Thursday, December 9, 2021 (11:00 am to 12:15 pm)

Gearing up for Pell Expansion: Prison Education Programs Now and Post-July 2023

Presenters:

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@ University of Maine at Augusta

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Prison Education Partnership at University of Maine at Augusta:
Scale: Director & assistant, university centers, university support staff to support ~120 students across 6 DOC programs
Mission: Transform lives and reduce systemic inequities through education

Vera's Priorities in the PSE Space:
Scale: Access to PSE for all people in prison and enough programs to match interest
Quality: Programs in prison are high quality and adhere to community-based standards
Equity: College programs fight systemic inequities in prison

General Overview for Today's Session

- Overview of current national landscape: FAFSA Simplification Act, the U.S. Department of Education's Negotiated Rulemaking Committee and Subcommittee (Prison Education Programs [PEP]), Pell expansion on or before July 2023 (BW);
  - Overview of one current prison education program (University of Maine at Augusta's Prison Education Partnership)(AN);
- Expectations for Prison Education Programs (PEP) moving forward after 2023 (BW);
  - Current example: The need for centralizing the onboarding process for students (e.g., financial aid, admissions, etc.)(AN)
- The need for strong student support services for students (e.g., tutoring, library access, technology)(BW)
  - Current example: What UM at Augusta is doing in this space (AN)
- The importance of reentry programs for students moving forward (BW)
  - Current example: What UM of Augusta is doing in this space (AN)
- Mode of delivery, staff training, and the importance of infrastructure (BW)
  - Current example: What UM of Augusta is doing in this space (AN)
- The importance of partnering with corrections and accreditation early in the process (BW)
  - Current example: What UM of Augusta is doing in this space (AN)

Overview of the National Landscape

- FAFSA Simplification Act,
- The U.S. Dept. of Education's Negotiated Rulemaking Committee & Subcommittee (Prison Education Programs [PEP]),
- Pell expansion on or before July 2023.

University of Maine at Augusta's Program

First cohort at Maine State Prison, funded by philanthropist

2006

Second Chance Pell for associate's degree students at Maine Correctional Center and Southern Maine Women's Reentry Center

2017

Programming now available in remaining facilities: Mountain View Correctional Facility, Women's Center, and Bolduc Correctional Facility

