

EDUCATION & PRE-ENTRY PROGRAMS ASSOCIATE

JOB OPENING

The Tennessee Higher Education Initiative (THEI) is a nonprofit organization working to disrupt systems of harm and create opportunities for autonomy and success by providing college access to people inside Tennessee prisons, preparing students for skillful re-entry, and reducing barriers to continued education and achievement. THEI is a grassroots, community organization committed to principles of harm reduction, healing, and centering the lived experiences of the people we serve. We engage in reimagining and building towards the world we want to see through systems work and direct service.

This position will be based in East Tennessee.

Tennessee Higher Education Initiative (THEI) seeks a full-time **Education and Pre-Entry Programs Associate** responsible for THEI's academic programs and providing comprehensive pre-release planning and support services to justice-impacted individuals during the critical 12 months prior to their release from Tennessee correctional facilities. Under the direction of the THEI Senior Manager of Education and Pre-entry Programs the Associate will coordinate implementation of bachelor's and associate degree programs, facilitate communication between all stakeholders, and provide direct support services to incarcerated students. This essential role also focuses on developing comprehensive and durable reentry plans through monthly meetings with participants, ensuring they have the knowledge, resources, and support for successful community reintegration.

This full-time, exempt position will require substantial car travel on a weekly basis to prison facilities and partnering colleges primarily in the Northeast region. Some overnight travel within Tennessee will be required. Apart from facility travel, the Associate's primary office location will be work-from-home or THEI's office in Nashville. The candidate will demonstrate strong relationship-building skills, case planning abilities, and experience in long-term goal setting. This role requires patience, consistency, and the ability to work within the constraints of correctional environments while building meaningful connections with individuals preparing for reentry.

Priority will be given to applicants who demonstrate a strong commitment to providing educational opportunities and service to at-risk populations and understand the mission of THEI to be located within a larger social-justice movement. We seek applicants who have experience working in secondary or post-secondary education and/or working in a prison environment providing case management or reentry planning; flexibility with work hours, including the ability to work nights and some weekends; excellent organizational and time management skills; and a strong commitment to breaking cycles of poverty and incarceration. Familiarity with TDOC practices and/or knowledge of the public higher education



system in Tennessee are beneficial. The candidate must be able to be a badged TDOC contractor, have a reliable car, can drive to prisons across Tennessee, be comfortable working in a prison and collaborating with incarcerated individuals. **We encourage people who have been impacted by the criminal justice system to consider applying.**

ESSENTIAL DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Student Support, Academic Services and Continuity

- Provide comprehensive advising and educational planning specific to the unique needs of incarcerated students and planning for continued education post-release to increase completion rates
- Build relationships and rapport with all THEI students across multiple cohorts and prison facilities using a trauma-informed, human-centered, strength-based approach
- Act as a regular tutor at prison campuses, providing direct educational support and academic coaching
- Serve as an advisor, liaison, and advocate for incarcerated people seeking to attend partner college institutions
- Onboard students into THEI academic programs and continue working with them through degree completion
- Facilitate the smooth communication of student needs to respective partners and work to resolve student challenges through collaborative problem-solving
- Facilitate College Prep program and oversee annual admissions process, maintaining meticulous records and managing multiple priorities with exceptional attention to detail
- Ensure students have access to educational materials, textbooks, and resources necessary to succeed in their courses
- Manage comprehensive student records, instructional materials, and academic documentation with attention to privacy and confidentiality
- Log contact notes in a timely manner, utilizing Salesforce and Google Drive systems for comprehensive case management
- Ensure all education information and data are maintained correctly in electronic and paper files for program evaluation and compliance
- Partner with the community to create and facilitate student success workshops and academic enrichment activities geared towards student interests and career goals
- Lead and manage student council groups and extracurricular activities that promote peer support and leadership development
- Coordinate with college partners to ensure smooth academic transitions and enrollment processes for post-release education
- Assist with college applications, financial aid processes, and academic placement planning during the pre-release period



Faculty & Instructor Coordination

- Communicate regularly with faculty as needed to ensure smooth implementation of courses and to mitigate possible disruptions
- Facilitate course delivery including professor accompaniment, preparing course packets and workbooks, uploading presentations, and gathering materials for student computer lab servers
- Ensure professors have the technology and materials needed to successfully teach their courses
- Facilitate Faculty Training and post-evaluation collection for all partner instructors prior to the start of each semester

College Partnership & Liaison Services

- Serve as primary liaison between incarcerated students and college partners, communicating key information and advocating for both student and institutional interests
- Work with partner campuses to provide outreach to students regarding THEI's academic programs and identify incarcerated people interested in post-release education opportunities
- Identify staff at partner institutions who will help formerly incarcerated people access and fully participate in college programs, either on campus or online
- Assist college partners with distribution and collection of course materials and supplies
- Support execution of colleges' administrative processes, including student rosters, roster changes, course adds and withdrawals
- Collaborate with college partners to host annual graduation ceremonies inside TDOC facilities
- Coordinate with college staff for data collection and program evaluation requirements
- Confer regularly with representatives from partner colleges regarding interpretation and implementation of program and institutional policies
- Network with other college navigators and academic coordinators to share best practices and facilitate connecting students with educational resources

