

Cost Breakdowns and Award Letters: Tuition Statements and Bills from Nine Institutions Participating in Second Chance Pell

Our research team asked if institutional leaders provide tuition statements to incarcerated students. If so, we asked them to provide de-identified student bills as part of their participation in the study. Five institutions provided these documents. If they responded, we describe what each institution offered to our team. It is important to note that our team received this information and documents from administrators, not students. Thus, we cannot make claims regarding whether incarcerated students actually receive institutional tuition or billing statements.¹

Table 1

TUITION STATEMENT INFORMATION BY SITE

Site	Institutional Type	Tuition Statement Information
A	2-year, Public	A financial aid administrator provided a de-identified, individualized tuition statement and shared that students receive both a printed and an online version (see Image 1). This document specifies tuition charges, fees, and the costs of required e-books. It is unclear if fees and e-book costs are set amounts or vary according to credit hours/course types. The statement also includes the amount of Pell award received on behalf of the student. Administrators explained that they manipulate student bills to exactly match the amount of Pell and the total for tuition, fees, and e-books so that students do not see any difference between institutional charges and their Pell award.
B	4-year, Public	A financial aid administrator provided a de-identified student account summary that includes lump sum debit and credit amounts (i.e. the amount charged to the student account and the amount of award applied). These amounts match exactly; the account summary does not show any difference between institutional charges and students' Pell awards. There is no breakdown of the specific costs that comprise the debit amount, and so it is unknown what the specific charges for tuition, fees, books, supplies, or related materials might be. It is unclear if students receive a statement like this, whether it is used for internal accounting purposes, or whether participants drafted it for our team.

Site Institutional Type Tuition Statement Information

C	2-year, Public	A financial aid administrator provided a generalized breakdown of student costs and stated that program staff issue a copy to students (see Image 2). This breakdown includes a table with the cost of tuition and fees per credit hour, a flat fee per course, a resource fee that varies according to how many courses a student takes, and a flat-rate technology and support fee. Students are expected to calculate their own “bill” according to this table. The breakdown also includes examples of what student costs might be based on hypothetical course loads. These examples include the refund amount that students would receive if they were not incarcerated, but the breakdown specifies that, “Students in the Second Chance Pell pilot program are not entitled to refunds by federal Financial Aid guidelines” and “excess funds are refunded to the Department of Education.”
D	2-year, Public	The Bursar at this site revealed that the college in question currently only issues e-bills to students and has not yet developed a paper form to send to incarcerated students. Students do not have online access in the facility to see these bills.
E	4-year, Private	The program director said students receive an award letter (see Image 4) that specifies how much Pell funding they received and how much scholarship funding the institution applied to cover the remaining costs of attendance. There is no breakdown indicating the specific costs of tuition, fees, and supplies and textbooks.
F	4-year, Private	This site did not provide information or documentation relating to student tuition statements.
G	2-year, Public	This site did not provide information or documentation relating to student tuition statements.
H	2-year, Public	This site did not provide information or documentation relating to student tuition statements.
I	2-year, Public	The prison higher education program coordinator indicated that program staff print out copies of tuition bills for students but did not provide documentation. It is unclear what these bills include or the frequency with which students may receive them. Additionally, our team does not know if individual students need to request the documents or if program staff routinely print and distribute to students.

EXAMPLES OF COST DOCUMENTATION

Below are the three clearest examples of tuition bill documents that schools provided to our team. Each document conveys cost information in different ways. Site C’s (2-year, public) general cost breakdown actually indicates the amount of refund that a student might receive, though it is not specific to the particular student. Site A (2-year, public) and E (4-year, private) both tell each student how much Pell funding was applied to their charges. However, Site A removes any refund amounts before students see their statements. In contrast to Site E, Sites A and C both include fee amounts, but explanations of the ways that these fees vary is complicated and can be confusing to students.

Image 1

SITE A'S STUDENT TUITION STATEMENT

<u>Course / Sec / Notes</u>	<u>Mtg</u>	<u>Start - End Dt / Day(s)</u>	<u>Time(s)</u>	<u>Blq & Room</u>	<u>Instructor(s)</u>	<u>Cred</u>
Intro to Psychology PSY-111-FC010	Int	01/18/22 - 03/07/22 TBA	TBA	TBA To Be Announc TBA	██████████	3.0
Introduction to Computers CSC-110-FC020	Int	01/18/22 - 03/07/22 TBA	TBA	TBA To Be Announc TBA	██████████	3.0
Composition II ENG-106-FC510	Int	03/15/22 - 05/02/22 TBA	TBA	TBA To Be Announc TBA	██████████	3.0
Principles of Microeconomics ECN-130-FC510	Int	03/15/22 - 05/02/22 TBA	TBA	TBA To Be Announc TBA	██████████	3.0

