



# Best Practices For Asking Rising Scholars Students On Campus About Their Prior Incarceration Status

*The California Community Colleges are increasingly striving to collect data about the number of formerly incarcerated students on their campuses. Although the data help demonstrate the need for continued funding and support, data collection can raise privacy concerns and may cause tension in the relationship between Rising Scholars students and the college. The suggestions below may help Rising Scholars programs navigate this challenging terrain. This document is not official guidance from the Chancellor's Office, but rather a collection of successful practices found in Rising Scholars programs throughout the State.*

## FRAMEWORK

- As of January 2022, CCCApply does not ask students about their prior incarceration status. The Chancellor's Office is considering adding a question but changing CCCApply is a lengthy process.
- In the meantime, some colleges have added a question to their local CCCApply, if they have local CCCApply questions. Other colleges either do not have local CCCApply questions or have chosen to gather the information from students directly and enter it manually.
- CCCCO's Management Information System (COMIS) uses the code SG15 for Rising Scholars students on campus. As of January 2022, SG15 is also used by WOIA. The Chancellor's Office is aware of the differences between the Rising Scholars definition and the WOIA definition and is working on a solution. Until further guidance is provided, colleges should use SG15 for their Rising Scholars students on campus and should expect that the Chancellor's Office will look to SG15 when it pulls data from COMIS about Rising Scholars.
- Rising Scholars students are students who are currently incarcerated or detained (SG04), or campus students with a prior adult conviction or juvenile adjudication (SG15). Rising Scholars programs that include systems-impacted students (i.e. students with family or community involvement in the criminal justice system rather than personal experience) should develop a process to separate Rising Scholars students from systems-impacted students in their data.

## COLLECTING THE DATA ELECTRONICALLY THROUGH CCCAPPLY OR EQUIVALENT

- Currently, there is no standardized version of the question. A few examples are included at the end of this document and colleges are encouraged to ask their Regional Coordinator for suggestions and support if they want to ask the question electronically.
- Colleges drafting their own question should gather feedback from their Rising Scholars students before the question is implemented. Colleges should seek student feedback on a regular basis thereafter, to ensure that the language continues to be appropriate and responsive to student needs.
- Colleges should consider "decline to answer" as a response option, to ensure that students know that they do not have to disclose their status unless they choose to.
- Some colleges have added a second question, asking if the student would like to be contacted by the program to learn about student supports available for formerly incarcerated students.
- Collecting the information electronically usually means that the student is presented with the question before they have a relationship with program staff. After students are involved with the program, Rising Scholars staff should explain why the question was asked and who has access to the information. This process builds critical trust with the students. In addition, a student who declined to answer the question electronically may share their information at a later point once trust has been established.

## COLLECTING THE DATA DIRECTLY FROM STUDENTS

- Many Rising Scholars programs first develop a relationship with their students, then ask the student in person if they have prior incarceration experience. Staff then use Banner, Colleague or similar to input the information and/or they give the information to their local Institutional Research (IR) department or A&R department.
- Colleges must develop a trust relationship with their students. Students should be told why the question is being asked, where the information is kept, and who has access. Rising Scholars program staff should ask their IR and/or A&R Departments where the information is kept and who has access, so that staff are providing accurate information to the students.
- Students should be given the option to decline. Colleges should not collect or enter the data if the student does not want to be identified in COMIS.
- Because this option requires time from IR and/or A&R staff, program staff are encouraged to build strong relationships with those local departments. Visit the departments and ask how the data will be input, how it can be easiest for the department, and how you can help.
- Colleges needing support in managing the relationship with their IR and/or A&R departments are encouraged to reach out to their Regional Coordinator.

## PRIVACY AND DATA MANAGEMENT

- Programs are encouraged to ask their IR department if they can mask SG15. If the code is masked, only designated program staff can see who is SG15 on campus. This protects student privacy and ensures the student is not discriminated against by any other campus employee who has access to student files. DSPS uses code masking for its students and many Rising Scholars programs have successfully copied the DSPS method for their formerly incarcerated students.
- As of December 2021, the reporting domain for SG files specifies that SG codes apply to students who meet any of the following four criteria:
  - Were enrolled in at least one class as of first census for daily or weekly census classes OR
  - Attended at least one meeting of a positive attendance class OR
  - Were enrolled in at least one class that resulted in a notation on the student's official record OR
  - Received a service from one of the college's categorical programs
- Since Rising Scholars is now a categorical program, program staff should confirm with their local IR department that they can code a student as SG15 if the student is formerly incarcerated and receives services from the program, even if the student did not enroll that term.

## EXAMPLES FROM COLLEGES ASKING THE QUESTION ELECTRONICALLY

- These three options have been used by colleges asking the question electronically:
  - Do you identify as formerly incarcerated?
  - Rising Scholars is currently providing support for students who have been incarcerated as an adult or a juvenile. If you identify with this and would like to receive specialized advising and academic services, please check the box below.
  - Are you formerly incarcerated or currently on/have been on probation?
- In 2021, the Chancellor's Office surveyed students about the question below. Student response was highly positive:
  - The California Community Colleges welcome all students, including students who have experienced incarceration. Answering this question will not affect your admission to community college. We ask this question because financial aid and support programs are available for formerly incarcerated students.

Do you have a prior adult conviction or juvenile adjudication?

- ◆ Yes
- ◆ No
- ◆ Decline to answer