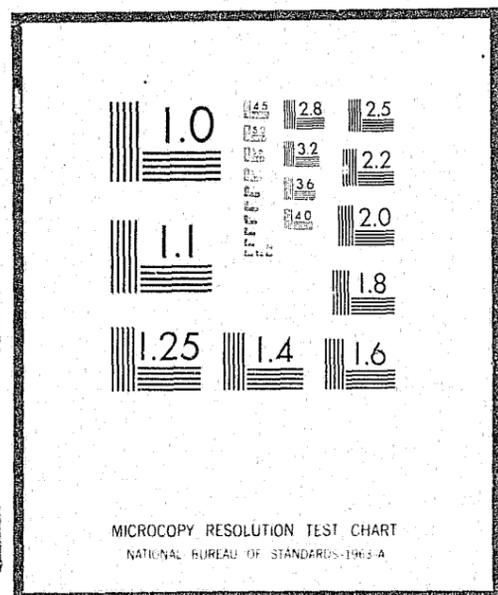


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Staff Report

May 1976

College Opportunities for Prison Inmates and Parolees:  
Needs and Future Directions

### Introduction

College programs serving prison inmates and parolees have blossomed on several campuses in the past few years. Constrained by tight financial resources of both colleges and correctional institutions, such programs have remained small. Legislation approved in 1974 urged community colleges to expand cooperative efforts with the Department of Corrections (CDC) and the California Youth Authority (CYA) (Assembly Bill 814 - Dixon). Legislation was also introduced by Assemblyman Alatorre (House Resolution 124) calling for an assessment of the adequacy of existing postsecondary educational programs for inmates and parolees. This brief staff report provides an initial assessment.

The study process had four components. First, a random sample of prison inmates and CYA wards\* were interviewed. Data from the interviews regarding educational background and current desires for postsecondary education were matched with available data on the inmates' math and reading scores, age, and length of incarceration. Second, information on the current supply and demand for postsecondary educational programs was obtained from the Department of Corrections and Youth Authority. Third, a brief survey of existing college programs for parolees was conducted. And fourth, an advisory committee was convened for the study, which provided invaluable advice and guidance to the committee staff. (Appendix 1).

This report provides hard numbers and outlines several issues which should be explored by colleges and correctional institutions. However, in collecting the numbers, flushing-out the issues, and, particularly, in talking with prisoners, an impression became clearer: There are hundreds of inmates who possess both the desire for and ability to benefit from postsecondary education who cannot enter overcrowded programs.

\*Since our study concerned college programs, the survey of CYA wards included only those over 18 years of age.

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Postsecondary education is important to inmates for at least three reasons. First, educational programs provide considerable personal, intellectual, and social development. Second, if the program within the prison is linked with a college parolee program, the reentering ex-offender has friends on the outside who can help him/her continue in school -- providing institutional and personal support. Third, postsecondary education continues, particularly for women and minorities, to increase job opportunities and personal income.

This initial report has two inadequacies. We did not have adequate resources to determine the demand for and supply of postsecondary programs in county jails nor federal prisons. The demand for programs reported herein relates only to state prisons and CYA institutions and, therefore, is understated.

Secondly, neither the quality nor precise impact of existing programs was evaluated. Most argue that postsecondary programs greatly improve an inmate's quality of life, and that college parolee programs substantially assist reentering ex-offenders. However, beyond such impressions no precise data are currently available to enable evaluation of quality and impact. Such information is indeed scarce for regular college programs. And the legislation emerging from this study (Assembly Bill 4217 - Arnett) would improve existing programs and additional demonstration programs which would be thoughtfully evaluated.

#### Current Programs

The Department of Corrections reports that in the 1974-75 fiscal year just under 1,200 of 20,000 inmates were enrolled in academic postsecondary programs. Twenty-three hundred (2,300) were enrolled in vocational training programs. In the same fiscal year the department expended \$263,000 on college programs. Over 500 inmates are on waiting lists, and many more, realizing there is little chance of getting in, do not sign up on waiting lists.

