

THE LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON

2020–2021

GOLDMAN SCHOOL
OF
PUBLIC POLICY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY


THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
Prison Education Project


ALLIANCE
FOR HIGHER
EDUCATION
IN PRISON

The Landscape of Higher Education in Prison, 2020-2021

published on June 20, 2023

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SUGGESTED CITATION:

Gaskill, S., Gould, M.R., Price, V., Castro, E.L., Lerman, A.E. (2023). *The landscape of higher education in prison, 2020-2021*. Alliance for Higher Education in Prison. <http://higheredinprison.org>

Introduction

In this report, we provide a descriptive overview of the landscape of higher education in prison during the 2020-2021 academic year (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021), based on the responses of known higher education in prison program staff (N=406) to the *2022 Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison Programs*. To our knowledge, the data we present here is the best available information about the state of higher education in prison programming for the 2020-2021 academic year.¹ Data for this report are drawn from responses to the *2022 Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison Programs* (n=172), which were compiled with existing program data in the National Directory of Higher Education in Prison Programs (n=234). The *2022 Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison Programs* was launched in May 2022 and closed in August 2022. The *Annual Survey* was distributed to all known higher education in prison programs, as well as made publicly available on multiple platforms.

Key Findings

- 1.** Most institutions of higher education offering classes to incarcerated students in prison are public two-year institutions, and the South has the greatest number of colleges/universities providing postsecondary education in prison.
- 2.** Most higher education in prison programs either provide on-site, face-to-face or hybrid modes of engagement (that includes on-site, face-to-face), but remote instruction only is being used in a range of ways during the ongoing global pandemic and by many programs that would normally provide on-site, face-to-face classes.
- 3.** The most common credential pathway for students in prison is an Associate's Degree of all types, and opportunities to obtain a graduate degree were very rare.
- 4.** Most higher education in prison programs operate at 1-2 facility/ies and annually enroll a median of 60 students.

¹ The data reported are the most up-to-date information available and therefore are referenced in the present tense; references to the *Annual Survey* are made in the past tense.

5. Nearly all higher education in prison program staff responded that they have difficulty collecting and reporting basic student demographic information and data on student academic continuation following release from incarceration.
6. Many higher education in prison programs staff would like to change their application processes by providing online access for admissions and FAFSA completion.
7. Some of the more common student support services that were reported include library access, study hall, teaching assistants, and computer lab.
8. The most common barriers to continuing postsecondary education for students post-release, as reported by program staff completing the survey, were finances and the need to prioritize finding safe and stable housing and jobs.
9. Most programs rely on philanthropy and individual contributions for a significant percentage of operating expenses, but colleges/universities provided more financial support in the 2020-2021 academic year than in previous years of reporting.
10. Most higher education in prison programs do not have paid staff, but instead rely on faculty service or course releases to fund program leadership, and financial limitations are one reason program staff state that it is challenging to include people who are formerly incarcerated in paid leadership positions or to create other full-time staff positions (i.e., program managers, reentry navigators).

How Many Higher Education in Prison Programs Are Identified in the Data?

The data includes **396 higher education in prison programs** for the 2020-2021 academic year, an increase from the previous year of 372 known programs.

The data reflects **a 9% increase** in the number of programs represented in the National Directory between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years.

For the purposes of this project, a higher education in prison program is **defined as an organization that** meets the following criteria:²

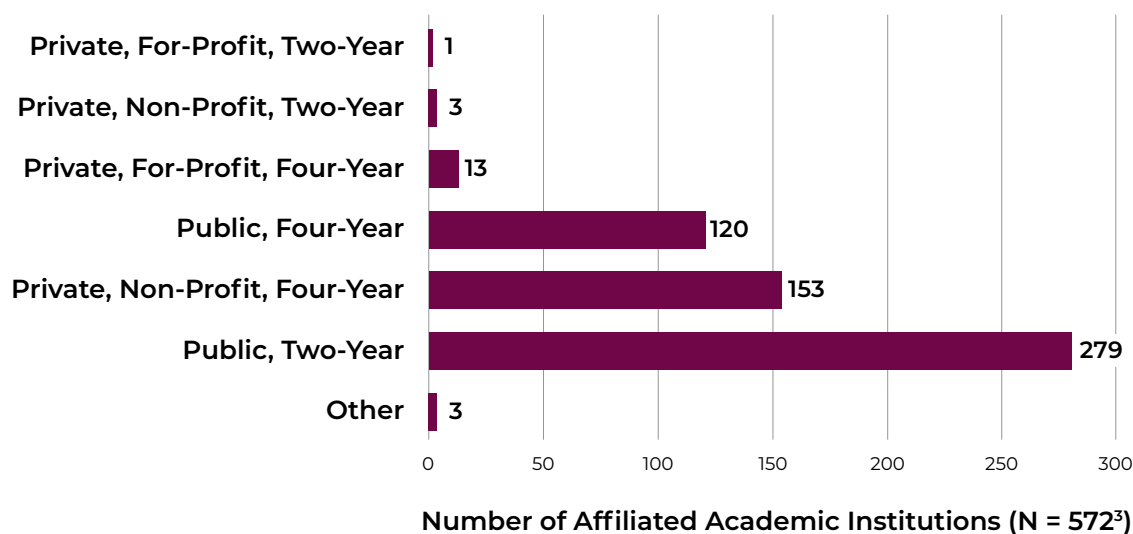
1. **provides postsecondary education;**
2. **is formally affiliated with a college and/or university;** and
3. **uses a secondary credential** (e.g., a High School diploma or GED) as a requirement for admission.

