

# EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

A Guide for Higher Education in Prison

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## INTRODUCTION

**Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison** provides a clear and specific summary of what the authors believe are the most essential components of high quality in-prison higher education programs that uphold a commitment to equity, excellence and access.

While the specific material and cultural context of prisons is unique, the values and practices in this report can be widely applied to the field of higher education generally. All programs have the potential to continually improve, and to benefit from increased material and financial support, ongoing engagement and resource-sharing among practitioners, and formal opportunities for professional development.

*Equity and Excellence in Practice* is divided into seven sections, with subsections in each that contain corresponding core practices that promote equity and excellence in higher education in prison. At the same time, the report specifically acknowledges the common barriers that practitioners confront to creating high quality programming, and approaches each of these realms as a work in progress.

## SEVEN CORE CONTENT AREAS TO PROMOTE EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

### 1. PROGRAM DESIGN

Program design refers to the structural and operational elements of a program that determine its capacity to maintain rigorous academic standards, recruit qualified faculty, provide adequate resources, and establish highly functional organizational and academic cultural norms. This section is further divided into the following subsections:

- Organizational Structure and Boards
- Program Leadership
- Funding Structure
- Accreditation, Credits and Degrees
- Classroom based Instruction
- Admission, Enrollment, and Placement
- Data Collection and Management

### 2. PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Every in-prison higher education program constitutes a unique partnership between some combination of one or more academic institution, non-profit organization, corrections department, and/or other government agency. Highly functional coordination among all entities, academic institutions, community partners and corrections, can contribute to the transition of students from prison through successful reentry and to further education. This section is further divided into the following subsections:

- With Universities
- With Department of Corrections
- With Community-Based Organizations
- With Researchers

### 3. FACULTY RECRUITMENT, TRAINING and SUPERVISION

Recruitment, training and supervision ensure that instructors are prepared to support the academic success of every student, even as they navigate the myriad logistical and psychological challenges of the prison environment. Effective recruitment, training and supervision to ensure that the content of courses offered inside is consistent with those offered on the main campus. This section is further divided into the following subsections:

- Faculty Recruitment and Screening
- Faculty Training and Supervision

### 4. CURRICULUM

The curriculum of a program determines what students will learn and what academic or professional pathways they will be prepared for upon completion. Program curriculum, as well as the degree or certificate conferred, establish not only the educational goals of a program but the very framework of students' experience in that program. This section is further divided into the following subsections:

- College Level Curriculum
- College Preparatory Coursework
- Extra-Curricular Learning Opportunities

### 5. PEDAGOGY

Pedagogy includes the theory and practice of teaching, instructors' specific teaching style, their manner of interacting with students in their classroom, as well as how they conceptualize the enterprise of teaching and learning. Strong pedagogy is dynamic, interactive, varied, intellectually stimulating, creative, flexible and adaptive to diverse student learning styles, and it

creates an intellectually stimulating and supportive environment that promotes student learning and creates opportunities for all students' success. This section is further divided into the following subsections:

- Teaching Practices
- Instructor Attitudes and Mindset
- Academic Standards and Expectations

### 6. INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

Ensuring that incarcerated students have reliable access to the supplies, materials and resources (including technology) that they need to succeed is essential to upholding the quality of programs and is also a matter of equity. This section is further divided into the following subsections:

- Materials and Supplies
- Library Services
- Technology Services

### 7. ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Academic support services provide students with the competencies they need to succeed academically such as: collaboration, study skills, how and when to seek help, time-management, and self-advocacy. It is essential that higher education in prison programs maintain a holistic approach that includes mentorship, tutoring, advising and the provision of the myriad "soft" skills that students need to succeed academically. This section is further divided into the following subsections:

- Academic Planning and Advising
- Academic Reentry Planning
- Student Support Services

## CONCLUSION

At its best, higher education in prison is part of a larger movement that both asserts the central importance of equity, excellence and accountability in higher education generally, and defends the value of creativity, critical inquiry, and independent thought as the bedrock of any high-functioning democratic society. The field of higher education in prison stands not only to benefit from such a movement but to lead it. To that end, achieving the goals outlined in this report will require thoughtful, collaborative and sustained engagement.

The enormous challenges facing the field of higher education in prison—the lack of oversight and accountability within the prison setting; the complex needs of students; and the material scarcity that pervades the field—are all microcosms of the most broken and vulnerable edges of the society as a whole. Yet while expanding access to excellent educational programs in prisons presents formidable challenges, it also provides an extraordinary opportunity to overcome inequity at a massive scale and to set an example—both for our own professional communities and for society as a whole.

To view the full report, visit: [higheredinprison.org](http://higheredinprison.org)



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