

ABSTRACT

SUZUKI, HARUNA. *College on the Margins: A Case Study of Three College-in-Prison Programs.* (Under the direction of Dr. Audrey J. Jaeger).

Currently, very little is known about the nature, scope, and quality of college-in-prison programs. Particularly given the reinstatement of Pell grants for incarcerated college students in December 2020—after a 26-year long ban—it is timely and urgent to center these issues and examine the educational experiences made available to college students in prison. The present research is a critical qualitative case study of three college-in-prison programs in one southern state in the United States. The study explores the views, experiences, and practices of program faculty and staff, as a means of interrogating the nature and quality of their programs and the educational experiences afforded to incarcerated college students. In particular, the research draws on higher education research and scholarship on student engagement as well as critical scholarship from the field of higher education in prison to examine four key areas: (a) faculty and staff conceptualizations of the purpose of higher education in prison, (b) faculty training, (c) the educational experiences made available to students, and (d) staff and faculty advocacy related to improving the student experience. The study engages in-depth with Ladson-Billing's (2006) concept of the education debt—and its historical, moral, and economic underpinnings—to provide a critical reading and discussion of findings. It is crucial to undertake a study of this nature not only to advance knowledge about the state of college programming in prisons, but also to identify and challenge potential instances of “better than nothing” education, wherein incarcerated students are systematically exposed to substandard educational experiences (Castro & Gould, 2018).

Data collection consisted of demographic and professional background questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, classroom description worksheets, and documents pertaining to

programs and coursework. Four main themes emerged from this research: (a) Faculty and staff in the three programs reinforce, depart from, or challenge correctional conceptualizations of higher education in prison, (b) Faculty training in all three programs fails to go beyond safety and security-related matters, (c) The educational experiences made available in the three programs are (dis)empowering, and (d) Faculty and staff in the three programs advocate for improving the student experience to the extent possible. Ultimately, the study highlights that the three college-in-prison programs in this study—like many across the United States—both contribute to and challenge the education debt.

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College on the Margins: A Case Study of Three College-in-Prison Programs

by
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DEDICATION

To my parents, Takako and Yoshiharu Suzuki, whose immigrant dreams were always about doing what makes one happy and without whom none of this would be possible.

BIOGRAPHY

Haruna Suzuki grew up in northern New Jersey, but has spent the majority of her adult life in various parts of the U.S. and world, including Boston, Japan, China, Ecuador, and North Carolina. She has spent the bulk of her professional career in various areas of higher education, including study abroad, service learning, research, teaching, and advising. In each of these areas, she has been invested in addressing issues of equity, inclusion, empowerment, and belonging among different student populations. Since 2017, Haruna has engaged consistently with the issue of prison education through research; internships with universities, policy organizations, and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety; collaborating with community-based organizations that work in the area of prison education; prison higher education conferences; and popular and academic literature on college-in-prison programs and policy. Haruna currently serves as the Director of Adult, Family, and Community Empowerment programs at Helps Education Fund, an education nonprofit based in Raleigh, North Carolina. In this role, she directs family literacy and adult empowerment programs in the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women in Raleigh as well as in various community sites in NC and beyond. Haruna is currently working to expand programming into several additional prisons in NC. In community with justice-impacted individuals and leaders, she hopes to incorporate college-level coursework in the future as well as build more relationships with community-based organizations aimed at dismantling mass incarceration and its damaging, long-term effects on individuals, families, and communities.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with over two million people under incarceration in state and federal prisons across the country (Prison Policy Initiative, 2019). As is well known, the U.S. criminal justice system disproportionately targets individuals and communities of color—while White individuals make up 64% of the U.S. population, they constitute 39% of the incarcerated population. In contrast, Latinx people comprise 16% of the general population and 19% of the incarcerated population and Black individuals 13% and 40% respectively (Prison Policy Initiative, 2014). Additionally, many incarcerated individuals come from educationally underserved communities. More than one third of people in state prisons aged 16 and over have less than a high school education, compared to 19% of the general population (Davis et al., 2013). Furthermore, although 35% of Americans have a bachelor's degree, only four percent of currently incarcerated and five percent of formerly incarcerated people have a four-year degree (Davis et al., 2017). At present, a mere six percent of the total incarcerated population in the U.S has access to higher education (Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011). Yet some two thirds of incarcerated individuals have a high school diploma or its equivalent, making them eligible to enroll in postsecondary coursework (Bacon et al., 2020). What is more, the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIACC) Survey of Incarcerated Adults found that out of a nationally representative sample of 1,351 incarcerated individuals between the ages of 16 and 74, 70% indicated an interest in participating in college coursework (Rampey et al., 2016). As Lockard and Rankins-Robertson (2011) argue, denying postsecondary education to incarcerated students violates the fundamental, internationally recognized principle of education as an intrinsic right.

Inadequate access to college in prisons is a result of more than fifty years of tough-on-crime policies (Newell, 2013), which culminated in the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. The Act eliminated state and federal prisoners' access to Pell Grant funding, resulting in the near disappearance of prison-based college programs¹ (Castro et al., 2015). Whereas before 1994, there were some 350 college-in-prison programs across the U.S., only an estimated 12 programs remained after the legislation went into effect (Henry, 2011). The programs that survived this period of public austerity turned primarily to private funding and donations to sustain their operations (Castro & Gould, 2019).

Federal policy changes over the past several years have allowed for a modest growth in prison-based higher education opportunities. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) temporarily removed the ban on Pell funding eligibility for a small proportion of incarcerated individuals for the first time in two decades under the Second Chance Pell (SCP) pilot program. The program initially granted federal funding for 67 community colleges and four-year institutions to enroll *up to* 12,000 incarcerated students. In subsequent years, SCP has continued and in 2020, another 67 colleges and universities were designated to provide college-in-prison programming. In December 2020, Congress passed the FAFSA Simplification Act, monumentally lifting a 26-year ban on Pell grants for incarcerated students.

The FAFSA Simplification Act has increased public awareness about the issue and benefits of higher education in prison. Additionally, research highlighting the economic benefits of prison-based higher education has helped to increase support for greater federal investment in career and technical education (CTE) as well as traditional postsecondary offerings in prison. At

¹ Throughout this document, college-in-prison program, prison-based college program, prison-based higher education program, prison-based postsecondary education program, and higher education in prison is used interchangeably to refer to college programming in prison.

the state level, New Jersey and Tennessee have led the charge on making state financial aid available for prison-based college coursework (Martinez-Beltran, 2019; O’Dea, 2018). Further, an increasing number of nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education are partnering to expand academic and vocational offerings in prisons and to provide re-entry support services for formerly incarcerated individuals (Bacon et al., 2020).

Research Problem

Although increased public awareness of postsecondary education in prison, the growth of college-in-prison programs across the United States, and the recent federal decision to open access to Pell grants for incarcerated students are positive developments for higher education in prison, very little is known about the nature, scope, and quality of existing programs (Castro et al., 2018; Castro & Gould, 2019). As Castro and Gould (2019) note:

higher education in prison programs have always existed with some level of secrecy, whether because of public opinion or stigma on campus, or other very real and emergent reasons. Without much of this descriptive information, we can actually say very little of the quality of programs...(p.8).

For the most part, research on college-in-prison has narrowly focused on the relationship between postsecondary education and correctional goals, particularly reduced recidivism (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2013; Kim & Clark, 2013; Vacca, 2004). While these concerns are vital from a correctional perspective, they simultaneously mask the need to ask critical questions about the nature and quality of the higher education afforded to incarcerated students. Discourses reducing the value of higher education in prison to its ability to advance correctional aims have shifted attention away from thoughtful considerations of what is in the best interests of incarcerated college students toward problematic debates around what kind of

education those in need of “correcting” deserve (Castro, 2018; Castro & Gould, 2018; Evans, 2018). Particularly given the recent reinstatement of Pell Grants for incarcerated students, it is timely and urgent to examine the nature and goals of college-in-prison programs across the U.S. and the extent to which they adhere to quality standards in the field of higher education (in prison).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The present research is a qualitative case study of three college-in-prison programs in one southern state in the United States. The purpose of the study was to explore the views, experiences, and practices of program faculty and staff, as a means of interrogating the nature and quality of their programs. The study was guided by the following overarching research question: *What do the perspectives and experiences of college-in-prison program faculty and staff reveal about the nature and quality of the higher education made available to incarcerated college students?* The following sub-questions were used to further focus the study:

- a. How do program faculty and staff conceptualize the purpose of higher education in prison?
- b. What kind of training do faculty receive to teach in prison?
- c. What kind of educational experiences are faculty and staff able to facilitate in prison?
- d. What do faculty and staff advocate for with regard to the educational experiences afforded to incarcerated students?

How faculty and staff conceptualize the purpose of higher education in prison is important for understanding the aims and potential of college-in-prison opportunities in the southern region of the United States—as Castro and Gould (2018) suggest, “If higher education in prison can only

be imagined through utilitarian paradigms, such as recidivism or return-on-investment, then the foci and promises of higher education are broadly compromised, both in the context of the prison and on the non-carceral campus” (p.5). Furthermore, faculty training as well as the provision or absence of particular educational experiences and opportunities in the three college-in-prison programs in this study (e.g., access to resources and services on the traditional campus) provided critical entry points for examining the nature and quality of programs and higher education opportunities in prison.

It is crucial to undertake a study of this nature not only to advance knowledge about the state of college programming in prisons, but also to identify and challenge potential instances of “better than nothing” education, wherein incarcerated students are systematically exposed to substandard educational experiences (Castro & Gould, 2018). This is particularly critical given the historical and contemporary scarcity of quality, formal² educational opportunities in prisons combined with the lack of college choice afforded to postsecondary students under confinement (Castro & Gould, 2019; Suzuki & Castro, in press).

Significance

The present study serves as an empirical contribution to the underdeveloped knowledge base on postsecondary education in prison. Indeed, many information gaps about the most basic elements of college-in-prison programs across the United States are currently in need of addressing (Castro et al., 2015). To this end, pre-interview² questionnaires gathered information regarding specific courses (e.g., enrollment, subject, mode of instruction, number of class sessions/week, hours/session, etc.) as well as faculty and staff demographics, and educational

² As author and educator, James Kilgore, who also served as a peer instructor within various prison education programs while incarcerated in California notes, prisons are full of “invisible educators,” who support the learning and educational trajectory of incarcerated students.

and professional background. Interviews with faculty and staff enabled in-depth understanding of the nature and quality of their programs. Furthermore, the present study moves beyond purely descriptive accounts to facilitate a critical examination of three college-in-prison programs in the southern part of the United States—in conversation with the concept of education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006), critical literature from the field of higher education in prison, and scholarship on student engagement in higher education. The research is in part a response to calls in the field of higher education in prison to center questions of nature, scope, equity, and quality in examinations of college-in-prison programs (Castro et al., 2018; Castro & Gould, 2019; Erzen et al., 2019). The study also provides a novel use of education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) to uncover broader implications about the educational realities of—and possibilities for—incarcerated college students in the southern part of the United States.

The present study is also intended as a contribution to the broader field of higher education by considering quality standards from the field in the non-traditional setting of a prison. In addition to generating new knowledge, the study is meant as an opportunity for program faculty and staff to reflect on their practices and to identify strengths and weaknesses with respect to the nature and quality of their prison-based college programs. In centering the perspectives of college-in-prison program faculty and staff, furthermore, this research highlights populations about which limited knowledge exists. Additionally, the study helps to identify areas in need of further discussion—ideally among incarcerated students, higher education professionals, and correctional administrators. As the aim of critical inquiry is not only to interrogate systems of power and oppression, but to foment change (Crotty, 1998; Gonzales, Kanhai, & Hall, 2018), the present study considers the perspectives of faculty and staff as well as broader insights from the field of higher education in prison to generate preliminary

recommendations for practice, policy, theory, and research. In this vein, the study is an important opportunity to connect the programs under study to dialogues, insights, and research from scholars and practitioners of higher education (in prison).

As scholars in the emerging field of higher education in prison have noted, the concerns that plague college-in-prison are in many ways reflective of broader concerns in higher education, where low-income students and students of color remain underrepresented and underserved in many sectors of higher education, and face myriad challenges brought on by the raced, classed, and gendered nature of traditional higher education (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017). Yet incarcerated students and their college experiences are rarely included in academic scholarship and discourse (Castro et al., 2015). As such, in solidarity with other work in the field of higher education in prison, the present research seeks to make incarcerated students and college-in-prison programs visible in broader discussions of access and equity in the field of higher education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study serves as an empirical and theoretical contribution to the nascent field of higher education in prison. In this chapter, I first provide an overview of the study's Conceptual Framework. I begin by describing how this research draws from the critical paradigm. I then present an overview of education debt (XX), also highlighting it as the overarching analytical framework for this study. Subsequently, I situate education debt within the broader literature on educational equity. Next, I elaborate on other key components of the conceptual framework, including critical scholarship from the field of higher education in prison on the purpose of college-in-prison, faculty training, and prison pedagogies as well as higher education research and scholarship on student engagement. Within the discussion on student engagement, I highlight the important role that faculty and student affairs practitioners play in facilitating engaging experiences and activities in college. Finally, I explore various areas of higher education (in prison) scholarship that are broadly relevant to the present study.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Paradigm. The present research is guided by the critical paradigm. The central aim of the critical paradigm is to “critique, interrogate, and transform any system implicated in the oppression of humans” (Gonzales, Kanhai, & Hall, 2018, p.505). In examining how societies are organized and maintained—and to whose benefit—critical researchers foreground issues of power and their relation to thought, language, and oppression (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1970, 2000; hooks, 1994; Hill Collins, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Martínez-Alemán, 2015; Pasque & Carducci, 2015; Zald, 2002). Although there is no single definition for the critical paradigm, Jermier (1998) suggests four assumptions that remain fundamental to its many iterations: a) at times, power is misused, b) misuses of power lead to the oppression of certain individuals and

groups, c) utopian thinking remains a critical form of resistance, and d) researchers have a responsibility to align their work with the interests of the oppressed.

In this research, I engage with the critical paradigm to examine higher education within an environment and system designed to limit incarcerated students' agency, choice, and power in virtually every realm of their lives, including (higher) education. In the spirit of critical research, I consider the ideological and material implications of program faculty and staff discourses and practices on the nature and quality of college-in-prison programming in the southern part of the United States. In this study—and in line with critical scholars and practitioners of prison higher education (Castro & Gould, 2018; Castro & Gould, 2019; Erzen et al., 2019)—I adopt the utopian perspective that higher education in prison ought to and can be of high quality, even given the constraints and violence of the carceral context. I seek to elevate awareness about the postsecondary education afforded to underrepresented students in a nontraditional context that remains largely invisible in higher education discourse and policy on equity, inclusion, and quality. I also aim to identify program strengths as well as areas that exemplify “better than nothing” education (Castro & Gould, 2018). Three areas undergird this critical inquiry: a) education debt, b) scholarship from the critical field of higher education in prison, and c) research on student engagement in higher education.

Education Debt. Applying a critical race theory lens, Ladson-Billings (2006) reframes the so-called achievement gap in K-12 schools as an education debt to underscore the “persistent inequality that exists (and has always existed) in our nation’s schools” (p. 4). Ladson-Billings argues that the national focus on achievement gaps moves education toward short-term solutions that are unlikely to address systemic issues rooted in racism and oppression. Furthermore, she contends, the notion of an achievement gap places the blame of low educational attainment and

underperforming schools on students and teachers rather than on the inequitable distribution of educational services and resources.

Education debt has four principal components: a) historical debt, b) economic debt, c) sociopolitical debt, and d) moral debt. Historical debt refers to the legacy of educational inequities in the K-12 system formed around race, class, and gender in the United States. Indeed, scholars of higher education have noted how these same inequities have plagued postsecondary education since its inception (Cabrera, 2014; Inwood & Martin, 2008; Yosso, 2006; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004; Wilder, 2013), and higher education in prison is no exception. Economic debt underscores the historical and contemporary funding disparities in education. Sociopolitical debt represents the degree to which families of color have been—and continue to be—excluded from the civic process, including from decision-making around their children’s access to quality schooling. Lastly, moral debt reflects the “disparity between what we know is right and what we actually do” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.8). At the core of Ladson-Billings’s (2006) theorization of the education debt is a concern for the historical lack of access to quality education for low-income communities of color.

In the present research, I apply education debt to a higher education (in prison) context; in doing so, I consider the implications of education debt for a novel group of students. Education debt undergirds the present study in two principal ways. First, given the disproportionate numbers of low-income and/or African American and Latinx individuals under incarceration, education debt underscores the urgent need to examine and address issues of quality with respect to education in prison, including postsecondary programming. Failure to do so means to (further) perpetuate historical educational inequities and the implicit notion that only some students deserve a quality education. Second, education debt poignantly captures the

educational histories and realities of many incarcerated individuals and helps to situate the general scarcity of diverse and high-quality higher education opportunities in prison—as well as mass incarceration more broadly—as extensions of a historical, racist, and classist system of educational marginalization and deprivation in the United States. Education debt also serves as a critical, analytical framework to engage with the broader implications of the present study. More specifically, the study’s findings will be interpreted in terms of how particular perspectives and practices within the college-in-prison programs under study exacerbate and/or challenge education debt.

Educational equity. Education debt and the present study cannot be discussed in isolation from the broader literature on educational equity. It is not possible to provide an exhaustive review of literature on educational equity within the scope of this project; I nonetheless cite several key components of this expansive area and attempt to situate the education debt within it. Broadly, early conceptualizations of educational equity focused largely on inputs (e.g., whether or not students were able to attend school, financial resources to support operations) and ignored what happened while students were in school (Alexander, Cook, & McDill, 1978; Good & Marshall, 1984; Murphy, 1988; Oakes, 1985). Starting in the late 1980s, scholarship reflected a shift to how we now broadly understand educational equity—for example, that it is a matter of unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and learning environments; that there are differences by race, gender, class, among other axes (e.g., Anderson, 2004; Chambers, 2009; Howard, 2010).

Drawing from and contributing to this work, Ladson-Billings (2007) identified and dispelled common explanations for school failure among low-income students of color (e.g. their families do not value education, they come from a “culture of poverty”) and argued for a more

robust understanding of the nature of inequity through her conceptualization of the education debt. Various scholars have used the education debt to highlight inequities in K-12 education as regards particular student populations, including Maori students in New Zealand (Berryman & Eley, 2017), black youth (English et al., 2016; Lozenski, 2017; Pitre, 2014), children of immigrants (Arzubiaga et al., 2009); and minoritized students in general (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018). Like Ladson-Billings, Irvine (2010) contested the notion of an achievement gap, instead highlighting structural issues such as the “the teacher quality gap; the teacher training gap; the challenging curriculum gap; and the school funding gap,” among many other areas (p. xii). Milner (2012) argued for the need to look at opportunity gaps in urban education and proposed a theoretical framework through which to explain such gaps, including considerations of (1) Colorblindness; (2) Cultural Conflicts; (3) Myth of Meritocracy; (4) Low Expectations and Deficit Mindsets; and (5) Context-neutral Mindsets and Practices. Focusing on opportunity gaps, he contended, enables an examination of deeply inequitable systems, processes, structures, and policies that often prevent students from reaching their full capacity.

Funding inequities in K-12 education are well-documented (e.g., Bruce, Ermasova, & Mattox, 2019; Geiger & Garcia, 2017; Hall & Ushomirsky, 2010). In addition to funding inequities, many have underscored the role of racism and other forms of oppression in sustaining inequitable education, particularly as related to Black students (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Lewis 2001; Parker & Lynn 2002). Milner (2007), for example, described the practice of “teaching down” to black students. Many scholars and researchers have also highlighted the underrepresentation of students of color in gifted education and their overrepresentation in special education (Artiles, 2003; Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002; Eitle, 2002).

Similar issues plague higher education—for example, the underrepresentation of Black students in higher education, racist experiences of students of color at PWIs, inequitable funding for HBCUs, and deficit thinking as relates to students of color, among many other areas (e.g., Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Minor, 2008, Patton-Davis, 2016). Looking at educational equity, opportunity, and quality along the K-16 continuum is particularly relevant for examining college programming in prisons, where many students come from communities where schools, students, and families remain underserved and marginalized. Many of the inequities that plague (higher) education in general are those that impact incarcerated college students even more acutely.

Higher Education in Prison. The present research is also guided by critical insights and critiques from the nascent and growing field of higher education in prison. In the following, I outline the central arguments undergirding this research.

Purpose of higher education in prison. For decades, any type of education in prison—including at the postsecondary level—has been framed as correctional education, of which the central aim is to reduce criminality and future incidences of incarceration (Castro & Gould, 2018). Leading scholars in the field of higher education in prison have argued that conceiving of prison higher education *primarily* as a correctional tool to reduce recidivism and rehabilitate incarcerated students ultimately (a) serves to pathologize people in prison, and consequently limits the kinds of educational experiences made available to them (Castro & Gould, 2018; Ginsburg, 2019; Maltz, 1984; Simpson, 2019), (b) distorts the public’s understanding of the value and purpose of higher education in prison beyond a commodified means to an end (Davis, 2018; Heider & Lehman, 2019) and (c) obscures the broader societal responsibility that colleges and universities have during an era of mass incarceration (Castro et al., 2015). Castro (2018)

further positioned the anti-recidivist rationale for higher education in prison as a colorblind and racist paradigm that not only individualizes the systemic problem of mass incarceration, but given the demographics of the prison population, disproportionately maps these discourses onto bodies of color. McCorkel and DeFina (2019) argued that a focus on recidivism ignores the relationship between education and democracy and “diminishes the radical possibilities of higher education for fostering peaceful and just communities” (p.2).

Currently and formerly incarcerated scholars have also contributed to this critical dialogue. Davis (2018) and Heider and Lehman (2018) described higher education in prison as a way for incarcerated individuals to critically examine their lives and circumstances. Evans (2019) interviewed five fellow incarcerated students about the value of postsecondary programming in prisons, highlighting that “higher education in prison creates an ‘elevating connection,’ by which I mean it re-establishes our connection to the world and raises our view of ourselves to scholars and human beings engaging in the intellectual community” (p.2). Castro et al. (2015) described higher education in prison as transformative in its potential to allow students to reflect on seemingly commonsensical notions, norms, and attitudes prevalent in their lives and in the broader society. Simpson (2019) called for college-in-prison programs to prioritize the “full development of students” and prepare them to engage in processes of social change (p.34).

In this research, I echo and draw on these critiques to examine how faculty and staff in the three programs under study understand and communicate the purpose of their work in prisons. At issue is whether or not and to what extent prison educators and practitioners reinforce and/or challenge commonsense thinking prevalent in the correctional education community and literature (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2013; Gerber & Fritsch, 1995; Vacca, 2004) regarding the goals and aims of postsecondary education in prison. As scholars in the field of

higher education in prison have noted, conceptualizing prison-based higher education predominantly as a correctional tool has both ideological and material implications that undermine the best interests of incarcerated students (Castro & Gould, 2018; Castro & Gould, 2019). I approach this research with these framings, questions, and concerns.

Training of faculty who teach in prison. In a recent edited volume featuring critical perspectives on teaching in prison, Ginsburg (2019) noted:

The current practice in many programs is for adjunct professors to be hired to teach a given course in a prison, provide them a *brief training on security matters*, and then let them loose on incarcerated students (emphasis my own, p.5).

Critical prison education scholars and practitioners have rightly expressed concern for this lax approach to faculty training in many college-in-prison programs, arguing for more intentional and critical approaches to prepare faculty for the prison classroom (Ginsburg, 2019; Scott, 2013). Various people have underscored the urgency for programs to help faculty understand the specific dynamics and inherent moral violence of prison contexts (Ginsburg, 2019; Scott, 2013; Wright, 2005). For example, incarcerated students must navigate a host of challenges and power dynamics in prison, not least of which include cramped living and study spaces, lack of control over noise and light, resource-deprivation, regularly surveilled movements and interactions, body counts, and cell inspections. As Wright (2005) highlights, without comprehensive pre-service training, faculty lack the cultural maps to understand their experience; they can only rely on stereotypical images of prisons in the media. Culture shock can ensue (Matthews, 2000; Wright, 2005), making the experience of teaching in prison unsustainable for some.

Yet thoughtful faculty training is not merely a matter of raising awareness about the realities of prison teaching; without it, faculty are “more likely to take on the values and

imperatives of the carceral state” and become an added source of oppression for incarcerated students (Ginsburg, 2019, p.1). Scott (2013) warns of the brand of positivism long prevalent in education where teachers predominantly concern themselves with curricular proficiencies while remaining ignorant about issues of power and privilege. As such, training must encourage and prepare faculty to be reflexive about their positionality, including how they occupy a place in the prison’s power structure (Ginsberg, 2019; Ginsburg, 2019; Scott, 2013). Furthermore, individuals working in the realm of college-in-prison must necessarily approach the work with humility—the job of a prison educator is neither to reform nor to save (Ginsberg, 2019; Ginsburg, 2019; Simpson, 2019). As Scott (2013) notes, “Indeed the very idea that a person could go into a prison and see themselves as potentially liberating people shows how quickly the skewed power politics of the prison classroom can intoxicate a well-intended liberal” (p.26). Additionally, it is critical for prison educators to reflect on how their pedagogical practices might play out with those students in prison who have never had a positive educational experience in their lives (Behan, 2007).

In their report, “Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison”, the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (AHEP) and the Prison University Project (PUP) outline several recommendations for faculty training and supervision, including that it ensures that a) course content and objectives are consistent with those offered on the traditional campus, b) faculty only teach within their areas of expertise; c) faculty uphold and communicate high expectations of their students, and d) faculty are able to support students with special needs and respond appropriately so as not to discourage students or trigger the prison’s disciplinary system. In this study, I will turn to these insights and critiques to investigate the kind of training faculty receive to teach in the three programs under study.

Prison pedagogies. To examine the educational experiences that the three college-in-prison programs under study facilitate, I will draw in part on critical insights on prison pedagogies. Various prison educators and scholars have highlighted the prison classroom as a space holding transformative and liberatory potential (Castagnetto & Shanley, 2019; Erzen, 2016; Moore, 2015; Trounstein, 2008). For example, as an instructor of African history, Moore (2015) described his in-prison classes as an opportunity for some students to engage their African heritage and build community inside and outside of the classroom. Similarly, Castagnetto and Shanley (2019) explained that writing classes in prison can help to build community, create solidarity, and foster new life narratives through restorying. Multiple works co-authored by incarcerated and non-incarcerated scholars note similar ideas (Castro et al., 2015; Heider & Lehman, 2019; Pinkert et al., 2013). Castro et al. (2015) and Heider and Lehman (2018) underscore the potential for higher education in prison to foster self-development, critical thinking, and foment positive, societal change impacting both the incarcerated and non-incarcerated.

