

## Bennington College Selected to Participate in Department of Education's Second Chance Pell Pilot Program

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The Department of Education announced today that Bennington College was among the colleges and universities selected from a competitive national pool to participate in the [Second Chance Pell pilot program](#). The pilot program will allow eligible incarcerated Americans to receive Pell Grants and pursue postsecondary education with the goal of helping them get jobs and support their families when they are released. Today's announcement builds on the Obama Administration's commitment to create a fairer and more effective criminal justice system, reduce recidivism, and combat the impact of mass incarceration on families and communities through educational opportunity.

"Education is fundamentally transformative," said **Bennington College President Mariko Silver**. "We are thrilled to have been selected by the Department of Education for their pilot program. This work has a tremendous impact—for individuals, their families, and society—and allows us to extend Bennington's educational philosophy into a world where it is most needed."

The United States currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world with approximately 2.2 million people incarcerated in American prisons and jails. [Hundreds of thousands of individuals are released annually](#) from these facilities. A [2013 study from the RAND Corporation](#), funded by the Department of Justice, found that incarcerated individuals who participated in correctional education were 43 percent less likely to return to prison within three years than prisoners who did not participate in any correctional education programs. RAND also estimated that for every dollar invested in correctional education programs, four to five dollars are saved on three-year reincarceration costs.

"The evidence is clear. Promoting the education and job training for incarcerated individuals makes communities safer by reducing recidivism and saves taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration," said **U.S. Secretary of Education John B. King Jr.** "I applaud the institutions that have partnered to develop high-quality programs that will equip these students with invaluable learning. The knowledge and skills they acquire will promote successful reintegration and enable them become active and engaged citizens."

Bennington College's Prison Education Initiative (PEI), housed in the Center for the Advancement of Public Action (CAPA), was launched in the fall of 2015. Currently, more than 20 incarcerated individuals at Great Meadow Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison in Comstock, New York, are taking courses with transferable credits in literature, the social sciences, and history. The funding via the Department of Education will allow PEI to offer a premier liberal arts education with an expanded curriculum in fast-growing fields like computer systems, environmental science and policy, and digital design.

"Even more impressive than the level of ability of our students from the very first class at Great Meadow, is the speed of the progress they are making," said **Annabel Davis-Goff, director of prison education**. "A great many of these men, if they had been offered a good education when they were children or adolescents, might have had other lives. They are hungry for education."

“One of our students told us that before the Bennington Prison Education Initiative, he used to spend his days zoning out in front of the television trying not to think,” said **David Bond, associate director of CAPA**. “Now he spends his time studying and has discovered a new problem: there's not enough time in the day to learn what he wants to know before he's released. Education has transformed this prisoner into an engaged student and promising citizen.”

### **About Bennington**

Bennington College is a liberal arts college in southwestern Vermont that distinguished itself early as a vanguard institution within American higher education. It was the first to include the visual and performing arts in a liberal arts education, and to integrate work in the classroom with work in the field. To this day, Bennington stands apart in requiring that every student—every winter term—get a job, complete an internship, or pursue an entrepreneurial experience. Bennington students work intensively with faculty to forge individual educational paths around their driving questions and interests. The College graduates small classes of tested students, regardless of chosen field, who are notably confident in their capacity to engage and succeed in the world.