

INVESTIGATING THE INSTITUTIONAL AND EXTRA-
INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO
SUCCESSFUL PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

by

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During a national survey on prison education in 2011, the Institute for Higher Education Policy released a list of thirteen states that they deemed “high-enrollment states” (IHEP, 2011) as a result of their comparatively high levels of enrollment in prison education programs, making up 86% of all prison education enrollment in the United States. Along with increased enrollment, this set of thirteen states also accounted for 93% of all bachelor’s degrees and 94.3% of all associate degrees despite making up less than half of the prison population (IHEP, 2011). This thesis searched for a number of institutional and extra-institutional characteristics that could potentially correlate with these high-enrollment states ranging from “cost per adult in custody” to “prisons per university.” Through an analysis of these statistical characteristics and how they correlate to high-enrollment states, there was shown to be a strong positive correlation between prison population and high-enrollment states as well as juvenile incarceration and high-enrollment states. With this information in mind, I conducted a further analysis into three high-enrollment states and the ways that each of their prison education programs operate, respectively, to see if anything could potentially be informative from a policymaking standpoint.

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Introduction

My interest in this project developed from a discovery I made researching a project surrounding prison education in the state of Oregon. In my preliminary reading, I was browsing an article on a website called “The Best Schools” when I stumbled upon an interesting claim:

Moreover, 86% of all incarcerated post-secondary students reside in these thirteen high-enrollment states:

- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Idaho
- Indiana
- Louisiana
- Missouri
- New York
- Ohio
- South Carolina
- Texas
- Washington
- Wisconsin (The Best Schools, 2021)

Reading through this list I was struck by a single thought: what a random group of states. Given the fact that this particular article was not peer reviewed, I followed its citation, and found myself on one of the most trusted sources in not only prison education, but education in general: The Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Now that I had confirmed the truth of this list of states, I took the time to think about this grouping a bit harder. Trying to decipher any patterns, I conducted a cursory

mental consideration of geography, adult in custody (AIC) populations, political leanings, and more, but nothing seemed to jump at to me as a reasonable explanation for the utter randomness of these states. This is what sparked my thesis project.

Prison education has been a fascination of mine over the course of the last several years. This primarily stemmed from the fact that I have had the opportunity to serve as an intern for a program that works to provide education to adults in custody; thus, I have spent a great deal of time researching, interacting with, and thinking about prison education. However, in all my time pondering prison education as a sociological and humanitarian project, I had not given it a great deal of consideration from a political science perspective. My reading of the states listed in this article prompted me to begin that consideration—politically speaking—what correlates with a good prison education program in a given state?

In this thesis, I will be conducting an analysis of all fifty states and their prison education programs. Once I have a sense of what states are succeeding (and what success looks like), I will cross-analyze the success of prison education programs in given states with a number of other characteristics of that state including political leanings, AIC population, prison funding, geography, universities, education outside of prisons, juvenile incarceration, and more. After this cross analysis is complete, I will be seeking conclusions surrounding what factors correlate with or possibly even create robust and successful prison education programs, and perhaps more importantly, what voters can do to contribute to these factors.

Literature Review

The topic of prison education is generally a very well-researched one. As a result of what is now centuries of history of education in prisons, the concept has been a locus of obsession among many scholars. This being said, while there are countless publications and even scholarly journals dedicated to prison education, there is an appalling lack of information from a purely statistical standpoint. In fact, in situating my thesis within the existing literature on this topic, it almost felt as if its goals were too far ahead of the existing body of data regarding prison education. There are a few reasons why I say this. For one, there is almost no data surrounding the operation of prison education programming on a state-by-state level across the nation. While some states are eager to boast about the number of individuals involved in their educational programs, others have almost no information on the matter whatsoever. Importantly, in all my searching of academic databases and even the internet at large, I could not find a single piece that compiled the prison education statistics of every state besides the aforementioned IHEP article, which did so without providing the raw data of their surveys. Along with the lack of information available about the status of prison education programs in various states, there are also often holes in statistics that I hoped to cross-analyze with prison education success. A good example of this is average sentence length. Very early in my thesis process I considered the possibility that average sentence length would correlate with the strength of prison education programming in the states, but try as I might, in the vast majority of states, that information simply was not available. As a result of this, the field of literature that my thesis is attempting to improve is clearly in need of such improvements. Unfortunately,

this also means that the acquisition of data is significantly more difficult in this case, and, given the nature of prison-related academia, the acquisition of data is largely reliant on the information that is given out by the Department of Corrections, which is often highly varied between states.

While the area that my thesis will be addressing is largely devoid of significant academic literature, as I stated above, there are libraries of literature on prison education. While perhaps not directly applicable to my rather narrow thesis, this literature is crucial to contextualizing why this thesis project is significant and necessary. One of these topic where there is ample literature is the history of prison education, and another where there is perhaps even more research is the benefits of prison education. To sufficiently address each of these topics, I will look into their academic literature individually.

History of Prison Education

Dating back to the eighteenth century, there have been efforts at rehabilitation through the mode of education, so it can be said that the idea of educating incarcerated individuals is not a new or particularly polemical one. At the first prisons established in the United States, chaplains were sent into prisons in an attempt to offer (albeit underwhelming) educational opportunities to incarcerated individuals (Angle, 1982). In fact, this was one of the first efforts in the United States towards any form of rehabilitation, not just educational rehabilitation. By the mid-1800s, however, these opportunities began to diversify, with states like New York offering classes of several subjects ranging from astronomy to physiology (Messemer, 2011). Since then, prison

education has evolved in a number of ways, but it has done so primarily on a state-by-state level. This is because the majority of prison operation is done by individual states, and as one might expect the prison education policies and timelines among the states were, and still are, very different. However, while the difference in state policies makes it difficult to explain any linear progression, it is safe to say that as a general rule, prison education has expanded significantly over the course of the couple of centuries. In fact, the last twenty years have seen some of the most significant change as programs at universities around the United States have increased their involvement in prison education, policymakers have begun to recognize its benefits, and the general public is viewing the prison system with a heightened level of scrutiny.

Interestingly, in many states there is very little research of even information surrounding the development of prison education policies. In interrogating why this is the case, it is difficult to overlook the lack of uniformity in reporting policies and data among the states that comprise the United States. Some state's Department of Corrections, such as Wisconsin, give a detailed history of the development of their state's programming with statements as in depth as "1932 - A full-time education director is hired at WSP but inmates still do all of the teaching" (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2022). Alternatively, some states give almost no information whatsoever on the history of their programming, making cross-analysis among different states nearly impossible.

Effectiveness of Prison Education

Until this point, I have postulated that prison education is a positive thing; however, seeing as though this thesis is directly targeted at the bolstering of prison education programming across the nation, it seems necessary to engage in an analysis of the importance of prison education.

As a result of both the age and prominence of prison education, there is a significant amount of research on the topic, specifically regarding its effectiveness in curbing recidivism (Hill, 2015; Hall, 2015; Tuner 2019). Recidivism is a percentage created through taking the overall number of individuals released from prison and dividing it by the number of prisoners [the term AIC is now preferred] that reoffend within a given timeline (Silke & Morrison, 2020). This number has been historically used as a measure of the efficacy of the prison system as, at least in part, the goal of prison is to deter crime and rehabilitate offenders (Zouklis, 2021). However, it is worth noting one of the flaws in the quantitative calculation of recidivism: the dark number or the number of individuals who commit further crimes following their release, but are not caught (Tollenaar & Heijden, 2013). While there are statistical models that make efforts at factoring these individuals into recidivism rates, since my thesis operates mostly through a comparative context between recidivism rates before and after education, the dark number affects both of these numbers evenly. Therefore, I will be considering recidivism by its strictest definition: the percentage of individuals released from incarceration who are convicted reoffenders.

My thesis will specifically be addressing education inside of prisons—a topic that has been explored in relation to recidivism frequently in the last several decades. It

has been found that there is indeed a significant link between prison education and recidivism rates (Davis et al, 2013; Hill, 2015; Hall, 2015; Tuner 2019). At every level of the educational process, there is shown to be a decreased level of recidivism (Chappell, 2004). In the United States the recidivism rate is 83% within the first nine years, meaning that if 100 incarcerated individuals are released, 83 will be reincarcerated within nine years of their release (National Institute of Justice, 2008); however, if an individual receives an associate degree, they will only have a 13.7% of recidivating within nine years. Moreover, if the released individual has a bachelor's degree, the likelihood drops to 5.6%, and if they have a master's degree, it is “virtually zero” (Turner, 2019).

