

# Expanding Prison Education Opportunities on Your Campus: Lessons from the Field



The Council of  
Independent Colleges

Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams // November 1–4, 2024  
Hilton Portland Downtown // Portland, Oregon

Thank you to our sponsors



Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams //





# Presenters

Daryll Henry Coleman, Vice President for Academic Affairs,  
Lane College (TN)

Tanya Erzen, Professor, Founder and Former Faculty Director, Freedom Education  
Project Puget Sound, BA in Liberal Studies,  
University of Puget Sound (WA)

Laura Ferguson-Mimms, Executive Director,  
Tennessee Higher Education Initiative

Drew Kerkhoff, Provost,  
University of Puget Sound (WA)

Sheila Meiman, Prison Education Specialist,  
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

*Moderator:* Molly Lasagna, Senior Strategy Officer, Ascendium



Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams //



The Council of  
Independent Colleges

# Agenda

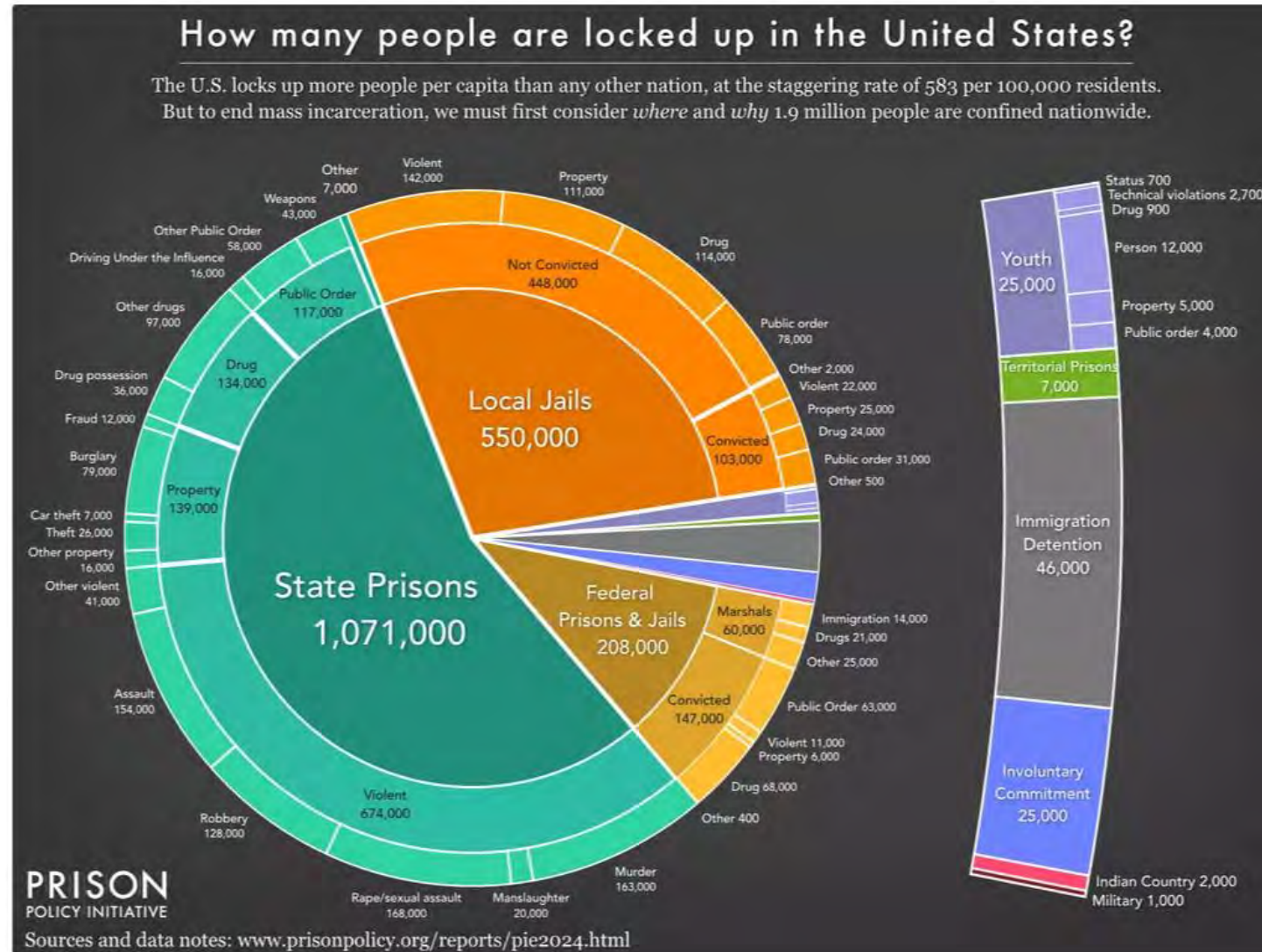
- **What is HEP?**
  - The prison landscape of the US
  - History of HEP in the US
  - History of funding HEP in the US
- **What is Ascendium?**
  - Why does Ascendium invest in HEP?
    - Upward mobility
    - Learners from low-income backgrounds
  - What is Ascendium's HEP strategy?
- **Deep Dive into Today's Pell Landscape & Process**



