

SIS CONFIGURATION FOR PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK AND BEST PRACTICES

Introduction

Before implementing any student information system (SIS) configuration for prison education programs, institutions should consider their long-term reporting needs and existing business processes. This guide provides multiple pathways for implementation rather than prescriptive solutions, recognizing that different institutions may choose different approaches based on their specific circumstances.

Planning Considerations Before Implementation

Reporting Requirements (Consider 3-5 Year Timeline):

- What federal reporting will be required for PEP programs?
- How will you track courses taught in prison settings for institutional reports?
- Can you extract historical data for cohorts of incarcerated students?
- How will you track student progression during and after incarceration?
- What faculty/instructor information needs to be tracked for turnover reporting?
- What specialized reports will corrections facilities require?

Business Process Considerations:

- How do your current data structures support new coding needs?
- What existing system configurations might conflict with PEP needs?
- Who will maintain and manage PEP-specific system configurations?
- How will you handle transitions between incarcerated and post-release status?

Multi-Stakeholder Reporting Needs:

Your system must serve multiple stakeholders including:

- Federal agencies (Department of Education, etc.)
- National Student Clearinghouse (NSC)
- State reporting systems
- Institutional administration and faculty
- Corrections facilities (customized rosters, progress reports)
- Financial aid offices
- Marketing/communications (with FERPA protections)

IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS

Student Population Identification

Institutions can choose from multiple approaches:

Option A: Location-Based Coding

- Code courses to specific prison sites/locations
- Enables reporting by location for all courses taught at facilities
- Suitable for institutions with multiple prison partnerships
- Best for: Institutions wanting to track all activity at specific locations

Option B: Student-Level Coding

- Use student groups, attributes, or cohort codes
- Enables tracking individual student progression
- Suitable for institutions focusing on student outcomes
- Best for: Institutions prioritizing individual student tracking

Option C: Program-Level Coding

- Code at the program or major level
- Enables reporting by specific PEP programs
- Suitable for institutions with distinct prison education curricula
- Best for: Institutions with specialized PEP degree programs

Option D: Hybrid Approach

- Combine multiple coding methods for comprehensive tracking
- Provides maximum flexibility but requires more complex maintenance
- Best for: Large institutions with extensive PEP operations

Term Structure Considerations

CRITICAL WARNING: Term Structure Complexity

Creating overlapping terms or non-standard term structures can create significant challenges for:

- National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) enrollment reporting
- Financial aid processing and compliance
- Registrar office workload management
- Graduation and completion reporting

Best Practice Recommendations:

- **Preferred:** Use existing term structures with part-of-term functionality
- **Acceptable:** Create separate term structures only when absolutely necessary
- **Avoid:** Overlapping terms across different reporting branches
- **Consider:** Impact on enrollment reporting before implementing any term modifications

Implementation Options:

- **Leverage Existing Terms:** Use part-of-term codes within standard academic calendar
- **Separate PEP Terms:** Create distinct term structures for prison programs only
- **Flexible Dating:** Use automated date calculation within existing term framework
- **Hybrid Calendar:** Combine standard and flexible terms with clear reporting boundaries

PLATFORM-SPECIFIC IMPLEMENTATION GUIDES

PeopleSoft Configuration Guide

Essential Setup Checklist

✓ Student Identification & Security

- Use student groups for PEP population identification (preferred method) with institution-defined naming conventions to protect identity.
- Assign role-based security controlled by registrar; include audit logging.
- Allow for institution-specific alternatives (e.g., service indicators, student attributes) with clear documentation of rationale.
- Ensure student groups are queryable for cohort-level historical reporting.

✓ Academic Calendar & Scheduling

- Use dynamic dating only where institutional financial aid and compliance teams have signed off.
- Avoid overlapping terms or branches unless system reporting structure allows accurate disaggregation.
- Tag courses using site/location codes for tracking instruction in carceral settings.
- Provide multiple examples for flexible course delivery within standard term structures.