This statistic is crucial in the analysis of the costs and benefits of prison education both for those who are incarcerated as well as the prisons and taxpayers. From the perspective of an incarcerated individual, if education lowers your likelihood of returning to prison by six-fold, it would seem to be a beneficial practice: from the perspective of a taxpayer, if education inside of prisons will have this significant of an impact on lowering the amount of people whose incarceration is being funded through taxes, this is positive as well (depending on the price of prison education—something I will address later on). Moreover, prison education programs in the United States are not paid for by the taxpayer or state, it is usually grants, donations, or incarcerated individuals paying for their own classes.

This being said, one of the key developments in recent years surrounding prison education is the desire to explore its implications outside the category of recidivism. In this area, two researchers, Emily Pelletier and Douglas Evans have pioneered with their

2019 article “Beyond Recidivism: Positive Outcomes from Higher Education Programs in Prisons.” This pattern in broadening research outside of recidivism rates is the result of an emerging recognition of the finitude of recidivism as a statistic. There is a general consensus among experts that recidivism is useful in examining the financial considerations of the prison education on part of the state and its prisons, but it falls short in addressing the success of rehabilitative efforts. A life out of prison is not necessarily a successful or rehabilitated life; thus, the larger consideration should be a previously incarcerated individual’s overall life following their release (Pelletier & Evans, 2019). One of the key aspects that is considered when reviewing prison education outside of the recidivism statistic is job outlook. The link between education and job outlook has always been established in our society, and it seems that prison education and job outlook is no different. People who leave prison with some form of post-secondary degree, on average, receive higher wages and more hours at the jobs that they find (Duwe and Clark, 2014). It is also worth noting that success in areas outside of recidivism is often a result of intermediary development in leadership skills, confidence, and positive self-image which prison education has been shown to impact (Pelletier & Evans, 2019).

As a result of the overwhelming evidence suggesting the importance of prison education in the project of ameliorating the American prison, it seems clear that the project of analyzing the correlations between state’s prison education programs and other institutional factors is a worthwhile one.

Research Question

(1) What, if anything, correlates with the success of prison education programs in a given state, and what conclusions can be drawn about the correlations? (2) In what ways can this information be used to create more effective prison education programs in states with less successful programming?

Hypothesis

My hypothesis surrounding the results of my analysis are comprised of two predictions. I expect that there will be loose correlations surrounding which states have the best prison education programming, but I do not expect any correlation coefficient to exceed .7 or -.7. This is due to the complicated nature of the prison system and the deeply complex and varied history of the prison system in every state. In the case that there are certain statistics that appear to be strongly correlated with high enrollment in prison education programming, I expect it to be items like “cost per adult in custody” and perhaps inversely, incarceration rate. Both of these issues seem as though they would be topics that would be actively addressed alongside prison education. By this I mean that a state’s overall interest in ameliorating prison education would likely also coincide with an interest in improving the state of the prison system as a whole, resulting in a lower incarceration rate and higher spending per AIC.

Methodologies

Defining Success of Prison Education Programs

Any work that surrounds the collection of data regarding prison programming is destined to face a number of obstacles, and in this case the biggest obstacle is defining the success of prison education programs. This is a result of a pair of challenges. First, while there is a general tendency for the Department of Corrections in a given state to provide information on their academic programming, the extent to which they do so and the specifics of that information is often extremely varied. As an exemplification of this stark difference, the Nevada Department of Corrections puts out an extensive annual report card regarding every numerical detail of their year's enrollment and accomplishment in correctional education. Other states give far more cryptic and limited explanations of their state's educational opportunities. For example, Wyoming, who limits their discussion of education statistics to one line: "75% of inmates without a verified diploma or HSEC leave prison with a HSEC" (Wyoming Department of Corrections, 2017). This presents a clear challenge in creating a way to analyze the success of educational programming and leads directly to the second challenge. In 2010, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) conducted a survey inside prisons across the United States regarding a variety of statistics such as enrollment, attainment, and availability in education programming inside state prisons. While IHEP used this survey as a source for the now famous report titled "Unlocking Potential: Results of a National Survey of Postsecondary Education in State Prisons" published in 2011, the actual data accrued in the survey was never made public. Instead, IHEP declared a set of thirteen states "high-enrollment" states and thirty states "low enrollment" states (the

survey did not receive feedback from seven states), leaving the public with a list of states that were doing well on prison education, and a larger set that was not.

Here it feels necessary to say a bit more about the classifications made in this report as they are the lone window into a comparative analysis of prison education programs among the states. First, the name “high-enrollment” state must be interrogated more directly for the sake of procuring a more specific definition. In this study, the division between high- and low-enrollment states is based on whether the state has more or less than 1,000 enrollments (IHEP, 2011). Here, there is a glaring question around this classification: is this simply a result of having more adults in custody within a given state? The answer here is a complicated one. This purely quantity-based classification makes certain states more likely to have “high-enrollment” based on their population and/or incarceration rate (Texas seems like the glaring example here, with 158,429 adults in custody (NIC, 2017)) and rules out others with smaller carceral infrastructure like Vermont and Alaska, but this does not overrule the value of this statistic entirely. While these high-enrollment states are responsible for 86% of all enrolled adults in custody nationwide, they only make up 47.5% of the United States prison population collectively (NIC, 2017). Moreover, of the seven states with the largest prison population in the United States, only three are high-enrollment states (IHEP, 2011). Lastly, the same report found that among all bachelor’s degrees earned inside prisons in the United States, 93% were earned in high-enrollment states, and for associate degrees, this number grows to 94.3% (IHEP, 2011). Thus, while there are limitations to this classification as a metric of success within a state’s prison education programming, these states are responsible for the preponderance of enrollments and degrees earned

despite making up less than half of the prison population. Considering this alongside the relative inaccessibility of alternative modes of measurement, this thesis will predicate its analysis of state prison education programs on the metric of high-enrollment states and low-enrollment states set forth by IHEP in 2011.

Research Method

In order to search for correlations between a state’s prison education programming and other factors both inside and outside of the state’s prisons, I will first create a list of potentially correlated statistics. These categories (listed under the next header) will be what are compared to the success of prison education programs. Once I establish a list of potentially correlated statistics, I will write them out prior to the beginning of my research. This will be done in order to avoid p-hacking, the practice of altering a studies bounds until achieving significant results ($p \leq .05$). Once I have this list finalized, I will begin to research each of these categories for each individual state until I have a data sheet that contains all the information necessary for my cross-analysis. The data sheet will be set up under the format that follows:

State	High- Enrollment State?	Prison Population	Cost per AIC	Incarceration Rate	...
Alabama	No	XXX	\$XXX	XXX/100,000	...
Alaska	No	XXX	\$XXX	XXX/100,000	...
Arizona	No	XXX	\$XXX	XXX/100,000	...
Arkansas	Yes	XXX	\$XXX	XXX/100,000	...

Table 1 – Example of Data Collection Sheet

After this data is compiled, I will explore the correlations between the states that fall under the “high-enrollment” category and those that do not, looking for any patterns

among the data. As I will be cross analyzing ten different categories across 50 states with varied political schemas and systems, I am not expecting perfect correlations and patterns to present themselves (but nonetheless, they may). However, my hope is that statements like “no state with a bottom twenty of [insert category] is high-enrollment” or “as a general rule, high-enrollment states tend to have lower [insert category]” may come from my analyses. Data that directly ties successful prison education programs to a specific institutional statistic would certainly be the most useful for analytical purposes; however, conclusions about what ensures a prison education program will not find success or will increase the likelihood of success are also useful. For example, a conclusion suggesting that no high enrollment state is outside of the top twenty-five states in “cost per adult in custody” does not prove that higher cost per AIC will lead to success, but it does seem that below average cost per AIC will not allow for success.

Cross-Analysis Groups

As this thesis aims to analyze the infrastructure surrounding successful prison education programs and seek correlations, there must be a list of different statistics among the states intended to be juxtaposed to the success of prison education programming. In an effort to ensure a lack of p-hacking, prior to the gathering of the data, the list of data sets to be cross-examined (alongside my reasoning for including them) will be listed below:

Prison Population- While this will likely show some level of correlation, as states with higher AIC populations will have an increased likelihood of having above 1,000 enrollments, this cross-examination will explore how much this truly impacts the list.

Cost per AIC- The amount of money spent by the state on each individual AIC may correlate with increased programming and higher levels of political concern for AICs.

