



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**  
**Reentry Division**  
P.O. Box 41120 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1123

DATE: March 10, 2023

RE: Request for Information Postsecondary Education Services to Incarcerated Individuals in Washington State

FROM: Kristen Morgan, RFI Coordinator, Education Services

SUBJECT: Department of Corrections Provided Answers to Questions

The Washington State Department of Corrections (“Department” or “DOC”) is initiating this Request for Information (“RFI”) to obtain information from qualified postsecondary education Institutions (“Institutions”) that may be interested in providing education programs to Individuals in the custody of the Department (“Individuals”) utilizing Title IV Pell Grant funds and other financial aid assistance (e.g., Washington College Grant).

Institution responses to this RFI may be used by the Department in determining available options to meet the postsecondary education needs of Individuals. The Department may use the information obtained to pursue direct negotiation of a contract or agreement with one or more Institutions.

The RFI can be accessed [here](#). For first consideration, Institutions’ responses are due by email to [RFI Coordinator](#) by 5:00 pm on Friday, March 31, 2023.

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**Q: Would the incarcerated students be admitted to the Institutions as regular degree-seeking students?**

A: Yes, incarcerated students are considered students of the Institution if they are enrolled in a Prison Education Program. The Department of Education considers Prison Education Programs to be Additional Locations pursuant to 34 § CFR 600.2.

**Q: Will Pell-eligible students be prioritized into classes and/or programs?**

A: Prioritization for enrollment will follow the requirements described in RCW 72.09.460, 72.09.465, and DOC Policy 500.00 (Education and Vocational Programs in Prison).

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**Q: How will incarcerated students apply for financial aid?**

A: Individuals can apply for financial aid using the paper FAFSA form and submit it either via U.S. Mail or provide it directly to the Institution they will be attending to be manually entered through financial aid systems on campus. The Department of Education will be publishing a FAFSA form specifically for incarcerated students.

**Q: Will students who are not financial aid eligible be permitted to enroll in a Prison Education Program and how will they pay?**

A: It is DOC's intent that individuals who are not eligible for financial aid, but meet priority criteria for enrollment, will be funded by the Department in compliance with RCW 72.09.460. The Department of Education does not allow education expenses to be charged differently based on the funding source. The Department would pay the same cost of attendance charged to students who are financial aid eligible.

**Q: Will students be required to wait until their financial aid status is determined before enrolling in an eligible postsecondary program or will the Department fund the individual's tuition until the award is determined?**

A: A determination of financial aid eligibility must be made prior to an individual enrolling in a Pell-eligible course of study. DOC will fund the cost of attendance for individuals who do not qualify for financial aid after a determination is made. The only exception would be if the individual's education was paid for by the individual or a third party in accordance with RCW 72.09.465.

**Q: Are there any individuals who will be excluded from postsecondary education programs?**

A: Washington State Law and DOC Policy do not exclude any individual from participating in postsecondary education programs based on length of sentence, offense type, or offense history. The Department of Education rules do require that individuals who would be banned from licensure or employment in a specific career would not be able to enroll in a Prison Education Program meant to prepare a person for a career in that field, as stated in 34 CFR § 668.236.

**Q: How is DOC defining "distance" and "hybrid" in relation to program delivery?**

A: The Department will define distance education in accordance with 34 § CFR 600.2. Hybrid program delivery means a mixture of both distance and in-person education program delivery where technology is used to deliver additional content and facilitate learning activities within the same education program. Distance education does not have the same definition as Correspondence education.

**Q. How will classes be scheduled within the prison facilities?**

A. Structured movement times for prison facilities are set by each individual location. The average length of each movement block is 2-3 hours. Classes will be scheduled in accordance with DOC Policy 500.000. Shared programming space/classrooms at each facility will be scheduled in advance of the start of the quarter/semester.

**Q. How will institutional transfers be addressed so students enrolled in Prison Education Programs are able to complete their education program?**

A. Students enrolled in postsecondary education are eligible for an "education hold" to remain at their facility in accordance with DOC Policy 500.000. In some instances, such as required court-ordered treatments, behavior-related incidences, or at the student's request, an individual may be removed from education prior to completion of a program.

**Q: What support does DOC provide for education programs provided in a prison environment?**

A: The Department will serve as the "oversight entity" for all Prison Education programs. The Education Services unit will serve as a primary point of contact for the Institutions, approve education programming and contract services offered, assess the "best interest of students," conduct compliance reviews, and serve as a liaison between Institutions and facilities. DOC will notify the institution of new or updated policies and procedures, shall work with the Institution to provide adequate infrastructure for new programs approved by DOC and provide access to the facility, programming space, and technology. The Department will also cover the gratuity costs for incarcerated workers who serve as classroom assistants/tutors.

34 CFR § 668.238 describes the Prison Education Program application requirements, including the types of services offered to admitted students, such as orientation, tutoring, and academic and reentry counseling by the Institution.

DOC also provides reentry services for individuals both generally through DOC reentry navigators and case managers as well as for education specifically through contracted Education Navigator positions located at several college campuses across the state.