✓ Security & Privacy Controls

- Implement tiered FERPA-aware role assignment practices.
- Configure proxy processes for transcript/record requests with clear consent logging.
- Flag institutional risks of misuse (e.g., marketing outreach lists, over-access by non-academic units).
- Build flexible reporting logic to accommodate multiple masters (campus, corrections, clearinghouse).

PeopleSoft-Specific Features

- Use group-based logic that supports both program-level and student-level reporting.
- Provide "you should be able to" reporting capabilities (e.g., historical PEP cohorts, faculty assignment, instructional site).
- Avoid locking into specific practices—describe alternative methods where appropriate.
- Encourage documenting institutional decisions and the reasons for each configuration.

Implementation Best Practices

- Emphasize cross-department coordination (registrar, IT, FA, legal) before implementation.
- Frame each feature as:
 - What you need to do
 - Options for how to do it
 - Considerations for compliance/reporting
- Create training guides for registrar and IT teams around PEP-specific use cases.

Colleague Configuration Guide

Essential Setup Checklist

✓ Legacy System Optimization

- Prioritize legacy cleanup—remove outdated roles, especially in systems over 15 years old.
- Transition from faculty-facing systems to registrar-managed, access-limited models.
- Avoid direct labeling of incarcerated populations; use lookup tables with coded fields.

✓ Automation & Scripting

- Build automated scripts for grade posting, flexible dates, and enrollment scaling.
- Provide alternate pathways for institutions unable to use USD rules directly.
- Include failure handling logic in batch processes to support corrections constraints.

✓ Privacy & Access Controls

- Use nondescript, coded values (e.g., location or cohort) to prevent population exposure.
- Require clear consent processes for any release of student data.
- Implement batch masking and exclusion filters for external report requests.

Colleague-Specific Features

- USD and scripting approaches should be benchmarked across institutions to avoid reinventing processes.
- Provide a menu of options for tracking student progression (e.g., cohort code, location code, student type).
- Include FERPA guardrails on any automated information sharing or flag-based queries.

Implementation Best Practices

- Document all institutional business rules driving SIS decisions.
- Design reporting tools around both internal needs and external partners (e.g., corrections, DOC, clearinghouse).
- Review all automation scripts with compliance and privacy teams before deployment.

Banner Configuration Guide

Essential Setup Checklist

✓ Course Scheduling and Part-of-Term Functionality

- Use PTRM codes carefully; avoid ad hoc or excessive part-of-term creation that risks over-accommodation. If using additional Parts of Term, be mindful of ongoing maintenance of SFARSTS and similar forms that are POT-based.
- Maintain standard terms unless approved by FA, registrar, and compliance.
- Use course scheduling templates aligned with facility calendars, not driven by DOC convenience alone.
- Consider use of Campus codes or a section numbering convention on SSASECT to track course offerings by location.
- If students do not self-register in the PEP courses, consider hiding these sections from the Schedule of Classes and setting up enrollment management protections such as reserved seating to avoid unintended registration by non-PEP students.

✓ Population Management

- Leverage existing processes for identifying and tracking special populations wherever possible.
- Use term-based tables for tracking participation over time, such as:
 - Student Cohort (SGASADD)
 - Student Attribute (SGASADD)
 - Student Type (SGASTDN)
 - Rate Code (SGASTDN)
 - Site Code (SGASTDN)
- If tracking via the Curriculum/Program level, ensure a process is defined for moving students to a non-PEP curricula when they no longer participate, especially if they continue attendance at the main campus.
- Avoid using obvious naming conventions that imply incarceration status.
- Design flexible reporting logic that accounts for multi-status students (during/after incarceration).

✓ Policy Compliance

- Provide clear internal guidance on acceptable use of custom parts of term.
- Emphasize coordination with financial aid for any calendar deviations.
- Configure audit-friendly exception handling and versioning for unusual schedules.

Banner-Specific Features

- Develop query forms that support "who taught what, where, and when" for DOC reports and accreditation needs.
- Provide multi-method tagging options to accommodate different reporting objectives (site, term, cohort).
- Flag reporting readiness: not just what's possible, but what's feasible over time.