² Responses representing seven programs for the 2022 Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison Programs and three programs for the 2020 and 2021 Annual Survey did not meet the inclusion criteria. Therefore, while these ten programs are represented in the National Directory of Higher Education in Prison Programs, the data they provided are not included in this Landscape Report for the 2020-2021 academic year.

What Types of Colleges and Universities are Affiliated with Higher Education in Prison Programs?

The types of institutions of higher education with which programs are affiliated vary, but, consistent with data from the 2019-2020 academic year, the majority of institutions (48.7%) that provide higher education in prison are public, two-year schools. This is a 2% increase from the previous year. In the 2020-2021 academic year, 97 more institutions of higher education were affiliated with higher education in prison programs than in the 2019-2020 academic year.

What types of academic institutions are affiliated with higher education in prison programs?



Where Are Institutions of Higher Education that Provide Higher Education in Prison Located?

The distribution of institutions of higher education that provide in-prison programming varies across the United States. In some states, many community colleges offer coursework inside prisons without an established prison education program at those academic institutions. This method of providing education in prison can lead to larger numbers of programs included in the data, compared to states where most higher education in prison programs are distinct entities from (or operate within) the affiliated institution of higher education. For example, the two states that have the most representation in the data, North Carolina (n=48) and California (n=47) have colleges and universities that offer academic opportunities inside prison, but some do so without formal affiliations with a higher education in prison program.

This is the first year since the inception of the *Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison Programs* (2020) that at least one higher education in prison program is represented in every state and the District of Columbia. The 2022 *Annual Survey* data also includes program representation in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.⁴

³ The number of affiliated institutions of higher education is higher (N=572) than the number of higher education in prison programs included in the data (N=406) because some programs are affiliated with more than one academic institution.

⁴ Locations included in reporting follow the U.S. Census geography categories.

Table 1: Regional Distribution of Institutions of Higher Education Providing Higher Education in Prison

Region	Number of Institutions of Higher Education Providing Higher Education in Prison (N=572)
South	173
West	141
Northeast	125
Midwest	119
U.S. Territories	4

Compared to other regions, there are more programs located in the South included in the data (30.7%) and the fewest programs are located in the Midwest (21.1%), which is a change from the previous academic year (2019-2020) when the fewest number of programs was recorded in the Northeast.

Where and How Was Higher Education Programming Offered?

There is substantial variation in where and how programming is offered, including modes of engagement and facility type.

MODES OF ENGAGEMENT

Program staff responding to the *2022 Annual Survey* (N=243) reported the following types of instruction:

- ▶ 92 offer only on-site, face-to-face instruction (38%).⁵
- ▶ 89 programs (36.6%) offer both on-site, face-to-face instruction and remote instruction.
- ▶ 38 programs that normally provide on-site, face-to-face instruction provided programming remotely in the 2020-2021 academic year due to COVID-19.⁶
- ▶ 25 programs (10.3%) offer solely remote instruction.

Responding program staff reported providing only on-site, face-to-face instruction (N=92) did so at a mean of 2.58 facilities, with a range of programs working at 1-14 facilities.⁷

⁵ Due to variance in responses to the survey, not all questions had the same number of respondents. 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 response to that specific question.

⁶ The increase in remote instruction from the 2019-2020 academic year to the 2020-2021 academic year can almost be fully attributed to the ongoing global pandemic and corrections departments' responses to it. There was an increase of 39 remote programs over the course of the two academic years and 38 of the programs responded that they are using only remote instruction during the pandemic.

⁷ The facility count provided for on-site, face-to-face courses refers to programs that "only" provide on-site, face-to-face programming. Survey respondents were also asked to report if they "typically provided on-site, face-to-face programming but used remote programming because of the pandemic" (n=38) or "provided both on-site, face-to-face or remote programming" (n=88).

Programs reported a range of ways they offered remote instruction. This includes content provided on tablets, through recorded or live broadcasts, via correspondence, online, and through other unspecified modes.

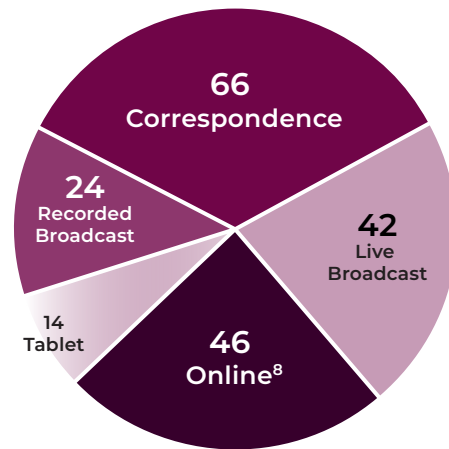
Other responses included peer-supported education, learning management systems, and multiple modes of remote instruction together, with the most common type being correspondence and online programming.

