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# New England Prison Education Collaborative Bi-Monthly Newsletter

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June 25, 2025 | Issue No. 5

Hello,

Welcome to the latest edition of the NEPEC newsletter, your bi-monthly update from our team on our collective efforts to expand high-quality postsecondary education opportunities for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals across New England.

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## NEPEC Accelerator Grants

The New England Prison Education Collaborative (NEPEC) Accelerator Grant Request for Proposals (RFP) closed on June 6, 2025, marking another step forward in expanding access to high-quality, Pell-eligible postsecondary education for incarcerated learners in New England. In Year 1 of this funding opportunity, Accelerator Grants will incentivize the launch or expansion of Pell-eligible prison education programs and support comprehensive reentry strategies. These grants are made possible through support from Ascendium Education Group.

We extend our sincere thanks to the members of NEPEC's Higher Education

Working Group for their thoughtful input in shaping the final RFP to ensure it would attract proposals that prioritize incarcerated learners and support the higher education providers working to deliver equitable, workforce-aligned postsecondary education in carceral settings.

We are also grateful to the more than 35 individuals who registered for our informational webinar and to all those who have submitted their proposals. A special thank you goes out to those from the region (and beyond!) who volunteered to serve as expert reviewers; this group now has the challenging task of evaluating an impressive pool of Accelerator Grant proposals.

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Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) so you don't miss this summer's announcement of the Year 1 Accelerator Grant Awardees!

[Click here to learn more about our Accelerator Grants](#)

## NEPEC Goes to Washington, D.C.



NEPEC Director, Sarah Kuczynski, and Project Coordinator, Quinn Barton, attended the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA)'s second annual higher education in prison focused convening in Washington, D.C. earlier this month.

They attended sessions on a range of topics including the need for student-informed support services, challenges with credit transfer and financial aid, and the importance of sustainable

funding and data systems to measure meaningful outcomes. The event concluded with a reentry simulation that emphasized the range of hurdles that can present post-release.

The convening offered a valuable opportunity to connect in person with program providers, financial aid professionals, student services staff, and higher education in prison experts from across the country, helping to expand NEPEC's growing network.

NEPEC also had the opportunity to bring together 17 of our New England-based colleagues for a dinner, continuing to foster collaboration across the regional network of prison education providers.

## State Strategic Planning Updates



June marks the fourth month of our year-long state strategic planning work in New Hampshire.

In May, the state strategic planning group, the Corrections Education and Vocational Planning Group (CEVPG), met to discuss the upcoming Unlocked Labs site visits and conducted a visioning session.

As we noted in the April edition of the NEPEC newsletter, the NEPEC

Team has partnered with Unlocked Labs to support the completion of a comprehensive technology assessment that will culminate in recommendations to the planning group for implementing the requisite infrastructure to enable twenty-first century educational opportunities within the Granite State's three carceral facilities. Unlocked Labs carried out the onsite portion of this work earlier this month, June 2-5.

The June meeting of this group took place on Tuesday, June 17. The session provided the opportunity for stakeholders across the group to reflect upon the milestone of the first White Mountains Community College graduation in the Northern New Hampshire Correctional Facility and featured a debrief of the Unlocked Labs onsite visit. Planning group members finalized the vision statement for the group's plan and completed a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

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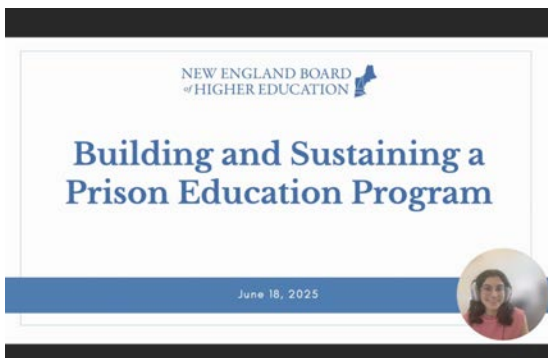
## NEPEC Quarterly Workshop Series

On June 18, 2025, NEPEC hosted the second installment in our quarterly workshop series, "**Building and Sustaining a Prison Education Program.**" This event brought together a panel of experts who shared strategies for developing and maintaining effective Pell-eligible Prison Education Programs (PEPs). Presenters covered topics including building institutional support for PEPs, building strong program provider and Department of Corrections partnerships, an overview of the PEP approval process, and developments related to proposed changes to federal financial aid (including Pell Grants) that could affect incarcerated students.

With over 50 in attendance, the session's expert panelists included:

- Ruth Delaney, Initiative Director for Unlocking Potential at Vera Institute of Justice
- Daniel McGloin, Director of the Prison Education Partnership at the University of Maine at Augusta
- Gena Bianco, Dean of the Extension School (RWU EXT) at Roger Williams University
- Leah Maciejewski, Vice President of Academic Affairs at White Mountains Community College

Those who were unable to attend can access the session's recording and post-event resource document below.



