EDITOR'S NOTES

On June 11, 2014, 60 incarcerated men took an entrance exam for placement into an associate's degree program in a prison in New York. They were asked to list any past college experience on their cover sheet; one man wrote, "Corning Community College at Elmira, 1995." In the wider world, one might ask what had prevented this individual from completing his associate's degree 20 years earlier—but in the prison context, the reference to 1995 is revealing.

Elmira refers to Elmira Correctional Facility (a prison in New York), and 1995 was the year its community college program was closed. In 1994, the Federal Crime Bill restricted the provision of Pell grants to incarcerated people, which was the sole source of funding for community colleges in prison. By the end of 1995, which happened to be this man's second year in prison, the majority of the college programs in prison were gone—not just in New York, but across the country. Thus, like so many men in New York prisons, the man encountered in 2014 had not completed his associate's degree, nor had he transferred to a four-year institution. Instead, he was still seeking an opportunity to complete his first semester of college. His academic transcripts now document a 20-year gap in college access that resulted from the 1994 law. Once he passed the entrance exam in 2014, he was allowed to continue where he left off, adding to the nine credits he received two decades earlier, now in the final months of his sentence before he is eligible for parole. Only this time, the state was not supporting his college expenses—post-1995 programs have created new means to bring college education into prison rather than wait for the return of state funding.

This volume of *New Directions for Community Colleges* engages the experiences of community college instructors working in America's prisons today, 20 years after the denial of Pell support to incarcerated students. There are fewer programs today than there were in 1994 (see Table 1, and Figures 1 and 2). The programs of 2014 have each had to discover new means to fund themselves, although many would suggest that the economic impact of such programs is offset by the reduced costs of reincarceration through successful reentry. Almost everyone in prison returns to the community they came from, and a community college education can make the difference between gainful employment and unemployment, a path to productive citizenship among various opportunities to return to a life of crime. The role of community college in providing ladders of opportunity goes back to the origins of the junior college; today's college-in-prison

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Table 1. Community Colleges in New York State Prisons When Incarcerated Students Could Receive Pell Grants (up to 1994) and 20 Years After Pell Grants Were Taken Away

1994: 13 Community Colleges in 31 New York State Prisons
Bronx Community College (Sing Sing)
Cayuga Community College (Auburn, Cayuga)
Clinton Community College (Altona, Lyon Mountain)
Columbia-Greene Community College (Hudson)
Corning Community College (Elmira)
Dutchess Community College (Beacon, Fishkill, Green Haven)
Genesee Community College (Albion, Attica, Groveland, Orleans)
Jefferson Community College (Gouverneur, Watertown)
Mohawk Valley Community College (Marcy, Mohawk, Mid-State, Oneida)
North Country Community College (Adirondack, Bare Hill, Franklin)
Sage Junior College of Albany (Coxsackie, Green, Mt. McGregor)
Sullivan County Community College (Sullivan, Woodbourne)
Ulster County Community College (Eastern, Shawangunk, Wallkill)
2014: 5 Community Colleges in 5 New York State Prisons
Cayuga Community College (Auburn)*
Genesee Community College (Attica)
Mohawk Valley Community College (Mohawk)*
Jefferson Community College (Cape Vincent)
Sullivan County Community College (Sullivan)*

*Of the five community colleges involved today, three are partnering with four-year colleges.

educators are particularly motivated by the dramatic growth of the prison system and the disproportionate incarceration of African-Americans and Latinos some 50 years after the Civil Rights Act.

The United States has the largest prison population, both proportionately and in absolute terms, of any society in the history of the world (Carson, 2014). We live in what has been referred to as "the era of mass incarceration." The 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States do not draw equally from all sectors of society: African-Americans and Latino/as are more likely than Whites to be sent to prison, even when found guilty of committing the same crimes. The policing of people of color, specifically Black men, has recently gained public attention via sensational media stories, and the preponderance of African-American men in U.S. prisons is a prominent theme in the chapters that follow. This is intuitive, for the sheer scale of mass incarceration has converted prison into a latent mechanism by which non-White people are denied access to higher education. For example, in one year there were 992 African-American men who received bachelor's degrees from Illinois state universities, while roughly 7,000 African-American men were released from Illinois state prisons just for drug offenses alone (Alexander, 2010, p. 185).

