

Individuals in Corrections: Five Steps to Prepare for College

Is college right for you? To answer this question, think about what you want in your life after prison or when you are on probation or parole. What kind of jobs would you like? What skills do you already have or need to learn?

Getting more education or training can help you earn more money. Compared to someone with only a high school diploma, data show that you could earn:

- Over \$300 more a month if you have some college but no degree;
- Over \$500 more a month if you have an associate's (two-year) degree; and
- Over \$1,500 more a month if you have a bachelor's (four-year) degree.³

A college education can help you change your life. You can learn new skills, have new experiences, build a career, and play a strong role in your family and community.

Getting ready for college can take time. First, you may need to get your high school diploma or work on your academic skills so you are ready for college classes. You also may need to apply for money (financial aid) to help pay for college. There are many people who can help you with each of these steps.

This handout describes five steps to get ready for college.

Step 1: Get help from organizations in your community.

Step 2: Create a plan for going to college and starting a career.

Step 3: Earn your high school diploma.

Step 4: Choose and enroll in a college program.

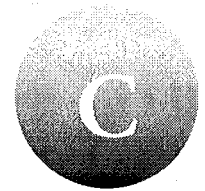
Step 5: Apply for financial aid.

You may be able to skip some of these steps. For example, if you have a high school diploma, you may need help just with choosing a college. If so, you can skip Step 2.

Amanda Seerattan's Path to College

At age 16, Amanda Seerattan was a runaway and high school dropout. She sold drugs and hustled to survive. She tried to get a job at a local mall, but no one would hire her. She decided she needed to get her high school diploma. In October 2005, she took and passed the GED test. But her past caught up with her: she was sent to prison two months after getting her GED diploma. While there, Seerattan learned that she was good at helping other people with their problems. She decided that she wanted to be a social worker. When she got out of prison, she joined a program, the Doe Fund, Inc., that helps former inmates and homeless people learn to take care of themselves. With help from a case manager, she entered college. Now she is working to get a master's degree in social work. It hasn't been easy, but she wants to be a good example for her old friends who are still living on the streets.

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2012. *Education Pays*. Washington, DC: Author. Accessed on May 21, 2012. http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm.



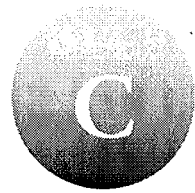
To learn more about these steps and find other information that can help you with reentry, see *Take Charge of Your Future: Get the Education and Training You Need*. It is available at: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/correctional-education.html#4>. This guide is for people who are incarcerated or on community supervision (parole or probation) and want help thinking about the education or training they need for a successful future.



Get Help from Groups in Your Community

Whether you are incarcerated and getting ready for release or under community supervision, many groups in your community can help you. Many groups offer college and career counseling. They also can test your education level and then help you improve your skills. Some groups provide other helpful services, like transportation, childcare, and financial aid. If not, they can tell you where to find those services.

- **Adult education programs:** These programs help you with reading, writing, math, and English skills. They also can help you get a high school diploma (called a General Educational Development [GED] diploma or an adult high school diploma). Adult education programs also can help you get ready for college. To find a program near you, go to: <http://www.literacydirectory.org/>. Enter your Zip Code or city and state. Then, choose the type of help you need. You will get a list of adult education programs and information for getting in touch with them.
- **Community colleges:** Community colleges can help you get a GED, a certificate, or associate's degree. They also can help you improve your skills so you can do well in college classes. To find a college near you, go to: <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/pages/ccfinder.aspx>. Then, enter your Zip Code or city.
- **One-Stop Career Centers:** These centers help you look for a job and find education or training programs. They also can help you to write your resume and practice for interviews. To find a center near you, go to: <http://www.servicelocator.org>. Enter your Zip Code or city and state. You will get a list of centers and information for getting in touch with them.
- **TRIO Programs:** These programs help people with low incomes or disabilities go to college. They also help people who are the first in their families to attend college. The different types of TRIO programs include:
 - Educational Opportunity Centers: These centers give advice and information on applying to and paying for college.
 - Student Support Services Programs: These programs provide mentors, education programs, counseling, and other services to help students do well in college and prepare for a job.



Many TRIO programs are located at colleges. To find a program near you, contact your local community college. Your local One-Stop Career Center or adult education program also can help you find a program.

- **Community groups:** Other groups can help you with jobs, education, training, counseling, housing, healthcare, and more. For a list of groups near you, go to: <http://www.211.org>. Enter your Zip Code or city and state. Then, choose the type of help or program you need.

