

Advancing Postsecondary Success through Prison Education Programs in Department of Corrections Facilities

Self-Assessment

Overview

The Advancing Postsecondary Success through Prison Education Programs (PEPs) self-assessment is a tool designed to help states reflect on their current policies and practices and identify opportunities to strengthen access to quality higher education for justice-impacted learners. Originally developed for SHEEO's Learning Community on Advancing Postsecondary Success for Justice-Impacted Learners, this resource is now available to all states interested in expanding or improving postsecondary opportunities in Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities.

Instructions

Please complete this self-assessment on PEPs in DOC facilities as a state team. It is recommended that you schedule at least 90 minutes together as a team, either in-person or virtually, to discuss each statement below and complete the assessment. Your responses will help inform ongoing planning, identify promising practices, and surface areas for growth.

For each statement below, choose the option that best describes your state.

- a. We don't do this.
- b. We plan to do this.
- c. We do this in part.
- d. We do this well.
- e. I don't know if we do this.

Please interpret each statement as it is best applied to your state. There is no expectation that you will be engaged in all the activities listed below. This tool is designed to initiate conversations within your team and help inform your next steps. You can add comments to provide additional information and context at the end of each section. **Please note that each of the practices and policies mentioned below applies specifically to PEPs in DOC facilities.**

A. Goals and Approach

Statement	Options		Notes
1. We have set a goal to offer at least one Pell-eligible PEP in each DOC facility in the state.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
2. We have set a goal to provide access to PEPs for the majority of eligible incarcerated learners in DOC facilities.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
3. We plan to ensure that PEPs are broadly accessible to both men and women in DOC facilities.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
4. The state supports colleges in successfully applying for and implementing PEPs.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

B. Financial Aid

Statement	Options		Notes
5. Learners receive accurate and timely information regarding their Pell Grant		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part	

and academic obligations prior to beginning a PEP in a DOC facility.		• We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
6. Learners have an opportunity to ask questions about their Pell Grant and academic obligations prior to beginning a PEP in a DOC facility.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
7. College and university partners support learners in successfully completing the FAFSA and resolving issues.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
8. Residents of DOC facilities are considered state residents for tuition and aid purposes.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

C. Access

Statement	Options		Notes
9. Eligibility and admissions requirements are routinely explained to prospective learners through multiple channels (e.g., flyers,		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

kiosk/tablet messages, orientation sessions).			
10. Learners with documented or self-disclosed disabilities receive reasonable accommodations while enrolled in PEPs (e.g., assistive tech, accessible materials, proctored testing).		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
11. Systems are in place to help learners obtain and submit key records needed for enrollment, such as transcripts, Social Security numbers, and proof of citizenship.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

D. Educational Supports and Resources

Statement	Options		Notes
12. Learners receive individualized and sustained academic advising.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

13. Learners receive peer tutoring or tutoring from program staff or faculty for academic support.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
14. Learners have access to other academic resources, such as research materials, library services, and technology.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
15. Bridge courses (e.g., GED, digital literacy, college readiness) are offered to prepare learners for credit-bearing programs.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
16. English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction is included as part of all PEPs in DOC facilities across our state.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
17. Learners receive career advising as part of their educational and pre-release plan.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

E. Educational Pathways

Statement	Options	Notes
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18. PEPs provide stackable credentials that count toward degrees.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
19. There are clearly defined pathways to facilitate learners' progression from short-term programs to higher credentials.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
20. There are elements in place, like common course numbering and articulation agreements, to facilitate smooth progression along pathways for learners.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
21. Credits earned in PEPs are transferable to other colleges without credit loss.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

F. Workforce Connections

Statement	Options		Notes
22. PEPs are tied to industry-relevant, in-demand, high-wage (or pathway to high-wage) careers.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
23. PEPs focus on fields that learners will be eligible to		• We don't do this • We plan to do this	

enter and avoid fields that prohibit felony or drug convictions.		• We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
24. PEPs incorporate pre-release and post-release opportunities to engage with employers.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

G. Completion

Statement	Options		Notes
25. The state aims to shorten the average time-to-credential for learners through options such as accelerated terms or competency-based learning.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
26. A significant number of learners enrolled in PEPs successfully complete their program in a timeframe comparable to educational programs on college campuses.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

H. Re-Entry and Continuity of Education

Statement	Options	Notes
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27. DOC collaborates with postsecondary partners to prepare for learners' re-entry and facilitate continuity of learning.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
28. College and university partners provide clear pathways for continued credential or degree completion upon re-entry.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
29. Learners are not subject to background checks for enrollment into campus-based programs.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
30. State financial aid is available to learners post-release.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
31. Postsecondary or community partners provide tailored support to facilitate learners' transition to a campus-based program.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
32. Postsecondary or community partners provide additional supports, such as housing, transportation, child care, mentoring, peer support, and/or life skills, to better		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

enable learners' educational success.			
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Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

I. DOC Policy and Approach

Statement	Options		Notes
33. The DOC policy manual includes postsecondary education policies in support of learners and collaboration with postsecondary partners.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
34. DOC ensures its technology policies enable access to instructional tools for faculty and learners.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
35. DOC provides dedicated space for educational instruction and learner studying.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

36. DOC policies and processes support learners who are in confinement to maintain access to classes.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
37. DOC facilities coordinate on learner transfers to support educational continuity in PEPs.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

J. Partnership and Collaboration

Statement	Options		Notes
38. Formalized cross-sector collaboration (among higher education systems, DOC agencies, and community partners) supports, improves, and expands PEPs.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
39. There is consistent collaboration between main campus leadership and PEPs to coordinate across programs, supports, and re-entry.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

K. Data and Continuous Improvement

Statement	Options		Notes
40. The state uses a longitudinal data system to track PEP learners' enrollment, retention, and completion.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
41. DOC, higher-ed agencies, and colleges use a unique student identifier in the longitudinal data system to follow learners' educational journey pre- and post-release.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
42. Key academic, employment, and recidivism metrics are reported regularly and disaggregated by relevant student characteristics.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
43. A formalized system tracks and flags learners at risk (e.g., low credit momentum) and triggers outreach.		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	
44. There are formalized data collection processes (such as focus groups, surveys, and/or student advisory councils) to incorporate the perspectives and feedback		• We don't do this • We plan to do this • We do this in part • We do this well • I don't know if we do this	

from justice-impacted learners into strategies and solutions for PEPs and related supports.			
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Additional Comments or Context: (Optional)

References:

- Vera: Race, Equity, and Inclusion in Postsecondary Education in Prison: Essential Policies and Practices Self-Assessment Tool
- Vera: The First Year of Pell Restoration: A Snapshot of Quality, Equity, and Scale in Prison Education Programs
- Vera: College in Prison
- Vera: Unlocking Potential Initiative
- Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison, The University of Utah: Leveraging the Power of Pell in Prison: Equity Challenges in Scaling the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative
- Brookings: Improving prison education programs: Experts discuss the expansion of Pell Grants for incarcerated learners