

FALL 2026

# WELCOME TO SUNY



*Graduates of Mohawk Valley Community College at the First Associate Degree Graduation at Marcy Correctional Facility, July 2026*

## About SUNY

The State University of New York (SUNY) is the largest comprehensive university system in the United States, with 64 campuses that span research universities, academic medical centers, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, colleges of technology, and an online learning network. Together, SUNY campuses provide high-quality educational opportunities that strengthen communities across New York State and beyond.

You are an important part of the SUNY community, which includes nearly 1.3 million students enrolled in credit-bearing courses and programs, as well as continuing education and community outreach programs. Whether through teaching, learning, research, service, or partnership, each member of the SUNY community contributes to a shared mission of expanding access and creating opportunities for New Yorkers. SUNY's nearly 3 million alumni continue to carry that impact around the world, making meaningful contributions in their communities and beyond.

SUNY's mission is to provide the people of New York with educational services of the highest quality, with the broadest possible access, through a comprehensive range of academic, professional, and vocational postsecondary programs and activities that support these goals.

## OHEP Fast Facts

**62%**

of incarcerated college students across New York were enrolled in SUNY programs in Fall 2025

**917**

degrees have been awarded through SUNY HEP programs from 2015 to 2025

**250+**

SUNY HEP alumni have been engaged by SUNY OHEP re-entry navigators to support their pursuit of higher education after release



# In This Issue:



Our Team 3

---

Welcome to SUNY 4

---

Program Locations 5

---

2026 Graduations 9

---

OHEP Updates 12

---

Essay Contest 22

---

Program Highlights 26

---

NY Highlights 28

---

Alumni Highlights 31

---

Student Resources 32

---

# Meet the OHEP Team



**Rachel Sander,  
Executive Director**



**Darryl Epps,  
Deputy Director**



**Sarah Cushman,  
Reentry Success  
Manager**



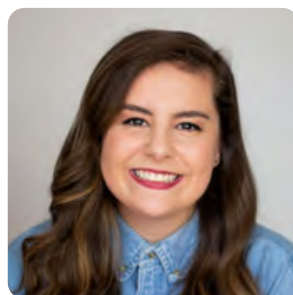
**Jenifer Lee,  
Program Manager**



**Brendan Mapes,  
Data Analytics  
Development Manager**



**Douglas Matthews,  
Finance and Budget  
Manager**



**Cara Wohnsigl,  
Research and Data  
Associate**



**Samantha Pisano,  
Communications and  
Executive  
Coordinator**



**Jessica Soble,  
Fellowship and  
Alumni Coordinator**



**Erica Mason,  
Senior Academic  
Reentry Navigation  
Coordinator**



**Jayna Betancourt,  
Academic Reentry  
Navigation Coordinator-  
Central NY**



**Sara Vacin,  
Academic Reentry  
Navigation Coordinator-  
Western NY**



**Higher Education  
in Prison**

# WELCOME TO SUNY

## A Letter from OHEP Deputy Director



Dear Students,

*As we begin the Fall 2026 school year, I want to welcome each of you to the SUNY community, whether you're beginning your very first semester, or returning to continue your educational journey.*

*When I was incarcerated, it took me twelve years before I had the opportunity to enroll in college. I could have requested a transfer to another facility where a program existed, but it would have separated me from my brother and made it even harder for my mother, who already traveled hours from New York City just to visit us. So I waited. When the opportunity finally came, I took it. I was only able to take one class each semester, but I didn't care. After years of waiting, I finally had the chance to pursue a dream I had carried since childhood—to attend college. At the time, my son was twelve years old. I remember asking him what he wanted to be when he grew up. He looked at me and said he wanted to go to college and buy his mom a house. That moment reminded me that education doesn't just change one person's life, it changes families. I wanted him to see that no matter where we start, learning can open doors and create possibilities.*

*Eventually, I became part of the first associate degree cohort offered through the Cornell Prison Education Program and Cayuga Community College. My brother and I were both released before completing our degrees, but we finished after returning home. I later earned my bachelor's degree from the College of Staten Island and a Master of Social Work from Hunter College. My brother went on to graduate from Yale Law School. Today, I have the privilege of serving as SUNY OHEP's first Deputy Director. Every time I return to a correctional facility for a graduation or student event, I am reminded of the extraordinary determination, resilience, and talent that exists inside these classrooms. I often reconnect with people I knew years ago, students who are still working toward their degrees despite transfers, setbacks, and countless obstacles. Their, and your, persistence continues to inspire me.*

*Your path may not always be straightforward. There will be challenges, moments of frustration, and times when progress feels slower than you hoped. But every class you complete, every paper you write, every discussion you participate in, and every exam you take is another step toward your goals. Education is not simply about earning credits or degrees, it is about discovering your potential and preparing for the future you want to build.*

*At SUNY OHEP, we believe your talent and ambition deserve every opportunity to grow. We are honored to be part of your educational journey, and we remain committed to expanding access so that more students across New York have the chance to experience the transformative power of higher education. Thank you for allowing us to be part of your journey. We are proud of what you have already accomplished, and we look forward to celebrating everything you achieve in the semesters ahead.*

Best,

# SUNY Higher Education in Prison Program Locations



40

**Correctional Institutions\***

\*State, Federal, Juvenile, and County Jails included



20

**Campus Partners**



1,159

**Students\***

\*as of November 2025



# PROGRAM LOCATIONS

## NYS DOCCS Facility Programs

| Facility     | SUNY Campus & Degree(s)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Adirondack   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>North Country Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Liberal Arts &amp; Science;</li> <li>◦ AAS Entrepreneurship Management</li> <li>◦ AAS Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                       |
| Altona       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Clinton Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Liberal Arts: Humanities and Social Sciences</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                         |
| Attica       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Genesee Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AS Liberal Arts and Science General Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                             |
| Auburn       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Cayuga Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Liberal Arts and Sciences</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>SUNY Cortland</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ BA Sociology</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                           |
| Cape Vincent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Jefferson Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Cayuga       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Cayuga Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Liberal Arts and Sciences</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Collins      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Jamestown Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Liberal Arts and Science: Social Sciences</li> <li>◦ AA Language, Literature, &amp; Writing</li> <li>◦ Certificate in Health Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                               |
| Clinton      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Clinton Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts: Humanities &amp; Social Sciences</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>SUNY Plattsburgh</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ BA Individualized Studies - General Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Elmira       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Corning Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Liberal Arts and Sciences</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Five Points  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Cayuga Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Liberal Arts and Sciences</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Franklin     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>North Country Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Liberal Arts &amp; Science</li> <li>◦ AAS Entrepreneurship Management</li> <li>◦ AAS Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                        |
| Gouverneur   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Jefferson Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Green Haven  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Columbia Greene Community College*</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AAS Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>SUNY New Paltz*</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ BS Sociology</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                     |
| Greene       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Columbia Greene Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AAS Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Groveland    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Genesee Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AS Liberal Arts and Science General Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                             |