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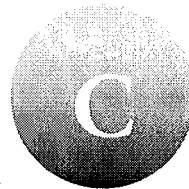
Create a Plan for Going to College and Starting a Career

What do you want to learn in college? What kind of job would you like? Your local adult education program, community college, One-Stop Career Center, or TRIO Program can help you create a plan for going to college and starting a career. You also can find help at:

- **mySkills myFuture:** On this website, you can search for jobs that need skills you already have. Go to: <http://www.myskillsmyfuture.org/>. Enter your current or past job. You will get a list of jobs using the skills you already have and names and contact information for employers. You also can get information about earnings and any training you may need.
- **My Next Move:** This website can help you find a job that matches your interests and training. Go to: <http://www.mynextmove.org/>. Then, you can search for jobs by industry or key words (for example, build houses or computers).
- **College for Adults:** This website can help you plan your career, choose and apply to a college, and get financial aid. It also links you to other websites with helpful information. Go to: <http://www.collegeforadults.org>.
- **The Occupational Outlook Handbook:** On this website, you can learn about different jobs and the education and training you need for them. The handbook is updated every two years. Go to: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>. Then, search for jobs by job type, earnings, or required education and training.

Remember that people with criminal records sometimes are legally forbidden from working in certain jobs. Before choosing an education or training program, make sure that your record will not prevent you from working in that job. To learn more, go to:

- **The National H.I.R.E. Network:** This website describes how your criminal record can affect your job search. Go to: <http://www.hirenetwork.org>. Click on “Resources and Assistance.” Then, choose “Criminal Record Issues.”
- **Reentry Mythbuster on Hiring/Criminal Record Guidance:** This explains why an employer cannot automatically keep people with criminal records from jobs. Go to: http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/documents/0000/1082/Reentry_Council_Mythbuster_Employment.pdf.



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Earn Your High School Diploma

If you do not have a high school diploma, you can get help from your local adult education program or community college. If you are still incarcerated, you can get help from the education program in your correctional facility.

These programs can help you get ready for the GED test or get an adult high school diploma. First, they will ask you to take a test to find out which skills you have and which skills you still need to learn. The classes that you go to will depend on your skills. The different types of classes are:

- **Adult basic education (ABE):** These classes help adults with basic skills, such as reading, writing, math, solving problems, and using a computer.
- **Adult secondary education (ASE):** These classes help adults get ready for the GED test or earn an adult high school diploma.
- **English literacy:** These classes help adults with speaking, reading, and writing in English. They also can help immigrant adults become U.S. citizens.

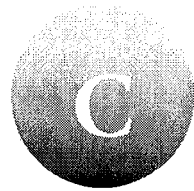
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Choose and Enroll in a College Program

You can work with a counselor at your correctional facility, local adult education program, or community college to get help choosing the right college program. If you are still incarcerated, ask your counselor about college programs offered in your correctional facility or through correspondence courses.

You can choose from several types of college programs, including:

- **Career and technical education (CTE) programs:** These programs help you get the skills needed for jobs (for example, auto repair or nursing). They mix classroom learning with hands-on training. You usually get a certificate when you finish the program. Other training programs include apprenticeships, vocational rehabilitation programs, and Job Corps.
- **Two-year academic programs:** These programs teach skills that can help you do well in many different jobs. They also help you go on to a four-year college for a bachelor's degree. You usually get an associate's degree when you finish a two-year program.
- **Four-year academic programs:** Programs at four-year colleges and universities give you skills needed for many different types of jobs. When you graduate, you receive a bachelor's degree.



You can go to the *College Navigator* website at: <http://collegenavigator.ed.gov> to learn more about these programs. On this website, you can search for colleges by location and type of program. To find out more about the cost of college programs, go to: <http://collegecost.ed.gov/catc/>. Select the type of college program you are interested in and then search by highest or lowest cost.

Talk to your counselor about getting college credit for any work experience or training you already have. You may need to take tests to get credit for these experiences.

If you are on community supervision, talk to your employer about your college plans. Some employers will help pay for college. Some may let you change your work schedule so you can attend classes.

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Apply for Financial Aid

You can get help with paying for college from colleges, states, and the U.S. government. The U.S. government offers several types of financial aid. Talk with your college and career counselor to find out what type of aid is best for you.

You also can get help from a website called *Student Aid on the Web*, at: <http://studentaid.ed.gov>. This website can help you get ready and pay for college. It can tell you how to find out what skills you already have and help you look into different careers. It gives information on taking the GED test and college entrance tests. You can learn about choosing a college, getting ready to attend, and paying for it. You also can get information about financial aid for adults by going to: <http://studentaid.ed.gov/pubs>. Then, look for the title *Federal Student Aid for Adults*.

Many people with criminal records think they cannot get financial aid. This is not true. Most people on community supervision can receive financial aid. But there are some restrictions. You can learn more about these restrictions at:

- ***Reentry Mythbuster on Federal Student Financial Aid***,
http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/documents/0000/1062/Reentry_Council_Mythbuster_Student_Financial_Aid.pdf; or
- ***Incarcerated Individuals and Eligibility for Federal Student Aid***,
<http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/IncarcFAQ.pdf>.

