Department of Management
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Higher Education in Iowa's Prisons 2016-2023

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Key Findings

- Iowa's long history of partnerships between colleges, universities and Iowa's prisons pre-dates the implementation of the U.S. Second Chance Pell Experiment that lasted from 2016-2023.
- Grinnell College, DMACC, ICCC, University of Iowa, IWCC, SCC have offered in-person classes to incarcerated individuals (II) through agreements with prisons at Clarinda, Fort Dodge, Mitchellville, Oakdale, Fort Madison, Mount Pleasant, Rockwell City, and Newton.
- The student population that was analyzed included 1,369 incarcerated individuals who enrolled in 23,770 credits between 2016 and 2023.
- The average age of incarcerated students was 33.7 years, and they were 74.8% white, 21.6% black, and 1.4% Hispanic.
- 1,109 (81.0%) incarcerated students exited prison during the study period while 260 (19.0%) did not exit.
- 505 students returned to prison at least once before 9/30/2025.
- Students returned to subsequent incarcerations in an average of 16.1 months (compared to 17.9 months for non-students).
- Students were incarcerated for more Violent and serious crimes in their initial incarceration compared to subsequent incarcerations.
- For both initial and subsequent releases, fewer students were paroled and more went to work release than non-students.
- Students were 19% less likely to recidivate within one year, however, there was no statistically significant difference in recidivism between students and non-students at the three-year mark.
- Serious students, defined as those who completed at least 12 credits, did not statistically differ in recidivism rates compared to non-students.
- Degree earners had statistically significantly lower recidivism rates than non-students at the one-year and three-year mark. However, it is important to note that the low number of degree earners may be contributing to the results.
- Interviews with academic instructors, college program staff, and prison staff found that even though offering higher education in prisons is labor-intensive and requires ongoing coordination, the effort is worth it.

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Introduction

The Iowa Department of Corrections (IDOC) operates nine prison facilities that house over 8,200 individuals daily, oversees eight district correctional services departments, and supervises over 30,800 people in the community on "community-based corrections" (CBC).[1] IDOC values and beliefs state "People can change. Every person should be treated with dignity and respect. Our efforts help make people safer. We must work as a team if we are to succeed."

Within the correctional system, education of varying types is offered including college courses. Research also supports academic education as a means to employment and financial stability[2,3,4,5] Between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2023, the United States Department of Education invested in the Second Chance Pell Experiment which allowed incarcerated individuals to use federal Pell Grant funds to pay for college courses taken while in prison. [6] The impact and outcomes on incarcerated students post-exit were studied nationally and it was found that education improved employment opportunities, financial independence, and reduced recidivism.[7] For these reasons, the Federal government legislatively changed eligibility for incarcerated individuals to have full access to Pell Grants and eliminated the "experiment" designation in 2023.

Iowa Post-Secondary Correctional Education

Even before the Second Chance Pell Experiment, Iowa institutions of higher education had been proactive in offering classes to incarcerated individuals. In 2009, Grinnell College established a private fund and began offering academic classes to incarcerated individuals (i.e., incarcerated students). Iowa Central Community College (ICCC) began offering classes in 2016 under the Second Chance Pell grant and the University of Iowa offered classes to incarcerated students through special funding (i.e., not Second Chance Pell) from 2018 through 2020. Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) became a Second Chance Pell site in 2022. Though from 2019 to 2022 DMACC collaborated with Grinnell College who paid for their

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[1] Iowa Department of Corrections Website. https://doc.iowa.gov/about-us

[2] Ballou, A. (2024). Degrees of difference: Do college credentials earned behind bars improve labor market outcomes? *Criminology, 62,* 129-155

[3] Bozick, R., Steele, J., Davis, L, & Turner, S. (2018). Does providing inmates with education improve postrelease outcomes? A meta-analysis of correctional education programs in the United States. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 14*(3), 389-428

[4] Davis, L.M., Steele, J.L., Bozick, R., Williams, M.V., Turner, S., Miles, J.N.V., Saunders, J. & Steinberg, P.S. (2014). How effective is correctional education and where do we go from here? Rand Corporation https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR564.htmlhttps://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR500/RR564/RAND_RR564.pdf

[5] Duwe, G. & Clark, V. (2014). The effects of prison-based educational programming on recidivism and employment. *The Prison Journal, 94*(4), 454-478

[6] USDOE ESI Report, 2023

[7] Taber, N. and Muralidharan, A. (June 2023). Second Chance Pell: Six Years of Expanding Higher Education Programs in Prisons, 2016-2022, Vera Institute https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/second-chance-pell-six-years-of-expanding-access-to-education-in-prison.pdf

students to take DMACC classes. Iowa Western Community College (IWCC) and Southeastern Community College (SCC) began offering academic classes to incarcerated students in 2022 through Second Chance Pell.

Table 1 shows when different colleges offered courses in different correctional institutions between 2016 and 2023.

Table 1. Iowa Colleges & Universities Active in Correctional Institutions

Prison	Calendar Year 2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Anamosa State Penitentiary								
Clarinda Correctional Facility			ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC IWCC	IWCC
Fort Dodge Correctional Facility	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC
Iowa Correctional Institution for Women Institution for Women	DMACC	DMACC	ICCC DMACC	ICCC DMACC	ICCC DMACC	ICCC DMACC	ICCC Grinnell DMACC	Grinnell DMACC
Iowa Medical and Classification Center			ICCC U of I	ICCC U of I	ICCC U of I	ICCC	ICCC	
Iowa State Penitentiary							SCC	SCC
Mount Pleasant Correctional Facility							SCC	SCC
North Central Correctional Facility	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC	ICCC
Newton Correctional Facility	Grinnell	Grinnell	Grinnell ICCC	Grinnell ICCC DMACC	Grinnell ICCC DMACC	Grinnell ICCC DMACC	Grinnell ICCC DMACC	Grinnell DMACC

Iowa academic and correctional institutions invest in post-secondary correctional education because it is believed to contribute to successful reentry for people who have been incarcerated thereby promoting public safety. Nationally, this supposition is supported by the findings from the Second Chance Pell evaluation. Locally, it has been difficult for Iowa to analyze incarcerated student outcomes because of the strict privacy rules held by colleges and prisons. An additional challenge is the lack of student outcomes data, despite having documentation of academic partnerships in prison annual reports. As Iowa prepares to embrace the next phase of Post-Secondary Correctional Education (PSCE) through new Pell Grant eligibility guidelines, there is a unique opportunity to amalgamate the data pieces for a complete view of higher education in Iowa's prisons.

Purpose

Post-Secondary Correctional Education (PSCE) has been offered in Iowa since 2009. However, a comprehensive overview of academic courses, institutions, programs, and students in Iowa's prison has not been conducted. The close of the "Second Chance Pell Experiment", that ran from 2016 through 2023, presents an ideal opportunity for a snapshot into Iowa's prison education.

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Document the evolution of higher education in Iowa's prisons through 2023;
2. Examine incarcerated student demographics and credit completion between 2016 and 2023; and

3. Compare recidivism and revocation rates of incarcerated students with incarcerated individuals who did not take higher education classes.

Methodology

The Iowa Department of Management, Division of Data, Planning, and Improvement (DOM-DPI) is Iowa's Statistical Analysis Center (SAC). DOM-DPI received funding from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) to conduct an evaluation of Iowa's PSCE. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by an independent Institutional Review Board on March 7, 2025. Data Sharing Agreements (DSAs) were executed with IDOC, the Iowa Department of Education (IDE), Grinnell College, the University of Iowa, ICCC, and DMACC.

