

**P**ostsecondary education has been proven to reduce recidivism and promote more successful transitions back into communities for adults returning from incarceration.<sup>1</sup> However, currently incarcerated and reentering adults often face barriers to receiving high-quality postsecondary education. The Council of State Governments Justice Center, with support from Lumina Foundation, conducted an intensive 50-state scan and survey of the statutory, financial, and administrative policies and practices that impact the provision of postsecondary education for this population. This fact sheet outlines the research findings for Arkansas.



### HOW ARE SERVICES FUNDED?

#### Correctional Agency Funding

- The Arkansas legislature appropriates state funding for implementing and operating career and technical education programs for people in correctional facilities.<sup>2</sup> Postsecondary education is funded through federal sources—such as the Second Chance Pell pilot program<sup>3</sup>—and private sources.<sup>4</sup>
- Arkansas is not using Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act funds for postsecondary education.<sup>5</sup>

#### State Financial Aid

- Arkansas's Academic Challenge Scholarship has a statutory restriction that prevents people who are currently incarcerated from receiving the award. The other three awards are administered by the state colleges, which may determine if incarcerated students are eligible.<sup>6</sup>



### WHAT IS OFFERED INSIDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES?

#### Career and Technical Education and Certifications

- Established by the Arkansas legislature for incarcerated individuals,<sup>7</sup> Riverside Vocational Technical School provides career and technical education in heavy equipment operations as well as programs leading to a National Center for Construction Education and Research certification, including core and various craft skills curriculums.<sup>8</sup>
- Certificates are provided through the federally funded Second Chance Pell Pilot program site at Shorter College.<sup>9</sup>

#### Associate and Bachelor's Degrees

- Associate degrees are offered through Central Arkansas Baptist Institute<sup>10</sup> and Likewise College,<sup>11</sup> private institutions.<sup>12</sup>
- Associate degrees are also offered through the Second Chance Pell Pilot site colleges at Arkansas State University-Newport and Shorter College.<sup>13</sup>
- Bachelor's degrees in biblical studies are offered through Central Arkansas Baptist Institute.<sup>14</sup>

#### Labor Market, Employer Feedback, and Outcome Data Alignment

- Arkansas has identified local labor market trends and employer feedback as the primary factors that determine the types of postsecondary education and CTE programming that are offered within the correctional facility.<sup>15</sup>



## WHAT RESTRICTIONS OR BARRIERS ARE IMPOSED ON ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION?

### Statutory or Administrative Requirements, Permissions, and Restrictions

- ➔ Participation in postsecondary education programs is based on behavior during incarceration and length of sentence; people with life sentences may not participate in the vocational education programming.<sup>16</sup>
- ➔ If withdrawn from an education program for disciplinary reasons, a participant will be eligible to reenroll one year after the withdrawal.<sup>17</sup>

### Use of Criminal History in State College and University Applications

- ➔ Arkansas has 11 state colleges and universities, 2 of which used the 2019–2020 Common Application.<sup>18</sup> Both of these schools—Arkansas State University and University of Arkansas at Fayetteville—added questions asking applicants to disclose their criminal history.
- ➔ Of the remaining nine state colleges and universities that do not use the Common Application, all require students to disclose their criminal history: Arkansas Tech University, Henderson State University, Southern Arkansas University, University of Arkansas (inclusive of its campuses at Fort Smith, Little Rock, Monticello, and Pine Bluff), University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, and University of Central Arkansas.



## WHAT INCENTIVES AND SUPPORTS EXIST TO ENCOURAGE ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION?

### Statutory or Administrative Benefits

- ➔ Individuals can earn good time allowance to reduce their sentence by attending postsecondary education programs.<sup>19</sup>

### Postsecondary Education as a Factor in Parole Decisions

- ➔ The Arkansas Parole Board may consider participation in postsecondary education when making early release and parole decisions.<sup>20</sup>
- ➔ The parole board may grant parole contingent on completion of a postsecondary education program while incarcerated.<sup>21</sup>

### Parole Conditions Related to Postsecondary Education

- ➔ Regulations allow the parole board to impose enrollment in an approved education program as an alternative to approved employment.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, post-release participation in postsecondary education may meet a parole requirement to seek or obtain employment.<sup>23</sup>

### Support and Services in the Community

- ➔ The parole-granting agency provides information on postsecondary education, but does not provide occupational training, postsecondary education advisors and coordinators, and vocational credential testing.<sup>24</sup>

### Coursework Transfer Policies

- ➔ Arkansas Department of Corrections has articulation agreements with schools offering programming in correctional facilities, which state that courses offered in the correctional facilities are equivalent to those offered in the community and indicate what credits can be transferred.<sup>25</sup>

1. Lois M. Davis et al., *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html).
2. A.C.A. § 12-29-304 (a).
3. U.S. Department of Education, "12,000 Incarcerated Students to Enroll in Postsecondary Educational and Training Programs through Education Department's New Second Chance Pell Pilot Program," news release, June 24, 2016, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/12000-incarcerated-students-enroll-postsecondary-educational-and-training-programs-through-education-departments-new-second-chance-pell-pilot-program>.
4. "Donate," Likewise College, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://likewiseinc.com/donate.html>.
5. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
6. A.C.A. § 6-85-206(8). Lauren Hobby, Brian Walsh, and Ruth Delaney, *A Piece of the Puzzle: State Financial Aid for Incarcerated Students—Technical Appendix* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2019), 6. The three other awards that incarcerated students may be eligible for are The Arkansas Workforce Challenge, Arkansas Future Grant (ArFuture), and the Arkansas Governor's Scholars Program.
7. "History of Vocational Technical Education in the Arkansas Department of Correction, accessed December 6, 2019, <https://www.riversidevtech.com/history.html>.
8. "Thomas 'Tom' J. Knight Vocational Complex," Riverside Vo-Tech, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.riversidevtech.com/varner.html>.
9. U.S. Department of Education, "12,000 Incarcerated Students to Enroll in Postsecondary Educational and Training Programs through Education Department's New Second Chance Pell Pilot Program," news release, June 24, 2016, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/12000-incarcerated-students-enroll-postsecondary-educational-and-training-programs-through-education-departments-new-second-chance-pell-pilot-program>.
10. "Inmate Programs Page 2," Arkansas Department of Correction, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://adc.arkansas.gov/inmate-programs-pg-2>.
11. "Academic Programs," Likewise College, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://likewiseinc.com/catalog.html>.
12. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
13. "College in Prison," Vera Institute of Justice, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.vera.org/projects/college-in-prison>; The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
14. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
15. Ibid.
16. "Vocational Education Program," Arkansas Department of Correction, accessed March 5, 2019, <https://adc.arkansas.gov/inmate-programs-pg-4#unity>.
17. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
18. The Common Application, an undergraduate college application system, recently removed its required criminal history question, but maintains its questions on disciplinary infractions. However, colleges on the Common Application can add questions regarding criminal conviction or disciplinary information to their individualized applications.
19. A.C.A. § 12-29-202(d)(1)(B).
20. Arkansas Department of Correction, *Arkansas Parole Board Policy Manual* (Arkansas: Arkansas Department of Correction, 2015), 8, <https://www.sos.arkansas.gov/uploads/rulesRegs/ArkansasRegister/2015/oct2015/158.00.15-001E.pdf>.
21. Ibid.
22. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state parole-granting agencies, July 12, 2019.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.