At the same time, multiple prison educators and scholars have problematized this notion of the prison classroom as a transformative and emancipatory site, particularly as regards instructors' use of critical pedagogy (Castro & Brawn, 2017; Ginsberg, 2019; Hicks Peterson, 2019; Kilgore, 2011; Scott, 2013). The ultimate aim of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) is to foster critical consciousness—what Freire terms “conscientization”—whereby learners gain a deeper understanding of the world through naming and questioning systems of power and oppression. Critical pedagogues strive to create learning environments wherein through inquiry and dialogue, students become empowered to respond to or act against internal and external oppression (Ellsworth, 1989). Yet in a totalizing and authoritarian institution like a prison, such a

practice remains untenable (Castro & Brawn, 2017; Ginsberg, 2019; Kilgore, 2011; Scott, 2013). Ginsberg (2019) asserted that critical pedagogy seeks to do the impossible within a carceral context in attempting to disrupt and reframe prisoner identity and agency. Further, he warned that the “incarcerated student’s identity as prisoner’ is unintelligible to the non-incarcerated instructor, making critical pedagogy’s insistence on student transformation epistemologically baseless” (p.61). In a dialogue between a professor and an incarcerated college student, Castro and Brawn (2017) similarly described critical pedagogy in the prison as a tragic endeavor, noting that it “may run the risk of reproducing the power structure they [non-incarcerated instructors] seek to expose by neglecting to consider incarcerated students’ unique positionalities—specifically, their inability to freely access information and to exist in the world as independent thinkers” (p.103). In order to address these contradictions, the authors argue for an “emplaced critical praxis” (Castro & Brawn, 2017) that facilitates engagement in critical discourse and practice while accounting for the subjectivities of incarcerated students and acknowledging the prison classroom as an inescapable extension of a broader system of oppression. For example, an emplaced critical praxis considers the limited ability of incarcerated students to “do the very rereading of their circumstances that critical pedagogies desire” (p. 116). As Hicks Peterson (2019) notes, once students leave the classroom, they return to the oppressive and violent spaces of the prison “where this newfound, self-awareness and personal work is usually unwelcomed and unsafe” (p.178). Similarly, Scott (2013) warned that higher education in prison must be nondeterministic and guided by incarcerated students’ subjectivities for there to be any possibility for a liberatory experience for educators and students. Simpson (2019), a student and scholar currently incarcerated in a North Carolina prison, suggests that “educators must identify the ‘reality’ of their students’ backgrounds, who they are today, what their possibilities are” in

the process of creating course curricula (p. 34). He notes that college-in-prison programs should allow students to take up subjects that concern their communities, rather than relying on abstract theory (Simpson, 2019). In the present study, I will draw on these perspectives to examine the educational experiences that faculty facilitate in the college-in-prison programs under study—as these scholars note, whether or not and how faculty engage with the inherent contradictions of the prison classroom and the lived realities of incarcerated students can have important implications for student learning, engagement, and empowerment.

Student Engagement. In addition to critical scholarship from the field of higher education in prison, I draw on a student engagement lens to examine the educational experiences made possible by the three college-in-prison programs under study. For the purposes of this research, I adopt Kuh's (2001; 2003; 2009a) definition of student engagement as the extent to which students participate in educational activities that are linked to positive learning and development outcomes *and* the degree to which institutions of higher education foster environments that enable students to engage in such activities. In using this definition, I echo Harper and Quayle's (2009) critique that the latter component—institutional responsibility—is particularly critical in considering the educational experiences of underrepresented and marginalized students for whom engagement in college is often far less accessible than for the traditional-aged, white, middle class, student. This concern is perhaps all the more pressing in prisons where students' use of time and space as well as their mobility are controlled and restricted at every turn.

In this study, I will draw on engagement benchmarks from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2020) to focus my conversations with program faculty and staff; including a) level of academic challenge, b) active and collaborative learning, c) student-faculty

interaction, d) enriching educational experiences, and e) supportive campus environments. Level of academic challenge refers to areas like higher order learning and integrated and reflective thinking, wherein students are asked to apply, analyze, and synthesize ideas or examine their own beliefs and assumptions as well as to consider alternative perspectives on critical issues (Nelson Laird et al., 2008; NSSE, 2018). Active learning comprises any classroom activity that “involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing” (Bonwell, & Eison, 1991, p. 2), including discussion, asking questions, debates, and role playing.

Collaborative learning comprises activities wherein students work with and teach each other in the process of exploring course content (Mayhew et al., 2016), collaborate on projects, and discuss ideas and assignments with classmates outside of class (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Student-faculty interaction includes activities such as discussing readings, assignments, or career plans with faculty and working on research with professors (NSSE, 2020). Enriching educational experiences refers to a wide range of activities, the majority of which are not possible in prison, including study abroad, internships, and learning communities; however, it also includes interacting across difference, which remains important for engagement in a prison classroom.

Lastly, supportive campus environment includes the extent to which institutions provide a wide array of support and services to college students, including tutoring services, writing centers, and counseling, among other areas (NSSE, 2020). Whether or not and how college-in-prison program faculty and staff facilitate and/or advocate for activities reflected in NSSE’s benchmarks is of paramount importance and constitutes one measure of educational quality (Kuh, 2009a). As Kuh et al. (2007) note, the use of student engagement as an indicator of quality was prompted in part by concerns about how institutions supported an increasingly diverse college-going population. Indeed, the AHEP and PUP provide several quality and equity

recommendations for in-prison programming that reflect these crucial student engagement factors (Erzen et al., 2019).

In addition to emphasizing institutional responsibility for student engagement in this research, I take seriously Harper and Quaye's (2009) concern that a traditional student engagement lens alone is insufficient to think about the quality of the college experiences provided to marginalized students. It is for this purpose that I engage the aforementioned critical insights from the field of higher education in prison. How, for example, might faculty reflection on positionality and power or their in-depth understandings of the histories and daily context of incarcerated students be important components of facilitating an engaging learning experience in prison?

Student engagement theories and research. Theorizations of student engagement in higher education are rooted in several seminal works. In developing his curriculum principles, Tyler (1949) emphasized the importance of time on task—the idea that students who invested greater time and effort into learning activities were more likely to realize their learning goals. Pace's (1984, 1990) research across several decades highlighted that students gained the most from their academic and social experiences in college when they devoted greater time and energy to particular activities that require greater effort than others. Astin (1984, 1993) built on these works to develop his theory of student involvement, which highlighted that factors such as involvement with peers and faculty enhanced nearly all aspects of learning and performance. Furthermore, he argued, the amount of time and physical and psychological energy that students invested in particular activities influenced their development (Astin, 1993).

Decades of subsequent research on student engagement has highlighted several factors and activities that contribute to enhanced engagement, learning, and development in college,

including student-faculty interaction (e.g., Cole, 2011; Kim & Sax 2014; Mayhew et al. 2016), peer interaction and collaboration (e.g., Braxton et al., 2004; Fischer, 2007; Lane, 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), active learning (e.g., Anderson & Adams, 1992; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Johnson et al., 1991), use of institutional resources such as libraries (Soria et al., 2015, 2017), and inclusive and affirming learning environments (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh, 2001; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; 2001). The bulk of the empirical research suggests that students from a diversity of backgrounds generally benefit from engaging in the aforementioned educational practices, although as expected, conditional effects apply when considering differential access to student engagement as well as student and institutional characteristics (Pascarella & Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Many examples of the nuanced benefits of student engagement exist, examining the role of race (Kuh et al, 2008; Littleton, 2002; Mitchell & Dell, 1992; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Shappie & Debb, 2017; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001), gender (Astin,1993; Cole & Jackson, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), college major (Cole & Jackson, 2005; Phelan, 1979), parental education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979), degree aspirations (Cole, 1999; Phelan, 1979), having similar interests as faculty (Pascarella, 2005), institutional size (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983; Cole & Jackson, 2005), and institutional type (Cole, 1999; Lacy, 1978).

Faculty and student engagement. Faculty behaviors and attitudes influence student engagement and success (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Abundant empirical research has shown that student-faculty interaction increases student engagement among a diverse range of students, including those who remain underrepresented in higher education (Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Allen, 1999; Cole & Jackson, 2005; Silverschanz et al., 2008; Vaccaro, 2012; Wood et al., 2015; Woodford & Kulick, 2015). Student-faculty interaction associated with a host of favorable

student outcomes, including academic motivation (Komarraju et al., 2010; Trolan, et al., 2016), gains in critical thinking (Kim & Sax, 2011; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005); enhanced academic self-concept and motivation (Cole, 2011; Kim & Sax 2014; Mayhew et al. 2016), increased sense of belonging and student satisfaction (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014), leadership development (Sax, 2008; Campbell et al., 2012), and enhanced professional development and career preparation (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014; Flowers, 2004). Both formal (in-class) and informal (outside of class) interactions have been shown to be important for student learning and development (Komarraju et al., 2010). Informal interactions can include seeking help about coursework and assignments or advice in a specific area such as further education or career development (Cotton & Wilson, 2006). Students that have informal interactions with faculty tend to be more motivated and actively involved in the learning process (Komarraju et al., 2010) as well as have higher degrees of skill development and greater satisfaction with the institutional experience (Endo & Harpel 1982; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976; Thompson, 2001). Bjorkland et al. (2002) noted that students who are in more frequent contact with faculty members and receive more feedback on their performance show remarkable improvement in group communication, competence in their specific field, awareness about their future occupation, and general problem-solving skills.

Faculty also influence student engagement and achievement through specific pedagogical practices. For instance, faculty who facilitate active learning tend to see positive outcomes, including enhanced student knowledge and comprehension of course content (Anderson & Adams, 1992; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Johnson et al., 1991). Faculty can also facilitate student engagement through collaborative learning practices, which research has demonstrated can positively influence student achievement, persistence, and attitudes about learning (e.g., Bowen, 2000; Prince, 2004; Smith et al., 2009; Van Boxtel, Van der Linden, & Kanselaar,

2000). Additionally, faculty can implement academically challenging activities that increase engagement and learning. According to NSSE (2018b), higher order learning as well as reflective and integrative thinking both allow for meaningful engagement with course content and may lead to greater subject matter competence (Deslauris & Wieman, 2011; Maskiewicz, Griscom, & Welch, 2012; Strauss & Terenzini, 2007).

Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) found that higher education institutions where faculty actively encouraged and facilitated activities and factors such as student-faculty interaction inside and outside of the classroom, active and collaborative learning, academically challenging work, and high expectations indeed had students who participated more in these activities and experienced positive learning outcomes. In short, research on student engagement shows that faculty can play an integral role in creating classroom contexts and cultures that foster student learning (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005), underscoring the value of examining faculty perspectives and practices in this study. I will draw on NSSE's student engagement indicators to converse with faculty about those activities and areas that have been associated with enhanced student learning and development.

Student affairs and student engagement. In addition to faculty, student affairs professionals can play an important role in enhancing student engagement and learning (Kuh, 2009b) . In fact, effective and high-quality institutions of higher education are those with student affairs professionals that see student engagement as a critical component of their responsibilities on campus (Kuh, 2009b). Indeed, the field of student affairs emphasizes concern for the whole student, including promotion of their development and learning, development of leadership skills, appreciation of diversity, and concern for student retention (Manning et al., 2013). Student affairs professionals can enhance student engagement by championing and facilitating

educational practices that research has shown to be important for student success (Kuh, 2008, 2009b). They can also monitor student participation in these activities and collaborate with faculty and administrators to foster opportunities for participation (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). Additionally, at high-performing colleges and universities, student affairs staff collaborate across campus to periodically collect and review data about the effectiveness of their policies and practices aimed at enhancing student engagement and success (Kuh et al., 2005). In this study, I draw on these insights to engage college-in-prison program staff in dialogue about the educational experiences (e.g., student-faculty interaction outside of class or access to libraries on campus or to other resources and services) that they are able to facilitate in prison. At the same time, I acknowledge the constraints of the prison environment and thus will also inquire about the types of activities and experiences they advocate for.

Relevant Literature

Correctional Education. As previously mentioned, there is little research on prison higher education. The vast majority of the relatively small body of research on prison-based education takes on a distinctly correctional lens, examining the effect of education in prison on post-release outcomes, particularly recidivism (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2013; Gerber & Fritsch, 1995; Vacca, 2004). This body of research groups all types of prison-based education under the umbrella of correctional education, including high school or GED programming, Adult Basic Education, Vocational, and Career and Technical programs (Drake & Fumia, 2017; Duwe, 2018). In Gerber and Fritsch's (1995) meta-analysis of studies assessing the effect of adult academic and vocational correctional education programs, the authors concluded that programs generally helped to reduce recidivism, decrease in-prison infractions, and enhance post-release employment outcomes.

While far fewer in number, some researchers have conducted studies isolating the effects post-secondary correctional education (PSCE) —defined primarily as any type of education beyond the high school level—on recidivism (e.g., Batiuk et al., 2005; Chappell, 2004; Lichtenberger & Onyewu, 2005). These studies concluded that PSCE has a positive relationship with reduced recidivism, showing reductions from anywhere between 12% (Lichtenberger & Onyewu, 2005) to 35% (Karpowitz & Kenner, n.d.). What is more, various studies have shown that PSCE has a stronger negative impact on recidivism than any other form of correctional education (Allen, 1998; Armstrong et al., 1995; Batiuk et al., 2005; Jenkins, Steurer, & Pendry, 1995; Wheeldon, 2011). As previously indicated, research and scholarship from the field of higher education in prison serves as a direct critique of this body of work. Scholars in this field call for a research agenda that prioritizes the same concerns as the broader research on higher education, including access, equity, and quality (Castro et al., 2018; Castro & Gould, 2019; Erzen et al., 2019). The present research contributes to this agenda by interrogating the nature and quality of college-in-prison programming in one southern U.S. state via faculty and staff perspectives and experiences regarding the purpose of higher education in prison, faculty training, the educational experiences made available to incarcerated college students, and faculty and staff advocacy aimed at improving the student experience.

Purpose of Higher Education. Faculty and staff perspectives on the purposes of higher education in prison must be situated within broader, contemporary understandings of the purpose of higher education in general. The aims of higher education have been conceptualized in multifaceted ways. Labaree (1997) identified three competing goals of postsecondary education: democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. Democratic equality focuses on the development of an engaged citizenry that possesses the values and knowledge necessary for

participation in civil society (Seddon, 1997; Walker, 2001). Social efficiency highlights higher education's role in preparing productive contributors to the workforce. Social mobility ties the purpose of higher education to the individual consumer of education, particularly as it relates to increasing one's socioeconomic status. As such, the first two goals represent the notion of education as a public good while the third firmly positions higher education as a private benefit.

Generally speaking, different types of institutions of higher education have conceived of and communicated the purpose(s) of higher education in distinct ways. For instance, public colleges and universities are more likely than private institutions to see their primary roles as providing services to local or regional areas, economic development, and preparing students to enter the local and regional workforce (Hannay, 2005). In contrast, private institutions often conceive of their role as holistically developing students, primarily through exposure to the liberal arts. Less selective institutions of higher education often emphasize their role in providing students with labor market-relevant skills and connections to employers (Hannay, 2005). Elite colleges and universities, on the other hand, value emphasizing exceptional learning experiences and connecting students with reputable faculty and researchers (Klassen, 2001; Morpew & Hartley, 2006).

In reality, mounting calls for accountability and the need to prepare students for success in a global economy have increasingly pushed institutions of higher education—regardless of type or sector—to conceive of their purpose(s) in market-driven, instrumentalist ways (Bastedo et al., 2016; Goodchild et al., 2014; Gumpert, 2000; Kerr, 1994; Thompson, 2014). In North Carolina, Florida, and Texas, governors and legislators have encouraged public higher education institutions and systems to prioritize degree programs with strong links to jobs (Frank, 2013; Kiley, 2012), increasingly shifting higher education from public good to private asset

(Filippakou & Williams, 2014; Pusser, 2006) and diminishing its democratic mission (Bylsma, 2015). As Walker (2001) notes, “The ‘good life’ is then seen as the accumulation of material goods, a highly individualized notion of what it means to be a ‘citizen’, and ‘democracy’ as synonymous with capitalism and the unrestrained pursuit of profit” (p.44).

At the same time, many still look to colleges and universities to help students develop into civic beings with the ability to engage with global problems. For example, Lagemann and Lewis (2012) noted that universities should cultivate students’ ability to solve problems, communicate, think critically, and be creative (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012). Kiziltepe (2010) argued that college should help graduates acquire five key dispositions, including interpersonal competence, multi-cultural understanding, problem solving skills, sense of purpose, and confidence to foment positive change. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2015) outlined three factors that all graduates should gain from a college degree: (a) to be informed by knowledge about the natural and social worlds, (b) to be empowered through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills, and (c) to be responsible for their personal actions and civic values. From a student perspective, past studies have suggested that students view higher education in two predominant ways: a) a means by which to acquire a job and financial wealth (Henderson-King & Smith, 2006) or b) an opportunity to gain new knowledge and develop expertise in a specific area (Henderson-King & Smith, 2006; McMahaon & Oketch, 2013). It is within these broader conceptualizations of the purpose of higher education—in addition to correctional discourses on the aims of college in prison—that I will consider study participants’ perspectives on the purpose(s) of higher education in prison.

Faculty Training and Supervision. At present, there is no research on faculty training in the prison context, leaving room for the present study to expand understanding of an important

aspect of the nature and quality of college-in-prison programming. Scholarship on faculty training and development in higher education in general suggests that faculty must continually cultivate the skills and knowledge to improve teaching and learning (Cannon et al., 2013). Rocca (2010) noted that institutions of higher education should channel significant finances, effort, and time into faculty development. According to Guskey and Yoon (2009) faculty development must be well-structured and organized in order for participants to benefit. What is more, faculty training and development must be a continuous process rather than an isolated incident (Minter, 2009; Mundy et al., 2012) in order to provide the encouragement and skills necessary to enhance student learning, engagement, retention, and success (Berg & Haung, 2004). In addition to emphasizing teaching and learning in a wide variety of general education courses, effective faculty training and development addresses applied learning theories, assessment, and technology in the classroom (Mundy et al., 2012). Yet, faculty often receive little or no formal training in teaching, relying primarily on informal trainings such as observing other professors' teaching and classroom practices (Colbeck et al., 2002). The present research engages with and expands upon this body of literature on faculty training in higher education to consider faculty development in the non-traditional setting of the prison and the implications for the quality of in-prison programming.

Educational Experiences of Incarcerated College Students. As previously noted, in addition to examining faculty training, the present research considers what faculty and staff perspectives and experiences reveal about the educational experiences afforded to postsecondary students in their respective programs. At present, only three scholarly works address the educational experiences of incarcerated college students. Tewksbury and Stengel (2006) surveyed 281 students enrolled in one of the 14 academic and vocational educational programs at

the Kentucky State Reformatory. The researchers asked students to comment on four principal areas: (a) reasons for participating in educational programming while in prison, (b) beliefs about the factors that allow for successful completion of a program, (c) perceptions about eleven key skills or content areas, and (d) perspectives regarding learning resources and their efficacy.

Students indicated three primary reasons for participating in educational programming, including feeling better about oneself, getting a job upon release, and improving one's skills. The majority of students rated math, reading, and listening as the most crucial skills; still, students enrolled in academic as opposed to vocational programming were more likely to perceive writing, spelling, literature, public speaking, and history as important. The authors additionally found that among learning resources, students most valued instructors and textbooks; students in the academic track were more likely than vocational students to have used and benefited from the assistance of a tutor. In general, Tewksbury and Stengel (2006) found that vocational students rated their instructors and overall program higher than did academic students.

In her study of incarcerated students enrolled in French courses through the Ohio University System, Salomone (1992) identified several obstacles to studying in prison, including (a) the unavailability of audio tapes (critical to language instruction at the time), (b) prison policies or requirements (e.g. prison "body counts" at different points in the day, restricted hours for visitation, parole board meetings) interfering with the ability to attend class or exams, (c) mandatory programming (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous or Stress Management) taking place at the same time as college offerings, and (d) having to use educational materials geared towards traditional college students. In spite of these issues, Salomone (1992) found that incarcerated students performed equally as well as non-incarcerated students in the same French courses.

Allred et al. (2013) examined student efficacy among incarcerated college students enrolled in courses modelled after the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, an initiative that brings incarcerated and non-incarcerated students together in a prison classroom. Administering the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) to incarcerated and non-incarcerated students at two time points (at the beginning and end of a 15-week semester), the authors found that incarcerated students' self-efficacy improved after taking college courses while non-incarcerated students' self-efficacy remained the same from Time 1 to Time 2. The limited scope of research on the educational experiences of incarcerated college students presents a valuable opportunity for the present study to expand understanding of the learning experiences made available to this underserved and understudied population of students. As opportunities and experiences can vary widely across locations (Castro et al., 2018), this research also provides in-depth understanding of three college-in-prison programs in one state.

Faculty Perspectives and Experiences of Teaching College in Prison. Much of the extant literature on faculty perspectives of working in the realm of college-in-prison consists of first-person narratives and reflections on teaching and pedagogy. Various prison educators and scholars have discussed the environmental and pedagogical challenges of teaching in prison, including having to teach around lockdowns, counts, and other unpredictable conditions that can cause delays or cancellations, poor classroom facilities, lack of teaching aids or materials due to prison rules and safety policies, limited or no time outside of class for students and faculty to interact, and frequent transfer of students to other facilities (Dodd, 1987; Hackman 1997; Osberg, 1986; Osberg & Fraley, 1993). Wright (1997) underscored the lack of support for the transformative and personal development aims of prison education from the correctional community and insufficient funding. Behan (2007) highlighted the challenge of building trust

with students in an institution like a prison that is “built on mistrust” (p.165) while Colson reflected on the complexity of having discussions with students who often have a lived understanding of racism, but live in a hypermasculine and violent environment that minimizes their ability to understand other forms of oppression. Additionally, Van Gundy et al. (2013) outlined the challenges of teaching in and managing an Inside-Out program, which brings incarcerated and non-incarcerated students together in the classroom; the authors noted the difficulty of teaching effectively in blended, highly diverse environment and of balancing the rules of the Inside-Out program and the prison. Interestingly, in their survey of 67 faculty teaching in a college-in-prison program in New York, Osberg and Fraley (1993) found that two thirds of faculty believed their prison classes were equivalent to their traditional campus classes, with one third expressing that the former was superior to the latter. This body of literature on faculty experiences of teaching in prison highlights both the challenges of, and possibilities for, prison-based higher education programming, and helps to situate faculty narratives from the present study within broader concerns and debates about teaching in prison. At the same time, the present research expands on how particular issues (e.g., the environmental challenges of providing college coursework in prisons) play out in the context of the programs under study, the ways in which prison educators conceptualize the purpose of their work, and the day-to-day classroom experience provided to incarcerated college students in each program.

Staff Perspectives on College-in-Prison Program Development and Management. In addition to highlighting college-in-prison program faculty insights and experiences, the present research examines staff perspectives and practices. There is scant literature in this area. Simpkins (2015) details her experience establishing College Inside, a program of Chemeketa Community College in Oregon. The author elaborates on various key aspects, including gaining the support

of the Department of Corrections and individual prison administrators, building the appropriate curriculum and degree paths, selecting and retaining students, and securing funding. Similarly, Larson (2015) describes his experience founding the Attica-Genesee Teaching Project (AGTP), a community college program granting Associate's degrees to incarcerated students at Attica Correctional Facility in western New York. Larson (2015) emphasizes not only the critical nature of funding, but of communicating a sense of community responsibility in providing higher education to incarcerated populations. Both articles include important lessons for developing or getting involved with prison-based programming, also highlighting the advantages of doing this work in the community college context. For example, Larson (2015) notes that at GCC, "I witnessed firsthand the organic relationship that community colleges bear to the communities where they stand, the commitment of community college administrators to local service, and the hard work contributed by community college faculty who provide the first step up for the majority of those first-generation students who seek to improve their condition" (p.11). Simpkins additionally maintains that "The community college is dedicated to addressing the educational needs of underserved populations, so they are more likely to be able to secure grants and are generally more connected with communities" (p.28). These insights highlight the fact that program staff on four-year campuses may face greater challenges in gaining support from their institutions to operate college-in-prison programs.

Sanford and Foster (2006) offer insights from their experience co-founding two college-in-prison programs provided by a four-year institution of higher education. The authors outline five essential components to developing programs, including gaining approval from the Department of Corrections (DOC), gaining matriculation support from an accredited institution, designating a program liaison, finding qualified and committed faculty representing a wide range

of disciplines, and securing funding. They also discuss common obstacles such as the contextual constraints of teaching in prison and gaining support from the DOC. This body of literature provides important high-level insights on developing and managing college-in-prison programs. The present research builds upon this small body of work to highlight staff perspectives on the broader aims of their work as well as their practices regarding faculty training and providing engaging postsecondary experiences in prisons.

Quality of Higher Education. The ultimate aim of the present research is to examine the nature and quality of three college-in-prison programs in a southern U.S. state. To do this, it is necessary to understand how quality is understood and discussed in higher education in general. Although there is no single definition of quality in higher education, some overarching themes exist in this broad body of literature. One way that quality has been conceptualized is *in terms of a central goal*. For example, various scholars have discussed quality with regard to how institutions of higher education fulfill a stated mission or a set of standards defined by accrediting and/or regulatory bodies (e.g., Cheng & Tam, 1997; Commonwealth of Learning, 2009; Green, 1994). Others have talked about quality in terms of the ways in which institutions achieve distinction through the fulfillment of high standards (e.g., Bogue, 1998; Harvey & Green, 1993; Peterson, 1999). Still, others have discussed quality with respect to how institutions positively affect student learning as well as their personal and professional development (e.g., Bobby, 2014; Pond, 2002; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2012). Additionally, scholars have addressed quality in terms of accountability to stakeholders for the efficient use of resources and the provision of exceptional educational products and services (e.g., American Society for Quality, n.d.; Harvey, 2005; Nicholson, 2011).