This evaluation included multiple data collection techniques, including:

1. Interviews with academic coordinators and instructors from multiple colleges and universities.
2. Interviews with educators and other members of the Iowa Consortium on Higher Education in Prisons (ICHEP).
3. Interviews with prison staff who determine eligibility and coordinate college courses.
4. Student data was collected from colleges and IDE.
5. Data on incarcerated individuals was collected from Iowa's Justice Data Warehouse (JDW), a central repository of key criminal and juvenile justice information received from the Judicial Branch (adult court and juvenile court services), Department of Corrections, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

The incarcerated student population ("students") were defined as individuals who were enrolled in college course(s) while incarcerated at some point between 1/1/2016 and 12/31/2023 and for whom offender IDs could be identified (N=1,369). The length of incarceration was not uniform. Therefore, some incarcerated students would have had more opportunity (i.e., time) to take courses than others. The comparison population ("non-students") included individuals who were both incarcerated and exited prison sometime between 1/1/2016 and 9/30/2024, but who did not enroll in college course(s) during that time (N=28,939) (See Table 2).

Table 2. Study Population

Study Population: Incarcerated Students & Non-Students, 2016-2023		
	Students	Non-Students
Total	**1,369**	**28,939**

Analysis

First, the colleges and course delivery were identified. Then, students were described. Finally, comparisons between students and non-students were provided. All prison exits for the student and non-student populations that occurred between 1/1/2016 to 9/30/2025 were examined. Next, recidivism was analyzed by comparing the first time an II exited prison (between 1/1/2016 and 9/30/2024) with any subsequent prison admissions that occurred between 1/1/2016 and 9/30/2025. If there was a new admission to prison after the exit date, then the individual recidivated. The one-year and three-year recidivism analysis was limited to a

single exit per incarcerated individual (II) to ensure independent observations. For student participants, the "index exit" was defined as the first release following their initial enrollment in college coursework. For the comparison group (non-students), the index exit was defined as their first release within the study period. Recidivism was the primary dependent variable and is defined as a return to prison for any reason within one or three years of the index exit.

Participation in higher education was evaluated using three distinct treatment definitions to measure "dosage" effects:

- Participation: Individuals who earned at least one college credit.
- Serious Students: Individuals who earned a minimum of 12 credits (equivalent to one full-time semester).
- Attainment: Individuals who earned a degree or professional credential prior to release.

Several logistic regression models were employed to estimate the relationship between college participation and recidivism. To isolate the effect of the 2CP program, the models controlled for several demographic and criminogenic factors known to influence reentry outcomes, including:

- Demographics: Race, gender, and age at the time of release.
- Criminal History: Convicting charge class (e.g., felony vs. misdemeanor) and charge type (e.g., violent, property, drug, or public order).

Results

Post-Secondary Correctional Education (PSCE)

Grinnell College

Grinnell College initiated the Liberal Arts in Prison Program[8] in 2009. Through this program, incarcerated students may complete 60 credits. Classes are offered in-person at the prison and follow the same semester schedule as the Grinnell College campus. Occasionally, the prison campus offers a January term. Student tuition is funded through private donations. The program is open to all eligible students who meet admission requirements, including long-term incarcerated individuals who want to be intellectually engaged. Grinnell College has taught classes in Newton Correctional Facility (NCF) and Iowa Correctional Institution for Women (ICIW).

Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC)

DMACC has offered college classes since at least 2016 at ICIW and since 2019 at NCF. Funding for incarcerated DMACC students at ICIW came from Skylark Scholarships from Iowa Women's Foundation and Friends of Women Prisoners grants. Grinnell College had wanted to offer their students at NCF an opportunity to complete an associate's degree. To this end, Grinnell entered into an agreement with DMACC where Grinnell incarcerated students could enroll in DMACC classes which would be paid for by Grinnell's private fund. This allowed incarcerated individuals the opportunity to earn a degree from DMACC before DMACC had

[8] Grinnell College Liberal Arts in Prison Program https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/centers-programs/liberal-arts-prison-program

become an official Second Chance Pell Experiment Site. DMACC did become an official Second Chance Pell Experiment Site in 2022.

Iowa Central Community College (ICCC)

ICCC became Iowa's first Second Chance Pell Experimental Site in 2016 offering classes at Fort Dodge Correctional Facility (FDCF) and North Central Correctional Facility (NCCF). Then, from 2018-2022, ICCC began offering classes at NCF, ICIW, Clarinda Correctional Facility (CCF), and Iowa Medical and Classification Center (IMCC).

Iowa Western Community College (IWCC)

IWCC became a Second Chance Experimental Site in 2022 and offered classes at CCF in 2023.

Southeastern Community College (SCC)

SCC became a Second Chance Experimental Site in 2020 and offered classes at Iowa State Penitentiary (ISP) and Mount Pleasant Correctional Facility (MPCF) in 2022 and 2023.

University of Iowa

The University of Iowa offered a program called "Beyond Bars" at the IMCC from 2018 through 2020.

Student Recruitment

The colleges advertise information sessions and classes by printing posters and placing them at various approved locations in the prisons. They post a notice to the prison-approved internet page ("Offnet"), and they send electronic notices to inmates' secure email system ("O-mail"). Students attend information sessions or set appointments with staff where they can complete college applications and financial aid forms. Advisors meet with students and together they map an academic program. Prison counselors keep college advisors informed of student eligibility and anticipated release dates. Currently enrolled students can get assistance to register for the next term during the final week of classes.

Students must complete an application process, including submitting high school completion or equivalency transcripts. The admissions process may also include an essay and participation in an interview. Students may be denied admission if the student's preparation or ability to complete college-level coursework is lacking, they do not qualify for funding, or they have not yet earned the privilege in the prison.

Students need to be granted the privilege to access computers, whether provided by the college or made available by the prison. Computers are set to strict security standards. Students use computers to write assignments, and then the assignments are printed and handed in for grading.

Student Enrollment

This study focused on 1,369 incarcerated individuals who enrolled in PSCE between 1/1/2016 and 12/31/2023. Students typically enrolled in one college (N=1,242). There were a small number of students who enrolled in two or more colleges (N=127). As shown in Table 3, students enrolled in a total of 23,770 credits, averaging 15.9 credits by college enrollment.

When the total credits (23,770) are divided by actual students, the average credits taken by students is 17.4. The number of credits taken ranged from 1 to 133.

Table 3. Students and Credits by College

Average Credits Per Student 2016-2023	Total Credits	Enrolled Students	Average Credits
ICCC	19,773	871	22.7
DMACC	1,519	332	4.6
U of Iowa	1,016	145	7.0
Grinnell	1,179	112	10.5
SCC	170	26	6.5
IWCC	113	10	11.3
Total	**23,770**	**1,496**	**15.9**

Figure 1 shows the number of students by college. ICCC served 63.6% of the 1,369 incarcerated students.

Figure 1. Student Numbers by College

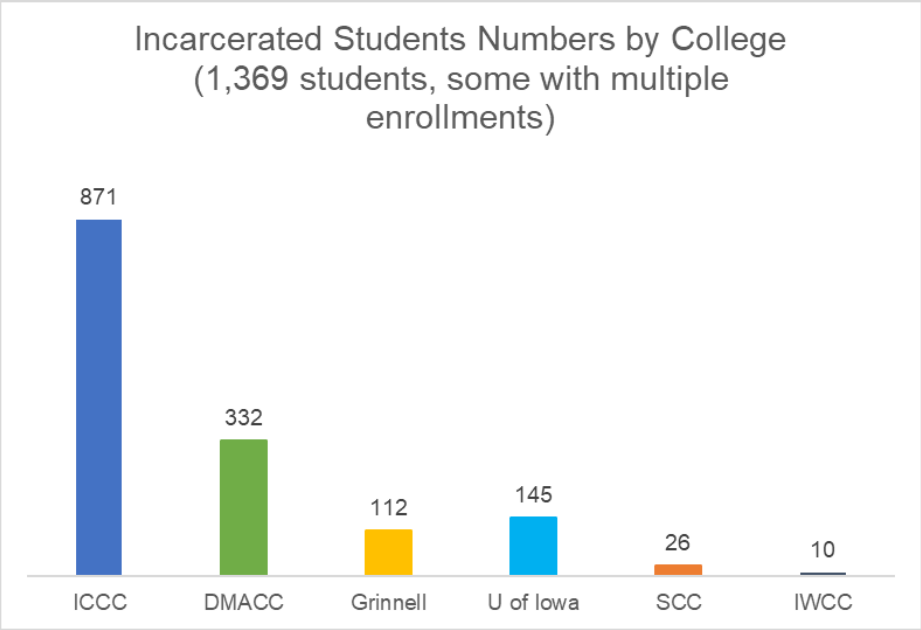


Figure 2 shows that most students (84.4%) completed between 1 and 36 credits.