Implementation Best Practices

- Emphasize “think five years ahead” design logic (e.g., reentry tracking, long-term transcript needs).
- Train IT and registrar staff on risks of term/branch proliferation.
- Build in routine access audits and role reviews.

UNIVERSAL BEST PRACTICES

FERPA and Privacy Protections

Access Control Strategies

- Implement query restrictions to prevent unauthorized population mining
- Use role-based security to limit access to sensitive student information
- Configure audit trails for all access to PEP student records
- Establish clear boundaries for what information can be shared with corrections

FERPA Compliance Considerations

- Document all waiver processes and consent forms
- Establish clear proxy authorization procedures for staff
- Record FERPA permissions directly in SIS when possible
- Create MOU language that clearly defines DOC access boundaries

Marketing and Communication Protections

- Prevent unauthorized extraction of PEP student lists for marketing
- Configure opt-out protections for students who don't wish to receive communications
- Establish approval processes for any communications targeting PEP populations

Financial Aid and Billing Setup

Standard Configurations

- Fee waivers for inaccessible services (technology fees, recreation, ID cards)
- In-state tuition rate approvals at system level
- Third-party payment processing protocols
- Documentation for waiver replication across cohorts

Reporting and Compliance Framework

Multi-Level Reporting Structure

- **Federal Level:** DOE reporting requirements, Title IV compliance
- **State Level:** State higher education system reporting
- **Institutional Level:** Internal progress tracking, faculty reports
- **Corrections Level:** Customized rosters, progress reports (FERPA compliant)
- **Student Level:** Transcripts, degree audits, academic records

Data Retention and Historical Tracking

- Configure systems to maintain historical data for longitudinal studies
- Enable tracking of student progress through multiple stages (incarcerated, transitional, post-release)
- Document all coding changes for historical data interpretation
- Establish clear data retention policies that exceed minimum requirements

Technology Integration Considerations

Learning Management System (LMS)

- Separate LMS instances for prison/general populations (optional)
- Content delivery protocols (flash drives, printed materials)
- Manual grade entry processes with staff intermediaries
- Pre-approval workflows for educational content

Student Reentry Planning

- Simple processes for removing incarceration-specific codes
- Automatic transition to standard student status upon release
- Extended return windows (suggested: three semesters) without reapplication
- Connection protocols to support services and resources

Implementation Timeline and Process

Phase 1: Planning and Assessment (2-3 months)

- Assess current system capabilities and limitations
- Identify all stakeholders and their reporting needs
- Document existing business processes that might be affected
- Choose implementation pathway based on institutional needs

Phase 2: Configuration and Testing (2-4 months)

- Implement chosen configuration options
- Test with sample data before full deployment
- Train staff on new processes and procedures
- Document all configurations and procedures

Phase 3: Deployment and Monitoring (Ongoing)

- Deploy configurations with initial cohort
- Monitor system performance and reporting accuracy
- Gather feedback from all stakeholders
- Refine processes based on real-world usage

Phase 4: Evaluation and Refinement (Annual)

- Assess effectiveness of chosen implementation pathway
- Review compliance with all reporting requirements
- Evaluate staff workload and system efficiency
- Make adjustments based on changing needs

Vendor and Technical Support

Each platform guide should be used in conjunction with:

- Institutional policies and procedures
- Vendor-specific documentation and support
- Legal review of all privacy and compliance configurations
- Regular consultation with SIS administrators and technical staff

Important Note: These recommendations provide frameworks and options rather than specific technical instructions. Always consult with your SIS administrator, vendor support, and institutional legal counsel before implementing any configurations that affect student privacy, financial aid compliance, or reporting requirements.

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Grounded in shared challenges and emerging practices, this resource is intended to help institutions at varying stages of PEP implementation strengthen operations, align with federal requirements, and advance more consistent, collaborative approaches to prison education.

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ABOUT ASCENDIUM EDUCATION GROUP

Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans. Ascendium's work identifies, validates and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for all. For more information, visit <https://www.ascendiumphilanthropy.org>