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John Jay College tries to help prisoners turn lives around



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Most people in prison fester; they're bored, angry and aren't being educated to improve their lives. Upon being released, many ex-prisoners are unemployed and are trapped into committing crimes to stay afloat. That's why the **John Jay College of Criminal Justice** in New York developed the Prison-to-College Pipeline in 2011.

Its goal is to encourage prisoners to gain college credits and move toward earning a degree after incarceration ends to restart their life. Hence, they'll be able to secure a job and avoid incarceration in the future.

The program cites a study that says offering education to inmates costs \$1,600 a year, but the price of extending prisons sentences is \$2,800, nearly double. Hence it's cost effective.

Baz Dreisinger, an associate professor of English at John Jay College and a journalist herself, serves as academic director of Prison-to-College Pipeline. She describes it as a "college and re-entry program, but also college as re-entry." It offers college level courses to prisoners that are within three years of release. The collegiate experience encourages former prisoners to adjust to life outside of the walls and transfer into **City University of New York** (CUNY) programs.

When Dreisinger was volunteering in a New York State prison, a superintendent asked her why John Jay College didn't have a prison education program. "I wasn't able to come up with a good answer," she admits. Motivated by the superintendent's query, she sought out Jeremy Travis, president of John Jay, who liked the idea. She coordinated with the Prison Reentry Institute, a research group, and gained funding from the David Rockefeller Fund. Prison-to-College Pipeline was borne.