\*In Partnership with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison

# PROGRAM LOCATIONS

| Facility   | SUNY Campus & Degree(s)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hale Creek | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Herkimer Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Credit courses starting Fall 2026</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Hudson     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Columbia Greene Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AAS Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Lakeview   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Jamestown Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Noncredit courses starting Fall 2026</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Marcy      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Mohawk Valley Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AAS Business Admin</li> <li>◦ Certificate in Entrepreneurship</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>SUNY Polytechnic Institute</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ BA Interdisciplinary Studies starting Fall 2026</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Midstate   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Herkimer Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA General Studies</li> <li>◦ AA Psychology</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>SUNY Polytechnic Institute</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ BA Interdisciplinary Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                           |
| Mohawk     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Herkimer Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA General Studies</li> <li>◦ AA Psychology</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>SUNY Polytechnic Institute</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ BA Interdisciplinary Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                           |
| Orleans    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Genesee Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AS Liberal Arts and Science General Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Riverview  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>SUNY Potsdam</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ BA Sociology</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Shawangunk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Ulster Community College*</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AAS Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Ulster     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Ulster Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Credit courses starting Fall 2026</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Upstate    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>North Country Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Credit courses starting Fall 2026</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Washington | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Adirondack Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Certificate in Entrepreneurship &amp; Business Management</li> <li>◦ AAS Management, Marketing, and Entrepreneurship</li> <li>◦ AS Individuals Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                             |
| Wende      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>University at Buffalo</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ BA Sociology</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Wyoming    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Genesee Community College**</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AS Liberal Arts and Science General Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                         |

\*In Partnership with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison

\*\*In Partnership with Rochester Education Justice Initiative

# PROGRAM LOCATIONS

## Non-NYS DOCCS Facility Programs

| Facility                        | SUNY Campus & Degree(s)                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FCI Ray Brook                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>North Country Community College</u></li> <li>• AA Liberal Arts &amp; Science</li> <li>• AAS Entrepreneurship Management</li> <li>• AAS Individual Studies</li> </ul> |
| OCFS Brookwood Secure           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Columbia-Greene Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AAS Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                         |
| OCFS Finger Lakes Residential   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Tompkins Cortland Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AS Liberal Arts and Sciences</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                 |
| OCFS Goshen Secure              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>SUNY Orange</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AA Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                      |
| OCFS Harriet Tubman Residential | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Tompkins Cortland Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>AS Liberal Arts and Sciences</u></li> </ul> </li> </ul>                          |
| OCFS Industry Secure            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Monroe Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AAS Individual Studies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                  |
| OCFS MacCormick Secure          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Tompkins Cortland Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ AS Liberal Arts and Sciences</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                 |
| Alden County Jail               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Erie Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Noncredit Courses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                         |
| Niagara County Jail             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>SUNY Niagara</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Credit Courses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                      |
| Oneida County Jail              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Mohawk Valley Community College</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Noncredit Courses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                |
| Suffolk County Jail             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Suffolk County Jail</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Credit Courses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                               |

*Beyond SUNY, New York's college-in-prison landscape is strengthened by several higher education partners working alongside DOCCS to expand educational access. As of Fall 2026, college programming is available in 40 of the state's 41 correctional facilities, ensuring that every viable facility offers higher education opportunities.*

**In addition to SUNY colleges, additional programs are offered by:**

- **Bard College:** Fishkill, Albion, Coxsackie, Green Haven, Woodbourne, and Eastern
- **CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College and John Jay College of Criminal Justice:** Otisville
- **CUNY LaGuardia Community College:** Queensboro
- **Mercy University with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison:** Sing Sing
- **Mount Saint Mary College with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison:** Shawangunk
- **New York University:** Walkill
- **Union Theological Seminary:** Sing Sing and Bedford Hills
- **Northeastern University:** Bedford Hills and Taconic
- **University of Rochester:** Attica

# CELEBRATING SUNY GRADUATES OF 2026



Photos by Angela James for Hudson Link

## Columbia Greene Community College at Green Haven Correctional Facility



Photos by Angela James for Hudson Link

## SUNY Ulster at Shawangunk Correctional Facility

# CELEBRATING SUNY GRADUATES OF 2026

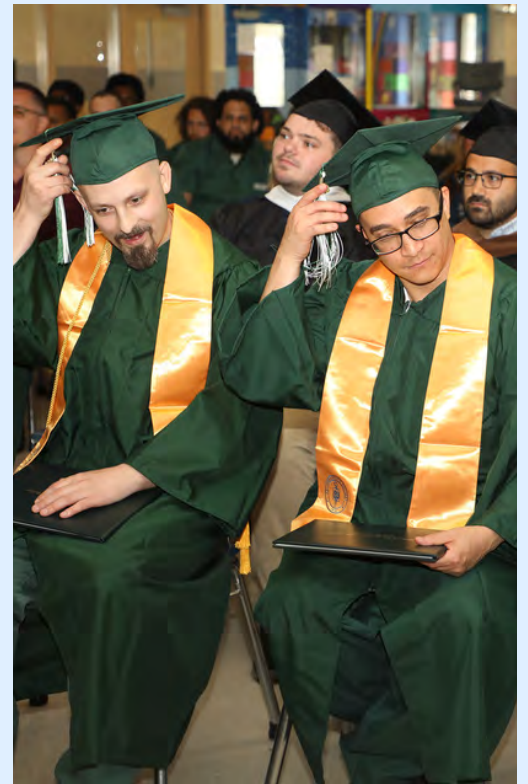


**Herkimer Community College at Mohawk Correctional Facility**



**Corning Community College at Elmira Correctional Facility**

# CELEBRATING SUNY GRADUATES OF 2026



**Mohawk Valley Community College at Marcy Correctional Facility**

**CONGRATULATIONS  
TO GRADUATES FROM OTHER PROGRAMS NOT  
PICTURED IN THIS NEWSLETTER!**



# OHEP UPDATES

## The OHEP Team Grows



### ***Jayna Betancourt, Academic Reentry Navigation Coordinator, Central NY***

Jayna is a passionate educator, advocate, and champion for equity and inclusion in education. Holding a Bachelor of Science in Education from St. John Fisher University and certification as a Recovery Peer Advocate, she is dedicated to supporting justice-impacted individuals and advancing educational access for all New Yorkers.

