

Calculating the Future Cost of TAP

Background

The Higher Education Reauthorization Act of 1992, in conjunction with the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, made incarcerated people ineligible to receive federal Pell Grants. In 1995, following the federal lead, New York banned incarcerated people from accessing its Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). As a result of these shortsighted and misguided policies, the number of college-in-prison programs in New York fell from over 70 to 4.¹ According to research by Human Impact Partners, “Until 1994, TAP and Pell grants helped incarcerated people in 45 New York prisons enroll in courses offered by 23 colleges. That year, about 3,500 students in prison received assistance, funded by a very small share of the total TAP budget (less than 1%).²

Providing college opportunities in prison has been found to [deliver](#) strong employment outcomes, [develop employer-demanded skills](#), [make prisons safer](#), and strengthen pathways to [successful reentry](#). These programs also hold the unique potential to improve students’ lives, help narrow racial and economic equity gaps in postsecondary attainment and workforce participation, strengthen local economies and communities, and [disrupt cycles of incarceration](#) that continue to target, harm, and limit opportunity for Black and Brown people and people from low-income backgrounds. Further, Rand has found that every \$1 a state invests in higher education in prison, saves it \$4-5 on incarceration costs.³

The recent bipartisan restoration of Pell Grant eligibility to incarcerated students is a clear political endorsement of the value of college-in-prison, signaling to New York that it is past time to also restore TAP.

Methodology

Only 29 New York prisons currently have college-in-prison programs, full and part time. With the return of Pell, that number should increase. As for the size of the overall college student body, there are no authoritative figures on how many people are taking higher education classes inside prison. Additionally, we know that students need to complete two semesters at 12 credits or more before they can qualify for a part-time prorated reward,⁴ and not all incarcerated students will meet this requirement. Given these variables, we find that a reasonable estimate should be drawn from what we already know about TAP to incarcerated people prior to 1995.

¹ Human Impact Partners (2015). “Turning on the TAP: How Returning Access to Tuition Assistance for Incarcerated People Improves the Health of New Yorkers.” Available at: <https://humanimpact.org/hipprojects/turnonthetapny/>

² Ibid.

³ RAND (2016). Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults. Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html

⁴ See The New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) from The Higher Education Services Corporation. Available at: <https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/apply-for-financial-aid/nys-tap.html>

The Calculation

Prior to New York's TAP ban in 1994, 5% of incarcerated people received TAP funding.⁵ There are currently 33,000 people incarcerated in New York. Five percent (5%) of this current population would be 1650 people. According to the Higher Education Services Corporation, from 2016-19, the state awarded a total of \$2,723,000,000 in TAP funding to students (not incarcerated) with an average award of \$3,315.⁶ Taking the number of potential college-in-prison student recipients (1650) in conjunction with the average student award (\$3,315) the projected cost of TAP for all college-in-prison students would be \$5,469,750 (Note that this number is only .67% of the average yearly TAP expenditure from 2016-2019, the average of which was \$816,900,000 per year⁷).

While the cost of TAP to incarcerated individuals would be negligible in relation to the state's total TAP expenditures, the cost savings that TAP would yield is significant. A 2016 Rand Corp. study found that for every \$1 a state invests in college in prison, it saves \$4-5 five dollars in terms of incarceration costs. In other words, by restoring TAP to incarcerated people would save the state between \$22 and \$27.5 million a year.

COST OF TAP

Average Award (2016-2019) = \$3315

Percentage of incarcerated people receiving TAP before ban = 5%

Current number of people incarcerated in NY = 33,000

Number of potential recipients of TAP = $33,000 \times 5\% = 1650$ people

Cost of TAP = $\$3315 \times 1650 = \mathbf{\$5,469,750}$

SAVINGS FROM TAP

For every \$1 spent on education, a savings of \$4-\$5 in incarceration costs.

TAP spending = \$5,469,750

Savings in incarceration costs = $\$4$ to $\$5 \times \$5,469,750 = \mathbf{\$22$ to $\mathbf{\$27.5$ million a year

⁵ See fn 1, Human Impact Partners (2015); Also note, in states where state level aid has already been restored to incarcerated people--Ohio, California, New Jersey--the number of students enrolled is between 3-5%. In California, the BOG waiver and an enrollment policy change in 2014 allows for community colleges to teach at every prison. This state enrolls 3.5% of all people in state prisons in community college programs. In OH, a state contract program that replaced Pell after the revocation in 1994 allows for programs at nearly all prison facilities and the state plans to expand to the locations where it does not currently have college programs. This includes vocational and academic programs. This state planned to expand enrollment to 5% of its prison population when access was granted to all facility levels. NJ operates college programs in 7 of the 9 prison facilities that could host a college program in the state. The program serves 4% of the state prison population at present (with facilities not served subtracted from the total). In estimating expansion to those facilities, adding students and the populations of currently not served facilities would still result in a 4% enrollment rate. See Don't Stop Now: California leads the nation in using public higher education to address mass incarceration. Will we continue? Available at: <https://correctionstocollegeca.org/resources/dont-stop-now>. The NJ and OH figures are courtesy of the Vera Institute of Justice as directly reported by college programs or the DOC in those states.

⁶ See NY state budget reports from Higher Education Services Corporation, New York State (2017, 2018, 2019). Available at: <https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy19/exec/agencies/appropData/HigherEducationServicesCorporationNewYorkState.html>
AND
<https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy20/exec/agencies/appropData/HigherEducationServicesCorporationNewYorkState.html>
AND
<https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy21/exec/agencies/appropdata/HigherEducationServicesCorporationNewYorkState.html>

⁷ Ibid.