

About

Who we are and what we do: The New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons (NJ-STEP) initiative is an association of higher education institutions in New Jersey that works in partnership with the [State of New Jersey Department of Corrections](#) and [New Jersey State Parole Board](#), (a) to provide higher education courses toward a college degree for students while they are incarcerated, and (b) to assist in their transition to college life upon release from prison.

Our vision is that every person in prison who qualifies for college will have the opportunity to earn college credits toward a degree while incarcerated and will obtain support in continuing their education upon release.

The current contributing institutions are: [Drew University\(PREP\)](#); [Princeton University\(PTI\)](#); [Raritan Valley Community College\(RISE\)](#); and [Rutgers University](#) (other institutions have also contributed coursework historically). We coordinate courses inside 5 out of the 8 accessible facilities across NJ and have created a continuum of higher educational services from prison into the community.

How we work: Raritan Valley Community College confers the AA degree in Liberal Arts and Rutgers University – Newark confers the BA degree in Justice Studies. The staff of NJ STEP, supported by Rutgers University – Newark, works with the partner colleges and NJ DOC to ensure collaborative operations, appropriate course offerings, and seamless transfers that ultimately allow students to complete degree

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requirements. Every college contributor is responsible for selecting faculty and instructors to teach courses in the AA or BA degree program. STEP Counselors are assigned to each prison facility and work on-site with the students, serving as liaisons with STEP teaching faculty. They maintain progress records for all students of the consortium and help students make appropriate choices regarding their degree work. Among their many duties, counselors are responsible for academic advisement, registering students, FAFSA applications, transcript requests, recruiting prospective students, and preparing pre-release educational plans.

NJ-Transfer guides our Liberal Arts curriculum and maximizes the transfer of courses for students upon release. Upon completion of the AA degree, the NJ Lampitt Law facilitates the entire AA degree to transfer to four year state schools. As students transition back into the community, a STEP Completion Counselor helps those who have not yet completed their AA degree enroll in community colleges near their residence. Once a student is enrolled, the STEP team's Completion Counselor works with them to finish their Associate's degree work and continue on to admission at Rutgers University or other four year state schools.

"Mountainview Communities" (MVC) provide wrap-around admissions/transition services and support for STEP students to continue college degree work at Rutgers University's New Brunswick, Newark, and Camden campuses. STEP students who have completed their AA degree or have begun their BA degree while incarcerated and maintained a 3.0 GPA or higher, are eligible for admission and degree completion work at RU. Mountainview Community Counselors are stationed on each campus to provide ongoing support through admissions counseling; campus networking; accountability; assistance with housing, financial management, and legal issues; peer support meetings; and facilitation of gainful employment opportunities on

and off campus. Five MVC alumni are currently employed through STEP.

How we are funded: From 2012-2016, NJ-STEP was selected for the national “[Pathways Project](#)” managed by the [Vera Institute of Justice](#) supported by a number of contributing foundations, and STEP continued its work with specific contributions from [The Ford Foundation](#) and the [Sunshine Lady Foundation](#).

Currently, the State of New Jersey supports NJ-STEP administration with a direct line allocation. Rutgers and Raritan Valley Community College also participate in the federal government’s [Second Chance Pell Experiment](#), providing some STEP students with Pell grants towards their tuition. The [Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#) provides support to NJ-STEP’s B.A. in Justice Studies program. Finally, a portion of funding for STEP administration comes from Rutgers University – Newark’s strategic operating funds.

Why we are doing this work: STEP partners share a vision for broadening educational opportunities and access. [Studies have repeatedly shown](#) that by expanding the opportunities for college in prison, we shift correctional cultures toward education, change lives and communities, increase public safety, and in the long run reduce the immediate and collateral costs of prison.