Prior to joining the OHEP team, Jayna served as the ASAP Coach at Cayuga Community College. Driven by a belief in the transformative power of education, she works to break down barriers and create opportunities for those facing systemic challenges. Jayna helps students navigate their educational paths and realize their full potential.

### ***Cara Wohnsigl, Research and Data Associate***

Cara is a social researcher passionate about using community-centered research and data-informed decision making to drive meaningful change. Her background includes conducting research and creating data visualizations that shed light on health, education, and income equity across the U.S.

She holds an M.S. in Applied Social Research from Hunter College, where she gained deep experience in both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Drawing from her design background, Cara strives to make data more accessible and impactful for diverse audiences.

### ***Sarah Cushman, Reentry Success Manager***

Sarah brings extensive experience at the intersection of reentry systems development and public health, with a professional focus on expanding access, opportunity, and supportive infrastructure for individuals impacted by incarceration, substance use, and housing instability.

Prior to joining SUNY OHEP, Sarah served as Associate Director of Reentry for the Cornell Prison Education Program (CPEP), where she led reentry initiatives and provided comprehensive, student-centered support for individuals returning to their communities after incarceration. She has also previously held senior leadership roles in community health, including serving as Senior Manager of Hepatitis C and Community Prevention Services at Trillium Health. In that capacity, she directed the design and implementation of evidence-informed prevention programming addressing critical public health priorities across the Finger Lakes region.

Sarah is a Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor and holds a Master of Public Health from the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry. Her professional practice is informed by both formal academic and clinical training, as well as her lived experience of incarceration, which continues to shape her commitment to equity, educational access, and systems-level transformation in reentry support. She also serves on the Board of Directors of the Reentry Association of Western New York (RAWNY).

# OHEP UPDATES

## A Historic Investment in Higher Education in Prison



*SUNY Chancellor King with the NYS Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus, February 2026*

For the first time, SUNY OHEP has received dedicated funding through the New York State Budget, marking a significant milestone in the continued growth and sustainability of higher education in prison programs across the state.

This investment is a meaningful step forward for students pursuing their educational goals. It reflects a commitment from Governor Kathy Hochul, the New York State Legislature, SUNY campuses, and community partners to ensuring that more students have access to the opportunities, resources, and support they need to succeed.

This moment represents more than a budget milestone, but is a powerful reminder of the value and impact of education for incarcerated students and the role public higher education plays in providing it. It's a recognition of the role that higher education plays in expanding opportunities and building stronger communities across New York State.

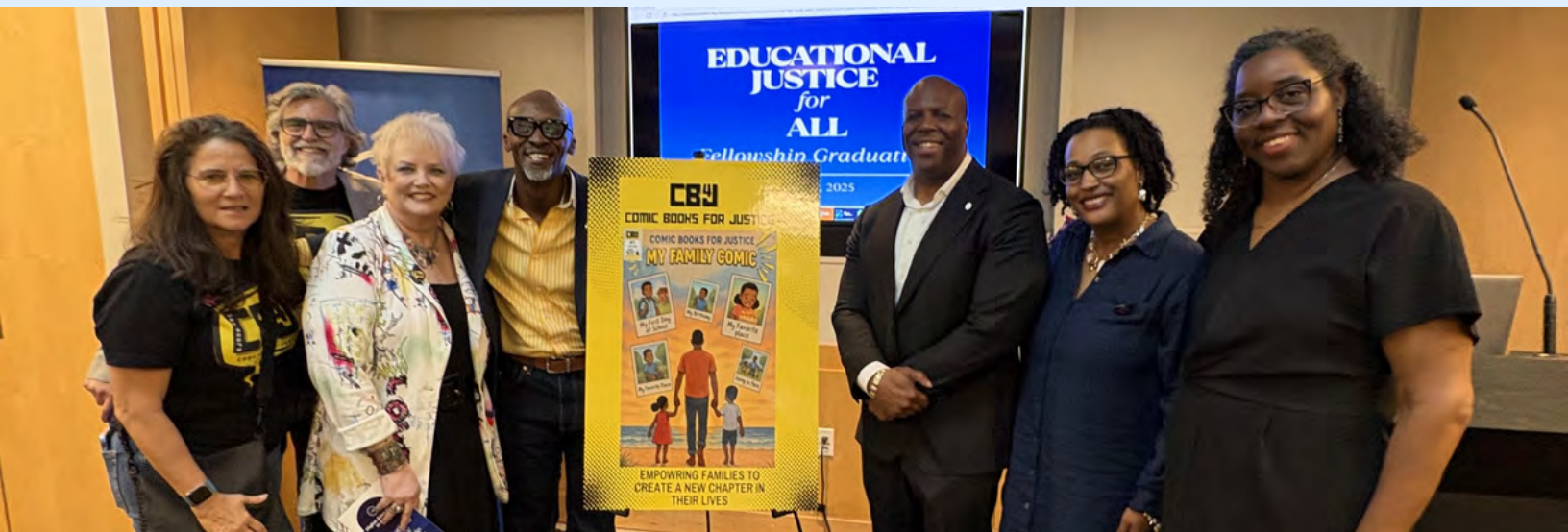
We are deeply grateful to Governor Hochul, the New York State Legislature, and our campus and community partners whose leadership, advocacy, and dedication helped make this investment possible. Their support strengthens the foundation for continued access to college education in prison and helps ensure that students across New York can continue working toward their academic goals.