In the current year, 391 CYA wards are enrolled in a postsecondary academic or vocational program. The Youth Authority currently spends \$97,000 for postsecondary programs. Similar to programs of the Department of Corrections, additional costs are absorbed by sponsoring colleges.

Information was collected on eight of the twelve existing college parolee programs. Such programs assist a parolee with admission and registration procedures and provide tutoring and counseling services. Programs are most often linked with educational opportunity programs (EOP). Each program provides services, on the average, to 25 parolees at any given time. The programs report that they are able to help only one-half of the parolees who

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applied for assistance in fall 1975. Sixty percent of the participants earned college credits while incarcerated.

Demand for Postsecondary Programs

To determine the abilities of and desires for postsecondary education among inmates, 400 inmates of state prisons and 400 wards (over 18 years of age) of Youth Authority institutions were randomly selected and interviewed.\* Information from the interviews was matched with existing data on reading and mathematics test scores.

Table 1 indicates that 71 percent of prison inmates and 82 percent of CYA wards anticipate being released in one year or less. Thus, inmates presently incarcerated realize they will be looking for schooling or job opportunities in a relatively short period of time. The interviews also indicate the need to better link postsecondary programs inside prisons with parolee programs.

Table 1

	Remaining Time of Incarceration			
	prison inmates		CYA wards	
		cumulative		cumulative
1 to 6 months	48%	(.48%)	54%	(.54%)
7 to 12	23	(.71%)	28	(.82%)
13 to 24	16	(.87%)	17	(.99%)
more than 24	13	(100%)	1	(100%)

\*Appendix 2 compares the characteristics of sampled inmates with the entire prison and CYA populations.

Thirty-eight percent of CYA wards and 56 percent of prison inmates have received a high school diploma or GED equivalent. One-fourth of all prison inmates report completion of postsecondary courses.

While educational aspirations are different (probably higher) than actual demand, general interest in postsecondary education is a useful indicator. About one-half of all prison inmates interviewed report a desire for general/academic postsecondary courses; 21 percent indicate a desire for technical/vocational courses, and 28 percent report no interest in postsecondary education. The high interest in academic programs contrasts with (and perhaps results from) the greater availability of vocational programs. As previously indicated current enrollment in vocational courses outnumbers enrollment in academic programs two to one. Among CYA wards, 46 percent are interested in general/academic courses, 37 percent desire technical/vocational courses, and 17 percent have no interest in postsecondary programs. Table 2 reports specific levels of education desired by inmates and wards.

Table 2

		Educational Aspirations	
		prison inmates	CYA wards
level of education desired	no desire for school	19%	5%
	some high school courses	3	1
	high school diploma	8	9
	some college courses	39	43
	4-yr college degree	23	32
	graduate school	8	9
		(100%)	(100%)

Reading and math achievement levels of inmates are generally low. The median reading levels of prison inmates and CYA wards are 9th and 8th grade, respectively; median math levels are 7th and 6th grade, respectively.

However, academic achievement levels of many inmates are high. The Department of Corrections and CYA require at least a 10th grade reading level to enter a postsecondary program.\* Thirty-seven percent of all prison inmates read at the 10th grade level or above. Thirty-one percent of CYA wards achieved reading scores at the 10th grade level or above. Thus, about one-third of all inmates and wards are eligible to enter postsecondary programs.

Not surprisingly, educational background and aspirations are closely related to inmates' academic achievement levels. Table 3 reports aspirations of prison inmates for postsecondary education by reading levels. Twenty-one percent of all inmates express a desire to enter academic/general postsecondary courses and read at the 10th grade level or above. An additional 8 percent would like to enter a postsecondary vocational/technical program and read at the 10th grade level or above. Similar data for CYA wards reveal that 28 percent of all wards aspire to enter a postsecondary program and achieve at least a 10th grade reading score.