FACILITY TYPE

Across all responding programs (N = 244) postsecondary programming was offered at a total of 710 penal facilities. Some facilities host courses from multiple higher education in prison programs.

The majority of programs responding to the question about facility type (N=203) offer coursework at male-designated facilities (78%, n = 469, N =601).⁹ Coursework is offered at 97 women’s-designated facilities (16.1%) and 29 facilities that are designated for both men and women. Most programs offer coursework to adults (n=202), but 16 programs (7.9%) also offer programming in facilities designated for juveniles.

How do programs provide remote instruction? (N = 111)



What Credential Pathways and Additional Opportunities did Programs Offer?

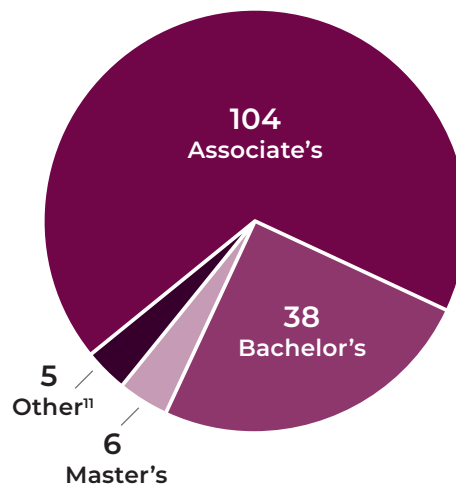
CREDENTIAL PATHWAYS

Among programs responding to the survey (N=396), most offer certificates.¹⁰ A total of 135 programs provide 153 degree pathways.

To date, there remain no Doctorate degree pathways recorded in the Annual Survey data.

In addition to reporting degree pathways, 87 programs reported the total number of credentials earned for the 2020-2021 academic year. The majority of credentials earned through these programs were certificates.

A total of 135 programs provide 153 degree pathways and include:



⁸ No further information was collected to determine if online instruction was synchronous or asynchronous.

⁹ Because U.S. prisons segregate people based on binary sex assigned at birth, the survey included male- and female-designated facilities. Many programs offer programming to trans*, transgender, gender non-conforming, and/or non-binary individuals.

¹⁰ The total number of certificates offered does not include non-credit bearing Certificates of Completion.

¹¹ No additional information was collected from respondents to describe the “other” category.

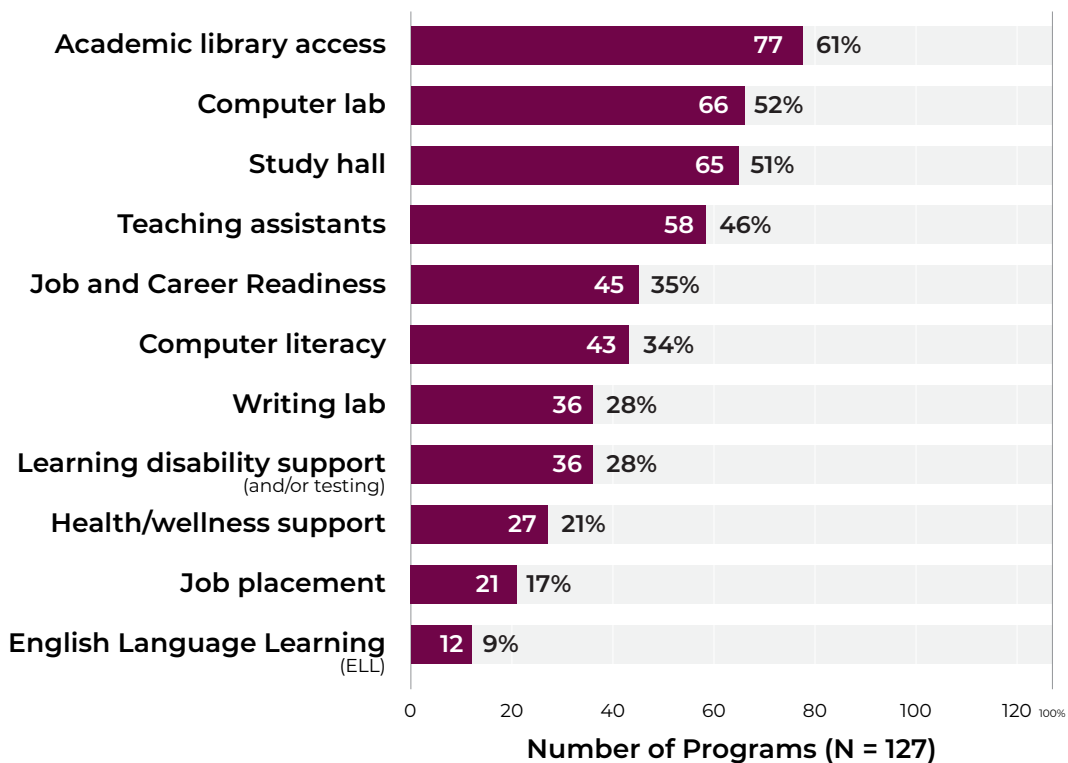
Table 2. Credentials Earned Among Programs in the 2020-2021 Academic Year (N=87)

Credential	Total Credentials Earned	Range Across Programs	Median	Mean
Certificates	9,000	1-4,477	20	176.5
Licensure	293	1-115	6	32.6
Associate's	2,331	2-321	14	44.0
Bachelor's	258	1-42	8	11.7
Master's	21	9-12	10.5	10.5
Doctoral	0	0	0	0
Professional	4	4	4	4

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

In addition to academic coursework, 127 higher education in prison program staff responding to the survey reported offering a variety of opportunities for student support and continued program engagement. These services include access to an academic library, computer lab, and extracurricular activities. Some programs (n=18) also listed additional opportunities not included below, such as parole preparation, art and writing workshops, peer tutoring and mentorship, student advisory committees, and veterans support services.¹²

How many programs provide which types of student support services?