With this investment, New York joins a growing number of states recognizing higher education in prison as an important pathway to opportunity, growth, and positive change. This milestone reflects a broader commitment to ensuring that education remains accessible to all New Yorkers. Funds will be used to expand OHEP's Fair Chance Scholarship Fund (read more on page 20) and support expansion and enhancement of SUNY HEP programs.

We are grateful to everyone who helped make this progress possible and look forward to continuing this journey together, expanding opportunities, supporting student success, and celebrating the achievements of students across New York.

# OHEP UPDATES

## Comic Books 4 Justice Collaboration



Social Justice Network Team, Ed Justice Fellowship Graduation, June 2025

On August 5, SUNY OHEP and Social Justice Network's Comics for Justice Initiative celebrated the launch of *I, HERO*, a new DIY workbook that uses storytelling, art, and comic creation as tools for literacy, reflection, and community building.

The official launch event was held on August 5 at the SUNY Global Center in New York City and brought together educators, artists, advocates, and community partners to celebrate the collaboration behind this innovative resource.

The event featured a panel discussion moderated by SUNY OHEP Executive Director Rachel Sander, with panelists including RTA Executive Director Jermaine Archer, SUNY OHEP Deputy Director Darryl Epps, Social Justice Network representatives Terrence Coffie and Luis Roman, and Commissioner Martuscello. The conversation explored the role of creativity, education, and storytelling in supporting personal growth and expanding opportunities for justice-impacted communities.

While the Global Center event marked the official launch of *I, HERO*, the first release of the workbook took place inside New York State correctional facilities. Copies were initially distributed to SUNY and GED students at Marcy, Mid-State, Collins, and Wende Correctional Facilities, allowing students to engage with the resource as part of their educational experiences and provide an important foundation for the project's continued expansion.

Developed through the Comics for Justice Initiative, the workbook encourages students to explore their own stories, creativity, and goals through the process of comic creation. By combining art, reflection, and learning, the workbook provides another opportunity for students to build skills, share their voices, and connect with their communities.

The *I, HERO* launch marks another milestone in the growing partnership between SUNY OHEP and Social Justice Network. Through this collaboration, we are continuing to develop innovative resources that create opportunities for students to tell their stories, build connections, and see their experiences reflected in meaningful ways.

# OHEP UPDATES

## Photos from the *I, Hero* Book Launch at the SUNY Global Center



# OHEP UPDATES

## Faculty Fall: OHEP Teaching in Prison Conference



*SUNY OHEP Teaching in Prison Conference, October 2025*

In October 2025, SUNY OHEP brought together more than 100 higher education in prison practitioners from across New York State and the country for the Teaching in Prison Conference at Genesee Community College in Batavia, New York. Centered around the theme “Teaching Inside, Reflecting Within, and Centering Student Success,” the conference created space for educators, administrators, and partners to share best practices, reflect on their experiences, and strengthen their collective commitment to supporting students impacted by incarceration.

Throughout the conference, participants attended workshops, panel discussions, and plenary sessions exploring innovative teaching practices and student-centered approaches to higher education in prison. Attendees also heard from HEP faculty and program alumni, whose experiences highlighted the transformative impact of higher education.

The conference also explored the history of prison education in New York. One plenary examined the history of higher education in prison in Western New York and its influence across the state, while another honored the women of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility whose work restored higher education after incarcerated students lost access to Pell Grants and TAP in 1994.

This October, the Teaching in Prison Conference will continue these important conversations at SUNY Ulster. With the theme “Purpose, Passion, and Pedagogy: Why We Teach in Prison,” the 2026 conference will invite educators, administrators, researchers, and partners to reflect on the motivations that drive this work and the lasting impact of higher education in prison programs.

Every workshop, conversation, and new partnership helps strengthen the learning experience for current and future SUNY students. We look forward to welcoming the HEP community together once again in October 2026 to learn, connect, and continue advancing access to high-quality higher education.

# Student Spring: SUNY OHEP Inaugural Student Symposium



The inaugural Student Symposium reflected the strength of our community and our continued commitment to elevating student voice, fostering connection across programs and regions, and expanding opportunities for learning, leadership, and academic reentry.

# OHEP UPDATES

## Teaching Forward Fellowship



*Inaugural Teaching Forward Fellowship Graduation, December 2025*

In December 2025, SUNY OHEP launched the pilot Teaching Forward Fellowship, a new initiative created in collaboration with partner organizations to provide individuals with lived experience of incarceration a paid opportunity to gain professional experiences and enhance their skills as they enter the workforce.

Through internship placements across New York City, fellows gained hands-on work experience while receiving professional development, mentorship, and employer support. The fellowship also created opportunities for participants to expand their professional networks, connect with leaders across the field, and build a community of peers committed advancing educational equity and expanding opportunity.

At its core, the Teaching Forward Fellowship recognizes that lived experience is a powerful form of expertise. Fellows brought unique perspectives to their host organizations, helping to strengthen programs, support individuals and communities, and advance more equitable approaches to expanding opportunity, education, and employment.

Because of the success and impact of the first cohort, SUNY OHEP launched a second cohort of the Teaching Forward Fellowship in Spring 2026. This second iteration expanded the Fellowship across New York State, creating even more opportunities for participants to grow professionally and contribute to organizations in their communities.

As the Fellowship continues to grow, it reflects SUNY OHEP's commitment to creating pathways that extend beyond earning a degree. By combining paid work experience, professional development, community networking and strong employer partnerships, the Teaching Forward Fellowship is helping fellows launching meaningful careers across New York State.

### Looking Ahead

*In our next newsletter, we'll introduce the newest cohort of SUNY OHEP's Educational Justice Fellowship and share how Fellows are using their lived experience, education, and leadership to create change in their communities.*

# OHEP UPDATES

## Expanding SUNY's Partnership with OCFS



*Cross System Collaboration Meeting, December 2025*

SUNY OHEP is proud to continue strengthening its partnership with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services(OCFS) Division of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth (DJJOY). This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to expanding access to higher education and supporting educational continuity for students across New York State.

Together, OCFS DJJOY and SUNY OHEP are working to ensure that students have meaningful access to higher education and academic support during their time in juvenile facilities and as they continue their educational journeys into DOCCS settings and beyond.

