

# New England Prison Education Collaborative NEPEC Newsletter

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## NEPEC Team Joins Planning Sessions on Second Chance Pell Funding in CT



The NEPEC team joined two days of [\*Expanding Access: The Future of Second Chance Pell Education in Connecticut\*](#) a four-day event, October 21-25, 2024, hosted by the Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division of Connecticut's [Office of Policy and Management](#) and the [Institute for](#)

[Municipal and Regional Policy](#) at UConn's School of Public Policy, the event brought together leaders and experts from across the country to explore strategies for expanding access to higher education in prison programming and to discuss the future of Second Chance Pell in Connecticut.

[Undersecretary Daniel Karpowitz](#) presented his vision for higher education in prison in the state of Connecticut. Kevin Neary, Policy Development Coordinator and Research Unit Director, provided updates on Connecticut's statewide needs assessment for post-secondary education in prisons – required under [House Bill No. 5523 Public Act No. 24-81](#). Colleagues from Maine Department of Corrections and University of Maine at Augusta: Laura Rodas, Mark Spahr, and Dan McGloin shared impactful examples of their work. Higher education in prison leaders from Minnesota: Soohee Ruthanne Kim, Matthew Palombo and Michael Valesano offered valuable insights into their transformative approach that is widely recognized as a leading model for Second Chance Pell implementation.

Sarah Kuczynski, Director, NEPEC and Transfer Initiatives at NEBHE presented on NEPEC's evolution and mission, tracing our development from the New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison (the Commission) to its current role in advancing the Commission's recommendations. The presentation illustrated NEPEC's work in fostering collaboration, as well as, accelerating and supporting the implementation of strategic initiatives across New England. Sarah also participated in the cross-sector panel discussion, *A Student-Centered Approach to Higher Education in Prison*.

The event successfully reaffirmed the critical role education plays in breaking cycles of incarceration and preparing learners for successful reentry into their communities. The NEPEC team is grateful to have been part of those important conversations, and we look forward to continuing to collaborate.

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## FAFSA Errors and Updates

### Addressing FAFSA Errors

Navigating the financial aid process can be complex for any student, but for learners who are incarcerated, these challenges are compounded by unique barriers. With the reinstatement of Pell Grant eligibility for learners who are incarcerated, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has become an essential gateway to higher education. However, limitations on internet access and restricted phone use have created significant hurdles for incarcerated applicants in completing and making corrections on the FAFSA.

The recent issues with the 2024–25 FAFSA paper forms have posed additional obstacles for applicants who are incarcerated. The Department of Education (ED) has identified and addressed [several errors](#), which they are working to communicate fixes to both students and participating institutions. For more information on the evolving situation with the FAFSA for learners who are incarcerated, please check out the important work of NASFAA [here](#).

### Looking Ahead: The 2025–26 FAFSA

For the [2025–26 FAFSA](#), ED has introduced a specialized paper form specifically for students who are incarcerated. This form, ([English](#); [Spanish](#)) identical to the standard FAFSA, includes a separate mailing address designed to accommodate the unique needs of correctional facilities. By addressing logistical barriers such as mailing and phone restrictions, this updated process aims to streamline access to Pell Grants for learners who are incarcerated.



# Ascendium HEP Grantee Convening NEPEC Team in Montgomery, AL



The NEPEC team was honored to attend the [Ascendium Education Group](#) Higher Education in Prison (HEP) Grantee Convening, *Creating Community to Strengthen a Systems Approach*, in Montgomery, AL, from November 6-9. We thank Molly Lasagna, Ascendium's Senior Strategy Officer, for making this convening possible and for fostering a collaborative space for the higher education in prison (HEP) community to engage, learn, and grow together.

The sessions were facilitated by Dr. Toya Barnes-Teamer, CEO of Teamer Strategy Group. Dr. Barnes-Teamer masterfully guided the sessions, balancing humor and insight with her supportive, time-conscious approach. She kept us focused, energized, and engaged, and contributed much to the convening's success.

The event featured impactful discussions, including panels with voices from the [Tennessee Higher Education Initiative](#)



In the keynote, Washington Post journalist and author [Robert Samuels](#), spoke about his powerful work and his own challenges during the writing of *His Name is George Floyd: One Man's Life and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. He shared some of the complexities in George Floyd's life and the impact of unjust systems on Floyd's life.

Samuels then led a compelling conversation with four formerly incarcerated leaders: Darryl Epps (SUNY OHEP), Josh Stoltz (THEI), Kiana Calloway (JSRI), and Shannon Ross (The Community). The panelists shared personal insights on how higher education in prison programs can be pivotal in creating pathways to opportunity for system-impacted individuals.



A visit to the [Legacy Museum](#) added a profoundly emotional layer to our experience in Montgomery. The museum's exhibits confront visitors with the horrific history of racial injustice in the United States, from slavery through the present-day impacts of mass incarceration.

The haunting images and harrowing stories were difficult to process alone, and we were grateful to have our higher education in prison community to unpack the experience together. Reflecting on the museum visit and recent events, we found comfort and strength in our shared mission. We left Montgomery with a renewed sense of purpose and unity.

(THEI), [VERA Institute](#), [NASFAA](#), [University of Utah](#), [Jesuit Social Research Institute at Loyola](#), (JSRI) [SUNY Office of HEP](#) (SUNY OHEP) and [The Community](#)



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## Growing the NEPEC Team

### NEPEC Spring 2025 Intern Hired

An offer has officially been extended and accepted by Suffolk University student Annamarana (Anna) Roberts-Briggs, a sophomore pursuing a double major in political science and criminal justice. Anna will join the NEPEC team at the start of January 2025. She will support the planning and implementation of meetings, workshops and conferences, assist in responding to stakeholder requests, as well as promote NEPEC initiatives through social media and the newsletter.

We are excited about the skills and energy Anna will bring to the role.

*NEBHE's commitment to inclusive hiring practices are essential to driving our mission forward. NEPEC is committed to leading by example through implementing practices that support equitable opportunities for all, particularly those impacted by the legal system.*

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## Upcoming Events and Opportunities

### NEPEC Quarterly Workshop

March 19, 2025 | Topic: To be determined by stakeholder feedback

### NEPEC on the Road!

[14th National Conference on Higher Education in Prison](#) (NCHEP)

April 10-11, 2025 | New Orleans, LA

[Horizons: Dare To Be Brave](#), presented by Jobs for the Future

June 10-11, 2025 | New Orleans, LA

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## Stay Connected

Thank you for your continued support and partnership as we work to make higher education accessible to all learners who are incarcerated in New England.

We look forward to keeping you informed and engaged in our shared mission.

Best regards,  
NEPEC Team

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