



## College Programs: Educating those who are incarcerated to reduce recidivism December 19, 2013

### History

Since the discontinuation of PELL and TAP grants in 1994 and 1995, The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision has supported using private funds for post-secondary education for incarcerated individuals. To further enhance the college program, DOCCS developed a model in 2007 that established working partnerships between a correctional facility, a collegiate institution in the same geographic region and, an outside, private funding source.

### Who teaches them?

The Department currently has 22 correctional facilities equipped with non-taxpayer funded college programs. Two large organizations that are present at multiple facilities are Bard Prison Initiative and Hudson Link.

[Bard Prison Initiative \(BPI\)](#) is a division of Bard College that enrolls 275 incarcerated men and women into Associate's and Bachelor of Art's degree programs. BPI provides a challenging and rigorous liberal arts education to inmates at six NYS correctional facilities: Coxsackie (Greene County), Eastern (Ulster County), Green Haven (Dutchess County), Taconic (Westchester County), Woodbourne (Sullivan County), and Fishkill (Dutchess County) with plans to expand.



A classroom at Attica Correctional Facility

[Hudson Link](#) started in 1998 and is currently present in four facilities, with a fifth facility being developed. Hudson link is located at Sing Sing (Westchester County), Sullivan (Sullivan County), Taconic (Westchester County) and Fishkill (Dutchess County). There are a total of 250 students enrolled and since 2001, 260 degrees have been awarded. The degrees are from Mercy College, NYAK College, Vassar College and SUNY Sullivan. Hudson Link will be expanding its presence into Greene Correctional Facility (Greene County) in 2014.



Students at Auburn discussing Shakespeare during a Literature course in the Cornell Prison Education Program

Doris Buffett, founder of the [Sunshine Lady Foundation](#) currently funds the Cornell Prison Education Program (CPEP) at Auburn Correctional Facility (Cayuga County). CPEP is an educational outreach effort on the part of Cornell University and Cayuga Community College. The program started in 2008 and currently has 82 students in the 12 to 13 active classes during the 2013 Fall Semester. The classes are taught by either Cornell faculty or graduate students. The students, after completing the program will receive an Associate's Degree from Cornell University.

Along with the major not-for-profit organizations that provide the financial means to continue college education programs, there are many other schools that donate their time, finances and resources ,including schools such as Marist College (Greene), Genesee Community College (Attica), Marymount Manhattan College (Bedford Hills), Mercy College (Bedford Hills), Vassar College (Otisville), and Niagara University (Wyoming).

## **Inmate Views:**

Many inmates have vocational or industrial programming during the day, and attend college classes in the evening. This schedule helps teach not only time management skills, but life skills that will serve them well as they re-enter their communities. By gaining an education, one inmate noted that he will be able to help others in the future and to teach them different ways to avoid making poor decisions. This is their way of giving back to society.



**The Mt. McGregor business communication class**

One student, working on his Associate's degree program at Attica, said that the college classes keep him busy not only physically with performing presentations, meeting with classmates, going to class but also intellectually. The benefits of going to school are not only to learn and obtain an education but it keeps their mind challenged and healthy. The conversations had in many classes are fruitful, scholarly and engaging, according to education supervisors.



Students are known for working together on homework assignments and helping to tutor outside the classroom. It is not uncommon for some students to be teacher assistants to instructors teaching high school equivalent classes. According to a teacher, their success is dependent on themselves and sometimes it takes time, to understand how important soft skills, communication skills and personal finance knowledge relate to successful re-entry.

## *Final Presentation*

At Mt. McGregor students in the Business Communication Class gave their final presentations for the semester during the first week of December. The class teaches communication and public speaking skills, marketing, and how to write a business plan.

The educational ability of many of the students and the effort they put towards their presentations and their work was clearly displayed. Some of the topics presented were: music promotions company, restaurant businesses, should NCAA athletes get paid, restorative justice, and a program called A.C.C.P. After each presentation the floor was open for questions and numerous inmates had questions, suggestions and constructive critiques of each topic.





A student creatively performed his final presentation as a mock interview with a loan administrator from a credit union. With the help of another inmate, he successfully interviewed for a loan application to be used to expand his solar panel business.

#### **The Research:**

In 2005, BPI graduated the first class of inmates who have received a Bard College degree while incarcerated. Among the alumni of BPI, less than 4% have returned to prison.

Hudson link has graduated 260 inmates since 2001 and 0% of their alumni have returned to prison.

Most studies investigate the effect of general correctional programs and recidivism, and only a handful has focused on prison-based college programs. Torre Fine and her colleagues (2011) researched the effect of college education on recidivism among the female inmate population at Bedford Hills (Westchester County). The results showed that non-participating female inmates returned to prison almost four times the rate of female college participants.

In 2013, DOCCS researchers Ryang Hui Kim and David Clark completed a study that was published in the Journal of Criminal Justice, titled The effect of prison-based college education programs on recidivism: Propensity Score Matching approach. The research examined the relationship of prison-based college education on recidivism. The results of their study showed that offenders who did not participate in college programs had a re-arrest rate of 35.9%, which is 3.8 times higher than the return rate of offenders who successfully completed prison-based college programs (9.5%). Overall, the study shows that prison based college education effectively does lower recidivism and can affect crime and incarceration rates.

#### **What are they doing now?**

More information about where alumni of both [BPI](#) and [Hudson link](#) are and what they are doing, is available on their respective websites. Videos, graphics and interactive features provide a deeper look into the college prison programs.