2021

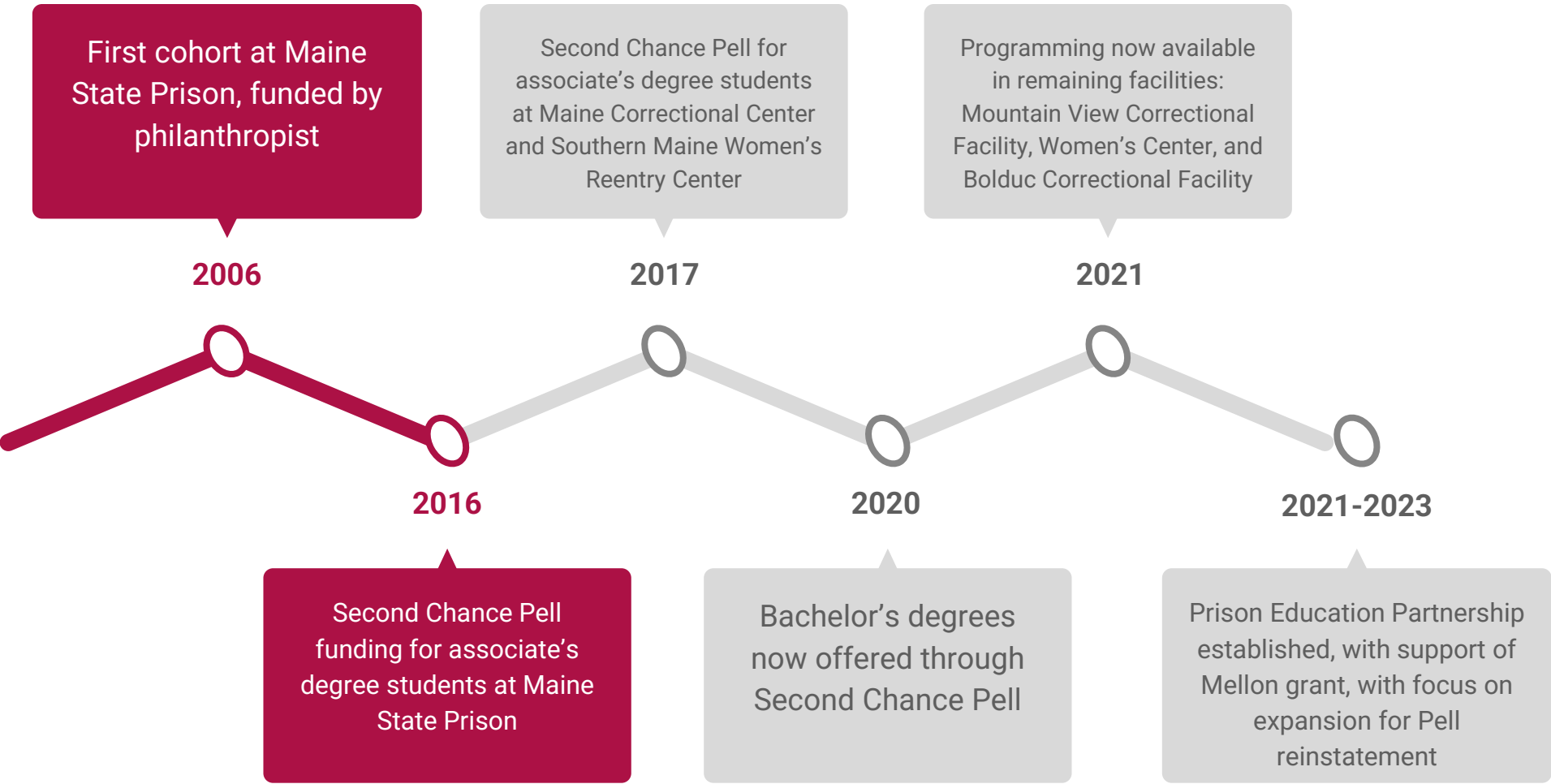**2016**

Second Chance Pell funding for associate's degree students at Maine State Prison

2020

Bachelor's degrees now offered through Second Chance Pell

2021-2023

Prison Education Partnership established, with support of Mellon grant, with focus on expansion for Pell reinstatement

University of Maine at Augusta's Program

- Spanning 5 DOC facilities, operating as 6 separate programs
- Currently enrolled students: ~90
- Graduates
  - Second Chance Pell-supported: 51 (as of 8/21)
  - Degrees awarded since 2006 (as of 8/21):
    - 11 certificates
    - 85 associates degrees
    - 39 bachelor's degrees
- Recidivism rate: <2%
  - National average: 14% with AA, 5.6% with BA/BS (Bureau of Justice Statistics)

Expectations for Prison Education Programs (PEP) moving forward after 2023

The conversation at the national level is still evolving, but some of the potential expectations for PEPs post-2023 include…

University of Maine at Augusta's Program

PEP Office
- Carry out all grant initiatives
- General program/ systemic improvement
- Course planning, faculty support
- Monitoring and guiding Centers

UMA Offices
- Work with PEP office and UMA Centers to provide traditional support and unique support
- Representatives from each office trained on nuances of justice-impacted students

UMA Centers
- Day-to-day support (advising, registration, orientation, etc.) , oversight, and troubleshooting
- Connecting students to university services

DOC
- "Boots on the ground"
- Assist with administrative support
- Decides on applicants, enrollment numbers, courseload, instruction modes, etc.

UMA's Recommendations

- Must Haves:
  - Dedicated office/support staff
  - Strong understanding of student needs
    - Training to understand nuances of students who are system-impacted
      - E.g., Advising
    - "Hand-holding" mechanisms
  - Thoughtfully developed communication flow

- DO NOT have different university services siloed
  - Leads to a breakdown in communication; students end up not being fully supported or slipping through the cracks

