



REENTRY CAMPUS PROGRAM

Reentry Campus Program

Program Guide for Replication

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Letter from the Executive Director



On December 10th, 2009 I was released from prison in Baltimore, Maryland where I had spent most of a 10-year sentence. I had all the hope in the world that I could build a future brighter than the dark walls of the penitentiary that is stained in my memory, but I also had a sense of doubt caused by repeated failures and recidivism of my past.

Just a few years earlier, after President Barack Obama won the presidency, I watched his speech from the rec room of my cell block. I stared at the TV in amazement and awe at the fact that we had just elected a black president. I felt for the first time in my life that I was an American in the full sense of the word. I felt pride and ownership. I made a vow to myself that upon release I would go back to school and, no matter what, would finish my education.

Working full-time during the day and part-time during the night to make ends meet, I took on a full course load. In one and a half years I was able to finish my BA degree in community development at Roger Williams University with honors and I have not had to look back since. Today, I have no worries about finding adequate paying employment. I feel fully capable of showing up as my best self, fully prepared to meet almost any job applicant requirements. And, I have a sense of what I like to call “True Freedom,” the freedom of choices that having an education brings.

I was fortunate to have a friend and mentor that helped me to get back into school upon release. He stuck by my side and continued to push me. He served as a powerful example of what can happen to a person who was at one time caught up in the criminal justice system yet upon release prevailed. In gratitude, I asked him, “What do I owe you?” He responded, “Nothing; just make sure to pass that on to someone else.” One year later, while presenting on stage at a Lumina conference, I was presented with that opportunity. I met a conscientious, influential, and professional woman, the Senior Vice-president of the Lumina Foundation, Danette Howard, who pushed me on that path to giving back. This effort landed us where we are now with the Reentry Campus Program (RCP), a nonprofit that helps guide and support incarcerated individuals toward their academic pursuits.

RCP’s design and growth are developed through the lens of personal experience. We understand how important it is to make sure that those most impacted are not only “at the table,” but also at the center of the decision-making around programmatic design and structure. This is why we made the decision to operate independently and in partnership with an academic institution.

RCP was formed in 2017, with the help of the person who served as the RI parole chairperson, Lisa Holley, who also paroled me in 2000. Lisa now sits as the chair of the

RCP's board of directors. Since then, RCP has worked to achieve our mission of expanding educational enrollments and expedited completion rates for individuals who are currently and formerly incarcerated. We utilize one of the most cost-effective strategies: the Prior Learning Assessment. This assessment serves as a mechanism to provide college credit to individuals who have spent years of incarceration studying and trying to better themselves.

Many individuals end up in prison sometimes serving long sentences with nothing but time on their hands. Once incarcerated they are hustled into prison yards with the usual weight pits, handball and basketball courts. But for many, who are looking to better themselves and not only get out of prison but put themselves in a better position to be able stay out of prison, there is the education building and prison libraries which are not only filled with books but with learning communities of others who are trying to do the same. These are the individuals that spend countless hours in their cell blocks and housing units reading, studying and debating instead of playing cards or lifting weights. They spend hours, months, years studying caselaw and writing briefs to overturn their sentence or the prison sentences of others. They spend hours, weeks, years learning about their addictions and the underlying issues that brought them there, taking trauma informed classes, addiction studies, and reading psychology books comparing readings to their years of personal lived experience. Other inmates spend countless hours putting together business plans, researching best business practices along with marketing and distribution ideas.

This is my personal experience which informed the creation and direction of the Reentry Campus Program. I had spent years in prison studying developmental and abnormal psychology on my own, trying to understand the circumstances that kept me cycling in and out of prison. This self-study allowed me to CLEP test out of many courses needed for the psychology program that I applied to, greatly decreasing the time it took to achieve my associate degree. It became clear that more education equaled more freedom, more freedom in the sense of freedom of choices. Once we as individuals find that sense of freedom, its only right for us to want that for someone else.

It is one of the most rewarding experience to watch both those who are incarcerated at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institution (RI ACI) and those who are released from the ACI graduate with certificates, associate and bachelor's degrees and once released, obtain employment in careers that are directly related to the goals they set while in prison. These individuals go on to obtain rewarding careers that impact themselves and their families and communities. These successful individuals become advocates for those who are coming after them.

It is my firmest belief that the greatest weapon against criminal addictive thinking is for those incarcerated to educate themselves so that when they have gotten out of prison, they make it in society legitimately in a way that removes and challenges any self-doubt. Once that self-doubt is removed all other barriers just become obstacles to be hurdled over and navigated through on the pathway to freedom. When we have found that freedom within ourselves it is only right that we would want that for someone else.

That is the compelling reason we have created this program guide, so that others might be inspired to replicate this process in their own cities and states, so that other incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men and women can also find that freedom through education. RCP is grateful for support from Ascendium Education Group which made this program guide possible.

James Monteiro
RCP Executive Director





Today, I have no worries
about finding adequate
paying employment.

I feel fully capable of
showing up as my best self.

