepreneurial opportunities post-incarceration, the journey for these students can be especially difficult. To ensure their success, institutions of higher learning and industry must partner together to build sustainable support systems for all students.

## CONCLUSION

Each interviewee's observations about the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCPESI) provide important insights for the U.S. Department of Education, state agency administrators, college personnel, correctional staff, and current and formerly incarcerated students. As we learned from eight people who know this work firsthand, educating incarcerated students provides opportunities (e.g., earning an academic degree or career certificate) and challenges (e.g., lack of access to technology) for all stakeholders, but in the end, the investment in it is paying off. At a time in American higher education when lawmakers, governors, college presidents, and philanthropists are searching for innovative ways to deliver an education to all adult learners, the lessons from SCPESI offer one place to look for answers.



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