

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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FACT SHEET: White House Launches the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge

Today at the White House, Domestic Policy Council Director Cecilia Muñoz and Education Secretary John King will host 15 higher education public and private institutions from across the country who are standing with the Obama Administration as founding partners in launching the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge. In total, 25 institutions have taken the pledge, including: Ancilla College, Arizona State University, Auburn University, Boston University, City University of New York, College of Saint Benedict, Columbia University, Cornell University, Eastern University, Howard University, New York University, North Park University, Nyack College, Raritan Valley Community College, Rutgers University (Biomedical and Health Sciences, Camden, Newark and New Brunswick), Saint John's University, San Francisco State University, State University of New York, Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, University of California System, University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, University of Puget Sound and University of Washington. These institutions represent and serve more than one million students. More information about the pledge is available [HERE](#).

Since the President took office, this Administration has been committed to reforming America's criminal justice system and expanding college opportunity.

In July 2015, the President highlighted the importance of reducing barriers facing people who have been in contact with the criminal justice system and are trying to put their lives back on track, and emphasized that a smarter approach to reducing crime and enhancing public safety must begin with investing in all of our communities. Right now, there are 2.2 million Americans behind bars, and more than 600,000 inmates are released each year. An estimated 70 million or more Americans have some sort of criminal record -- almost one in five of all Americans; almost one in three Americans of working age.

Too often, a criminal record disqualifies Americans from being full participants in our society -- even after they've already paid their debt to society. This includes admissions processes for educational institutions that can make it difficult if not impossible for those with criminal records to get an education that can lead to a job. As President Obama has said, "that's bad for not only those individuals, it's bad for our economy. It's bad for the communities that desperately need more role

models who are gainfully employed. So we've got to make sure Americans who've paid their debt to society can earn their second chance."

Today's announcement provides higher education institutions and a broad array of coalitions with an opportunity to voice their support for the reforms needed to remove unnecessary barriers to college access.

By signing the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge, these higher education institutions are:

- **Demonstrating an ongoing commitment to take action to reduce barriers to a fair shot at a second chance, especially through an educational opportunity**, including adopting fair chance admissions practices like going "Beyond the Box" by determining whether criminal justice-related questions are necessary to make an informed admission decision, and if so, whether these questions should be moved to a later part of the application process (e.g., after schools make an initial admission decision or after students meet the academic criteria), or whether the initial review of the application can be conducted without knowledge of the answers to the criminal-justice related questions.
- **Taking action in their local communities** by supporting professors and students who want to teach or are teaching in correctional facilities and ensuring internships and job training are available to individuals with criminal records.
- **Setting an example for their peers.** The Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge is available for more higher education institutions to sign on [at this link](#). The Obama Administration will highlight these additional pledge takers later this year.

Last month the Department of Education released The "Beyond the Box" Resource Guide. The Guide provides information for colleges and universities to help remove barriers that can prevent citizens with criminal records from pursuing higher education. The guide also encourages alternatives to inquiring about criminal histories during college admissions and provides recommendations to support a holistic review of applicants. More information is available [HERE](#).

Earlier this year, the White House [launched the Fair Chance Business Pledge](#), a call-to-action for all members of the private sector to improve their communities by eliminating barriers in employment for those with a criminal record and creating a pathway for a second chance. Over 100 organizations have joined the pledge, including: American Airlines, The Coca-Cola Company, Facebook, Georgia Pacific, Google, The Hershey Company, The Johns Hopkins Hospital and Health System, Koch Industries, PepsiCo, Prudential, Starbucks, Uber, Under Armour/Plank Industries, Unilever and Xerox. A full list of companies who have signed the Fair Chance Business Pledge is available [HERE](#).

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THE FAIR CHANCE HIGHER EDUCATION PLEDGE

We applaud the growing number of public and private colleges and universities nationwide who are taking action to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to succeed, including individuals who have had contact with the criminal justice system. When an estimated 70 million or more Americans — nearly one in three adults — have a criminal record, it is important to remove unnecessary barriers that may prevent these individuals from gaining access to education and training that can be so critical to career success and lead to a fulfilled and productive life. We are committed to providing individuals with criminal records, including formerly incarcerated individuals, a fair chance to seek a higher education to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to our Nation's growing economy.

