

Successful Transitions to College in the Community: College Initiative

A Project of the Prisoner Reentry Institute, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

The mission of **College Initiative (CI)** is to create pathways from criminal justice involvement to higher education and beyond. Through targeted outreach, academic counseling, and peer mentoring, we create a community of leaders that is invested in academic success and personal development. CI provides **academic counseling** in person and via correspondence to men and women during incarceration and assistance with **college readiness, enrollment, mentoring,** and other **transitional services** once they are released. In July 2015, College Initiative joined the Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College of Criminal Justice—expanding CUNY’s capacity to support the success of students with criminal justice histories.

Outreach and Public Education

College Initiative provides critical information on higher education to over 750 currently and formerly incarcerated people each year to encourage the pursuit of higher education, demystify the application process, and dispel some of the many myths about college after contact with the justice system.

Since 2002, CI has assisted more than 1200 New Yorkers enroll in college and graduate school.

Academic Counseling and Support

College Initiative staff members build strong relationships with students to help them develop the skills necessary for success in college and in their communities. Our assessment and academic counseling model takes an individualized, strengths-based approach to understanding the academic and social supports students need to navigate college and reentry.

Since 2002, over 300 students have used CI’s support to earn Associate’s, Bachelor’s, Master’s, and doctoral degrees.

Peer Mentoring

Peer mentoring is designed to provide additional support to CI’s newest members during the critical first year of college by pairing them with a senior CI student, who develops leadership capacity through the experience of serving as a mentor. The Peer Mentoring program has been positively evaluated by the Vera Institute of Justice and the Center for Institutional and Social Change at Columbia Law School.

The cumulative recidivism rate for students enrolled from 2010-2012 is just 3.8%.

The College Initiative (CI) Model

Through **Outreach and Public Education**...

CI helps people see college as an option.

- College Initiative conducts college information and readiness workshops and seminars inside correctional facilities and at community-based organizations to encourage the pursuit of higher education among individuals preparing for or already engaged in the reentry process.
- Prospective students receive a college toolkit that includes information on CUNY and SUNY schools, financial aid, information on CUNY's extensive support programs, and an outline of next steps.
- Through these outreach activities, CI helps to demystify the college experience and application process and show how college can fit into a student's personal strategy for community reentry.

Through **Academic Counseling and Support**...

CI helps people go to college and succeed there.

- CI Academic Counselors are on the front lines of student support, there to assist every step of the way.
- Academic Counselors help students set academic and employment goals, choose a campus and field of study, and complete enrollment and financial aid applications.
- Through working with Academic Counselors, students develop self-advocacy skills both inside and outside the classroom.

Through the facilitation of **Peer Mentoring**...

CI develops leaders, creates student networks, and builds community.

- CI Peer Mentors are active senior students and alumni with exceptional grades who have been paired with first-year students just beginning their college journey.
- Mentors complete a comprehensive training program that focuses on interpersonal skill and leadership development.
- Participation in mentoring has been proven to increase first-to-second year retention of CI students.

College Initiative currently supports students at 20 CUNY campuses across the five boroughs

*Baruch College | BMCC | Bronx Community College | Brooklyn College | City College
College of Staten Island | CUNY Graduate Center | CUNY Law School
Hostos Community College | Hunter College | John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Kingsborough Community College | LaGuardia Community College | Lehman College
Medgar Evers College | NYC College of Technology | School of Professional Studies
Queens College | Queensborough Community College | York College*