As more young people have the opportunity to begin their college education while in OCFS facilities, maintaining continuity across educational settings has become increasingly important. Many students continue their educational journeys as they transition into DOCCS or return to their communities. Through this partnership, SUNY OHEP and OCFS DJJOY are working to strengthen those connections so students can

continue building on the progress they have already made and remain connected to educational opportunities every step of the way.

This partnership includes programming across Brookwood Secure Center, Finger Lakes Residential Center, Goshen Secure Center, Highland Residential Center, Industry Secure Center and MacCormick Secure Center. Across these sites, students engage in college coursework and academic experiences that support the development of long-term academic pathways.

At the center of this work is a shared belief that access to education should not be defined by a single placement or point in time, but instead supported as part of the broader network. By working across systems, SUNY OHEP and OCFS DJJOY are helping to ensure that students remain connected to opportunities for learning, growth, and academic achievement.

SUNY OHEP is grateful for this continued partnership and looks forward to building on this work in support of students across both OCFS and DOCCS facilities.

# OHEP UPDATES

## Increasing Financial Access & Skills for Students

This fall, OHEP launched the Fair Chance Scholarship Fund. The fund provides limited last-dollar scholarships to eligible incarcerated students with demonstrated financial need, including those who are ineligible for sufficient Pell Grants, TAP, or other forms of financial aid.

The Fair Chance Scholarship Fund was created to help students with financial barriers by providing additional support for educational expenses and helping them stay on track toward completing their degrees. By investing in students' success, the fund strengthens pathways to opportunity and recognizes the determination and commitment students bring to their educational journeys.

To address another common barrier to financial aid eligibility, OHEP also established a partnership with Success Map Initiative to help justice-impacted students resolve defaulted federal student loans. Through loan rehabilitation support, repayment planning, and financial literacy, the partnership helps eligible students regain access to federal financial aid and return to college.

Resolving student loan defaults can be an important step toward rebuilding financial stability and creating new opportunities for continued learning, career advancement, and personal growth. Through this partnership, students receive guidance and support navigating the loan resolution process so they can focus on achieving their academic goals.

Together, these initiatives expand educational opportunity by addressing both unmet financial need and one of the most significant barriers to financial aid eligibility. By reducing financial



OHEP Team Members with Success Map Initiative Founder, Trent Griffin-Braaf

obstacles and connecting students with resources, OHEP is helping more justice-impacted students enroll, persist, and succeed in higher education.

Talk with your campus HEP program coordinator or OHEP Re-entry Navigator to learn more about the scholarship fund.



### SUCCESSMAP INITIATIVE

*Success Map Initiative provides Business Bootcamps and financial literacy training in correctional facilities nationwide. In New York, programs are planned for Greene, Brookwood, Hudson, Taconic, and Bedford Hills. Since November 2025, Columbia-Greene Community College has awarded three credits (BU113: Entrepreneurship) to students who complete the Hustle for Freedom Business Bootcamp and matriculate into a degree program.*

# OHEP UPDATES

## Exodus Partnership to Support Student Success

This Fall SUNY OHEP is partnering with Exodus Transitional to pilot Services Student Success Support Circles across three DOCCS facilities to provide culturally responsive, trauma-informed spaces that address emotional and psychological wellness and develop strategies to help incarcerated college students overcome barriers to persistence, retention, completion, and reentry success.

The program will train incarcerated alumni peer mentors within facilities to embed trauma-informed, healing-centered practices into existing educational environments—ensuring meaningful opportunities for SUNY alumni who are still incarcerated can stay engaged and connected to the college program and support a broader ecosystem of higher education behind the walls.

This initiative strengthens the connection between incarcerated learners and the broader SUNY community. By cultivating peer leadership and expanding access to wellness-focused programming, the partnership reinforces OHEP's commitment to creating equitable educational opportunities that extend beyond incarceration and support long-term student success.

Fall 2026 pilot facilities include: Elmira (SUNY Corning), Midstate (Herkimer County Community College), and Shawangunk (SUNY Ulster).

### OHEP & Exodus Partnership at a Glance

- Culturally responsive Student Success Support Circles
- Trauma-informed peer mentor training
- Alumni engagement within correctional facilities
- Wellness and emotional support for students
- 3 pilot facilities launching Fall 2026



**Higher Education  
in Prison**

# NEWSLETTER ESSAY CONTEST

## Congratulations to students Camilo Botero and David Caraballo!

*Last issue, we asked students to reflect on a word, phrase, or idea they've encountered in their studies that has stayed with them and shifted their perspective.*

### My Second Chance

by Camilo Botero, North Country Community College

Since the beginning of my studies, my goal was to graduate from college. When I first heard the phrase "Second Chance Pell," the words "second chance" stayed with me. Graduating from college during my incarceration is important to me personally, for my environment and for society. Even though prison is a difficult place to be, and for some, it may even be a dangerous place, the education element in prison can be life changing for the individuals that choose to take part in it. For me, education gave me a second chance to change the path of my life. College has given me knowledge, skills and hope for the future. It helps me be a better person, and become someone who can give back to society instead of taking from it.

**"For me, education gave me a second chance to change the path of my life."**

First, graduating from college is important to me personally. Being in prison can make us feel stuck, hopeless, and forgotten. College gives me something positive to work toward every day. It helps me set goals and builds a sense of purpose when I achieve them. When I am in class and studying, I am not just a number—I feel like a student working to better myself. Learning new material helps me think more positively and make better decisions. Coursework is teaching me patience, discipline, and responsibility—the "hidden curriculum" skills I will need for the rest of my life.

College education has also helped me build confidence. Many of us in prison did not have a good school experiences or support in developing social skills. When we were younger, we may have felt like we were not smart or capable enough for school. Earning a degree now proves that we can succeed

through hard work and patience. This confidence will stay with me long after my release, reminding me that my past mistakes do not define my future.

Second, college education can help improve the prison environment. Prisons can be stressful and tense at times, especially when programs are cancelled. But when you focus on your education—your homework, your quizzes, etc.—there is less violence and more respect towards your peer that is doing his work. In college, students are busy studying, reading and helping each other learn. That is what creates a calm and safer environment for everyone, including staff.

When I work toward my degree, I am also setting an example for others to follow. When people see me studying and notice the changes in my lifestyle, they may decide to make similar changes, helping more people choose growth over trouble. In this way, prisons can become environments that foster learning. I believe everyone benefits from this shift.

