NSHE Prison Education Program
Overview

The Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) is eager to work with Nevada inmates to prepare them for successful re-entry back into our communities by providing a higher education and training for jobs in the emerging Nevada economy. NSHE is proposing a scale up of a pilot program that was implemented at the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) during the 2017 legislative session.

In our nation there are nearly 700,000 state prisoners that are released back in our society every year and most are not adequately equipped with the tools needed to re-enter the workforce. Most prisons have programs to help inmates earn their GED during their time incarcerated and many have programs that offer post-secondary education with opportunities for inmates to earn vocational certificates and college degrees. Studies have shown that 43% of prisoners that receive a college education do no recommit criminal activity.

THE NEED IN NEVADA
The prison population has been on the rise since 1978. It is clear that leaders in the great state of Nevada want to work on decreasing our prison population. As such, we need to get even more serious about offering a higher education to inmates prior to their release from prison. Due to limitations with access to technology in our prisons as well as funding challenges in Nevada, currently there are very limited opportunities for inmates to pursue a higher education while in prison. Working with policy makers and Department of Corrections leadership we can truly provide an opportunity for inmates to have the proper tools they need to enter back into our communities and join the workforce in high demand careers upon their release.

BENEFITS
Providing a higher education to inmates who will eventually be released puts them on a positive pathway for re-entry. This pathway will prepare inmates for a career as well as continued higher education. This also gives community colleges the opportunity to fulfill their access mission by making higher education available to all. With a strong prison education we can reduce recidivism, reduce the cost of imprisonment and increase the success of former inmates in obtaining employment. Every inmate who leaves the system saves that state an average of $25,000 per year. Nationally more than 650,000 people were released from state prisons in 2010. If we were to cut re-incarceration rates in half, the United States could save $2.7 billion per year. Research has shown recidivism rates are inversely proportional to a released prisoner’s level of education. A study by Emery University found that: Ex-offenders who complete some high school courses have recidivism rates around 55 percent. Vocational training cut recidivism to approximately 30 percent. An associate degree drops the rate to 13.7 percent.

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN NEVADA
• Barriers to colleges trying to get into some of the prisons.
• Lack of funding for the community colleges to offer prison education programs.
• Nevada prisons do not have the technological infrastructure to allow colleges to effectively deliver higher education programming.
• Very limited re-entry programming exists across the state to help ex-felons find good employment upon release.

CSN Pilot Program
As prescribed from SB 306 legislation, the pilot program has been offered to one hundred inmates (50 women and 50 men) who were incarcerated at either High Desert State Prison or Florence McClure Women’s Correctional Center. These 100 students were each given a choice between pursuing a traditional college degree and pursuing a pre-apprenticeship experience which would prepare them for a career with a union within the construction industry. These options provided participants with an opportunity to align their futures with sustainable employment and continuing higher education. The outcome of the college path provides inmates with six transferable college credits, while the pre-apprenticeship path provides three college credits and four industry-recognized credentials which are required for employment in the construction industry.

Since implementation of the CSN prison education
program, CSN provided seven sections of academic courses and a pre-apprenticeship training with the opportunity for students to obtain four credentials required for employment in various labor union industries.

Key findings from the CSN prison program evaluation demonstrate a great impact in program participant success. Senate Bill 306 allocated $300,000 for the implementation of this PEP pilot. This funding provided an opportunity for CSN to award 201 college credits and 90 employment credentials that served to prepare the participants for further higher education and employment. The pilot program funding covered instructional costs, student course fees, textbooks for two college level courses and pre-apprenticeship materials, faculty & staff salaries and general program operational expenses.

NSHE PRISON EDUCATION PROPOSAL

Goals

- Increase educational attainment leading to employability for incarcerated and previously incarcerated individuals;
- Provide for seamless transition into higher education;
- Reduce recidivism and improve quality of life;
- Reduce costs to state

Focus

- High School Equivalency Programming (note: CCSD is already providing HSE within the prisons in Southern Nevada)
- College readiness and Academic and Life Success course
- Other general education courses that are applicable to general college degrees and certificates
- Career and technical education training in high demand career fields
- Academic and Career Advising & Re-Entry Services
- Assistance with job placement

Vocational Training

Of all the different types of correspondence education that inmates can participate in, career and technical (vocational) programs for inmates are likely the most useful and practical due to the quick and relatively inexpensive ability to train inmates with the knowledge and tools needed to get a job upon their release.

Types of vocational training programs that would be beneficial to inmates:

- Ophthalmic Lab Tech
- Ophthalmic Dispensing
- Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC)
- Automotive
- Welding
- Culinary
- Information Technology
- Construction Site Training to include Flaggers training
- First aid and CPR training

Job Placement

For program participants that have completed a program and have maintained good behavior will be connected with a representative from Hope for Prisoners prior to release to help prepare them for employment and re-integration upon release.

Eligibility

Participants must meet certain criteria to participate in the program. As with any individual desiring to enroll in one of Nevada’s community colleges, they must possess a high school diploma or its equivalent. Inmates cannot have any disciplinary infractions on their record and must be within 12-18 months of their release from state custody.

Re-entry and Employment Partnerships

- Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR)
- Local business and industry to include local unions
- Workforce Connections
- Hope for Prisoners

Conclusion

In the Governor’s recommended budget $333,976 was allocated to continue the program at CSN. The budget also included additional funding to expand a similar program to TMCC ($230,308) and WNC ($311,509) allowing NSHE to scale up the Prison Education program to additional populations within the state.