Incarceration Rate- High incarceration rates could mean an increased concern about prisons and higher likelihood of funding. However, it could also mean more political apathy about criminal justice reform—this could correlate in either direction.

Partisan History of the State Legislature Since 1980 - As the bulk of development of contemporary prison education programs has occurred in the last forty years, this will explore whether a certain partisan tendency correlates with better prison education programming.

Partisan History of the State Legislature Since 2002- The twenty-first century has seen both increased interest in prison reform and a plethora of literature supporting a correlation of prison education and decreased recidivism. Has one party been more receptive to these calls?

State Education Ranking K-12- Some states seemingly prioritize education more than others, so this will explore whether general education ranking correlates with education programming inside prisons.

State Education Ranking in Higher Education- As a large portion of AICs enter the system with a GED or diploma, the more important factor surrounding educational interest of the state may be their prioritization of higher education.

Number of AICs per Prison- A higher number of AICs per prison may mean that if a single prison provides educational programming, there is a higher accessibility to that program. Alternatively, the opposite may be true, as overcrowding may lead to higher selectivity in these programs.

Juveniles Incarceration - States with high levels of juvenile incarceration may feel an increased need to provide educational opportunities for those who were unable to complete high school. Along with this, they may have more experience providing education in prisons as juvenile facilities offer significantly more educational programs.

Universities/Colleges per Prison- Does a higher number of colleges per prison mean that there is a higher likelihood that at least one college provides classes to a given prison?

In formulating this list, there were a variety of ideas taken into consideration. For one, I considered aspects of the prison system and areas outside of the prison system that would have reason to potentially affect the prison education programs in a given state. However, I also considered certain societal stereotypes and how they might affect the prison education programs in a state. An example of a category that falls into this group is the state's partisan history, as from a societal perspective, Democrats tend to run campaigns centered around rehabilitation in the prison system more often.

For each of these categories, I will gather the data in the above categories for all fifty states in the nation, and analyze the data to find any patterns or correlations among high-enrollment states. Based on these findings, I will engage in an analysis of these correlations, begging questions of potential causation, importance, and utility in ameliorating the education systems in prisons.

Individual State Analyses

Following an analysis of the data, I will choose a set of three states and investigate in more detail what shaped their current prison education policy. I will wait

until I have the data before selecting the states that I analyze in order to allow myself to pursue any curiosities brought about by data-based my findings. If there are no correlations whatsoever, I will likely choose a high enrollment state with a large prison population, a high enrollment state with a smaller prison population, and a high enrollment state somewhere in between. This will allow me to address the various ways in which each state ended up with the prison education program that they have. However, if my findings point me to the fact that a certain statistic is pivotal in determining whether or not a state has a strong prison education program, I will consider that statistic in the selection of which states I will further analyze.

Results and Analysis of Data Gathering

Early in my viewing of the results of my cross-analysis it became clear that each distinct category had a different set of information to offer. In order to perform a successful analysis of all of the statistical categories that were addressed, the most intuitive way of breaking down my results is going category-by-category. Thus, I will do so in order.

Prison Population

Among the categories, this was the one that I expected to exhibit the most correlation to high-enrollment states. As the measurement that IHEP used in establishing what constitutes a high-enrollment state is over 1,000 active enrollments (IHEP, 2011), it seemed intuitive that states with a higher prison population would be more likely to be high-enrollment states. While this was true, it was only a partial truth, and upon further analysis, there could potentially be more to the correlation than mere volume.

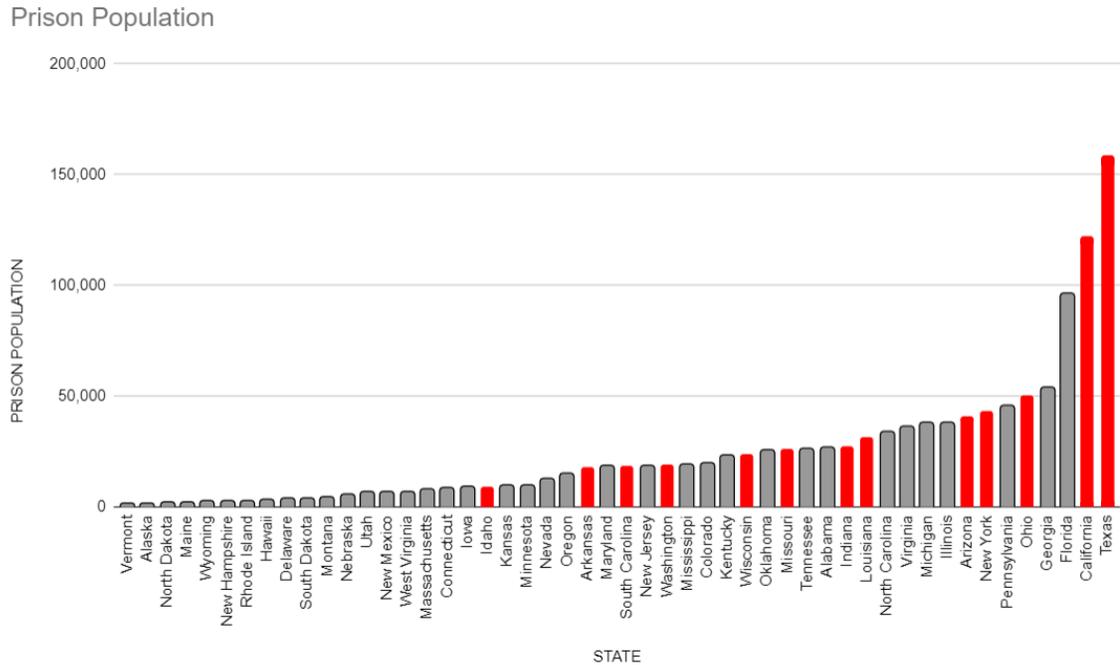


Figure 2 – Prison Population vs. High Enrollment

(NIC, 2018)

In the above chart, high enrollment states are denoted by a red bar, showing that there is certainly (and perhaps unsurprisingly) a correlation between high-enrollment and higher prison populations. This correlation’s exact numerical value is .41. This is considered a “strong” correlation according to Quinnipiac University’s Political Science Department’s metrics for measuring correlation coefficients in the field (Akoglu, 2018). However, as the graph above shows, there is still significant variation in the prison populations of high enrollment states, despite a general trend of higher population correlating with higher enrollment. For example, Idaho, while ranking 31st in prison population and having less than 1/10th of Florida’s prison population, is a high

enrollment state while Florida is not. Moreover, when looking at the top seven states, only three are high-enrollment, and when looking at the top twelve, only five are high enrollment.

As for the absence of high enrollment states in the bottom third of the data, a pair of reasonings come to mind. First, in many states, there are simply too few adults in custody to reach the 1,000 enrollment threshold required for the IHEP designation of high-enrollment. States like Vermont, Alaska, and North Dakota would need more than a 50% enrollment rate in order to earn this designation, which, while something to strive for, is not particularly likely. The second reason may be that the perceived benefit of providing prison education is lower in states where there is a smaller prison population.

With all of this in mind, there is a strong correlation between the prison population of a given state and whether or not it is a high-enrollment state, but it is neither a prerequisite nor guarantee that a state with a higher prison population will be high-enrollment.