Figure 2. Total Credits Taken by Incarcerated Students

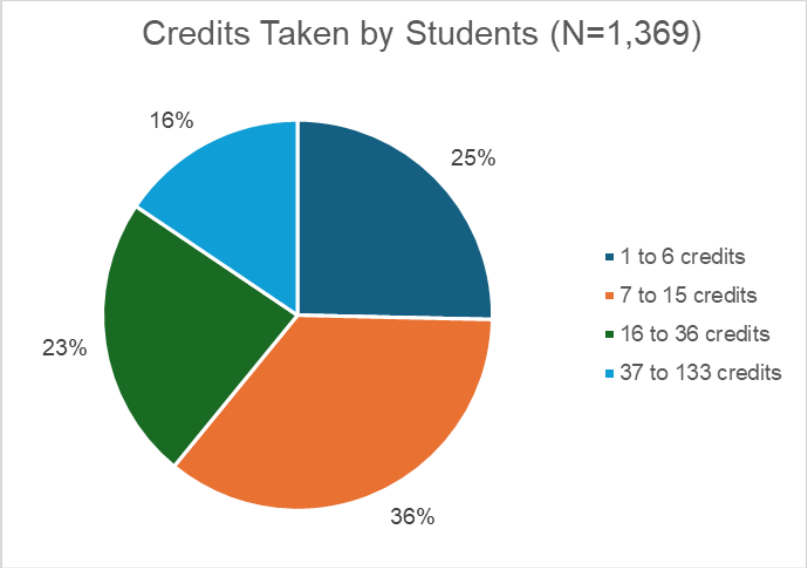


Table 4 details the number of credits earned through Iowa colleges and universities from 2016 through 2023. Both ICCC and Grinnell offered classes every year, while the other colleges offered courses at different times.

Table 4. Credits Earned by Incarcerated Students

PSCE Credits by College and Year									
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
ICCC	468	1,509	1,758	3,217	1,242	2,268	3,219	6,092	19,773
DMACC	142	70	132	108	152	133	362	420	1,519
U of Iowa			104	219	693				1,016
Grinnell	303	145	177	89	109	122	29	205	1,179
SCC							30	140	170
IWCC								113	113
Total	**913**	**1,724**	**2,171**	**3,633**	**2,196**	**2,523**	**3,640**	**6,970**	**23,770**

Courses

Together, the colleges and universities offered 242 different PSCE courses. ICCC offered 130 courses; Grinnell offered 46; DMACC offered 32; University of Iowa offered 23; SCC offered 7; and IWCC offered 4 courses. These courses are listed in Appendix A.

Demographics

The tables below present demographics of the incarcerated student population along with the comparison group (i.e., non-student population). Table 5 shows the gender distribution of students and non-students. There is a significantly higher percentage of females in the student population (x^2=36.7, df=1, p<.001).

Table 5. Gender of Incarcerated Students and Non-Students

Gender of Study Populations				
	Incarcerated Students		Non-Students	
	N=	%	N=	%
Female	277	20.2%	4,121	14.2%
Male	1,092	79.8%	24,807	85.7%
Unknown			11	0%
Total	**1,369**	**100%**	**28,939**	**100%**

Table 6 provides the age distribution of students and non-students. The average age of incarcerated students was 33.7 years, which is significantly younger than for non-students who averaged 37.4 years (t-stat=-14.0, df=48,321, p<.001).

Table 6. Age of Incarcerated Students and Non-Students

Age of Study Populations				
	Incarcerated Students		Non-Students	
	N=	%	N=	%
17 & Under	2	0.1%	4	0.0%
18-20	51	3.7%	479	1.7%
21-25	264	19.3%	4,219	14.6%
26-30	322	23.5%	5,169	17.9%
31-35	254	18.6%	5,159	17.8%
36-40	197	14.4%	4,531	15.7%
41-50	208	15.2%	5,486	19.0%
51-60	51	3.7%	2,911	10.1%
61-70	17	1.2%	809	2.8%
71-80	2	0.1%	140	0.5%
81+	1	0.1%	31	0.1%
Unknown		0.0%	1	0.0%
Total	**1,369**	**100%**	**28,939**	**100%**

Table 7 shows the race/ethnicity distribution of students and non-students. Both the student and non-student populations consisted primarily of white individuals (73.3% and 73.7%, respectively) with black individuals representing the second most common group at 21.6% for students and 22.8% for non-students.

Table 7. Race/Ethnicity of Incarcerated Students and Non-Students

Race/Ethnicity of Study Populations				
	Incarcerated Students		Non-Students	
	N=	%	N=	%
American Indian or Alaska Native	42	3.1%	673	2.3%
Asian or Pacific Islander	7	0.5%	301	1.0%
Black	296	21.6%	6,604	22.8%
White	1,003	73.3%	21,325	73.7%
Hispanic	21	1.5%	-	0.0%
Unknown	-	0.0%	36	0.1%
Total	**1,369**	**100.0%**	**28,939**	**100.0%**

PSCE and ICON

PSCE is offered and tracked through individual colleges. Iowa Corrections Offender Network (ICON) is the DOC's internal system for tracking an offender's activities. Ideally, ICON tracking can identify all of the incarcerated student's educational accomplishments, but there have been barriers to this process. Colleges are limited on what they can share with prison staff due to confidentiality rules[9], and prison staff have little time to track down individual course data. Table 8 shows the differences between college-specific interventions in ICON that are created and documented by prison staff and the student numbers that were provided to DOM-DPI by colleges. ICON undercounts all but IWCC student numbers, reflecting the disconnect between official records kept by colleges and the ability of corrections staff to access that information.

Table 8. Comparison of ICON Admissions to Interventions and Number of Students Reported by Colleges

ICON Intervention	ICON Admissions	College	# Students	Difference
DMACC AA	29	DMACC	280	**251**
Grinnell College	29	Grinnell	147	**118**
IWCC Industrial Tech	10	IWCC	10	**0**
UI LABB College Classes	25	UI	114	**89**
ICCC	806	ICCC	856	**50**
SCC	24	SCC	26	**2**

Prison Exits & Returns

The study population included 1,369 incarcerated students who were compared to 28,939 non-student offenders who were incarcerated at some point between 1/1/2016 and 12/31/2023. Of the student population, there were 522 (38%) students who began their prison sentence prior to 1/1/2016 and 847 (62%) students who began their sentence between 1/1/2016 and 12/31/2023. For the non-student population, 6,589 (22.8%) began their incarceration before 2016 while 25,053 (77.2%) began their incarceration between 1/1/2016 to 12/31/2023 (see Table 9).

[9] https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/ferpa

Table 9. Study Population Initial Prison Entrance

Entered	Students	Non-Students
Prior to 2016	522	6,589
Between 2016-2023	847	22,350
Total	**1,369**	**28,939**

Of the student population, 1,109 (81.0%) exited prison between 1/1/2016 and 9/30/2025, while 260 (19.0%) did not exit. For the comparison population, researchers purposely chose non-students who had exited (see Table 10).