Data Management & Program Evaluation

- Create and maintain student-specific data for process, program, and outcome evaluation to support continuous program improvement
- Maintain comprehensive records and update documents and record systems
- Digitize data for academic programs and coordinate with organizational staff for data collection and analysis
- Assist with scanning, anonymizing, organizing, and other administrative support tasks as required
- Support program evaluation and assessment activities through data management and systematic analysis



- Work in consultation with Senior Manager of EPP to implement sustainable, system-wide programming initiatives
- Adhere to FERPA privacy policies and best practices for storing and sharing sensitive materials
- Maintain comprehensive records using organizational database systems (Salesforce) with attention to privacy and confidentiality requirements
- Complete regular progress reports and case updates for supervisory review and program evaluation purposes
- Document service referrals, resource connections, and partnership engagement for program improvement and replication
- Prepare participants for transfer to post-release support services and ensure seamless transitions to community-based programming

Event Coordination & Professional Development

- Collaborate with leadership team to organize and execute events both at prisons and in community settings
- Assist in planning and execution of commencement ceremonies at TDOC facilities for graduating students
- Support orientation of new students to programs at various facilities
- Provide support for extracurricular and pre-college activities including academic clubs, reading groups, and enrichment programs
- Actively participate in team meetings and attend related state and local conferences to stay current with best practices
- Network with other academic coordinators and education professionals to share resources and strategies
- Perform related duties as assigned to support organizational mission and program excellence

Long-Term Pre-Release Planning & Case Management

- Initiate contact with THEI students 12 months prior to their scheduled release date to begin comprehensive reentry planning process
- Conduct monthly meetings with participants to assess progress, update reentry plans, and address emerging needs or concerns
- Develop comprehensive and durable reentry plans in collaboration with participants, incorporating their goals, strengths, educational aspirations, and identified support needs
- Create individualized case plans that address housing, employment, education, healthcare, family reunification, and personal development goals
- Monitor and document progress toward established goals through regular assessments and plan updates
- Maintain detailed case files documenting all interactions, goal progress, resource connections, and plan modifications

Partnership Development, Resource Connection & Pre-Release Coordination

- Research and connect participants with housing resources, employment opportunities, and community services in their intended release locations
- Facilitate connections with community-based organizations, service providers, and support networks prior to release
- Coordinate with family members and support systems to prepare for successful reunification and community reintegration
- Build and maintain relationships with community service providers, employers, housing programs, and educational institutions in participants' release areas
- Coordinate with TDOC reentry staff, case managers, and facility administrators to ensure seamless information sharing and collaborative planning
- Engage with family members and support networks to prepare them for participants' return and facilitate healthy reunification

REQUIRED CAPABILITIES, SKILLS, & KNOWLEDGE

- Bachelor's degree in Education, Counseling Psychology, Program Administration, Social Work, or related field required
- 3+ years of experience within higher education in prison, reentry, social services, or related fields (preferred)
- Demonstrated ability to work with and gain the cooperation of people in a variety of organizations and positions, including academic institutions and human service organizations
- Strong understanding of reentry challenges and barriers faced by formerly incarcerated individuals
- Experience providing trauma-informed, human-centered, strength-based approach to working with students and justice-impacted populations
- Knowledge of community resources including housing, employment, education, and social services
- Proficiency in Google Suite, particularly Google Calendar, Sheets, Docs, and Slides; experience with Salesforce preferred
- Exceptional administrative, written, and verbal communication skills with ability to advocate effectively for student needs
- Ability and willingness to organize and manage complex data systems for program evaluation and student tracking
- Strong organizational skills with attention to detail and ability to manage multiple cases simultaneously
- Valid driver's license and reliable transportation for regular travel to prison facilities across Tennessee
- Flexible schedule including ability to work evenings and occasional Saturdays
- Timeliness around email correspondence and professional communication
- Investment in relationship-building and passion for creating partnerships with diverse populations and organizations

- Energy for creative problem-solving and navigating ambiguous situations with intentionality and judgment
- Thoughtful and critical understanding about the social and historical context of THEI's work
- Emotional intelligence with ability to balance healthy boundaries while maintaining professionalism with incarcerated student population
- Ability to follow guidelines from the Tennessee Department of Correction
- Ability to work effectively with diverse individuals and groups, balance competing needs, and employ objectivity
- Effectiveness with both independent and collaborative team work
- Must be eligible to be a badged TDOC contractor

Relational Requirements

- Collaborative and proactive, communicative approach to work across teams
- Ability to navigate challenging professional partnership relationships with respect and resourcefulness
- Openness to creative problem-solving and working in ambiguous situations
- Commitment to self-care, healthy boundary setting and professionalism
- Willingness to co-create an "uncommon work culture" through shared commitment to community agreements

Social Justice Requirements

- Strong commitment to providing service to at-risk populations and understanding THEI's mission within the larger social justice movement
- Strong commitment to breaking cycles of poverty and incarceration
- Commitment to use Person First and humanizing language in all interactions
- Cultural competence in working with diverse populations and justice-impacted individuals

COMPENSATION & BENEFITS

This is a full-time, exempt position with a salary of \$50,000 plus travel reimbursements, comprehensive medical/dental insurance, a monthly wellness stipend, Simple IRA with employer match, professional development opportunities, generous paid leave and holidays, and flexible work arrangements.

THEI is an equal-opportunity employer; all applicants will be considered for employment without attention to race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, veteran or disability status.

Interested applicants should submit cover letter and resume to work@thei.org with "Education and Pre-Entry Programs Associate" in the subject line.