In addition to considering quality with respect to particular goals, scholars have addressed quality in higher education *in terms of desired inputs and outputs* (e.g., Barker, 2002; Scott, 2008; Tam, 2010). Regarding quality-related inputs, scholars have discussed administrative indicators, including developing a relevant mission, fulfilling internal and external standards, and garnering resources for effective institutional functioning (e.g. Hill et al., 2003; Zineldin et al., 2011). Others have talked about student-focused inputs, particularly as it relates to the availability of student support services (e.g., Lagrosen et al., 2004; Mishra, 2007; National Institute of Standards & Technology, 2015). Some researchers have addressed instructional inputs, such as the relevancy and rigor of educational content or faculty competence (e.g., Biggs, 2001; Commonwealth of Learning, 2009; Iacovidou et al., 2009). Regarding quality-related outputs, scholars have mostly discussed student performance and outcomes, including engagement with educational content, faculty, and staff as well as the development of skills that result in gainful employment (e.g., Haworth & Conrad, 1997; Iacovidou et al., 2009; Scott, 2008). In short, the literature on quality in higher education has highlighted the multidimensionality of quality, particularly with respect to different stakeholder groups (e.g., students, the general public, funders, regulatory bodies, etc.). The present research engages with the concept of quality in higher education, both in terms of particular goals (e.g., the degree to which college-in-prison programs positively affect student learning and development as well as fulfill a set of standards from the field) as well as in terms of inputs (e.g., faculty preparation, engaging content and activities, and the availability of student support resources and services.)

Nature and Quality of Higher Education *in Prison*. The few extant works on the nature and quality of higher education in prison highlight the importance of holding rigorous quality standards for higher education, whether inside or outside of prison. In their analysis of

postsecondary opportunities in prisons across the U.S., Castro et al. (2018) investigated three metrics of equity and quality: transferability, credit-bearing status, and accreditation. As the authors noted, these three areas were selected because they demonstrate that institutions of higher education are (a) formally serving students and granting them certain rights and privileges, (b) providing students with opportunities for further education, and (c) operating under formal quality standards. The authors found that only four percent of the 4,627 degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the U.S. offered credit-bearing higher education opportunities in at least one prison, simultaneously highlighting the dearth of transfer opportunities for incarcerated college students. Furthermore, the authors discovered that the western region of the U.S. offered more than a third of the regionally accredited, credit-bearing postsecondary opportunities and that more than half of higher education providers were public two-year institutions (Castro et al., 2018). Thus, Castro et al. (2018) concluded that (a) there are an insufficient number of credit-bearing postsecondary opportunities in U.S. prisons (b) the existing opportunities lack diversity, and (c) much more research is needed to elucidate the types of experiences made available to incarcerated college students.

Suzuki and Castro (in press) also examined the issue of quality with regard to prison higher education, conducting a critical analysis of tablet-based education platforms providing postsecondary education in prisons, particularly JPay Lantern. Using a student engagement lens, the authors explored the types of educational experiences JPay Lantern affords to incarcerated college students, focusing specifically on four factors that decades of research in higher education have highlighted as critical for quality learning and development in college: (a) student-faculty interaction (e.g., Mayhew et al, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005), (b) peer interaction (e.g., Braxton et al., 2004; Kim & Sax, 2014; Sax,

2008), (c) access to institutional resources and support (e.g., Astin, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), and (d) access to an academically challenging education facilitating higher-order learning as well as reflective and integrative thinking (e.g., Brierton et al. 2016; Ghanizadeh, 2016; Scrivener & Weiss, 2013). Suzuki and Castro (in press) underscored Lantern’s weak performance with respect to these factors, concluding that at best, technology-enabled education platforms in prison facilitate “banking education” (Freire, 1970, 2001), where students passively receive information delivered by instructors and the “best” students are those that can efficiently store and recite information.

The previously referenced report from the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison and the Prison University Project also addresses quality issues in higher education in prison. “Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison” (Erzen et al., 2019) is the only guide of its kind that delineates quality standards for college-in-prison programs. Based on insights from expert practitioners and scholars on college-in-prison programs, the report is the first and only of its kind to delineate quality indicators for college-in-prison programs in seven key areas: a) program design; b) partnerships and collaborations; c) faculty recruitment, training and supervision; d) curriculum; e) pedagogy; f) instructional resources; and g) student advising and support services. The report also outlines common challenges that college-in-prison programs face and offers quality-focused recommendations for a wide range of stakeholders, including institutions of higher education, policymakers, funders, and corrections. The present study serves as a valuable contribution to the limited literature base examining the nature and quality of college-in-prison programming. Specifically, it expands on Suzuki and Castro’s (in press) work on the quality of education made possible by tablet-based education platforms in prisons to consider in-person higher education programming provided by two- and four-year

institutions of higher education in one southern U.S. state. Furthermore, the research engages with AHEP and PUP's equity and quality recommendations in the context of these programs.

Summary. The present literature review highlighted the conceptual framework that undergirds the present study. Guided by the critical paradigm, the research draws on the concept of education debt, critical perspectives from the field of higher education in prison, and research on student engagement in higher education. In addition to outlining the conceptual framework, the present literature review underscored the areas of scholarship with which the present study engages and expands upon. No other study explicitly explores college-in-prison program quality via faculty and staff perspectives on the purpose of higher education in prison, faculty training, the day-to-day classroom experience provided to incarcerated college students, and faculty and staff advocacy regarding those experiences. The dearth of literature on college-in-prison programs in general, and on the quality of programs in specific, provides an opportunity for the present study to make an important empirical contribution to the knowledge base. Furthermore, this research examines faculty training and student engagement in a novel context and builds upon critical scholarship on prison-based higher education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As noted in Chapters One and Two, the relatively underdeveloped body of scholarship on higher education in prison necessitates greater understanding of college-in-prison programs and the educational experiences they afford to students. Through its exploratory, qualitative design, the present study aims to provide an in-depth, empirical contribution to the field of higher education in prison. In this chapter, I outline the research design, case and participant selection procedures, and methods of data collection and analysis. I also provide case (program) descriptions as well as aggregated demographic and professional background information about study participants. Further, I address issues of trustworthiness, research ethics, and researcher subjectivity. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of study limitations.

Qualitative Design and Rationale

This study employed a qualitative research design for several reasons. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for exploring phenomena and populations that are little researched (Creswell, 2014). As stated previously, little is known about the specifics of college programming in prisons nor the faculty and staff that work in this realm. Additionally, a qualitative research design allows for in-depth understanding of multiple perspectives on complex phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As there is virtually no research on this topic, it was ideal to collect rich, descriptive qualitative data on participant's perspectives about the nature and quality of postsecondary programming in prisons in the southern region of the United States. Further, a qualitative research design enabled an emergent and inductive approach to inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell 2016; Patton 2015), which is particularly suited for exploratory studies such as the present one. Lastly, qualitative research emphasizes the importance of historical and social context and focuses on complexities "that cannot meaningfully be reduced to a few discrete

variables and linear, cause-effect relationships” (Patton, 2015, p.41). Prison education is an under-resourced and historically contested arena of education that requires meaningful engagement with geographical, historical, and sociopolitical contexts as well as with complex notions of criminality, deservingness, educational access, and human potential.

Qualitative Case Study

This research employed a qualitative case study design. Case study is well suited for exploratory research as it allows for in-depth understanding of social phenomena using multiple forms of data collection (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Creswell, 2014). In particular, I took inspiration from Bartlett and Vavrus’s (2017) critical comparative case study (CCS) methodology. CCS is appropriate for research about practice, wherein practice is understood as a process in which “social actors, with diverse motives, intentions, and levels of influence, work in tandem with and/or in response to social forces to routinely produce the social and cultural worlds in which they live” (p.1) This notion of practice is highly relevant for this study in which I viewed faculty and staff insights and experiences working in postsecondary programming in prisons as both entangled in—and producing—subjective understandings of what constitutes a high-quality college experience for incarcerated students. The CCS approach importantly calls for considering questions of power and “the cultural production of ‘common sense’ notions of social order” (p.10)—for example, the ways in which faculty and staff might utilize and perpetuate taken-for-granted goals of higher education in prison.

The CCS approach allows for a more fluid notion of context than traditional case study methodologies; as Bartlett and Varus (2017) note, “Too often context is presumed to signal place. It is important to expand our notion of context spatially and relationally” (p.115). Thus, in addition to their immediate contexts (e.g., a particular college-in-prison program in a specific

prison and state), I viewed faculty and staff as being embedded in broader, historical, evolving systems of power and inequality (e.g., higher education, law enforcement, criminal justice, fiscal, political) that shape their insights and experiences and blur the boundaries between case and context. In this study, I employed what Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) refer to as homologous horizontal comparison, wherein the entities under examination have a corresponding position or structure to one another (in this case, credit-bearing higher education programs in a southern state of the United States).

Case Selection. The present research is a case study of three college-in-prison programs in a southern U.S. state. To select the cases for this study, I used several criteria, including that the program must a) be credit-bearing, b) be provided by an accredited, nonprofit institution of higher education, c) provide face-to-face instruction (under normal circumstances outside of COVID), d) operate in one or more state prisons, e) have been in operation for at least one year, and f) only enroll incarcerated students. Of the seven programs that qualified—there were eight programs in total, but one is an Inside-Out program which brings incarcerated and non-incarcerated students together in prison classrooms—I narrowed it down to three using a maximum variation sampling approach, wherein the cases represent a range of variation on a dimension of interest (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Specifically, I selected college-in-prison programs representing a diversity of postsecondary institutional types offering college-level coursework in prisons in one southern U.S. state, not only to enable some degree of breadth but also to honor the different types of institutions working in this underserved and underfunded area of higher education. In the following, I provide more information about each case (program), using pseudonyms for the sponsoring postsecondary institution and general descriptor to protect confidentiality.

Lake Community College. The first case is a college-in-prison program offered by Lake Community College (LCC). LCC's program is funded in part by the state Department of Corrections and state funding for community colleges. The program falls under one of the major schools of study at LCC and offers an Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S) degree in Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) in one medium custody men's prison. Coursework spans technical and humanities. Students receive 30 hours of instruction per week—six hours a day, five days a week—and complete five semesters of coursework, including one summer semester between the first and second year. To participate, students: (a) must have a GED or high school diploma, (b) must be in their final three to five years of incarceration, and (c) have to have been a resident in the state for at least one year so that the program can pay in-state tuition.

The program currently includes two tracks: (a) HVAC, and (b) Electrical Systems Technology; it is possible that the Electrical Systems track will be replaced by a business track. A first-year student in the program starts in one of these tracks; students can get a certificate in just one side or the other. However, if they obtain a certificate in each track and complete some coursework during the summer, they can obtain an HVAC diploma. They can then choose to go into the second year, which provides humanities and other coursework. After completing the five semesters of coursework, students can get an A.A.S. in Air Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration Technology. The program director estimates that in a typical year, there are some 18-20 students in the first year HVAC track and 18-20 in the first-year Electrical Systems Technology track. Of these students, some 16-20 complete summer coursework and move on to the second year towards the A.A.S. Two groups of students have already graduated from the A.A.S program.

There are currently 15-20 students enrolled. Students are male, between the ages of 18 and 85, with the majority in their 30s; across multiple semesters, the race and ethnicity breakdown of students has been approximately 50-55% African American, 40-45% White, and 5-10% Latinx.

River State University. The second case is a college-in-prison program offered by River State University (RSU), a public four-year institution. RSU's program grants college credits, but does not confer certificates or degrees. In terms of further education, the program is intended to help students transfer into community colleges, if desired. The program curriculum focuses largely on the Humanities and Social Sciences, spanning English, Literature, Writing, Sociology, Art History, History, and Cultural Studies. One quarter of the courses are writing courses to ensure that students strengthen written communication skills. Although courses are normally taught face-to-face, the COVID-19 pandemic suspended in-person instruction in Fall 2020; a few faculty participants noted that they transitioned to correspondence-based instruction toward the end of that semester.

A typical semester is 7.5 weeks in length, with classes schedule to meet twice a week for three hours each; given inconsistencies in prison schedules, various faculty reported teaching 2.5 hours each class meeting. The majority of faculty described their teaching format as seminar/workshop, followed by lecture, and a mix of lecture and hands-on learning. To participate, students must: (a) have a GED or high school diploma, (b) take the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), and (c) have 10 years or less remaining on their sentence; if seats are available, someone with a longer sentence—including a life sentence—can participate. The faculty participants in this program teach in six different prisons, the majority of which are minimum custody; five of the six prisons are male facilities. Across the six prisons, students'

ages range from 18-65, with the majority in their 30s-50s. Student race and ethnicity across prisons is roughly 40-60% Black, 40-60% White, and 5-10% Latinx or Asian.

Mountainside University. The third case is a college-in-prison program offered by Mountainside University (MU), a four-year private university. The program falls under Adult and Online Education and offers an Associate of Science in Behavioral Science and is meant to help students pursue a Bachelor of Social Work and/or move into a range of helping professions. Coursework spans a wide range of areas, including English, Math, Religion, Social Work, Exercise Science, Psychology, Fine Arts, and Sociology. The program has traditional 15-week semesters, with classes meeting once a week for three hours each time. Under normal circumstances, classes are provided via face-to-face instruction, but due to COVID, courses switched to remote format in the Spring 2020 semester. The remote courses are provided synchronously by faculty who log in from home using MU's learning management system; in the prison, a facilitator is in the classroom with students and also logs in.

The program is held in one male medium security prison, with 11 enrolled students. According to an article from MU's campus magazine, students are male and between 25 and 50 years of age; the race and ethnicity breakdown of students is approximately 70% African American, 20% White, and 10% Latinx. Most of the enrolled students have some community college experience in non-academic curriculum. To participate in the program, students must first undergo multiple screenings from the Department of Corrections about behavioral issues, time remaining on sentence, and work release readiness. Once approved by the DOC, students must apply for admission with MU. MU requires that students: (a) have a GED or high school diploma and/or submit a high school transcript and standardized test scores (if available), (b) complete an interview, and (c) have no less than seven or eight years remaining on their

sentence. One faculty member noted that the prison wanted students with more time remaining on their sentences so that they could act as positive role models for other incarcerated individuals. The program director added that the intent was to ensure that students who completed the program also had enough time to prepare for community re-entry.

Participant Selection and Recruitment. The following inclusion criteria were used to recruit faculty participants: (a) taught in a credit-bearing higher education program in prison in one state in the U.S. South, (b) had taught for at least one semester in the program during the previous two years, and (c) was from an accredited two- or four-year institution of higher education. Regarding staff participants, the following inclusion criteria were used: a) coordinated and/or managed a credit-bearing higher education program in prison in one state in the U.S. South, b) coordinated and/or managed a program for at least one semester during the previous two years, and c) was from an accredited two-or four- year institution of higher education.

Ultimately, the only program staff—and therefore the only staff participants—were the directors of each of the three programs³. For River State University (RSU) and Lake Community College (LCC), after obtaining approval from the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study, I first emailed the program directors introducing the study and requesting a phone meeting. For Mountainside University (MU), the Director of Education in the state Department of Corrections emailed the director of the prison program on my behalf. I subsequently spoke with each director to explain my educational and professional background, learn about the impacts of COVID-19 on the status of programming, describe the goals of the dissertation study, and gauge their interest in participating in the study (both as an individual participant and as a program whose faculty would also participate). After introductory

³ Each staff participant's official title is not Program Director, but for the purposes of this study, I use this title, as they are the primary managers of each program.

calls, I emailed the program directors: (a) a short description of the study with an overview of the methodology, (b) a copy of the IRB approval from NC State University, (c) participant inclusion criteria, and (d) the recruitment email template that would be sent to each faculty member to request participation in the study; this email provided a short description of the study and listed the inclusion criteria, including willingness to participate in all four types of data collection: (a) demographic and professional background questionnaire, (b) semi-structured interview, (c) observation (which, as will be described later, was modified into a classroom description worksheet to be completed by each faculty and staff participant), and (d) sharing program- and course-related documents (see Appendix A for recruitment email template).

The director of the RSU program reviewed the materials and approved moving forward with the study. The directors of the LCC and MU programs first shared the materials with leadership in their respective institutions and areas—and at the community college, with their IRB office—before confirming participation in the study. To recruit faculty at RSU, the program director provided a list of faculty who met inclusion criteria and their emails. The director subsequently sent a message to all qualifying faculty on RSU’s learning management system, notifying them to expect an initial email from me. For recruitment at MU and LCC, the program directors asked to make the initial contact with faculty. Once they heard back from those who were willing to participate, they provided me with their names and emails to initiate contact. I subsequently sent each participant the recruitment email template.

Ultimately, of the 13 individuals that met the inclusion criteria at RSU, 11 agreed to participate (10 faculty and one Program Director/faculty), with nine completing all four phases of the study. Of the seven prospective participants that met the inclusion criteria at LCC, four participated (three faculty and one Program Director), with two completing all phases of the

study. Additionally, of the nine people that met the inclusion criteria at MU, six agreed to participate (five faculty and one Program Director), with three completing all four phases of the study. In short, across the three programs, a total of 21 people participated in the study. In the section on data collection, I indicate how many participants completed each stage of data collection.

Participants. Table 1.1 indicates the demographic characteristics of study participants by program. As the data indicate and is true of most college-in-prison administrators and faculty across the United States (Ginsburg, 2019), the majority of participants in this study self-identify their race/ethnicity as White.

Table 1.1.

Participant Demographics by Program

| | Lake (n=4) | Mountainside (n=6) | River State (n=11) |
|--|------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Gender Identity | | | |
| Woman | 2 | 3 | 7 |
| Man | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | |
| White | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| Asian | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Two or more races | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Age | | | |
| Under 29 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 30-39 | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| 40-49 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 50-59 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| 60 or older | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Highest Education | | | |
| Associate's | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Bachelor | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Master's | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Ph.D. | 0 | 5 | 4 |
| Professional | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Median yrs. working in higher education | 12.5 | 15 | 7 |

Table 1.1. (continued).

| | | | |
|---|------|----|---|
| Median yrs. working in prison- based education | 6.75 | <1 | 2 |
|---|------|----|---|

Note: Under highest education level, Professional refers to degrees such as M.D., J.D., D.D.S., etc.

In addition to demographic information, participants provided information about their professional backgrounds in questionnaires. In terms of professional experience prior to their current position, LCC participants indicated social work, HVAC, K-12 education, and the private sector. At MU, two participants indicated that they have spent their entire career in higher education; three in higher education and another field, including social work, the private sector, and corrections; and one in athletic training. The vast majority of participants at RSU indicated teaching at the college level, including community colleges and four-year institutions. Other professional backgrounds represented were the legal field, the arts, development work, private sector, and postdoctoral work. One participant at LCC, one at MU, and none at RSU have worked in another college-in-prison program in the state. One participant at RSU has worked in a college-in-prison program out of state, while none have done this work at LCC or MU. Two out of three faculty at LCC, four out of five at MU, and one out of 11 faculty at RSU indicated that their prison class is part of their regular teaching load.

Data collection

Demographic and Professional Background Questionnaires. As the first step in the study, each participant was asked to complete a demographic and professional background questionnaire (see Appendices B and C). The questionnaires for both faculty and staff gathered

key demographic information such as self-identified race/ethnicity, gender identity, highest level of education, and age. The faculty questionnaire also asked participants to describe their educational and professional backgrounds, academic disciplines, current and past courses taught in prison, time spent in prison classrooms per week, time teaching in higher education, and time teaching in prison. Additionally, questionnaires asked faculty participants to provide information about whether or not their prison course is part of their regular teaching load, how they were recruited and by whom, and the nature and level of support they receive from their academic departments and institutions to teach in prison. Staff questionnaires asked participants to describe their educational and professional backgrounds, time working in higher education, and time working in the college-in-prison program. Questionnaires were distributed via a secure Qualtrics form. Participants were first directed to an informed consent form in Qualtrics before completing or foregoing the questionnaire. More than half of participants had to sign an updated consent form in Qualtrics due to a change in the data collection methods (i.e., from observations to classroom description worksheets) in response to COVID-19. Across all three programs, 100% of participants completed the questionnaire.

Semi-structured Interviews. Interviews were the primary method of data collection in this study. Interviews remain one of the most important research methods in the CCS approach, as participant accounts allow for rich, nuanced, and in-depth within-case and horizontal comparisons (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). One-on-one semi-structured interviews captured key information from all participants while allowing for flexibility in the order and the depth of conversation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Patton (2015) described six types of interview questions. As is evident in the interview protocols (see Appendices D and E), the interview questions for the present study were

predominantly of two types: (a) experience and behavior and (b) opinion and value. Participants were invited to participate in interviews via email upon completion of demographic and professional background questionnaires. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, save for one which took place via phone. All interviews were audio-recorded (in Zoom and on a portable audio recorder) with the participant's consent and took place in a private and quiet setting. The portable audio recorder was kept in a locked drawer throughout the duration of the study and interview audio were uploaded to a secure Google drive after each interview. Across the three programs, 100% of faculty and staff completed an interview, with the majority of interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes; one interview lasted 120 minutes and another, 180 minutes.

Classroom Description Worksheets. In addition to questionnaires and interviews, each participant completed a classroom description worksheet. I initially proposed to conduct classroom observations in each program to get a sense of the physical setting and environment of the prison classrooms as well as the educational experiences they enabled and disabled. However, by the time of data collection in late summer/early fall of 2020, two of the three programs had suspended classes for the fall semester due to COVID-19. With the ability to only observe classrooms in one program, I decided to modify this data collection method to a Classroom Description Worksheet that would enable me to capture much of the information I otherwise would have collected through observation.

I provided each faculty and staff participant with a worksheet (see Appendix F), in which they were asked to sketch the prison classroom(s) and to share their descriptive and reflective observations. Descriptive observations included descriptions of the physical setting and environment (e.g., The room is small; The classroom is well-ventilated). Reflective observations included descriptions of how the physical setting and environment impacted teaching and

learning (e.g., It's quite noisy right outside the classroom, which can be very distracting for me and the students). While I was unable to directly observe classrooms, having faculty and staff complete the worksheet allowed me to compare descriptions and observations of the same classrooms and in the case of RSU, collect data on classrooms in multiple prisons; had I conducted observations, it might have been difficult to get access to the various prisons. Nine of 11 RSU participants, three of four LCC participants, and two of six MU participants completed the classroom description worksheet.

Documents. As a fourth form of data collection, I gathered program- and course-related documents from study participants. Documents comprise written, visual, digital, and physical materials (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and provide important contextual, historical, and descriptive information, without researchers having to insert themselves into the research setting as is typical with interviews or observations (Merton, 2015). At RSU, 10 (out of 11) participants submitted a total of 59 documents, with the vast majority being course syllabi and assignment prompts. At LCC, two (out of four) participants submitted 26 documents, with the majority being course assignments and project prompts. Additionally, four (out of six) participants at MU submitted 45 documents, the majority of which were class assignment prompts and lecture slides. Examples of additional document types submitted across programs include the program proposal used when initially applying for funding and approval of the program, a campus magazine article about the program, an orientation sheet for new instructors in the program, library material request forms, exams, and grading rubrics, among other documents.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously and inform one another (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As such, data analysis for the present study began upon

gathering the first pieces of data—in this case, demographic and professional background questionnaires. Questionnaires provided important background information on participants and helped to identify areas in need of clarification in interviews. To analyze interviews, I first transcribed each one, utilizing the automatic transcription tool in Zoom; I manually transcribed the sole interview I conducted via phone. As the automatic transcription tool in Zoom does not capture speakers' statements with 100% accuracy, I first cleaned each transcript and subsequently uploaded them into QDA Miner Lite, a free Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) program. Transcripts corresponding to each program were saved as individual "projects" in QDA Miner Lite. I then conducted a broad scan of the interview data corresponding to each program, taking initial notes in a hard copy research journal about general ideas, overall tone, depth of information, and credibility of participants. Based on initial notes, I developed analytic memos to enable further reflection on initial impressions (Heath & Street, 2008; Saldaña, 2016). It is important to note that due to COVID-19, participants in each program shared information that deviated from a typical semester, where classes are provided entirely in person and without interruption.

After getting an overall sense of the interview data in each program, I began the coding process. During first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016), I conducted two rounds of open-ended and eclectic coding, analyzing text by paragraph and research question, and using three types of codes (a) *in vivo* codes, which are verbatim words or short phrases from interviews (e.g., "Prison education is an investment"), (b) descriptive codes (e.g., for descriptions of training, teaching, and faculty and staff advocacy), and (c) *a priori* codes generated from the conceptual framework and relevant literature (e.g., anti-recidivist logic, student-faculty interaction, community-building). These three types of codes allowed me to address the research questions, take note of

key descriptive information, incorporate and honor the voices of study participants, and stay close to the conceptual framework and relevant bodies of scholarship and research. In addition to taking notes in a hard copy researcher journal I used the “comment” tool in QDA Miner Lite to attach comments and impressions to particular codes.

After coding each interview twice in the first cycle of coding, I uploaded documents into the respective projects in QDA Miner Lite, using the “variables” tool to create different categories of documents corresponding to each participant (e.g., syllabus, assignment, campus magazine article, program prospectus, etc.). Before coding documents, I assessed the authenticity of documents (McCulloch, 2004) using suggested questions from Guba and Lincoln (1981), including who the author is, for whom the document is intended, based on what sources of information, and possible sources of bias.

After assessing the authenticity of documents, I conducted content analysis employing the coding process described above. Qualitative content analysis enables researchers to examine “latent and more context-dependent meaning” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Schreier, 2014). In the context of the present study, latent meanings included, for example, underlying values tied to the purpose of higher education in prison. I employed a similar data analysis procedure for classroom description worksheets to develop composite descriptions of prison classrooms in each program. Throughout this process, I continued to create memos of impressions and questions—including clarification questions for participants—in the researcher journal.

After completing first cycle coding for each program, I conducted second cycle coding, in which the aim is to further focus and consolidate the coding scheme (Saldaña, 2016). I utilized pattern coding (Saldana, 2016) to group individual codes (e.g., library access, study hall, tutoring) into larger categories (e.g., resources and services for students) and subsequently into

broad themes corresponding to each research question (e.g., Resources and services for students are a work in progress). This process allowed for in-depth within-case analyses and the development of preliminary themes/findings by program. I subsequently conducted a cross-case analysis to establish final themes across programs and by research question. As a final step, I “read” the findings through the lens of education debt to enable further discussion about the nature and quality of educational experiences afforded to incarcerated students enrolled in the programs under study; to do this, I coded the narratives within themes using the four components of education debt: (a) historical debt, (b) economic debt, (c) sociopolitical debt, and (d) moral debt.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that rather than reliability and validity, trustworthiness remains the most appropriate standard of rigor in qualitative research. Trustworthiness and credibility was established in the present study in numerous ways. First, I thoroughly disclosed the data collection and analysis strategies employed throughout the study. Second, I shared the main findings—the final cross-case themes as well as within-case findings—with participants in each program (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to ensure that I accurately captured their perspectives and descriptions. Third, I triangulated my findings using multiple methods of data collection (questionnaires, interviews, classroom description worksheets, and documents) and multiple sources of data (e.g., cross-checking interview data collected from different people with divergent perspectives). For example, it was important to examine participants’ conceptualizations of the purpose of higher education in prison in interviews as well as in quotations from a magazine article or the program proposal.