Table 10. Study Population Offenders Who Exited Prison

	Students		Non-Students	
	N=	%	N=	%
Exited	1,109	81.0%	28,939	100%
Did Not Exit	260	19.0%	-	0%

Table11a presents the number of times that individuals exited from prison during the period of this evaluation. Table 11b shows there were 604 students and 18,952 non-students who exited once and did not return, which indicates successful reentry in the community (thus far). There were 505 student returns (45.5% of students who exited) compared to 9,987 non-student returns (34.5% of non-students who exited) which is a significantly higher return rate for students (X^2=57.1, df=1, p<.001). For those who returned to prison, or recidivated, the returns and subsequent exits ranged from two exits to 11 exits.

Table 11a. Number of Times Incarcerated Individuals Exited Prison

	Students		Non-Students	
Number of Exits	N=	Total # Exits	N=	Total # Exits
0	260	0	0	0
1	604	604	18,952	18,952
2	254	508	6,322	12,644
3	160	480	2,453	7,359
4	59	236	866	3,464
5	25	125	266	1,330
6+	7	42	80	480
Total	**1,369**	**1,995**	**28,939**	**44,229**

Table 11b. Number of Prison Exits and Returns

	Students		Non-Students	
	N=	%	N=	%
Total Exited	1,109	100%	28,939	100%
Returned	505	45.5%	9,987	34.5%
Did not Return	604	54.5%	18,952	65.5%

Incarceration Characteristics

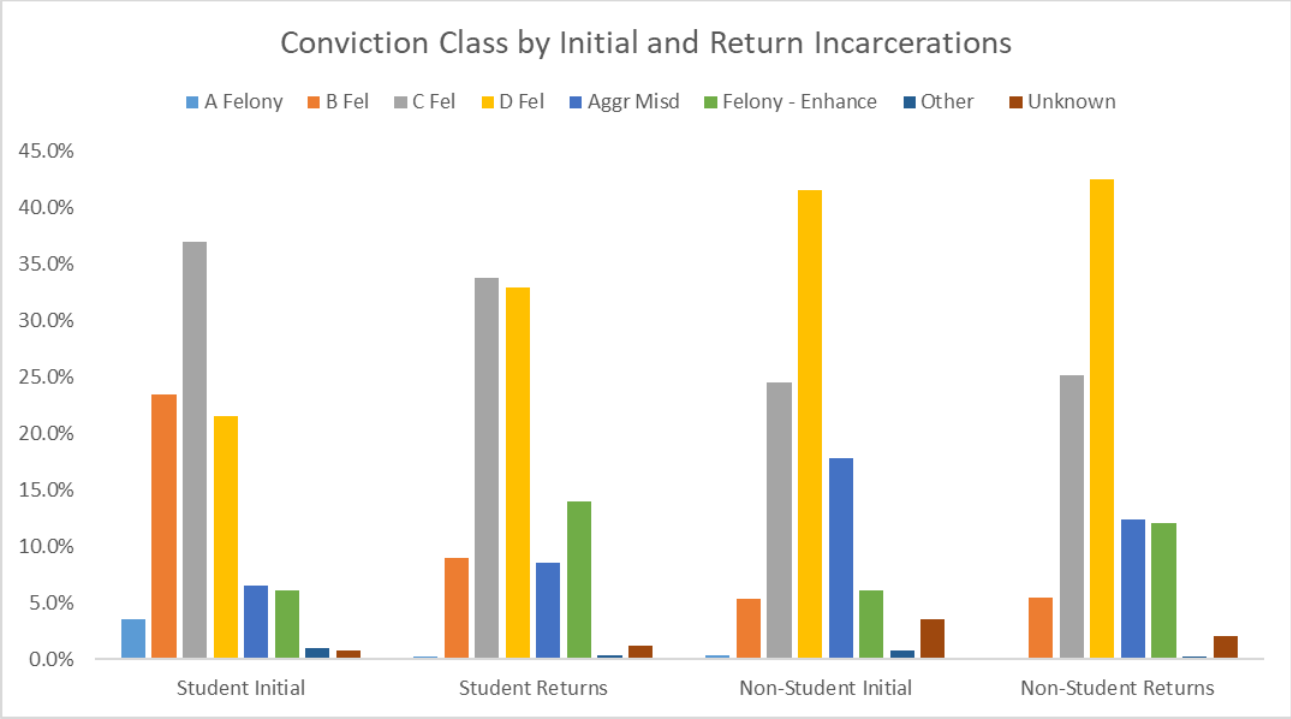
The crime class for which students and non-students were convicted and incarcerated vary depending on if the incarceration was the first versus any returning sentence. Table 12 and Figure 3 detail the number and percentage of crime classes for students and non-students in their initial and return sentences.

- C Felony was the most frequent crime class for students' initial incarceration (37.0%) while D Felony was the highest crime class for non-students' initial incarceration (41.5%). This indicates that students' initial incarceration was for more serious crimes than non-students when they participated in college courses.
- B Felony was the second most frequent crime class for students (23.5%), which then dropped to 9.0% in return sentences. For non-students, it remained stable at 5.3% for initial incarceration and 5.5% for return incarceration(s). This reflects a drop in the seriousness of crimes among students who returned to prison.
- Students in their first incarceration who were convicted of an A Felony were 3.5% of students overall, but this dropped to 0.2% for the return student incarcerations. For non-students, this was 0.4% for initial incarceration and 0.0% for return incarcerations. Once again reflecting a student population who was convicted of less serious crimes on the return to prison.

Table 12. Comparison of Conviction Class for Initial vs. Return Incarceration

Conviction Class	Students				Non-Students			
	Initial	%	Returns	%	Initial	%	Returns	%
A Felony	48	3.5%	2	0.2%	110	0.4%	6	0.0%
B Felony	319	23.5%	81	9.0%	1,526	5.3%	848	5.5%
C Felony	502	37.0%	304	33.7%	7,051	24.6%	3,914	25.2%
D Felony	292	21.5%	297	33.0%	11,922	41.5%	6,602	42.5%
Aggravated Misdemeanor	89	6.6%	77	8.5%	5,103	17.8%	1,917	12.3%
Felony - Enhancement	83	6.1%	126	14.0%	1,743	6.1%	1,876	12.1%
Other	14	1.0%	3	0.3%	238	0.8%	49	0.3%
Unknown	11	0.8%	11	1.2%	1,012	3.5%	321	2.1%
Total	**1,358**	**100%**	**901**	**100%**	**28,705**	**100%**	**15,533**	**100%**

Figure 3. Comparison of Conviction Class for Initial vs. Return Incarceration



Crime type is another way to examine student and non-student incarcerations (see Table 13 and Figure 4). Crimes are classified into five types: Drug, Property, Public Order, Violent, and Other.

- Over half (55.7%) of the students' initial incarceration crimes were Violent which declined to 20.4% for return incarcerations. While non-students' Violent offenses during initial incarcerations also declined for return incarcerations (26.6% to 15.3%).
- Students' rate of Property (16.8%) and Drug (16.2%) crimes during their initial incarceration jumped to 27.7% and 26.6%, respectively, during student return incarcerations.

Table 13. Comparison of Crime Type for Initial vs. Return Incarceration

Crime Type	Student				Non-Students			
	Initial	%	Returns	%	Initial	%	Returns	%
Violent	757	55.7%	184	20.4%	7,623	26.6%	2,378	15.3%
Property	230	16.9%	250	27.7%	7,597	26.5%	4,207	27.1%
Drug	220	16.2%	240	26.6%	6,683	23.3%	4,439	28.6%
Other	80	5.9%	153	17.0%	1,810	6.3%	2,148	13.8%
Public Order	60	4.4%	63	7.0%	3,980	13.9%	2,040	13.1%
(blank)	11	0.8%	11	1.2%	1,012	3.5%	321	2.1%
Total	**1,358**	**100.0%**	**901**	**100.0%**	**28,705**	**100.0%**	**15,533**	**100.0%**

Figure 4.

