BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Overview

The Understanding the Landscape of Higher Education Prison Survey (Landscape Survey) was designed as a confidential follow-up to the 2020 Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison Programs (2020 Annual Survey), distributed by the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison. The Landscape Survey contained 93 questions designed to collect both descriptive and open-ended responses from participants about their college-in-prison programs during the 2018/2019 academic year. Included within this survey were specific questions about student, staff and volunteer demographics, program funding, student enrollment and admissions, program goals, and program evaluation.

The Landscape Survey was designed by Drs. Erin L. Castro and Caisa E. Royer from the Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison at the University of Utah and Dr. Amy Lerman from the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley and in collaboration with Dr. Mary Gould from the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison.

Methodology

The survey was distributed to all participants of the 2020 Annual Survey (131 programs) in December 2020 and closed for participants in February 2021. The response rate for the survey was 45.8% (60 programs). Data from the two surveys were combined to provide additional descriptive information about programs participating in the Landscape Survey, including number of academic institutional affiliations or affiliations with prisons, jails or detention centers. Participants who completed the survey were given the opportunity to enter into a chance to win one of five $1,000 donations to their programs.

The survey was sent only to known programs that had participated in a previous, large nationwide survey. The result was a fairly small sample of respondents. In addition, much of the data collected about the programs was collected through the original 2020 Annual Survey, which made it difficult to assess institution-specific information in comparison to program-specific information. For example, for programs that reported being affiliated with multiple academic institutions, there was no way to know which institution provided funding, staff, or instructors.

Survey Respondents

Responding programs were primarily higher education in prison programs housed within a single college or university (n = 46, 76.7%) that provided in-person, on-site instruction at an average of 3.2 facilities (SD = 5.5).¹ Six participating programs offered primarily remote instruction, with those programs working at an average of 26.3 facilities (SD = 19.2). Across all

¹ Due to variances in responses to the survey, not all questions had the same response size. This report uses the capital “N” to refer to the total number of responses to a particular question and the lowercase “n” to refer to the number of respondents who indicated a particular response to that question.
participating programs, programs were affiliated with 84 total academic institutions (M = 1.4, SD = 1.6). These academic institutions were largely a mixture of public two-year schools (n = 34), private, non-profit four-year schools (n = 21), and public four-year schools (n = 21). One academic institution was a public, non-profit two-year school. Programs offered an average of 4.59 certificate pathways (n = 27 programs, Median = 2, Range = 1 – 23) and an average of 2.1 degree pathways (n = 39 programs, Median = 2, Range = 1 – 9). Programs within the sample were founded largely after 2010 (n = 35), with eight programs founded between 2000 – 2009, three programs founded in the 1990s, and five programs founded before 1980.

A total of 10 participating programs were enrolled in the Second Chance Pell Experimental Site Program. Participating programs were spread across the U.S., with 7 participating programs located in the Midwest, 14 in the Northeast, 18 in the South, and 19 in the West.

**Study Limitations**

The results of this study are limited by the convenience sampling technique of targeting previous responders of the Annual Survey, and results are further limited by the moderate response rate. Even among participating programs, survey responses were limited by the data collected within the programs and thus responses to questions varied. As such, the findings of this study preview the landscape of the field of higher education in prison during the 2018-2019 academic year, but they should not be extrapolated to represent the entire field. Interpretation of the data should be done cautiously. The data reports produced as a result of this survey effort are:

- Admissions and Enrollment in Higher Education in Prison Programs: 2018-2019
- Instructors for Higher Education in Prison Programs: 2018-2019
- Demographic Data Collection for Higher Education in Prison Programs: 2018-2019
- Funding for Higher Education in Prison Programs: 2018-2019

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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The complete set of data briefs from the survey can be found at: https://www.higheredinprison.org/publications/understanding-the-landscape-of-higher-education-in-prison-survey-2018-2019

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