

A man wearing a blue short-sleeved button-down shirt, a dark blue baseball cap, and glasses is sitting at a metal desk in a classroom. He is looking down at an open book on the desk, holding a blue pen in his right hand. He has a tattoo on his left forearm and is wearing white socks and white sneakers. In the background, other students in similar blue shirts are seated at desks, some looking towards the camera. The overall scene is dimly lit, with a blue grid overlay on the image.

**YOU CAN
YOUR
MORE
TO
INVOLVED**

**MAKE
CAMPUS
WELCOMING
JUSTICE-
STUDENTS**



Access to education changes lives. For students who are incarcerated, [participating in college-in-prison programs](#) can improve their quality of life behind bars and increase employment opportunities once they return home.

Receiving a postsecondary education while incarcerated benefits students, their families, and their communities.

But the opportunity to access life-changing postsecondary education is still out of reach for most people in prison. [The 1994 Crime Bill banned Pell Grants](#)—federal need-based financial aid—for incarcerated students, making higher education inaccessible to most for nearly 30 years. That changed on July 1, 2023 when access to aid was restored.

Reinstating Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students means that more than 760,000 people in prison will have an easier time affording college behind bars. However, the limited number of college-in-prison programs available means that many prospective students still cannot access it. In order to realize the full potential of this change, more schools across the United States must work toward creating college-in-prison programs and ensure that they are fostering supportive, welcoming environments for justice-involved students.

Read on to find five actions you can take to advocate for a more inclusive, equitable campus.

- [Send a letter to your school's administration](#)
- [Share your support on social media](#)
- [Help ban the box in college admissions](#)
- [Inspire your campus community](#)
- [Learn more about college in prison and supporting justice-involved students](#)

Send a letter to your school's administration

Send an email or letter to your school's administration as a student or student organization to explain the need for a college-in-prison program and greater support for formerly incarcerated students. Download the [PDF template](#) or [Word template](#) that can be updated with your school's information.



Share your support on social media

Use the suggested social posts and download the following graphics (or write your own message!) to share your support for creating a more inclusive campus community on social media. Don't forget to replace "[@SCHOOL]" with the tag for your school's account and include the hashtag, #EducationForAll.



→ Access to college in prison has the potential to transform families and communities, disrupting mass incarceration. But it's still out of reach for too many.

[@SCHOOL], will you commit to creating opportunities for currently and formerly incarcerated students? #EducationForAll

→ Expanding educational opportunities to justice-involved students makes campus communities stronger.

[@SCHOOL], it's time to work toward creating a college-in-prison program and expanding supportive services so all students have a fair chance to thrive. #EducationForAll

→ 🗣️ EVERYONE deserves a fair chance to access education.

To make that a reality, we need more college-in-prison programs and support services for formerly incarcerated students. Join the movement for #EducationForAll: <https://www.vera.org/campus-advocacy>

→ Education is transformative, and everyone deserves a fair chance to access it.

As a student at [@SCHOOL], I want to see my university create opportunities for currently and formerly incarcerated students. #EducationForAll



[Download Graphic →](#)



[Download Graphic →](#)



[Download Graphic →](#)

Help ban the box in college admissions

Around [70 percent of four-year colleges](#) in the United States require that applicants disclose prior experience with the criminal legal system. This practice doesn't make campuses safer, but it does discourage potential students from applying.

Asking about conviction histories on college applications is one of many ways—including barriers to housing, employment opportunities, and so much more—that people with conviction histories continue to be punished even long after their involvement with the criminal legal system.

Change can come from individual school, state, or federal policy that prevents applications from asking about criminal legal system involvement.

[Take action and add your name](#) to call for an end to asking about conviction histories on college applications.



Inspire your campus community

There are a variety of ways you can engage your campus community on these issues, either through your own outreach or with the help of a student organization.



- **Host a screening of [College Behind Bars](#):** This four-part documentary series follows a group of incarcerated students working toward getting their college degrees through the Bard Prison Initiative.
- **Write an op-ed in your school's newspaper:** Writing an op-ed on the need for a college-in-prison program or ways to better support justice-involved students can show other students and college administrators that this is an important issue for the community.
- **Volunteer or organize a fundraiser for a local reentry service provider:** Reentry service providers, like [Fortune Society](#) in New York City and [Operation Restoration](#) in New Orleans, play a key role in helping support people returning from jails and prisons.

Learn more about college in prison and supporting justice-involved students

We've compiled a list of Vera resources to guide your advocacy on supporting justice-involved students and college-in-prison programs. It includes research and personal stories from students that you can share with your college administration to help them understand the need for these programs and services.



- [College in Prison](#)
- [A Monumental Shift: Restoring Access to Pell Grants for Incarcerated Students](#)
- [How College in Prison is Changing Lives](#)
- [After 29 Years, Incarcerated Students Are Finally Going Back to School](#)
- [College Applications Shouldn't Ask About Conviction History](#)
- [Filling Out the FAFSA Behind Bars](#)
- [For Incarcerated Women and Their Families, Equal Access to Education Transforms Lives](#)
- [Watch this video to learn how college in prison changes lives](#)

To continue learning more about this work and other efforts to end mass incarceration, [sign up for emails from Vera to get the latest updates.](#)

Conclusion

Restoring access to Pell Grants for incarcerated students is a victory that took decades of advocacy from formerly incarcerated leaders, colleges, corrections departments, and more. It is a cause to celebrate, but the work can't stop here.

Advocating for schools to create new programs and services for justice-involved students brings us one step closer to a world where everyone has the opportunity to pursue high-quality education with the support they need to complete degree programs whether it is behind bars or in their community.

If you have any questions about this work, contact us at collegeinprison@vera.org.