I was motivated to organize this volume of *New Directions for Community Colleges* by a desire to share the experiences of community college

Figure 1. Map of Prison Higher Education in New York State, Spring 1994

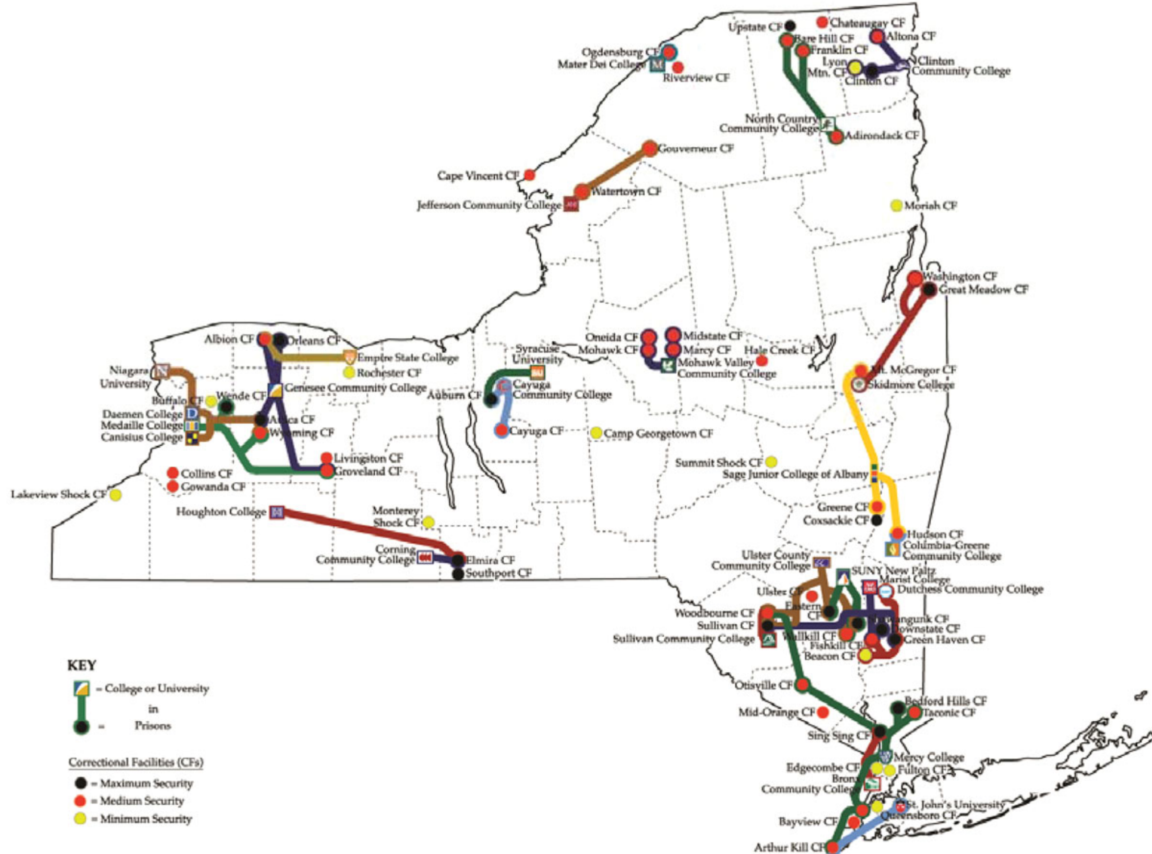
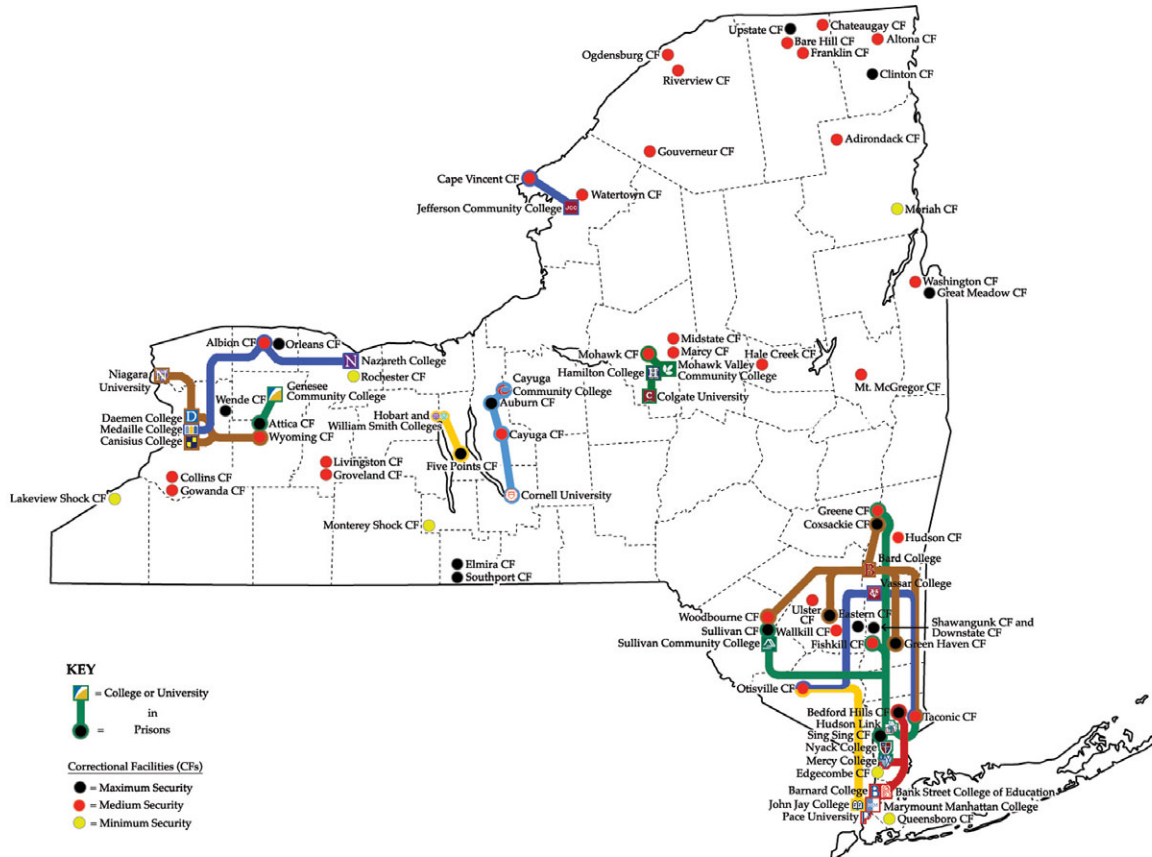


