


Support Higher Education & Workforce Training in Texas Prisons

A close-up photograph of a person's hands writing in a notebook with a pen. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt. The background is blurred.

“The only way I could feel like I was doing something was getting a college education. I wanted to take every class.”

-Craig

Meet Craig



When Craig Caudill began his sentence in a Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) prison, he was committed to ensuring that time wasn't wasted. “The only way I could feel like I was doing something was getting a college education. I wanted to take every class.”

After years of battling poverty, drug addiction, and undiagnosed PTSD from his military service during the Gulf War, Craig leaned into education as a way to stave off boredom, grow his intellect, and better understand himself and the world around him. He ultimately earned three associate's degrees—in business, humanities, and microcomputer applications—and a commercial driver's license.

Craig recognizes that he was fortunate to have access to college and to be able to enroll. While Craig was able to take classes, some potential students weren't able to due to lack of space or offerings at their unit. “Everyone knew about college, and most of us saw the obvious benefits—to get an employable skill, to grow. There just weren't enough seats,” he says. “I guess I got lucky.”

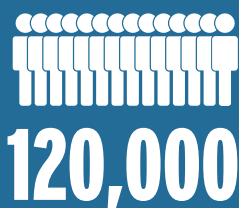
With federal Pell Grants becoming available for incarcerated Texans in July 2023, luck may not have to play such an important role in the future. New programs could emerge across the state, making the same sorts of opportunities Craig received financially possible for thousands more in Texas prisons.

Today, Craig runs his own trucking business and hopes to reach \$1 million in revenue in 2023, his first full year of operation. He even regularly visits TDCJ facilities to share his story with others. “My life is incredible,” he says. “I'm blessed. I've worked very hard to get what I have.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a framework to create a **coordinated system of higher education programs** designed to meet the varied personal, professional, and financial needs of the more than 120,000 people in Texas prisons.
2. Reform **occupational licensing** laws to ensure that formerly incarcerated people can work in their chosen field as quickly as possible after release.

THE FACTS



120,000

There are **more than 120,000 people** currently incarcerated in TDCJ facilities. According to an analysis by the Vera Institute of Justice, **more than half** could be eligible for Pell Grants.



The average person released from TDCJ custody in 2020 was **37 years old** with the equivalent of an **eighth grade education**.



Pell Grants are **essential**. Before incarcerated people were disqualified from receiving them in 1994, there were **772 college programs** operating in nearly 1,300 prisons nationwide. Just a couple of years later, there were **eight**.

ZERO

Although **thousands** of incarcerated Texans have received Pell Grants since 2017 through a federal pilot program, **zero** women (out of approximately 10,000 currently incarcerated) have received a Pell Grant to support their education.



There is currently **no law** governing enrollment eligibility, program quality, or data collection for higher education programs in Texas prisons.

THE MANY BENEFITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISONS

- 1. Lower Recidivism.** Education in prison has been linked with a 48% reduction in reincarceration.
- 2. Better Employment and Earnings.** Formerly incarcerated students are more likely to find jobs and earn better wages, aligning with TDCJ's employment goals.
- 3. Meeting Workforce Needs.** By 2030, more than 70% of jobs in Texas will require a postsecondary credential. Program development can be closely aligned with workforce needs, benefiting students and employers.
- 4. Safer Facilities.** Education programs improve prison culture and foster a safer environment.
- 5. Intergenerational Potential.** Children of people who earn a postsecondary credential are more likely to enroll and complete higher education themselves.
- 6. Bridging Racial Disparities.** Education in prison creates opportunities for all people and the communities they return to, including people of color, who are overrepresented in prisons and underrepresented in higher education.
- 7. Cognitive Benefits.** Analytical thinking and engaging in critical conversations has been shown to address root causes of criminality.

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