Cost per Adult in Custody

The next statistic considered in this cross-analysis is whether the amount of money that a state spends per adult in custody has any correlation with whether they are a high-enrollment state. This offered me the first result of my data that surprised me. Contrary to what one might expect, the more money spent per AIC had a -.13 correlation with high-enrollment states which is in between a “weak” and “negligible” negative correlation according to Quinnipiac University’s standards on political science correlations (Akoglu, 2018). The following graph exhibits the relationship between cost per inmate spending by the state and whether a state is classified as high enrollment:

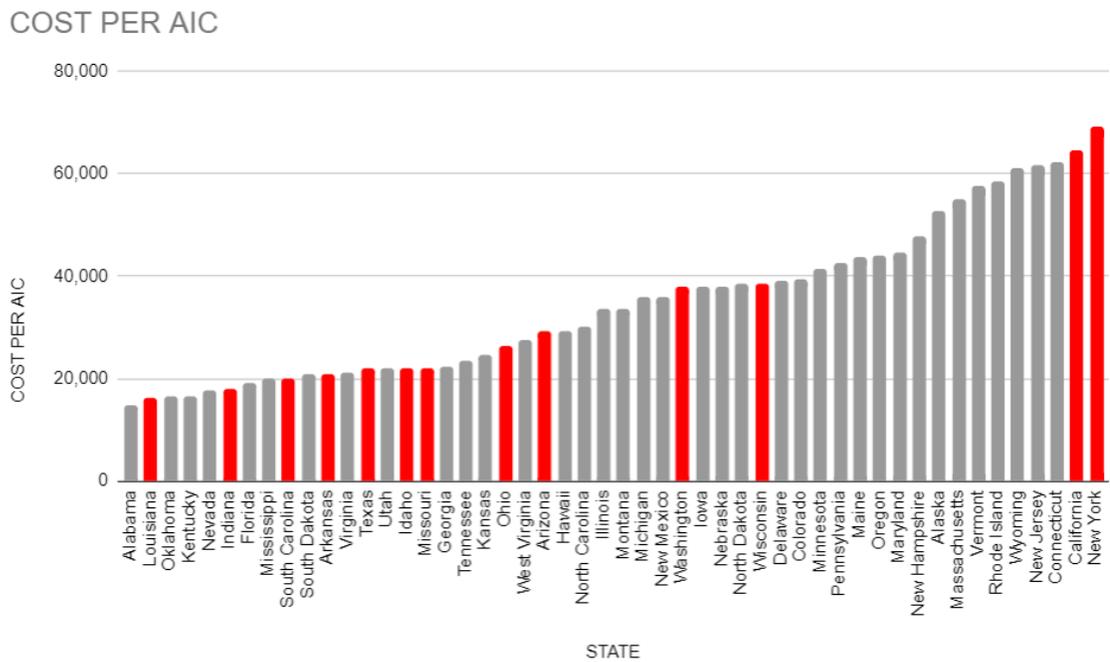


Figure 3 - Cost per AIC vs. High Enrollment

(Vera Institute of Justice, 2016)

There are a variety of inferences that can be made from this graph and correlation coefficient. The main takeaway here is that simply spending more money on prisons is not an effective mode of creating educational opportunities for those inside of them. In order to establish a successful prison education program, there are a number of factors involved including: support from higher education institutions, Department of Corrections policy, interest among AICs in a given institution, and hundreds of other considerations that are not related to spending. With this in mind, it seems that this would lead to the conclusion that in an effort to create policy that promotes successful prison education programming, lawmakers need to be specific in their allocation of

prison funding. Only going as far as spending more money on prisons does not ensure that positive educational programming will follow.

Incarceration Rate

The next category for consideration is derived from an interest in the way that the amount of people incarcerated per capita may influence the strength of prison education programming within a state. In this case, as is visible in the graph, there is a “moderate” positive correlation of .32 (Akoglu, 2018).

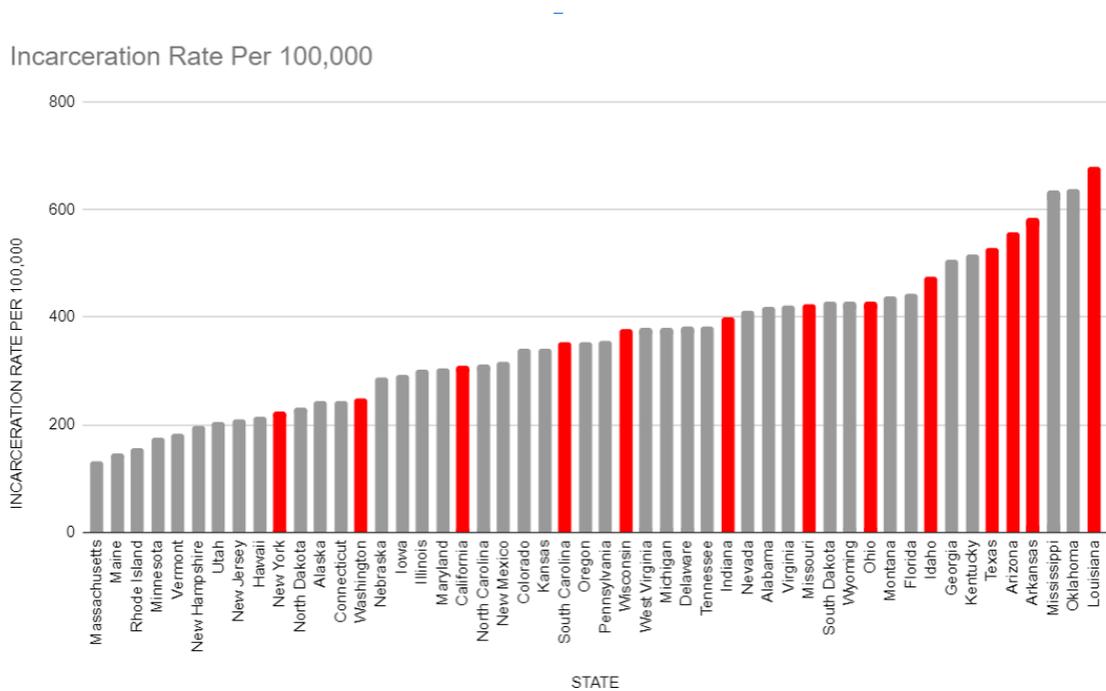


Figure 4 – Incarceration Rate vs. High Enrollment
(NIC, 2018)

Here, there are several realities that stick out to me as possible conclusions to be drawn from the discovery of this correlation. The first possibility is that certain states are increasing their educational opportunities as a response to its alarming incarceration

rate and others are less worried about access to education for AICs due to the comparatively small population of people who are perceived to be affected by it. Take for example the state of Louisiana, very well-known for their heightened incarceration rate. One conclusion as to why Louisiana is so dedicated to finding success in prison education could be an attempt to fix that very statistic of incarceration rate. After all, as exhibited in the literature review, there are mountains of research suggesting that education curbs recidivism, and recidivism is on average responsible for 76.6% of incarceration rate in the United States (Esparza Flores, 2018). However, this is not the only conclusion that could potentially be drawn by this correlation. An alternative reading of this data would suggest a potential call-back to the correlation reached surrounding prison population and high-enrollment. It is logical that the increased volume of the prison system in states with heightened incarceration rates is, at least in part, responsible for the increase in enrollment required to earn a high-enrollment status under IHEP (2011). This being said, some of the high-enrollment states with the lowest prison population are in the top portions of the incarceration rate (notably Idaho, Arkansas, and Louisiana). This suggests that incarceration may play a more significant role than supplying AICs to enroll in educational programs.

State Legislative Partisanship Since 1980 (and 2002)

One of my biggest curiosities in the construction of this thesis was the relationship between prison education and partisanship in the United States. Over the course of the last half century, there is no doubt that both parties have done irreparable harm to incarcerated populations through the war on drugs, harsher sentencing laws, infrastructure bills, and running “tough on crime” campaigns (DuVernay, 2016). These

so-called “law and order” policies have been touted by Democrats and Republicans alike, accruing support from individuals ranging from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump to the Clintons; however, both parties seem to be withdrawing their support of the “tough on crime” policies they once avowed, as 91% of American voters now support criminal justice reform (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017). Naturally, this led me to beg the question: is there a partisan influence on whether a state is more likely to have strong prison education programming? In order to address this question, I wanted to be sure to address a breadth of partisan leanings dating back all the way through the last half century (which is largely considered the modern era of our criminal justice system, and conveniently when the parties began to stabilize into the political ideologies that they hold today). In order to accrue this highly qualitative statistic in a quantitative way, I considered the partisanship of a given state’s legislature. Following this, in my analysis, I broke these two categories further down into average partisan support dating back to 1980 and dating back to 2002. This ensures that the historical considerations of partisanship during the “tough on crime” era is considered along with the more recent era which has seen a heightened level of educational programming inside of prisons.

First, I will investigate the data dating back to 1980, meaning that this incorporates the partisan tendencies of the states dating back to just before the election of Ronald Reagan who, in many ways, really ushered in the war on drugs (following Nixon’s efforts) and the “tough on crime” era for politicians. In this graph, the bars below x-axis are Republican leaning and those above x-axis are Democratic leaning. As an example, Utah and Wyoming have had a Republican state legislature every year since 1980, and Hawaii, Rhode Island, and California have had a Democratic state

legislature since 1980. As is fairly visible in the graph, the correlation between party and high enrollment states is fairly negligible at a $-.11$ suggesting slight tendency for high enrollment to lean Republican, but when considering that the majority of high-enrollment states lean Democratic over the course of the last forty years, this correlation becomes even more negligible.

