

Identifying and Scaling Higher Education in Prison Programmatic Resources: Grantee Profile



Restorative Justice Initiative (RJI) at Pennsylvania State University



Location | University Park, Pennsylvania

Facilities served:

- State Correctional Institution Benner Township
- State Correctional Institution Huntingdon
- Centre County Correctional Facility
- and more

[Additional Program Information](#)



Resource Overview: Reentry Simulation Toolkit for HEP Programs

Unlike conventional reentry simulations that tend to emphasize personal responsibility, Penn State's reentry simulation centers structural barriers such as housing restrictions, employment discrimination, and challenges accessing education, healthcare, and social services. The Reimagined Reentry Simulation (RRS) challenges participants from postsecondary institutions and the broader community (including university leaders, legislators, legal professionals, employers, community service providers, and students) to grapple with the bureaucratic, financial, and social obstacles that returning citizens face. By shifting the focus from "walking in someone's shoes" to highlighting system inequities, the RRS creates a springboard for coalition-building and meaningful reform.



What the Resource Includes

The Reentry Simulation Toolkit for Higher Education in Prison (HEP) Programs aims to prepare communities for successful reentry. The RRS is designed to spark dialogue, shift perspectives, and ultimately dismantle systemic barriers to success for justice-impacted individuals.

The resource includes these components:

- A structured simulation experience with interactive scenarios reflecting real-world reentry barriers (e.g., employment, housing, parole, higher education, health care, transportation)
- Facilitator guides, training videos, and debrief modules to ensure simulations are framed critically and lead to action-oriented dialogue
- Adaptation suggestions for tailoring the simulation to different audiences, communities, or program contexts
- Printable and digital materials, including wild cards, role descriptions, and station instructions
- Case studies and filmed debriefs to model facilitation strategies



Resource Refinement and Scaling Journey

Through this grant, Penn State will engage in an evidence-informed cycle of continuous improvement to systematically facilitate, evaluate, and improve the Reentry Simulation Toolkit for HEP Programs.

The Penn State team will improve and finalize the RRS through a series of hands-on refinement activities. This work will include reviewing existing research to guide the resource content, piloting with university and financial aid administrators, and gathering feedback from advisory board members with lived experiences. These steps will help ensure the materials are useful, practical, and based on solid evidence. The team will explore these key areas during the refinement and scaling process:

- A scan and review of existing reentry simulations
- Guidance on best practices for conducting online simulations
- Defining the knowledge, skills, and resources needed for effective facilitation

Learn More About the Grantee

Since 2015, Penn State's Restorative Justice Initiative (RJI) has provided courses, workshops, and pathways to higher education for hundreds of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students across Pennsylvania. Beyond classrooms, RJI focuses on reshaping the environments students return to, ensuring communities, institutions, and employers are ready to welcome and support justice-impacted individuals. The RRS is one of RJI's most impactful tools for driving this cultural change and the focus of the resources developed through this grant.

To learn more about the project's evidence-informed continuous improvement cycle, read the [Identifying and Scaling Higher Education in Prison Programmatic Resources one-pager](#). The insights and materials developed through this project will be shared with the broader HEP field to support ongoing improvement in prison education programs.



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