Table 3

		Desire for Postsecondary Education by Reading Levels (prison inmates)		
		type of postsecondary education desired		
		general/academic courses	vocational/technical courses	no desire for post- secondary education
reading grade level	8th grade and less	21%	9%	16%
	9th - 10th	16	6	10
	11th - 12th	11	4	1
	13th and above	3	1	1
	totals	51%	20%	28% (100%)

\*This eligibility standard is appropriate when compared to achievement levels of "regular" college students. For example, the median reading level of Los Angeles high school graduates entering community colleges is 11th grade.

Those who express a desire for postsecondary education and possess adequate achievement levels also have the strongest educational backgrounds. Table 4 reports prison inmates' educational background by reading level. Thirty-one percent of all prison inmates have at least obtained a high school diploma or GED equivalent and read at the 10th grade level or above.

Table 4

		Education Background by Reading Level (prison inmates)		
		educational background		
		less than high school diploma	high school diploma or GED equivalent	some college work
reading grade level	8th grade and less	27%	18%	0%
	9th - 10th	11	20	2
	11th - 12th	3	14	1
	13th and above	0	3	1
		totals	41%	55%

Projecting these findings for the entire prison inmate and CYA ward populations, the following contrast between the supply and demand of postsecondary programs is apparent:

- About 6,000 prison inmates -- 30 percent of all inmates -- desire to enter and possess the educational background and academic ability to benefit from a postsecondary program. However, current programs serve only 1,200 inmates.
- About 750 CYA wards over 18 -- 25 percent of all wards (over 18) -- desire to enter and possess adequate backgrounds and abilities to benefit from a postsecondary program. Yet current postsecondary programs serve only 391 in number.

- While twice as many inmates are currently enrolled in vocational courses as academic courses, two times as many inmates are interested in academic programs versus vocational courses.

#### Delivery of Postsecondary Programs

If correctional and educational agencies, the Legislature, and the Governor decide to expand and improve postsecondary programs, several program delivery issues should be addressed:

- Financing: Current law prohibits community colleges from receiving ADA support for instructional programs within prisons. Some argue that elimination of this prohibition would solve long-run financing problems. However, the impact of expanded postsecondary programs should be carefully evaluated prior to allowing full ADA (or FTE) support. Thoughtful expansion of existing programs and support of additional demonstration projects seems the best financing approach in the short-run.

Current inmate programs are supported directly by the Department of Corrections and the Youth Authority, while parolee programs are supported by colleges and community agencies. As programs are expanded and new demonstration projects begun, increasing cooperation among correctional institutions, educational agencies, and community agencies and employers is essential. Inmates at San Quentin report greater attraction to and trust in college programs sponsored by colleges and perceived as independent of the prison administration. As support of programs increases, involvement of the Postsecondary Education Commission could increase interinstitutional cooperation and strengthen commitments by educational agencies. Involvement of the commission in financing programs should be supported by a formal advisory process including the Youth Authority, the Department of Corrections, colleges and universities, and parolee programs.

- Alternative instructional methods: Traditional lecture courses should not be exclusively relied upon. Several correspondence/independent study programs are currently available for inmates. Alternative instructional methods should be explored, including development of learning contracts between inmate and teacher and expansion of independent study programs.
- Academic/motivational support: Different methods of providing counseling and tutoring services should be

attempted. Integration of postsecondary programs with group and individual counseling/therapy could be beneficial. Use of college students as tutors for inmates has been successful and should be expanded.