Total Credits: 12.0

	<u>Debits/Charges</u>	<u>Credits/Payments</u>
Resident Tuition	2,640.00	
Student Fee	360.00	
e-Book Charge (Cengage)	119.99	
Est. Federal Pell Grant		1,507.99
Federal Pell Grant		1,612.00
TOTAL	3,119.99	3,119.99

Account Balance	Minimum Payment Due
0.00	0.00

Image 2

SITE B'S STUDENT ACCOUNT SUMMARY

Account Details

ID	Account Number	Term	Business Unit	Account Balance				
	EED001	Fall 20	██████████	0.00				
Debits	1,332.00	Credits	-1,332.00	Applied	1,332.00	Unapplied	0.00	
etails				Find View All First				
Item	Term	Class	Taxes	Amount Incl Tax	Balance	Installment ID	Last Activity Date	
Pell Grant - 2nd CP	Fall 20			-1,332.00	0.00		01/04/2021	Item Details
██████████ BA Communication	Fall 20			1,332.00	0.00		09/19/2020	Item Details

Image 3

SITE C'S GENERAL COST BREAKDOWN HANDOUT

Data is based on the 2020-2021 Academic Year

	2-credit	3-credit	4-credit	5-credit
Cost Per Credit	\$ 205.65	\$ 411.30	\$ 616.95	\$ 822.60
Material Fee Per Course	\$ 4.50	\$ 4.50	\$ 4.50	\$ 4.50
Online Fee Per Credit	\$ 10.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 30.00	\$ 40.00
\$70 Per Course Resource Fee - (Material Fee + Online Fee)	amt varies	\$ 45.50	\$ 35.50	\$ 25.50
TOTAL	\$ 481.30	\$ 686.95	\$ 892.60	\$ 1,098.25

Add up the total due for each course you choose \$
 Add the DOC Technology and Support Fee Charge Per Semester \$ 180.00
 Grand Total Due \$
 Award range for Pell Funds based on total credits taken this semester \$
 Subtract estimated Pell Funds from the Grand Total Due \$

Note: excess funds are refunded to the Department of Education

If the amount here is zero \$\$ you owe no money, if there is a positive balance you owe money and if there is a negative balance, it will be returned to the Federal Government. Students in the Second Chance Pell pilot program are not entitled to refunds by federal Financial Aid guidelines.

Credits Taken Range	6-8 Credits	9-11 Credits	12-15 Credits
Second Chance Pell Funding Awarded	\$ 1,586.00	\$ 2,380.00	\$ 3,173.00

	EXAMPLE Person A	EXAMPLE Person B	EXAMPLE student C	EXAMPLE Person C
	takes a 2-credit & a 4-credit class	takes two 3-credit & one 4-credit class	takes one 3-credit, one 4-credit & one 5 credit class	takes four 3-credit classes
# of credits	6	10	12	12
Class #1	\$ 481.30	\$ 686.95	\$ 686.95	\$ 686.95
Class #2	\$ 892.60	\$ 686.95	\$ 892.60	\$ 686.95
Class #3		\$ 892.60	\$ 1,028.25	\$ 686.95
Class #4				\$ 686.95
Total Course Fees	\$ 1,373.90	\$ 2,266.50	\$ 2,607.80	\$ 2,747.80
DOC Tech/Support Fee	\$ 180.00	\$ 180.00	\$ 180.00	\$ 180.00
Grand Total Due	\$ 1,553.90	\$ 2,446.50	\$ 2,787.80	\$ 2,927.80
2nd Chance Pell Award	\$ 1,586.00	\$ 2,380.00	\$ 3,173.00	\$ 3,173.00
	\$ 32.10 Refund DoFE	\$ (66.50) Amt Due	\$385.20 Refund DoFE	\$245.20 Refund DoFE

SITE E'S FINANCIAL AID AWARD LETTER

December 09, 2021

██████████ ID: ██████████

Dear ██████████

Thank you for applying for financial aid at ██████████. We have completed our review of your financial aid file and are pleased to offer you the following financial aid for the fall 21/spring 22 academic year which equals your related tuition costs.

Source	Fall ██████████	Total
Federal Pell Grant	\$1,624	\$1,624
██████████ Scholarship	\$1,576	\$1,576
	-----	-----
Total	\$3,200	\$3,200

If you wish to decline your financial aid, please see your academic advisor. In addition to speaking with your advisor, you must give him/her a letter stating your desire to decline your financial aid. You should also review your enrollment options and any enrollment related paperwork with the staff member at that time. If you wish to decline your financial aid, please meet with the staff member AND submit the letter stating that you wish to decline your aid immediately. A student who declines his/her aid will receive a letter from ██████████ confirming that change in status. If you do not receive such a letter within two weeks, follow up with the ██████████ staff in person and in writing by institutional mail.