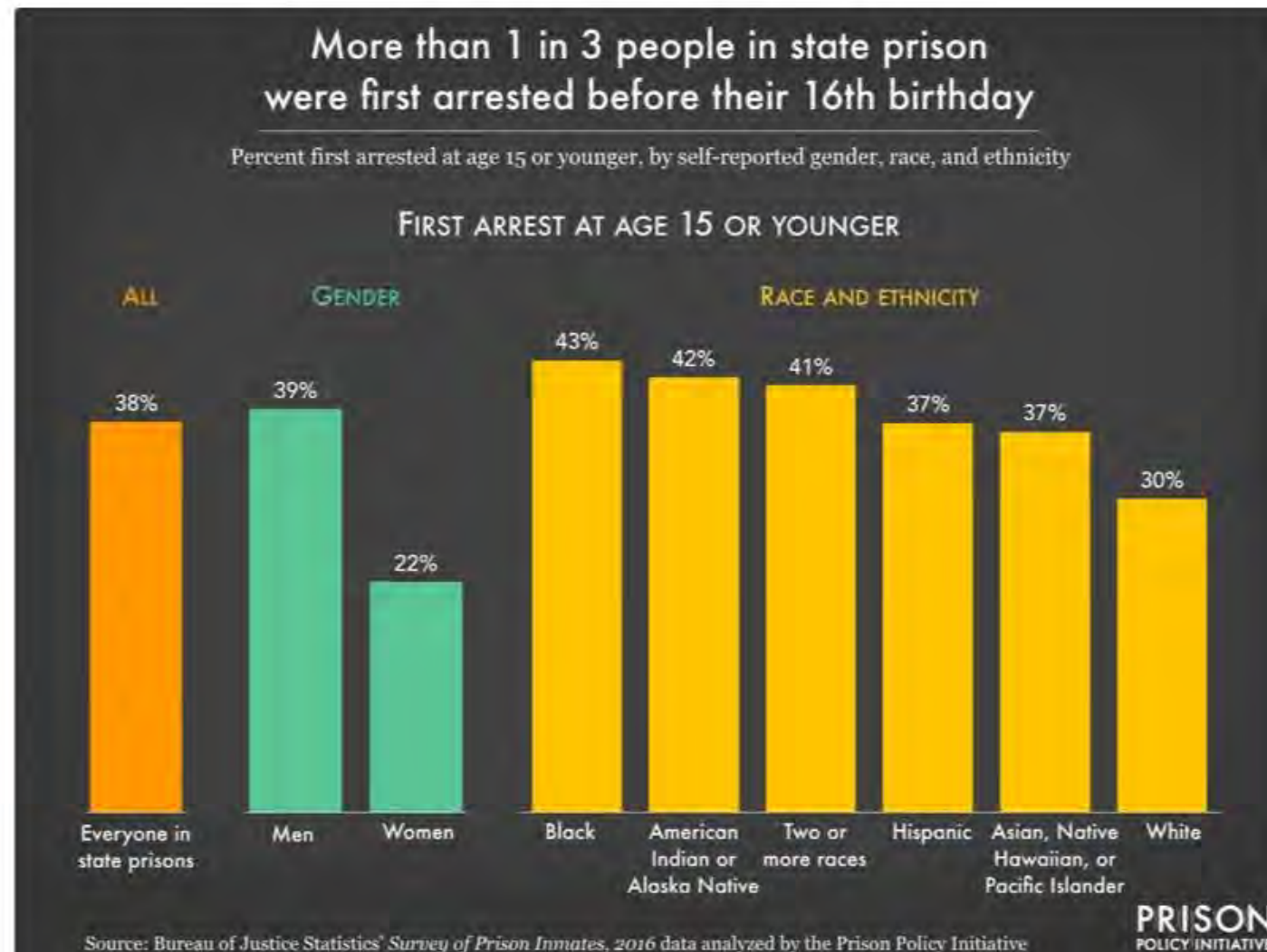
**What is HEP?**



# The Prison Landscape of the US



# The Prison Landscape of the US





# The Prison Landscape of the US





# Pell in Prison: A Quick Timeline

- **1965:** The Higher Education Act (HEA) is signed into law.
- **1972:** Pell Grants are created. Incarcerated individuals permitted to apply for Pell Grants and attend college.
- **1982:** More than 350 prison higher education programs available in 90% of the States. 9% of the prison population is enrolled in college programs, funded primarily through the Pell Grant.
- **1986:** Congress passes the Anti-Drug Abuse Act.
- **1988:** Congress amends the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, removing access to federal financial aid for higher education for those convicted of a drug offense.
- **1992:** Congress amends the Higher Education Act, prohibiting incarcerated individuals serving a death sentence or life sentence without the possibility of parole from receiving grants and limiting the grants for other incarcerated students to tuition, fees, books, and supplies.
- **1994:** Congress passes the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, revoking incarcerated individuals' eligibility to receive federal need-based financial aid for college.



# Pell in Prison: A Quick Timeline

- **2015/2016:** The Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCP) begins. 67 schools participate and roughly 12,000 students gain access to higher education in prison.
- **2019:** Legislative attempts are made to lift the ban on Pell grants for incarcerated college students
- **2020:** A second round of SCP is announced, adding another 67 schools and roughly 10,000 more students.
- **Also 2020:** The Pell ban is lifted, attached to the federal stimulus package.
- **2021:** Negotiated Rulemaking begins around design of Pell restoration.
- **2022:** A third round of SCP is announced, with the potential for another 67 programs to join.
- **July 1, 2023:** Pell is to be restored through a “clean restoration”. Estimates of immediate eligibility exceed 700,000.