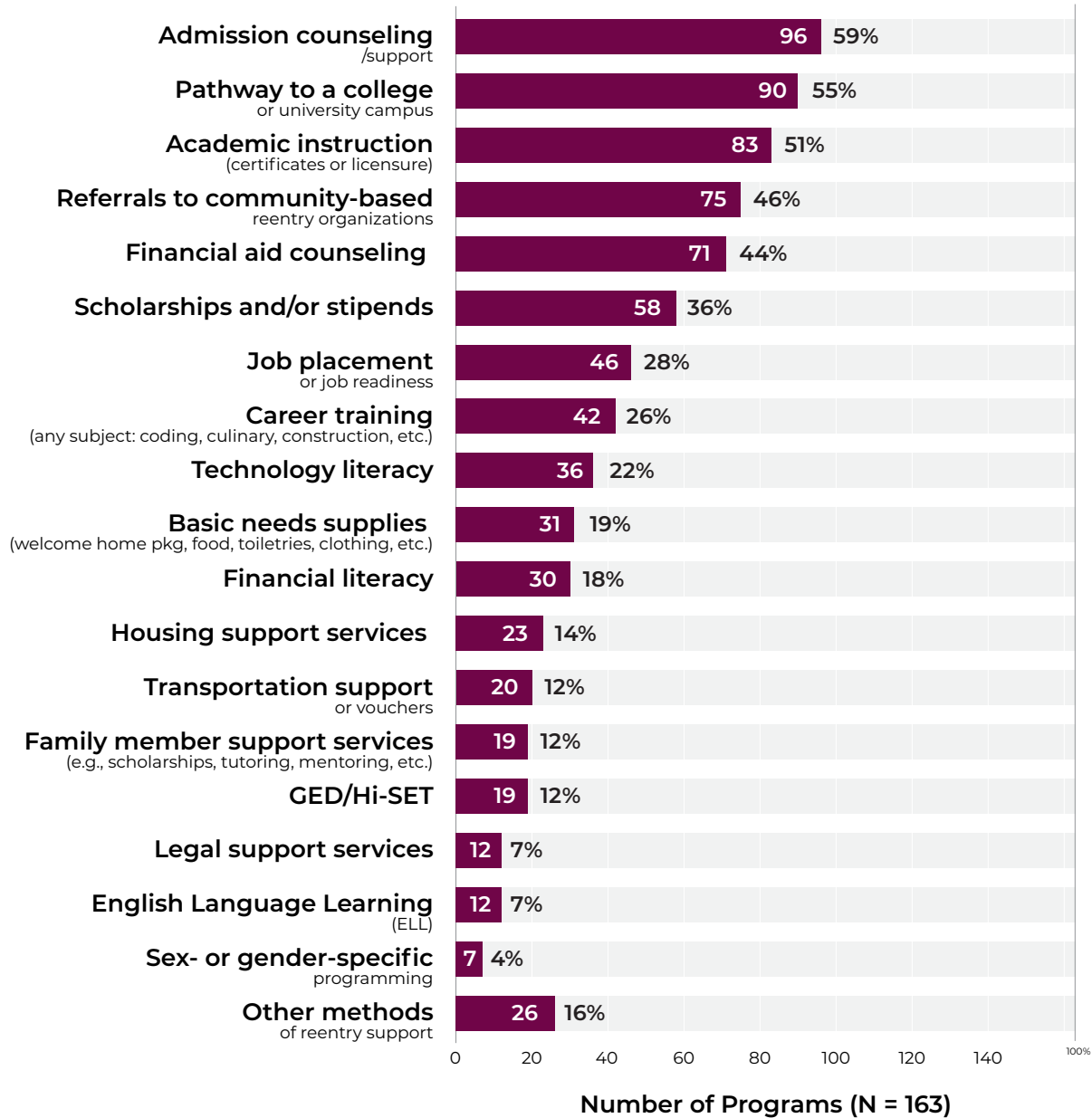


¹² The *Annual Survey* does not ask respondents to indicate the degree or amount of access to these services to which students who are incarcerated are afforded.

REENTRY SERVICES

Responding programs (N=163) reported offering a range of reentry support services, most frequently through college admissions counseling or support and pathways to a college or university campus.

How many programs provide which types of reentry services?



How Many Students are Enrolled by Programs?

Across 182 programs, respondents reported a total of 58,494 incarcerated students who are currently enrolled in postsecondary education programs.¹³ Enrollment at reporting programs range from 4 students to 21,232 students (median=60) in a single program. For remote instruction, a median of 35 students were enrolled at each program (n=61) and a total of 20,506 students were enrolled.