**"Earning a degree now proves that we can succeed through hard work and patience. This confidence will stay with me long after my release, reminding me that my past mistakes do not define my future."**

Third, graduating from college in prison is important for society. Most people in prison, including myself, will one day return home to the same society they got arrested in. In my view, society benefits when we return with education instead of anger or hopelessness. When we

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

# NEWSLETTER ESSAY CONTEST

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

graduate college, we are more likely determined to find jobs and less likely to return to prison, meaning lower crime and a safer society. Being educated also helps me become a better citizen. With a degree I can contribute through hard work and volunteering. Skills like critical thinking, communication and problem solving, can help me guide young people away from making the same mistakes I made. When I earn my degree, I can show my family that change is possible and that education can open doors, even in the hardest situations.

Finally, earning a college degree is prison shows that anything is possible through hard work and determination. It also shows the true purpose of justice--rehabilitation. Punishment alone does not fix problems. Education is key to rebuilding lives, and when society supports college programs instead of relying only on punishment, it shows they belief in second chances--when people are judged by who they become, and not what they once were.

In conclusion, graduating from college during my prison incarceration is very important for my personal growth, Society, for creating a positive prison environment and helping society as a whole. Education gives me hope, direction and a greater sense of self-worth by preparing me to return to society as a better person and more responsible. Thank you Ms. Kilby, Mr. Snyder, NCCC staff, and Second Chance Pell for giving me my Second Chance.

## I Am the Student

**by David Caraballo, *North Country Community College***

I have been incarcerated for the past six years and it has been a real test of my abilities. I often max out my abilities while not tapping into my potential. Attending college has strengthened my abilities and my potential in ways I could have never imagined. It has helped me to think, write, and communicate more effectively. There was once a time when incarceration and higher education was unheard of, a time when rehabilitation, correction, and prison had no correlation. But due to a new Commissioner and the passionate staff of the SUNY Higher Education in Prison program, we now have the opportunity to reduce the recidivism rate and become productive members of society.

When I think back on this first semester as a college student, the word or phrase that has stayed with me and has had a meaningful effect on me is manifestation. I can't remember when I first encountered manifestation, but I can tell you when it became a mechanism I apply to every aspect of my life. It was during my Stress Management course when I read a book called The Four Agreements.

This book, in my opinion, embodies the manifestation concept. There is a line on page 26 that states, "It is through the word that you manifest everything. Regardless of what language you speak, your intent manifests through the word. What you dream, what you feel, and what you really are, will all be manifested through the word." That line reshaped my thinking and my values. I compartmentalize manifestation into three categories: thought, action, and a firm belief. Not only do I want to tell you about it — I want to show you how it has worked for me.

There is a student who is incarcerated and not a very good writer. He resorts to this very concept called manifestation. He lays back on his bed and pictures himself winning the SUNY HEP Newsletter Essay Contest. He frees his mind and imagines how it would feel winning, and becomes engrossed with the feeling, as if it has

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

# NEWSLETTER ESSAY CONTEST

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

already happened. The feeling is so vivid that he calls his family informing them that he has entered a writing contest and won. He calls his children first and their mom. His kids say yes, you are going to win, and their mom congratulates him for being in college and entering the contest. He continues to tell them he will send them a copy of the newsletter when it is published. Pushing past the negative thoughts of his incarceration, he fully commits to the process because he knows his thoughts are reflected in reality. Hanging up the phone, he asks himself, what did that winning essay look like? He thinks about the introduction, structure, and proceeds to writing his thoughts.

Then, he envisions the body paragraphs. Before he can visualize, the negative thoughts reappear. The voice says, “You can’t pull this off, it’s not worth it. Just forget it and move on. You’re not going to need writing anyways.” The voice sounds like him. That is the hardest part—when the voice telling you to quit is your own. The voice also says, “you are a product of your environment, look where you are!” The student replies to himself, “I am a product of my thoughts. I never thought these things were possible for me, so they weren’t. I am not in prison. I am on a college campus, cultivating me.” He continues to write the body paragraphs of his essay.

Once the student finishes applying these steps, he is left with the most important step of them all, in my opinion: belief. Then the negative thoughts reappear again, saying “How can you fully commit to something when the outcome is uncertain?... Because I believe.” He believes he gave the essay all he had to the best of his ability, at that moment. He also believes his potential is becoming manifested through his English 101 class. Ultimately he believes he will win.

Finally, the student visualizes his conclusion, asking what would it entail. What he really wants is a powerful closing that will inspire others to pursue higher education. To believe in themselves and understand that they are in total control of their destiny. To fight back against the negative thoughts and chase self-progression. So he does just that and hands his paper to his English class instructor and states, “I’m going to win!” as he completes his manifestation process.

I have been talking about this student like he is someone else. He is not. He is me, and this is how I got here. Before manifestation, I did not believe I had control over certain things in my life. I felt like I had to conform to my surroundings. My dreams before were not grounded and lacked substance or direction. I wanted to be what I thought I was supposed to be, what everyone else was doing. Now I know I can be what I want to be.

Manifesting is not passive. It is how I show up to class, how I approach every assignment, and how I understand what education is for. On a hard day, I try to remember that this is part of the process and I have to choose between two processes: hard now, easy later, or easy now, hard later. And that I’m in control. I used to go with the flow. If it was a hard day, it reflected in my attitude and demeanor. Now I let the feeling wash over me by believing in the process. I also use gratitude.

**“My dreams before were not grounded and lacked substance or direction. I wanted to be what I thought I was supposed to be, what everyone else was doing. Now I know I can be what I want to be.”**

My studies have changed my perception in ways that now I understand I am not a product of my environment, but a product of my thoughts and belief. I must change the belief I put behind my thought and action. In order for me to change for the better I must embody and become the person before I actually achieve the success of said person. I AM THE STUDENT SPOKEN ABOUT IN THIS ESSAY. If you are reading this, then you have just become either a part of the manifestation process or a witness to the results of manifestation. Will your mind convince you otherwise, or will you choose to believe in what you have become a witness to?

# NEWSLETTER ESSAY CONTEST



## NEXT ESSAY CONTEST

Help shape next year's Student Symposium! We're inviting students to submit a proposed theme for the 2027 Student Symposium, along with a brief explanation of why it matters and what conversations it could inspire.