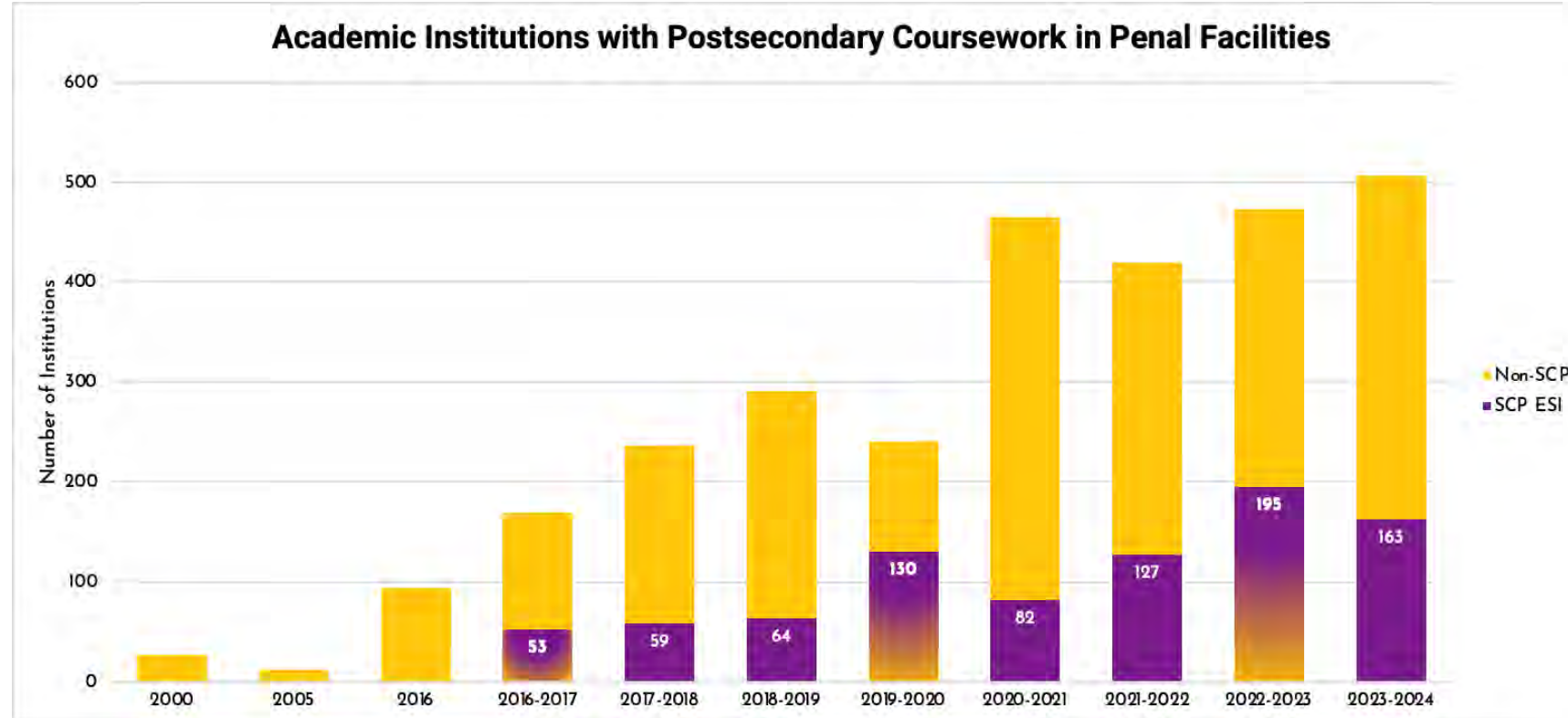


# The Impact of Pell on HEP

- Hundreds of programs existed before 1994, almost all drawing on Pell grants.
- By 1995, the number of programs across the country had dropped to 8.
  - All 8 programs were at private institutions that were mission-bound to the work and could afford to absorb the cost of attendance.
- There are students in prison today who are still waiting for their programs to return.



# The Impact of Pell on HEP





# The Impact of Pell on HEP

**FIGURE 1**

## **Unduplicated students enrolled in Second Chance Pell\***



\* Unduplicated students refers to the number of unique participants enrolled through Second Chance Pell over the six financial aid years reported here. (Some students participating in longer programs enrolled in multiple years.)

*Niloufer Taber, Amanda Nowak, Maurice Smith, Jennifer Yang, and Celia Strumph, The First Year of Pell Restoration: A Snapshot of Quality, Equity, and Scale in Prison Education Programs (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2024).*



What is Ascendium?



# Upward Mobility

- More than 1.2 million people are incarcerated in state and federal prisons in the U.S.
  - 6 out of 7 will return to the community at some point.
  - More than 650,000 are released to the community every year.
- Only about 1 in 20 folks who reenter has a postsecondary credential.
  - Without a credential, opportunities for stable employment earning a living wage are limited or nonexistent.
- Two out of every three individuals are rearrested within 3 years.
  - The lack of labor market opportunities undoubtedly is an important contributing factor to recidivism.
  - Meaningful employment is the #1 indicator of successful reentry.



# Learners from Low-Income Backgrounds

- Regardless of how an individual enters prison, they are experiencing indigency while incarcerated.
  - Prison wage for a full-time job is generally 15 cents per hour.
  - Wages are often garnished while incarcerated for state fees and court costs.