In accordance with Federal regulations, under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 1965, as amended, consumer information is made available to all enrolled students. This information can be made available as a reference in study hall. If you would like to access it, please write by institutional mail to a ██████████ staff member and they will make it available to you in a subsequent study hall. This information pertains to (1) general disclosures for enrolled students, (2) annual security report and fire safety report, (3) report on athletic program participation rates and financial support data (Equity in Athletics Data or EADA), and (4) FERPA information (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974).

If you have questions about this information, please see a ██████████ staff member.

Sincerely,

██████████
Student Financial Services



Discussion and Recommendations

- » The majority of staff in our sample did not provide documentation regarding student bills. Our team does not know the reasons why so few institutions and programs responded to our request. However, it is concerning that such documentation is either not readily available to share or that staff are apprehensive about sharing de-identified bills that communicate institutional charges and how the Pell Grant is being applied to student accounts.
- » Among staff who did provide documentation, there is much left to be desired. In general, the three documents in this brief lack the kind of explanatory details needed for students to fully understand the true costs of attendance. For example, Site E's (4-year, private) financial aid award letter provides a breakdown of scholarship and grant awards applied to the student's account, but it does not include a

calculation of tuition, fees, and requisite costs of attendance. Site A's (2-year, public) documentation is a PDF document without any detailed information; there is no explanation for the costs provided, such as resident tuition, student fee, or e-book charge. How are these costs determined, what do they include, and how might students inquire about them?

- » Site C's (2-year, public) general cost breakdown can be improved, too. With this generalized handout, institutional staff place the burden of calculating the specific costs of attendance on incarcerated students. Moreover, it appears that this document was drafted for non-incarcerated students as it instructs students to "see your academic advisor" if they have questions. Focus group data from this site indicate that students do not have access to an academic advisor.
- » While the data presented here are drawn from a small sample, it is worth making recommendations for prison higher education programs and affiliated colleges and universities regarding the creation and distribution of student bills. First, administrators should generate standard tuition and fee statements for incarcerated students that have the same kind of cost breakdowns available to non-incarcerated students on their campus. Statements should indicate how charges for tuition, fees, books, supplies, and equipment are calculated, especially when these costs differ from non-incarcerated students on campus. Creating and distributing these documents is critical for incarcerated students because they have infrequent or nonexistent access to the internet to see an online student account. Therefore, program and institutional staff have a greater responsibility to be proactive in regularly communicating and disseminating this information. Staff should also make it clear to students how they can address questions they have regarding tuition statements and bills.
- » Second, administrators should draft an accounting explanation for the amounts students are charged for fees, books, supplies, equipment, and related materials. This document should clearly explain the costs and what they include. Fees for books and equipment should indicate whether students are renting or buying books or equipment, as well as what the fees cover (e.g., technical support for faulty equipment).
- » Third, administrators should ensure that students regularly receive individualized bills. These bills should include itemized charges and the amount of Pell award students received per academic term. For Pell recipients, additional documentation should include an accumulation total to indicate lifetime eligibility status (if not already provided on the standard statement).
- » Fourth, administrators should include any site-specific rules or regulations regarding scholarships, credits, or overages on student accounts. If students are not going to receive refunds from their Pell Grant, documentation should explain why the school is not issuing refunds. The bills should include the amount of any overages or credit balances, even if institutional staff do not issue student refunds.²

None of the institutions in our sample provided students with refunds of Pell monies. Administrators should draft and distribute documentation to students that explains why students do not receive a refund. The tuition bill should indicate the refund amount a student would have received if not for incarceration status, too, so that students understand the accounting.

Suggested citation: Gaskill, S., Castro, E. L., & Aguilar Padilla, E. (2022, October 1). *Cost Breakdowns and Award Letters: Tuition Statements and Bills from Nine Institutions Participating in Second Chance Pell*. Salt Lake City, UT: Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison.

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Endnotes

¹ Indeed, qualitative data from incarcerated students indicate that some receive no tuition statements at all or must request generalized statements that do not include their specific Pell award amount. Others indicate that they receive tuition statements but do not pay much attention to these documents because program staff assure them that they should not worry about being billed for classes.

² According to Department of Education guidance as of August 2022, Second Chance Pell guidelines allow institutions of higher education to provide incarcerated students with refunds of Pell awards in some cases, as long as corrections partners agree to facilitate payment. Federal Student Aid. (2022, August 5). *U.S. Department of Education's Experimental Sites Initiative Second Chance Pell Experiment Frequently Asked Questions*. <https://experimentalsites.ed.gov/exp/pdf/SecondChancePellFAQ.pdf>. See Q&A 21. However, the Department of Education indicated in its July 2022 Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding Pell expansion that future guidance may change such that, "the postsecondary institution must reduce the Pell Grant award if the amount exceeds cost of attendance so that it does not result in a credit balance." It is unclear which guidance the Department of Education will ultimately adopt. See Institutional Eligibility, Student Assistance General Provisions, and Federal Pell Grant Program. 87 Fed. Reg. 45432 (proposed July 28, 2022).