What Data Were Collected on the Demographics of Students, Staff, and Volunteers in Higher Education in Prison Programs?

Participants were asked whether they collected demographic information about the instructors, students, staff, and volunteers enrolled in or working with their programs. This included data for the following categories: race/ethnicity; gender identity and sexual orientation; sex; incarceration status; ability; immigrant, refugee, immigration status; first generation student; and age. Programs were also asked to provide data that were currently available and to report whether that number was exact or an estimate.

Of the programs reporting student data (N=87), the majority were unable to report exact demographic information for multiple categories. 70% of the programs that provided student data (N=71) were able to provide at least one exact number and 4 programs (5.6%) were not able to provide a single exact number to any of the demographic questions. The majority of programs (94.3%) provided a combination of “exact” and “estimated” figures.

What was the Admissions Process Like for Higher Education in Prison Programs?

Students are admitted to programs in multiple ways. Of the programs reporting information about their admission process (N=157), the following forms of admission were reported:

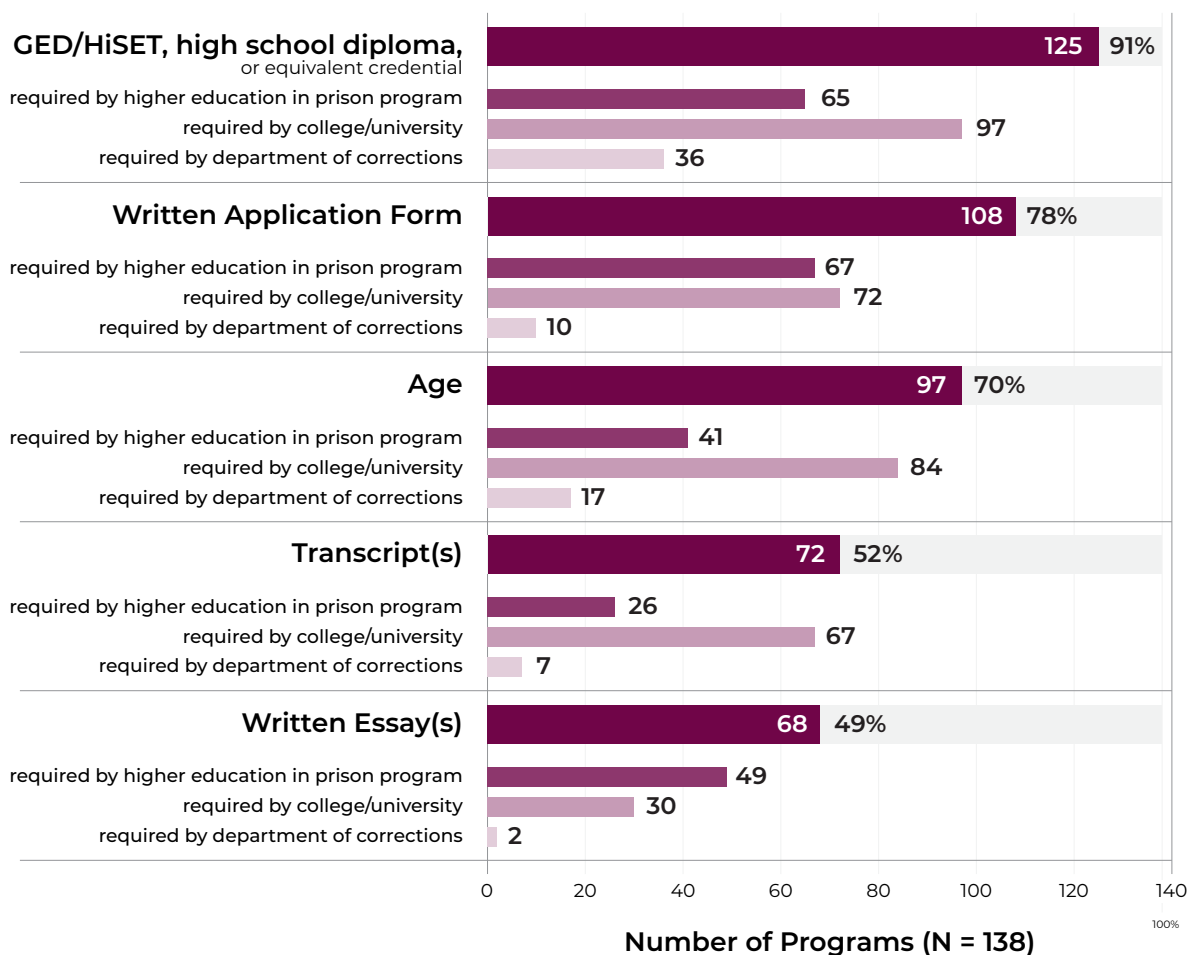
- ▶ Admission to the college/university (n=90)
- ▶ Admission to the college/university and higher education in prison program (n=34)
- ▶ Admission to the higher education in prison program (n=14)
- ▶ Other admission structure (n=19)

Among programs that marked “Other,” the majority shared that they have students taking courses as non-matriculated students. In these instances, students will receive a transcript, but are not admitted to the institution and/or the higher education in prison program as a degree-seeking student.