[Click here to access the workshop recording](#)

**Post-Event Resource Guide**  
Event Title: Building and Sustaining a Prison Education Program  
Date: June 18, 2025, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM EDT  
Hosted By: The New England Prison Education Collaborative of the New England Board of Higher Education  
**Thank You for Attending!**  
Thank you for attending the New England Prison Education Collaborative's first quarterly meeting, "Building and Sustaining a Prison Education Program."  
Below, you'll find key takeaways, the session recording, additional resources, and ways to stay connected.  
**1. Presentation Slides & Recording**  
• To access the slide deck, please click here.  
• To access the presentation recording, please click here.  
**2. Additional Resources**  
• [NEPEEC's 1st 100th Anniversary for Applying for Prison Education Programs](#)  
• [Prison Education Program Operations and Assess \(PPEO\) Q&A](#)  
• [Comparing the C&P Application and the In-Person Q&A to on-demand sessions](#)  
• [Critical Knowledge in Administering a Prison Education Program \(KNAP\) on-demand sessions](#)  
• [NEPEEC's Prison Education Programs Web Center](#)  
**3. Feedback & Stay Connected**  
We'd love to hear your thoughts! Please share your feedback here.  
Interested to learn more? Stay updated by subscribing to our newsletter and following us on LinkedIn.  
**Contact Us**  
For any questions related to the event, reach out at [info@nepeec.org](mailto:info@nepeec.org).  
For any questions for our network of speakers, please find their contact information below.

[Click here to access the post-event resource document](#)

## NEPEC Regional Advisory Council

NEPEC facilitated the inaugural meeting of the Regional Advisory Council, which took place on Friday, May 16, bringing together national and regional cross-sector stakeholders. This group will convene quarterly to provide guidance on NEPEC's ongoing work streams and offer strategic input as needed.

We are grateful to these dedicated individuals for lending their expertise and leadership to NEPEC's mission of expanding access to high-quality, workforce-aligned higher education in prison:

- Carole Cafferty, Co-director, The Educational Justice Institute (TEJI)
- Nicholas Deml, Commissioner, Vermont Department of Corrections
- Amy Grzybowski, Vice President of Workforce Development and Community Relations, New England Institute of Technology
- Molly Lasagna, Senior Strategy Officer, Incarcerated Learner Initiatives, Ascendium Education Group
- James Monteiro, Executive Director and Founder, Reentry Campus Program
- Ved Price, Executive Director, Alliance for Higher Education in Prison
- Holly Sargent, State Representative, Maine State Legislature
- Priscila Sousa, State Representative, General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- David Watters, State Senator, New Hampshire General Court

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*We look forward to sharing member spotlights and updates on progress made by the working group and the advisory council via the [NEPECLinkedIn](#) page*

# Graduation Spotlight

Across the New England region, the months of May and June have provided many occasions to celebrate the accomplishments of system-impacted graduates who have completed higher education programs and earned certificates or degrees. Each graduation spotlighted below—and the countless others that are not similarly spotlighted—stands as a testament to the resilience, dedication, and transformative power of education. Members of the New England Prison Education Collaborative (NEPEC) were honored to be able to celebrate alongside the graduates and the communities that champion their success in two of the four ceremonies that are spotlighted below:

## *May 8 – Tufts University Prison Initiative of Tisch College (TUPIT) – MyTERN Graduation*

Tufts University Prison Initiative of Tisch College (TUPIT) held its MyTERN Cohort Five graduation ceremony in Medford, MA. The program honored 10 formerly incarcerated students who earned a certificate in Civic Studies from Tufts University and five MyTERN Alumni who earned their degrees from Tufts University, Boston College, Bunker Hill Community College, and North Shore Community College, respectively. The graduates were recognized for their commitment to education, civic engagement, and leadership.

## *May 19 – Boston College Woods College of Advancing Studies Commencement*

This year's Boston College Woods College of Advancing Studies Commencement ceremony featured an exciting milestone with Nurudeen Alabi walking across the stage as the first formerly incarcerated student to graduate on the Boston College campus. The day affirmed the importance of creating post-release pathways to degree completion. This milestone highlights the hard work of both this pathbreaking graduate and the Boston College Prison Education Program community, as is captured in the quote featured below—from the program's director Patrick Conway:

*“This graduation marks a powerful moment—not just for Nurudeen, but for all of us committed to expanding access to higher education in and after prison. It’s a testament to the importance of community, the transformative power of education, and the talent and resilience of our students. As a program, we now look forward to graduating students annually—both inside MCI-Shirley and on campus in Chestnut Hill. Reaching this point has taken tremendous effort from the University, our staff, faculty, students, and partners, and we’re excited to continue building on that momentum.” – Patrick Conway, Ignacio Chair and Program Director, Boston College Prison Education Program.*

## *May 20 – Roger Williams University Extension School (RWU EXT) Commencement*

RWU EXT conferred associate and bachelor's degrees to 12 graduates at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) John J. Moran Medium Security Facility. Two graduates earned a bachelor's degree in applied psychology, and ten graduates earned their associate degree in liberal arts. This

graduation marks the most degrees RWU has awarded in a single year to incarcerated individuals at the Moran Facility and the first degree-conferring ceremony for the expanded Prison Education Program.

