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Educating Prisoners for Life on the Outside

To the Editor:

Re "College Dwellers Outnumber the Imprisoned" (news article, Sept. 27):

According to newly published Census data, more Americans are living in dormitories than in prison. Viewed alone, this statistic causes no alarm. A wide-angle lens, however, reveals something more troubling: our swelling prison population.

With 2.1 million currently incarcerated, the number of prisoners has nearly doubled since 1990, exceeding the historical average by almost fivefold.

Framing the issue as prisons versus dorms does not help. Instead, it creates a dichotomy between incarceration and education that is both unnecessary and shortsighted.

Indeed, almost all of the 2.1 million prisoners will eventually be released, and education will significantly influence whether they stay out.

Whether by returning juveniles to

school or providing courses for adults, studies show that educating ex-offenders reduces recidivism, a necessary outcome if the prison population is ever going to decline. Rather than separating the imprisoned from the educated, therefore, perhaps we should be asking how to bring them together.

MARIE CLAIRE TRAN
Chicago, Sept. 28, 2007

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