



The Illinois Department of Corrections

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Illinois Department of Corrections and Augustana College Launch the First ‘Second Chance Pell Experimental Site’ in the State

(East Moline, IL) – Last week was the first week of fall semester classes for college students across the state – including 30 students enrolled in the Augustana Prison Education Program (APEP) inside East Moline Correctional Center. The program is the first Second Chance Pell Experimental Site in the state of Illinois to draw upon Second Chance Pell awards from the US Department of Education. In 2021, Augustana College applied and was selected to participate in the Second Chance Pell Initiative to provide the prison education program. The Second Chance Pell Initiative, which the US Department of Education expanded for the 2022-2023 award year, enables individuals in custody to participate in post-secondary education programs with Pell grant funding. This is the first program of its type in Illinois since incarcerated persons were banned access to Pell grants in 1994. This collaboration between Augustana College and the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) aims to identify best practices to share with the broader higher education community in Illinois and comes in advance of full Pell grant restoration for individuals in custody in summer 2023.

“Pell restoration is a tremendous opportunity to expand partnerships between colleges and correctional agencies to deliver high-quality education to individuals in custody,” said **Rob Jeffreys, Director of IDOC**. “The work of Dr. Varallo, her team of educators, and staff at East Moline Correctional Center were essential to establishing the robust and effective program that exists today. Launching a Second Chance Pell site is an important step to prepare IDOC for full restoration next year.”

Launched in 2021, APEP is a full-time liberal arts Augustana College Bachelor of Arts degree program offered to individuals in custody at the East Moline Correctional Center. Students take Augustana coursework from the same Augustana faculty who teach on the college’s main campus in Rock Island, Illinois. APEP was started with funds from the Austin E. Knowlton Foundation and sustained with donations from community organizations and private donors. Now, as a Second Chance Pell Experimental Site, Augustana can utilize need-based Pell grants to pay for the costs of college for individuals in custody.

Mission: To serve justice in Illinois and increase public safety by promoting positive change in individuals in custody behavior, operating successful reentry programs, and reducing victimization.

"The APEP students are driven to succeed. They express their thanks every day, sometimes literally and often in the effort they take to be prepared for every class every time. They make their professors proud. APEP is a joy," said **Dr. Sharon Varallo, Executive Director of APEP.**

"East Moline is proud to partner as an arm of IDOC with Augustana in this collaborative agreement. The coursework is challenging, and we have seen the growth that has led to a more competitive entry to our second cohort. We look forward to what the future holds as Pell grants will likely increase opportunities for individuals in custody to receive a post-secondary education. We have seen how providing access to excellent education sets individuals up for success as they re-enter back into society," said **Amber Allen, Assistant Warden of Programs at East Moline Correctional Center.**

A variety of studies have demonstrated that postsecondary education programs in prisons are effective investments that reduce prison costs. Those with the opportunity to enroll and complete college courses are considerably less likely to recidivate and pose fewer disciplinary challenges while incarcerated. Individuals who participate in prison education programs are also more likely to have gainful employment with life-sustaining wages upon release.

This semester, the 30 students enrolled in APEP will take full-time coursework with the option to select from eight different courses including Principles of Economics, Introduction to Liberal Arts, and Writing Poetry, among others. Augustana plans to offer courses during a winter session and the spring semester.

"We are thrilled that Augustana applied and was approved for this opportunity," said **Alyssa Williams, Assistant Director of IDOC.** "We look forward to continuing our partnership with them and deepening IDOC's understanding of how to prepare for Pell restoration next year. We anticipate it will become an essential part of expanding access to academic college courses across the Illinois prison system."

IDOC is actively working with Illinois stakeholders and national experts to further prepare for full Pell restoration in 2023 and anticipates the launch of another Second Chance Experimental Site in partnership with Lewis University in January 2023.