The selected submission will help guide the development of next year's symposium and will be recognized in the 2027 Student Symposium materials and the Fall 2027 SUNY OHEP newsletter.

**Word Length:**  
max 500 words

**Due Date:**  
February 28, 2027

**Mail to:**  
Office of Higher Ed in Prison  
The State University of New York  
H. Carl McCall SUNY Building  
353 Broadway Albany, New York 12246

OHEP  
Student  
Symposium



HEP  
Higher Education  
in Prison

# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Clinton Community College and SUNY Plattsburgh to Launch Programs at Clinton Correctional Facility



*Clinton Correctional Facility Site Visit, June 2026*

SUNY OHEP is excited to welcome a new partnership between Clinton Community College and SUNY Plattsburgh as they launch a higher education in prison program at Clinton Correctional Facility beginning in Fall 2026. Together, the campuses will expand access to higher education by offering multiple degree pathways, including Clinton Community College's Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts: Humanities & Social Sciences and SUNY Plattsburgh's Bachelor of Arts in Individualized Studies. The program will begin with two foundational courses, English Composition and Introduction to Psychology, for a total of six credits during its inaugural semester. These courses will provide students with a strong academic foundation as they begin their college journeys and work toward earning their degrees.

This collaboration reflects the shared commitment of Clinton Community College, SUNY Plattsburgh, and SUNY OHEP to expanding educational opportunity and creating meaningful pathways for student success. Through careful planning and partnership with correctional facility staff, faculty and administrators have worked together to develop a program that provides rigorous academic instruction while supporting students throughout their educational journeys.

We are excited to see this partnership grow and look forward to celebrating the achievements of the students, faculty, and staff who will help shape its success in the years to come.

# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## SUNY Potsdam

13 students completed their remaining degree requirements in Spring 2026, and 6 students who completed their degrees after release celebrated at May Commencement.

Potsdam at Riverview CF students earned 5 of the 7 annual Sociology awards presented by the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice Studies.

College students tutor peers working toward their GED. This summer, 11 students who completed their GEDs immediately enrolled in college courses.

The program reached a milestone of more than 100 enrolled students and graduates this summer, and nearly 40 students completed the Wellness Recovery Action Plan Seminar One.



## SUNY Corning Community College

In May 2026, 12 students graduated with Associate in Arts degrees in Liberal Arts and Sciences: Humanities and Social Sciences. 10 students were inducted into Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, with 9 graduates earning both honors.

Corning-Elmira Prison Education Program (CEPEP) received approval to launch a new Associate of Applied Science in Business Administration (Career), offering a career-focused pathway for students.

A new computer lab will feature 14 student workstations, updated technology, and expanded academic resources.



## State University of New York at Buffalo

State University of New York at Buffalo successfully completed its first academic year, with nearly two dozen students earning credits toward a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology.

Students engaged in meaningful academic conversations, including a visit from an author whose book they studied in class to discuss the text and the author's new research.

The program also established scholarships for justice-impacted students at Wende and the main UB campus.



# NY HIGHLIGHTS

## Interview with Commissioner of the New York City Department of Corrections, Stanley Richards

*In February, a week after Stanley Richards, former CEO of Fortune Society, was named Commissioner for NYC Department of Corrections by Mayor Mamdani, SUNY OHEP interviewed him about this historic announcement. Commissioner Richards is the first formerly incarcerated leader to hold the highest rank in NYC's DOC or any DOC in the country. As a beneficiary of higher education in prison, Commissioner Richards is passionate about access to programs and about ensuring all students receive the opportunity to imagine a different future for themselves and their communities.*

**SUNY OHEP:** When and how did you get the news? How did this come your way?

**Commissioner Richards(CR):** I got an email from a senior advisor on the transition committee asking if I had time to talk about DOC. I assumed they wanted to ask me who I would recommend for commissioner. When we started talking, the advisor said a few highly respected people had recommended me and that my name had come up. Then he said he wanted to talk to me about me potentially being commissioner.

It reminded me of when [then-DOC Commissioner] Vinnie [Schiraldi] called me to ask me to be First Deputy Commissioner. I was in our Harlem office, where I almost never answer the phone, and when he said, "Stan, I want you to be my First Deputy Commissioner," my jaw hit the ground. This felt like one of those moments again.

We talked about the role, and I started thinking about the experience, passion, and vision I could bring — doing the work I'd been doing on the outside, but now on the inside. I went through the vetting process, met with the mayor, the first deputy mayor, and the mayor's chief of staff. We talked about increasing jail safety, reducing the population using the levers available to the commissioner, and building a borough-based jail system.

Two days later, I got the call offering me the position.



**SUNY OHEP:** What did you do first after getting the offer?

**CR:** I went home and talked to my wife. Any job this intense requires your family. We've been married 35 years, and she's been an incredible partner in my journey. I couldn't have accomplished what I have without her. She wasn't thrilled at first. I talked again with the first deputy mayor, who acknowledged that this role requires sacrifice — from me and from my wife — in service of the city. We both love New York City, and opportunities like this come once in a lifetime. So, we both said yes.

**SUNY OHEP:** Clearly, the Mayor knows your lived experience is as an asset you bring to this role. In the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29

# NY HIGHLIGHTS

vetting process did it come up? Did you experience any pushback?

**CR:** No. I've been doing this work since I came home from prison in 1991. I've always been transparent about my past and the harm I caused my community. I hope the work I've done over 35 years has made amends. I'm clear-eyed about my experience. It's part of my story, but it's not who I am. When I met with the mayor, he didn't ask me about my past — he wanted to know how I would help solve this problem. What I bring is 25 years of experience and the skills to do the job.

**SUNY OHEP:** What do you think will be the best part of this new role?

**CR:** Bringing hope to a system that has been hopeless. I've said I want to bring light to a place that has been very dark — a place that's been demonized, minimized, and isolated. I want to bring light and hope, and work in partnership with unions, members of service, advocates, community-based providers, and my administration. The goal is to make our jails safe, prepare for borough-based jails, equip officers with the skills they need, and reduce the jail population.

