

Educational Initiatives



The Prisoner Reentry Institute of John Jay College of Criminal Justice sponsors Educational Initiatives to increase the number of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people who go to college and succeed there. PRI's efforts include educational programs inside correctional facilities as well as community-based services that demonstrate the potential of higher education to promote successful prisoner reentry and, by extension, generate safer and more robust communities.

While higher education is powerful – even transformational – for people in the justice system, the spectrum of educational needs within correctional facilities goes beyond accredited college courses. In order to maximize the benefits of higher education for this population, students need adequate preparation for college-level work as well as transitional support to continue their education in the community after release. PRI is now working to provide a continuum of educational services that reflects the full spectrum of these needs.

College Preparation and Readiness

Developmental Education

The Developmental Education program builds reading and writing skills that prepare students for college-level coursework, as well as prepares students to pass the CUNY Assessment Test (CAT).

Pre-Release Reentry Workshops

PRI facilitates workshops designed to support reentering students' successful transition into postsecondary education in the community. These workshops focus on accessing wrap-around reentry services and on-campus supports as well as building social capital, self-advocacy and the soft skills essential to college success.

Pre-Release Academic Counseling

PRI provides academic support and builds relationships with students prior to release, both in person and through the mail. This process initiates the academic counseling relationship and intake process, and gives students a head start on the paperwork that will be required for college enrollment in the community.

College Access: *Prison-to-College Pipeline (P2CP)*

Introductory-Level Liberal Arts Courses

Through the Prison-to-College Pipeline (P2CP) program, PRI brings City University of New York (CUNY) professors to Otisville Correctional Facility to teach accredited college courses in a variety of liberal arts disciplines including English, Sociology, Anthropology, and more. These courses provide a solid academic foundation that prepares students for the standards and expectations of rigorous college-level work.

Learning Exchanges

P2CP also brings students from the John Jay and Hostos campuses to Otisville for Learning Exchanges, monthly opportunities for campus students to learn alongside their incarcerated counterparts. Professors teach Learning Exchanges on a wide variety of topics.

Tribeca Film Institute Screenings

P2CP hosts regular film screenings and discussions that are open to the larger population of various correctional facilities. The program is now run by the Tribeca Film Institute, which also trains members of the Lifers Association at the prison to facilitate the post-screening discussions.

Transition, Enrollment, and Retention: *College Initiative*

Academic Counseling

Released students take several assessments developed by College Initiative (CI) to identify their academic and non-academic strengths and weaknesses, as well as resources that will be needed to reintegrate into the community. CI Academic Counselors then make referrals or collaborate with partner organizations to provide services related to housing, employment, health, and other transitional needs. Students also work one-on-one with their CI counselor to develop a personalized plan to achieve their educational and career goals.

Financial Aid Advisement

CI Academic Counselors help students to compare college costs as well as assist with the college application and financial aid application processes. Students are informed on the costs of loans and their implications and, if applicable, how to bring their existing student loans out of default or consolidate them.

College Readiness

Assessment may also indicate that students would be better served by college preparation programs before enrolling in classes. CI has developed a college readiness strategy that integrates best practices from existing transition-to-college models and enlists the participation of CUNY faculty and staff, as well as collaborative leadership from successful formerly incarcerated students in its program.

Peer Mentoring

CI's primary support strategy is the peer mentoring program, which matches incoming students with committed and trained senior students and alumni who work with them through two consecutive semesters. The mentoring component aims to develop and leverage networks and relationships beyond one-on-one mentor-mentee partnerships to assure program sustainability as well as institutional and systems change.