- Typically, individuals leave prison and return home without savings or other financial resources and earn around half of what their never-incarcerated peers make annually.
  - CA (\$200) & CO (\$100)
  - AL & LA (\$10)
  - NH (\$0)





# Ascendium's HEP Strategy

- In the past six years, the field of HEP has grown from approximately 100 programs to over 600 programs; this growth is due to the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative and the ultimate full return of Pell grants for HEP students.
- This rapid, open-access growth has happened without the appropriate infrastructure. As a result, there are too many new HEP programs without any markers for quality or alignment to pathways, and without a single repository for resources or any investments in technical assistance, training or supports.
- The current landscape of the field leads to a set of circumstances whereby students are not informed consumers of Pell and will not end up on the road to success (which we still don't know how to estimate).
- Compounding the “quality problem” is that the leadership of the field does not reflect the students being served.



# Ascendium's HEP Strategy

If we identify quality, pathways-driven proof points extant in the field, and we create the enabling conditions for the field to use those proof points to design, launch and continuously improve more solid, more sustainable pathways to mobility, then we will ready the field to responsibly scale its high-impact practices, return itself to the realm of public systems, and absorb diverse funding streams. We do this by making grants in five overarching categories:

- building a bench of intermediaries
- building an evidence base
- building networks and resource hubs
- building pathways to mobility
- building the capacity for convening

We do this in the interest of building a world where learners with a history of incarceration complete HEP programs that set them up for lifetime autonomy and success.