Fourth, I provide rich descriptions of settings and participants to the extent possible given confidentiality issues to allow readers to appropriately contextualize study findings and determine the level of transferrability to other places and programs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Fifth, I disclosed the sources and purposes of the documents collected for the study, again in an effort to provide proper context and background. Lastly, I comprehensively engaged with data, noting both confirming and disconfirming information as well as striving to reach saturation (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). In the next section, I provide a subjectivity statement with the intent of further enhancing the trustworthiness of the present study.

Subjectivity Statement

In qualitative research, the researcher has a responsibility to explicitly state her position and biases to the fullest extent possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To this end, I acknowledge several fundamental premises from which I approach the current research. First, as evidenced by this dissertation, I am firmly in favor of prison-based higher education. Furthermore, I believe that mass incarceration is one of the greatest injustices of our time and that higher education professionals and institutions have a responsibility to: a) defend education as a human right b) ensure that postsecondary education—regardless of the context—is of high quality and guided by what best serves students, (c) support formerly incarcerated students who seek to pursue further education, (d) call attention to the dehumanizing impacts of incarceration, not only on incarcerated individuals, but also on communities that often lie in close proximity to colleges campuses, and e) support a wide range of efforts aimed at dismantling society's overreliance on prisons.

Interest in the issue of higher education in prison. In the fall of 2017, I started the Higher Education doctoral program at North Carolina State University. Every day, on my

commute to campus, I drove past Central Prison, Raleigh's first prison and a facility constructed by incarcerated individuals over a period of 14 years. Central Prison is only two miles from NC State, so close that it could easily be a part of the college campus. It was not lost on me that I was driving somewhere to take classes in a PhD program while minutes away, people were locked up, with access to few educational or life opportunities. I became curious about whether or not NC State provided classes to individuals incarcerated in Central Prison; I quickly learned that they did not. I began to read everything I could find about prison education, learning in the process that there was little scholarship and research on higher education programming in prisons. I did, however, come across an article that Dr. Erin Castro at the University of Utah had co-published with five incarcerated students and scholars. In addition to arguing for expanded provision of higher education in prisons, the authors broached the critical question, "What should postsecondary education look like in prison?" (Castro et al., 2015, p.17). Drawing on Foucault (1977), they framed the overrepresentation of vocational and technical education-based offerings in prisons as a form of disciplinary power intended to transform incarcerated bodies into productive subjects of the state (Castro et al., 2015). The authors also highlighted the problematic tendency—in academic scholarship and in public discourse—to position higher education in prison predominantly as a correctional intervention (Castro et al., 2015). This single article impacted me in a way that no other piece of scholarship had done before, not only in its arguments, but in its form—co-publishing across prison walls is no simple feat, but a necessary one to push dialogue forward with those most impacted by the criminal (in)justice system in this country. The article also helped me understand the need for more higher education practitioners and scholars—including and mostly, currently and formerly incarcerated scholars—to contribute to research, dialogue, and advocacy that would help to center issues of access, equity, quality,

and justice in the realm of prison education. Since 2017 and in community with currently and formerly incarcerated as well as non-incarcerated practitioners and scholars, I have engaged consistently with the issue of prison education through research; internships with universities, policy organizations, and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety; collaborating with community-based organizations that work in the area of prison education; prison higher education conferences; and popular and academic literature on college-in-prison programs and policy. All of these experiences have influenced my thinking greatly, particularly in further emphasizing the importance of approaching prison education with a critical eye while at the same time elucidating the limits of critical frameworks in a system as oppressive as a prison.

Identity-based considerations. I could not have become interested in the issue of prison education in the first place were it not for my personal history. I have long been interested in social-justice related concerns, a circumstance that was borne in part out of childhood and adolescent experiences. I grew up in New Jersey as the child of working class, Japanese immigrant parents in a predominantly white, Christian town. My brother and I were some of the few students of color—and bilingual students—in all of the public schools we attended in NJ throughout our lives. Like many people of color who grow up in predominantly white spaces, I considered whiteness both the norm and the ideal. I was called a Chink by strangers at school and saw friends poke fun at other Asians who could not pass as white; my brother was bullied for being different and subsequently struggled through school; my parents—who speak very poor English to this day—were powerless to intervene. My mother and father worked a lot in jobs that gave little long-term security and their linguistic and cultural identities prevented them from being able to build networks of support and friendship with the American families around them. While at the time, I did not understand my experiences in these terms, in college and beyond, it

was precisely these experiences that gave me a way to connect with and become more interested in questions of power, privilege, inequity, race, and culture. I have spent the majority of my adult life trying to educate myself about systemic injustice. The bulk of my professional career has been in higher education, where I have drawn on these interests and experiences to think about different student populations and differential access to success, empowerment, and belonging; I see my desire to engage with the issue of prison higher education as a natural outgrowth of this trajectory.

At the same time, I do not for one moment pretend to understand something as foreign and complex as incarceration and recognize my privileges as an Asian female who has never been targeted by law enforcement nor had to fight to gain access to education. While I identify as a woman of color with a particular story of (dis)empowerment that may overlap in some ways with the narratives of other people of color or non-dominant groups, I remain cautious not to over identify with those whose struggles have been far greater than mine and thus, unintelligible to me; incarcerated people and their educational histories and realities certainly fit into this category. My race, life circumstances, and educational background inevitably position me as a privileged person looking at phenomena (both mass incarceration and higher education in prison) that impact one of the most disenfranchised populations in the United States. I thus acknowledge my inherent power as a researcher and see it as my responsibility to regularly consult critical and justice-impacted mentors and colleagues about my assumptions, blind spots, and limitations in an effort to do the issue of prison-based higher education proper justice. For example, one of my greatest blind spots remains the fact that I have never taught at the college level in a U.S. prison; I have taught English in a women's prison in Ecuador, an experience that has helped to foster my understanding of prison education and the environmental limitations of a prison, but is certainly

not the same as having in-depth knowledge about teaching higher education in U.S. prisons. As such, I have been careful throughout the research process to turn to experts and colleagues who have participated in, taught in, and/or directed college-in-prison programs as sounding boards for my thought process.

Ethical considerations. All research should emphasize a strong ethical foundation, a circumstance that I took seriously in pursuing this work. In order to protect the rights and confidentiality of participants, I obtained approval to conduct this study from North Carolina State University's IRB as well as from each program in the study. Further, I provided each participant with an electronic consent form in Qualtrics (see Appendix D) and also assigned pseudonyms to each participant and postsecondary institution providing the college-in-prison program.

In the data collection process, I was transparent with interviewees about the purpose of the research and the potential uses of findings. Further, I provided respondents with the interview protocol as well as any other materials upon request. With regard to Classroom Description Worksheets and documents, I described the goals of the broader research as well as of these two forms of data collection. I also fully disclosed my background and intentions as well as explained how I planned to maintain participant confidentiality.

While the level of risk for faculty and staff participants was minimal, one ethical concern was that faculty interviewees may experience discomfort in having to comment about their training to teach in prisons if they have had little or no professional development in this regard. What is more, faculty and staff may experience feelings of unease, frustration, or even guilt in commenting about the educational experiences afforded to incarcerated students in their courses and programs, particularly in those facilities where staffing, organizational structure, and funding

(among other factors) may inhibit practices or services that they would otherwise support. To address this, I made clear that (a) they could elect to pass on particular questions or provide comments “off the record” and (b) that the goal of the research was not to critique individual actors but to read their perspectives as part of the broader landscape of higher education in prison in the southern U.S. as well as the complex history and reality of education within the country’s prisons.

Although I firmly believe that the perspectives of incarcerated students are crucial—one can argue *most* crucial—in understanding the state of prison-based education, I have intentionally avoided including students as interview participants based on my belief that undertaking research involving highly vulnerable populations requires long term, in-depth, and thoughtful consideration, not only with respect to grappling with the unequal power dynamics embedded in the research process, but to ensuring that the participation of marginalized people does not unintentionally lead to further oppression, exploitation, or fetishization. I also believe that researchers involving vulnerable populations in their work have a heightened responsibility to spend ample time cultivating knowledge, experiences, and relationships that will allow the voices of participants to be heard in meaningful and impactful ways; while I have devoted the past four years to understanding the complexity of prison-based higher education and gaining applied experience in this field, my relationships with stakeholders involved with college-in-prison are still evolving and I still have a lot to learn. Therefore, I do not yet feel that I can justify nor do justice to research that engages incarcerated students as participants. I thus claim the absence of student voices as both a strength and limitation of my research.

Limitations

The present research has several limitations. First, the study only highlights credit-bearing higher education programs in prisons in the southern U.S. Incarcerated students in the state also take vocationally-oriented coursework towards certificates of completion and some may access extension courses. These opportunities are important and worth investigating in their own right. In addition, in focusing the research on one state, the extent to which study findings will be transferrable will depend on how similar the historical and contemporary context of the criminal justice system and prison-based education is in other places; as such, the findings may be highly informative for other states in the South, but far less so for states like California and Washington which are on the forefront of delivering higher education opportunities in prisons. What is more, given the variation of historical, educational, and political contexts within any given region of the country, it is not necessarily the case that study findings would be helpful for other southern states. In an attempt to address this, I have provided as much information as possible about the programs to allow others to determine the degree of transferability to their own contexts. Additionally, while this study examines faculty training as well as student engagement and scholarship from the field of higher education in prison to consider the quality of programs, quality in higher education is conceptualized in myriad ways that are not accounted for in this particular study. Lastly, as previously indicated, the student voice is absent from this research, suggesting a need to identify ethical and feasible methods to incorporate students' perspectives and see how they do and do not align with those of faculty and staff. To answer any questions about nature and quality of programs, the student voice is paramount. In spite of these limitations, the present study is a valuable contribution to the relatively small body of empirical

and critical scholarship on higher education in prison and has the potential to inform and enhance the practices of the college-in-prison programs under study as well as the prisons and the DOC.

INTERLUDE: THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON COLLEGE-IN-PRISON

There is no way to do justice to what COVID-19 has been like for incarcerated people and their families. However, I include the following excerpts from study participants to honor the experiences of students and faculty during a monumentally challenging time.

Vanessa (Faculty, Mountainside University): I was recording lectures on flash drives and sending them only to find out that their computers wouldn't even play MP3 files...so I couldn't even communicate with them, let alone them connecting with me. So there was this time where they were getting no communication and the students thought that [the university] had just sort of dropped them because we were sending stuff, but the facility was so overburdened they weren't even telling the students. Students were showing up to class and no one was there; it was very bad.

Ed (Program Director, Mountainside University): Initially there was great concern. I went in and once we had COVID-19, there was a time period where nothing was happening. We were trying to figure out how to finish up that semester. I was working with teachers and I was taking materials to the students...actually giving the warden or the education coordinator at the site their lessons and things such as tests or whatever. And after a while, several weeks, the students had a lot of concerns and an officer emailed me and said, they're concerned and I talked with the warden and he allowed me to go talk with them and they voiced their concerns; you know, 'Are we going to be allowed to finish this program, is this program done? So they had concerns because they were in the dark.

Mindy (Faculty, Lake Community College): This summer was bad because we ended up online, and then unfortunately our facility had COVID cases. And it got bad, like we had I think [several hundred] cases they're saying now. All of my students in my [prison] class were given

incompletes because they were no longer allowed to go to [the] education [unit], which makes total sense, you're trying to isolate everybody. So I don't know what that's going to look like; some of those guys were close to graduating and getting out of [the prison] as well. So I don't know who's going to come back, who's not going to come back. We'll just have to wait and see.

Mindy (Faculty, Lake Community College): I taught [this summer], but I taught it through the [learning management system]. We have a special portal that is just for [the prison], which limits their ability to move about into internet or anything like that. But the frustrating part about that is that the guys were given an hour a day to go and work on the computer and they were having to decide, am I going to do my Psych class or am I going to do my English class today? A lot of them would message me but then by the time I messaged them back, even if it was 30 minutes, they were gone. So what we ended up deciding to do after the first week, I was like, this is not working. If they want to do the work on [the lms], fine, but I'm going to send them paper copies of everything. I even took my lectures and my PowerPoints, and made a book for them where they can read all the lectures and everything and then do their work from their dorm is what they call it, but wherever they were. That way they can turn it in. We had somebody going in once a week to pick up work.

Charles (Program Director, Lake Community College): So the problem that we've got right now is that there is no movement within the camp [the prison]. So when I say they're eating out of bags, I'm talking, think about kindergarten field trip. You know, here's your bag lunch. They're not actually in cells, they're in more, think of like military barracks. So they actually see the same eight people all the time.

Alexandra (Faculty, River State University): I'm actually teaching again this semester. But it's a completely paper based-course. No in-person instruction. So I'll travel there [the prison]

to kind of pick up student work and meet with the prison representative like the education coordinator, but I don't see any of the students. So there's just...it's a slog. there's just, it's a slog. There's all kinds of delays and it's pretty tough not having that ability to speak to students and clarify things, you know (laughs). They'll write me notes that I'll get like a week and a half later, and it takes a while for my stuff to get back to them.

Casey (Faculty, River State University): They don't have the level of technological ability in prison for that [remote learning] to work. They could maybe video conference you in and then they would have to have a CO sit there the whole time. And that wouldn't work for my class.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This qualitative case study examined the nature and quality of three college-in-prison programs in a southern U.S. state via program faculty and staff perspective and experiences. The study was guided by the overarching research question: What do the perspectives and experiences of college-in-prison program faculty and staff reveal about the nature and quality of programs and the higher education made available to incarcerated college students? Four sub-questions helped to further focus the research:

- a. How do program faculty and staff conceptualize the purpose of higher education in prison?
- b. What kind of training do faculty receive to teach in prison?
- c. What kind of educational experiences are faculty and staff able to facilitate in prison?
- d. What do faculty and staff advocate for with regard to the educational experiences afforded to incarcerated students?

The present study examined three college-in-prison programs in one southern U.S. state. Each program is provided by a distinct type of postsecondary institution: (a) a public four-year university (River State University), (b) a private four-year university (Mountainside University), and (c) a community college (Lake Community College). The study generated four main themes:

Theme 1: Faculty and staff in the three programs reinforce, depart from, or challenge correctional conceptualizations of higher education in prison.

Theme 2: Faculty training in all three programs fails to go beyond safety and security-related matters.

Theme 3: The educational experiences made available in the three programs are (dis)empowering.

Theme 4: Faculty and staff in the three programs advocate for improving the student experience to the extent possible.

In the following, I present and elaborate on each theme.

Theme 1: Faculty and Staff in the Three Programs Reinforce, Depart from, or Challenge Correctional Conceptualizations of Higher Education in Prison.

Critical scholars and practitioners of higher education in prison have underscored the need to examine how different stakeholders in the realm of prison-based college programming conceptualize the purpose of higher education in prison (HEP, hereafter) (Castro & Gould, 2018; Castro, 2019). They argue that how people view the aims of HEP has implications for the scope and diversity of programming in prison. In this study, faculty and staff across programs shared a variety of conceptualizations—in some cases providing explicitly correctional perspectives, in others blending correctional goals with non-correctional aims, while in others, challenging the notion of HEP as a correctional tool.

Reducing Recidivism and Investing in Families and Communities. Various faculty across all three programs highlighted two specific purposes: (a) reducing recidivism and (b) investing in families and communities. Vanessa, an English professor in the MU program, noted, “If people get released from incarceration and they have very few skills...we should expect high recidivism rates. And so, just as a sheer investment in the common good.” Matt, a professor of Religion at MU added:

If we can rehabilitate in any way those gentlemen in that program so that they come out, they don’t fall victim to recidivism, and they can find a productive place in our society,

that's important to Mountainside University. That's the institution that we aspire to be, to change lives. And I can't think of any lives needing to be changed more than those lives that are being spent behind bars.

Matt explained that this sense of purpose stems from MU's Christian worldview, rooted in the importance of being of service to individuals and the greater good. At the same time, Matt shared his belief that education is only one aspect of reducing recidivism. He explained that:

We have to envelope [a] person in restoration and so that's mental, that's physical, that's spiritual, that's educational, and it's relational. It's in the arts, you've got to help this person from every perspective of his or her life, 360 degrees to rebuild themselves, and only then will we reduce recidivism.

The Director of the MU program highlighted the role that educational programs in prison play in stopping generational cycles of incarceration:

I want to hear success stories. I want to see programs that stop this cycle of, my father is in prison, my mother is in prison, I'm going to be in prison, my children are going to be in prison. That's what I'm hoping programs like this do inside the facility.

The Director commented about feeling a sense of fulfillment when re-encountering people—in church or elsewhere in public—that he once worked with in a prison-based education program and hearing about the success they have had in life. An article about the HEP program in MU's campus magazine as well as the initial proposal to establish the program (program prospectus, hereafter) likewise emphasize the reduction of recidivism as a benefit or purpose of the program; the latter references commonly cited statistics—that academic and vocational programming in prisons is associated with more than a 40 percent reduction in recidivism—and highlights the “transformative power of education.” The magazine article, however, additionally notes that a

program in another state that has had a high success rate with regard to reducing recidivism is not simply a result of students receiving a college education, but because they also obtain life skills and receive re-entry support. No faculty in this study discussed the importance of providing re-entry support alongside educational programming.

Like the MU Program Director, Kent, an HVAC instructor in the LCC program, highlighted the disruption of cycles of incarceration as the purpose of higher education in prison:

We're trying to get them [students] a skill that they can go out as soon as they get out of prison and become productive members of society. So we don't have to keep on spending thousands of dollars, putting them back in prison because some of these guys have been in prison four to five times, and it's just a revolving door.

Kent expressed concern not only about the phenomenon of recidivism, but about the costs of incarceration. Also like the director at MU, Kent described his involvement in the prison college program as his way of "giving back to the community." As is common of broader discourses about the benefits of higher education in prison, Kent at LCC and the MU program director credited prison-based college programs as helping to cultivate "productive members of society" or finding a "productive place in our society." Max, a professor of math in the MU program, added that HEP helps people become a "benefit to the society."

Several RSU faculty discussed HEP as an anti-recidivist tool. Gwen, an Art History professor in the program similarly talked about her rehabilitative role as a prison educator, but positioned it as something that lies in contrast to the punitive nature of the prison system:

I really had to commit to the fact that people can be rehabilitated, right. And instead of buying into this prison industrial complex, it's like, what can I do as a person, as an educator to help rehabilitate people in some sort of tangible way? So for me it was, not to

make it some sort of savior complex, but how can I and my political beliefs in the way that I want to live my life as an educator, how do I talk the talk and walk the walk? And this is part of the walking for me is to make my teaching accessible as well.

For Gwen, the purpose of prison-based college programs is not only about rehabilitation, but about educational access. Casey, a professor of English and Writing at RSU, pushed back against notions of rehabilitation, stating simply that the purpose of higher education in prison is to provide incarcerated individuals with an education. She commented, "I'm not one of the rehabilitative people. For me, in my classroom, the purpose is to support the learning of students, to give them as many resources and opportunities as I can." Cameron, also an English and Writing professor in the RSU program, strongly critiqued discourses positioning higher education in prison as helping incarcerated individuals:

There's this idea that prison teaching is somehow kind of virtuous and altruistic and...that only certain type of people do that work. And the students must be so grateful, yada, yada, yada. And to me, I think that that misunderstands the prison itself and misunderstands why incarcerated students are incarcerated. I don't find it to be this kind of altruistic, like I'm sure that that's really helping them right because the "them" is so pronounced when those sentences are uttered, and I think people just don't understand that incarcerated students are often victims of state violence and there's not just this bleeding heart perspective about it. It's like you've just got to go in and do the work like you're doing [with] any other class. And if you try to approach it in any other way, students are going to pick up on that and distrust you because ultimately it's your kind of cultural capital of being some woke ass instructor or whatever as opposed to caring about your students in the way that you care about any other student.

Like Cameron, Chris, a professor of sociology in the RSU program, humbled his role as a prison educator, explaining, “I never ever make any claims about transforming anybody’s life...what I can teach you is how to think sociologically, and I can treat you like a human being. That’s about as good as you’re going to get from me.”

In addition to reducing recidivism, some faculty and staff across programs also talked about HEP as an investment in families and communities. Mindy, a psychology professor at LCC, emphasized that HEP allows people to turn their lives around and better support themselves and their families:

people have an expectation that these guys serve their time and then we’re going to release them back out into the community and they’ve got to fend for themselves...what better opportunity than to give them education while they’re in prison to help them better themselves, better their lives, their families’ lives?

Mindy highlights HEP as a worthy time investment in prison. The program director at MU similarly talked about the benefits of HEP for students’ families:

I’ve heard several students talk about, ‘My wife said I need to get an education and the more education I get...the better that we can be...we’re more likely to be successful when you get out, the more we can have and make us a better life.’

Vanessa talked about a different type of investment in family and community, namely that students can be an educational role model for their children:

When I asked them [the students] what their strengths were, it was all about motivation and so many of them wrote about their kids. Most of them said, ‘I haven’t been a good role model to my children and maybe this is an opportunity, so I’m motivated.’ One of them said, ‘you know, my daughter’s 15 and she has no interest in going to college, but

maybe if I show her that I do college in prison'...So I mean, a number of them, it wasn't even for them. From their perspective, it was as much for their children, particularly the older students and that was very striking to me—that this is an investment, not just in these men who have done whatever they've done. But it's an investment in their families. And that's an investment in their communities.

Casey at RSU also described college-in-prison as an important point of connection for some families:

It's really meaningful to the people in prison and just emotionally and also materially for people who are getting out. I had a student who had been in prison for a while, maybe 10 years at this point, and his daughter was also in college at the same time and, my course was similar to a course that she was taking, so they would talk on the phone about their college classes.

Increasing Employment Opportunities. Common conceptualizations of higher education in prison also emerged among some faculty in the LCC and RSU programs. For example, select faculty in these two programs commented that HEP opens up more employment opportunities, thereby leading to more stability. Greg, a professor of English and Writing at RSU noted:

I think there is a value just from a practical level of, I got literature or humanities credit or I got a writing credit...three credits that go on my transcript...so I think that's valuable, especially if it is the case, we see all these stats about having a BA, having a degree really just puts you in a better position to get a more sustainable job down the road.

Mindy indicated that individuals with a criminal conviction can go into various helping professions, including substance abuse counseling and social work

I think there's a big assumption that if you have had a criminal background or you've served time that you can't get a job. And that's just not true. Even in the substance abuse field, you can be a felon and work in a substance abuse field because you've done those things, you know how to help people...I think if we don't provide these educational opportunities and training, then we're setting them up for even more failure.

The MU prospectus highlights that "inmates aspire to 'helping careers' upon release" and notes that one aim of the program is to prepare those interested to continue on to a Bachelor's program and work toward their career objectives.

Enhancing Sense of Self and Hope. Some faculty at LCC and MU also shared conceptualizations of the purpose of HEP. Specifically, they discussed HEP as a vehicle to enhance one's sense of self and hope. Amy, a professor of Exercise Science in the MU program expressed, "It provides them, the students, a sense of self-worth, and something that's motivating. A sense of purpose...while they're there [in prison]." Lauren at LCC added that HEP "increases their hope, self-esteem. They know when they get out, they can open an HVAC business and they have hope from that." Emma at MU discussed how HEP empowers students to identify as intellectual beings:

It allows the men to see themselves in some other situation other than the one that they've always been in...When you're in college classes, you can see yourself with a college degree...they all could see themselves in a different situation, in a different way...if you can start to see yourself as an intellectual, as a thinking man, as a rational man, then you can be those things.

Emma additionally shared her belief that everyone has value and the ability to “turn something around”—in this case, by engaging in one’s intellectual development.

Unique Within-Program Conceptualizations. Some unique ideas emerged among faculty and staff at MU. Tom, a math professor and Ed, the Program Director, commented that HEP helps to improve behavior and safety within the prison and can motivate other incarcerated individuals to participate in educational programming. Ed highlighted:

I’m hoping that other guys in the facility are seeing guys taking these programs and say, this is something that I could do. So it motivates others to try to find things that...make them more successful, that can help them stay out of trouble in prison.

Faculty and staff at RSU also shared unique insights about the purpose of HEP. The majority conceptualized the purpose of prison-based higher education as serving the same purpose(s) as higher education in general. For example, many talked about the significance of credentialing and increased social capital, particularly among employers. Alexandra, a professor of English and writing, remarked:

It can really help upon release, especially with the credit-granting programs to have something kind of substantial, something to their name that they can say and show employers that they are organized, consistent, they can complete a semester-long course. And they deserve to re-enter into society as kind of fully functioning members.

Cameron similarly stated:

I tell my students all the time, keep your certificates that I’m going to give you in this class, keep them for your jobs because even though you took one class at River State University...you have a single credit for a class that shows that you’re willing to do that kind of work and other people will identify with you.

Both Alexandra and Cameron highlight the harsh and incontestable reality that college credentials serve an important social function—that people see individuals with college experience as capable, reliable, and someone with whom they can identify. Cameron elaborated further about the manner in which HEP actively and explicitly counters the “de-credentialing function” of incarceration:

When people see that college certificate...they see that you have received a liberal arts education, that they can identify with you because they have also gone through that experience. They trust you implicitly because of that identification and then you can move out into the world and occupy different spaces because of that certification. So although it [higher education] doesn't have an inherent value, it has social value...And so I think with incarcerated students, they are de-credentialized by being in [the prisons] that I've taught.

Cameron sees college credentials as a tangible way to defy the “certificate of distrust” that people who have spent time in prison otherwise earn. Anna discussed how she came to see the purpose of HEP primarily in terms of credentialing from the students themselves:

From the feedback that they've [students] given me, I would say that it actually is the college degree that they're hoping for. So it's not necessarily enrichment for enrichment sake...they are very focused on, can I get a transcript here? Will this class transfer? Will I ultimately...will this be sort of progressive towards something very tangible like a degree?