These institutions put forth their pledges as follows:

- **Arizona State University (AZ)**

- Arizona State University is an institution committed to making higher education accessible to the millions of individual capable of doing college level work who want to better his or her life. This is why ASU is signing the Fair Chance Pledge. We must remove barriers to success in education and employment for everyone, including individuals with criminal convictions, who have demonstrated a commitment to academic and professional success post-incarceration. We as a nation must create opportunities for these individuals if we expect them to follow a different path than the one that led them to prison.
- The innovation and mold-breaking that are hallmarks of ASU are all in service of this broad mission of inclusiveness and opportunity. Like our partnerships with Starbucks to make college free to all their employees and the launch of the open-access Global Freshman Academy, the Fair Chance pledge represents a belief that opportunities must be given for self-improvement to all those who are willing to expend the necessary effort and commitment. It is the key to the long-term success of our nation.
 - Auburn is committed to its land-grant traditions of service and access through the rigors of academic study and a welcoming, inclusive campus community. The first priority in the Auburn strategic plan is enhancing student success and diversifying enrollment, and eliminating unnecessary barriers provides one avenue toward those objectives. Auburn's reputation for providing a challenging and practical learning experience is strengthened through integrated academic and student life programs that equip students of varied backgrounds to become leaders in their professions and communities.
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- **Boston University (MA)**

- Boston University has a tradition of inclusiveness and service to the community that goes back to its founding charter. We believe in the power of education to elevate, nurture, and transform. BU has delivered college-level courses in correctional institutions since 1972, which makes our prison education program one of the oldest continuously operating programs in the country. While education is difficult to deliver in prison, we know that education's power to change lives is critical in prison. Today BU continues to offer a full Bachelor's degree to incarcerated individuals and provides over \$1,500,000 annually for scholarships, books, instructional and administrative support. We also support scholarships for the staff of the correctional institutions. Our program improves the climate within the correctional institution and helps prisoners obtain the intellectual leverage they need to revise their view of themselves and emerge from prison better equipped to contribute positively to their families and communities.

- **City University of New York (NY)**

- CUNY strongly believes that educational opportunity is critical to helping formerly incarcerated people re-enter society with the knowledge and skills to become productive, self-sufficient citizens. Public dollars are saved by reducing recidivism, while safer communities are created. With CUNY's John Jay College of Criminal Justice in the lead, and working in close collaboration with Hostos Community College, programs have been developed to provide academic courses to inmates. The University currently operates the Prison to College Pipeline -- known as P2CP -- through John Jay's Prisoner Reentry Institute. This effort brings accredited courses, which are privately funded, to inmates at several New York State correctional facilities, and the University has plans to expand to other prisons.

- **Columbia University (NY)**

- As an academic institution committed to inclusion and excellence, Columbia University has a particular responsibility to support enhancing access to college education and employment for those who need a second chance and, more broadly, for those from communities bearing the brunt of mass incarceration. Signing the Fair Chance pledge provides an opportunity to reaffirm the scope of Columbia's commitment in these areas:
- Columbia is committed to policies and practices that ensure fair, equitable, and well-informed consideration of all prospective students and employees, including those with a criminal record.
- Columbia faculty teach in prisons, jails and, on the Columbia campus, in programs that make it possible for students who have returned from prison to continue their education and to increase their opportunities for employment.

- Columbia is committed to supporting the success of the members of its community who have experienced incarceration and to valuing their contributions to the vibrancy of our academic community and to the public discourse on criminal justice reform.
- Faculty, students, and staff across the University carry out research that advances the analysis and understanding of social issues that have contributed to and result from mass incarceration. Many members of our academic community are civically engaged in addressing those issues as well.
- **Cornell University (NY)**
 - Cornell University was founded on egalitarian principles of providing access to higher education for all academically-qualified students, and a practical vision of higher education dedicated to a land-grant mission of public service and engagement. Cornell strives to foster diversity in our student populations by seeking, admitting, and graduating students from all backgrounds. These values are consistent with the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge that encourages colleges and universities to commit to actions so that all American have the opportunity to succeed through pursuing advanced education. Cornell considers criminal history information of any applicant only in later stages of the admissions process and provides an opportunity for applicants to provide explanatory information. Once admitted, Cornell provides a supportive campus environment. We are proud to take action in our own region through the Cornell Prison Education Program, providing academic opportunities for incarcerated students, some of whom have been admitted to Cornell University following their affiliation with that program.
- **Eastern University (PA)**
 - Eastern University supports the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge and appreciates the White House's efforts to ensure that our nation's many returning citizens are greeted with opportunity as they return to their homes and communities. The Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge is consistent with Eastern University's history and practice of seeking to remove barriers to educational attainment that many of our neighbors experience. Over the years, Eastern has embraced initiatives, built programs, and sought partnerships that have allowed it to better provide educational opportunities to populations side-lined by the dominant practices of higher education. This creative activity reflects our commitment to values reflected in our motto, "Faith, Reason, & Justice." In a manner congruent with those ends, we are dedicated to providing all individuals who seek an Eastern University education, including those who have been incarcerated, a fair chance at gaining the knowledge and credentials they need so that they may access the opportunities they seek. One expression of Eastern University's commitment to returning citizens is a June 2016 Conference on Reentry sponsored by our Center for Urban Youth Development, a City Councilman, several area nonprofits, and a church in Philadelphia. At Eastern University, embracing the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge is more than mere words. It is an expression of our history and core identity.
- **Howard University (DC)**