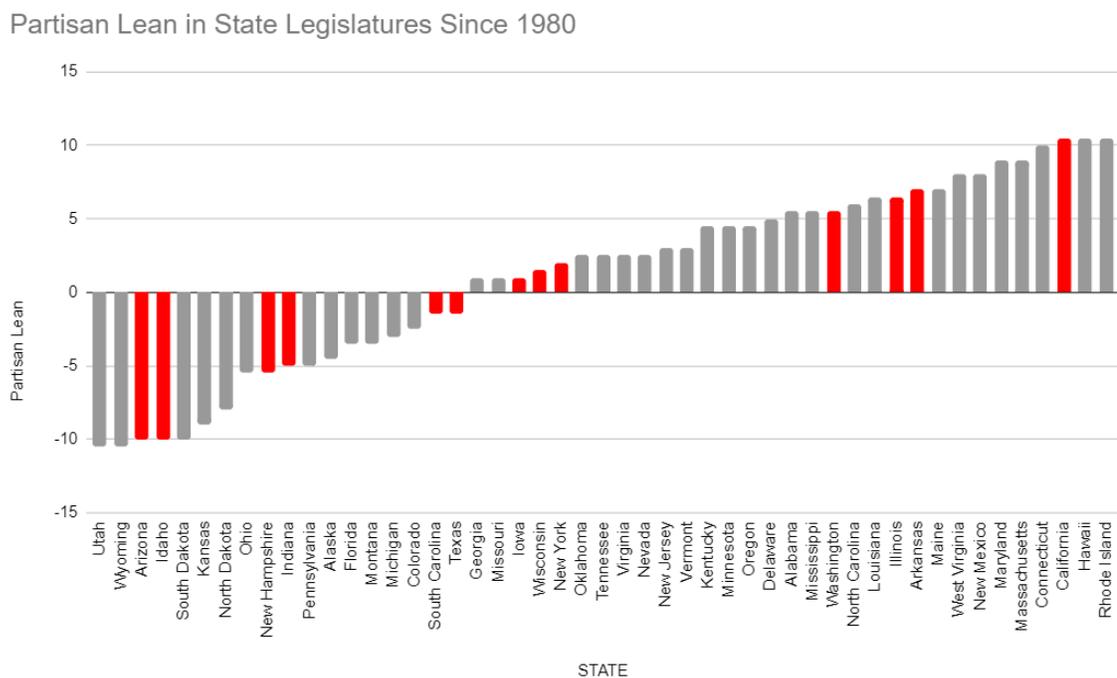


Figure 5 – Partisanship in State Legislature Since 1980 vs. High Enrollment
(Williams and Mahoney, 2021)

While the above chart tested the partisan leaning over the last 40 years, there are many states that have undergone notable partisan change in the last twenty years, and since these years have been pivotal to the formation of a significant portion of prison education programs, it also seems worthwhile to investigate the leanings of the state

legislatures since 2002. This graph uses the same structure as that of the graph above, with Republicans below the x-axis and Democrats above it.

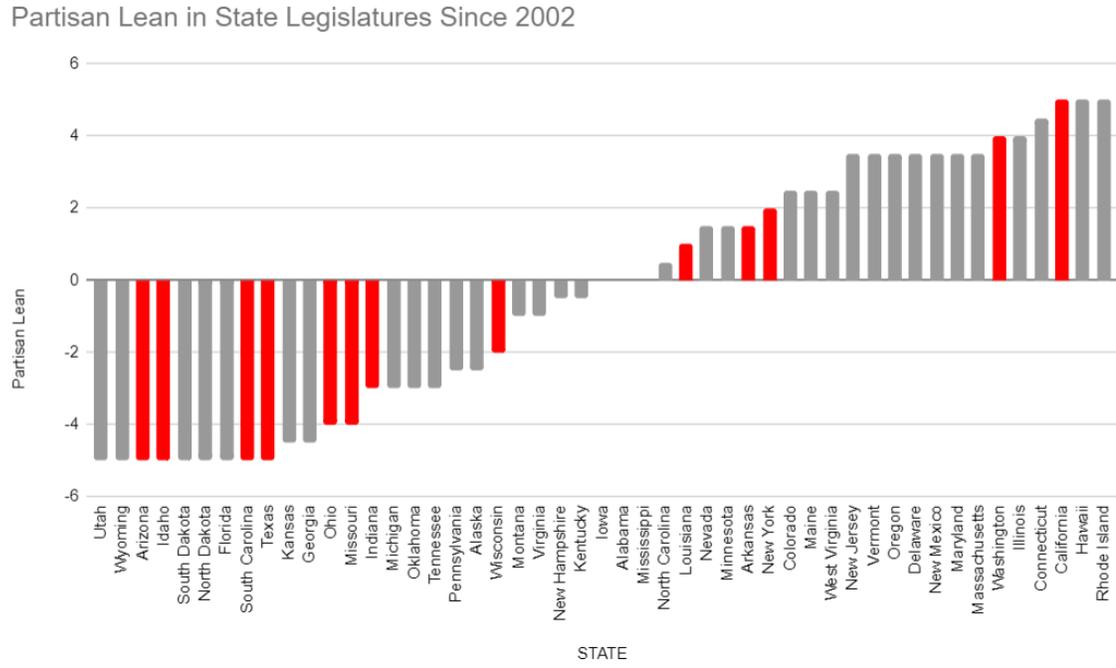


Figure 6 – Partisanship in State Legislature Since 2002 vs High Enrollment
(Williams and Mahoney, 2021)

Just like our considerations of the partisan leanings of the state legislatures over the past forty years, a consideration of the past twenty years yields a weak correlation. Numerically, this correlation coefficient is a bit stronger, sitting at $-.20$, once again suggesting a slight Republican lean among high enrollment states, but since both of these correlation coefficients fall into the categories of negligible (for the former) and weak (for the latter), it seems that the impact of parties on the likelihood of stronger prison education programs in a given state are almost nonexistent. Considering this,

those among us who are hoping to vote their way into more robust prison education will seemingly have to find a different method than straight-ticket voting.

State Education Ranking in Higher Education and K-12

Another seemingly reasonable explanation for why certain states have better prison education programming is that they, as a state, are more concerned with education at large. If a state sees education as a priority, it would be unsurprising that strong prison education programming follows. In order to adequately analyze whether or not this is a correlating (or even contributing) factor to the strength of a prison education program in a given state, I broke down education into a pair of distinct categories. The first category is the state's ranking in higher education. This ranking of higher education considers five categories: Educational Attainment, Two-Year Program Graduation Rate, Four-Year Program Graduation Rate, Debt at Graduation, and Tuition and Fees (U.S. News & World Report, 2022). Along with this consideration of higher education in each state, I also considered K-12 education rankings. The reasoning behind my inclusion of this subcategory of education is that it seemed to parallel correctional education more closely from a conceptual standpoint. While higher education is more privatized and exclusive, K-12 education is often a topic that politically centers around equality and accessibility to education—something that is fundamental to the idea of prison education. In this ranking of K-12 U.S. News & World Report Considered a state's college readiness, high school graduation rate, NAEP Math scores, NAEP Reading scores, and pre-school enrollment (U.S. News & World Report, 2022). The rankings of each high enrollment state are displayed

(alphabetically ordered) in the table below:

State	Ranking in Higher Education	Ranking in K-12 Education
Arizona	33	47
Arkansas	41	38
California	3	40
Idaho	30	23
Indiana	34	9
Louisiana	48	46
Missouri	26	26
New York	14	19
Ohio	35	20
South Carolina	45	42
Texas	31	35
Washington	2	11
Wisconsin	15	8
Average	27.4	28.0

Table 7 – Higher Education and K-12 Ranking of High Enrollment States

(U.S. News & World Report, 2022)

As shown above, the average educational rankings of high-enrollment states are incredibly close to the average of the United States as a whole (which would be exactly 25). In fact, they are a bit (but negligibly) below average. This infers that the ideologies surrounding prison education are likely distanced from the ideologies of education at

large within a given state. While this data does offer an interesting perspective into the way that prison education is treated juxtaposed to general education, the lack of correlation does not necessarily suggest any specific considerations surrounding policy changes or ways that programming can be improved. In this regard, this data rules out an explanation for the success of certain states' prison education programming rather than suggesting one.