Anna describes having gone into the work thinking about HEP in more abstract terms than in terms of its practical implications.

In addition to credentialing, a few faculty at RSU highlighted that like higher education in general, HEP lends itself to growth and development and to cultivating new modes of thinking. Alexandra described:

The social good that education performs for non-incarcerated people, it does the same for incarcerated people. You know, develop and grow and develop your perspective and be exposed to new knowledge and be exposed to something that might contradict what you believe and it just kind of forces that...it can help combat really negative effects of ignorance or lack of education, lack of access to kind of high-quality education.

Chris provided a critical example of HEP cultivating new modes of thinking, particularly through the sociological framework that emphasizes the connections between individuals and the broader society:

The fundamental theme of sociology is understanding the complex relationship between the individual and the larger society or social forces that are external to the individual...one of the reasons that I've been saying this, since I started teaching in prison is, there is not a population that could benefit more from a sociological imagination than this population of students who are incarcerated...because we tend to, and this is not just with respect to criminal justice but with respect to every aspect of society of human behavior in U.S. society is that we tend to fall back on the individual-level explanations. And so even if students don't go out and...continue their education upon release, I think that kind of...helping them develop a sociological imagination and understand how their individual-level experiences are connected to a broader socio-historical context and forces [is important].

Chris notes that because prisons abound with discourses of personal responsibility, engaging with sociological frameworks is both necessary and challenging.

Faculty from RSU also uniquely highlighted two other purposes of HEP. Various people talked about HEP as a vehicle for making visible—and educating non-incarcerated people of the realities and injustices of—prisons and mass incarceration. Alexandra shared:

Prison often operates as a black box; there's a reason why they're located really far away from major cities, right? They are where we put people to kind of forget about them, social problems to be sealed off and kind of...forgotten and kind of made invisible. So I think anything that combats that kind of invisibility, especially in this country, it's so likely that we all know someone who was incarcerated at some point. I mean, it's just so common, we lock up so many people. There's this contradiction that it's so banal on one hand, it's very common for people to spend time in prison, then we'll say maybe like normal middle-class people have no conception of what prison is, what it's like, who goes there and why. It's just considered this completely wild, far away, has nothing to do with them. So I think shining a light on the experience...for so many of our fellow citizens, this is their life. This is where they live. This is their existence.

Alexandra notes that HEP breaks down some of the barriers that have been intentionally built between prisons and incarcerated people on the one hand and the broader society on the other.

Joe likewise noted:

I think there's a value for instructors to see what the prison system in their particular state is like, and what happens in the dynamics of it. And so that you know that the prison industry is a kind of shadow industry that we don't hear much about...So I definitely have gotten value out of seeing that side of [the state].

Helen talked about HEP's role in both education her about—and increasing her interest in—the criminal (in)justice system:

I am so much more interested in this arena and the justice system just from working in that, which is embarrassing to say that it took me until I was working in the prison system to be interested in our justice system in a significant way.

Multiple faculty at RSU also highlighted the important ways in which HEP disrupts the logic and routine of the prison. Jenna notes that “to offer distraction, to offer normalcy...was something concrete that I could bring in.” Alexandra emphasized that HEP offers “incarcerated folks a very rare sense of control, you know that they are in control of their education, what they're interested, in what kind of topics make them who they are.” For Alexandra, HEP gives back some elements of agency and individuality that prisons strip from students. Helen added that HEP offers a way to “bring back humanity into the prison structure and especially if you're offering a course in the humanities.” In summary, faculty across programs shared diverse conceptualizations of the purpose of HEP, some of which had explicitly correctional aims and others a combination of correctional and non-correctional goals. Some faculty pushed back against notions of rehabilitation and reduced recidivism, highlighting that conceiving of HEP in these ways fundamentally misconstrues how mass incarceration operates and inflates the role of the instructor.

Theme 2: Faculty Training in all Three Programs Fails to go Beyond Safety and Security-related Matters

Faculty training is an important aspect of higher education (in prison). Across all programs, faculty shared that the only training they received to teach in prison was provided by the prisons and focused primarily on security-related policies and safety. In particular, faculty

received an orientation and training on the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), a law designed to address and prevent sexual violence in prisons as well as to institute zero-tolerance policies for sexual assault (Smith, 2020). According to Lauren at LCC, “PREA is all about creating boundaries between instructors and students, warning signs, things to watch out for.” Though PREA training is mandated by law, in a few rare instances, faculty in each of the programs did not receive the training for various reasons, including having received the training in a prior year, COVID-related complications, and unknown reasons. Although prisons are required to provide a refresher course on PREA every two years, the faculty member who had had the training in a prior year reported that it had been at least five years since her first and only training.

A handful of faculty across programs shared the ways in which their prison orientation and training emphasized discipline, control, and the potential threat of danger with respect to incarcerated students. For example, Mindy at LCC explained that she was told to “be stern and firm with them [students] from the get-go, lay out the rules...” Alexandra at RSU recalled, “They kept saying to me, they [students] are like middle-schoolers...you have to keep them busy, keep them active. Don’t let there be any downtime. Something bad’s going to happen.” With regard to concerns about safety, Vanessa at MU described:

I think what’s interesting about going in there is that I never thought about safety concerns until sort of being oriented from the corrections side. And so you do have to think about some things differently. But having said all that, in the classroom I never, ever, ever felt remotely insecure with the students or [that] there was any, any kind... I simply can’t conceive of these guys committing violence against me.

Many faculty across programs, including Mindy and Alexandra, echoed Vanessa's sentiment that their experience working with students in prison little resembled the ways in which correctional staff depicted.

Faculty across programs uniformly described the absence of training from the program side, likening their experience to being "thrown to the wolves" or a "baptism by fire." Various faculty across programs shared that they would have liked to have more information about the prisons, the students, working with correctional staff, and classroom facilities and resources for teaching, among other key areas. In the case of MU, Vanessa explained that the lack of faculty training was in part due to uncertainties and delays around initial funding for the program. She noted, "I think it was one of those things where, when the money finally came to start the program, it was right up against when we needed to start," leaving no time for the development and implementation of faculty training. Vanessa's comment aptly reflects the resource constraints that plague many college-in-prison programs. Still, she added, "The university does have faculty initiatives on main campus and I think that if the program stabilizes with COVID and our funding stabilizes, I'm confident we'll develop training." In the meantime, Vanessa described doing some light self-training about adult education and growth mindsets before beginning to teach in the program.

Though there was no formal training from the various universities, several faculty at MU and RSU described meeting with their respective program directors to discuss basic logistics and policies before entering the prison classroom. Helen at RSU described:

He [the program director] briefs us on kind of what's expected, the level of instruction that we're expected to give, but also the lack of resources that we'll have, who the population is you know, the facilities that we're going to, we're not going to the

maximum-security facility or anything like that. He talks about getting into the prison because, for most of us, we've probably never even been inside of one as a visitor.

Indeed, a "Guide for Correctional Education Instructors" provided to each faculty at RSU and submitted by one participant shows that pre-service information focuses on the basics of teaching in prison, including the various required steps (paperwork that needs to be completed, class roster, entering grades, doing course evaluations); what to do about school supplies, travel, food for class; and classroom discipline and safety, particularly the need to report any type of harassment to the Department of Corrections. The Guide comes with an Academic Information sheet to be distributed to each student, with information about post-release education (phone numbers, websites, advising, policies, etc.).

The program director at MU similarly commented that in initial conversations with faculty, he focuses on safety, classroom facilities, services for students, and—like the prison—the importance of keeping appropriate boundaries with students. He noted:

I don't want them to be best friends. I don't want them [faculty] to be taken advantage of. I don't want them to take advantage of, for example, the offenders also. So it's that dual situation... You want to keep it professional... You want to keep boundaries, probably tighter boundaries here than you would in a regular classroom.

The program director at LCC described doing some light training about the community college (some program faculty only teach at the prison) and the use of the learning management system in the prison.

Some faculty at RSU also indicated other important areas covered by the program director in their initial meeting. Anna, for example, explained that he "encouraged us to basically translate the classes that I was teaching at [the university] to the classes that I was teaching in the

prison.” The Program Director emphasized the importance of making classes as comparable as possible to on-campus offerings in terms of rigor. Alexandra added that the program director stressed the need to make course materials “so clear that they speak for themselves,” as students do not have the ability to email professors between classes. Greg explained that the director warned about harmful misconceptions that people often have of incarcerated students. He described:

Something that [the program director] and others did establish early on, which is [that there’s] a misconception, where you’re like, oh, I’m going to teach prisoners or something, as opposed to these are students...to have these kind of humanizing conceptions of them...so I think that should be established first because I think it’s easy again, with all the kind of societal misconceptions and misperceptions about what incarcerated folks are like or what kind of behavior is necessary around them.

Indeed, Anna shared her observations that some instructors in the RSU program fetishize the experience of teaching in prison:

One thing that I've noticed in talking with some of my colleagues, is that there's...a certain type of instructor who almost fetishizes the prison teaching experience. And I think that it's really important not to do that. I think that they think that it's really cool...I've noticed that in some of my interactions with my colleagues and I don't mean to give them a hard time about that...But I think it's important when you're distinguishing [on-campus] students versus prison students that yes, there are differences, but the fetishization that I think happens can be really counterproductive to the process.

As exemplified by Anna’s comment, it is critical that program directors caution faculty against fetishizing or exoticizing students in prison. Still, with no formal, standardized training from the

program or university side in any of the programs, it is likely that faculty do not receive information with any consistency before entering the classroom. The program director at RSU commented that for the most part, in talking with prospective or new faculty, he prefers to stick to the nuts and bolts of teaching and otherwise let faculty find their way because “What do you say about prison teaching that doesn’t other the whole enterprise?”

Beyond speaking with the program director, faculty at RSU talked about ad-hoc sharing of materials and resources as a form of preparation for teaching in prison. Anna shared, “We met a couple of times as instructors, groups of four or five, and we would talk about the syllabus or we would talk about others’ materials.” Cameron described similar instances of resource-sharing, but also highlighted that “faculty meetings are not trainings, it’s like skill share or here’s a new idea or this is a new thing we’ve got to worry about. That’s what the meetings tend to be geared towards, not necessarily training.” Several faculty also talked about connecting with faculty that had taught in the program as a form of preparation.

The majority of faculty and staff across all three programs expressed the need and desire to do more with faculty training. Although study participants in each of the programs had myriad suggestions for training, across the three, various people highlighted the need for more preparation on logistics and the basics (e.g., entering and exiting the prison, rules on what can and cannot be brought in, dress code, rules for the classroom, prison schedules and procedures that may impact teaching, etc.). Multiple faculty and staff at RSU and MU also emphasized the need for training on pedagogical issues, including teaching adult and non-traditional learners, teaching without technology, and accommodating students’ specific needs. Though in the minority, a few faculty felt that more training was not necessarily needed; some professors in the RSU program described their experience teaching at the college level—including in community

college where students had a diverse range of skills and backgrounds—as sufficient preparation for teaching in prison. Tom at MU noted that in addition to having ample years of experience teaching university students, he had taught in another prison in the state. Anna at RSU supported more faculty training, but also underscored the challenging nature of developing training for prison-based education “because so much was specific to the class itself...and so specific to the students themselves...that I don’t know what specific training might look like.” In summary, study findings revealed that across programs, the only formal training that faculty was received was from the respective prisons and specific to security-related policies and safety. Most faculty shared that in addition to the prison training, they met with their program directors to review general and logistical information. Faculty in the RSU program highlighted informal sharing of resources or speaking with faculty who had previously taught in the particular prisons to which they were assigned. Across programs, the majority of faculty and staff expressed the desire and need for more training.

Theme 3: The Educational Experiences made Available in the Three Programs are (Dis)empowering

Education scholars and researchers have long theorized the concept of student engagement in higher education, highlighting particular factors that contribute to enhanced learning and development in college (Astin, 1993; Tyler, 1949; Pace, 1980, 1984). In this study I drew on engagement benchmarks from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2020) to examine the educational experiences afforded to students in the three programs under study, including (a) level of academic challenge, (b) peer learning, (c) experiences with faculty, and (d) supportive campus environments, particularly with respect to resources and services for students. Additionally, I considered factors of the educational experience outside of a student

engagement lens and drawing from insights from the field of higher education in prison. In the following, I address each of these areas with respect to the RSU, LCC, and MU programs. For purposes of brevity, I provide only a few illustrative examples within each of these areas.

Academic Challenge. In spite of the myriad challenges of providing college programming in prisons, the majority of faculty across programs described their in-prison courses as being generally comparable to what they offer on campus in terms of rigor, desired learning outcomes, and holding high expectations of students; many faculty commented on the additionally challenging nature of their prison-based courses resulting from the lack of resources for students as well as the highly controlled nature of the prison environment. Within NSSE's (2018) engagement framework, academic challenge encompasses various aspects of student engagement, including two areas that participant accounts, syllabi, as well as assignment and paper prompts consistently highlighted: (a) higher order learning and (b) reflective and integrative learning. Briefly, higher order learning entails in-depth synthesis, analysis, and evaluation of ideas; applying facts and theories to practical problems or situations; and evaluating information sources. Faculty across programs described numerous examples of higher order learning. Greg, a literature professor at RSU, explained that his courses center on “coherently and persuasively analyzing works of literature” and interpreting course readings with peers. Helen and Gwen, both professors of Art History, commented that their courses focus on critical thinking and visual analysis. Helen noted:

They're learning to critically think of images and think about the situations in which images are produced; who controls the production of images, how images can be manipulated, and how that affects our day-to-day-lives. And I think because we are such a visual society that that's actually a more valuable skill than people tend to think of it as.

Vanessa, an English professor in the MU program, discussed facilitating critical and active reading through reading journals where students reflect on what they have read, consider if and how it challenges their thinking, or gives them a new perspective.

Classes across programs provide opportunities for students to connect course content and theories to practical problems or situations. Multiple faculty in the RSU program and Lauren at LCC explained that their writing classes allow students to analyze and practice diverse rhetorical and stylistic conventions of professional and academic writing. In Amy's Exercise Science class in the MU program, they "discuss how all the dimensions of wellness affect and interact with one another—physical, emotional, spiritual, environmental, mental, how one affects the rest. They're (course activities) are all kind of self-assessment and critical thinking, reflecting on those findings." Mindy's syllabus for her Interpersonal Psychology course in the LCC program describes that the course focuses on personality traits, communication and leadership styles, problem solving, and cultural diversity as relates to personal and professional development. Not surprisingly the HVAC-related courses in the LCC program combine hands-on training with problem solving and customer service skills, which prepares students to "get on an installation crew where they install equipment. They can become service technicians, where they go in and work on equipment. They can go work maintenance for a business...there's quite a few different routes they can go with."

Faculty across programs also highlighted numerous examples of reflective and integrative learning, which encompass activities such as examining one's beliefs and assumptions, considering diverse and alternative perspectives on critical issues, and combining ideas from different courses to complete assignments. For instance, Emma, a professor of Social Work in the MU program described:

I expect them to come out of it [the course] with a real critical look at how our society functions in a way that oppresses some and not others, and leads to the exclusion of many. And I do expect them to be able to look at it from both sides. You know, what beliefs do the oppressors have, whether they can still sleep at night. Are they all just monsters?

David, the program director at RSU and a professor of cultural studies, shared that in his course students discuss issues of identity, subjectivity, race, and gender; engage with critical theory; and consider popular culture materials through these critical texts. Various faculty in the MU program in particular noted how their program emphasizes metacognition, or the interconnections between and among coursework. Matthew reinforced that coursework is intended to help students:

see that a liberal arts education is not in isolation of or has nothing to do with other courses, but that the whole thing is just building and building upon something critical to see those connections internally within themselves as well as externally.

Across programs, faculty described academically challenging curricula that emphasize higher order, reflective, integrative, and applied learning. A close examination of what these programs offer remains important, as there is great variation in the scope of opportunities and experiences across programs, facilities, and states (Castro et al., 2018).

Learning with Peers. Peer learning and collaboration is an important aspect of learning and development in college (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Lane, 2018). Across the three programs, the majority of faculty discussed regularly incorporating peer work during class, mostly in the form of pair and group work as well as group discussion. Several faculty noted that because students in their programs tend to be older and have greater life experience than the

average-aged college student, class discussions tend to be more involved and organic. Casey at RSU highlighted, “They [students] know themselves and they are more open to participating and speaking and have more experiences to draw on. So the older thing I think is great.” NSSE emphasizes “discussions with diverse others”—in terms of race, ethnicity, class, religion, political views, among other areas of identity—as an important component of an engaging postsecondary experience. Various faculty in the three programs described how their coursework facilitates engagement with diverse perspectives. Matthew, a Professor of Religion at MU, described how his Introduction to Christianity class exposes students to religions outside of their own, both within and outside of Christianity. He noted that:

All of the students in the prison had a faith tradition and even those that are practicing...a unique African approach to the Muslim faith that is predominant in prisons, it started in the 1920s, most of the students that are gravitating toward that even come out of a Christian tradition and most of them Protestant...it made for interesting conversation.

As a stark illustration of how a prison-based college classroom might facilitate meaningful interaction among people who may otherwise never have opportunities to engage deeply with one another, Emma, a social work professor in the MU program, described having a student with a swastika tattoo on his forehead, noting “In any kind of group work, the former white supremacist has had to work with African American students.” She highlighted that although some prison officials expressed concern about in-class discussions about race due to the presence of racially segregated factions within the prison:

any time we talked about it [race], they all did pretty much agree with the facts presented to them. There wasn't any, what about white men? What about our rights, kind of thing that I expected...There was nothing like that.

In general, Emma described in-depth and fruitful group discussions about systemic oppression, the impact of different intersectional identities on life experiences and opportunities, among other areas.

While most faculty across programs described regularly incorporating peer work into their classes, a few RSU faculty described doing less or no peer work; instructors provided different reasons for this. Helen explained that uncertainties about interpersonal dynamics in the prison made her shy away from peer work in class:

I didn't do too much group work in the prison setting just because I wasn't sure how their dynamics are. I didn't know who knew each other and who didn't. I was not sure what the dynamics would be. And so when I initially designed the course, it was a lot less group work or small group work.

Cameron highlighted that peer work in class can be challenging because students often have little time for socializing outside of class:

I actually try to limit peer-to-peer work in the prison setting...I found that any kind of group work devolves extremely quickly into chatting because they have such curbed social lives that like any opportunity to talk, they're going to try to just shoot the shit essentially. And so in terms of actual academic work, I found that group work does not work in at least the men's prison [I worked in].

Cameron added that the hypermasculine environment of the prison can also make students uncomfortable with doing peer work that requires them to share their writing. In describing the creative writing unit in his writing class, Cameron noted:

Nobody wants to share work with one another because, especially I think it's different in the women's prison than it is in the men's prison because of the way that people perform

gender. There's like razzing that goes on between the guys. A lot of times it will devolve into, I don't care or they pretend not to care about the work as much as in the women's prison because it's not cool to really care about your personal narrative. It doesn't give you any sort of capital in the social environment.

Multiple other RSU faculty who teach writing also noted some students' reticence to share work, but more so due to the fact that their prior educational experiences had poorly, if at all, trained them in writing; as such, they were only comfortable sharing their work with the professor. Cameron added that the creative writing unit is otherwise often the most popular aspect of the course because students "want to be able to tell their stories."

Interviews with faculty revealed that outside of class, students in the various programs have different degrees of opportunity for peer learning and collaboration. At MU, they utilize a cohort model to ensure that students move through coursework together and build community and camaraderie. The program director noted:

What we were really hoping for with this program is since it's a cohort of students, that they would bond together and work and learn together because that's an important skill. Once they're released and they get into occupations, they're going to have to work with others in a professional manner and that's what they're doing.

Further, in the MU program, students have study hall five days a week for two to two and a half hours each day, where they can work and study together. Dedicated, quiet spaces for study are rare in many prisons (Simpkins, 2015; Sanford & Foster, 2006), including those in the RSU and LCC programs. Elise at RSU stated:

They [students] would just be like, look, you don't understand how hard it is to work here, it's so hard to find a good environment where you can sit down and read

uninterrupted...So I just think that would be so nice if, and I don't know, maybe different institutions do this differently, but if the prisons themselves had for these students who are taking these classes, designated places and or times, like the library or something where they could go and do their work and even have those times be at the same time as some of the other students so that they could discuss if they have questions or if, what do they think about this text or, could you help me with this paper or whatever...the benefits of education I think...reside so much outside of the classroom.

The Program Director at MU indeed highlighted the benefits of a collaborative, out-of-class space:

Early on we had some students who had never used a laptop...they were older students...and some of the younger students who had some previous experience were able to teach some of the older students how to use these laptops...They'll also take the time, like one will make flashcards and they'll work together to go over test terms and things such as that so I think it's very important and the students have been extremely successful academically.

MU program faculty and staff noted that as an added benefit, the study hall offers one of the few spaces where students and their activities are not under constant surveillance from correctional officers. In addition to study hall, MU faculty and staff noted that students also live in the same housing areas, providing other opportunities for collaboration.

At LCC before COVID, students were in class together six hours a day, five days a week; the prison also tried to assign students to the same living areas. Both the director and Kent shared that some students reported working and studying together in their housing areas. However, Kent also highlighted that:

they don't really have enough time at night because of all the distractions back in the dorm to really study...For every credit hour, you should have three hours of studying...They can't necessarily get that back in the dorm because the other inmates just won't let them study.

In an attempt to address this issue, Kent tried to provide in-class time for students to complete their assignments whenever possible. Before COVID, peer learning or collaboration mostly took place in the classrooms at LCC, but as the pandemic became more serious, faculty reported that students could only go to the classroom in smaller groups and for one hour at a time only; eventually students were on lockdown and could not go to the classroom at all. At RSU, faculty reported that very few students have opportunities for peer learning and collaboration outside of class; most students do not live in the same areas and do not have access to spaces dedicated for study and work. Many RSU faculty highlighted their inability to assign out-of-class peer work as a result. Casey, an English and Writing professor, shared:

I've done group assignments where...you have to come up with some piece of collaborative writing at the end, but usually it doesn't extend over many weeks because people are in and out and it's hard for people to, they're not all necessarily able to access each other outside of class time. So I can't assume that they will be able to actually collaborate like on campus.

Greg echoed:

Given some of these guys' schedules and access to each other, I've been wary of mandating any kind of outside of class work where you have to collaborate on some project or something like that. So yeah, it really is mostly in class, where I'll say, turn to

your neighbor and talk about this this passage for a little bit and come back and we can talk together.

Similar to LCC, various RSU faculty noted that as a result of COVID, multiple prisons placed even more restrictions on student movement and interaction. To broadly summarize, across programs, the majority of faculty described regularly incorporating peer work during class. Outside of class, only the students in the MU program have a dedicated space to work independently and with their peers. While in the MU program, the students live in the same housing areas and therefore have *some* opportunities for peer collaboration in their living spaces, students in the LCC and RSU programs mostly have access to one another during class.

Experiences with Faculty. Sustained and regular student-faculty interaction is an important aspect of a college experience (Cole, 2011; Kim & Sax 2014; Mayhew et al. 2016). Based on their accounts, it is clear that faculty in all three programs are highly dedicated to supporting students however and whenever they can, often times going above and beyond what is required of them, particularly given the challenges brought on by COVID. However, unlike on a traditional college campus, access to faculty outside of class is not guaranteed. The majority of faculty across all programs described that pre-COVID, they did not have the ability to interact with and support students outside of class. At best, there were brief moments outside of the class session that students could ask additional questions, including during class breaks, for a few moments after class, or walking out of the class together. Multiple faculty across programs shared different logistical barriers to helping students at these times. Vanessa and Emma at MU noted that the remote location of the prison necessitated that they leave the prison relatively quickly after class in order to be able to make the next commitment—including for one of them, teaching a class on main campus. Some faculty at LCC and RSU added that because of prison

schedules and/or correctional staff's desire to leave immediately after class, they were unable to stay back and provide additional student support.

Interestingly, Emma in the MU program reported that even before COVID, she could interact with students between class sessions. Students could contact her on the phone via a correctional officer to ask questions about course content and assignments:

Most of the time...the correctional officer would just call me and say, I've got so and so here; he wants to ask you a question. And so...he's like, do you have time? I'm like, sure. And so most of the time when that happened, it was during our study hall, that kind of thing...it would just be one guy after another, asking me a question.

Emma also reported that correctional officers sometimes scanned students' work and sent it to her for review between classes. Her account reflects how prison rules are at once rigid and arbitrary—one professor could do what all her colleagues could not.

In response to COVID, the MU program set up remote learning. Although students were no longer benefiting from in-person instruction, remote learning capabilities opened up options for student-faculty interaction between classes. Vanessa explained that students and faculty could relay email communications through the correctional officer assigned to log into the remote conferencing software and to accompany students in the classroom. Also as a result of the remote learning setup, Vanessa was able to hold virtual office hours in summer 2020 and Tom, a virtual tutoring session to provide students with additional assistance in math. In the case of LCC, as previously described, pre-COVID, students spent six hours, once a week in the classroom with each faculty member; they could therefore ask questions and receive feedback on their work in the same day; however they could not communicate with faculty between classes. Once COVID became more serious, LCC switched to a form of remote learning; students had at most one hour

in the classroom each day, during which time they completed coursework and assignments in the learning management system (LMS). Faculty were not permitted on-site at the prison, so students used a messaging tool in the LMS to communicate with faculty. Mindy described the challenges that students faced in having only one hour to complete their work (as opposed to the usual six hours of instruction and work time) and in having to rely on the messaging tool in the LMS as their only form of communication with faculty:

There's an inbox where they can send me an email through the [learning management system] and I can see that and email them back. So typically what I would do was every morning, I would pull that up...So if an email popped up, I could try to catch them really fast, because otherwise, with only having one hour in there and some of them had an hour in the afternoon, you might not get them 'till the next day.

Eventually, COVID restrictions prevented students from going to the classroom at all, eliminating access to faculty, to one another, and to the programming.

At RSU, faculty reported having no contact or interaction with students outside of class, whether before or since COVID. As Gwen described, "there's total cut off." And unlike the LCC and MU programs, none of the prisons in the RSU program have remote learning capabilities. Several faculty described that when face-to-face classes were in session, they used in-class time to compensate for the lack of faculty access outside of class. Casey explained:

Because two and a half hours is quite a long time for class...there's often a rotating conference time. So people will just come up and talk with me one-by-one during class time while someone else is working on whatever. So I try to do that fairly often so that I can talk to everyone individually, and I do a lot of going around to everyone's desk and awkwardly crouching in front of their desk.