1/

Introduction





Current research indicates that 70% of all jobs in 2027 will require postsecondary education.ⁱ However, research also shows that formerly incarcerated people are eight times less likely to complete college than the general public and are unemployed at a rate of over 27% — higher than the total U.S. unemployment rate during any historical period, including the Great Depression. Each year, more than 700,000 incarcerated individuals leave federal and state prisons and return to their local communities and, the reality is, having a college education makes it easier to compete for many available jobs.ⁱⁱ

The impact of postsecondary education on unemployment rates was made even starker during and after the global economic shutdown in 2020 due to COVID-19. A U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report released in 2020 found the median weekly income for those with a bachelor's degree to be over \$500 a week higher than those with only a high school education.ⁱⁱⁱ Conversely, the unemployment rate for those with bachelor's degree was 2.2%, versus 3.7% among those with only a high school education.^{iv}

It is difficult to quantify the social returns afforded by a postsecondary education degree, however, social science researchers over the last two decades have established that college graduates live more stable family lives, enjoy better health, live longer, commit fewer crimes, and participate more in civic life.^v In fact, researchers assert that being college educated is not only good for individuals but their families, communities and the nation as well. "Those who enroll in postsecondary education programs during or after prison share their knowledge and skills with their children and families, multiplying the impact of a single college degree."^{vi}

Unfortunately, there are substantial challenges to postsecondary learning and pathways to a college degree in prison. Cost is a leading factor as evidenced by the decline in postsecondary enrollment in prison after the 1994 Crime Bill eliminated Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students in federal and state prisons.^{vii} Fortunately, Congress recently reinstated access to Pell Grants for students in prison, to start no later than 2023.

It can also take incarcerated students significantly longer to earn credentials and certifications and complete college coursework for any number of reasons. Barriers include: the need for students to take developmental coursework before being able to begin in-prison college courses, a lack of and variety of courses available to students, and the transfer of students to different facilities during their incarceration before coursework is completed.^{viii}

Another barrier to the degree path for in-prison learning is the lack of credit for life experience and learning – Prior Learning Assessments (PLA). Credit for prior learning has been shown to shorten the time and cost it takes to obtain a degree. It is not unusual for individuals incarcerated for a long-term to accumulate experience and skillsets that are transferable into employment skills and college credit, yet credit-worthy knowledge is often not recognized in prison education.

Continuing on a degree path after release can also be a challenge, as the number of competing requirements, interests and needs frequently cause education to drop as a priority. For example, newly released individuals are often mandated to find employment and obtain suitable housing arrangements, while obtaining vital documents and reliable transportation, reconnecting with family members, addressing behavioral or physical health conditions, and adjusting to post-release life.

The challenges to a postsecondary education whether it be the pursuit of a degree or professional certificate are heightened for people of color. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports college enrollment rates are impacted by race, ethnicity and family income with African American and Latinx students from low-income families least likely to enroll and complete college degree programs. This population also has much higher rates of incarceration, and markedly lower rates of having a college degree upon entering prison.^{ix} Reentry Campus Program (RCP), therefore, feels strongly that addressing access to and completion of postsecondary education for incarcerated individuals is a racial justice issue.

The Reentry Campus Program (RCP) was established to address these challenges and inequities, taking an innovative approach to delivering postsecondary education and alleviating some of the biggest barriers to degree and certificate completion. This guide is designed to provide insight about the development of RCP and assist others interested in building a similar program.

America's prisons and jails have produced a new social group, a group of social outcasts who are joined by the shared experience of incarceration, crime, poverty, racial minority, and low education. As an outcast group, the men and women in our penal institutions have little access to the social mobility available to the mainstream. Social and economic disadvantage, crystallizing in penal confinement, is sustained over the life course and transmitted from one generation to the next. This is a profound institutionalized inequality that has renewed race and class disadvantage.

RCP was established to address this “profound institutionalized inequality.”

Cite: Robert Bozick, Jennifer Steele, Lois Davis, and Susan Turner, “Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Postrelease Outcomes? A Meta-Analysis of Correctional Education Programs in the United States,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 14, no. 3 (2018), 389- 428, perma.cc/NKE4-KDFK.

A man with a beard, wearing a blue graduation cap and gown, is smiling and holding a certificate. The background is a blue banner with white text that is partially visible as 'R C P'.

...social science researchers over the last two decades have established that college graduates live more stable family lives, enjoy better health, live longer, commit fewer crimes, and participate more in civic life.



2/ Overview

of The Reentry Campus Program

Since 2018, RCP has been providing services behind the walls of the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institutions (RI ACI). The goal of the program is to make postsecondary education available to anyone who wishes to have access to it. The program has grown exponentially since its inception, a clear indicator of the need for these services.

The intent of RCP is not to compete with institutions of higher education, some of which provide classes within the RI ACI, but to ease access to and the cost of postsecondary education for both currently and formerly incarcerated men and women. A core strategy of RCP, as explained in more detail below, is to provide a bridge between prior learning assessments (PLA) and postsecondary educational programs, working with students where they are and with what they have already learned through their life experiences. Taking advantage of PLAs whenever possible, RCP staff help students align their interest and goals to clear educational pathways that are cost effective, time sensitive, and aligned with employment trends that are friendly for returning citizens. RCP is a voice and advocate for these students inside and outside of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC).