- Transition of inmate-to-parolee: College parolee programs have provided meaningful support for released inmates. Stronger links between postsecondary programs in prisons and college parolee programs should be developed. Postsecondary programs serve to ease the transition back to the outside world. The University of California, Santa Barbara operates a prerelease program for inmates at Lompoc federal prison who live on campus and attend courses prior to being paroled. Also, offering college courses in prison for inmates and "regular" students could yield benefits for all.
- Information about postsecondary programs: Several inmates interviewed were unaware of available programs. If neighboring colleges are offering programs in prisons, the college should provide informational services in cooperation with efforts of the prison education department.
- Educational agency and program quality: In recent years, correctional agencies have contracted with local colleges to offer postsecondary programs rather than hire additional prison teachers. For the sake of quality and variety, local colleges should be the primary delivery agency. However, limited resources often require college instructors to teach prison courses on an overload basis beyond their normal workload.
- Interinstitutional approaches: The need to better link prison programs with existing parolee programs was discussed above. In the same way, stronger links between two- and four-year colleges should be developed. Improved connections between prison college programs and local colleges will improve an inmate's ability to pursue postsecondary education once paroled.
- Rights of inmate-students: Several inmates indicated they chose not to enter an educational program because they could earn money working in prison jobs. Stipends comparable to prison wages would reduce this financial disincentive. Inmate education committees have been formed in some prisons to communicate the educational needs of inmates. Encouragement of such committees could help improve programs and provide invaluable learning opportunities.
- Information to prison personnel: Resentment has developed among prison guards who feel that colleges are

more interested in serving inmates than others. Such colleges should inform prison personnel of existing college opportunities. The University of Massachusetts has offered college programs in which inmates and guards enrolled together.

- Eligibility for college programs: Both CYA and the Department of Corrections require a 10th grade reading level to enter college programs. Some programs should experiment with waiving this requirement for inmates with verbal, intellectual, or motivational abilities that more than compensate for lower reading skills.
- Cost/benefit evaluation of college programs: There is a subjective consensus that postsecondary programs lower recidivism rates, thereby greatly reducing incarceration costs (which average \$15,000 per inmate at Vacaville). However, while individual examples are abundant, data are unavailable to systematically evaluate the cost/benefit of programs.

Three proposals: Improvement of Existing Programs, Additional Demonstration Projects, and a Prison College

This report demonstrates a clear need to expand existing programs, providing educational opportunities for additional prison inmates and CYA wards. Increased support could also improve the quality of existing programs, particularly by providing additional books and instructional materials.

Secondly, creation of additional demonstration projects would help serve the unmet demand for postsecondary education and enable alternative approaches to questions regarding how postsecondary programs could best be delivered.

Fiscal incentives should encourage cooperation among correctional institutions, educational agencies, parolee programs, and community agencies and potential employers. As existing programs are strengthened and new demonstration projects begun, links between existing efforts and agencies must be strengthened. Current programs and new efforts involving alternative approaches must also be thoughtfully evaluated as they develop. Financing such efforts through the Postsecondary Education Commission would be useful in accomplishing these objectives. (Assemblyman Dixon Arnett has introduced legislation (AB 4217 - Appendix 3) to strengthen existing efforts and develop additional programs.)

As a long-run approach to providing postsecondary education for prison inmates and CYA wards, correctional and educational agencies should explore the desirability and feasibility of establishing a prison college. As first proposed in the state of New York, a prison college could provide a supportive environment for inmates who have the motivation and ability to pursue postsecondary

education. The common problems of inadequate classroom facilities, library resources, study facilities, and a pervasively adverse environment could be overcome by converting one existing prison into a prison college. The prison college idea is especially timely in the context of discussions about closing San Quentin and making several changes in facilities.

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Appendix 2

Comparison of Sampled Inmates and  
CYA Wards to Total Populations

	population	median age	ethnic breakdown (percents)					anticipated time in institution (months/ percent)			
			white	black	Chicano	American Indian	other	1-6	7-12	13-24	24+
<b>Inmates:</b>											
Department of Corrections											
sample	393	-	30%	44%	35%	20%	2%	48%	23%	16%	13%
total population	18,993	-	30	47	33	18	2	42	25	18	14
<b>Wards:</b>											
Youth Authority											
sample	366	19y 9m	43	37	19	1	0	54	28	17	1
total population	3,036	19y 3m	42	35	20	0	2	-	-	-	-

**END**

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