Anna employed a similar method to provide more individualized support:

So basically the general format would be for the first hour we would talk about content and about what needed to be accomplished or what have you. And then the rest of it would essentially be an office hour where I would go around to each student and check on their work.

At the same time, various faculty across all programs noted that prison schedules and procedures could also constrain time with faculty during class. Matthew at MU provided an example:

I realized that my class wasn't going to start at 8:00. I think on a good day, they [the prison] didn't release them [students] until 8:00 to come to class. Then I was told after I got there that I needed to be finished by 10:15 because at 10:15 they have a count. And it shuts the place down and you don't move. You do not move and it could take up to 45 minutes before they open the campus up for you to be able to leave. So they were encouraging us to be out of there by 10:15. I thought I was going to have two hours and 45 minutes every week to deliver content. And now it's cut down. So I was changing things quickly.

Other faculty also identified body counts, students' in-prison work assignments, laundry days, and meal schedules, among other prison-related factors, as disruptions to in-class time. In summary, students in all three programs mainly have access to faculty during class. Outside of class, prison rules, procedures, and schedules preclude students from having sufficient time with faculty. To compensate, faculty across programs do as much as they can to provide support during class.

Resources and Services for Students. Resources and services—including academic libraries, academic advising, tutoring, and career counseling, among other resources for

students—support student success in myriad ways (NSSE, 2018; Soria, Fransen, & Nackerud, 2017). In prison contexts, where education of any form is not the primary mission, resources and services remain a challenge. In the following, I outline what the three programs offer in this area.

Library. One of the biggest concerns that faculty and staff across programs expressed was students' lack of *direct* access to the electronic, campus library. Students in the RSU and LCC programs are only able to get resources from the library via faculty; faculty described the time-consuming process of searching for, compiling, and bringing resources into the prisons for student use. At MU, students and faculty have support from campus librarians; librarians developed two types of request forms to enable students to ask for a particular book or journal article, or for requesting resources for specific research topics. Campus librarians then search for resources and either a librarian or the Program Director delivers the materials to the prison. According to the library request forms, the turnaround time for resources is one week. Not surprisingly, Vanessa and Emma at MU described the stress that this timeline often caused for students, which was even further delayed as a result of COVID. They noted that in part, the process was slow even before COVID because faculty were required to sign off on research requests on the one day a week that they saw students. According to the MU program prospectus, the university had wanted and expected the students to have access to the electronic library from the start of the program—specifically to 30 databases and 2100 journals. Matthew explained that delays in setting up library access have been due to security concerns on the part of the DOC. He added:

We've had legislators coming into the prison system saying what's the holdup? Why aren't they getting access because that was a point of contention from the very

beginning...we knew that without access to our learning resources [the higher education accrediting body] was not going to look favorably on this program.

With no direct access to the on-campus library, students across programs have no opportunities to conduct independent research. Lauren at LCC stated:

You tell the average person on campus the story about their research paper and you get a face that's full of horror and disbelief. How can they do a research paper if they can't research? And I'm thinking, welcome to my world.

Anna at RSU described the continuous frustration that she and students felt by the process:

I realize that they [the prison] have to limit their [students'] access to the internet, but I can't imagine why they wouldn't be allowed to visit certain sort of scholarly sites or encyclopedias online or something like that in order to do their own research. I think that they [students] were just chronically exasperated by the idea that I had to bring in the materials and I didn't always know what exactly they...I tried to ask them to be as specific as possible so I can try to find the material that's most useful...But it was always like I would bring in material and then they would say no, can you bring in something more specific to x, y, or z? So then it would be this constant process of my trying to bring in the research that they needed.

In addition to these challenges, students' ability to select different research topics and access a wide range of materials inevitably rely on the amount of time faculty or librarians are able to devote to finding resources. Many faculty described the enormous time they invested in doing this work. However, for faculty like Cameron who taught other classes outside of prison and had little extra time, students "have to choose one topic. It's the case so that I can find resources for everybody. Because if everybody chose different topics, I couldn't possibly do all

that research on my own.” Alexandra and Chris at RSU also noted other missed learning opportunities related to the lack of direct library access. Alexandra explained: “[Something] we really don’t get to do in the prison English class [is] locating sources. You know, how do you conduct a good, focused library search? We literally, we just can’t do that.” Casey described fashioning handouts to replicate the search process to the extent possible:

I created a form that was basically screenshots of the [university] library search thing. And then they would have to fill in all of their keywords and all of their limiters, and I took those...paper forms, brought them home, ran the searches for them, and then brought them the top five or 10 hits. So they’re kind of seeing what the interface looks like, but just a screenshot.

Not surprisingly, Casey highlighted the time-intensive nature of this process. In the MU program, Vanessa described that in the absence of direct library access, she could assign tasks like annotated bibliographies and evaluating sources of information. She explained:

I typically will have them do an annotated bibliography, leading to a research paper...in a normal class, I would have them evaluate their sources. Who is the author? Why are they an expert? Why are you citing them? The library found them the sources. But then they [students] were like, well there’s just a name...I would come to class the next week and they’d be like, I don’t know how to evaluate the source, understandably. So then I would do all of the google searches and send them information. And so the next semester I just cut that out.

Across programs, faculty described the on-site, prison libraries as insufficient for supporting academic work. Faculty consistently described the libraries as holding mostly fiction, outdated encyclopedias, biographies, and other works that remain irrelevant for

college-level work. Matthew explained that at MU, they have been working to improve the resources available on-site, noting:

It's certainly not hundreds of thousands of volumes, but what we have done with the good help of our librarian and her staff is we have polled the faculty that are teaching the courses...So we're making sure that from the faculty perspective, we have the auxiliary materials there that the students may want access to. For example, in Introduction to Christianity, they need access to the geography of the Holy Land. So we wanted to make sure that there were resources there that could support a student's interest in wanting to spend time looking at the maps of the ancient Near East. And the Psychology faculty did the same thing. Now what we're doing is we're going back to the students and saying, okay, the faculty have put here what the faculty think you need. From the student perspective, what do you wish you had?

Faculty and staff at MU have notably invested a great deal of time into developing the in-prison library. And in a prison context, where incarcerated individuals have virtually no opportunities to provide feedback about their preferences, it is important that students are able to indicate what would be useful for them. Still, the resources to improve the in-prison library are by no means abundant. When asked to rate the current on-site library on a scale of one to ten, Matthew stated, "In all honesty, I would probably have to say it's a four." Furthermore, Matthew's course syllabus indicates that books—whether from the prison library or the on-campus library—can only be used in the classroom; in other words, students are not permitted to take books to their living spaces.

Computers and internet. In the MU and LCC programs, students are provided with computers. In the case of MU, students are provided with laptops to be used strictly in the

classroom. At LCC, the classrooms are essentially computer labs where each student has a desktop computer. Still, Lauren at LCC explained that students cannot save their work because “within four weeks of a class ending, the computers are wiped and they [students] are not allowed to have flash drives. She commented, “I just thought, that’s not even humane. For me, if I did all that work, I would want copies of it.” As a result, Lauren tried to provide students with copies of their work whenever possible, noting that some students wanted it not only for themselves, but to send to their families.

Unlike in the MU and LCC Programs, students in the RSU program do not have access to computers. As a result, they have to handwrite everything, including papers that could be up to five to eight pages in length. Casey at RSU explained, “It’s frustrating for students and for me and they’re spending hours writing two copies of something.” Alexandra added:

It [handwriting papers] takes longer, it’s physical, you’re physically hurt afterwards. So it can be tough when they [students] have already done say, one or two drafts of their paper, they don’t want to write it again. And they don’t want to turn in anything where it’s like, this paragraph goes up here. So it’s such an important part of writing that sometimes it’s hard to reproduce, you know. Writing is this completely kind of iterative process where usually you write an ugly draft and then you revise. And you can reorganize.

Casey noted that the RSU program considered providing computers, but ultimately determined that there were too many barriers to warrant the time investment in obtaining them. She stated,

We thought, can we get a bunch of computers and just bring them in with us? Would they let us do that? And I think it was kind of like it came down to the investment of time and money versus the chances that it would actually get let in...in some facilities maybe, but others not.

As is true of many programs across the U.S., students in the three programs in this study do not have access to the open internet. At most, students at LCC have the ability to log into a learning management system. Various RSU faculty, in particular, expressed concern about the implications of lacking open access to information as a college student. Anna noted that it:

not only keeps you ignorant, but it also sort of discourages any further questioning and kind of a curious mind and I thought it was kind of the biggest tragedy of the situation is that information is so limited in this age of information.

Jenna at RSU also talked about losing spontaneity in teaching:

Just having the internet is huge. It just changes everything about the way you teach and not having spontaneity to be like, you know what, we need to watch this video right now or something like that. Everything had to be planned.

RSU faculty additionally expressed concern about students' complete lack of preparation to re-enter a world where the ability to use the internet is critical for personal and professional empowerment. Casey noted:

There are people who have been in prison since the 90s. They don't know how to use the internet and it's going to be a huge disadvantage when they transition out. And the prison system is really falling down on their supposedly rehabilitative purpose not giving people the chance to learn how to use the internet effectively.

Cameron further critiqued the lack of access to open internet and technology, citing it as one method by which prisons relegate incarcerated individuals to non-citizen status:

Access to technology. These are things that if we think about how we classify what it means to be a good student and what it means to be a citizen in society. Right now it's information access and manipulation of technology; these are two foundational things of

how we view citizenship. And so if we are not granting students in prison access to those same things, but trying to measure them by students who do have access to those same things and are embraced by society because of their ability to have access to manipulate or access technology, why in the world are we expecting that same thing from an environment that doesn't have it? And that we're actually actively in the case of [the two prisons in which I work] actively undermining access to those types of things that would allow students to be seen as full citizens or whatever in the eyes of educators... We're approaching students as non-citizens... We're dangling a carrot of citizenship when we're not giving them the access to all of the technology that allows them to get there.

As RSU instructors note, the absence of open internet and/or computers has far broader implications than simply reducing the quality of postsecondary experiences in prison—it threatens one's place in an information and technology-driven world. Generally speaking, across all programs, faculty discussed playing multiple roles in an attempt to compensate for the lack of—or limited—resources and services, including academic advisor, career counselor, and librarian. However, and understandably, various faculty noted that they often lacked the knowledge to provide sufficient assistance.

Unique resources and services in MU program. MU faculty and staff described several additional resources and services that are not currently available to students in the LCC and RSU programs. The MU program director described establishing tutoring services in the prison via the Student Support center on campus. Tutors are undergraduate students who have successfully completed a given course in which students in prison seek additional support. MU faculty and the program director also commented that the program has a general teaching assistant (TA) for all courses; the TA is an incarcerated individual with some higher education experience that can assist

faculty with administrative tasks and provide homework assistance to students during study hall. Emma, a professor of social work, also noted that in her role, she is able in some respects to serve as both educator and social worker (informally) with students. She described supporting students through connecting them to resources and providing a listening ear:

As a social worker, I'm also working to really build these men up and...using the college class experience as a respite or safe place, safe space in their prison experience. Whereas in a regular college classroom there are a lot of things where I would normally just say, thank you for bringing that to my attention. How about we talk to somebody at the Counseling Center Whereas in the prison, they don't have anybody else. So for example, there was one man whose wife, he would talk to me after class, his wife was extremely sick. She had some bizarre medical problem. It was a type of cancer. And so he did ask me to approve research articles on this blood cancer.

Students cannot access library resources without approval from instructors, making Emma's willingness to approve non-course related materials particularly important.

One of the most critical supports and resources for students is Ed, the MU program director, who—outside of COVID—is on-site at the prison five days a week and meets regularly with students to answer questions, offer academic support (e.g., devise study strategies, etc.), and address any academic issues that may arise. He explained:

Most of the time, if they [students] had something that was detailed if they came in and they said, 'Well, I have this need, I would prefer to have more time,' we'd schedule an appointment for that, but they could come and talk to me anytime they wanted to.

Ed is essentially director, academic advisor, career counselor, instructor, teaching assistant, confidante, and more. He described providing academic and career counseling support to students, highlighting counseling in general as:

something that I think is really important for this type of program to be successful. Just because looking at the past, when I was working at other facility sites, a lot of students just don't know what they can do, they don't have any idea. There's not a lot of support besides in the education areas for these programs and of course most of the educational facilities are not targeting postsecondary education.

Ed also noted the importance of helping students navigate the potential impacts of their felony conviction on their professional trajectory:

One student asked me about, he wants to be a medical doctor. And so I actually contacted [the university] and asked them about the possibility of him having the opportunity to become a medical doctor. And so he sat down in my office and we discussed the possibilities and the roadblocks to be placed in front of him to eventually have that occupation. What we were trying when we came up with this specific program, we were looking for something that they could take this degree and actually get a job because what I don't want to do is they've done all this work and realize hey, it means nothing. I can't get a job in the area that you're guiding me towards.”

Some students—having been out of school for a long time—have gone to Ed when they have struggled in a given semester and asked for help with study strategies. With a background in special education, he is uniquely and particularly qualified to help with study strategies or possible learning difficulties. The program director has also taught a course on college success—a course that is required on the main campus—to help students in the prison program with

effective study skills, strategies, and habits. Various MU faculty acknowledged the integral role that the program director plays in enhancing student success and empowerment. In summary, with regard to resources and services for students, faculty and staff across programs reported that students do not have direct access to the campus library nor to open internet. In the case of RSU, students also do not have computers and as such, must handwrite all of their assignments and papers. Lack of access to the library and the internet mean that students across programs miss out on opportunities to conduct independent research and hone their skills in searching, evaluating, and using a wide range of library materials. In the next section, I engage two additional areas that provide insight into the educational experiences that students are able to access in the three programs under study.

Beyond Student Engagement. As Harper and Quaye (2009) note, it is critical to both consider, and move beyond, a traditional student engagement lens when examining the postsecondary educational experiences afforded to marginalized students. In the following, I describe two areas that faculty and staff in all three institutions highlighted about their college-in-prison programs: (a) community building and (b) connecting coursework to students' subjectivities and lived experiences.

Community building. Various scholars of higher education in prison have noted the critical role that college-in-prison programs can play in building community within prisons (Castagnetto & Shanley, 2019; Heider & Lehman, 2019; Moore, 2015). Across institutions, faculty indeed cited this aspect of their programs. Chris at RSU indicated that coursework provides the sense that "we're in this together inside the classroom." Alexandra at RSU added:

A key part of the college classroom is the social aspect, not just academics, not just the cognitive aspect, [but] this very kind of social and communal part. And the best classes

I've ever taught there [prison], there is a kind of camaraderie or collegiality that the students develop with each other and they want to see each other do well.

Like Alexandra, faculty across programs emphasized camaraderie as an important element of the college classroom. Alexandra noted that in her course evaluations, multiple students described the “communal experience” and the “supportive and uplifting environment” as some of the best aspects of the class.

The program director in the RSU program commented that community building in the prison-based college classroom is particularly meaningful given the challenges of building community in carceral contexts:

Community is very difficult to achieve in prison. And then a classroom is a community...some kind of community will develop. I've had the moment in which that happens in a class, and it's kind of gradual but...it's a glorious moment when you see a community emerge. And so I like that because...the contrast between that and what's possible generally in prison, is pretty stark.

Casey shared that the classroom space and community also provide a welcome respite for students, noting “It really creates a little community and in the class, they have something that isn't controlled in the way the rest of prison is.”

Mindy in the LCC program shared an example of how the classroom community can sometimes provide support in unanticipated ways:

They've had some conversations about difficult family relationships because they're in prison, and ‘I haven't talked to my daughter in 10 years’ or stuff like that and they find that they all have things in common by doing that, and I think it opens their eyes a little bit because these people that they're trying not to know so much about because they're

angry or they want to be angry with them and fight them or whatever, now they know okay, I haven't talked to my daughter in five years, but he hasn't talked to his in ten and understand how that feels.

Greg at RSU described community-building in a broader, global and historical sense. In reading Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story, the *Yellow Wallpaper*— in which the central character's physician husband, believing she suffers from depression and hysteria, confines her to bed rest and forbids her from writing or working—a student commented that having been in solitary confinement, he could intimately relate to the experience of the protagonist. Greg commented that in engaging with themes of oppression in literary works, students often come to see:

that it's not just them...there's a whole history of this and other folks who have dealt with this. I think it creates a bit of solidarity, even with folks who aren't alive anymore, but realizing that they're part of the long struggle.

Faculty and staff across programs underscored aspects of community, camaraderie, and support that they have observed—and participated in creating—in their classrooms. In a controlled and often segregated context like a prison, the college classroom offers one space to bring people together in the common pursuit of knowledge and exploration.

Connecting coursework to students' subjectivities and lived experiences. In addition to community-building, faculty across programs emphasized grounding their courses in the lived experiences of students. Casey in the RSU program noted that in her literature courses, they analyze systems of power and how they affect people in their lived experiences. She noted:

We talked about racism, prison, policing, sexism, things like that. I want students to be able to understand and grasp the systems; most people can intuitively because of lived experiences. So it becomes more of a deeper discussion about nuances.

Casey also highlighted that she often prioritizes teaching literature written by currently or formerly incarcerated people to:

make the content as relatable and grounded in their experiences as possible...I'm sure I could have taught Melville and Hawthorne or something. But I taught it through incarcerated literature because that's what people were experiencing. When I teach writing I try to connect it as much as possible with, what is your writing going to do? How can you make change with writing and for people in prison, the prison system is one of the things that's most affecting them and important to them.

At the same time, Casey noted that she also leaves space for people to explore beyond these boundaries, importantly highlighting that "it's not just about, we're in prison and let's talk about prison. I try to balance that so that we have opportunities to think beyond the walls that we're in." Chris, a sociology professor in the RSU program, described a lesson, which focused on the impact of geography and residential segregation on people's lives. He described:

I have them tell me where they grew up. And then we map out the racial composition of the city in terms of zip codes and then I have them pinpoint where they are and where they grew up and then we talked about how that shapes their lives. And you can see ok, I went to this school. And this is what it was like. This is what the parks were like, this is how the police interacted with people in my neighborhood and stuff like that. And, like in my on-campus class, people start to make the connections. They're like, my individual-level experience is not just because of my work ethic or my psychological characteristics, etc. It's directly connected to the broader social forces.

Chris described that in general, his sociology courses incorporate a great deal of reflection on broader issues and "different axes of stratification" that shape people's lives. Emma at MU

described one of the several assignments in which she asked students to think like a social worker and consider issues that matter for local communities, including their own. She noted:

I would give them a neighborhood or a community situation...And they would have to talk about what were the kind of resources if you were the social worker and you only had so many dollars to bring in some community programming, what would you bring in? They would talk about whether or not it would be to establish a food pantry or would they want to have a community meal. If it was an elderly housing complex something like a community meal might be a better idea...so they have to talk about how they would address food insecurity in this scenario with this population...This is actually a harder thing for my traditional students because You know, they don't have any idea what it is to be food insecure.

In the LCC program, Lauren shared that her final project is a proposal for social change. She described one student's proposal in which he explored the topic of securing higher compensation for state-appointed defense attorneys so that low-income populations could access fairer representation in the criminal (in)justice system. In the RSU and MU programs, various faculty talked about how their courses focus on issues of race, racism, gender, subjectivity, and the history of people of color, which given the racial demographics of the prison classes—where 50-90% of students are students of color—is important and provide opportunities to think critically about subjectivity, history, and oppression, among other areas.

Theme 4: Faculty and staff in the three programs advocate for improving the student experience to the extent possible

As evidenced by the study findings, college-in-prison programs face many obstacles to providing educational experiences that resemble those of a traditional college campus. Still,

faculty and staff advocacy point to possibilities within a challenging environment. In this study, faculty and staff shared the different ways in which they have advocated to improve the student experience. At the same time, and as expected, various participants also noted that advocacy is not possible for numerous reasons.

Pushing Back on Prison Rules and Culture. Multiple faculty across the three programs commented on how they have negotiated prison rules that would otherwise negatively impact the student learning experience. Gwen, an Art History professor in the RSU program, described having to censor images perceived to be problematic in her course textbook. She explained:

I was teaching Western Art once, which has a lot of, basically a lot of nude sculptures...the fact that there was any sort of nudity, apparently somebody at the correctional institution thought that these gentlemen would be enticed...So me and my boss, the program director, had to go through and actually censor textbooks by hand. We had to cover images that had any sort of nudity or violence in them.

Gwen shared her discomfort with having to practice this kind of censorship, not only because of the implications it had for the production of knowledge, but because of the “infantile kind of treatment of these gentlemen.” She added, “These are grown men. What do you have to hide?” Gwen explained that not surprisingly, students took great issue with the censorship. She ultimately decided with the Program Director that going forward, they would no longer agree to censor books and images.

Emma, a Social Work professor in the MU program, similarly talked about opposing censorship attempts by the prison in which she taught. She explained that when prison officials told her that she could not talk about race in her class, she spoke with the MU Program Director,

who subsequently convinced the warden that prohibiting discussions of race in class would significantly diminish the learning experience. Emma stated:

That's [race] the main problem in the United States, the very biggest problem. So I just don't know how to pretend that it doesn't exist when we're talking about all these systems of oppression. And it just, it makes no sense. So I just explained that I didn't know how it's possible to teach a social work class [without talking about race] and he [the Program Director] said, 'Well, the warden said you just have to understand that there are very serious racial factions between the Aryan people⁴ and the African American community in the prison and they really hate each other and you've just got to be mindful of that.' I was like well, they're not going to be in jail forever.

Although Emma was ultimately able to get permission to discuss race, she also expressed concern that certain professors would automatically be discouraged from considering the possibility of discussing topics that the prison found controversial: "From the way they put it in the orientation, some people will simply not ask [if they can talk about race]...The way they made it sound...it was not worth, you weren't even allowed to ask, is the impression I got." The program director explained that as time progressed, the warden became more supportive of instructors discussing topics such as race and discrimination; however, it is not clear if during orientation, correctional officers will continue to discourage such topics.

Casey and Cameron at RSU described continuing to teach students even once they were sent to solitary confinement. Casey noted:

⁴ This refers to the self-proclaimed name of the group

Sometimes a student gets transferred to a different facility or put in solitary during the class and I want them to finish and be able to get the credit and then that's kind of like a back and forth with prison administration.

Cameron added:

I passed a student who got put in solitary halfway through the semester for stabbing somebody in self-defense. And the [prison officials] would not help me. I had to go every day and remind them [to give him course materials]...just trying to force them essentially to help me help this student and they are extremely reluctant to do so.

Matthew in the MU program lamented the fact that in the prison, even the classroom felt institutional and bare. In response, he developed a project with a student honor society on campus to make the prison classroom feel more like a college learning environment. He described, "We want to put university gear in there...I want to put pennants up on the wall. I want to put photographs of the campus of traditional students." Matthew explained the importance of making the students feel like a part of the university.

A few faculty at RSU and LCC shared the ways in which they distanced themselves from the prison culture, particularly correctional officers' attempts to control and discipline students. Anna at RSU did not comply when correctional officers recommended she discourage certain students from participating in tutoring sessions for fear that they mostly used the time to socialize. She disclosed, "I basically said no. And so I would say, oh no, they do need help on this assignment or maybe they need help on x, y, or z." Mindy at LCC explained an incident in which:

I had two inmates that got into it. They were disagreeing with each other. The guard got involved. They turned and went on him, arguing with him and he got the warden

involved. They came down, took me outside, had a whole conversation with me, and wanted to know what I wanted to see happen. And I said well, I want them to succeed and kicking them out of my class is not success.

Mindy shared that she wished that correctional officers would not interfere so readily, noting, “I’ve found that when I handle situations, when I approach them [students], they respond better than if a guard gets involved—then they escalate and that makes it harder.” Lauren at LCC pointedly highlighted the sometimes contrasting views of officers and faculty:

You’re supposed to go into a class and treat them [students] with a clean slate. The officers don’t like that. They want you to know what they [students] have done. And they want you to be as angry and suspicious of them as they are.

Lauren disclosed that in her experience, the prison culture not only emphasized discipline and control, but promoted lack of care for students:

We can’t appear to care. We can’t say what’s wrong with Mr. So and So today? You can’t appear to care...because it then looks like I’m bonding with that student...So it’s like emotional whiplash, because on campus I’ll have a class, and I’m supposed to care, you’re supposed to bond...and you’re supposed to spend as much time as is needed with each student. And then I’d go over there [the prison] one day a week and have to completely change.

Given such an environment, actively opposing prison rules and cultural norms that harm students is a critical form of advocacy.

Additional Student Support. Some faculty and staff at RSU and MU also discussed advocating for additional student support in different ways. Anna, a professor of English and writing, and the Program Director at RSU spoke with the wardens at two prisons to allow

teaching assistants (TAs) for her courses on the days she was not on site teaching. The TAs provided students additional assistance with their writing. Anna noted that one of the TAs stayed for three hours each Sunday night to ensure students received ample support; however, she also described receiving pushback from one of the prisons and the challenges students sometimes faced when tutoring hours conflicted with mealtimes or other activities in the prison. The Program Director at RSU also noted that before COVID became severe, he and other professors were in discussions about connecting students to the Writing Center on campus; the idea would be for program faculty to relay student work between students and Writing Center tutors to allow students to get feedback beyond program faculty.

At MU, Vanessa described how she successfully petitioned for offering remote office hours once the classroom was internet-enabled in response to COVID. She noted:

I said look, it's summer, can I take an hour during when they're in study hall and can a facilitator be there to log in? They didn't always show up, the facilitator wasn't always remembering, but I did have office hours and that was great.

During office hours, students were in the classroom together and Vanessa was projected on the screen. She and the students appreciated the additional time to work together, but she also lamented the fact that unlike on a traditional campus, there was no way to do individual office hours with students; she noted, "The students are trying to ask for their individual papers, but they're all there in one space. So hey, awkward."

Matthew at MU also discussed speaking with the Dean about the possibility of having graduate students from the divinity school on campus offer pastoral services for students in prison. To better support student success, Kent at LCC discussed successfully advocating to do away with night classes, noting that before that, "The students were in class 43 hours a week and

that was too much. All they did was go to class, eat, and sleep.” Kent also helped to improve the sequencing of courses so that students were better prepared to go into 200-level courses.

