

DOCS Seeking Partners to Offer More College Courses to Inmates

The Department of Correctional Services is actively seeking partners to bring more college courses – at no cost to state taxpayers- into its correctional facilities, a key part of preparing offenders to return to their communities as employable, law-abiding citizens.

DOCS launched its effort with a one-day forum May 12, 2008 at the Albany Training Academy that drew potential sponsors, including institutions of higher education, community groups and charitable foundations.

Commissioner Brian Fischer and New York State Higher Education Services Corp. (HESC) President James Ross opened the forum by expressing a vision for changing offenders' lives through education and enhancing public safety with evidence-based post-secondary programs to prepare ex-offenders to enter the job market.

The New York State Education Department, State University of New York (SUNY) community colleges, the U.S. Department of Education, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Prisoner Reentry Institute, Bard College and the College and Community Fellowship Program at the City University of New York Graduate Center offered presentations. About 80 participants representing colleges, facilities, community organizations and formerly incarcerated individuals attended.

“From the standpoint of public policy and public sense, finding a way to restore inmate higher education programs makes imminent good sense, and that’s why I’m so delighted and heartened to see all of you here today for this particular conversation,” Dennis Golladay,

SUNY Vice Chancellor for community colleges, told the participants. “Data consistently shows the positive relationship between prison education programs and rates of recidivism. And simple comparison of the cost of incarceration with the cost of education makes a compelling and rational case for inmate higher education at the college level.”

Since the forum, Gouverneur Correctional Facility has submitted an initial proposal to SUNY Canton for a possible college program and Taconic Correctional Facility is looking into partnerships, including one with Hudson Link.

Additionally, Director of Education Linda Hollmen presented information on inmate higher education programs at a Statewide Reentry Task Force Meeting and HESC Senior Policy Advisor Charles Treadwell went to the Capital Region Economic Security Council Meeting to promote inmate higher education programs as a means to helping the formerly incarcerated become productive, working members of the community.

Commissioner Fischer also approved a summer intern for the Education Office to explore funding sources for post-secondary programs, with an emphasis on community colleges. Already, 16 correctional facilities offer college courses, and 1,667 inmates statewide participated in college and correspondence courses during the Spring 2008 semester.