RCP fervently believes in the importance of providing RCP program participants with a variety of PLA strategies. PLAs shorten the pathway to graduation while reducing college costs. PLAs can also increase the number of adults who possess industry-recognized credentials in high-wage, high-demand careers. Importantly, RCP also pays for DSST exams for incarcerated students. DANES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST) were originally designed for military personnel pursuing college degrees, but DSST tests are now available to anyone who wants to save time and money on their education. There are over 30 under-graduate level college subject tests, and accompanying study materials, that students can take to earn college credit for knowledge they acquired outside of a traditional classroom.



While coursework and a predictable pathway to a degree is critical, additional support is required to ensure reentry success and transition to the outside while continuing to focus on educational goals. With its partner agencies in the RI Reentry Collaborative, RCP provides a range of necessary services and transitional support including obtaining vital documents, securing housing, employment, financial and transportation assistance, and accessing legal support, medical coverage, behavioral health treatment and emergency assistance, along with continued academic advisement.

Spotlight

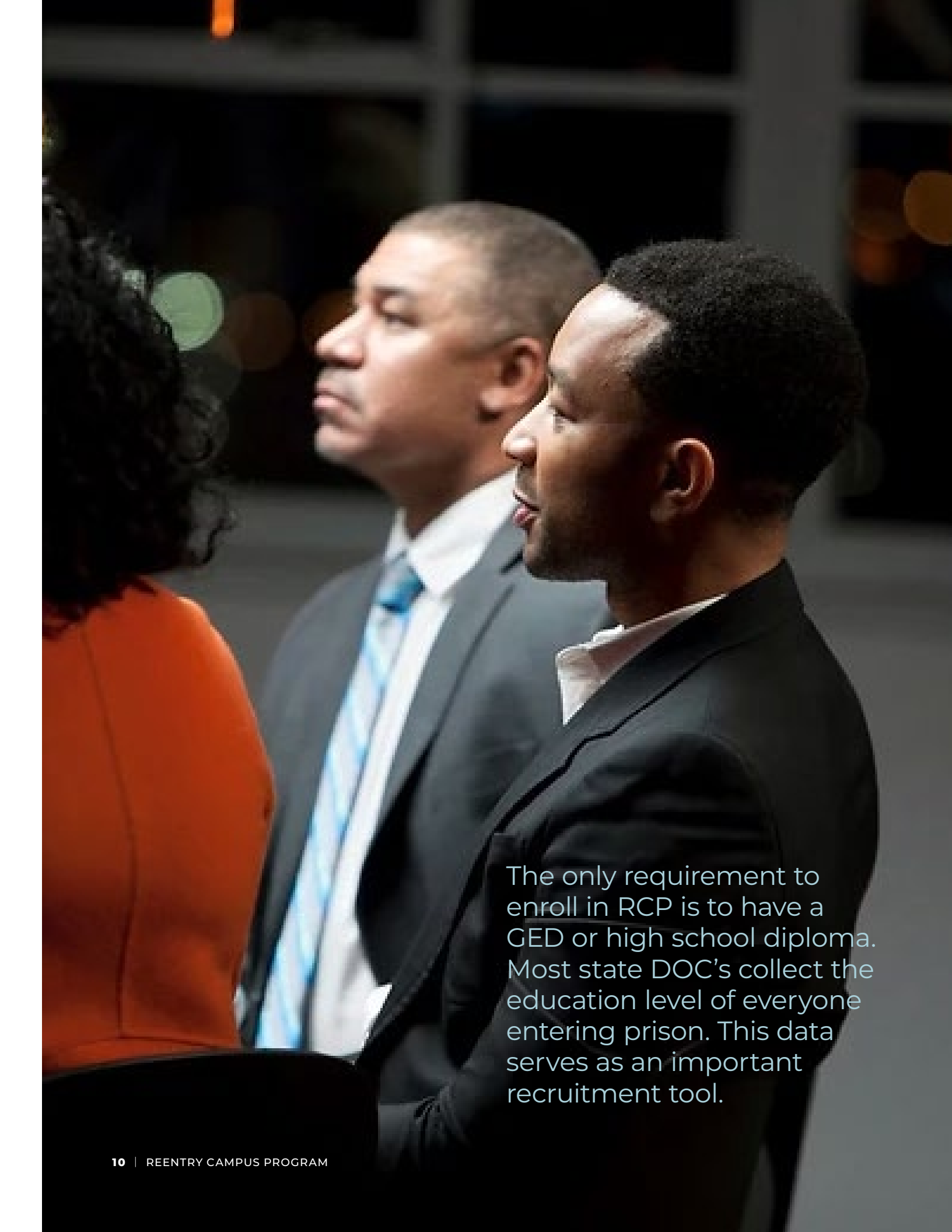
James Monteiro

Founder and Executive Director of RCP

James Monteiro founded RCP to provide currently and formerly incarcerated individuals with affordable pathways to accredited postsecondary education and certification programs that are embedded in and enhance the reentry process. Formerly incarcerated, James understands the value of education and its undeniable connection to freedom and success.