- Since being chartered by the U.S. Congress on March 2, 1867, Howard University has been dedicated to researching and developing solutions to address the disparities and social ills that affect our communities, nation and the world, with a legacy of breaking barriers and creating opportunities. Through its admission practices, Howard University works to provide inclusive opportunity and an equal chance to all who are preparing themselves for postsecondary education. The University recognizes academic talent and potential, despite an applicant's economic or social circumstances, and already provides a broad array of support services to help students successfully complete their higher education. Howard University instills in all of its students its time honored principles of In Truth and Service.
- **New York University (NY)**
 - At NYU, we believe in second chances and in the role of universities as engines of social mobility. We are also sensitive to the concerns about how equitably our justice system serves our society. NYU reviews all candidates for undergraduate admission holistically, and criminal conviction has never been an automatic bar to admission; every year, we admit applicants who "checked the box." Even as NYU remains committed to providing a safe environment for our students, we think the modifications we've made to our admissions process -- in which applications' first readings are "box blind" -- are an important step in the right direction. And we look forward to continuing the dialogue, posing questions, and carrying out the research about the role and value of the "box."
- **North Park University, Chicago (IL)**
 - North Park University in Chicago educates students for lives of significance and service. We believe that all people desiring a high-quality education deserve the opportunity. This has meant expanding the range of students we are educating, and expanding the support services we provide. Over the past few years we have been holding courses in a state prison. Several of those students have asked if, upon their release, they can continue their education at North Park. It is important to us that they can do so. We applaud the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge, and we will work diligently to create pathways for a second chance for people with a criminal record. We are delighted to join fellow universities in working to remove unnecessary barriers for a higher education and becoming places of hope and opportunity.
- **Raritan Valley Community College (NJ)**
 - Raritan Valley Community College, a major partner in the New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons Consortium (NJ-STEP), is especially proud to applaud and to support the White House Fair Chance Business Pledge. As a mission-driven college of opportunity, Raritan Valley believes in the transformative power of education. In providing incarcerated students with a dynamic and innovative learning environment, in offering students the opportunity to earn an Associates Degree, and in building a seamless transition into a four-year college, we help to create that "pathway for a second chance." We are honored to include these remarkable graduates as our alumni and as our most persuasive and eloquent examples of success.

- **Rutgers University (NJ)**

- Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, has over 60,000 students spread across its three universities in Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick, as well as Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences. For more than a decade, Rutgers has been building new strategies for providing higher education to people with prior criminal justice histories. Our seminal effort, the Mountainview Program, was a peer, on-campus, student community for students who have previously been incarcerated. It showed that a campus support system can produce substantial educational outcomes: more than 100 students enrolled, over 40 baccalaureate degrees to date from more than 6 different Rutgers schools, 6 master's degrees from distinguished institutions around the country, and Rutgers' two most recent Truman Scholars. Today we host NJ-STEP, a consortium of New Jersey higher education institutions which offers dozens of college courses throughout New Jersey's state prison system, provides transition services to ensure that people released from prison enroll in New Jersey's colleges, and oversees the Mountainview communities now operating at all Rutgers universities.
- Rutgers' mission is to serve New Jersey's most promising students by providing educational opportunity, and to achieve that mission we make a special effort to promote educational access for students who come from previously excluded groups. Our three different universities offer a range of options for those with previous criminal justice involvement, and we particularly note that two of our universities are located in cities whose residents are at elevated risk of criminal justice contact. Our philosophy is to make college available to any New Jersey resident who can succeed academically at Rutgers, without preconceptions about prior justice system experiences. Once students with criminal justice histories are admitted, we work hard to make sure they are supported academically and personally while they study on our campuses. This, we know, is a key to success.
- More importantly, we take pride in the degree to which these students participate fully in our campus life, make contributions to the broader Rutgers community while they study here, and bring credit to themselves, to Rutgers, and to the State of New Jersey in the way they use their education to build successful lives after they graduate.