*“... The success of these graduates demonstrates their perseverance and willingness to keep moving forward. By offering a variety of courses and degree paths, students in the program are given opportunities to explore their full potential and prepare for their next phase in life – and it has a positive ripple effect for the communities they will return to.” – Gena Bianco, Dean, Roger Williams University Extension School.*

### *June 13 – Emerson Prison Initiative, Norfolk, Massachusetts*

On June 13, Emerson College held a commencement ceremony at the Massachusetts Correctional Institution–Norfolk for graduates of the Emerson Prison Initiative (EPI). Seven incarcerated students earned bachelor's degrees in Media, Literature, and Culture, with a Minor in Economics. The ceremony served as a powerful milestone in the program's mission to provide rigorous liberal arts education behind prison walls. The seven graduates join 11 EPI alumni; many of whom have since been released and attended the ceremony to support the new graduates.

*"As applicants, you sat across the table from us in your admissions interview and explained what a college education would mean to you: a chance to reinvent yourself, to make your family proud, to fulfill a dream derailed in youth, to open doors to new career paths, and to do something that felt impossible while serving time. We saw you then, and we see you now. You took a risk; the challenging, exhilarating, frustrating, laborious experience of exploring your own intellectual and creative potential. You decided that you wanted a college education, that you could do it, and then you did it!" – Mneesha Gellman, Associate Professor, Founder, and Director, Emerson Prison Initiative.*

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### **Graduate Spotlights:**

#### ***Victoria Scott***

**Date of Graduation:** May 10, 2025  
**School:** University of Maine at Augusta  
**Degree Earned:** Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies with a Minor in Psychology

*“My degree is the sum of every moment of adversity, every growth opportunity, every soul that believed in me, and proof of my resiliency. Pursuing higher education was my first act of self-love and it became the forge for my*

#### ***Nurudeen Alabi***

**Date of Graduation:** May 19, 2025  
**School:** Woods College of Advancing Studies at Boston College  
**Degree Earned:** Bachelor of Arts in Business

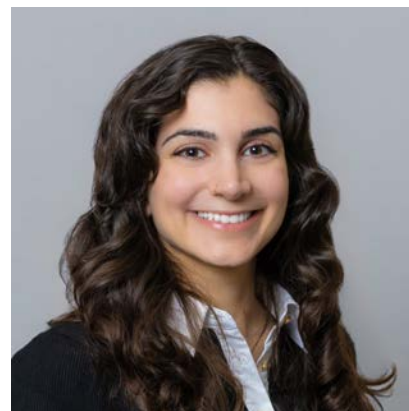
*“The Boston College Prison Education Program (BCPEP) has proven to be a road to many opportunities. Not only did they provide quality education, they also instilled values and a sense of belonging that has supported me in navigating my reentry. “*

*transformation. This world deserves the best version of me, and I hold my degree today so that I could leave prison saying, 'Not for nothing'.*

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## NEPEC Team Member Updates

In May 2025, NEPEC Project Manager, Zeia Fawaz, began pursuing a Master of Science in Data Analytics and Computational Social Science and a graduate certificate in Public Policy and Management—both at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.



Since joining NEBHE in August 2024, Zeia has been responsible for the co-management of the NEPEC initiative, external communications efforts, and workshop planning and execution. As a professional with a passion for using data and research to drive social change, Zeia is excited to leverage the skills she will hone during her graduate career to help to actualize NEPEC’s mission.

“I’m so grateful for the support I’m receiving from both the organization and my team,” Zeia said. “And I’m really excited to use what I learn to support the work I do here at NEBHE.”

Zeia will be studying part-time while maintaining her full-time role at NEBHE and is expected to graduate in February 2027.

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## Upcoming Events and Opportunities

### **NEPEC Quarterly Workshops**

September 17, 2025 | Topic - In Development  
*Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) to stay updated!*

### **NEPEC on the Road**

4th Maine State Prison Undergraduate Symposium  
July 16, 2025 | Warren, ME

[79th Correctional Education Association International Conference & Training Event](#)

August 10-13, 2025 | Pittsburgh, PA

[Boston College Prison Education Program Graduation](#)

September 2025 | Shirley, MA

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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,

The NEPEC Team

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## ABOUT NEPEC:

*The New England Prison Education Collaborative (NEPEC) is a regional initiative led by the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE). In February 2024, NEBHE was awarded five years of grant funding from [Ascendium Education Group](#) to establish the Collaborative to build upon the recommendations of the 2023 [New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison](#), a nine-month regional convening of leaders from across multiple sectors aimed at preparing the region for the reinstatement of federal Pell Grants for all currently incarcerated learners.*

*Through this initiative, NEBHE seeks to accelerate, support, and collaborate to help create a future where every incarcerated person in New England has access to high-quality, workforce-aligned, equitable postsecondary opportunities with a diverse range of educational pathways.*

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