The first time James was incarcerated he thought it would be his last. With only an 8th grade education, he was unable to find adequate paying employment, and ended up going back to prison repeatedly. He ended up spending the next 20 years of his life incarcerated up and down the east coast. The last time he was incarcerated, James went back to school and earned his GED. The prison where he was incarcerated did not have any college-level classes, so he registered for an online school. He had all of his course work sent to him. He would then call his girlfriend on the phone, have her log in to the online learning platform, and provide her with the answers to the quizzes and assignments so she could enter them online. James would mail in writing assignments, and when it came time for midterms and finals, he asked the prison GED instructor to proctor his exams.

While it can take an average of ten-years to complete an associate degree in prisons throughout the United States, James was able to complete his Associate Degree in two and one-half years in prison by applying for PLA credits and completing additional course work. James' own personal experience has allowed him to create an innovative roadmap through RCP to allow those in prison to achieve similar success. James earned his bachelor's degree in Community Development at Roger Williams University upon release.



The only requirement to enroll in RCP is to have a GED or high school diploma. Most state DOC's collect the education level of everyone entering prison. This data serves as an important recruitment tool.

3 / Program Design

RCP is a unique program that works along-side traditional postsecondary institutions that provide prison education programming. As noted above, the intent of RCP is not to compete with these institutions of higher education, but to collaborate, working as an intermediary to provide critical information, guidance and support for equitable access and to reduce the time and cost of postsecondary education for both currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. While recent research attention has turned to best practices in providing postsecondary education in prisons, there is minimal research into companion programs such as RCP. Therefore, the critical aspects of each program component listed below are designed based on the lived experiences of RCP students, the field experience of staff providing the program, and research-tested best practices for postsecondary education within prisons.

RCP is still growing and enhancing its programming. Since its inception, the program design has been fluid, quickly pivoting to the changing conditions brought on by factors such as Covid-19 and the very nature of working within prisons. But always, the students' interests and needs are at the forefront of program design. Below is a brief description of key program elements, important points to keep in mind for successful replication and, where appropriate, recommendations for enhancements that RCP is in the process of planning or implementing.

Recruitment and Admissions

Recruiting and admission to the program should be designed with as few barriers as possible. The only requirement to enroll in RCP is to have a GED or high school diploma. Most state DOC's collect the education level of everyone entering prison. This data serves as an important recruitment tool. It is important to use as wide a variety of recruiting tools as possible. Outreach should include fliers, posters, information sessions for prison education staff (GED and ABE instructors) and postsecondary prison education program staff, and of course word of mouth. Outreach materials should include images, success stories, and testimonials of formerly incarcerated alumni and graduates. Emphasizing the connection between education and employment and the freedom that comes from having choices provided by education is also important. If DOC has incentives such as goodtime off sentence, note that as well.

Along with an initial application, which aids in data collection for evaluation and reporting purposes, collect a signed release of information document that satisfies Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA laws) that protect the privacy of student records. This document is necessary for staff to collect key documents such as transcripts. It is also useful to collect a writing sample with the application, such as a written response to why the potential student wants to continue their education. A face-to-face interview is critical as it will provide the staff

with more detailed information about the student's completed academic or training programs, prior work experiences, institutional job assignments and criminal history. This information will aid in designing PLA strategies as well as guiding career choices.

RCP Spotlight: **Recruitment**

Most of the recruitment inside the RI ACI happens through word of mouth. There is an extraordinarily strong desire among this population to pursue postsecondary education. Additionally, since space availability and course offerings are limited at the RI ACI, it is extremely helpful for students to have options outside of the academic institutions that are providing course in the prison to fill in courses they need towards degree completion, but which are not available in the prison setting. For example, program managers from the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) working within the RI ACI also recommend students to RCP for DSST exams and other prior learning alternatives to fill in courses they have not yet completed in their degree plan.

Additionally, RCP sends out its quarterly newsletter, brochures, and information about the program through the no cost RIDOC internal institutional mailing system. Correctional officers also recommend individuals that they feel would be a good fit for the program. Interested individuals and students send request slips through the mail to RCP staff at their offices in the RIDOC administration building.

Once requests / inquiries are received they are reviewed, and an appointment is scheduled to meet with the potential candidate to see if he or she meets the basic requirements (has a GED or High School Diploma) to be a part of the program. RIDOC records about institutional infractions can also be a factor in whether someone is accepted into the program. If the potential candidates meet the requirements, they complete an application and sign a FERPA form, which allows RCP staff to begin advocating for loan remediations, PLA and credit transferability on behalf of the client and to gather the necessary documentation needed to begin the program and eventually transfer into either a 2-year or 4-year institution of their choosing. The staff interviews the candidates to review previous academic, training and work experience, any institutional disciplinary records, and conviction history to help recommend career options.

Gateway Course

Gateway courses are often thought of as the first introductory course required in a particular program of study. However, data shows that students from underrepresented populations are disproportionately held back by traditional academic gateway courses resulting in lower graduation rates.

RCP has taken a different tactic in selecting a gateway course for their students. The course, titled StoryPathing, is designed to awaken self-identity, promote self-leadership, articulate goals, and form an inner narrative that guides and prepares individuals for high stakes storytelling — whether for interviews or public speaking events — so that their work-life story is integrated and makes sense to audiences both large and small.