Number of Adults in Custody per Prison

My interest in this statistic's relationship with the success of prison education stems from my personal experiences of helping offer courses inside of prisons. In my experience, and particularly during the times of COVID-19, the difficulty in providing education to AICs is not necessarily dictated on a per-AIC basis. Rather, the challenges are often a result of setting up programs within a specific prison. In order to offer classes within an institution, there are a number of very bureaucratic steps for both the educational institution and Department of Corrections in order to offer a class. In my experience, it is significantly easier to offer one class to thirty students than to offer five classes to six students each. Moreover, it is easier to offer two classes in one prison than one class in two prisons. Thus, my curiosity was sparked about whether having more AICs in a given prison resulted in higher rates of enrollment.

In this statistical analysis, data of "AICs per prison" was derived from dividing the total prison population of a given state by the number of prisons within that state. In this case the data resulted in a moderate correlation of .33 (Akoglu, 2018). This suggests that there is a correlation between the two, albeit not one that is particularly strong. However, it is worth noting that four of the top six states in this statistic are

high-enrollment states (IHEP, 2011).

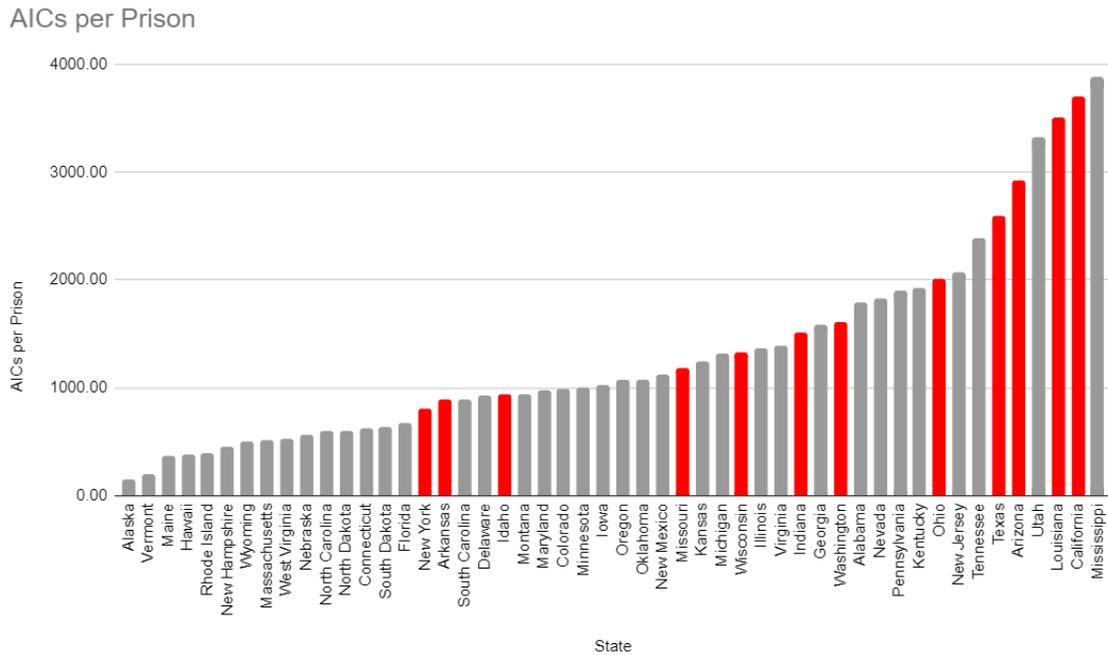


Figure 8 – AICs per Prison vs. High Enrollment

(NIC, 2019)

While this correlation is fruitful for analysis and confirms my own personal experience, its policy implications are complicated. Had the data pointed in the other direction, the fix would have been simpler: support policy that deals with prison overcrowding, whether through the building of more institutions or (more ideally) lowering the incarceration rate. However, the results did not point in this direction, they suggested that more AICs in a prison is correlated with (and perhaps even productive) for educational purposes. For this reason, the complexities of prison overcrowding must be considered in potential policy implications of the above data. As with most matters regarding the prison system, there is significant contestation about the true results of

prison overcrowding. Some individuals, such as Gerald Gaes, a professor at Florida State University, suggest that prison overcrowding is not necessarily correlated to many of the problems that reform advocates suggest it triggers such as violence and medical issues (Gaes, 1985). Alternatively, others suggest that prison overcrowding “often results in cramped and unpleasant physical conditions and in restricted programs. It can also increase the risk of disturbances” (U.S. Department of Justice, 1995). Moreover, in the COVID-19 era, prison overcrowding often produces increased health concerns for AICs (United Nations, 2021). However, while there is debate on the effects of prison overcrowding surrounding certain issues such as health and violence, among scholars there is an overwhelming agreement that nothing good comes of it. While the data in this thesis may suggest an alternate truth (that is to say that there may be one benefit), the grave nature of several of the complaints surrounding prison overcrowding seemingly place educational benefits to the side.

Juvenile Incarceration

The next area that I considered in my analysis was the juvenile incarceration statistics within individual states. As juvenile incarceration is often accompanied by educational programming, this connection seemed like a crucial one to explore. The very nature of being incarcerated as a juvenile (widely defined as being below the age of 18) often disallows juvenile offenders from completing their high school education. I anticipated that this may have an effect on state education in two ways. The first is that there would be higher demand for prison education if the state had an increased level of AICs who were incarcerated as juveniles and were unable to earn their diploma or degree. Second, in states with high levels of juvenile incarceration, there may be an

increased familiarity with bringing education inside of correctional institutions, as “Correctional education is a fundamental component of rehabilitative programming offered in juvenile justice confinement facilities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). With these considerations in mind, the data conformed to my expectations. With a correlation coefficient of .41 indicating a “strong” correlation (and the strongest found in this thesis), the data supported the fact that higher levels of juvenile incarceration correlated with better prison education programming.

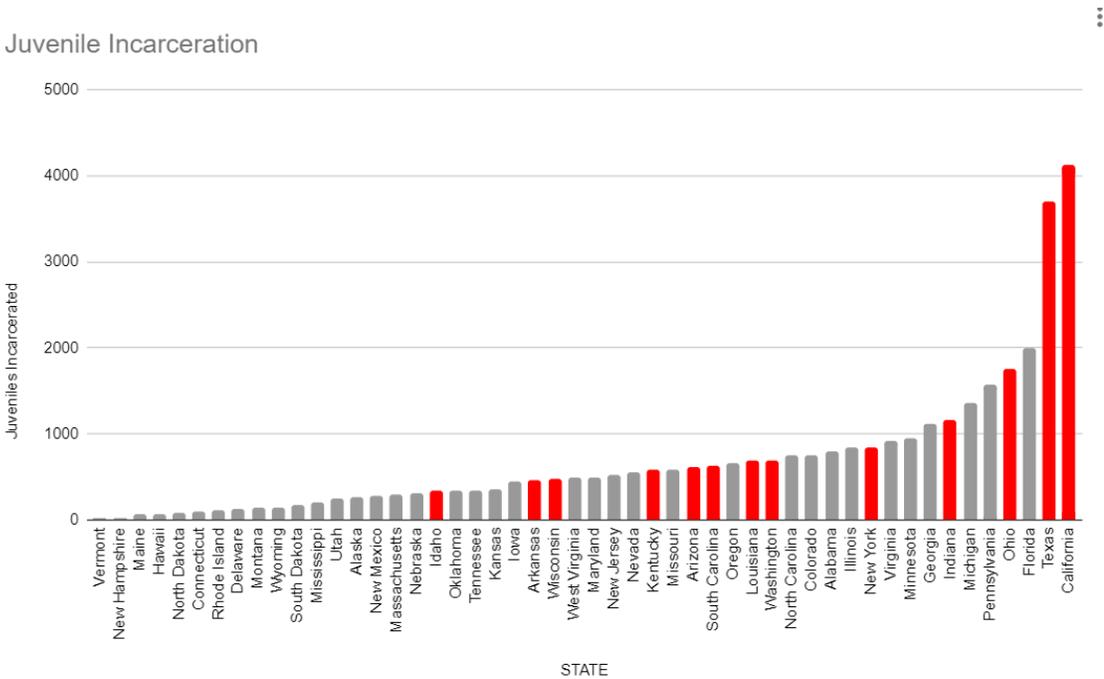


Figure 9 – Juvenile Incarceration vs. High Enrollment
(National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2019)

In regard to this correlation the answer is obviously not to raise the juvenile incarceration rate. Rather, it seems necessary to look back at the two aforementioned explanations for why states with higher juvenile incarceration may have higher-enrollment. The first explanation is a simple one: the lack of education achieved by

many AICs who were incarcerated as juveniles creates a stronger need for educational programming. While this seems logically sound at a more abstract level, there are also studies that confirm this difference in educational attainment among those in the juvenile justice system. A study of 8th graders in the state of Washington found that students who stayed out of the juvenile justice system graduated at a rate of 64.9% while students who had been involved in the juvenile justice system at some point graduated at a rate of just 25% (Education Research and Data Center, 2016). To make matters worse, this nearly 40% drop-off in graduation rate is only compensated by a roughly 15% increase in GED acquisition for individuals in the juvenile justice system (Education Research and Data Center, 2016). This study leads to the conclusion that higher juvenile incarceration rates will lead to lower educational attainment among those in our prisons, and therefore an increased need for educational programming.

