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MDOC, Hinds partnership means degrees for inmates

JACKSON – The Mississippi Department of Corrections anticipates more inmates to earn college degrees as one has already done thanks to a partnership with Hinds Community College.

Shannon Hinton (MDOC #222986) became the first inmate at the Mississippi Correctional Institute for Women (MCIW) to earn her Associate of Arts degree through the Prison Education College Program. Hinds CC President Dr. Stephen Vacik conferred Hinton's degree during a ceremony held Tuesday at MCIW on the grounds of the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) in Rankin County. Hinton also received a certificate of membership in the Phi Theta Kappa national honor society.

Dr. Thomas Ware, vice-president at Hinds CC, said the school has partnered with MDOC for seven years and five more students are expected to follow as graduates in spring 2026 during their incarceration. Additionally, 23 male and 24 female inmates are expected to enroll in 10 hours of courses for fall 2025 classes at the facility.

"We are happy to have these students getting their education during their incarceration because it is a step toward reducing recidivism and helps the people in the region that we cover," Dr. Ware said. "We hope to have Pell grants that will further expand our ability to offer programs to the inmates."

LaShetta J. Wilder, statewide education director for MDOC, said Hinds is in the second phase of the accreditation process. "This is a huge milestone as we're striving to have these programs become Pell eligible in our prisons. This will improve our efforts of establishing CMCF and MCIW as a college site under the U.S. Department of Education," Wilder said.

Dr. Ware also noted little difficulty in getting instructors to work with the inmates earning their degrees through the partnership, which was facilitated through the Mississippi Humanities Council.

“We have no trouble recruiting because faculty members want to come here. We have really good students here who are focused and eager to learn and have a better life,” Dr. Ware said. “MDOC is really committed to the education of students and a joy to work with. The agency is very forward thinking and our experience with MDOC has been fantastic from the top down.”



Dr. Stephen Vacik, left, president of Hinds Community College, presents a diploma to Shannon Hinton during a commencement ceremony for her on July 29. Hinton, an inmate at the Mississippi Correctional Institute for Women in Rankin County, completed the requirements to earn an Associate of Arts degree from Hinds.