RCP Spotlight: **Gateway Course**

Once accepted, students are enrolled in the required gateway course, “StoryPathing.” This course is founded and created by Dr. Dennis Rebelo, Professor of Technology, Leadership and Management at Roger Williams University. His Ph.D. research study, for which he is internationally recognized, explored new models for integrating work-life storytelling. The resulting course has received approval for three credits at RCP’s partner institution Roger Williams University.

During this course students begin to identify and express themselves and their goals. The course is designed to encourage students to acknowledge their past and have a clear understanding of how it is a

piece of who they are today, to take ownership of that past in a way that allows them not to stay stuck there. They take inventory of their accomplishments and prepare to move on to their next phases in life. Students also learn how to clearly articulate their goals and generate confidence, clarity, and direction. The students capture this work in a portfolio which supports them in college-prep interviews, entrance essays, school selection, and choice of major, and the transition from college to work.



Academic Advisement

Many incarcerated students are the first generation in their families to go to college and may not have role models from their communities to rely on who understand the college choice and application process. Students who are currently incarcerated and enrolled in RCP often have many questions related to their educational goals and their goals post release. To address students' individual needs and ease access, advisement is a critical piece of RCP's services. Academic advisors work with individual students to assess their needs and identify their passions and interests and then assist in aligning those with clear pathways. This process should be started as early as possible once incarcerated so the students begin working towards their specific goals and use their time wisely.

RCP advisors find it useful to use O*Net (www.onetonline.org) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Job Descriptions (<https://www.bls.gov/ocs/ocsjobde.htm>) to help students make informed decisions around their career choices. These resources include wage and employment trends as well as general work contexts and activities. Other elements of the advisory meetings include aligning prior learning with career choice to determine what could be included in PLA strategies. Advisors also assist students in assessing different college options, conducting degree audits and comparable costs to understand matriculation requirements for their desired career choices, and determining a timeline to reach their certification or degree goals.

RCP Spotlight: **Academic Advisement**

Upon successful completion of the StoryPathing gateway course, a student will meet with our academic advisor. Together they check in on progress towards reaching their goals that were set out in the gateway course, where the student is now in relation to those goals and determine what colleges and degree programs best align with their career path. Advisors will consider the following factors when helping a student to choose a career path, a higher education institution, and an area of study:

- Is this career choice formerly incarcerated friendly?
- What is the cost per credit hour of the institution(s) of interest?
- How long will it take to complete?
- Is the institution accessible to formerly incarcerated?
- What are the wage and employment trends of the career field the student is interested in?

The degree audit is a crucial aspect of this process. Once the student determines a career choice and academic institution that he or she would like to attend, a degree audit is performed with the help and assistance of the program staff. The team works with the student to determine which remaining courses the student is going to need to reach their academic goal. If the student has never taken any college courses, RCP strongly recommends starting with 100 or 200 level general education courses. RCP has also collected course transferability lists

from local institutions to help craft the degree plan.

When advising, employment trends in career choices are explored with the help of occupational information networks, taking into consideration criminal background and whether the career track is formerly incarcerated friendly.

RCP has a partnership with Roger Williams University (RWU), a local Rhode Island private institution. (For more about this partnership see Partnership Section below.) RWU offers competitive tuition rates negotiated specifically for RCP students and a variety of degrees and certificates. When going over educational goals with students and revealing their area of interest, we first present the list of degree programs offered at RWU and see if any align. Students however have the option to pursue degree programs at the school of their choice.

Prior Learning Assessment

A core feature of the RCP process is applying Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) strategies to dramatically accelerate the time to and decrease the cost of attaining a postsecondary degree. When replicating the RCP model, make sure to identify institutions in your state that offer a range of PLA strategies.

Research supports the critical importance of PLA strategies to increase access, lower cost, and expedite postsecondary degree attainment, especially for non-traditional students. A 2020 research study report from CAEL and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education titled *The PLA Boost*,^x found that PLA is associated with better student outcomes, including:

- PLA students were more likely to complete college credentials than non-PLA students—this was true for adult students of all races, ethnicities, and income levels – with a credential completion rate of 73% for adults with PLA credit.
- PLA has strong potential to be a tool for closing equity gaps in postsecondary achievement, provided PLA is made more accessible to students who could benefit the most. The largest PLA boost to completion was for Hispanic students and Black students. The report stated “PLA is a huge component of accessibility and equity. It is an equitable practice that does not discriminate on the basis of how the knowledge and skills were acquired.”

- Adult students saved time and money from earning PLA credit. Estimated cost savings were between \$1,500 and \$10,200 and estimated time savings were between 9 to 14 months, depending on type of educational institution attended.
- Because PLA students were more likely to persist and complete, they earned 17.6 more credits through regular course-taking at their institutions than non-PLA students.

Over the past 30 years, hundreds of postsecondary education institutions have developed systems to award college credit for what people have learned outside the classroom through training, work experience, civic activity, and independent study. In the same way that people learn in the nontraditional ways outside of prison, incarcerated individuals have a body of previous knowledge learned from the years of independent study they may have performed in their cell and housing units, institutional work assignments, and through other programming offered within the institution.