Additionally, 138 programs reported that some type of student information was collected during the admission process, and information collected was either required by the higher education in prison program, department of corrections, and/or the college/university. The most common criteria for admission and the entity requiring the admission criteria are shown below.

¹³ Enrollment data does not include students who are not incarcerated and are enrolled through programs that bring them from the outside campus to the prison campus.

What are the most common criteria for admission and what entities require the admission criteria?



What is Enrollment in Higher Education like for Former Students Post-incarceration?

Most programs were unable to report the number of former students who were currently enrolled in postsecondary education during the 2020-2021 academic year. Most of the 47 programs who answered this question reported, either as an estimate or an exact number, that no former students were enrolled. Five programs reported a total of 189 former students enrolled on campus. This includes a range of five students to 150 students, with a median of 10 and a mean of 37.8.

Many programs (N=83) responded to a question about the barriers faced by their former students pursuing educational opportunities on the outside. The most frequently mentioned obstacles were financial (i.e., tuition/scholarships, cost of living, basic needs, transportation). Other common barriers were compulsory employment as a required stipulation of parole; college/university lack of peer navigators to help ease the transition to campus; and policies that prevented admission to college.

What Sources of Funding do Programs use to Support their Operations?

Programs rely on few funding sources to support their operations (excluding student tuition). Based upon the responses from programs answering questions about funding (N=141), the most common funding sources were from:

- ▶ The affiliated academic institutions (n=78); and
- ▶ Private foundations or philanthropic donations (n=61).

The affiliated academic institution accounted for 28.4% of program funding and private foundation/philanthropic grants accounted for another 24.7% of funding. In previous years, private foundation/philanthropic donations were the primary funding source, but this changed in the 2020-2021 academic year. Together, federal (reported by n=46 programs) and state (reported by n=40 programs) grants or appropriations comprised 29.8% of support for all reporting programs, with federal grants or appropriations allocating an average of 18.0% of budgets and state grants or appropriations allocating an average of 11.8% of budgets. Other sources of funding included individual donors (6.7%), corporate grants or donations (2.4%), and endowments (.06%).

Who Makes Up the Leadership Teams and Staff for Higher Education in Prison Programs?

Respondents (N=135) also offered information about the number and composition of people who work for their programs. Programs with leadership positions (n=133) had an average of 3.5 people with decision making authority and only 2 programs reported not having a leadership team.

Programs reporting having full-time staff positions (N=109) had a total of 885 staff, with a range of 1 to 260 full-time staff per program (mean=8.1). Programs that reported having part time staff (N=85) had a total of 341 positions with a range of 1 to 31 part time staff per program (mean=4).

Additionally, 142 programs reported having 2,956 instructors teaching in higher education in prison programs. The number of instructors for programs ranged from 1 to 280 with a mean of 20.8 instructors.

How were Instructors for Higher Education in Prison Programs Compensated?

Of participating programs, 154 provided information about how their instructors were compensated for their labor. For the 2,956 instructors teaching for higher education in prison programs, the most common forms of compensation were paying an adjunct rate commensurate with the affiliated academic institution (38.1%); reducing contracted teaching load (20.9%); and as volunteers (17.2%). In previous academic years, stipends were the third most common form of compensation, but in the 2020-2021 academic year, volunteer service was the third most common form of compensation.

Table 3. Compensation for Instructors

Compensation for Instructors	Total Number of Instructors Across Programs (N = 2956)	Percent of Instructors Across Programs	Total Number of Programs (N =154)	Percent of Programs
Adjunct Rate	1125	38.1%	83	53.9%
Teaching Load	617	20.9%	57	37.0%
Volunteer	508	17.2%	25	16.2%
Stipend	211	7.1%	14	9.1%
Course Credit	23	.07%	9	5.8%
Teaching Assistantship	15	.05%	5	3.2%
Adjunct Replacement Pay	13	.04%	3	1.9%
Other	254	8.6%	15	9.7%

How was Tuition Paid for Students in Higher Education in Prison Programs?

Within and across programs, tuition was paid in different ways by reporting programs (N=123), with most utilizing multiple funding sources.

- ▶ The most common forms of tuition payment were federal funding from Pell Grants (n=43); scholarships from the college/university (n=27) or tuition subsidy from the college/university (n=28); and donations from individuals (n=33) or grants from foundations (n=30).
- ▶ Departments of Corrections paid full or partial tuition for some programs (n=21) and some programs (n=22) received state funding paid directly to the program.
- ▶ Federal funding in the form of G.I. and/or veterans benefits were used by a few programs (n=12).
- ▶ Students and/or their families paying tuition was relatively rare in the form of personal student loans (n=6) or a promissory note (n=2), though self-pay and/or family pay was more common (n=18) than student debt.

In order to access federal (and sometimes state) student aid, students within some programs complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This process is required for programs utilizing Pell Grants, but the FAFSA may also be used by programs and students pursuing other types of student aid. For many of the responding programs (N=134), students do not complete the FAFSA (n=59), but the FAFSA was completed by all students in 41 programs. The remaining programs (n=34) either had students who completed the FAFSA on their own and without the support of the program, students who applied for state aid instead of completing the FAFSA, or programs were uncertain if the FAFSA was completed or not.

