

MISSISSIPPI

Access to Continued Education for People in the Criminal Justice System

Postsecondary education has been proven to reduce recidivism and promote more successful transitions back into communities for adults returning from incarceration.¹ 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 Mississippi.



HOW ARE SERVICES FUNDED?

Correctional Agency Funding

- The Mississippi legislature may appropriate state funds for college programs in state correctional facilities.² Postsecondary education is funded through federal sources, such as Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and privately funded foundation grants.³
- Mississippi is not using Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds for postsecondary education and did not apply for/receive Second Chance Pell pilot funding.⁴

State Financial Aid

- Mississippi's largest financial aid program, the Mississippi Higher Education Legislation Plan has a statutory ban against applicants who have a criminal record (excluding misdemeanor traffic violations). The other scholarships do not have specific laws that prevent incarcerated students from applying, but other "eligibility requirement[s] may make it difficult."⁵



WHAT IS OFFERED INSIDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES?

Career and Technical Education and Certifications

- The Mississippi Department of Corrections provides career and technical education in barbering, carpentry, cosmetology, HVAC, plumbing, pipefitting, and welding.⁶

Associate and Bachelor's Degrees

- Mississippi does not provide associate degrees.⁷
- Bachelor's degrees in theology are offered through New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.⁸
- College courses are offered through the Prison-to-College Pipeline Program with support from the University of Mississippi's College of Liberal Arts as well as Mississippi College, a private institution.⁹

Labor Market, Employer Feedback, and Outcome Data Alignment

- Mississippi has identified local labor market trends as the primary factor that determines the types of postsecondary education and CTE programming that are offered within the correctional facility.¹⁰





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 custody level and behavior during incarceration.¹¹
- ➔ If withdrawn from an education program for disciplinary reasons, a participant who is incarcerated will be eligible to reenroll six months to one year after their withdrawal.¹²

Use of Criminal History in State College and University Applications

- ➔ Mississippi has eight state universities, three of which used the 2019–2020 Common Application.¹³ All three of these schools added questions asking applicants to disclose their criminal history: Mississippi State University, the University of Mississippi, and the University of Southern Mississippi.
- ➔ Four of the five state colleges and universities that do not use the Common Application require students to disclose their criminal history: Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi University for Women, and Mississippi Valley State University. Mississippi University for Women also asks whether an applicant has been convicted of a misdemeanor and has an “Admissions Application Review Process” outlining the university’s next steps in reviewing the applicant’s criminal history.



WHAT INCENTIVES AND SUPPORTS EXIST TO ENCOURAGE ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION?

Statutory or Administrative Benefits

- ➔ Individuals can earn “meritorious earned time credits” to reduce their sentence by attending postsecondary education programs.¹⁴ Participants are eligible to earn 10 days credit per month for active participation in educational programming and 30 days for completion of a program.¹⁵
- ➔ Dedicated or specialized housing incentivizes individuals to participate in postsecondary education programs.¹⁶

Postsecondary Education as a Factor in Parole Decisions

- ➔ State law requires the board to consider participation in postsecondary educational activities during incarceration as a factor when granting or denying parole.¹⁷

Support and Services in the Community

- ➔ The parole-granting agency provides information on postsecondary education, but not postsecondary education advisors and coordinators, occupational training, and vocational credential testing.¹⁸

Coursework Transfer Policies

- ➔ Mississippi Department of Corrections does not have formalized articulation agreements with schools offering programming in correctional facilities to ensure that courses offered in correctional facilities are equivalent to those offered in the community and that credits fully transfer.¹⁹

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.
2. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Miss. Code Ann. § 37-106-75(3)(e); 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), 44-45.
6. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
7. "Prison Education," Mississippi Humanities, accessed May 21, 2019, <http://mshumanities.org/program/prison-education/>.
8. Ibid.
9. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019; Email correspondence between CSG Justice Center and MDOC, December 20, 2019.
10. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. 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.
14. Miss. Code Ann. § 47-5-142(2).
15. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
16. Ibid.
17. CMSR 29-010-201(2.1); The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state parole-granting agencies, July 12, 2019.
18. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state parole-granting agencies, July 12, 2019.
19. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.