RCP offers their students PLA through a variety of strategies. Before the pandemic, one reliable PLA strategy was DSST tests, which offered more than 30 exam titles in college subject areas such as social sciences, math, applied technology, business, physical sciences, and humanities. RCP students, with the help of an academic advisor, begin to fill in missing degree requirements with DSST prior learning assessment

courses that have already been determined to be transferable to the institution they are planning to attend post release.

The academic advisor helps the student identify courses in their degree plan in which the student may have prior knowledge and DSST exams that could fulfill that content requirement. Students are then provided with study material to brush up on previous knowledge and practice tests to better prepare themselves for exams. Students can take exams three times a year. Unfortunately, Prometric, the institution that administers DSST exams, changed from paper to all online testing during the pandemic and internet connectivity is not yet available to students inside the RI ACI. This is one reason it is critical for incarcerated students to have access to technology inside. DSST prior learning exams are still available to released students.

An excellent use of PLA is for students who only need a few courses to graduate and those courses are offered through DSST. RCP works with the institution that the student is planning to transfer into in order to map out a plan for the student to receive up to 30 credits of DSST courses through RCP. If the student is beginning an associate degree, the PLA credits will allow them to complete their degree in only 30 credits (1 year of college) post release. Additionally, students who have recently completed their associate degree and want to pursue their bachelor's degree can benefit from DSST PLA tests.

Some of the known benefits of prior learning credit through DSST exams include:

- The American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service has evaluated and recommended college credit for all 30+ DSST exams.
- Over 1,500 colleges and universities recognize the DSST program and award college credit for passing scores.
- The cost for each DSST exam is \$85, far below the cost of a 3-credit course from a postsecondary institution.
- If students successfully pass the exams, they can receive credit on their transcript. If they do not pass the exam it does not go on their transcript or affect their GPA.

RCP Spotlight: **PLA**

RCP's partnership with Roger Williams University has enabled extended use of PLA strategies. In addition to DSST, the following is a list of approved learning methods for receiving Prior Learning Assessment through RWU:

- Workshops and Training Programs
- Certificates and Licenses
- Work and Life Experiences
- Volunteer and Community Services
- RWU Challenge Exams
- CLEP Exams
- American Bar Association / Paralegal Studies
- Previous Military Credit

RWU – University College has created a smooth, easy to navigate process for Prior Learning Assessment. The process is completed online and turn around for most assessments is under 14 days. It costs nothing to go through the PLA process, and staff guide and support students in the process. Working with an advisor and the academic institution to create a degree pathway prior to submitting for prior learning assessment cuts down on duplication when taking college courses.

Additional PLA strategies that RCP has used include:

- Arranging for PLA credit for the Gateway course.
- Working with RWU to ensure PLA credit is approved for certificate courses that are important to RCP students. Examples include: Peer Recovery Coach Certification, Case Management Certification and a Peer Reentry Coach certification that is in development.
- Working with local colleges and universities to aid transfer of PLA credits. For example, RCP is working to get a strength finder course approved for credit at RWU. The course is approved for PLA at the University of Rhode Island.

Transitional Planning & Reentry Case Management

Moving out of prison and negotiating all the life supports needed for successful reentry is a difficult and complex process. The high national recidivism rate verifies this reality^{xi}. Focusing on educational goals can easily get lost when there is a need to address housing, employment, family reunification, and physical and mental health issues, alongside requirements imposed by parole and probation. Therefore, transition planning and reentry support is an integral part of the RCP approach.

It is critical to begin the process in transition/reentry planning as soon as possible upon enrollment and ensure the plan is handed off to a case manager on the outside upon release. Forming partnerships with community-based organizations to provide needed services is essential. Assistance with college applications and preparing FAFSA forms is also part of the reentry process, so students do not lose progress toward achieving their educational goals. Your state's TRIO program can assist students with exploring and applying to financial aid. TRIO programs are part of a national effort in providing financial aid and admissions application assistance and other support to overcome barriers to success in higher education.

RCP Spotlight: **Transition Planning & Reentry**

Nine months prior to release, an RCP student is paired with a case manager. Once released, an RCP student is supported by a case manager and academic advisor through the RCP office. In addition to supporting the student with their higher education goals, the case managers assist in obtaining vital documents, completing resumes and cover letters, exploring career options, looking for employment and housing and any additional personal goals. The case manager connects the student to community organizations that may help with workforce development and physical and mental health services. Sharing the transition plan between inside and outside case managers makes this process smoother.

RCP has offices located in Providence, our capitol city, accessible by bus, and staffed by two case managers who assist reentering students. The office also provides computers and internet access for student use. Post-release the case manager assists the student in negotiating the steps to completing their higher education goals by completing university applications, connecting students with appropriate university faculty for further degree planning, and filing for financial aid. Case managers continue supporting the students throughout the academic year. The case managers connect all students interested in tutoring support services to the Petey Greene Program at Brown University. This program

is part of a national effort to train and coordinate volunteers to serve as academic tutors and teaching assistants for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. Assistance with financial aid is provided by the RI Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) which provides services to RCP participants both within the prison as well as in reentry.

Critically, in addition to assistance with academic goals, post release case managers provide support to assist students with their reentry plan, connecting students to partner agencies in the community through the RI Reentry Collaborative to help meet their specific needs, and conducting check-ins ranging from daily to monthly depending on the student's individual needs and case plan.