Table 4. FAFSA Completion by Students

Do students in programs that responded to the survey complete the FAFSA?	Number of Programs (N = 134)	Percent of Programs
Yes, all students	41	30.6%
Yes, some students	16	11.9%
No, students do not complete the FAFSA	59	44.0%
No, but some students complete the FAFSA on their own	5	3.7%
No, but students do complete a state need-based aid application	3	1.5%
Uncertain	2	.05%
Other	8	6.0%

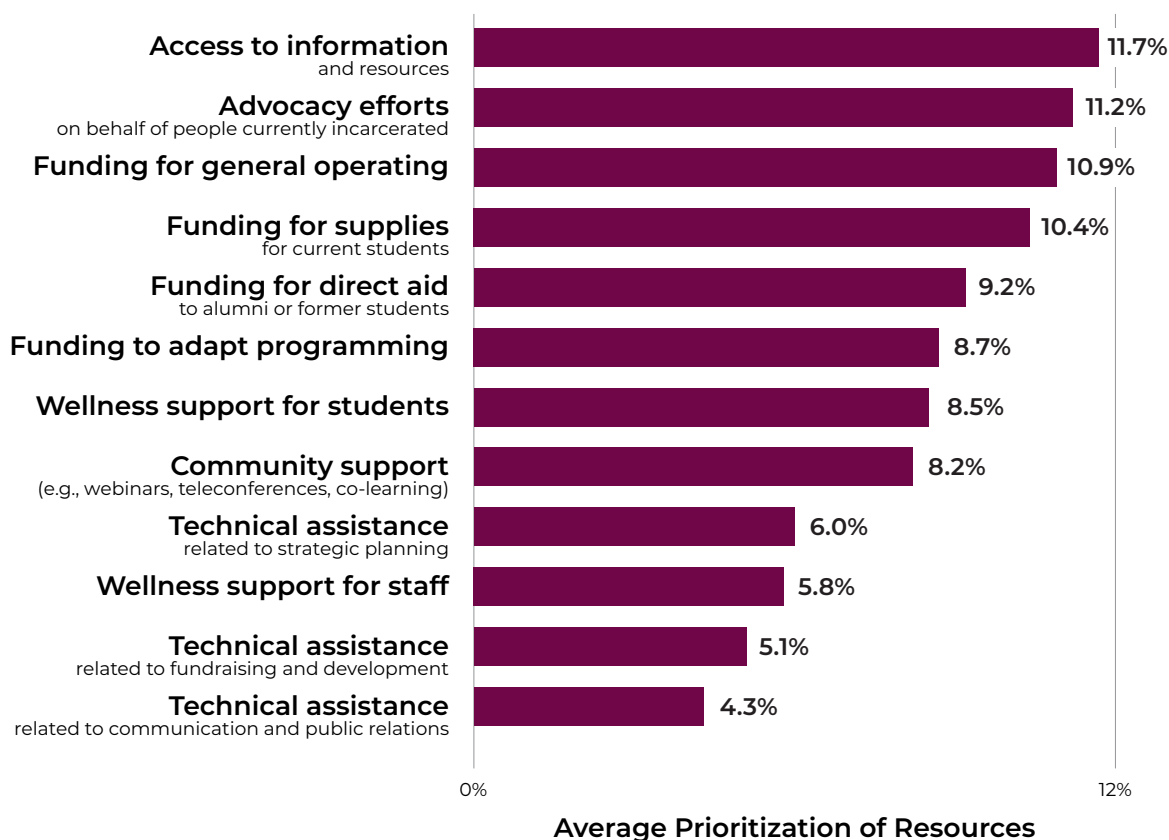
Respondents (N=48) listed a variety of challenges that their programs and students faced when completing the FAFSA. Some of these challenges should be addressed by FAFSA simplification (mandated by the FAFSA Simplification Act passed by Congress in December 2020), but other challenges will likely remain and require support on the part of colleges/universities and programs. Some of the most commonly reported challenges include:

- ▶ Lack of internet access, requiring the FAFSA to be completed in a paper format and creating delays in the process, potential miscommunication, and additional labor for program and college/university staff.
- ▶ Lack of access to necessary personal information, such as social security number, legal name, or tax information (or tax information for spouse).
- ▶ Lack of support from trained financial aid professionals from the college/university.
- ▶ Past student loan debt.
- ▶ Lack of clarity around Fresh Start.
- ▶ Unreliable access to follow-up communications directly from the Department of Education.

What are the Priorities of Higher Education in Prison Programs?

Survey participants were asked to rank order their most pressing priorities, based upon a list of items provided in the survey. 82 programs responded to the question, expressing a range of varying priorities.

What needs did programs rank as priority?



What do Program Leaders Wish they Knew Before Starting to Work in the Field of Higher Education in Prison?

Survey respondents were asked what they wished they knew before starting work in higher education in prison. 38 participants offered comments, which included the following commonly expressed sentiments:

“The learning curve was steep”: respondents referenced not being aware of the way that prisons functioned, the lack of resources to which students would have access (i.e., technology, library and research materials, and tools to communicate with the program), and generally how complicated it is to manage all of the competing needs and interests of students, instructors, and administrators on campus and within the prison.

