

Educational Attainment and Incarceration

“As the educational prospects of most Americans improved, the prison system continues to be filled with people who suffer from the disparities in education systems. Surveys of the incarcerated population have consistently shown that people in prisons and jails have less educational attainment than the general population in the United States.”¹

“Higher education (can enhance) prospects for employment after release, and function as a cost-effective approach to reducing recidivism. Postsecondary ...education offers a chance to break the cycle of inequality and benefit both the formerly incarcerated person and the society in which he or she lives.”²

“Despite the clear link between higher education... and living a crime free life, increasing numbers of colleges and universities are requesting applicants to provide criminal justice information, creating significant systemic barriers to for millions of men and women attempting to move from criminal justice to college.”³

Facts:

- 68% of people incarcerated in state prisons did not receive a high school diploma, as compared to 48.4% of the general population age 18 and over.⁴
- The incidence of institutionalization among young people who are pushed out and drop out of high school is more than 63 times higher than among young four-year college graduates.⁵
- While almost half of the general population has some postsecondary education, only 13% of the adult prison population has any postsecondary education.⁶

¹ Justice Policy Institute. 2007. Education and Public Safety. Washington DC: Author. Available at <http://www.justicepolicy.org/research/category/294>

² Erisman, W. and Contardo, J.B. 2005. Learning to Reduce Recidivism. The Institute for Higher Education Policy. Available at www.ihep.org/Publications/publications-detail.cfm?id=47

³ Center for Community Alternatives. 2010. The Use of Criminal History Records in College Admissions: Reconsidered. Available at www.communityalternatives.org.

⁴ Harlow, C.W. 2003. Education and Correctional Populations. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available at bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf

⁵ Sum, A, Khatiwada, I. and McLaughlin, J. 2009. The consequences of dropping out of high school. Center for Labor Market Studies. Available at http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/documents/The_Consequences_of_Dropping_Out_of_High_School.pdf

⁶ Harlow op.cit.