# Beginning with the End in Mind: The Tennessee Prison Education Program (PEP) Application and Process

Daryll Henry Coleman, Lane College (TN)

Laura Ferguson-Mimms, Tennessee Higher Education Initiative



Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

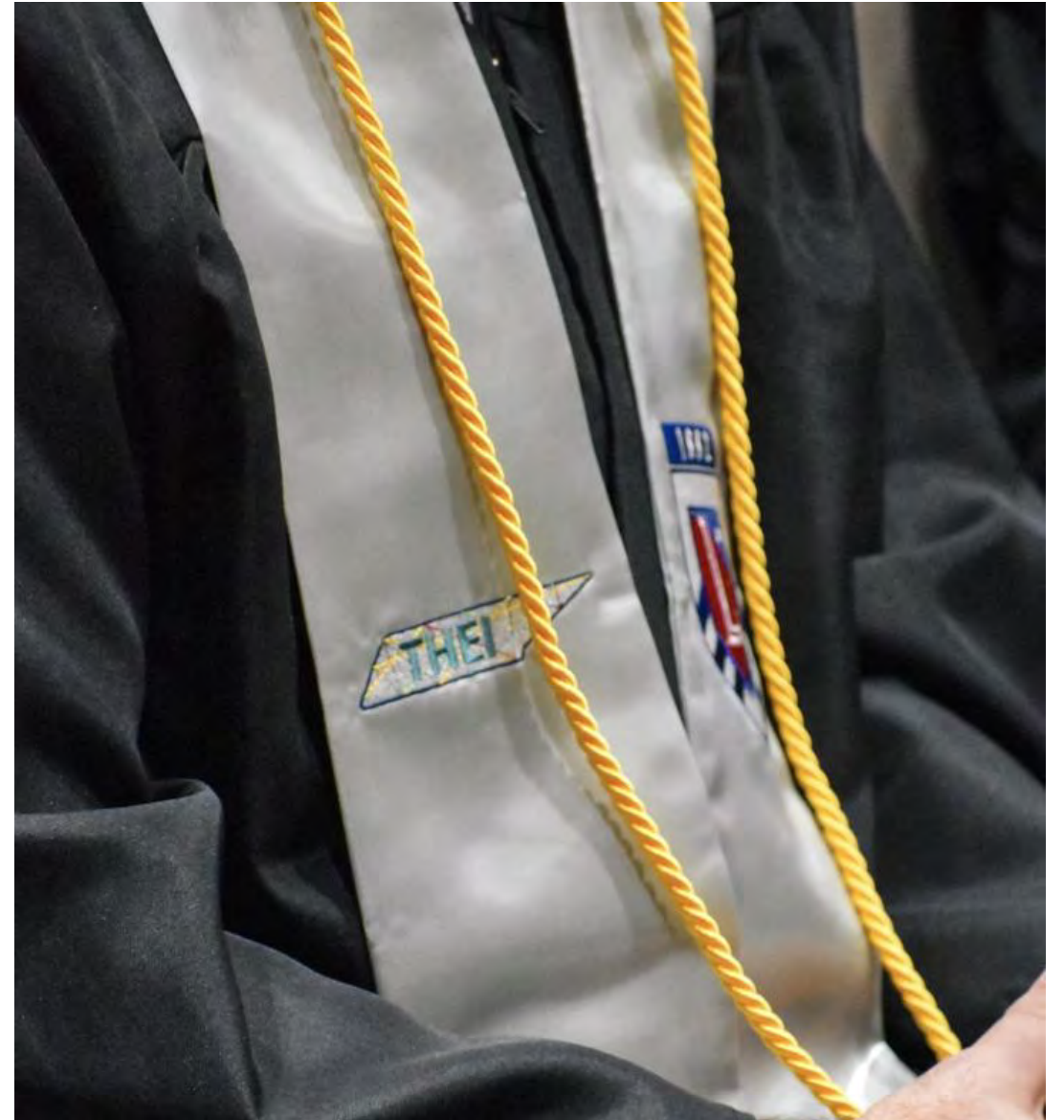
2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams //



The Council of  
Independent Colleges







# The Tennessee Prison College Coalition (TPCC)

- Launched in 2019 to foster collaboration across organizations to serve justice-impacted students in Tennessee
- Led by the Tennessee Higher Education Initiative in partnership with the Department of Correction, the Higher Education Commission, the Board of Regents, the Department of Labor and Workforce, and the Office of the Governor
- Includes expertise from PEP alumni



Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams //



The Council of  
Independent Colleges



# The Plan

Embed factors in the PEP application to ensure applicants understand TPCC metrics:

- Incorporate a multi-agency panel in all review processes, including individuals with lived experience.
- Support and create the conditions for student academic persistence, completion, and competency while incarcerated.
- provide an extended circle of support post-release, including critical reentry services such as access to career counseling, housing, etc.

Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams //



The Council of  
Independent Colleges

# The Promise

Students participating in Tennessee PEP programs have the skills and support needed to successfully complete their degree (while incarcerated or post-release) and navigate reentry.



Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams //



The Council of  
Independent Colleges



# Case Study: Lane College

- The Lane College program started June 2021 as a Second Chance Pell Site.
- First HBCU in Tennessee to facilitate a bachelor's degree program and award degrees in a Tennessee prison
- To date, 21 students have graduated.
- The first college in Tennessee to complete the Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC) application and receive approval at the state level
- Lane College's experience navigating the accreditation process as a Second Chance Pell site informed the Tennessee PEP application.



Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams //



The Council of  
Independent Colleges

## Q&A and Table Question:

What external partnerships have you built/do you plan to build to launch or strengthen your Higher Education in Prison (HEP) initiatives?



# The Pell Process – Accreditor Approval

Tanya Erzen and Drew Kerkhoff, University of  
Puget Sound (WA)



Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams //



The Council of  
Independent Colleges



---

**Where people in prison can realize their academic potential through access to sustained, high quality higher education degrees and opportunities**



BA in Liberal Studies at the Washington  
Corrections Center for Women (WCCW)

---

---

## Founded in 2012, BA began in 2019 with Mellon Funding

- 15-20 students are accepted biannually for a BA in Liberal Studies.
- 98 professors have taught at WCCW.
- 325 women have taken courses earning over 6,000 college credits.
- Lecture series, film series, study halls, research partners, ethics bowl, labs





---

# June 2024 Graduation

## 10 BA graduates





---

# Accreditation Process: Second Step after DOC Approval

Substantive Change  
Process with  
Regional Accreditor

Prison as extension  
site of University

PEP meets the same  
standards as  
substantially similar  
programs at the  
institution's main  
campus

Site visit within 6  
months to 1 year

## Q&A and Table Question:

For those who run an HEP program or are considering launching one, which offices and personnel have you brought into the strategy and planning discussions?