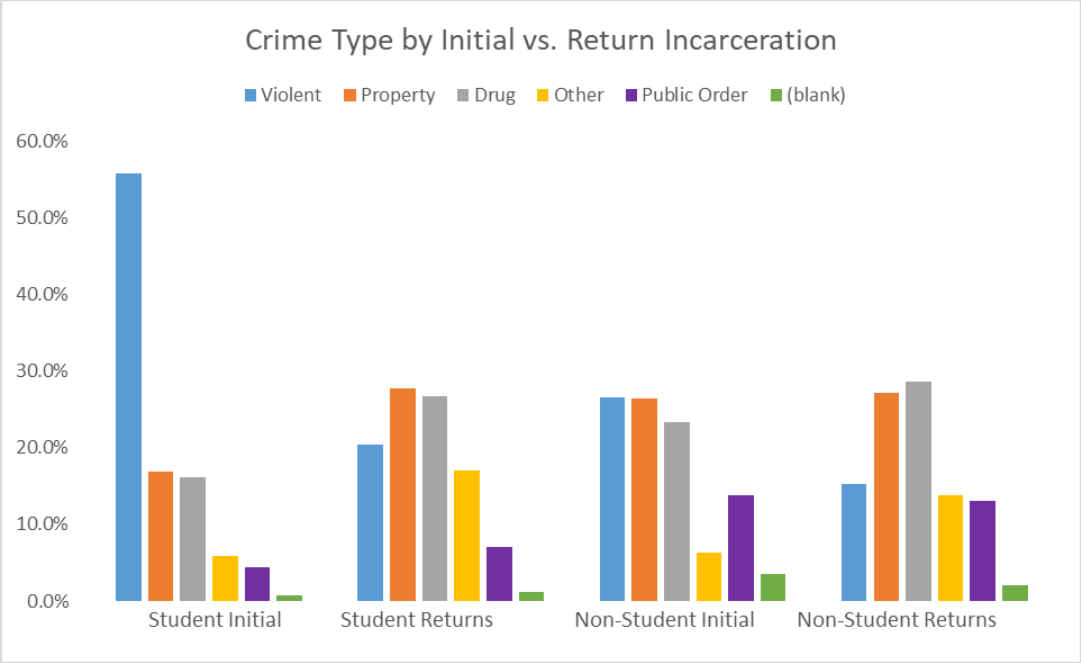


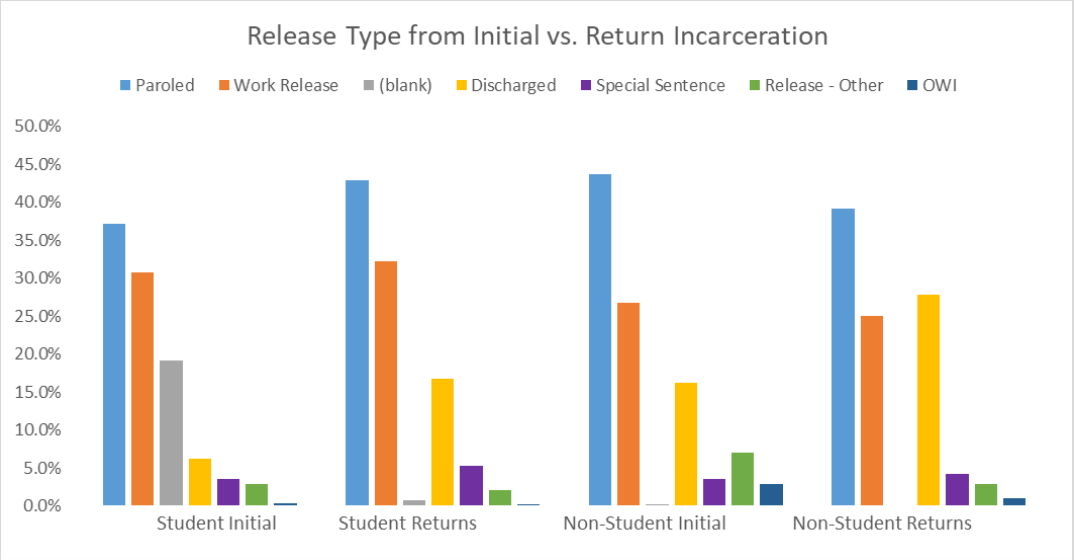
Table 14 and Figure 5 show the different types of release from initial and return incarcerations.

- When released from an initial incarceration, students were less likely to be paroled (37.2%) than when released from a return incarceration (43.0%). The opposite was true for non-students: 43.7% were paroled when released from an initial incarceration and 39.1% were paroled when released from a return incarceration.
- Students' release to work release (30.8%, 32.2%) was higher than non-students' for both initial and return incarcerations (26.7%, 25.0%).

Table 14. Release Type by Initial and Return Incarceration

	Release Type							
	Student				Non-Student			
	Initial	%	Returns	%	Initial	%	Returns	%
Paroled	505	37.2%	387	43.0%	12,537	43.7%	6,076	39.1%
Work Release	418	30.8%	290	32.2%	7,666	26.7%	3,881	25.0%
(blank)	260	19.1%	6	0.7%	12	0.0%	-	0.0%
Discharged	85	6.3%	151	16.8%	4,647	16.2%	4,320	27.8%
Special Sentence	48	3.5%	47	5.2%	1,019	3.5%	645	4.2%
Release - Other	38	2.8%	18	2.0%	2,019	7.0%	449	2.9%
OWI	4	0.3%	2	0.2%	805	2.8%	162	1.0%
Total	**1,358**	**100%**	**901**	**100%**	**28,705**	**100%**	**15,533**	**100%**

Figure 5.



Total Returns During Study Period

Table 15 shows the students and non-students who exited and returned to prison before 9/30/2025The students who returned to prison did so in an average of 16.1 months, whereas the non-students returned in an average of 17.9 months. The students returned significantly faster than non-students (tStat=3.7, df=1030, p<.001).

Table 15. Study Population Returns

	Students	Ave. time to return	Non-Students	Ave. time to return
Returned to prison	505	16.1 months	9,987	17.9 months

Education Participation and Recidivism

Further analysis considered amount of education in recidivism. Four categories were established:

- Non-students: Did not earn any college credits while incarcerated.
- Students: Earned at least one college credit while incarcerated.
- Serious Students: Earned at least 12 college credits which is roughly equivalent to one full-time semester of college.
- Degree Earners: Earned at least one college degree or certification while incarceration.

Error! Reference source not found.8 Shows the number of II's who meet the criteria for each category. Please note that these categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, a Degree Earner will also be counted in the Student and Serious Student categories. Thus, the total will not add up to 100%

