

# Newsday

## College in Prison?

BY KEITH HERBERT  
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Citing research that shows inmates who take college courses are less likely to return to prison upon release, advocates said Thursday they hope the Paterson and Obama administrations will restart the state and federal programs.

Federal funding for prison higher education, in the form of Pell Grants, was cut in 1993 when then-President Bill Clinton signed anti-crime legislation. In New York, former Gov. George Pataki denied inmates access to the state's Tuition Assistance Program in 1995.

But with a new chief executive in Albany, and a new president in Washington in January, advocates hope to get funding restored, despite troubled financial outlook in both capitals.

"We should be relentless," said the Rev. Calvin O. Butts III, president of SUNY at Old Westbury, who supports returning higher education funding to prisons. "We must not stop even in the face of this terrible financial crisis we find ourselves in."

Studies show that education of prison inmates, particularly higher education, reduces recidivism rates, said Robert Gangi, executive director of the Correctional Association of New York, a nonprofit advocacy group in New York City.

A 1991 study of New York prisoners compared college program inmates with those who took no college courses and found that 26.4 percent of college program inmates returned to prison, compared with 44 percent of inmates who had no college courses while incarcerated, Gangi said.

Returning public money for prison higher education also pays off in the form of higher employment rates, less homelessness and lower rates of crime once inmates are released, he said.

"There could be significant return on investment," Gangi said.

New York's prison population has a high percentage of African-Americans when compared to their percentage of the population, mostly because state illicit drug laws are too harsh, Butts said.

However, the political climate is ripe for change, Butts said, because Gov. David A. Paterson is from Harlem, and President-elect Barack Obama worked as a community organizer on the South Side of Chicago, a historically black neighborhood.

In 1994, 27,000 inmates receive public money to take college courses while incarcerated, said Anna Crayton, deputy director of research with the Prisoner Re-Entry Institute at John Jay School of Criminal Justice in New York City.

That figure dropped by 44 percent in the years following, Crayton said.

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