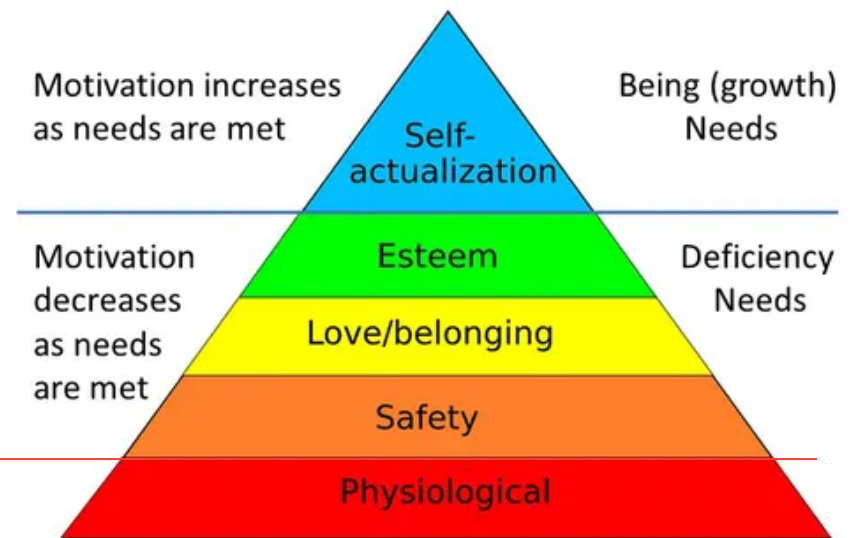# The need for strong student support services as outlined by ED

Student Support at UMA

- Students who are incarcerated are entitled to the same high-quality, support services as any other students
  - However, they way in which students access support services may vary based on DOC limitations
  - There is a difference between awareness and access

- Examples:
  - Library Services
    - Offline databases
  - Tutoring
    - Pre-recorded info sessions
  - Accomodations
    - Barriers to documentation
  - Writing Center
    - Internal programs

- Peer-to-peer models are great, but it cannot be the only mechanism

The importance of reentry programs for students moving forward

UMA's Commitment to Reentry

- When students are released, education is often the first thing to be deprioritized (understandably!)
  - A plan is needed to support students who are releasing and formerly incarcerated
- UMA is made aware of release dates and begins working with students in advance to make sure their needs are met
  - This also has many financial aid implications
- Support is provided by the same staff who support individuals who are incarcerated, partnering with community organizations is key
- There is much to be improved:
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Laptop
  - Job
  - Food
  - Money

Motivation increases as needs are met

Being (growth) Needs

Self-actualization

Motivation decreases as needs are met

Esteem

Deficiency Needs

Love/belonging

Safety

Physiological

simplyspychology.org

Mode of delivery, staff training, and the importance of infrastructure

Additional Planning

- Infrastructure matters
  - Do your students have access to…
    - internet/email/course sites?
    - education materials at any time or only at certain times?
    - research article databases?
    - zoom/meet with faculty as needed?
- Modes of instruction must be optimal for students
  - Face-to-face isn't always better
  - Contingency plans must be in place
- Staff/faculty training is CRUCIAL
  - Students can be unintentionally harmed without proper training
  - Staff/faculty need support too
- All of these considerations can vary BY FACILITY -- the ability to adapt is key

Additional Planning at UMA

- Infrastructure
  - All students can access Brightspace, so we use it to house important resources on university services, reentry support, FAQ, etc.
  - Regular in-person visits, especially facilities with limited internet access
  - We offer online and offline library databases
- Modes of instruction
  - Online asynchronous works best for students who work and for those who want to choose a different major
  - Face-to-face classes can switch to zoom in the event of a lockdown
- Staff/faculty training
  - Staff/Faculty have their own Brightspace
  - Orientations each semester
  - Monthly community conversations, reading groups, etc.

The importance of partnering with corrections & accreditation agencies early in the process

Partnerships at UMA

- It can be a balancing act!
  - DOC dictates what they are capable of or *willing* to support
  - NECHE will communicate what the needs are to be considered comparable quality to more "traditional" programming
  - UMA works with DOC to slowly push the needle
    - Facility-level changes = work with the facility staff
    - Broader-level changes = work with central office
- DOC "holds the power," so a good working relationship is needed
  - Be prepared to adapt to changes - DOC responds to many pressures (e.g., political) and as a result their policies and processes may be constantly in flux

Centering Students' Voices

As we look forward to Pell expansion beyond 2023, let us be mindful of always keeping our students voices front and center of this process.

Thank You!

Any questions?

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