

TENNESSEE

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 Tennessee.



HOW ARE SERVICES FUNDED?

Correctional Agency Funding

- The Tennessee legislature may appropriate state funds for college programs in correctional facilities.² Postsecondary education is funded through self-pay and privately funded foundation grants through Lipscomb University's endowments.³
- Tennessee is not using Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds for postsecondary education and did not apply for/ receive Second Chance Pell pilot funding.⁴

State Financial Aid

- Every relevant Tennessee financial aid program has a statutory restriction that prevents people who are incarcerated from receiving aid.⁵ Further, these programs have statutory barriers for those who do not meet federal drug-free rules and laws, which may prevent people who are formerly incarcerated from receiving aid for an indefinite period of time.⁶



WHAT IS OFFERED INSIDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES?

Career and Technical Education and Certifications

- The Tennessee Department of Correction provides career and technical education in cosmetology as well as programs leading to a National Center for Construction Education and Research certificate.⁷

Associate and Bachelor's Degrees

- In partnership with the Tennessee Higher Education Initiative (THEI), Nashville State Community College, Dyersburg State Community College, and Lipscomb University provide associate degrees.⁸ Further, through Lipscomb University's Lipscomb Initiative for Education program, students from the traditional university take associate degree courses with students in the Tennessee Prison for Women, and incarcerated students have the ability to take additional coursework at the university campus upon their release.⁹
- College courses earned through THEI at Nashville State Community College and Lipscomb University are transferable to any Tennessee Board of Regents colleges or universities and certain private colleges and universities in the southeastern region.¹⁰
- Bachelor's degrees are also offered through Lipscomb University.¹¹



Labor Market, Employer Feedback, and Outcome Data Alignment

- ➔ Tennessee has not identified local labor market trends, employer feedback, and outcome data as the primary factors that determine the types of postsecondary education and CTE programming that are offered within the correctional facility.¹²



WHAT RESTRICTIONS OR BARRIERS ARE IMPOSED ON ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION?

Use of Criminal History in State College and University Applications

- ➔ Tennessee has nine state universities, two of which used the 2019–2020 Common Application.¹³ Only the University of Tennessee at Knoxville added questions asking applicants to disclose their criminal and disciplinary history.
- ➔ Three of the seven state colleges and universities that do not use the Common Application require students to disclose their criminal history: East Tennessee State University, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and University of Tennessee at Martin.



WHAT INCENTIVES AND SUPPORTS EXIST TO ENCOURAGE ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION?

Statutory or Administrative Benefits

- ➔ People—excluding those convicted of Class A disciplinary offenses or any disciplinary offense besides verbal reprimands, classified as maximum custody, or sentenced to punitive segregation—can earn “educational good time credits” to reduce their sentence by attending postsecondary education programs.¹⁴

Postsecondary Education as a Factor in Parole Decisions

- ➔ The parole board may consider postsecondary educational activities during incarceration as a factor when granting or denying parole.¹⁵

Parole Conditions Related to Postsecondary Education

- ➔ Post-release participation in postsecondary education can meet a parole requirement to seek or obtain employment.¹⁶

Support and Services in the Community

- ➔ The parole-granting agency provides information on postsecondary education, but not occupational training, postsecondary education advisors and coordinators, and vocational credential testing.¹⁷

Coursework Transfer Policies

- ➔ Tennessee Department of Correction 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.¹⁸

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. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-7-169. State of Tennessee, Public Chapter No. 238, <https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/acts/111/pub/pc0238.pdf>; State of Tennessee, Public Chapter No. 405, <https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/acts/111/pub/pc0405.pdf>; State of Tennessee, Public Chapter No. 505, <https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/acts/111/pub/pc0505.pdf>; Email correspondence between CSG Justice Center and TDOC, December 2 and 11, 2019.
3. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
4. Ibid.
5. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-4-904(6).
6. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-4-904(5), (6).
7. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
8. "LIFE Program," Lipscomb University, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.lipscomb.edu/academics/undergraduate-studies/life-program>; "Turney Center Industrial Complex," Tennessee Higher Education Initiative, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.theinitiativetn.org/tcix>; "Northwest Correctional Complex," Tennessee Higher Education Initiative, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.theinitiativetn.org/nwcx>.
9. "LIFE Program," Lipscomb University.
10. "Charles Bass Correctional Complex," Tennessee Higher Education Initiative, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.theinitiativetn.org/cbcx>.
11. "LIFE Program," Lipscomb University.
12. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
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. Tenn. Code Ann. § 41-21-236(B)(i); Tennessee Department of Corrections, Inmate Rules and Regulations, (Tennessee: Tennessee Department of Correction, 2014), 2-3, <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/correction/documents/502-04OffenderHandbook.pdf>; The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.
15. Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-35-503(g); Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 1100-01-01-.07(h).
16. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state parole-granting agencies, July 12, 2019.
17. Ibid.
18. The Council of State Governments Justice Center electronic survey of state correctional education directors, July 12, 2019.