Expanding Academic Offerings. A few faculty and staff at RSU and MU talked about expanding offerings. The Program Director at RSU, for example, discussed increasing course offerings from three to nine courses a year in certain prisons. He also explained that pre-COVID, he was in the initial stages of developing a certificate credential designed specifically for students in prison; currently, students in the RSU program can obtain college credits, but do not receive a credential. The director described, “I think it [the certificate program] would be five courses...it would be across each division of the arts and sciences.” He noted that at one time, the university had a certificate program for active-duty military, which established precedence for developing certificate programs for populations with unique and specific needs. The Director stated, “It’ll be an interesting moment to see what the university says about this other discrete population [incarcerated students] because they’re identical in many ways for the conditions in which they live.”

At MU, Matthew referenced starting initial conversations about bringing more arts-related courses to the prison. He explained:

I’ve been having conversations with our Professor of Theater and the Department Chair. There are some wonderful plays that have been written for production in prison settings. I really want to have good conversations with him about how we might be able to take Introduction to Theater down there [the prison]. They have to have something in the fine arts. So if we took Introduction to Theater down there, could these students, pardon the pun, take the lead in trying to put together something...for the general population? I think that would be good. I think it would give the students recognition. And I also think it may

cause some of the other inmates to aspire to the program if they see the program and understand that we're trying to do good for both the inmate as well as the general population.

Matthew also described exploring the possibility of working with the Music Department on campus to start an in-prison choir.

Not Possible to Advocate. While multiple faculty across the three programs shared examples of advocating for improvements in the student experience, various faculty at RSU and one faculty member at LCC also highlighted their lack of power within broader systems—prisons, Department of Corrections, and the university—to effect change. Anna at RSU stated, “I’ve advocated for the...use of the computer labs and stuff like that. But there’s really nothing to be done. I mean, it’s beyond my control.” Chris at RSU added, “It [advocacy] hasn’t been possible...and I haven’t had the capital or the time or the energy to even begin that process.” He described that as a PhD student without the security of a tenure track line, he has not felt capable of helping to improve the educational experiences offered by his program. Given that the majority of faculty in the RSU program are in the same position, it is likely that others feel similarly. Cameron at RSU emphasized that the marginalized position of the prison program makes it difficult to push for and realize improvements:

I think it [advocacy] is not a possibility at [our university] because of the way that the program is segregated from campus... it’s just, again, seen as this add-on. I think in an institution where they tell their prison program it’s an important part of what they do, where they’re supported and have representatives at department meetings and stuff like that, I think that there are tons of ways that we can advocate...But again, [the program director] is fighting to keep the program going so there’s really no space to team up with

the library or whatever. And they've done some things. But again, it's all been through different individual grants that are very limited and short.

Cameron importantly noted that the lack of support, including financial support, ultimately forces the program director to devote most of his energy to simply keeping the program afloat, never mind advocating for improved services or resources for students. To complicate matters, several faculty in the RSU program—some of whom teach in the same prison(s)—noted that certain prison leadership or staff are at best, indifferent and at worst, hostile to college programming in prisons and by extension, faculty and the students. As such, advocacy is out of the question. In contrast, the program director and faculty at MU described that generally speaking, prison staff have been supportive of the programming or at minimum, willing to consider the director and faculty's positions on particular aspects of programming. At LCC, expressed fear of suggesting changes, as on multiple occasions, doing what she thought was best for students was met with disapproval from the prison. In summary, select faculty across programs have successfully advocated for changes to improve the student experience, in the form of pushing back against prison rules, providing additional student support, and expanding academic offerings. At the same time, many, if not all, faculty lack the institutional power to suggest or make improvements. In some cases, such as at RSU, faculty and staff devote most of their time to simply sustaining the program, leaving little room or time for more.

INTERLUDE: PRISON CLASSROOM DESCRIPTIONS

The following composite descriptions of prison classrooms in each program were compiled from classroom description worksheets completed by study participants. Some sentences are verbatim reproductions of participants' written responses.

Classroom in the Mountain University Program

The classroom is longer than it is wide, shaped like a rectangle. The walls are barren, save for limited technology; the university needs branding on the walls to help students feel connected. There is a whiteboard at the front of the class. The students do not have desks but sit in chairs at long tables. The furniture is institutional, but adequate. The instructor has a desk and chair. The lighting? Fluorescent, but adequate. The HVAC and air flow? Adequate.

The classroom is too small. The students are cramped and therefore interrupt one another by shifting in seats. It's challenging to administer quizzes without worry of students seeing neighbors' work. Although the desks are movable, there isn't enough space in the room to rearrange them. Ideally, some faculty would like to have students sit in a circle so that they can see and speak directly to each other during class discussions.

Technology in the classroom is a wall-mounted television /DVR and a white board. A larger white board is needed to give students better views of class content. A/V equipment is needed to include either an LCD projector and screen or Smart Board so professors can use other teaching strategies other than lecture and discussion. There is no lectern (tabletop or free-standing). Professors can only have their teaching resources flat on their desk.

There is a small collection of reference books and other resources for students on a bookshelf in the room. The resources are provided by the university. Students sometimes get up during class to grab reference works or dictionaries to help them with discussion, reading, or

other work. The students enjoy these resources and are protective of the books and materials. But library resources and shelving are needed.

A quiet classroom is not guaranteed. Announcements over the loudspeaker are quite loud and disruptive. Given the hard surfaces in the building, noise can be a problem even with the doors closed.

On the other side of the hallway from the classroom is the program director's office. This is beneficial, as the instructors and students know that the director can easily provide assistance. At the end of the hallway is the Assistant Superintendent of Custody and his assistant's office. Staff and students' bathrooms are next to the Assistant Superintendent's office. At the end of the hallway, on the other end, is the correctional officer's office. This office has a copier and a cabinet on wheels where laptops and some supplies are stored. When students use laptops, they are wheeled into the classroom. Technology has been an issue, as several of the students did not have experience using a laptop or a computer.

It was chaotic over the summer because the only quarantine space for new individuals or individuals with COVID symptoms was the classroom. A faculty member remembers two instances when the classroom wasn't available and students were placed in the prison intake room. The professor taught from home. The intake room had no air conditioning; there were metal detectors and people constantly going in and out. Nobody could hear one another.

Classroom in the Lake Community College Program

The classroom is an open, long and wide warehouse-like space with high ceilings, no windows, and bare cinder-block walls. The room is hard to heat and cool. In this open, cavernous space, an instructor needs a loud, booming voice that carries well. Some faculty walk up and down the aisles so the students can hear them.

There is a 12-14 foot plywood wall dividing the classroom in two. Each classroom has approximately 8 tables—each table with 4 computers—so it more closely resembles a computer lab than a classroom. The desks can't be moved or rearranged to promote any kind of group discussions. Discussion among the students is discouraged as a general rule anyway, so the arrangement of desks reflects this policy. The seats are assigned to the students; they are not allowed to move around. The instructor's desk is located centrally.

Sometimes there are two classes going on simultaneously. On one side there may be an English or Psychology class while on the other there's an HVAC class. The dividing wall is not sound-proof, so students on one side can hear the professor on the other side; it can be very distracting. Some students in the back of the room can't see the board.

On the HVAC side, there's not enough equipment or tools in the classroom. There are 21 students and only five pieces of equipment. On campus, each class has 6-8 students so the student-equipment ratio is much better. At the prison, each person gets less hands-on experience than an on-campus student would. It's a lot harder to be an HVAC student in prison.

The professor and students want newer, better equipment, but it can take anywhere from two weeks to six months to bring in equipment; equipment has to be ordered, inspected, and approved.

It is possible to circumvent the sterile, warehouse-like space by moving methodically among students to answer questions and provide individual feedback. But the classroom doesn't otherwise suggest a welcoming, friendly, or cozy space. It mirrors the prison setting, where the goal is to encourage strict boundaries and clear, well-defined distance between people.

Classrooms in the River State University Program

There are six prisons and multiple classrooms. Some of the classrooms are standalone trailers. Many of the rooms are small, cramped, crowded; furniture can't be rearranged to facilitate different types of in-class interactions. Some faculty don't mind the small size; it's cozy and allows for easy interaction with students.

Most of the classrooms have only basic learning resources and technology, if that; this matters more for some classes than others. An Art History professor describes her inability to project artwork during class discussions. A History instructor wishes she could have projected maps of the places she and her students discussed. A Cultural Studies professor and an instructor of English note that their courses don't require technology anyway—students spend all of their time engaging with and discussing critical texts.

In the warmer months, air conditioning can be unreliable. But in several prisons, the classroom offers better air conditioning than the rest of the prison. The fluorescent lighting in some rooms can be oppressive, draining. Many rooms don't have windows or perhaps only a small cutout in the door or an opening or two high up on the wall. The few rooms that have windows bring some welcome natural light or a view of flowers planted by the facility's residents.

Rarely do the rooms resemble college classrooms. Some have bare walls; others have posters that are more indicative of a space for a drug/alcohol support group or for a high school class. Some students like the high school feel—they're young and they find it familiar and comforting. They say things like, "I feel normal here." One room has posters with quotes meant to be inspirational for students, including this one from Malcolm X: "In the hectic pace of the world today, there is no time for meditation, or for deep thought. A prisoner has time that he can

put to good use. I'd put prison second to college as the best place for a man to go if he needs to do some thinking. If he's motivated, in prison he can change his life."

Noise, interruptions, and surveillance are constant fixtures of some classrooms while nonexistent in others—one of the classrooms is in a trailer separate from the rest of the prison; the professor who teaches there describes it as a refuge from heat, from surveillance, from vigilance. A few others note that their classrooms enabled a good learning environment.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

I refuse to create in myself, or promote in others, the idea that learning in prison sets me free without acknowledging the extent to which being educated in prison also helps me understand the extent to which I am unfree.

—*James Davis III, Caught Somewhere Between...*

The present qualitative case study explored the experiences and perspectives of faculty and staff in three college-in-prison programs in a southern U.S. state. Through faculty and staff insights, I examined the nature and quality of programs and the educational experiences they enable. In Chapter 4, I outlined the study's four primary findings. In the present chapter, I put the findings in conversation with critical scholarship from the field of higher education in prison as well research on student engagement in higher education. I also provide a critical analysis of findings through the lens of education debt and scholarship on prison-based higher education. Furthermore, I offer recommendations and implications for practice, policy, and theory and conclude with directions for future research. It is important to note that throughout the discussion—and the entire study—I draw on and cite the knowledge and expertise of formerly and currently incarcerated students, scholars, and practitioners. However, to avoid overemphasizing this fact—I do not, for example, refer to other authors and scholars as non-incarcerated—I do not use these descriptors unless it is necessary for the purposes of clarity or meaning.

It is also worth noting that program critiques are not intended to generalize individual programs as good or bad—such an analysis would not only be a gross oversimplification, but would fail to acknowledge how these programs collaborate with, and rely on support from, their sponsoring institutions of higher education, the respective prisons, the state DOC, and state and/or private funding. Instead, my objective from the beginning has been to provide in-depth

understanding of these programs and call attention to flawed, harmful, or absent *practices* in need of addressing. What is more, as noted in Chapter 3, I view faculty perspectives and experiences as both shaping and being shaped by their programs as well as the broader systems in which they are embedded. Whenever possible, I attempt to honor these perspectives in the following discussion.

Theme 1: Faculty and Staff in the Three Programs Reinforce, Depart from, or Challenge Correctional Conceptualizations of Higher Education in Prison.

Critical scholars and practitioners of higher education in prison (HEP, hereafter) have underscored the importance of interrogating how people conceptualize the purpose of prison-based higher education (Castro & Gould, 2018; Davis, 2018; Simpson, 2019). How we conceptualize the aim of HEP, they argue, has ideological and material implications for what college-in-prison programs offer to incarcerated students and delineates the boundaries of what is possible (Castro & Gould, 2018; Castro & Gould, 2019). For the most part, the value and purpose of HEP has been discussed in correctional terms, as evidenced by the vast majority of research and scholarship that emphasizes the link between HEP and reduced recidivism (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2013; Gerber & Fritsch, 1995; Vacca, 2004). Media representations likewise focus on anti-recidivism as the main purpose of HEP, often using commonly cited statistics to quantify its impact on reducing rates of reincarceration. To date, no studies outside of the present one have empirically explored college-in-prison program faculty staff conceptualizations of the purpose of HEP. In this research, faculty and staff both reinforced and departed from—and in some cases, challenged—correctional notions regarding the aims of HEP. Those conceptualizations that deviated from the correctional realm were generally consistent with insights highlighted in the broader literature on prison-based higher education.

Across the three programs, select faculty and staff conceptualized the purpose of HEP in terms of rehabilitating incarcerated individuals and/or reducing the recidivism rate. Various people emphasized how HEP enables incarcerated individuals to ultimately “find a productive place in society” or “become productive members of society.” This notion of being a “productive” member of society is commonplace. On their website, the Correctional Education Association (2018) describes in its philosophy that “Education is the key to effective rehabilitation...Acquiring personal, social, and technical skills are necessary for a successful and permanent reentry into society as productive citizens, parents, and coworkers.” Currently and formerly incarcerated students and scholars also employ this language or its underlying implications. Evans (2018) notes that HEP “fosters a belief in us that our lives have value and meaning and that we are worthy of living among other productive, social people” (p.7). Heider and Lehman (2019) highlight that HEP “could help produce a well- rounded, responsible, and law-abiding citizen at release” (p.5).

Still, various study participants pushed back on the correctional and rehabilitative perspective, noting alongside critical scholars of higher education in prison that the notion of rehabilitation both misunderstands the phenomenon and history of mass incarceration as well as the role of prison educators. Many faculty and staff across programs provided alternative, non-correctional conceptualizations of HEP. Various rationales are reflected in scholarship and/or popular representations of college-in-prison, including that it is an investment in families and communities (Evans, 2018; Stern, 2014), enhances employment opportunities (e.g. Batiuk, Moke, Rountree, 1997; Cho & Tyler, 2008; Fabelo, 2002; Hull et al., 2000; Jenkins, Steurer, & Pendry, 1995) and increases public awareness of prisons and mass incarceration (Ginsburg, 2019; Mayorga in Castro et al., 2015; Scott 2013). In addition, participants described the aims of

HEP as enhancing students' sense of self and hope, serving the same purpose(s) as higher education in general, and disrupting the routine and logic of prisons—all of which I address further in the following discussion analyzing the findings vis-a-vis education debt.

Purpose of HEP and Moral Debt. Leading scholars in the field of higher education in prison have argued that conceiving of college-in-prison primarily as a correctional tool to reduce recidivism and rehabilitate incarcerated students ultimately serves to pathologize people in prison and can limit the kinds of educational experiences made available to them (Castro & Gould, 2018; Ginsburg, 2019; Maltz, 1984; Simpson, 2019). In conversation with these critiques, I frame the anti-recidivist rationales reflected in the narratives of some faculty and staff in this study as well as in broader discourses about HEP as an extension of moral debt. Moral debt “reflects the disparity between what we know is right and what we actually do” (p.8). Ladson-Billings impels us to consider what is owed to individuals who have been historically “excluded from social benefits and opportunities” (p.8). As critical scholars and practitioners of HEP have noted (Castro & Gould, 2018, 2019), colleges and universities first and foremost have a responsibility to provide high-quality postsecondary education to those who seek it, including incarcerated individuals—a reality that is obscured by focusing on recidivism. Castro and Gould (2018) highlight that the stated, desired outcomes of higher education outside of prison minimally, if at all, resemble how HEP is represented. They note, for example, that on traditional campuses, postsecondary students are encouraged to pursue higher education to prepare them for a life of civic engagement, learn how to think critically about and address complex social issues, and explore new ideas. In contrast, the expectation for incarcerated college students is that they complete higher education to reduce recidivism, save taxpayer money, and increase safety and security both within and outside of prison (Castro & Gould, 2018). HEP scholars and

practitioners have acknowledged the importance of reducing rates of reincarceration (e.g., Castro et al., 2015; Scott, 2013)—as Scott (2013) notes, “Colleges are interested in recidivism because repeated imprisonment is detrimental to formerly incarcerated alumni, period” (p.12). At issue, however, are the broader implications of using reduced recidivism as a primary justification for college-in-prison.

Ladson-Billings highlights the dangers of contemporary discussions of morality, which often over emphasize personal responsibility in every aspect of a person’s life, including one’s behavior and education. Similarly, rationalizing and using higher education in prison predominantly as a correctional tool to reduce recidivism fails to acknowledge the structural underpinnings of—and collective, societal responsibility for—mass incarceration (Evans, 2018; McCorkel & DeFina). As McCorkel and DeFina (2019) emphasize, positioning HEP primarily as a form of rehabilitation or a means of reducing recidivism places the onus on incarcerated individuals to “solve the problem of their own economic and social marginalization” (p.3). What is more, notions of transforming incarcerated students into “productive” members of society belie the social, racial, and class inequities that determine who has the privilege of being productive in the first place and places a “requisite pathology” (Castro and Gould, 2018, p.3) on incarcerated students.

The anti-recidivist rationale also distorts the role of the prison educator. Ginsburg (2019) highlights that the job of an instructor in prison is not to reform students any more than it is the responsibility of an instructor on a traditional campus. Further, she cautions, emphasizing rehabilitation as a principal goal of HEP aligns programs with the agendas of the DOC. In this vein, one participant’s comment that rehabilitative aims serve to oppose the prison industrial complex is worth greater conversation, especially as many other prison educators likely have the

same view. The rehabilitation discourse is especially problematic given the racial demographics of most prison classrooms (majority students of color) versus the racial demographics of the typical prison educator (predominantly White, as evidenced in this study). As Alexandra at RSU commented, thinking about one's role as a rehabilitator in the classroom is "not helpful and...they [students] don't want your sympathy...especially being White, that's not a good way to interact with your students." Ultimately, this issue illustrates why seeing education and corrections as a dichotomy is unproductive—the two can and do overlap.

It is important to situate the anti-recidivist rationales reflected in some participants' responses within broader systems of power and inequality. For example, Ginsburg (2019) emphasized that donors and funders often want to hear that HEP contributes to reducing repeated instances of incarceration and cost savings for the public. As Scott (2013) further highlighted, "recidivism is amongst the only outcomes to fit positivism's narrow horizon of testable or measurable results" (p.411). Complicating the matter further are the rising costs of higher education for low- and middle-income families (Pew Center, 2008)—the broader society often demands clear justifications for providing higher education to incarcerated individuals (Castro & Gould, 2018). Further, the concept of a "productive member of society" reflects a harmful neoliberal logic increasingly prevalent in higher education, whether within or outside of prisons (McCorkel & DeFina, 2019)—that is to say, individuals that do not fit neatly into the role of worker, consumer, or both are deemed socially undesirable and often times subjected to various forms of state violence and control (Gottschalk, 2016; McCorkel & DeFina, 2019). In short, the moral debt is incurred not only by individual college-in-prison programs, prisons, or departments of corrections, but by a broader society that upholds prisons as a reasonable response to social inequity.

Scholars and practitioners of HEP have described just ways of conceptualizing the purposes of HEP, some of which emerged in participants responses and can be thought of as countering moral debt, albeit in small ways. For example, many have noted the importance of conceptualizing HEP in the same ways that we regard higher education in general (Castro et al., 2015; Ginsburg 2019; Davis, 2018). Ginsburg (2019) and Davis (2018) stressed that HEP's value lies in the fact that it provides access to accreditation and cultural capital. The majority of RSU faculty and staff similarly highlighted the simple yet profound importance of credentialing and increased social capital conferred by HEP, particularly among employers. As Davis (2018) poignantly described, "credentials signal inclusion while the lack of credentials signals that exclusion is acceptable" (p.10). Additionally, Evans (2019) contended that a truly just argument for higher education in prison is one that acknowledges incarcerated students as people deserving of opportunities to experience intellectual growth, enhance their critical thinking skills, and foster personal enrichment—again, the same justifications that we employ for higher education outside of prison walls. Consistent with Evans (2019), various RSU faculty commented that HEP offers important opportunities for growth and development as well as for fostering new modes of thinking.

Several study participants in the LCC and MU programs also highlighted HEP's role in enhancing students' sense of self, both in terms of enhancing self-esteem and cultivating or strengthening students' identities as intellectual beings. Such conceptualizations echo what Evans (2019) has shared about HEP and identity formation: "[HEP] re-establishes our connection to the world and raises our view of ourselves to scholars and human beings engaging in the intellectual community" (p.2). Participants at LCC and MU also discussed HEP's role in enhancing students' sense of hope. Evans (2019) validated that college-in-prison brings

optimism and possibility to the otherwise hopeless context of the prison. Karpowitz (2017) further highlighted that HEP offers hope by creating greater life options and “alternative ways of being that lie between the extremes of compliance and disobedience, between resistance and surrender” (p.IX). Lastly, multiple faculty at RSU and MU also highlighted the important ways in which HEP disrupts the logic and routine of the prison; participants talked about HEP’s ability to bring a rare, albeit temporary, sense of agency and humanity into the prison. Vanessa at MU shared:

One of my students said, ‘This was so much work, this was so hard. I’m not going to say that I’m not glad I get a break from English.’ But he said, ‘This is the only time I felt like a normal person since I’ve been here.’

Indeed, the HEP literature addresses the potentially humanizing effect of college-in-prison. That some study participants in each program described the purpose of HEP in ways that aligned with critical advocates and scholars of prison-based higher education signals the potential for fruitful dialogues among faculty and staff that can begin to address moral debt in meaningful ways.

Theme 2: Faculty Training in all Three Programs Fails to go Beyond Safety and Security-related Matters

In their report, “Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison,” the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (AHEP) and Mount Tamalpais College (MTC, 2019)⁵—highlighted the need for college-in-prison programs to “dedicate significant time and attention” to the recruitment, training, and supervision of all program faculty and staff (p. 5). Ginsburg (2019) has lamented that many college-in-prison-programs across the United States only provide faculty with brief training(s) on security matters and nothing more. Consistent with

⁵ Mount Tamalpais College, formerly known as the Prison University Project, is the first and only independent liberal arts institution dedicated specifically to serving incarcerated students

Ginsburg's observation, faculty at RSU, LCC, and MU reported that the only formal training they received was from the respective prisons on facility policies and safety, and in particular, PREA. Several faculty also described the training from the prisons as far from neutral, involving negative depictions of incarcerated individuals and the need to discipline and control them.

In addition to the training from the prisons, the majority of faculty across programs described meeting with program directors to obtain logistical and policy-related information prior to teaching. Some RSU faculty described ad-hoc sharing of syllabi and other instructional materials and/or consulting faculty who had already taught in the program about policy and the mechanics of teaching in prison. The AHEP and MTC report (2019) highlighted these types of activities and exchanges as an important part of faculty development in the context of college-in-prison.

Across all programs, the majority of faculty and staff highlighted the need and desire for more faculty training, also describing their program's efforts and/or desire to expand and standardize faculty training.

Faculty Training and Historical Debt. Critical prison education scholars and practitioners have rightly expressed concern about the limited nature of faculty training in many college-in-prison programs, where at best, instructors receive a brief training on security matters before starting to teach in prison (E. Corbett, personal communication, January 5, 2021; Ginsburg, 2019). This norm is all the more troubling when one considers the racial demographics of most prison classrooms across the United States, including those in this study—the majority of faculty participants identify as White, while generally speaking, their students across multiple prisons are at minimum 50% individuals of color and often times more, with Black students overrepresented among students of color. As Dr. Erin Corbett, long-time prison educator,

advocate, and administrator; researcher and scholar of prison higher education; and founder and CEO of Second Chance Educational Alliance, asked in a recent conversation, “How do White faculty prepare themselves to go into spaces that are largely populated with Black and Brown bodies?” (E. Corbett, personal communication, January 5, 2021).

Lack of comprehensive and thoughtful faculty training in the college-in-prison context, I argue, is reminiscent of—and extends upon—a long history of K-12 teacher preparation programs that have been largely unsuccessful in training a predominantly White teaching force to work effectively with increasingly racially diverse student populations (Goldenburg, 2014; Love, 2019). I thus frame the lack of faculty training on matters beyond safety and security-related policies in the programs in this study—and in many college-in-prison programs across the country—as an exacerbation of historical debt. Ladson-Billings (2006) described historical debt as the legacy of educational inequities in the K-12 system formed around race, class, and gender in the United States. Ample scholarship highlights that K-12 teacher preparation programs often fail to build the critical and intercultural consciousness of White teachers (e.g., Bloom, Peters, Margolin, & Fragnoli, 2015; Milner, 2010; Milner & Laughter, 2015). Programs often do not sufficiently address issues of identity, race, class, culture, and systemic oppression, among numerous other areas of importance. Many K-12 teachers leave preparation programs never having—or only superficially having—examined their beliefs, practices, or positionalities. As such, they may project deficit-based thinking and other harmful biases onto students of color (e.g., Bloom et al., 2015; Howard, 2010; Hyland, 2005). Likewise, the college-in-prison programs in this study as well as many others across the country have not facilitated opportunities for faculty to engage critically with relevant issues (e.g., mass incarceration, the history and role of education within prisons) or to reflect on their worldviews, biases, or

assumptions regarding teaching in prison or incarcerated students. Andra Slater (2015), who completed college coursework while incarcerated commented:

Upon entering prisons, white prison educators come into contact with people and communities of color who have radically different backgrounds than their own. I wonder if they have ever grappled with their own deeply held ideas and assumptions about those of us who are incarcerated (p.25).

Ginsburg (2019) thus argues that in the prison classroom, as in any classroom, “an honest appraisal of one’s assumptions, prejudices, and biases will contribute to better classroom experiences, and a more trusted and sustainable program” (p.7). The absence of thoughtful faculty training in HEP programs can result in prison educators’ own brand of deficit thinking or what Slater (2015) has described as the “wow factor” (p.25), wherein prison educators are wowed because students’ intellectual abilities surpass what they expected to find inside prison. Without comprehensive training, some faculty may also lack awareness of the dynamics and the inherent brutality of prisons and how that environment impacts students’ lives and learning; in short, they lack the “cultural maps” (Wright, 2005) to successfully navigate the prison and its classrooms. They may also inadvertently take on the values and logics of the prison system and contribute to the further oppression of incarcerated students (Ginsburg, 2019).

Although far in the minority, a few faculty participants expressed that further training was not necessary because their training as college educators and for one participant, as an educator in a different prison, sufficiently prepared them for the prison classroom. This logic also falls in line with historical debt—Scott (2013) cautioned that rationales of this nature reflect a long-held, positivistic approach to education, wherein teachers focus on content and curricular proficiencies while ignoring issues of power and privilege. Ultimately, positioning the lack of

comprehensive faculty training in the HEP realm as an exacerbation of historical debt serves to highlight the pervasiveness of what critical education scholar, Bettina Love (2019), described as the “teacher education gap” across the educational pipeline. Greater care and thought in the area of faculty training in HEP can increase the potential for mutually humanizing pedagogical experiences in prison.

