



NEW MEXICO CORRECTIONS DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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NMCD approves UNM for Prison Education Program

SANTA FE – The New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD) approved the University of New Mexico's (UNM) Valencia campus to serve as a Prison Education Program (PEP) institution. For the first time in nearly 30 years, this program brings access to federal funds for incarcerated students, like the Pell Grant, beyond the limited pilot program known as the [Second Chance Pell Experiment](#). The implementation of this program is a direct result of a new federal policy, which went into [effect last July](#).

"This new program recognizes the value of education in our prisons," said **NMCD Cabinet Secretary Alisha Tafoya Lucero**. "It provides the incarcerated individuals with an opportunity to further their education and increase their chances of successful reintegration into society upon release. With everything we do at NMCD, our goal is to build safer communities, and this program is a significant step towards achieving that goal."

The PEP levels the playing field and enhances educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals. Here's how:

- 1. Access to federal funds:** Previously, incarcerated students relied solely on the Opportunity Scholarship to finance their education. Now, with the PEP, NMCD students have equal access to federal funds for their educational pursuits. Additionally, the program guarantees equal access to various student services, which were previously limited to students on traditional campuses.
- 2. Increased rehabilitation:** Education has long been recognized as a powerful tool for rehabilitation. By providing educational opportunities to incarcerated individuals, the PEP promotes critical thinking and self-improvement, in preparation for successful returns to society.
- 3. Reduce recidivism:** Research by the [RAND Corporation](#) shows participation in prison education programs significantly reduces recidivism rates and increases employment prospects for formerly incarcerated individuals. This program aims to break the cycle of re-offending by providing access to an education that can lead to better employment prospects and increased stability.
- 4. Improved social integration:** Education not only equips individuals with knowledge and skills, but it also fosters social integration. Through participation in educational programs, incarcerated individuals can engage with instructors, peers, and mentors. These valuable connections provide support networks and resources when the individual tries to successfully transition back into society.

“We are proving that there is no wrong door to higher education in New Mexico,” said **New Mexico Higher Education Department Cabinet Secretary Stephanie M. Rodriguez**. “Incarcerated individuals will now be able to leverage both state and federal scholarships to ensure they have the opportunity to reach higher and ensure they can achieve success in their communities when they are out. Higher education for people of all backgrounds creates a positive contribution to New Mexico’s work force and economy.”

Incarcerated students will have access to the federal funds once UNM-Valencia is approved by the U.S. Department of Education. Colleges and universities interested in applying to serve as a PEP, may contact the NMCD [Reentry Division](#).

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The New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD) is one of the largest State Departments in New Mexico. The department staff and volunteers are fully committed to integrating programs in its state-owned facilities for rehabilitation. It is through programs, like educational certificates, that the department aims to reduce the risk of recidivism and enhance public safety in communities. For more information, visit cd.nm.gov or follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) at @NMCDPIO.