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To learn more about the Higher Education in Prison Landscape Project, visit:
<https://www.higheredinprison.org/higher-education-in-prison-landscape-project>



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Program Report Spring 2022

History

The Higher Education in Prison Program (formerly the “Reverse the {school to prison} Pipeline Program”) was originally conceived by two women who had been directly impacted by a broken criminal justice system: Deborah Arthur, a former criminal defense attorney, and Ailene Farkac, a formerly incarcerated mother who earned both her undergraduate degree and her MSW from PSU. When we came together in January 2018, we imagined a comprehensive program designed to ignite a love of learning in a population that had mostly not found welcome and success in education, combined with support both inside carceral settings and on the PSU campus for students impacted by the criminal legal system. The two determined to offer higher education to the most historically underserved segment of incarcerated people in Oregon, the women, trans identified and gender non-conforming people at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF). We have grown significantly since that time. Each step of the way, we work closely with “Rubicon GPS,” a group of incarcerated people at CCCF who organized to advocate for access to higher education.

Mission

The mission of the HEP program is to provide access to rigorous, quality higher education for people experiencing incarceration, and to support students post-release. The vision is a university and a community where the transformational power of education is accessible to all, changing lives, opening doors, reducing recidivism and enhancing community safety and well-being. Through this work we seek to bolster PSU’s diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

Current snapshot

- Since September 2019, the HEP has offered 16 courses and enrolled 75 students
- Our course offerings have included general education, business, and writing, all along a Liberal Studies degree pathway.
- In our original cohort, 15% of participants identified as BIPOC. In our second group of students, this percentage doubled. Our students and leaders at Coffee Creek shared their experience in the program with others, building interest and trust in the BIPOC communities inside the prison.
- Multiple students from our program have released back to the community in the past year; our program is in touch with all of them, supporting them in their next steps.

- We are working closely with Admissions, and Financial Aid, looking ahead to the return of Pell grants to incarcerated students in AY 23/24.
- With funds from a Ready for Pell grant from Ascendium Education Group and Jobs for the Future, we are hiring a Pell Readiness Counselor/ College Navigator.

Funding

As of April 2022, the Higher Education in Prison program has received grants and donations in the amount of: \$360,500. These are philanthropic grants, individual donors, and matching funds from the University.

Links

<https://www.pdx.edu/liberal-arts-sciences/higher-education-prison>

- Frost, Allison. 2022. "PSU Brings College Classes to Oregon's Women's Prison." *Oregon Public Broadcasting*, March 14, 2022. <https://www.opb.org/article/2022/03/14/psu-brings-college-classes-to-oregons-womens-prison/>.
- Goodwin, Jon. 2022. "PSU Program Invests in Incarcerated People with Higher Education." *KGW8*, March 15, 2022. <https://www.kgw.com/amp/article/news/education/psu-program-inmates-higher-education/283-4055e5dd-1f4d-4a04-8a00-0b37fd1313ff>.
- Miller, Elizabeth. 2020. "New PSU Program For Incarcerated Women Confronts Pandemic In First Year." *Oregon Public Broadcasting*, June 3, 2020. <https://www.opb.org/news/article/portland-state-university-program-incarcerated-women-coffee-creek-pandemic-coronavirus/>.
- Wood, Douglas, 2017. "Why education in prison matters to democracy" The Ford Foundation <https://www.fordfoundation.org/just-matters/just-matters/posts/why-education-in-prison-matters-to-democracy/>
- diZerega, M., and Cochos, G. "Postsecondary Education in Prison is a Racial Equity Strategy" <https://www.vera.org/blog/target-2020/postsecondary-education-in-prison-is-a-racial-equity-strategy>
- Williams, Anna (2018) Reversing the pipeline: program offers currently and formerly incarcerated people a future at PSU <https://psuvanguard.com/reversing-the-pipeline/>
- College Behind Bars <https://www.pbs.org/show/college-behind-bars/>
- Clear, Todd (2019) College classes in prison can unlock an eager committed group of potential learners; The Lumina Foundation . <https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/college-classes-in-prison-can-unlock-an-eager-committed-group-of-potential-learners/>