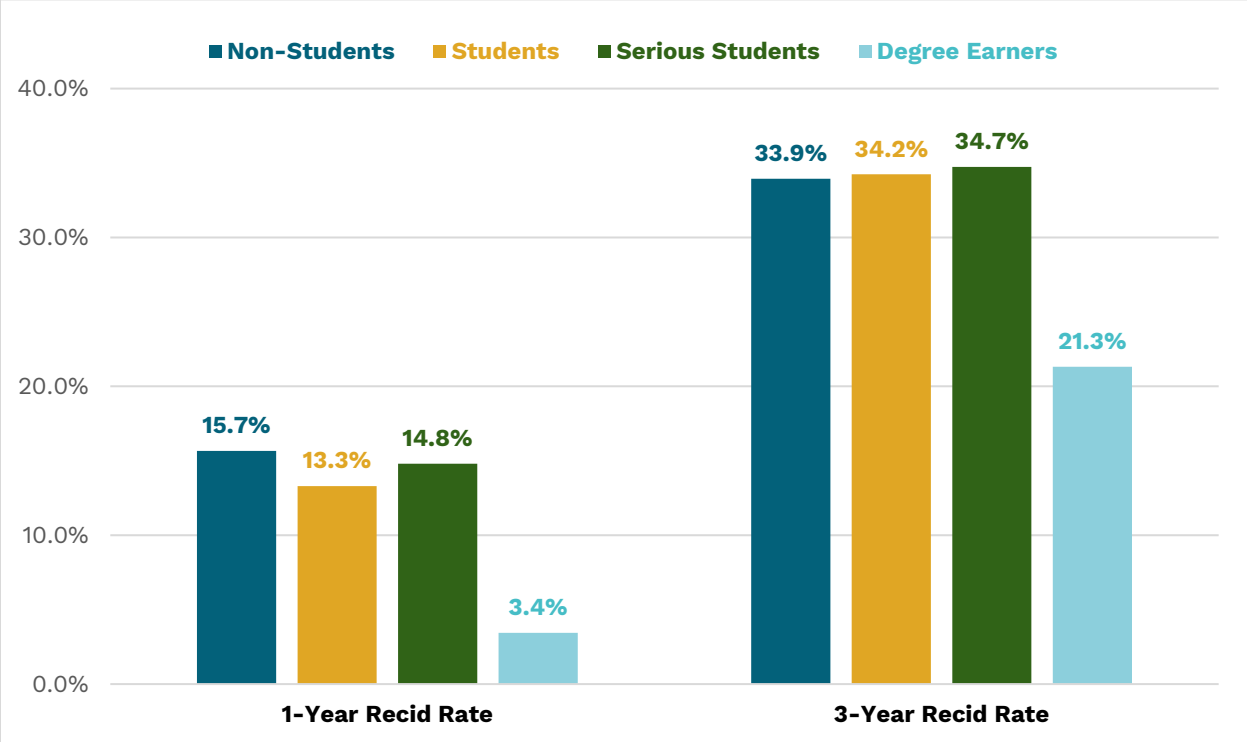
Students were a small portion of all exits (3.6%), 2.1% of exits were Serious Students, and 0.3% were Degree Earners.

Table 18. Number of IIs Who Exited by Education Participation Category

	N	% of Exits
Overall Exits	26,826	**100%**
Non-Students	**25,856**	**96.4%**
Students	**970**	**3.6%**
Serious Students	**554**	**2.1%**
Degree Earners	**87**	**0.3%**

The recidivism rates for each group are illustrated in Figure 9. Overall, non-students had slightly higher recidivism rates than students and serious students. Non-students had a one-year recidivism rate of 15.7% and a three-year recidivism rate of 33.9% (n=4,051 and 7,505 respectively). Students who earned at least one credit prior to exit from prison had slightly lower recidivism rates than non-students with 13.3% (n=129) recidivating in one year but slightly higher three-year recidivism rates at 34.2% (n=239). Similarly, serious students also had slightly lower recidivism rates than non-students with 14.8% (n=82) recidivating in one year but slightly higher three-year recidivism rates at 34.7% (n=140). Degree earners had significantly lower recidivism rates than non-students with 3.4% (n=3) recidivating in one year and 21.3% (n=13) recidivating in three years.

Figure 9. 1 and 3-Year Recidivism by Education Participation Level



Results of Logistic Regression on Recidivism

Researchers also conducted logistic regression analyses evaluating the impact of select variables on recidivism. The logistic regression simultaneously controls for demographics, crime class, and crime type in order to isolate the effect of education on recidivism. Because these variables are controlled for in the model, details regarding these variables are included below. Detailed results of the logistic regression are provided in Appendix B. Any reported differences in recidivism are statistically significant at the $p<0.05$ level.

Education

- Students were 19% less likely to recidivate within one year, however, there was no statistically significant difference in recidivism between students and non-students at the three-year mark.
- Serious students (i.e., those who earned at least 12 college credits), were not statistically different in recidivism rates compared to non-students.
- Completion of a degree reduced the likelihood of recidivating within one year by 79% and within three years 49% compared to non-students. It is important to note that the low number of degree earners (n=45) may be a factor influencing statistical effect or significance.

Demographics

- Males were 1.4 times as likely than females to recidivate within one year and three years.
- Older II's were less likely to recidivate than younger II's at both the one-year and three-year marks, with the probability of recidivism decreasing by about 3% for each additional year of age.
- Black II's did not have statistically significantly different recidivism rates from white II's. II's of a race other than white or black were about 44% more likely to recidivate at the one-year and three-year marks.

Crime Class

- In general, II's incarcerated for higher level offenses were more likely to recidivate than those incarcerated for lower-level offenses.
- Specifically, compared to II's incarcerated for a misdemeanor offense:
  - II's incarcerated for A and B Felony offenses were as likely to recidivate at the one-year mark and roughly 30% more likely to recidivate at the three-year mark.
  - II's incarcerated for C Felony offenses were roughly 67% more likely to recidivate at the one-year mark and 65% more likely to recidivate at the three-year mark.
  - II's incarcerated for a D Felony offense were about 60% more likely to recidivate at the one-year mark and 40% more likely to recidivate at the three-year mark.
  - II's incarcerated for an "Other" crime class offense were about 34% more likely to recidivate at the one-year mark and 63% more likely to recidivate at the three-year mark.

Crime Type

- Compared to II's incarcerated for a property offense:
  - II's incarcerated for a drug offense were about 20% less likely to recidivate at the one-year mark. However, this difference is not statistically significant at the three-year mark

- II's incarcerated for a public order offense were about 24% less likely to recidivate at both the one-year and three-year mark.
- II's incarcerated for a violent offense were roughly 36% less likely to recidivate at one-year and 40% at the three-year mark.
- II's incarcerated for other offense types were about 34% more likely to recidivate at the one-year mark. And about 30% more likely to recidivate at the three-year mark.

Interview Results

Offering college courses in prisons is an involved process. Prisons are secure locations and having college instructors come in and out of facilities and offering group classes requires special security allowances and designated staff who are responsible for assisting the process. The purpose for carrying out this involved process was explored through interviews with groups of instructors, college program staff, members of the Iowa Consortium on Higher Education in Prisons (ICHEP), and prison staff.

- **Moral Imperative:** Interviewees repeatedly used phrases like "it's the right thing to do," and "want to contribute to human potential." There was a core belief that everyone deserves a second chance and that people "shouldn't be defined by their worst mistake." There was a sense of duty to use institutional resources for the greater good.
- **Rehabilitation and Empowerment:** Education is seen as a powerful tool for personal growth, building self-esteem, a sense of "agency," and a "passport to opportunities." It provides a positive focus for "long termers" and helps them develop the knowledge and skills needed for a better life. For some incarcerated individuals, they may be the first in their family to attend college. There is a great sense of pride in those who complete courses and degrees.
- **Rehabilitation and Safety:** The purpose of college programs is to prepare incarcerated individuals for a successful return to the community. This isn't just about helping the individual; it's about making society safer. Interviewees believe that educated and employed individuals are more likely to become "productive taxpayers" and less likely to reoffend, which reduces recidivism and saves the state money. A key phrase that appears is the idea of investing in people to help them "become better people."
- **Community:** The education experience creates a sense of community both inside and outside the prison through group discussion and exposure to shared learning.
- **Reciprocal and Rewarding:** Instructors find the "lived experience" of incarcerated students enrich the learning environment.
- **Reducing Recidivism**: Education is seen as the most effective way to help inmates "get out, stay out, and be productive taxpayers." Investing in people is deemed more economical in the long run than the continuing costs of the correctional system.
- **Institutional and Financial Motivations:** Providing prison education also offers benefits to the colleges themselves. It can help with enrollment numbers and provide financial gain for the institution and instructors, although it is noted that this revenue may or may not be sustainable.
- **Productively Engaged**: Interviewees reported that they believe attending college classes provides positive and meaningful ways for inmates to spend their time. Education programs give individuals a sense of purpose and help them develop

discipline and self-regulation which is important for managing behavior within the facility. As one source states, when "guys have stuff to do, it makes a safer environment" for everyone. The alternative of not offering productive activities could lead to negative behaviors.

