

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



University of Saint Mary (USM)



Location | Leavenworth, Kansas

Facilities served:

- Lansing Correctional Facility
- United States Disciplinary Barracks
- Joint Regional Correctional Facility
- Federal Correction Institution, Leavenworth

[Additional Program Information](#)



Resource Overview: Student Success Survey & Resource Guide

The Student Success Survey & Resource Guide is a tool designed to assess incarcerated students' needs through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, highlighting how physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs directly impact students' ability to persist and succeed in higher education while incarcerated.

The Likert scale survey helps identify student needs, ranging from basic concerns such as sleep and safety to academic confidence and future aspirations. To protect students' privacy, the survey is anonymous and nonidentifiable. Grounded in research and adapted for correctional environments, the survey and accompanying resource guide enable higher education in prison (HEP) programs to better understand their students and intentionally tailor support services and interventions based on their needs.



What the Resource Includes

The Student Success Survey & Resource Guide includes three main components:

- A survey designed to identify gaps in the primary dimensions of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, including physical, emotional, academic, and social supports

- Implementation guidance and analysis tools, including navigating the institutional review board process, survey administration, and step-by-step instructions for analyzing the results
- A resource guide with strategies for translating survey data into targeted student supports and interventions



Resource Refinement and Scaling Journey

Through this grant, the USM team will engage in an evidence-informed cycle of continuous improvement to pilot the survey with other programs, create implementation guidance, and provide training on analyzing and interpreting results.

The USM team will improve and finalize the resources through a series of hands-on refinement activities. This work will include reviewing existing research to inform the resource content; gathering feedback from formerly incarcerated survey respondents to identify where targeted interventions can improve enrollment, retention, and graduation; and conducting interviews with HEP instructors to inform strategies for addressing the distinct challenges faced by HEP students and strengthening data-driven supports. 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:

- Understanding the role of physiological, emotional, and academic support in persistence and educational outcomes for students who are incarcerated
- Defining the research and evidence-base for using Maslow's hierarchy of needs for juvenile facility retention
- Understanding best practices for creating and populating a survey implementation guidebook

Learn More About the Grantee

Since 2021, the University of Saint Mary (USM) has been working to strengthen student retention and success across its Prison Education Program (PEP), which now serves over 100 men across all facilities. Recognizing that traditional college retention strategies do not always apply in prison settings, USM developed the Student Success Survey & Resource Guide to better understand and respond to the unique needs of incarcerated students.

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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