# Department of Education Approval Process

Sheila Meiman, National Association of Student  
Financial Aid Administrators



Academic Leadership  
**NOW&NEXT**

2024 Institute for Chief Academic Officers and Their Teams //

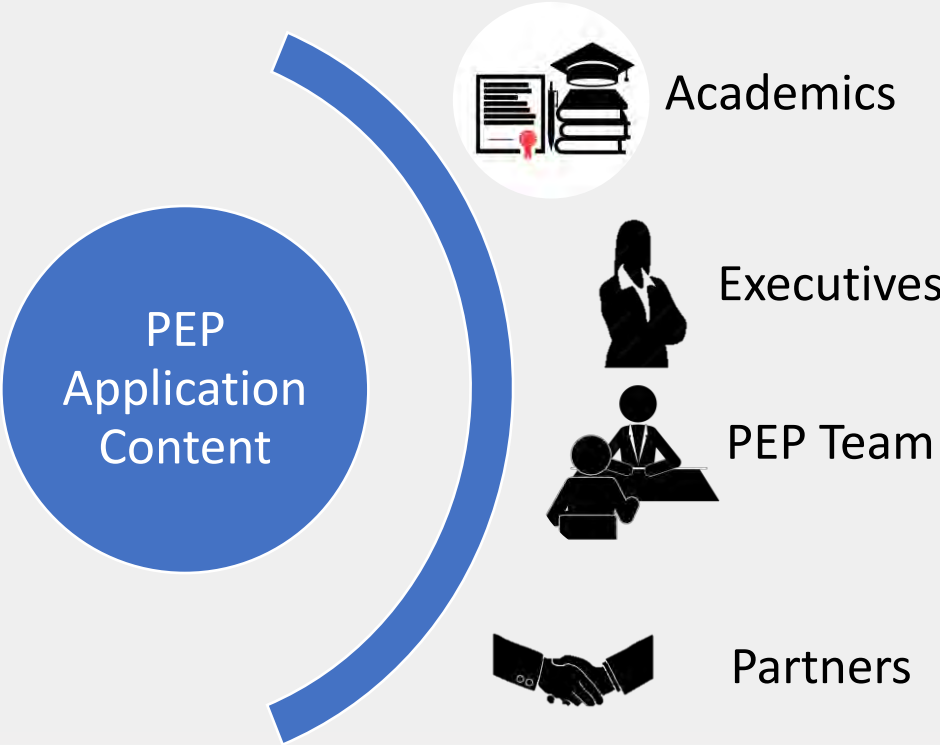


The Council of  
Independent Colleges



# PEP Application to the Department of Education

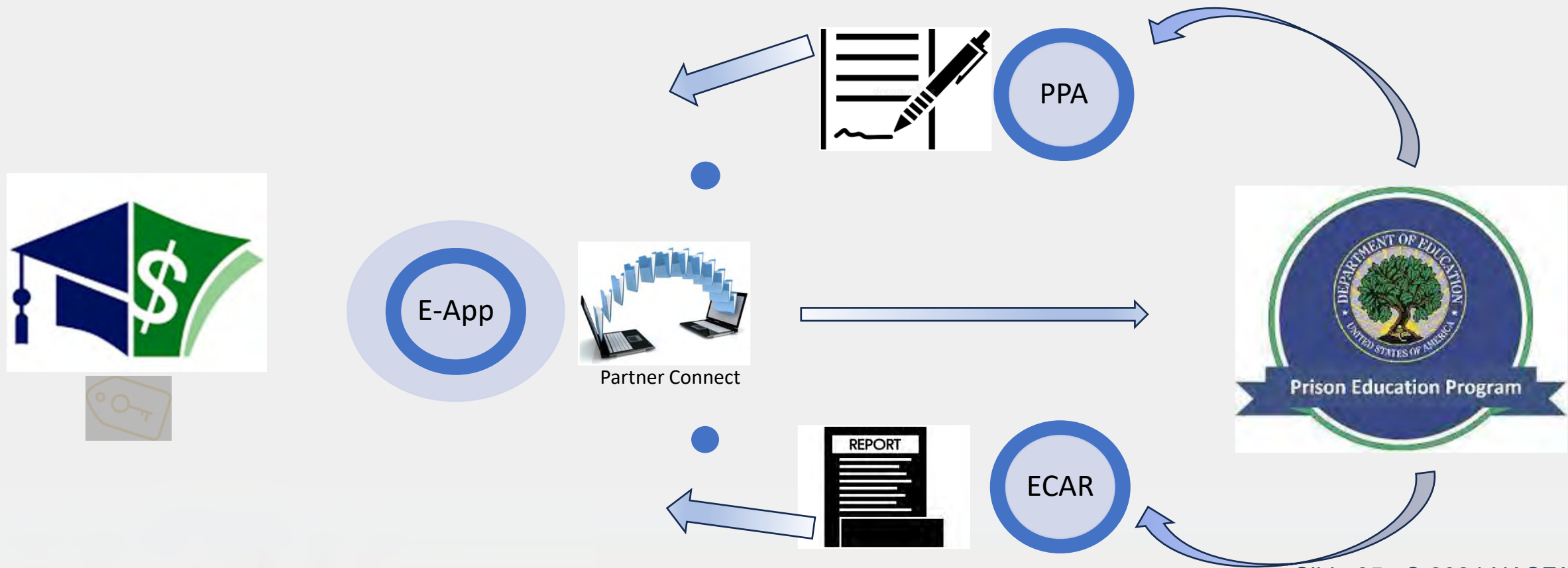
## *Preparing to Apply*



Slide 34 © 2024 NASFAA



# PEP Application to the Department of Education *Process Flow*



Slide 35 © 2024 NASFAA



# PEP Application to the Department of Education *After Approval*

FAFSA completion & processing

Aid disbursement

Reporting

Leveraging the Community of Practice for support



Slide 36 © 2023 NASFAA





## Q&A and Table Question:

How does your institution plan to support students who are not Pell eligible or students whose bills are higher than the Pell grant will cover?



The Council of  
Independent Colleges



Thank you for attending  
this session!



The Council of  
Independent Colleges