The second plausible explanation I noted is that a higher volume of juveniles incarcerated in a given state would likely increase their familiarity with offering educational opportunities inside of prisons and correctional facilities. As education is a central tenet of juvenile rehabilitation, it seems reasonable to infer that both AICs and prisons would be further familiarized with the concept of prison education and therefore more likely to partake.

A final reason that this correlation may occur could be that more states have moved in the direction of abolishing juvenile life without parole following the *Miller v. Alabama* decision (Fettig & Rovner, 2021), meaning there is a guarantee in the majority of states that any juvenile convicted of a crime will be up for parole at some point. This may serve as motivation to partake in educational programming as there is the

possibility for release among all juveniles. Even in cases where *Miller v. Alabama* is not a factor (cases where juvenile life without parole was never on the table), juveniles consistently receive less harsh sentencing than their adult counterparts (Justia, 2021) which may urge them to attain a degree inside their institution due to the salience of their release.

While the contemplation of the correlation between juvenile incarceration and high enrollment in educational programs is one that may not evoke direct policy implications, it is worth considering when asking what sticks out about states that excel at prison education. It seems that this relationship likely has significant implications about prison infrastructure and educational demand, but these issues cannot be fully explored without more uniform documentation of the data surrounding juvenile education by the Department of Corrections at a state-by-state level.

Prisons per University

The last statistical category that I chose to consider in my analysis of this issue is prisons per university in a given state. This unique statistic taps into an important factor surrounding prison education: someone must be capable of and interested in teaching the classes offered inside of a correctional institution. While many universities have become involved in correctional education with their own prison education programs, some states simply have more universities that could pursue such a program and fewer institutions that would need to be taught in. Below is the data, with a higher number signifying more prisons and less universities:

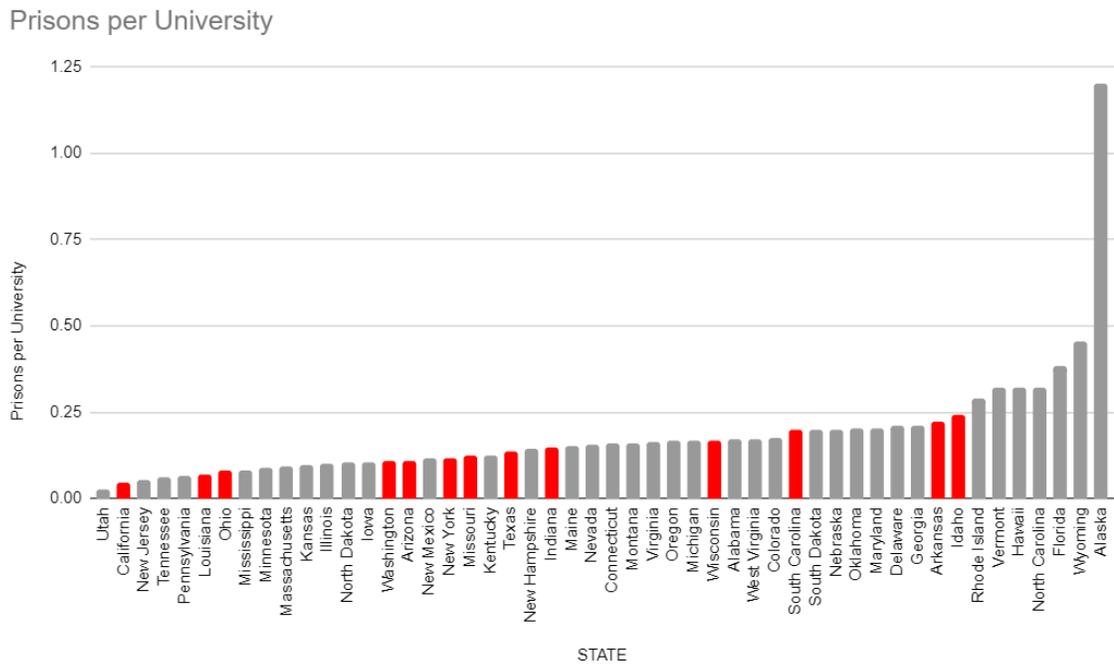


Figure 10 – Prisons per University vs. High Enrollment

(Univstats, 2022; NIC 2019)

This data has a -0.16 correlation signifying a weak to negligible correlation (Akoglu, 2018). Seemingly, this suggests that the issue is not necessarily finding in-state institutions that are willing to work within the prisons and the successful aspect of high-enrollment states is not the access to significantly more universities per prison. While this correlation is negative, suggesting, at best, a weak correlation favoring states with more universities per prison (which should be relatively unsurprising to the predictive reader), few conclusions can be drawn from this result that can be used in ameliorating a state’s prison education programming.

Summary of Statistical Findings

The findings in the above analysis conformed to my hypothesis fairly well. As I expected, there was no overwhelming correlation that could serve as a backbone for which future prison education policy could be created. Instead, there were a pair of strong correlations interlaced with a significant amount of negligible or weak correlations and a number of interesting and notable patterns throughout. Prior to moving forward into my next section, I will conduct a cursory summary of those findings. The table below includes a list of the correlation coefficient for each cross-analysis conducted in this thesis (excluding the education category, which did not have a correlation coefficient, as it was a ranking, but had a negligible difference in average ranking from the United States at large):

Category	Correlation Coefficient	Strength of Correlation*
Prison Population	.41	Strong
Cost per AIC	-.13	Weak-Negligible
Incarceration Rate	.32	Moderate
Partisan Leaning in State Legislature Since 1980	-.11	Negligible
Partisan Leaning in State Legislature Since 2002	-.20	Weak
Number of AICs per Prison	.33	Moderate
Juvenile Incarceration Rate	.41	Strong
Prisons per University	-.16	Weak-Moderate

Table 11 – Correlations Discovered in Statistical Analysis

*as categorized by Quinnipiac University's Department of Political Science (Akoglu, 2018)

When looking for the takeaways from the data analysis of these statistical categories, it appears that the two statistics that are most commonly shared among high-enrollment states are high prison population and high juvenile incarceration rates. Unfortunately, there are two limitations on what can be done with this information. The first is that it cannot be determined whether this is a matter of correlation or causation in any way that is reliable. The second is that if this information were available, a policy recommendation of increasing either of these statistics would be completely ill-advised. Thus, what is left to do is make inferences surrounding what could cause these correlations. In the case of prison population, a pair of possibilities seem clear: either heightened numbers of AICs result in heightened levels of enrollment or heightened levels of AICs result in a desire to increase programming (specifically programming that reduces recidivism). Similarly, there are a number of explanations for why juvenile incarceration rates are correlated with high enrollment, however a few include familiarity with providing more correctional education, increased motivation to take part in educational programs by juvenile offenders, and a prison population with a higher demand for education as more of them were incarcerated as juveniles, lowering their educational achievement. These strong correlations thus beg more questions than they give answers, and in order to more accurately address those questions, I will be diving deeper into a group of three high-enrollment states to attempt to parse out the complexities of their prison education programs: Idaho, Texas, and Indiana.

A Closer Look Into Programming in Idaho, Texas, and Indiana

Having completed the data analysis regarding the statistical correlations between various characteristics of a state's prisons and high-enrollment levels, there are a number of further questions surrounding what to make of these outcomes. This is because political and institutional development is not something that can be easily quantified into a set of numbers, so in order to transcend the limits of a numerical analysis, I will investigate the information surrounding the development and status of prison education programs in Idaho, Texas, and Indiana.

