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NJDOC PARTNERS WITH DREW UNIVERSITY IN MASTER'S LEVEL PILOT PROGRAM

Dec. 8, 2021 -- TRENTON, NJ -- In the continuing effort to expand educational opportunities for individuals under its care and custody, the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) announced a partnership with Drew Theological School, which will offer classes to the prison population pursuing credits towards a master's level certificate in theology.

Drew will be joining a consortium of degree-granting higher education institutions, which includes Rutgers University and Raritan Valley Community College, as part of the New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons (NJ-STEP) initiative to provide educational services to the New Jersey incarcerated population. East Jersey State Prison in Rahway is the first institution to offer post-graduate credits. The program joins a suite of robust educational programming offered by the Department, including an associate's degree in Liberal Arts, bachelor's degree in Justice Studies, and over 30 Career and Technical Education programs.

"At the heart of all we do is ensuring individuals have the tools they need to succeed," said NJDOC Acting Commissioner Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq. "Education, whether vocational or post-secondary, is critical for successful reintegration into society. We thank Drew University for enhancing our educational offering and re-entry efforts, and joining us in the mission to establish essential programming and critical opportunities for those leaving our system."

"At East Jersey we have the highest number of people who have graduated from NJ-STEP, completing their associate's and their bachelor's degree," said Dr. Darcella Sessomes, NJDOC

Assistant Commissioner, Division of Programs and Community Services. “We are excited to launch this program at East Jersey State Prison for those individuals who wish to take the next step in their continuing educational journey.”

Officials from Drew and other colleges toured East Jersey State Prison to assess educational spaces and determine the interest in and viability of the program.

“Our pilot graduate certificate program is in religious leadership and social transformation, and is open to people of all faiths or no faith tradition,” said Rev. Dr. Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre Interim Dean of Drew Theological School. “The interdisciplinary program has its roots in theological studies and develops leadership for the common good.”

Students in the program gain experience in graduate studies earning them 15 credits and a head start to pursue a master’s degree in their field of interest.

“Many master’s programs accept transfer credits,” added Rev. Johnson-DeBaufre. “The NJDOC initiative can expedite time to completing graduate degrees across disciplines.”

The pilot program is scheduled to offer its first class to coincide with the 2022 spring semester.

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