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Second Chance Pell Program to expand educational opportunities, drive reentry success, for incarcerated Delawareans

DOVER, Del. – Delaware inmates will soon have access to college-level instruction through a new collaboration between Delaware Tech, the Delaware Department of Correction, and the Delaware Department of Education, officials announced today. [Delaware Tech was recently approved to participate in the Second Chance Pell Experiment](#), a federal initiative that provides incarcerated individuals with need-based Federal Pell Grants to enroll in postsecondary programs through local colleges and universities or distance learning programs. As a Second Chance Pell Grant participant, Delaware Tech will begin offering Pell grants and postsecondary courses through a pilot program to incarcerated students in two state correctional facilities.

“This program will provide greater educational opportunities that create pathways to gainful employment and reduce recidivism,” **said Dr. Mark Brainard, President of Delaware Tech.** “It’s clearly aligned with our mission to change our students’ lives through an inclusive environment that fosters equity and student success”.

The Second Chance Pell Experiment, established by the U.S. Department of Education in 2015, waives federal regulations that prohibit inmates from receiving federal grants, with the goal of expanding educational opportunities, driving reentry success, and helping to reduce recidivism.

Representatives from Delaware Tech, the Delaware Department of Education, and the Delaware Department of Correction are working closely together to offer an associate of applied science degree program in Human Services at state correctional facilities. Delaware Tech plans to launch the pilot program with a series of human services classes at Baylor Women’s Correctional Institution beginning in Spring 2021. After implementing those classes, the College plans to expand the same class offerings to inmates at Howard R. Young Correctional Institution in Wilmington.

“The Department of Correction is committed to driving reentry opportunities through innovative educational, treatment and training programs as we embrace our dual mission of public safety and second chances,” **Department of Correction Commissioner Claire DeMatteis said.** “In addition to expanding access to vocational and skills training for incarcerated individuals, a college education can be their pathway to earning a livable wage and set their foundation for success in life. We value our partnership with President Brainard, Secretary Bunting and our exceptional teams who are making these new educational opportunities a reality.”

DeMatteis noted that many inmates express the desire to “give back” to the community after achieving sobriety and getting their lives back on track through treatment and training while incarcerated. Their experience in the prison system and as participants in treatment programs gives them a unique ability, after their return to the community, to connect with others in need of programs and services. These and other factors drove the decision to offer the human services degree which provides the skills and training to work in a variety of social service environments.

"The value of an education is more evident now with dramatic changes in Delaware’s job market,” **Delaware Department of Education Secretary Susan Bunting said.** “More education equates to more job opportunities and better paying jobs. Those exiting prison encounter additional barriers due to a criminal history even after serving their time. This pilot project will provide many prisoners with their first opportunity to ever attend postsecondary education. A RAND Corporation study found that inmates who participated in correctional education programs had 43 percent lower odds of returning to prison than those who did not receive services. Consequently, this project is good business for the state, the job market, communities and offenders."

Prison education programs in Delaware are offered by Department of Education teachers and staff who are embedded in state correctional facilities. These dedicated professionals offer a variety of adult education program that provide a foundation of knowledge to enable offenders to be productive workers, family members, and citizens while incarcerated and upon release to the community. Each year Prison Education has over 2,900 enrollments in academic, life skills, and vocational training services across Delaware’s four prison facilities. While adapting to COVID-19 restrictions during the 2020-2021 school year, Prison Education has already distributed 1,700 correspondence packets and conducted over 125 video conferencing sessions with more than 600 incarcerated students.

Classes offered by Delaware Tech through the Second Chance Pell Grant pilot initially will be delivered primarily in a virtual format through live video sessions between instructors and students. Information sessions will be held over the coming weeks to make inmates aware of these new educational offerings, review their eligibility, and help them initiate the application process. Eligible students will be able to apply federal Pell Grant awards to assist with tuition, fees, and course materials.

Delaware Tech, the Delaware Department of Correction, and the Delaware Department of Education are receiving technical support from the Vera Institute of Justice on the best ways to leverage technology while balancing security considerations inside prison facilities. Staff have participated in numerous webinars and teleconferences to learn best practices from other states in rolling out online college degree programs in prison systems.

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