- **San Francisco State University (CA)**

- San Francisco State University applauds the growing number of public and private colleges and universities nationwide who are taking action to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to succeed, including individuals who have had contact with the criminal justice system. When an estimated 70 million or more Americans — nearly one in three adults — have a criminal record, it is important to remove unnecessary barriers that may prevent these individuals from gaining access to education and training that can be so critical to career success and lead to a fulfilled and productive life. We are committed to providing individuals with criminal records, including

formerly incarcerated individuals, a fair chance to seek a higher education to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to our Nation's growing economy.

- Founded in 1967, Project Rebound at San Francisco State University is a special support program for students transitioning out of prison and jail which has helped hundreds of formerly incarcerated individuals to earn bachelor's degrees and beyond. Project Rebound is a proven model that reduces recidivism and empowers criminal justice-involved individuals through higher education. The CSU Project Rebound Consortium has developed a three-year plan to establish and expand programs for formerly incarcerated students across the CSU system. Each university plans to develop a campus-based re-entry program to help motivated individuals to prepare for college, apply for admission, enroll, persist, and graduate, ready to enter the workforce. Key objectives for the next three-years include:
 - Build the capacity of CSU campus administrators, faculty and staff to serve currently and formerly incarcerated students.
 - Create on-ramps between state and county correctional facilities and CSU campuses, and develop connections with reentry service providers to support student success.
 - Identify and support enrolled students and help prospective students to prepare, apply, matriculate, persist, and graduate.
 - Develop a data collection, management, and evaluation system to inform program development and to communicate program outcomes.

- **State University of New York (NY)**
 - The nation's largest comprehensive public university system, The State University of New York (SUNY), was established in 1948 to create opportunity and increase access to quality higher education. For individuals across the New York State and the nation who have a history with the criminal justice system, access to college can be a challenge due to requirements for disclosure of criminal records and other barriers - both real and perceived - throughout the application process. To combat this issue and bolster its commitment to providing educational opportunity for every New Yorker, a SUNY workgroup is consulting with campus and community stakeholders throughout the state as the 64-campus university system prepares to improve pathways to college for justice-involved individuals as recommended by "beyond the box."

- **University of Pittsburgh, Bradford (PA)**
 - The University of Pittsburgh at Bradford community proudly supports the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge. We are fully committed to creating a mutually respectful, enterprising, and intellectually curious community of students, faculty, and staff who value and embrace diversity in all of its forms, manifestations, and expressions. This pledge only strengthens our educational partnership with Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) McKean.

- **University of Puget Sound (WA)**

- Puget Sound has adopted fair chance admission practices that include considering criminal justice questions only in the later part of a holistic read of all admission files, giving all prospective students an opportunity to explain criminal justice involvement and preparedness for postsecondary study, communicating clearly on the Puget Sound website (item 16) how justice and discipline involvement will be considered, and demonstrating a clear record of admitting students who have reported history of justice or discipline involvement. In faculty and staff hiring processes, contingent offers precede criminal background checks; results are considered in the context of the specific position description. We have a strong set of programs in support of campus safety, including prevention of and response to sexual assault. Our campus also supports the Freedom Education Project Puget Sound as a signature initiative in civic scholarship, which includes establishing mutual, reciprocal community partnerships to support justice-involved individuals and providing high quality liberal arts education at the Washington Correctional Center for Women. Twenty-three Puget Sound faculty to-date have taught in the program and a long list of students has served as tutors and volunteers, and – this summer – in a new internship program at the prison. The Race and Pedagogy Initiative, another signature initiative, has hosted campus-community summit sessions on race, education, and justice.

- **University of Washington (WA)**

- The University of Washington is committed to reducing barriers and challenges to achieving a high-quality higher education — that is the foundation of our Race and Equity Initiative. The UW believes, fundamentally, that higher education allows individuals boundless opportunities. This is why the UW, through our faculty and graduate students, is a long-time active partner in University Beyond Bars and Freedom Education Project Puget Sound, which together recently applied for the pilot program allowing incarcerated individuals eligible for PELL grant funding to pursue BA degree completion. The UW leads by example in helping individuals put their lives back on track and investing broadly in our community through our Inner Pipeline Seminars, which includes a community practicum inside the King County Correctional Facility; through programs like UW's Mixed Enrollment Courses, where UW faculty teach classes combining students from campus and from inside a prison learning together; as well as on-going and expanded teacher training, volunteer teaching, and active research programs for greater collaboration to reach across prison walls and connect academic institutions, incarceration facilities, and incarcerated individuals to better understand challenges and develop better tools, training and assessments to support individuals for re-entry.

Additional signatories to the Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge:

- **Ancilla College (IN)**
- **College of Saint Benedict (MN)**

- **Nyack College (NY)**
- **Saint John's University (MN)**
- **University of California System (CA)**