
Prison Education Initiative Accredited to Add a Bachelor's Degree

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Bennington, VT: Bennington College's Prison Education Initiative (PEI), which serves Great Meadow Correctional Facility, a maximum-security men's prison in Comstock, NY, is poised to become [the tenth](#) in New York State to offer incarcerated people the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree.

"This means that we are a step closer to fulfilling the promise we made to offer ongoing education to any student who wishes it, in particular to students who are serving very long sentences," said Annabel Davis-Goff, the program's co-founder and a member of its faculty. "We don't think of the BA as the culmination of students' education. It's just the next step."

The College has been offering an associate's degree, including many 2000- and 4000-level courses, at Great Meadow since 2015. A substantive change report was submitted to the New England Commission of Higher Education, and the proposal was approved this month. The New York State Department of Corrections is expected to approve the expansion of the PEI in time for students to enroll this fall.

"What better way to improve yourself than higher education," said Terrance C., a recent graduate of the associate's degree program intending to continue towards a bachelor's degree. "I really want to contribute something intellectually, spiritually, morally, back to my community. It's life changing. There's nothing more productive in here for a man than that college education."

In order to be eligible to apply, students must have a PEI associate's degree, an associate's degree from another accredited institution, or sixty credits toward a degree. They must then write an essay describing their individualized educational plan, known at Bennington College as the Plan Essay. A Plan Committee will review the essays. Those whose essays are accepted will be accepted into the program. Davis-Goff expects eight students in the inaugural class of bachelor's degree students at Great Meadow.

"The process for students studying at Bennington College in Bennington, VT, and those studying at Great Meadow is identical," said Davis-Goff. "All Bennington College students are required to have a Plan Essay accepted by their Plan Committee at the end of their fourth term."

The classes offered at Great Meadow—including everything from Aesthetics to Epidemiology—are also identical in scope and rigor to those offered at the College's Vermont campus. There are between eight and ten faculty teaching and about ten classes offered each term. Students study part-time, so their completion of degrees takes longer than completion for full-time students.

"An associate's degree is wonderful and we are so grateful to have that opportunity for students, but there is something about a bachelor's that is really substantial," said Aila West, PEI's associate director. "This is a very well established program that is well recognized across the country, and that means a lot to the students at Great Meadow."

The Bennington College PEI is planning to extend the program yet again to offer a masters of fine arts in literature and writing as early as 2025. When approved, Great Meadow will be among [just three](#) of forty-four New York State prisons offering graduate degrees.

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ABOUT BENNINGTON COLLEGE

Bennington College is a liberal arts college in southwestern Vermont that has distinguished itself as a vanguard institution within American higher education. It was the first to include the visual and performing arts in a liberal arts education. Bennington students work intensively with faculty to forge individual educational paths around their driving questions and interests. Rooted in an abiding faith in the talent, imagination, and responsibility of the individual, Bennington invites students to pursue and shape their own intellectual inquiries and, in doing so, to discover the profound interconnection of things. Learn more at bennington.edu.

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