



BACK TO SCHOOL

Education Opportunities for Inmates

Pursuing an education while you're incarcerated or upon release is highly recommended and shown to drastically reduce the risk of recidivism. If you've been putting it off, now is the time to do your homework - pun intended. But seriously, if you look into every option for higher education, you will find a way to make this dream come true. No matter what level of education you currently possess, advancing your education will improve your quality of life both in and out of prison.

Anyone can pursue an education, even while incarcerated. Research shows that continued education helps keep inmates from returning to prison. For instance, inmates who took college courses while incarcerated were four times more likely to stay out of trouble upon release. Those are great odds, so WriteAPrisoner.com has put together a step-by-step guide to help you in your quest for a better life!

WHILE IN PRISON

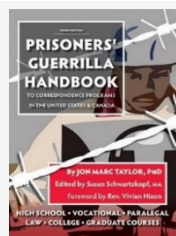
While you are still incarcerated, here are some steps you can take:

STEP 1 First and foremost, check with your local prison's education department. Ask what level of education they offer and see if it meets your needs. Many prisons offer only the most basic of classes, such as a high school diploma or GED equivalent. This should be your first step if you haven't already completed this. Types of classes to look for:

- Basic Literacy
- High School Equivalency/GED
- Vocational Training
- College Classes
- Correspondence Courses (see below)

STEP 2 Many prisons also offer vocational schools. These are hands-on classes that help you develop a trade. Unfortunately, space can often be limited in these classes. Talk to the appropriate official at your prison to see about adding your name to a list if space is short. Be sure to keep your disciplinary record clean while awaiting class. As you're undoubtedly aware, this can have an impact on your status at the prison and your likelihood of being accepted into a vocational program.

STEP 3 Fewer than half of all prisons offer college/postsecondary courses, which is why it's important to research correspondence courses. Once you're familiar with the educational opportunities your prison does offer, make the most of them. If your prison can't help, ask a friend or family member to purchase this helpful guide on obtaining an education while in prison:



Prisoners' Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs In the United States and Canada: High School, Vocational, Paralegal and College Courses

by Jon Marc Taylor, Audenreed Press.

This book offers detailed descriptions of 212 programs. It is only available through: Prison Legal News, P.O. Box 1151, Lake Worth, FL 33460
(Online at: prisonlegalnews.org).

Thousands of inmates earn degrees through correspondence courses, and you can become one of them!

STEP 4 Choosing the right field of study is important. Most college students pursue specific degrees related to the career path they have chosen. However, research shows that most people ultimately change career paths completely within a few years. The fact that they have a college degree is often sufficient to open new opportunities for them, even if the degree (e.g., Marketing, Science, English) isn't related to the new career. Choices for incarcerated students tend to be even more limited, so here are some points worth considering:

- All learning is good. If only one course is available to you, take it. It will help you develop study skills that you can apply later when you finally get to take the courses you really want.
- Consider a range of courses. Poetry might sound boring or completely out of your realm, but poetry is rich in vocabulary at the very least, and research shows a good vocabulary correlates with a rewarding career. And at its best, poetry inspires. Study something you never had the chance to study before. It can change your life. Philosophy sounds lofty, but it opens doors to consider many perspectives on the world that can have tremendous benefit both inside and outside of prison walls.
- Consider courses that offer skills you can apply in an entrepreneurial endeavor. Many inmates face challenges in being hired because of their criminal records, so they start their own businesses. What courses can help you launch and successfully run your own business? Any course that strengthens your math and computation skills is a good place to start. Also consider bookkeeping, basic accounting, communications, marketing, public relations, business, writing and composition, or any course that will enhance skills you have or seek if you do have an idea for your own business.

STEP 5 Paying for your education can be a challenge. In 2015, the U.S. Dept. of Education launched the Second Chance Pell Pilot program to provide Pell Grants to help inmates cover the cost of their secondary education during incarceration. However, inmates and/or their families still pay the bulk of tuition fees in most cases. Perkins Grants are available for vocational or technical courses, but these typically do not cover the full cost. Grant applications can be requested through the school to which you are applying. Private foundations and social organizations (e.g., Rotary, Lions) also provide funding. You may need someone on the outside to help you locate these organizations and their contact information. Work closely with your school to help secure funding for your classes. It is also possible that student loans will be available, although you should pay close attention to the terms as some are worse than terms offered by predatory lenders. Educate yourself on all aspects of earning a college degree - especially how you pay for it.

Additional Resource! Whether it's paying for your education or meeting existing financial obligations, finances can be tricky. If you'd like information on budgeting as well as other financial tips, or if you need to repair, rebuild, or maintain your credit while incarcerated, our Credit Repair & Finances Self-help guide is a great place to start.