- **Worth the effort**: Despite the extra work (e.g., setting up secure technology, performing background checks on teachers, ensuring constant supervision in computer labs, etc.), the colleges are enthusiastic and prison staff see the value.

Limitations

This study does have limitations. First, the goal was to analyze the impact of higher education on incarceration, presuming that education would be completed and then the offender either did or did not return to prison. However, that is not the case. Education was an ongoing option that took place during multiple incarcerations. The number of credits taken by students also varied widely meaning that the student population was not uniform in the amount or type of “intervention” that was being measured.

Another limitation was the imbalance between the student population and the non-student population. The group sizes were very different, 1,369 and 28,939, which means that the comparison group was 21 times the size of the student population. In addition to the size, students were younger and included more women than in the comparison population.

Summary

Iowa has a long history of colleges and universities partnering with Iowa’s prisons to offer college classes to incarcerated individuals. In fact, this partnership even pre-dates the implementation of the U.S. Second Chance Pell Experiment that lasted from 2016-2023. Grinnell College, DMACC, ICCC, University of Iowa, IWCC, SCC have all offered in-person classes to incarcerated individuals through agreements with prisons at Clarinda, Fort Dodge, Mitchellville, Oakdale, Fort Madison, Mount Pleasant, Rockwell City, and Newton. This report documents students’ demographics, credits, convicting crimes, and recidivism using data from schools and the Department of Corrections.

The student population that was analyzed included 1,369 individuals who had taken at least one college credit course while incarcerated between 2016 and 2023. Incarcerated students enrolled in 23,770 credits between 2016 and 2023, averaging 17.4 credits per student. There have been 242 different college courses offered. ICCC provided classes to 63.6% of the incarcerated students.

Comparisons were made between student and non-student populations which included individuals who were incarcerated and exited at least once between 1/1/2016 and 12/31/2023. The average age of incarcerated students was 33.9 years, which was significantly younger than the non-students who averaged 37.2 years. The majority of both the student and non-student populations were white (73.3% and 73.7%, respectively) and then black (21.6% and 22.8%, respectively). There were 21 (1.5%) students who had been identified “Hispanic” and zero in the non-student group. There is a larger proportion of females in the student population than the non-student population.

Of the student population, 1,109 (81.0%) exited prison during the study period while 260 (19.0%) did not exit. Of those students who exited, 505 returned to prison at least once before 9/30/2025. The comparison population was selected if they were in prison and exited during the study period, so 100% of non-students exited.

If students returned to prison, they did so on less serious charges with fewer violent offenses. Almost one-quarter (23.5%) of students were initially incarcerated for a B Felony, versus less than one-tenth (9%) of returning students and approximately one-twentieth of initially incarcerated and returning non-students (5.3% and 5.5%, respectively). There were 3.5% of initially incarcerated students who were convicted of an A Felony, compared to 0.2% for returning students, 0.4% for initially incarcerated non-students, and 0% for returning non-students. Over half (55.7%) of the students' initial incarceration crimes were for Violent crimes which was more than double the percentages of returning students (20.4%), initially incarcerated non-students (26.6%), and returning non-students (15.3%).

Students released from their initial incarceration to parole was lower after their initial incarceration (37.2%) versus when students were released from a returning incarceration (43.0%), and also lower than non-students released from initial incarceration or a returning incarceration. A higher percentage of students were released to work release (30.8% from initial incarceration and 32.2% from a return incarceration) compared to non-students (26.7% from initial incarceration and 25.0% from a return incarceration).

When analyzing the total population that returned to prison from 1/1/2016 to 9/30/2025, students returned to prison in an average of 16.1 months, which was statistically significantly less time than non-students who returned in an average of 17.9 months.

Students had a lower recidivism rate than non-students at the one-year mark but were statistically no more or less likely to recidivate at the three-year mark. Serious students, those who completed at least 12 credits, had statistically the same recidivism rates as non-students. However, degree earners had significantly lower recidivism rates than non-students within one year and three years.

Interviews with academic instructors, college program staff, and prison staff found that while offering higher education in prisons is labor-intensive and requires ongoing coordination, the effort is worth it. Offenders benefit by having goals, improving cognitive skills, spending time on positive activities, and increasing their chances of finding jobs and staying employed once they leave prison. Education is seen as the most effective way to help inmates "get out, stay out, and be productive taxpayers."

Conclusion

Iowa's colleges and universities that pursued providing academic education to incarcerated individuals have reached students in eight of the nine prisons. This effort has established relationships between educators and prison staff and given educational opportunity to 1,369 incarcerated individuals who completed 23,770 credits through 242 different classes.

The study suggests that any amount of education is better than none. Students who complete degrees show lower recidivism. When incarcerated students do return to prison, they do so for less serious crimes than their initial incarceration. Even those who participated or were

serious participants showed somewhat lower recidivism rates compared to non-students. It is interesting to note that program participants often had multiple prison stays, coming in and out of prison, and participated in education programming over the course of time. The educational benefits can accumulate over time, and don't necessarily follow a one-time start and end trajectory.

Instructors who work with incarcerated students and prison staff overwhelmingly believe that higher education is good for offenders, citing personal growth, positive goals, and meaningful time spent working on constructive projects. Their belief is supported by this study's finding that IIs who obtained their degree in the program were 79% less likely to recidivate in one-year and 49% less likely in three years compared to non-students. To maximize the program's success, efforts could be made to identify ways to increase degree obtainment among those enrolled in the program, and the barriers preventing people from obtaining a degree.

In addition, Iowa's colleges and universities that pursued providing academic education to incarcerated individuals have reached students in eight of the nine prisons. This effort has established relationships between educators and prison staff and given educational opportunity to 1,369 incarcerated individuals who completed 23,770 credits through 242 different classes.

Appendix A

Courses offered by Colleges and Universities in Iowa Prisons 2016-2023

Grinnell College PSCE 2016-2023
Adv Prnclpls in Writing w/lab
Adv Prncpls in College Writing
Anthropological Inquiries
Basc Prncpls of Writing w/lab
Basic Prncpls College Writing
Drawing
Hum I: Ancient Greek World
Intro Gndr, Wmn's & Sxlty Stud
Intro to Art History
Intro to Political Science
Introduction Spanish Lang I
Introduction Spanish Lang II
Introduction to Acting
Introduction to Economics
Introduction to French I
Introduction to French II
Introduction to Shakespeare
Introduction to Sociology
Jazz Traditions
Literary Analysis
Music Fundamentals
Music, Culture, Context
Oral Comm for Academic Purpose
Oral Communication Skills
Reading Laboratory
Scholar's Seminar
ST: America's Age of Reform
ST: Anthropology of Disaster
ST: Creative Writing: Poetry
ST: Crisis, Lib, Just, Ldrshp
ST: Dr. Syntax
ST: Grammar & Usage Workshop
ST: History of Modern India
ST: Hlth, Inequality, Soc Jus
ST: Intro Creative Writing
ST: Iowa Reform
ST: Modern Arch & Glblztn
ST: Soc Justice/Justice Systm
ST: Teaching Writing
ST: Worlds of Tibetan Buddhms
Teaching & Tutoring Writing
Topics Grm Lit/Trans
Tradition of English Lit I
Traditions of Islam
Tutorial
Writing in the Liberal Arts

University of Iowa PSCE 2016-2023
Elementary Psychology
Entrepreneurial Finance
Entrepreneurial Marketing
Entrepreneurship and Global Trade
Entrepreneurship and Innovation
Exploring Liberal Arts
Foundations in Entrepreneurship
Life Design
Managing the Growth Business
Movement: Special Topics
Peacebuilding in a Prison Choir
Principles of Microeconomics
Reading and Comprehension
Rhetoric
Singing, Reflecting, Writing in a Choir
Social Entrepreneurship
Special Projects for Undergraduates
Special Topics I
Special Topics II
Topics in Human Rights
Topics in Teaching and Learning
U.S.A. in a World at War 1931-1945
Writing for Academic Success