**SUNY OHEP:** What do you think will be the hardest part of the job?

**CR:** Moving all the pieces that need to move. This is a watershed moment, but it's not a speedboat moment. It's a battleship turn — inch by inch. We're talking about changing systems to make jails safe, make officers feel valued, and help incarcerated people experience hope through services. That takes time. I'm building an administration that will work every single day on the critical actions needed to make that transformation real — for staff, people in our care, and their families.

***"I've always been transparent about my past and the harm I caused my community. I'm clear-eyed about my experience. It's part of my story, but it's not who I am."***

**SUNY OHEP:** Can you share more about how you are building out your own administration?

**CR:** Yes. I just selected Meg Egan, president and CEO of Women's Prison Association, as my First Deputy Commissioner. Together, we'll look at the organizational chart, make adjustments, and build an administration that carries out the vision: jail safety, communication with staff, and making sure people in our care and their families know they are safe.

***"College programs provide hope. Programs help people see new possibilities for themselves. Those possibilities become seeds of hope that can grow into full lives when people leave custody."***

**SUNY OHEP:** You've devoted your life to systems change. Where do you believe systems change actually happens?

**CR:** It starts with dissatisfaction inside the system. Right now, officers aren't happy with the conditions or the violence. Incarcerated people aren't satisfied with their conditions or lack of resources. That level of dissatisfaction creates an opportunity to introduce new ideas and address entrenched challenges. That's the beginning. We'll work in partnership with the remediation manager, unions, members of service, incarcerated people, providers — all stakeholders. We may not agree on every strategy, but we can agree on the goal: safe jails.

**SUNY OHEP:** Why is access to higher education and programming in prison so important?

**CR:** College programs provide hope. When people feel hopeless, abused, and isolated — whether officers or incarcerated people — bad things happen. Programs help people see new possibilities for themselves. Those

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30

# NY HIGHLIGHTS



Commissioner Richards and Mamdani Administration Officials, February 2026

possibilities become seeds of hope that can grow into full lives when people leave custody. Hope reduces violence. Programs make jails safer, supports reentry, strengthen families, and improves public safety.

**SUNY OHEP:** As you prepare for this transition, what are you proudest of building at Fortune?

**CR:** I'm proud that we built a community that cares. When I started at Fortune, we had about 35 staff. Now we have over 700, operate in every borough except Staten Island, house over 1,000 people nightly, serve over 18,000 people annually, and provide meals, housing, mental health services, and food access. But more than the services, we created a place where people feel safe and valued. We don't have metal detectors or security — people know Fortune is a safe space. People don't see it as a stop along the way. They see it as a community they belong to.

**SUNY OHEP:** What advice do you have for students — especially someone currently incarcerated reading this?

**CR:** The transition home is going to be hard. There are seen and unseen barriers that will challenge your hope. You don't have control over those things.

What you do have control over is holding onto hope. When you lose hope, you give up on yourself. So retain your power. Don't let challenges diminish your belief in yourself.

Get connected to the network of providers who are here to help. And remember — while people talk about recidivism, we focus on desistance. If 70% go back, what about the other 30%? I wanted to learn how they did it. I became one of them. And the key was holding onto hope.

**“What you do have control over is holding onto hope. When you lose hope, you give up on yourself. So retain your power. Don't let challenges diminish your belief in yourself.”**

*Stanley Richards was appointed Commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction in February 2026.*

*Commissioner Richards is a formerly incarcerated man with decades of experience in the criminal justice field. He previously served as president and CEO of The Fortune Society, where he helped individuals successfully return to the community after incarceration and advanced alternatives to incarceration.*

*Commissioner Richards first joined The Fortune Society in 1991 as a reentry counselor and rose through the nonprofit's ranks over the course of his career. In recognition of his commitment to supporting individuals impacted by the justice system, Commissioner Richards was named a Champion of Change by the Obama administration.*

*Prior to his appointment, Commissioner Richards served as First Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction, becoming the first formerly incarcerated individual to hold a senior leadership role within the agency. He was also the first formerly incarcerated person appointed to the New York City Board of Correction.*

*Commissioner Richards earned his A.A. from Medaille College and pursued his B.A./M.P.H. from Hunter College. He was selected as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation fellow in the Developing Leadership Program to Reduce Substance Abuse and completed Columbia University's Institute for Nonprofit Management Executive Program (New York City Department of Correction, 2026).*

# ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS

## Congratulations, Graduates!



This graduation season, SUNY OHEP celebrated 30 students graduating across 11 SUNY campuses in the community, including 20 students supported through the OHEP Academic Reentry Program. These milestones were marked at ceremonies across the state, where SUNY OHEP staff joined students, families, campus partners, and communities in recognizing this important achievement and celebrating the dedication it took to reach this moment.

For many of these graduates, their academic journeys began through higher education in prison programs and continued beyond release with the support of the Academic Reentry Program. Through individualized guidance, campus connections, and continued access to resources, students were able to successfully navigate the transition into higher education in the community and remain focused on degree completion. Their accomplishments reflect not only their own determination and perseverance, but also the strength of the campus partnerships and support networks that help students thrive throughout their educational journeys.

SUNY OHEP is proud to celebrate each graduate and the many accomplishments that brought them to this moment. We remain committed to expanding pathways to opportunity and supporting students as they continue working toward their educational, professional, and personal goals beyond graduation.

# STUDENT RESOURCES



## OHEP Academic Reentry

SUNY OHEP is excited to share information about the Academic Reentry Program, a statewide initiative designed to support individuals pursuing higher education during and after incarceration. Individuals in all 41 DOCCS facilities can connect with SUNY OHEP for support exploring educational opportunities, whether they are currently enrolled in college, have previously taken college courses, or are interested in getting started.

- **Academic Advising and Transition Support:** Including guidance on transfer applications, financial aid applications, transcript requests, and connections to campus-based academic services.
- **Digital Literacy Support:** Assistance with developing the skills needed to navigate digital learning environments.
- **Community-Based Basic Needs Referrals:** Support in identifying and accessing basic needs following release.
- **Health and Wellness Services:** Referrals to mental health and well-being supports, physical health care providers, and substance use treatment programs.

If you are interested in continuing your education and learning more about the Academic Reentry Program, please ask your college coordinator to make a referral on your behalf or you may contact us by mail:

Office of Higher Education in Prison  
SUNY System Administration Building  
353 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12207