Get your
FREE COPY

SEND A SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE TO*:

WriteAPrisoner.com
Credit Repair & Finances Self-help
P.O. Box 10
Edgewater, FL 32132 USA

* Prison staff or pen-pals can also print this guide at
<http://www.writeaprisoner.com/self-help>

CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence courses are an excellent way for inmates to pursue a degree in higher education. However, with the easy access of the Internet, many universities have switched to offering online courses instead of the traditional paper and pencil courses that could be sent through the mail. Internet access is not available to inmates; therefore, correspondence courses are not as readily available.

Below is a list of schools that continue to reach out to inmates to provide higher education. (Note: If you are aware of a college or university that provides courses specifically for inmates, please contact us so that we can update our information.)

College Program for the Incarcerated
Haning Hall 222
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701
Phone Toll-free: 800-444-2910

Parent Link (Parenting Information for
Incarcerated Parents)
University of Missouri
College of Education
Phone Toll-free: 800-609-3727

Incarcerated Re-Entry
Rio Salado College
2323 West 14th Street
Tempe, AZ 85281
Phone: 480-517-8345 or Toll-free: 877-517-8345

Boston University Prison Education Program
808 Commonwealth Avenue, Room 237
Boston, MA 02215
Phone: 617-353-5945

RELEASED FROM PRISON

Once you are released, take immediate steps to continue your education, even if it is just taking one class at a time at your local community college. Community colleges offer a wide array of courses you will need if you plan to go

on for your bachelor's degree, and they are reasonably priced. If you already have your associate's degree, consider applying at a state university. These, too, are more reasonably priced. Also, once you are out of prison you can sign up for online courses as long as you have access to a computer and the Internet. This can save considerable expense in traveling to and from classes and provide scheduling flexibility so you can hold down a job while going to school. A word of warning: online courses do require you to be well organized and self-starting. Schedule time for your studies! And choose friends that will offer encouragement.



*Intellectual growth should
commence at birth and cease
only at death.*

- Albert Einstein



Some people do not realize that they CAN pursue an education that has been interrupted. If you have dropped out of high school, or even elementary school, no matter how old you are right now, you can pick up where you left off and take your education as far as you want. Here is the order of a traditional education:

- High School Diploma or Equivalency (GED)
- Associate's Degree (usually from a community college)
- Bachelor's Degree (from a four-year college or university)
- Master's Degree (from a college or university with a graduate program)
- Doctorate Degree (from a college or university with a doctoral program)

There will be an application process that usually includes placement tests or other qualifying exams. Don't be afraid of these! If you don't do well at first, the school can recommend a tutoring program. Most schools have these types of resources available right there on campus. There will also be an application fee. The financial aid office will guide you through the process of applying for financial aid determining your eligibility for grants. Do not let the fear of paying for college stop you. College schedules are extremely flexible today so that students can be employed full-time even while attending school.

There are also more “non-traditional” students than ever before – students that are far older than the typical college student. Some colleges have programs designed to help with re-entry, such as:

Prisoner Reentry Institute
John Jay College/CUNY
555 W. 57th Street, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10019
Phone: 212-484-1399

Ask friends and family members to inquire on your behalf before you are released to the college or university you are most interested in attending. Plan ahead!

REMEMBER!

The Bureau of Prisons conducted research on inmates who participated in programs inside the prison, such as vocational training and mock job fairs. Their studies showed that these programs that teach marketable skills to prisoners help to reduce recidivism and/or repetition of criminal behavior patterns.

Access to education can change an inmate’s life, lower taxes for taxpayers, and provide skilled labor for the workforce. Education uplifts the human spirit, promotes understanding and empathy, and improves the quality of lives for families.

Take charge of YOUR education. Do not just sit inside your cell counting off the days. Get busy. Do some research. Find out what courses are available. Volunteer to help teach others – it will help you in your own studies. Begin applying to colleges before you are released. Ask your friends and family on the outside to make calls to schools where you have an interest. There are more opportunities than you realize, but you have to take the initiative.

We wish you the best in your educational quest! Never give up. The knowledge and skills you gain will improve the quality of your life in ways you can only imagine right now.

Inmates who participated in correctional education programs had “43% lower odds of recidivating than inmates who did not.” This represents a reduction of 13 percentage points on the risk of recidivism.

Data based on a 2014 study published by RAND Corporation titled *How Effective is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?*

Success story or suggestion? We want to know what worked for you so we can share it with other inmates.
If you have a suggestion to make about this resource, please do so at:
Self-help Suggestion - P.O. Box 10 - Edgewater, FL 32132 USA

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