



## Estabrook: Inmate education good for them, us

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On Tuesday, June 5 Auburn Correctional Facility held its first college graduation. Fifteen inmates graduated with their associate degrees through the Cornell Prison Education Program which is funded through a grant from The Sunshine Lady Foundation. The degrees were conferred by Cayuga Community College.

I was somewhat surprised by the backlash to this wonderful news. It seems a lot of people take umbrage at the fact that these 15 inmates received a free college education.

But education is a primary function of the Auburn Correctional Facility, as outlined in its directives, which were issued and approved by the New York State Department of Corrections. The directive reads that Auburn Correctional facility will offer inmates “academic education, vocational training, industrial training, (and) college programs.”

The philosophy behind correctional facilities is to find a balance between punishment and rehabilitation. Punishment is the loss of freedom. Rehabilitation varies depending on the individual and may include counseling, drug and alcohol therapy, religious practice, vocational training or education.

The ultimate goal of the Auburn Correctional Facility is to provide inmates with the skills and tools necessary to become productive members of society. For those inmates facing life imprisonment, rehabilitation is still vital to ensure that the negative behaviors that the inmates exhibited outside the prison walls aren't exhibited inside the walls either.

Education has been shown to help ensure order within the prison walls. A study conducted by the New York State Department of Education found that inmate education programs lower the rate of repeat offense once a prisoner is released back into society.

I think a lot of people falsely assume that these inmates each received a master's degree from an Ivy League school. In actuality these inmates received an associate degrees through the State University of New York.

I also think it is important to remember that this program is privately funded through a grant. And productive members of society can apply for grants too. In fact a lot of grants and scholarships aren't ever awarded, simply because people don't think to apply.

Even if these inmates were receiving PhDs from Harvard, a college degree isn't going to offset a felony offense on a job application. And I would rather have college debt hanging over my head then have a rap sheet following me for the rest of my days.

Bottom line, a “catch and release” program isn't going to help convicts learn how to be productive members of society.