The Education Navigators coordinate with regional and local community corrections offices to provide information regarding education opportunities, recruit individuals who are reentering the community and are interested in pursuing higher education, work with prison-based corrections education programs to facilitate a seamless transition for participants reentering the community, assist individuals with enrollment, completing financial aid applications, career planning, and make referrals to applicable education programs and other services.

**Q: What technical support will DOC provide?**

A: As contract staff, all college partners will receive access to DOC systems including DOC accounts, email addresses, internal DOC websites, Kiosk (incarcerated individual messaging system), and the Learning Management System for online training. Contract staff has access to DOC Helpdesks and access to on-site IT support. The Department will provide administrative support to approve and establish accounts of college staff.

Contracted staff will be responsible to provide IT support for incarcerated individuals in classroom settings and manage content learning management systems, such as Canvas. The Department will provide liaison services between College IT staff to support offline networks and the Off State Network and Secure-Internet system.

**Q: What specific technology is available inside the prisons for students to use and what will be available to education providers?**

A: For educational use, classrooms have the capability to access closed offline networks that can host content learning management systems, such as Canvas, and software systems that can operate in an offline environment (ex. Microsoft Office Suite, Adobe Acrobat, Chrome, and Windows applications.) Classrooms are enabled with desktop computers and some students are also issued Department approved laptops.

**Q: Does the Department of Corrections require Institutions to use a particular learning management system?**

A: DOC does not limit what learning management systems can be used to deliver education materials, however, any program must be approved by DOC IT security and be compatible with the technology available to individuals.

**Q: Are online courses an option?**

A: At this time, online learning is not available within prison facilities in WA State.

**Q: Where can comprehensive information be found about what postsecondary education programs are currently offered inside DOC facilities?**

A: Please see the Department's [Education Fact Sheet](#) and [Education Programs by Location](#) publications located on the [Education](#) website.

**Q: How will the Department make the determination that a Prison Education Program is operating in the “best interest of students?”**

A: The Department of Education has issued regulatory language regarding the “best interest” assessment in 34 CFR § 668.241. The mandatory factors that must be considered are:

- Whether the experience, credentials, and rates of turnover or departure of Prison Education Program instructors are substantially similar to other programs at the institution, accounting for the unique constraints of Prison Education Programs.
- Whether the transferability of credits for courses available to confined or incarcerated individuals and the applicability of such credits toward a related degree or certificate programs is substantially similar to those at other similar programs at the institution, accounting for constraints of Prison Education Programs.
- Whether the Prison Education Program’s offering of relevant academic and career-advising services to individuals while they are confined or incarcerated, in advance of reentry, and upon release, is substantially similar to offerings to a student who is not a confined or incarcerated individual and who is enrolled in, and may be preparing to transfer from, the same institution, accounting for constraints of Prison Education Programs.
- Whether the institution ensures that all formerly incarcerated students are able to fully transfer their credits and continue their programs at any location of the institution that offers a comparable program, including by the same mode of instruction, barring exceptional circumstances relating to the student’s conviction.

DOC is currently developing how we will elicit feedback from relevant stakeholders that will assist in making the “best interest” determination.

**Q: What is DOC’s timeline for approving Prison Education Programs and when does it anticipate classes will begin?**

A: Please note: Institutions will need to receive approval from their accrediting agency and the Department of Education to be eligible to utilize Pell funding. These timelines are not known at this time.

DOC is closely following the Department of Education’s published guidelines for approving Prison Education Programs. At this time, we are looking to identify options to expand and enhance our existing programs to include up to a bachelor’s degree. The RFI is the first step in the process and is meant to identify interested Institutions to work with toward this goal. DOC will reach out to all responsive Institutions to discuss their interest, identify mutual goals, and from there work to establish processes and timeframes for approval and when the program will commence as applicable. DOC’s criteria for initially approving any program are described in the RFI. At this time, the RFI is only requesting information regarding how the institution will develop a Prison Education Program, the supports the institution believes are necessary to sustain any program, and potential costs related to development and delivery.

**Q: What factors would disqualify a person from being able to work in a prison facility as a contracted staff?**

A: All contract staff will complete the required new hire paperwork (including criminal and sexual misconduct disclosures) to be reviewed by the respective Appointing Authority for approval. These are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. All DOC employees, contract staff, and volunteers are required to provide proof of vaccination for COVID-19 in order to enter prison facilities.

**Q: What is the required DOC training that contract staff will have to complete?**

A: All contract staff are required to complete in-person New Employee Orientation and online Annual In-Service Training. Staff who will work at least 30 hours in a prison setting are required to complete the non-custody portion of the Correctional Worker Core Academy.

**Q: Does the Department intend to cover the costs related to the development of a Prison Education Program to include ongoing administrative expenses, equipment, tools, supplies, and travel?**

A: The Department issued the RFI to help us identify the aspects needed to develop and sustain a Prison Education Program to better understand the related costs and scope of work for Institutions. The Department makes no assurances of any funding support for goods or services discussed in the RFI.

**Q: My institution's question was not answered.**

A: The purpose of the question-asking period is for Institutions to seek clarification regarding the information requested in the RFI or the RFI process itself. As noted in the RFI timeline of events, DOC will meet with respondent Institutions individually to discuss their interest in providing an education program to incarcerated students and other information not encapsulated in the RFI.