Figure 2. Map of Prison Higher Education in New York State, Spring 2014



educators in establishing and maintaining college programs in prison during this historical moment. The contributing authors write of the inspiring resilience of their incarcerated students, the programmatic innovations that made it possible to bring college education into prison, and most importantly what educators around the country can do right now to reconnect community colleges with nearby citizens behind bars. Many of these authors touch upon the constraints of working inside prisons—for instance, the real or perceived hostility of prison employees to those who enter prisons temporarily with a mission of education and social uplift. Others highlight how the social structure within prison, which is enacted by the incarcerated population, impacts the classroom. A few authors also describe the specific steps by which their community college developed a program in recent years, given the scarcity of financial resources.

Partnerships between community colleges and four-year colleges and universities have fueled the recent growth of college-in-prison programs, and much of this volume of *New Directions* focuses on the collaboration and learning between partnering institutions working inside prison walls. At the time that I proposed the idea for this sourcebook, I was working for both a state university and a community college that offered courses in a prison in Illinois. The community college provided an associate's degree program, and the university enrolled graduates of the program in upper-division (third and fourth year) courses with the hope of offering a bachelor's degree—I say hope because, like many of the programs around the country, this initiative was fairly new, and there were considerable challenges encountered in launching a degree program without state support. This is all to say that bringing college education into prison is a work in progress, and this sourcebook contains a collection of insights and experiences from educators who are bringing these programs back into existence.

Our volume begins with an essay that both articulates the need for prison education and describes a mechanism to fund new community college programs inside prison walls. Doran Larson draws thoughtful comparisons between the U.S. prison system and its counterparts in Northern Europe, then goes on to explain a low-cost mechanism to fund community college programs today by mimicking the dual credit arrangements that are set up for high school students. The second chapter is a case study of the creation of a community college program inside of a correctional facility, written by Betsy Simpkins. Her chapter answers many basic questions facing a community college operating a program inside a prison: What is the rationale? How does a community college program in prison work? How are students recruited and selected? How does one communicate with the Department of Corrections? The remainder of the volume provides many variations on these introductory themes.

The following three chapters engage student voices from inside prison walls. In Chapter 3, Jenifer D. Drew, José Duval, and James R. Cyr describe a

successful four-semester Spanish curriculum that was made possible against the odds due to enlisting tutors from within the incarcerated population at a prison in Massachusetts. In Chapter 4, Lee Ragsdale describes a similar program from a community college in Illinois, and coauthor Erick Nava Palomino reflects on the empowerment of the experience from his new home in Mexico, where he now works as a language instructor. Chapter 5 switches gears as Daniel E. Graves warns us from within prison walls of the threat of corruption that community colleges face when hosting courses on the inside. He tells us that institutional pressure to graduate as many people as possible can combine with a culture of nondisclosure of misconduct to create the conditions for low-quality education to go undetected, due to the walled-off nature of prison life.

The next three chapters dive into questions of pedagogy with respect to the specific populations found in prison settings. In Chapter 6, Nathaniel B. D. Moore describes his experience teaching African history in the heavily racialized and segregated space of a California state prison. The themes of his chapter are echoed by Tony Gaskew in Chapter 7, as both authors call for curricular content that reflects the specific racial and ethnic interests of the prison population. Gaskew develops an entire pedagogical model he terms the "Humiliation to Humility Perspective," which employs an Afrocentric education to directly confront the reality of challenges that lay before African-American men, who are disproportionately incarcerated in the era of mass incarceration. In Chapter 8, Jane Maher introduces us to the particularities of teaching writing in a women's prison; she reflects on the various assignment and readings she has selected over the years, and how they worked in the all-female context.

The final two chapters address broader questions of how to understand and use community college to address the issue of prison in the era of mass incarceration. In Chapter 9, Larry Brewster describes the vivid space of transformation that opens up when education in the fine arts are engaged in prison. Art is crucial to prison education; creative expression is not only potentially therapeutic but at the same time it holds the potential to enable radical critique and commentary on the system, engaging multiple intelligences and conserving creativity in a prison context that otherwise tends to diminish the variety of human potential. Finally, in Chapter 10, Mary Rachel Gould, Gillian Harkins, and Kyes Stevens discuss the civic engagement implicit in prison teaching, and ask us to think of prison education in a participatory framework rather than the more common service-oriented model. Rather than end on a note of resolution, their essay reminds us that the work proposed in this sourcebook is problematic, and that the answer to mass incarceration is not only more education but decarceration.

Robert Scott
Editor

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