

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



Restorative Justice Lab (RJ Lab) at the University of North Alabama



Location | Florence, Alabama

Facility served:

- Limestone Correctional Facility

[Additional Program Information](#)



Resource Overview: Community-Building Toolkit for HEP Programs

Developed through RJ Lab's four semesters of implementation at Limestone Correctional Facility, this resource reflects continuous participatory action research with students, faculty, and community-based restorative justice practitioners. The Community-Building Toolkit for Higher Education in Prison (HEP) Programs provides structured modules and ready-to-use template materials to guide intentional community-building and create environments where students feel supported, engaged, and accountable. By offering field-tested materials shaped by on-the-ground experience and student feedback, this resource enables HEP programs to engage in community-building in correctional settings with clear intentions and proven practices.



What the Resource Includes

The Community-Building Toolkit is for HEP programs—whether degree-granting, credit-bearing, or noncredit—that seek practical guidance for establishing intentional community-building in correctional environments. It includes the following components:

- Curriculum framework and implementation guidance for six foundational modules:
 - Building a Strong Cohort
 - Strengthening Relationships
 - Managing Conflict
 - Modeling Accountability
 - Creating Continuous Student Engagement
 - Developing and Sustaining Programmatic and Institutional Relationships
- Ready-to-use materials, including rubrics, protocols, structured exercises, and facilitation guides



Resource Refinement and Scaling Journey

Through this grant, the RJ Lab team will engage in an evidence-informed cycle of continuous improvement to enhance the applicability and transferability of these resources to the broader HEP field.

The RJ Lab team will improve and finalize the resources through a series of hands-on refinement activities. This work will include scanning the literature to inform resource content, organization, and presentation; field testing RJ Lab's community agreement process; piloting select modules at partner sites; and vetting content through subject matter expert review. These steps will help ensure that the materials are useful, practical, and based on solid evidence. The team will explore these key topics during the refinement and scaling process:

- Trauma-informed instructional design that supports student success in carceral settings while addressing the unique needs of justice-involved learners
- Culturally responsive teaching that engages multicultural cohorts effectively and navigates social barriers in correctional environments
- Cohort models in HEP, including best practices for student recruitment, retention, attrition management, and admissions standards across different program types
- Restorative justice practices that address conflict, foster accountability, and build connection among students in prison education programs

Learn More About the Grantee

The Restorative Justice Lab (RJ Lab) at the University of North Alabama operates within the largest men's prison in the state and takes a comprehensive approach to building intentional community within higher education in prison (HEP) programs.

The Community-Building Toolkit for HEP Programs is a robust resource featuring six modules that guide programs through concrete strategies for improving student engagement and retention, fostering relationships, addressing conflict, and creating a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. This resource enables programs to move beyond the assumption that community will develop naturally. It encourages students to give feedback, seek support, and express their needs.

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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