“That a prison [education] program would be so expensive to run”: respondents wished they had known more about the costs associated with running a program, how

important it would be to work with “outside funders”, how fragile the funding model was, and how the Pell Grant would not cover all of the necessary program expenses.

“Need more strategic ways to manage resistance and/or barriers within the institution”: many respondents suggested that they felt unprepared to navigate the policies and practices of the department of corrections or the college/university and that they were unaware of how either system works.

“I wish ... we understood how to better advocate for them [students] without ... putting the program in jeopardy”: multiple commenters suggested a concern for the safety of students and the sustainability of programs as a result of actions taken by program staff and/or instructors.

“Self-care and program care are not small things and they are vital for [individual and program] sustainability”: the need for more and/or better wellness, mental health, and trauma-informed support and practices were expressed by a number of respondents and they described the effects of primary and secondary trauma on everyone involved in the program.

What Resources are Higher Education in Prison Programs Most in Need Of?

45 respondents answered the question: “What resources, materials, and/or information would help you build a stronger network of support for students in your program?” The most commonly referenced resources were related to funding: to support student reentry, general operating funding for programs, and books and supplies for students. Additionally, learning about fundraising and how to access funding were mentioned. Other responses to this question included:

- ▶ Handbooks, resources and materials for faculty, advisors, and students;
- ▶ Access to technology for students;
- ▶ Program evaluation samples and/or templates;
- ▶ More peer-to-peer learning opportunities for program staff;
- ▶ Secure network/database to track program data and outcomes; and
- ▶ Learning opportunities to help program staff understand how to garner/leverage university support.

How Can I Add a Program to the National Directory?

To see if your prison higher education program is currently included in the database, go to:
<https://www.higheredinprison.org/national-directory>

To add or update a prison higher education program in the database, go to:

<https://www.higheredinprison.org/national-directory/suggest-an-update>

What is the History of this Project?

In 2008, the Prison Studies Project at Harvard University began compiling a list of higher education in prison programs throughout the United States. For the next 10 years, the National Directory of Higher Education Programs in Prison remained a central focus of the Prison Studies Project and an important resource for the higher education in prison community. Today, working with our partners at the Prison Studies Project at Harvard University, the Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison at the University of Utah, and the Possibility Lab at the University of California, Berkeley, the Alliance for Higher Education maintains the National Directory of Higher Education in Prison Programs (2020), which serves as a comprehensive and up-to-date resource for people seeking information about college in prison programs in the United States. For additional information on the Higher Education in Prison Landscape Project, go to: <https://www.higheredinprison.org/higher-education-in-prison-landscape-project>

Appendix A: Project Methodology

The *Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison Programs* was first launched in March 2020 and was used to create the National Directory of Higher Education in Prison Programs. The second *Annual Survey* was launched in March 2021 to update the directory and collect information about changes in the field. In May 2022, an invitation to take the survey was sent to the primary contact email address of all higher education in prison programs that participated in the *Annual Survey* in either 2020 or 2021 and to all programs included in the National Directory. The survey was also distributed as a link through a mailing list maintained by the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison and through social media and other communication outlets.

The *2022 Annual Survey* consisted of 85 questions, gathering descriptive program information for the 2020-2021 academic year of the COVID-19 crisis. Questions included where programming was offered and to whom, what certificate and degree pathways were offered, and what additional programming existed for incarcerated students. Some programs did not answer all survey questions, accounting for the varying range of sample sizes reported throughout this analysis. Some programs had multiple representatives who participated in the survey, and when that occurred, responses from different program affiliates were combined to create one entry for that program.

Participants were entered into a drawing to receive one of five \$1,000 incentives for participation. Once the survey was completed, additional data were retrieved for programs included in the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison's *National Directory* but that did not respond to the *2022 Annual Survey*. These data were used to update the *National Directory* with the most recent known program information.

Appendix B. Number of Prison Higher Education Programs, by State

State	Number of Programs (N = 396) ¹⁴
Alabama	9
Alaska	4
Arizona	14
Arkansas	5
California	47
Colorado	9
Connecticut	15
Delaware	4
District of Columbia	8
Florida	11
Georgia	17
Hawaii	8
Idaho	6
Illinois	16
Indiana	5
Iowa	10
Kansas	8
Kentucky	5
Louisiana	7
Maine	5
Maryland	9
Massachusetts	11
Michigan	14
Minnesota	9
Mississippi	7
Missouri	7
Montana	2
Nebraska	4
Nevada	7
New Hampshire	5
New Jersey	8
New Mexico	7
New York	31
North Carolina	48
North Dakota	6
Ohio	11
Oklahoma	8
Oregon	11
Pennsylvania	20
Puerto Rico	2
Rhode Island	5
South Carolina	7
South Dakota	2
Tennessee	9
Texas	20
U.S. Virgin Islands	2
Utah	7
Vermont	4
Virginia	12
Washington	15
West Virginia	6
Wisconsin	23
Wyoming	4

¹⁴ Higher education in prison programs providing programming in more than one state are represented in the chart multiple times, causing the total number of programs per state to be higher than the number of individual programs.