Student Support

Two key considerations in providing services to RCP participants are to use a consistent, high-touch approach and always be mindful of the unique needs and conditions of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. RCP employs case managers and academic advisories who work inside the prison as well as case managers that work with formerly incarcerated individuals in the RCP community office. A key consideration in hiring staff is life experiences that relate to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. RCP gives preference to case managers who are themselves formerly incarcerated and have completed the case management certification course offered through Roger Williams University.

RCP also ensures their students have tutoring and mentoring support. Much attention has been paid to the benefits of mentoring youth involved with the juvenile justice system, including improved self-esteem and academic achievement, and reduced drug use and delinquent behaviors. In fact, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, in partnership with MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, launched the National Mentoring Resource Center website. This online resource offers research-informed mentoring tools and resources, training materials, and technical assistance to help local programs.

A promising practice in supporting reentry is the use of Peer Justice/ Reentry Coaches. People who have been through the justice system and

have successfully reentered their communities can serve as positive role models and mentors to others. Some cities such as New York have built a certification process for Peer Justice Coaches providing training and job skills that lead to wages for the coaches. RCP is collaborating with the NYC Peer and Community Health Worker Workforce Consortium and Rhode Island College to develop a Peer Justice Coach initiative. This program is based on the successful Community Health Worker and Peer Recovery Coach certification training programs piloted in Rhode Island and elsewhere.

RCP also partners with the Petey Green tutoring program, a national initiative with an affiliate housed at Brown University. Trained tutors aid students both inside and outside the RI ACI. RIDOC does recognize the tutoring program and allows time and space for the tutoring relationships to occur. Also of note are the informal tutoring relationships and learning communities that spring up among the student cohorts. Students meet in the library during recreation time and in their housing units to do assignments together and keep each other on track.

RCP Spotlight: **Student Support**

RCP is working in collaboration with RIDOC and Mentor RI to train and support peer mentors for younger individuals incarcerated at the RI ACI. Future plans include providing mentor training to current students and graduates in order

to match mentors with any RCP student who wishes to participate. At the request of RIDOC, RCP staff was trained by Mentor RI and are now in the process of revising the training curriculum to be more responsive to incarcerated individuals.

RCP itself is supported by an exceptional Board of Directors with diverse and highly relevant perspectives to guide program success. Board members have backgrounds in postsecondary education, government, law enforcement, parole, corrections, social work, substance abuse, law, finance, and lived experience in incarceration. Collectively, the Board of Directors is a group of innovative thinkers with the experience and expertise to make material change in the education of currently incarcerated inmates, most of whom are economically disadvantaged and largely underserved.



4 / Partnerships & Collaboration

In building a program similar to the RCP model, it is of utmost importance to establish relationships with a varied group of qualified and vetted partners to better serve the needs of students and accomplish your program's mission. It is critical to develop partnerships with local colleges and universities connected with community-based social service agencies that provide a wide range of needed assistance to reentering citizens and perhaps, most importantly, it is essential to develop a good relationship with the state's Department of Corrections. RCP has also benefited from guidance from national organizations focused on justice and equity issues, such as fair chance licensing, voting rights, Pell restoration and expungement of records.

We recommend the following to make the relationship with your state DOC as beneficial as possible:

- Be sure to incorporate programmatic officials, those in charge of contracts, the head of education, and discharge planning in all major decisions.
 - Find out what educational opportunities are already happening inside the prison and make every attempt to not compete but to create programming that enhances what is already happening.
 - Include wardens and correctional officers in decision-making and implementation processes.
 - Always follow the chain of command.
 - Be sure to connect with parole and probation and build relationships and buy-in from them.
- Building strong relationships with key staff and departments at area colleges and universities is also essential. We recommend that you:
- Build relationships with institutions that are accredited and have good reputations.
 - Interview colleges to determine their PLA policies and develop strategies for increasing PLA opportunities for justice impacted learners inside correctional facilities and post release.
 - Determine college specializations to better match students' interests to appropriate institutions.
 - Determine if the colleges are receptive to formerly incarcerated or if their application process includes barriers for formerly incarcerated individuals.
 - Determine the demographics of the institution and if it is committed to social, racial, and criminal justice reform.



Partnerships & Collaborations

RCP has built an invaluable relationship with Roger Williams University – University College (RWU-UC). The institution has been responsive to RCP students' needs by providing PLA opportunities and classes to RCP participants at a reduced tuition rate both within the prison and outside. RWU offers over 40% reduction in cost per course for formerly incarcerated RCP students taking courses outside of prison and nearly 65% reduction per three credit hour course for those taking RWU School of Continuing Education classes within the prison walls. RCP's relationship with RWU-UC spans several years and affords RCP program participants ever growing educational opportunities, including certificate courses developed in careers important to RCP participants. Additionally, the Community College of Rhode Island provides course credits toward an associate degree behind the walls and is a Second Chance Pell grant site. RCP provides a supportive bridge to these post-secondary institutions for RCP participants. As noted above, RCP also takes advantage of the national Petey Greene Program at Brown University, which supports the academic goals of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people through trained volunteer tutoring.

