
FISCAL TOPICS

Fiscal Services Division

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Corrections Pathway Navigators

Background

The Corrections Pathway Navigators program, a recent initiative of the Iowa Consortium for Higher Education in Prison (ICHEP), connects incarcerated individuals with educational resources through the presence of pathway navigators in the State institutions. The ICHEP is an organization formed as a partnership between the Iowa Department of Education, the Iowa Department of Corrections (DOC), the Iowa Board of Regents, and institutions of higher education. The ICHEP was established in April 2021 with the mission of providing high-quality and accessible educational opportunities, successful reentry, and the restoration of dignity and opportunity for incarcerated students. The ICHEP currently consists of representatives from the Department of Education, the DOC, the Board of Regents, the University of Iowa, Grinnell College, Southeastern Community College, Kirkwood Community College, Iowa Western Community College, Iowa Central Community College, and Des Moines Area Community College.

Funding

In 2021, Iowa was awarded an Optimizing Delivery Systems for Higher Education in Prison grant to be used to integrate postsecondary coursework into the State institutions. Through the grant, the Department of Education will receive \$1.1 million over three years. Part of this grant award was used to create and fund the Corrections Pathway Navigators program. In November 2021, moneys from the grant were awarded to five community colleges to partially fund a pathway navigator position to be based out of each community college. Each community college receives approximately \$43,000 annually and provides a match of at least 25.0% of this award. Although the Corrections Pathway Navigators program is being funded by a three-year grant, the sustainability of the program is a priority of the ICHEP.

Program

The Corrections Pathway Navigators program consists of five pathway navigators. The pathway navigators are based out of five community colleges throughout the State, but they also have a physical presence in the institutions. Each pathway navigator is considered a statewide coordinator, and the pathway navigators are based in different regions to better cover the State and each institution. The role of a pathway navigator is similar to that of an academic advisor. The pathway navigators serve as points of contact for students interested in pursuing various educational opportunities and help to coordinate the necessary details. They support incarcerated students through each step of the educational process.

Through the program, pathway navigators assist incarcerated students with the following:

- Finding educational opportunities and presenting all available options.
- Guiding students in what options may be best for them.
- Setting up funding and financial aid.
- Filling out applications.

More Information

Iowa Consortium for Higher Education in Prison:

educateiowa.gov/iowa-consortium-higher-education-prisons

Iowa Department of Corrections: doc.iowa.gov

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- Setting up courses.
- Completing paperwork.
- Navigating timelines.
- Ensuring college credits and transcripts will transfer.
- Planning for postrelease education.

Students may be pursuing a variety of educational programs, including college classes toward associate and bachelor's degrees, high school equivalency diplomas, vocational programs, and career and technical education classes. Through the program, the ICHEP also wants to ensure there will be a smooth transition for incarcerated students who are released and continue to pursue educational opportunities postrelease and for incarcerated students who transfer to other institutions.

Future Plans

The Corrections Pathway Navigators program is in its early days, and the ICHEP has plans for growing the program. Potential plans include identifying programming needs based on preliminary feedback received, having pathway navigators help form treatment plans to include education, adding additional pathway navigators outside the institutions, identifying student support services that allow equitable access to education, and identifying best practices and making policy recommendations.

The pathway navigators currently only provide educational assistance to incarcerated individuals in the State institutions, but the ICHEP has identified the need for similar assistance for individuals who have exited the institutions and are now in community-based corrections (CBC). Availability of funding currently limits the ability to address this need, but the ICHEP is forming a subcommittee to look into the use of pathway navigators for this purpose.

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