



FAIR CHANCE HIGHER EDUCATION PLEDGE

Since the President took office, this Administration has been committed to reforming America's criminal justice system. In July 2015, the President highlighted the importance of reducing barriers facing people who have been in contact with the criminal justice system and are trying to put their lives back on track, and emphasized that a smarter approach to reducing crime and enhancing public safety must begin with investing in all of our communities. A broad array of coalitions have come together to support the reforms needed to bring about this change.

The White House is building upon these efforts by issuing a challenge to higher education institutions to take on the “**Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge**.” This pledge represents a call-to-action for all members of the academic sector to improve their communities by eliminating unnecessary barriers for those with a criminal record and creating a pathway for a second chance.

Many colleges and universities, including some of the largest in the country, have stepped up to lead in these efforts by providing admission opportunities through actions like adopting “ban the box” policies. By delaying asking about or evaluating criminal history until later in the admission process, these institutions provide applicants with a fair chance to get their foot in the door and be considered based on their qualifications. Other institutions have supported and implemented programs that provide course work and training to create access to education to create a pathway for individuals with a criminal record to improve themselves and improve their ability to participate in the community.

This call to action represents a targeted effort to convene leaders, identify effective strategies, and work together to accomplish the shared goal of creating a stronger and broader set of opportunities for people who have been impacted by the criminal justice system. This does not represent a new federal program. Pledge participants are encouraged to reach out with questions or ideas.

GET STARTED

✓ TAKE ACTION ON THE PLEDGE

The Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge will represent the nationwide effort to take action.

“[INSERT NAME OF INSTITUTION] applauds the growing number of public and private colleges and universities nationwide who are taking action to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to succeed, including individuals who have had contact with the criminal justice system. When an estimated 70 million or more Americans — nearly one in three adults — have a criminal record, it is important to remove unnecessary barriers that may prevent these individuals from gaining access to education and training that can be so critical to career success and lead to a fulfilled and productive life. We are committed to providing individuals with criminal records, including formerly incarcerated individuals, a fair chance to seek a higher education to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to our Nation’s growing economy.”

✓ EXAMPLES OF WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

Many colleges and universities are working to take action on this pledge by building on existing efforts and making new commitments to meet the goals of promoting educational opportunity for all, eliminating barriers to reentry, and providing meaningful opportunities to succeed for reentering individuals. Show us how your college or university plans to take action. Examples include:

1. **Adopt Fair Chance Admissions Practices:** One of the most important contribution colleges and universities can make to this effort is to give a fair chance to all applicants, to ensure that information regarding an applicant’s criminal record is considered in the proper context, and to engage in admissions practices that do not unnecessarily place higher education out of reach for those with criminal records. Commitments can include actions to:
 - Go “Beyond the Box” by determining whether criminal justice-related questions are necessary to make an informed admission decision, and if so, whether these questions should be moved to a later part of the application process (e.g., after schools make an initial admission decision or after students meet the academic criteria) or whether the initial review of the application can be conducted without knowledge of the answers to the criminal-justice related questions;
 - If inquiring about criminal history, narrowly tailor inquiries about criminal history to avoid overbroad exclusion of students;
 - If inquiring about criminal history, ensure questions clearly define what justice-related information applicants must disclose (e.g., felonies versus misdemeanors or convictions versus arrests) and limit requested information to a specific timeframe (e.g., in the past five years);
 - Be transparent about how criminal history will be evaluated and clearly inform potential students as early as possible in the application process about how their specific criminal justice involvement will be considered;
 - Offer students denied admission due to their criminal record the reason for the denial, and a right to appeal a denial, especially in light of the fact that criminal background checks sometimes include inaccurate or out-of-date information;

- Give all prospective students the opportunity to explain criminal justice involvement and preparedness for postsecondary study;
 - Provide admissions personnel and counselors training on the effective use of criminal history data.
2. **Promote a Supportive Campus Environment for All Students:** Even after being admitted into college, students who may have had prior justice system involvement — like many underrepresented and vulnerable groups of students — need support to persist in and successfully complete higher education. To ensure this support, you could commit to:
- Provide well-informed academic and career guidance, including advising students of possible employment barriers related to criminal justice and opportunities to overcome those barriers;
 - Inform students of available support services, including counseling and legal aid;
 - Recruit peer mentors, college coaches, and successful justice-involved graduates to work with justice-involved students;
 - Support student groups for youth who have had justice system involvement;
 - Provide students who have had justice system involvement access to meaningful work opportunities;
 - Offer justice-involved individuals financial aid counseling;
 - Incorporate student feedback when determining support services for students who have had justice system involvement;
 - Establish partnerships with the community to ensure support for the holistic needs of students.
 - Ask students, no matter what their background, to make a personal commitment to campus safety, including to be part of the solution to campus sexual assault.
3. **Take Action in Your Community.** Colleges and universities play an important role in their communities and are often prominent employers. There are important ways you can contribute to the fair chance effort beyond your admissions practices, such as:
- “Ban the Box” in your own hiring practices by delaying criminal history questions until later in the hiring process;
 - Support professors and students who want to teach or are teaching in corrections facilities;
 - Support research on the criminal justice system and incarceration;
 - Ensure internships and job training are available to individuals with criminal records;
 - Encourage students to mentor the children of incarcerated parents;
 - If you are located near a prison or juvenile detention facility, support both education programming inside that facility and any education needs of corrections officers and their families.

We welcome any additional commitments that achieve the goal of promoting fair chance higher education, eliminating barriers to reentry, and providing meaningful opportunities for all to succeed.

✓ **SHARE BEST PRACTICES AND SUCCESS STORIES**

By taking the Pledge, you are joining a community of local, state, and national partners that believes in providing second chances. We encourage you to share best practices and success stories with other employers.

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