

Prison education programs reduce inmate prison return rate, study shows

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According to the Pew Center on the States, one in one hundred American adults is currently in prison. U.S. Department of Justice statistics show that 67 percent of those inmates will recidivate, or re-offend and return to prison after they are released. Now, a University of Missouri researcher has found that educating inmates and preparing them to find jobs upon their release from prison greatly reduces their recidivism rate.

Jake Cronin, a policy analyst with the Institute of Public Policy in the Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri, studied Missouri Department of Corrections data and found that [inmates](#) who earned their GED in Missouri prisons were significantly more likely to find a job after [prison](#) and less likely to recidivate than inmates who did not. Cronin found the biggest jump in reduced recidivism rates, more than 33 percent, when he looked at inmates who earned a GED and acquired a full-time job after their release.

"Employment proves to be the strongest predictor of not returning to prison that we found," Cronin said. "Those who have a full-time job are much less likely to return to prison than similar inmates who are unemployed. Recidivism rates were nearly cut in half for former inmates with a full-time job compared to similar inmates who are unemployed. Inmates who take advantage of the [educational opportunities](#) available to them in prison are more likely to find a job than those who do not."

Cronin says these reduced recidivism rates can save the state a

substantial amount of money in reduced incarceration costs. He points to a similar study which found that educational programs that reduced recidivism rates saved the state of Maryland \$24 million a year, which is twice the amount of money spent on the program. Cronin believes this shows that correctional facility educational programs are a good investment for the state of Missouri.

"If similar results occur in Missouri, which I would expect given the findings of this study, that would mean the state is currently saving more than \$20 million a year in reduced incarceration costs as a result of correctional education programs," Cronin said. "In this political environment, states across the country are looking for ways to save money. This is one program that, in the long run, saves the state money. It is a good investment; an investment that has a high rate of return."

The Institute of Public Policy is a research and public service entity committed to increasing knowledge and understanding of issues facing Missouri state and local governments. It provides policy research to policymakers and conducts program evaluation and other applied research through contracts with public and nonprofit entities. To view the full policy brief, visit: <http://www.ipp.missouri.edu>

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