IWCC PSCE 2016-2023
Circuit Analysis I
Industrial Engineering Technology Orientation
Motors and Controls
Technical Math

SCC PSCE 2016-2023
American National Government
Art Appreciation
Environmental Science
Math for Liberal Arts
Nutrition
Public Speaking
Survey of World Religions

ICCC PSCE 2016-2023	
Courses	Courses
Access for Business Apps	Intro to Psychology
Adv Gas Metal Arc Weld	Intro to Resid. Construction
Adv Gas Tungsten Arc Weld	Intro Transportation Tech
Adv Shield Metal Arc Weld	Introduction to Accounting
Adv. Fabrication and Layout	Introduction to Computers
Advanced Fabrication	Introduction to Ethical Conflicts
Advanced Gas Metal Arc Welding (MIG)	Introduction to Literature
Advanced Gas Tungsten Arc Welding (TIG)	Introduction to Philosophy
Advanced Lathe	Introduction to Psychology
Advanced Shielded Metal Arc Welding	Introduction to Religion
American National Government	Introduction to Residential Construction
Architectural Modeling	Introduction to Sociology
Automotive Brake Systems	Introductory Biology
Basic Baking and Lab	Introductory Biology Lab
Basic Pastry and Lab	Jams, Jellies, and Preserv.
Basic Writing	Juvenile Delinquency
Beginning Welding	Maintenance Welding
Blueprint Reading	Managerial Accounting
Building Science I	Marriage and Family
Building Science II	Mastery of Math I
Business Communication	Mastery of Math II
Business Law I	Mastery of Math III
Business Math	Mastery of Math IV
Cake Decorating	Mastery of Math V
Capstone	Mastery of Math VI
CNC Operations	Math for Liberal Arts
Composition I	Mechanical Processes
Composition I Laboratory	Minority Group Relations
Composition II	Office Calculators
Computer Accounting	Operation Prod. Management
Computer Integrated Manuf.	Payroll Applications
Concrete Lab and Theory	Pipe Welding
Concrete Theory	Pipe Welding II
Concrete Theory & Lab	Precision Measurements Lab
Construction Tech Lab	Predictive & Prev. Maint.
Construction Technology Lab	Prin of Management
Cpr, First Aid and Safety	Prin of Marketing
Creative Desserts	Princ Distrib/Warehouse Mgt
Demand Plan/Inventory Mgt	Principles of Macroeconomics
Developmental Psychology	Principles of Microeconomics
Elements of Writing	Principles Purchasing/Logistic
Excel for Accounting	Principles/Transport Mgt
Exploring Physical Science	Psychology of Human Relations
Exploring the Humanities	Public Speaking
Exterior Finish	Res Construction Apps
Fab, Layout, Est. & Repair	Residential Construction Applications
Fabrication, Layout, Estimating and Repair	Residential Estimating
Financial Accounting	Shielded Metal Arc Welding
Food Safety and Sanitation	Shop Operations
Framing for Sustainable Design	Site Layout & Blueprint
Gas Metal Arc Welding	Site Layout and Blueprint Reading
Gas Tungsten Arc Welding	Social Problems
Group Communication	Strategies for Online Academic Success
Information Computing	Strategies/Online Acad Success
Interior Finish I	Success Seminar
Interior Finish II	Sustainable Design
International Trans/Logistics	Technical Math
Internship	The College Experience
Intro Lathe Operations	Thermal Cutting and Welding
Intro Mill Operations	U.S. History Since 1877
Intro to Business	U.S. History to 1877
Intro to Business Logistics	Welding Blueprint Reading
Intro to Entrepreneurship	Welding Technology Fundamental
Intro to Ethical Conflicts	Welding Technology Fundamentals
Intro to Human Disabl & Serv	Workplace Communications

DMACC PSCE 2016-2023
Art Appreciation
Business Law I
Communication Skills
Composition I
Composition II
Elementary Algebra
Environmental Science
Environmental Science Lab
Finite Math
Fundamentals of Oral Communication
General Physics I
History of Photography
Human Resource Management
Interpersonal Communication
Introduction to Accounting
Introduction to Psychology
Introduction to Sociology
Introduction to Theatre
Leadership Development
Marriage and Family
Math for Liberal Arts
Organizational Behavior
Playwriting
Principles of Management
Principles of Supervision
Study Strategies
The College Experience
U.S. History Since 1877
Western Civ: Ancient to Early Modern
Western Civilization: Ancient to Early Modern
Western Civilization: Early Modern to Present
Women Writers

Appendix B

Logistic Regression Results

Logistic regression offers a more rigorous analysis than basic frequency tables by calculating the statistical significance (p-values) of each variable, allowing us to determine if the differences in recidivism are a reliable pattern or merely the result of random chance. Furthermore, by accounting for the high impact of variables like gender and age, the model provides a more accurate estimate of how "degree earning" specifically shifts the odds of returning to prison

The models compare one-year (n = 26,815) and 3-year (n= 22,795) recidivism rates for students, serious students, and degree earners compared to all other II's. Results are reported as odds ratios with standard errors provided in parentheses.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Results

	Dependent Variable					
	1-Year Recid	3 -Year Recid	1-Year Recid	3 -Year Recid	1-Year Recid	3 -Year Recid
Students	0.814**	0.956				
	(0.080)	(0.080)				
Serious Students			0.937	0.952		
			(0.116)	(0.103)		
Degree Earners					0.216***	0.516**
					(0.127)	(0.164)
Male	1.351***	1.444***	1.357***	1.446***	1.358***	1.445***
	(0.071)	(0.062)	(0.062)	(0.062)	(0.071)	(0.062)
Age	0.973***	0.975***	0.973***	0.975***	0.973***	0.975***
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Race- Black	1.044	1.035	1.047	1.035	1.045	1.034
	(0.075)	(0.036)	(0.043)	(0.036)	(0.043)	(0.036)
Race- Others	1.449***	1.441**	1.447***	1.441**	1.447***	1.439**
	(0.124)	(0.114)	(0.124)	(0.114)	(0.124)	(0.114)
Crime Class- A & B Felonies	1.107	1.291***	1.091	1.290***	1.101	1.295***
	(0.108)	(0.094)	(0.106)	(0.094)	(0.107)	(0.094)
Crime Class- C Felony	1.682***	1.652***	1.668***	1.651***	1.674***	1.653***
	(0.098)	(0.077)	(0.097)	(0.077)	(0.097)	(0.077)
Crime Class- D Felony	1.600***	1.396***	1.594***	1.395***	1.596***	1.396***
	(0.086)	(0.059)	(0085)	(0.059)	(0.085)	(0.059)
Crime Class- Others	1.349***	1.631***	1.337***	1.630***	1.346***	1.636***
	(0.132)	(0.126)	(0.130)	(0.126)	(0.131)	(0.126)
Crime Type- Drug	0.800***	0.962	0.801***	0.962	0.800***	0.962
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.039)
Crime Type- Public Order	0.767***	0.769***	0.768***	0.769***	0.768***	0.770**
	(0.046)	(0.039)	(0.046)	(0.039)	(0.046)	(0.039)
Crime Type- Violent	0.640***	0.604***	0.637***	0.603***	0.639**	0.604***
	(0.031)	(0.025)	(0.031)	(0.025)	(0.031)	(0.025)
Crime Type- Other	1.343***	1.305***	1.340***	1305***	1.337***	1.304***
	(0.115)	(0.094)	(0.114)	(0.094)	(0.114)	(0.094)
Constant	0.304***	0.769***	0.302***	0.768***	0.301***	0.768***
	(0.028)	(0.056)	(0.027)	(0.056)	(0.027)	(0.056)
N	26,815	22,795	26,815	22,795	26,815	22,795
AIC	22,591	28,336	22,595	28,336	22,585	28,332

Note: p-value significance codes- ***= p<0.01, ** =p<0.05 ,*= p<0.1