The reason for my selection of these three states is their status as high enrollment states, but extreme variability on other matters. Idaho is a sparsely populated state ranking 31st in overall prison population (NIC 2018), yet its prison education program is robust enough for it to have more enrollment than states like Florida with over ten times as many AICs. Alternatively, Texas falls on the other side of the spectrum. Widely considered one of the most "tough on crime" states, Texas has a massive prison system composed of over 150,000 AICs and 61 prisons within its borders (National Institute of Corrections, 2018). However, despite its harsh policies on almost all other criminal-justice-system-related matters, Texas boasts one of the top thirteen prison education programs. Finally, Indiana seemingly fits right in between these two extremes. Landing almost directly in the center of the high-enrollment states statistically, geographically, and politically, if there is a "typical" high-enrollment state, it seems to be Indiana.

Idaho

Upon looking into Idaho's prison education programming, it becomes clear almost immediately just how much of a priority prison education is for the state's Department of Corrections. The Department of Corrections of Idaho has a fairly limited amount of information on their website that is available to the public. Many states go as far as making weekly press releases surrounding a particular topic within their corrections system (Oregon is a good example of a state with high levels of transparency from the Department of Corrections); however, Idaho has a relatively basic and simple set of information on their website. Nevertheless, their education programming is very available and easy to understand for the reader. In the state of Idaho, the Department of Corrections has created its own "state accredited, special purpose school" named "Robert Janss School" (Idaho Department of Corrections, 2022). This is particularly unique among prison education programs, as the majority of states operate through other institutions that come into the prisons, not an institution within the prison. Idaho Department of Corrections does clarify that it relies on teachers from outside the prison system; however, the existence of a school as its own entity for the prison wherein students can enroll and receive a degree is particularly cutting edge.

Along with the existence of the Robert Janss School, Idaho is also particularly well organized in terms of its educational goals. Dividing its curriculum into post-secondary education, juvenile education, and literacy training, the Idaho Department of Corrections lays out a specific set of goals surrounding both the opportunities for growth within these programs and the ways in which AICs can benefit from their use. As we saw in the statistical analysis above, this emphasis on juvenile education is likely

a pivotal aspect of finding success as an education program, and despite its relatively low juvenile incarceration rate, Idaho's prioritization of juvenile education exemplifies once again that juvenile education seems to be part of the formula for success.

Based on Idaho's prison education programming (or at least the information and data made available to the public surrounding it), their success seems to be coming from a genuine effort to establish their education program as a powerful resource for their AICs and juveniles. This, of course, is not something that can be wrapped into a statistic and analyzed in the above graphs and tables, but nevertheless explains why Idaho has found itself among the most successful prison education programs in the United States despite its comparatively small prison system. Simply put, Idaho should serve as an example of how states can make their education systems more robust without relying on the sheer volume of a massive prison system.

Texas

In stark contrast to Idaho which had several pages of information on the complexities of its prison education programming, the Texas Department of Corrections does not even mention correctional education on its website. Of the 26 pages that Texas Department of Corrections homepage hyperlinks to, not one of them is related to education in any capacity (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2022). However, there is a reason for this, as far as prison education in Texas, the Department of Corrections is hardly involved. Instead, other organizations are responsible for the success of Texas's prison education programming. One of these programs is called the Texas Prison Education Initiative (TPEI). According to the TPEI website, they are a program based out of University of Texas - Austin that has over 60 volunteers and

regularly offer both for-credit and non-credit classes through University of Texas (Texas Prison Education Initiative, 2022). Similarly, Texas A&M University offers a pair of degree programs to those incarcerated in Texas prisons: a “Bachelor of Business Administration in Management [or] Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in Business” (Texas A&M University, 2019).

Prison education programs like that of University of Texas - Austin and Texas A&M University show the other route to prison education, alternative to more institutionalized programs like Idaho. While both of these states achieved the status of a high-enrollment state, Texas’s categorization as such was largely dependent on the work of outside organizations that accrued volunteer support and donations in order to provide higher education to AICs in the state of Texas.

Here, it does seem important to note that neither of these states earned their designation as a high-enrollment state as the result of institutional factors considered in the quantitative analysis that preceded. Rather, Idaho’s Department of Corrections felt particularly strongly about education and made it a pillar of their correctional programming and university programs in Texas felt passionately about providing education to those incarcerated and created an infrastructure that did so.

Indiana

Indiana, a state chosen for analytical purposes due to its middle ground between Idaho and Texas, seems to find itself just in between the styles of Texas and Idaho here as well. Much like Texas, Indiana has a number of universities that offer AICs the opportunity to earn degrees accredited to the specific school offering the program. In Indiana’s case, these schools are Oakland City University, Holy Cross College, and

Miriam University (Indiana Department of Corrections, 2022). However, unlike Texas, Indiana is extremely proactive with the educational programming that goes on within their institutions. The Indiana Department of Corrections publishes a specific “target population” guide at the beginning of every fiscal year wherein they list the educational demographics of their institutions, and later publish what they call “completions” outlining the ways that their target populations have found educational success over the course of the year. This, partnered with the help from outside institutions such as the colleges listed above have allowed Indiana to operate educational programming in fourteen out of the eighteen prisons within the state (Indiana Department of Corrections, 2021).

Once again, it seems that the institutional structure was largely outweighed by the efforts of third-party organizations and a willingness on part of the Indiana Department of Corrections to take education seriously.

State Analysis Conclusion

Seemingly, the central theme among these three states is the power that a single organization or agency can have. In the case of Idaho, the Department of Corrections’ creation of a school inside the prison system has allowed their small state to be a front-runner in the realm of prison education. In the case of Texas, a number of independent organizations combined to overcome a general disinterest in education on part of the Texas Department of Corrections, and in Indiana, it is exemplified what the power of the two of those things combined can be, as their enrollment nearly doubles the “high-enrollment” threshold annually (IHEP, 2011; Indiana Department of Corrections, 2022).

While cross-analysis of high enrollment states with various statistics surrounding a state's correctional and educational infrastructure provide a solid outline for the ways in which we can be predictive about how a robust education system may come to be, the deeper analysis into these three states suggest ways in which a Department of Corrections or outside organization can create one.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to ask a very specific question: what do Arizona, Arkansas, California, Washington, Wisconsin, Indiana, Idaho, Ohio, Texas, New York, South Carolina, Missouri, and Louisiana have in common, if anything, that allows them to foster such strong prison education programs? The research and data analysis conducted in this thesis suggested a number of answers to this question. The states that have earned the distinction of high enrollment per IHEP's 2011 survey tend to share the traits of higher prison population and heightened juvenile incarceration, along with, to a lesser extent, a higher number of AICs per prison and a higher incarceration rate. Along with this, they seem to have a particular entity in their state that is very interested in creating the opportunity for AICs to access education, whether that entity is the Department of Corrections or a third-party organization. These results, however, are limited in their ability to address the second question in this thesis: what can be done to improve prison education from a policy standpoint? Simply put, it would be a poor answer to the plight of prison education to claim that it can be ameliorated through the introduction of more individuals into the prison system, higher incarcerations rates for adults and juveniles, and more crowded prisons. Nevertheless, the state-by-state analysis did give some cause for optimism for both policymakers and everyday people interested in improving prison education. For policymakers, it seems that creating initiatives within your state's Department of Corrections would likely give rise to an increased interest and participation in prison education. More than 60% of states have more AICs in their prisons than Idaho, yet through the creation of the Robert Janss School, they were able to surpass the majority of those states in prison enrollment. For

the everyday citizen, there is reason to have optimism as states like Texas, whose Department of Corrections has seemingly no interest in promoting correctional education, are able to achieve high enrollment due to efforts of individuals outside of the system who are willing to take matters into their own hands to provide educational opportunities to those behind bars.

Takeaways and Suggestions for Future Readers

In tackling the goals set forth in this thesis, by far the biggest obstacle was the acquisition of different statistics and information regarding what goes on inside prison walls. In order for the academic world to produce research that adequately responds to the plight of the prison system, there must be a heightened sense of transparency and data collection that occurs within the prison system. As a result of the gaps that exist within the records of data and information surrounding the prison system, it is crucial that researchers find a way to work around these gaps in an effective manner. There were ample times in this thesis where I was forced to reroute my ideas entirely as a result of a seemingly basic statistic that was simply not collected within certain states (the best example being the impossibility of finding what percentage of AICs have a high school diploma in most states). While there is little that can be done about these gaps in research material, the academic world must find creative methods of side-stepping these obstacles and creating research that helps policymakers and the public better understand the complexities of the prison system.

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