



## **South Carolina Department of Corrections Claflin University**

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For immediate release

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### **Claflin University and SCDC to offer bachelor's degree programs to incarcerated individuals through historic partnership**

Individuals incarcerated in S.C. Department of Corrections facilities will soon be able to receive bachelor's degrees at no cost through a historic partnership with Claflin University.

In April 2020, Claflin University was selected as a U.S. Department of Education Second Chance Pell Experimental Site, which continues an initiative that began under President Barack Obama to help incarcerated individuals earn university credentials. Healthy Routines, a Columbia-based community non-profit, is also participating in the program that will offer educational programming to incarcerated students.

"Claflin's Pathway from Prison Program, Second Chance Pell Grant, and our Center for Social Justice all reflect Claflin's deep and abiding commitment to expanding access to exceptional educational opportunities that can change the trajectory of people's lives," said Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack, president of Claflin University. "It's in our DNA. Claflin was founded as the first HBCU in South Carolina and the first institution of higher education in the state that welcomed all students regardless of ethnic origin, gender, race, or religion. A quality education is the gateway to empowerment and plays a critical role in the successful reentry of formerly incarcerated people into their respective communities."

Claflin plans to launch the program in early 2021 and the SCDC has already started the application process.

“This is a tremendous opportunity for our inmates to better themselves and receive an education,” SCDC Director Bryan Stirling said. “Our goal is to return citizens to the community with skills to succeed, and a college degree can put them on that path. We appreciate this important partnership. This program will give inmates the opportunity to leave prison with a college degree, something that can transform not only their life but the lives of their family members as well.”

Dr. Belinda Wheeler said that Claflin is delighted to be a part of this historic agreement. Wheeler is director of Claflin Pathways from Prison Program and the Center for Social Justice. She is also an associate professor of English.

“Claflin looks forward to working with SCDC and Healthy Routines to provide South Carolina’s incarcerated population with transformational credentials that will help them on their own journey,” Wheeler said.

Claflin will offer three different bachelor’s degree programs through its Center for Professional and Continuing Studies: Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice, Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Bachelor of Science in Organizational Management. Students also will be able to obtain minor and certificate credentials.

“Receiving a degree not only changes the inmate’s life – it can change the lives of entire families,” said Nena Staley, SCDC’s Deputy Director of Programs, Reentry and Rehabilitative Services. “We look forward to seeing many successful family stories as part of this program.” Healthy Routines has previously provided non-credit programming to incarcerated individuals in certain SCDC sites through its Mind Plug Academy. As part of this partnership, Healthy Routines will offer non-credit college preparation courses for incarcerated individuals.

Jay Holder, director of public affairs at Healthy Routines and national executive Council at Columbia University’s Center for Justice, can speak firsthand to the power of education in prison as a formerly incarcerated scholar.

“I took advantage of school while inside and I’m in school right now,” Holder said. “In less than 20 months after being released, I was able to use the college in prison experience to not only establish new pathways to the university for currently incarcerated people, the returning citizen, and myself – I have also been able to use education to build meaningful relationships with conglomerates who are making a clear effort to improve our communities. Education is real. It takes you places you never knew you could go. The university is the cornerstone to both mobility and public safety.”

For more information about Claflin’s Pathways from Prison Program please contact Dr. Belinda Wheeler at [bwheeler@claflin.edu](mailto:bwheeler@claflin.edu) or (803) 535-5717.