It is worth mentioning that the RI Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) provides services to RCP participants within the walls of the RIDOC and in the community to those interested in postsecondary school opportunities. EOC is a federal TRIO program serving adults seeking postsecondary education. EOC has a designated counselor to work with RCP once a week, mainly assisting RCP participants to submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. EOC will also help students explore additional financial opportunities to cover the cost of attendance. EOC works with students throughout their college enrollment to ensure they are informed about maintaining their eligibility for student aid.

Another key early partner for RCP is Amos House, a leading social service agency in Rhode Island, that manages the largest soup kitchen

Spotlight

in the state, and provides social services to over 15,000 people a year including housing nearly 165 homeless men, women and children a night. More than 500 adults have graduated from its job training programs. RCP's partnership with Amos House helps ensure that RCP participants have transitional housing upon release and receive priority enrollment in Amos House's carpentry and culinary certificate programs. In addition to transitional housing, Amos House provides case management and employment support services to reentering citizens as part of the RI Reentry Collaborative. Also, as part of the collaborative, the Nonviolence Institute provides employment support, including resume preparation and job placement, and discharge planning at the program participant's time of release. Expanding reentry social services for its students as part of the RI Reentry Collaborative has been a critical part of the RCP program.

Also of utmost importance is a good working relationship with the RI Department of Corrections. RIDOC provides access to all of their divisions and provides space for learning. The RIDOC administration is looking into providing computer and internet access within their walls. Technology access is critical for students. The Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training provides program funding through grants and job placement for students. RCP also partners with the RI Office of Postsecondary Commissioner to highlight the need for postsecondary opportunities for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, joining together in collaborative grants and advocacy efforts.

Reentry Campus Program is aligned with several leadership and talent accelerators, including Providence-based Social Enterprise Green House, JustLeadership USA, Echoing Green Community, and Transcending Through Education Foundation. These invaluable organizations provide RCP access to like-minded visionaries around the country who are transforming their communities, addressing economic justice, racial and gender equity, environmental sustainability, and more.





5 /

Measuring

Program Success

Thoughtful determination of what data to collect and how it is to be stored and analyzed is an important aspect of beginning a new program. Metrics are important in effectively telling a program's story and accurately measuring success of both program and participants. Metrics are driven by how the organization defines success and what goals and objectives are used to achieve that success.

RCP Spotlight: Program Success

RCP is a relatively young program and as such has not yet undertaken a formal program evaluation.

As part of that process, RCP articulated the organization's main goals as assisting formerly incarcerated individuals to increase their:

- Educational levels (reduce time to degree / costs)
- Career related employability options
- Wage earnings
- Civic engagement
- Strength of their families and communities

RCP also aims to build a network of formerly incarcerated individuals who have achieved success and will mentor those who are coming after them.

6/ Recommendations for Replication

RCP is still growing and evolving but share early lessons and continuing work [not exactly the best phrasing but was trying to include a nod to RCP is still building some of the infrastructure and relationships] required for building a similar model.

1. Educational advising and reentry planning should begin at intake and follow students through their reentry.
2. Incarcerated students need access to technology both to provide a wide range of study materials as well as access to DSST testing.
3. The effective program will have extensive community-based partnerships to address the myriad issues of reentry.
4. The program should take a cross government approach to advocate for reform policies and braiding of resources that impact returning citizens – housing, education, employment, parole/probation, civic engagement.
5. Programs should consider using the Justice Peer Navigator model to assist students both inside prison and when they reenter community.
6. Various forms of Prior Learning Assessments for credit need to be included in programming to reduce cost and time spent on earning a degree.
7. There should be PLA testing centers, along with GED testing, inside the prison as well as in the community to increase enrollment and completions.
8. For those students who have accrued education loan debt, a program to assist them in addressing loan default should start in prison while students are working on receiving PLA credits. RCP pays \$5/month for 6-9 consecutive months to get students out of loan default

We also recommend that anyone interested in embarking on this work be familiar with and engaged in local correctional and reentry reform or advocacy efforts. This work cannot be done in a silo and it is vital to be knowledgeable and up to date about local and national reforms that can enhance your ability to develop and deliver effective programming. For example, RCP is advocating that the state's Office of Higher Education design and implement a process for encouraging, supporting, and selecting quality accredited higher educational institutions to provide programs inside prisons now that Pell grants are being restored to incarcerated students. A process is needed to ensure institutions do not take advantage of incarcerated student's grants but deliver quality programming focused on their unique needs.

As reentry reform focuses on the need for more transitional and recovery housing, RCP is collaborating with community-based agencies to embed educational services into these housing options for returning citizens. Ideally, these services would include a continuum of educational services and dedicated educational housing that nurtures a learning community of formerly incarcerated students while also providing necessary services for reentry and recovery. The plan will include PLA testing centers in each learning community as well as equipping them with Peer Recovery and Peer Justice Navigators.

We are thrilled that you are interested in spreading the RCP model beyond Rhode Island and are hopeful that this guide has provided insight into emerging services for both incarcerated and released students. We wish you well in your programming efforts.



End Notes

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REENTRY CAMPUS PROGRAM

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