Theme 3: The Educational Experiences made Available in the Three Programs are (Dis)empowering

Currently, only a handful of studies illuminate the educational experiences of incarcerated college students (Allred et al, 2013; Salomone, 1992; Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). HEP scholars have thus underscored the need for greater knowledge in this area (Castro et al., 2015). The present study provides empirical data about the day-to-day classroom experiences provided by three programs in one southern U.S. state. Broadly speaking, study findings revealed that the three programs offer various aspects that research has shown remain important for a meaningful college experience (in prison), including academically challenging experiences (NSSE, 2018), community-building (Castagnetto & Shanley, 2019; Moore, 2015; Pinkert et al., 2013), and connecting coursework to students’ subjectivities and lived experiences (Scott, 2013; Simpson, 2019). At the same time, programs share similar challenges, including limited or no student-faculty interaction outside of class meetings, limited or no student support services from the main campus, no direct library access or open internet for students, and basic classroom facilities that do not support diverse and dynamic classroom experiences.

The findings also highlighted important differences, namely that students in the MU program have access to various experiences unavailable to students in the LCC and RSU programs. Specifically, MU students have a dedicated study hall space for independent and

collaborative study and learning five days a week; an on-site program director that serves myriad critical roles (e.g., academic advisor, career counselor); greater support from the main campus for student-facing services, including library support and tutoring services through the Student Support Center; and specialized student support, such as an instructor who serves primarily as a social work educator, but can also provide social work support as well as a program director whose training in special education equips him to provide assistance should students have particular learning difficulties. In the following section I elaborate more on these areas through the lens of education debt and higher education (in prison) research and scholarship.

Educational Experiences and Education Debt. The students in the three programs under study, like many postsecondary students in prisons, have few or none of the privileges and experiences guaranteed to college students on non-carceral campuses (Erzen, Gould, & Lewen, 2019). As such, I contend that these programs, along with the prisons and the DOC, inevitably play a role in exacerbating the education debt. There are real implications to not providing opportunities for sustained and regular interaction with faculty inside and outside of class; regular opportunities for peer learning and collaboration outside of class; access to internet and academic libraries—and by extension opportunities for independent research; and a wide range of student support services and resources. To briefly address these areas, abundant empirical research has linked student-faculty interaction—both inside and outside of the classroom—to a host of positive outcomes, including but not limited to academic motivation (Komarraju et al., 2010; Trolan, et al., 2016), gains in critical thinking (Kim & Sax, 2011; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005); enhanced academic self-concept and motivation (Cole, 2011; Kim & Sax 2014; Mayhew et al. 2016), and enhanced professional development and career preparation (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014; Flowers, 2004). Peer learning and collaboration have been shown to

enhance retention and persistence (e.g., Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, & Hartley, 2008; Crisp, 2010); learning gains (e.g., Bettinger, Liu, & Loeb, 2016; Bowman 2010b; Butler-Paisley & Clemetsen, 2018); gains in academic self-concept (Cole, 2007; Kim & Sax, 2014; Sax, 2008); and stronger problem-solving skills (Harmon, 2006; Zevallos & Washburn, 2014), to name a few benefits. Furthermore, research has shown that academic library usage is linked to greater academic achievement and information literacy (e.g., Moore, Brewster, Dorroh, & Moreau, 2002; Soria, Nackerud, & Peterson, 2015). That students in the three programs have little or no access to student support services from their main campuses (e.g., academic advising, tutoring, Writing Center, counseling and wellness) remains problematic as research has shown that high-quality student services—particularly integrated services that combine multiple forms of support—enhance academic achievement (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Sanchez, Bauer, & Paronto, 2006).

The lack of internet access for students in these programs as well as in most programs across the country not only highlight persistent disparities in higher education, but also serves as a poignant example of moral debt—although it is abundantly clear that students need to build their digital competency to support their personal, professional, and educational success after incarceration, the prisons in which the programs under study take place and/or the DOC do not make it a priority to provide students with internet access. As previously stated, lack of internet access also prohibits students from independently identifying and evaluating information sources and conducting independent research. Numerous studies have documented that generally speaking, undergraduate research can help students build a range of analytical skills, enhance communication skills, build confidence, and develop their ability to work independently (e.g., Jones, Barlow, & Villarejo, 2010; Kaul, Ferguson, Yanik, & Yan 2016; Lopatto, 2007).

What is more, as Castro and Brawn (2017) note, incarcerated students' "inability to freely access information and to exist in the world as independent thinkers" (p.103) precludes their participation in any kind of a critical pedagogy in prison. It is worth noting that while these debts have the greatest impact on students, they also disadvantage faculty—as evidenced in this study, college-in-prison instructors must often compensate for the scarcity of resources and services through their own time and labor.

In addition to moral debt, I contend that an examination of the educational experiences afforded in each program illustrates economic debt. Ladson-Billings (2006) defined economic debt as the historical and contemporary funding disparities in education. That students in the programs in this study lack direct access to the campus library or to open internet, that they are not automatically and/or regularly provided with access to services on campus, among many other areas, is not simply a reminder that prisons are designed to punish rather than educate—it exposes the immense funding gaps plaguing higher education in prison, gaps that also reflect a longer history of inequitable distribution of resources for disenfranchised and underserved students (e.g., Bruce, Ermasova, & Mattox, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Milner, 2010). It is well documented that the highest poverty K-12 school districts and districts serving large proportions of students of color receive less funding per pupil than other districts (Education Law Center, 2015). When this historical reality intersects with the criminal (in)justice system, the economic and historical debt is further compounded—often times, educational programming in prison is deemed a worthy investment *provided that* it reduces recidivism, saves taxpayer money, and decreases prison spending (Castro & Gould, 2018). In other words, it is not a worthy investment in its own right, as something that supports the continued education of incarcerated individuals.

Despite these critiques, the college-in-prison programs in this study also challenge education debt by providing academically challenging experiences, opportunities for community-building, and coursework that reflects student subjectivities and lived experiences. Across programs, faculty indicated high levels of academic challenge in their courses, through incorporation of higher order as well as reflective and integrative thinking. Faculty described course content that, for example, allows students to connect learning to prior experiences and knowledge and evaluate issues from different perspectives. They also described rich class discussions that challenge both students and faculty. Higher education researchers indicate that these types of higher order as well as reflective and integrative thinking foster deep learning and enable students to fully participate in their academic, social, civic, and professional lives (Brierton et al. 2016; Ghanizadeh, 2016; Scriven & Paul, 2004); they have also been associated with greater subject matter competence (e.g., Armbruster, Patel, Johnson, & Weiss, 2009; Deslauris & Wieman, 2011; Maskiewicz, Griscom, & Welch, 2012).

Faculty and staff in the three programs also highlighted the ways in which classroom experiences facilitate community-building. Various HEP scholars and practitioners have described their experiences in similar ways (Moore, 2015; Novek, 2019; Pinkert et al., 2013). They emphasized that the sense of community that emerges in some HEP classrooms are far from a given and can provide rare moments of normalcy and humanity as well as a respite from the routine of prison. As Davis (2018) described:

I am a prisoner, but in the classroom, I am part of a special community that is dedicated to learning...It is special to be within this harsh prison environment and be able to experience, even momentarily, some semblance of normalcy. There is also a positive culture within that community that is entirely different from the culture in general

population. In the classroom space ideas are shared and debated, intellectual growth is fostered, and friendships can transcend prison and the normal prison routine of separation (p.3).

McCorkel and Defina (2019) added that prison higher education enables people who—based on religion, race/ethnicity, age, political ideology, or geographical origin—might not otherwise interact with one another be part of an enriching intellectual community. And as faculty participants in this study noted, the prison classroom provides a community “that isn’t controlled in the way the rest of prison is” and can offer personal and moral support around difficult life circumstances. In this way, HEP and its participants redefine community within the context of the prison in multiple ways.

In addition to community-building, select faculty and staff across programs also emphasized the ways in which course content centers students’ subjectivities and lived experiences. Indeed, Scott (2013) highlighted that for HEP to realize its liberatory potential, it must be guided by students’ subjectivities. Some faculty participants described addressing issues that impact many of the communities from which students originate (e.g., racism, policing, residential segregation) from historical, contemporary, and sociological perspectives. Simpson (2019) reinforced the need for educators to understand students’ life experiences and provide opportunities for “students to take up subjects that concern their communities, rather than relying on abstract theory” (p.34). He argued, for example, that courses in sociology and criminology are vital for helping students to identify the underlying causes of—and possible remedies for—issues such as crime, poverty, and unemployment. Various scholars have also noted that college-in-prison programs can and should foster students’ abilities to participate in social action and change (Castro et al., 2015; Scott, 2013; Simpson, 2019). In this study, faculty described

assignments or projects that asked students to think through particular community or social issues and propose actions to address them. As described in this section, the college-in-prison programs in this study simultaneously exacerbate educational inequities—and in community with students—provide important opportunities for intellectual development and human connection.

Theme 4: Faculty and Staff in the Three Programs Advocate for Improving the Student Experience to the Extent Possible

Faculty advocacy in the realm of prison higher education is an unexplored area. As such, the present study serves as an important empirical contribution to the broader body of scholarship on HEP. Select faculty participants across programs discussed the different ways in which they have successfully advocated for change in their respective programs. Some faculty described pushing back on prison rules and culture, in the form of opposing censorship of images and “controversial” course content; continuing to teach students even after they have been sent to solitary confinement; and choosing not to participate in the disciplining of students. Acts of defiance such as these are not only reasonable, but critically important. As Ginsburg (2019) highlighted, when “prison educators become stand-ins for correctional officers, college-in-prison reinforces the regression of incarceration” (p. 2). Lauren’s comment that the prison culture altogether discourages care for students underscores the brutal environment within which those who desire to advocate for students must function. Still, she and other faculty across programs consistently work to demonstrate care and support in multiple ways.

In addition to pushing back on prison rules and culture, some faculty described successfully advocating for additional student support, whether through securing a TA for their courses or offering virtual office hours or tutoring sessions. Furthermore, some faculty discussed

expanding academic offerings in the form of diversifying the curriculum or adding more courses across the year. At the same time, various faculty at RSU and one faculty member at LCC commented that ultimately, it is not possible for faculty to advocate for students within prison programs. Faculty, they note, lack institutional power and are in many ways marginalized themselves as they fight to offer programming that may be far from a priority for particular correctional officials (Ginsburg, 2019). As Davis (2019) emphasized, “You educators who come into prison to truly teach need to know that you are not wanted by the administration” (p.9). Many scholars and administrators of HEP have underscored the challenges of navigating the mission and cultural mismatch between corrections and education (Castro & Brawn; Davis in Ginsburg, 2019; Ginsburgh, 2019; Novek, 2019; Sanford & Foster, 2016; Simpkins, 2015). Sanford and Foster (2016) highlighted that programs need:

complete practical support of the administration of the particular prison in which instruction will be offered... This official and practical support of corrections officials must happen not only at the level of the Commissioner of Corrections and the Superintendent (or Administrator, or Warden, as the case may be), but also at the levels of programming, education, and volunteer services and all the way to the correction officers at the involved facilities (p.602).

As highlighted in the literature and as evidenced in this study, the level of support from prisons can vary greatly across programs and in prisons within the same program (Simpkins, 2015). Multiple faculty at RSU described experiencing hostility from correctional officers while on the whole, those in the MU program commented on the positive relationship with the prison—which in turn has allowed for greater advocacy on the part of students. Given the many real barriers to

making change in prison environments, it is perhaps all the more important to learn from those who have experienced success in this realm.

Study Implications

College-in-prison is a challenging and oftentimes fraught endeavor. The programs in this study, like many other programs, are under-resourced, understaffed, and must navigate the priorities and regulations of prisons and the DOC. As such, I offer the following recommendations for practice and policy with humility. Whenever possible, I also point to resources that program staff and faculty can consult.

Recommendations and Resources for Practice

Collectively develop or refine program philosophy, mission, and goals. Faculty and staff in this study shared diverse ways of conceptualizing the purpose and goals of HEP, each of which implied distinct roles for the program, faculty, and students. While a diversity of perspectives can enrich HEP in some respects, scholars and practitioners have also cited the need for college-in-prison programs to be clear about—and communicate to staff and faculty—the program’s mission, goals, and philosophical stance vis-a-vis teaching and pedagogy⁶ (see Appendix G). As the programs in this study are relatively new and/or at best, have only a general sense of their broader objectives, it is recommended that they involve faculty, staff, and students in developing—or refining—a shared mission, program aims, and general philosophy to guide their work. Student participation in these dialogues is key to allow faculty and staff to better understand what students seek out of the experience and to ensure that program values and goals

⁶ In this section, I draw from an unpublished resource, the “HEP Faculty Training Table of Contents.” The TOC is a collaboratively-developed resource resulting from multiple virtual conversations hosted by the Second Chance Educational Alliance (SCEA) and involving some 40 HEP practitioners (per meeting). The TOC is an evolving document that outlines HEP faculty training priorities and recommendations. With permission from Dr. Erin Corbett, Founder and CEO of SCEA, I have included the TOC in Appendix G.

do not undermine the best interests of students. With regard to philosophical stance, scholars and practitioners have recommended that programs consider and identify the perspective from which they approach prison education—whether abolitionist, humanistic, or pragmatic, among other perspectives (see footnote 6 and Appendix G). Having clarity about mission, goals, and philosophy can inform and strengthen recruitment and hiring practices and provide greater alignment among all those involved.

Establish and communicate clear policies around language use and student privacy. In this study, various faculty and staff across programs referred to students on multiple occasions as offenders or inmates. In an open letter to HEP stakeholders, the late Eddie Ellis and the Center for Leadership on Urban Solutions argued that such terms are “devoid of humanness” and identify incarcerated individuals “as ‘things’ rather than as people” (p. 1). Indeed, many members of the broader HEP community—including currently and formerly incarcerated people—have continued to contest the use of dehumanizing terminology to refer to individuals in prison (Castro et al., 2015; Ellis, n.d.). It is thus critical for the programs in this study to educate faculty and staff about broader debates surrounding terminology and establish well-defined policies around language use. Select faculty and staff in this study also shared that they had looked up their students’ criminal records out of curiosity. As such, programs also need to devise and communicate policies around student privacy and under what circumstances, if at all, it is appropriate to view students’ records. Failure to grapple with these types of issues can result in the further oppression and marginalization of incarcerated individuals.

Develop a Faculty Handbook. As noted in Chapter Four, various faculty across programs shared that they wished they had had more information about the prisons, the students, what to expect in the classroom, and resource or technology restrictions, among other areas. To

strengthen faculty orientation and preparation, the programs in this study should consider developing a faculty handbook. Among other areas, the handbook should clearly state the program mission, goals, and philosophy; provide information about program history; outline program curricula; provide information about the prison(s); and cover key policies, including appropriate language use, student privacy, etc. To assist with the process of developing a handbook, staff can consult examples of faculty handbooks in AHEP's document library, which is freely available on their website (<https://www.higheredinprison.org/national-directory/document-library>).

Develop and provide faculty orientation and ongoing training from the program side.

As previously noted, faculty across programs noted that they would have liked to receive more information before beginning to teach in prison. It is thus recommended that programs develop a faculty orientation; again, students would ideally have an opportunity to weigh in on the orientation content. For the three programs in this study as well as many programs across the United States (Ginsburg, 2019), faculty training comes solely or predominantly from the prisons and mostly emphasizes facility policies and safety. It is critical that programs develop their own ongoing training to ensure that a higher education—as opposed to correctional—perspective is provided for faculty and staff. As some study participants noted, training from the prison side may unnecessarily heighten faculty concerns about safety or overemphasize the need to control student behavior. It is important for programs to be aware of the specific information and messaging that faculty receive from the prisons and to be clear with instructors about the program's philosophical stance and how they view students. Programs can also help faculty navigate the inevitable tensions that arise between the corrections and education sides as well as the problematic ways in which the two overlap.

The Second Chance Educational Alliance has facilitated multiple, critical discussions with more than 40 HEP educators, practitioners, and scholars about the various areas that HEP faculty training should address; SCEA has made the resulting, collaboratively-developed list of training priorities publicly available (see Appendix G), and it is recommended that program faculty and staff refer to it as a key resource. Erzen, Gould, and Lewen (2019) similarly highlighted the need for faculty to comprehend the “unique political, social, and cultural aspects of the prison environment” (p.28). Given the racial demographics and uneven power dynamics of prison classrooms, experienced HEP educators and practitioners (e.g., Erzen, Gould, & Lewen, 2019; Ginsburg, 2019) have also advocated for faculty training to address instructor positionality, biases, and assumptions, particularly those that may be harmful to students.

Programs should also consult their current and former students in designing faculty training. What do students want faculty to know? In a recent AHEP Community Conversation⁷, for example, a panel of individuals who participated in college programming while incarcerated shared that before setting foot in a prison classroom, faculty should understand the culture of the prison(s) in which they will teach, including how prison policies affect incarcerated students and their learning. Panelists also discussed the importance of helping faculty to understand that (a) their role is not to save incarcerated students, (b) language matters—people taking coursework are students, not inmates, and (c) given the traumatizing environment of prisons, self-care among students and faculty is paramount. There are existing models—albeit few—for fully incorporating students in the training process. For example, Second Chance Educational Alliance staff not only solicit their students’ feedback about training content, but also have the students

⁷ AHEP regularly hosts free, virtual Community Conversations, which provide a space for HEP practitioners, leaders, and scholars to share information, resources, experiences, and lessons learned.

conduct the trainings. Programs should also ask their faculty what kind of training would be valuable. In this study, faculty recommended multiple training topics, including logistics and rules related to the prisons, teaching adult and non-traditional learners, teaching without technology, and accommodating students' needs. Programs can simplify the process of developing training by consulting experts and resources from the field of higher education in prison. For example, program staff can join and connect with others in the field of HEP on a prison higher education listserv (prison-ed@googlegroups.com), where users regularly request and share resources. For further guidance on faculty training, program faculty and staff can also consult AHEP and Mount Tamalpais College's report, "Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison" at higheredinprison.org/publications/equity-and-excellence-in-practice-report.

As various experts in the field of HEP have noted (Erzen, Gould, & Lewen, 2019), as part of faculty training, programs should provide regular opportunities for faculty to share their experiences. For example, faculty could benefit from hearing how other instructors have successfully advocated for change with prison leadership and/or potentially find ways to collectively advocate for change(s). Faculty can also share resources, instructional materials, and effective pedagogical practices for prison classrooms where students may have a wide range of skill levels and educational histories. In addition to sharing materials, it is essential for faculty to have opportunities to consult and learn from faculty who have more experience teaching in the program and in the respective prisons (Erzen, Gould, & Lewen, 2019). To enable greater faculty interaction and engagement, programs can consider hosting several informal faculty meetings or events throughout the year. RSU faculty and staff also described creating a site on the university learning management system where faculty could share resources, post questions, and dialogue

about teaching in prison. Particularly during COVID, this can be a relatively easy way to facilitate greater communication and support.

Also as a component of faculty training, programs should provide faculty and staff with research and resources that address a wide range of subjects that prison educators and programs should consider. Currently and formerly incarcerated scholars and students, critical prison educators, HEP practitioners and leaders, and researchers specializing in HEP all contribute to this growing body of knowledge and provide critical insights about the politics of prison higher education, pedagogical concerns, faculty preparation, and the tensions between corrections and education, among many other areas. For example, program faculty and staff would benefit from learning what justice-impacted scholars and students have said about the anti-recidivist rationale for higher education in prison or about the purposes and possibilities of HEP beyond correctional aims. To assist with this process, I offer a reading list for HEP faculty and staff (Appendix H). The list is by no means an exhaustive resource, but provides an entry point for college-in-prison faculty and staff to explore relevant research and scholarship. Faculty and staff can collectively read and discuss resources from this list as part of ongoing professional development.

Additionally, programs can provide faculty and staff with higher education research that can potentially help prison and DOC leadership better understand the importance of providing particular educational experiences within programs. For example, according to research, what are the impacts of sustained and regular interaction with faculty? Why and how is peer learning and collaboration important? What does research indicate about using academic libraries and conducting independent research? And perhaps most importantly, how do the positive impacts of these activities and others relate to outcomes that may resonate with prison and DOC leadership—for example, student retention, completion, increased motivation, enhanced

leadership skills, improved communication skills, etc. Prison officials and the DOC know about the research linking higher education in prison with reduced recidivism, but as educators and education professionals, it is our responsibility to communicate and advocate for the experiences that will allow for a high-quality postsecondary education. I thus include research and scholarship on student engagement in the faculty and staff reading list (Appendix H). Given the work that is required of faculty to teach in prison, it is important that whenever possible, faculty are provided with support—by making teaching in prison part of faculty’s regular teaching load or providing financial compensation for training and teaching.

Learn with and from other college-in-prison programs. College-in-prison programs should engage with other programs in their own state and across the country to share experiences and potentially provide guidance on particular areas of operation. What have different programs accomplished in terms of providing students with a high-quality college experience in prison and can their learnings be transferred to other programs? For example, in 2018, I participated in a site visit that a college-in-prison program in the western part of the United States conducted with a program in the South to learn how the latter program was able to provide students with virtual access to the Writing Center on campus and to the university library. The site visit entailed meetings with program leadership to learn who they collaborated with from the university, the prison, and the DOC and how, how they worked through the prison and DOC’s security concerns, and how—from a technical and infrastructural perspective—they set up the access to resources on campus.

Likewise, the three programs in this study might benefit from dialoguing with one another. For instance, the MU program can provide insight into how they worked with the prison and the DOC to set up remote learning and their study hall space. Similarly, it could be helpful

for the RSU and LCC programs to hear what MU has learned from collaborating with campus librarians on providing library resources for students. Because the three programs in this study are in the same state, they can learn from each other—for example, about working on particular issues with the DOC. At the same time, these programs should consult other programs that are provided by similar institutions of higher education. What, for example, can the RSU program learn from other public research institutions that have a college-in-prison program? To search for comparable programs, faculty and staff can consult AHEP's directory (<https://www.higheredinprison.org/national-directory/list-view>), which lists the sponsoring institution of higher education, the type of program, program profile with general information, and contact name and information.

Incorporate more student voice and participation. As noted in Chapter Four, the programs in this study either do not administer or inconsistently administer course evaluations. Interviews revealed that faculty in all three programs individually solicit student feedback about their courses. In the case of MU, students also have opportunities to meet with the program director about their needs and concerns. However, programs can do much more to consult and collaborate with students. As Ginsburg (2019) has noted, “Adult students, of the sort we teach in our programs, are capable of being partners in the design and administration of college-in-prison, to the extent the security apparatus of the facility allows” (pp.7-8). At minimum, programs should systematically collect course evaluations and provide additional avenues for students to offer feedback about the program as a whole. Programs that have the capacity to do so can consider creating formal mechanisms like a student advisory council to allow greater, institutionalized guidance and participation from current and former students about program planning, administration, and evaluation (Erzen, Gould, & Lewen, 2019). Collaboration of this

kind can help programs remain accountable to students while also enhancing students' leadership skills (Erzen, Gould, & Lewen, 2019).

Collaborate with undergraduate and graduate students to increase program capacity.

In light of staffing, resource, and time constraints, the programs in this study can consider working with undergraduate and graduate students to address particular program needs. For example, in consultation with experts in the field of HEP and as part of an independent study course or research project, a graduate student with an interest in—and in-depth knowledge of—prison higher education could assist with creating a faculty handbook and/or developing faculty training materials. As suggested by a faculty member at RSU, programs can consider working with undergraduate students as volunteer writing tutors or research assistants to provide additional support for student research; ideally, students could do this work as part of a work-study assignment. Undergraduate and graduate students can also assist with identifying funding sources, including funding for specific needs such as computers and other technology for the prison classroom.

Recommendations for Policy. The following recommendations are by no means an exhaustive list, but outline several priorities.

Formalize faculty recruitment and hiring procedures. According to study participants, faculty recruitment and hiring is currently an informal and inconsistent process. To ensure that faculty understand and are aligned with program mission, philosophy, and goals—and that they are provided with clear expectations around faculty training and other responsibilities—it is important that programs standardize and formalize their recruitment and hiring procedures. Programs can consult other programs that already have these procedures in place to assist with the process.

Required Faculty Orientation. To formalize faculty onboarding, it is recommended that programs require all new faculty to attend Orientation. During the required Orientation, facilitators should walk through the Faculty Handbook to review program mission, history, background on the prisons, general information about the students; policies about language, student privacy, and other key policies, etc. Facilitators should provide ample time for questions and have faculty sign off on having reviewed the Handbook. In addition to more comprehensive onboarding, Orientation will allow new instructors to meet one another and begin to build a community of professors who teach in prison.

Required faculty training. To ensure ongoing professional development for faculty, programs should require that faculty attend trainings throughout the year. Trainings can take different formats, including facilitated discussions (facilitators can be students, program leadership, experienced instructors, etc.), brown bag lunches, or panel events. Given limited time and resources, programs need not concern themselves with putting on formal events, so much as providing meaningful and ongoing opportunities for discussion and reflection, resource sharing, and problem solving.

Internet access in prisons. Internet access and by extension, access to academic libraries is an ongoing challenge for many programs across the country. It is important that prisons and the DOC prioritize providing these resources for all of the reasons described previously. According to study participants at MU, the prison in which they operate and the DOC were on board with providing closed internet and library access in the initial stages of program design and planning—it is thus clear that these resources are not an impossibility and require far more time and attention. Though few, there are examples of prisons that have set up closed internet

access—the prisons in the programs under study and the DOC can seek out and consult other facilities about how they have successfully implemented these resources.

Study space. As previously described, only the students in the MU program have a dedicated space for independent study and peer collaboration. The prisons that work with the programs in this study and the DOC should make it a priority to provide a similar space for the RSU and LCC programs. As with the MU program, this need not be a new space—the MU study hall is in the same room where students have class; they simply are provided with additional designated time for out-of-class work and collaboration.

Hire staff (or more staff) with education backgrounds. To ensure that college-in-prison programs—and educational programming in general—are well-supported, it is recommended that the prisons and DOC hire staff with explicit training in higher education. The more the prisons have staff who truly understand education, the greater the possibility that students will gain access to the appropriate and needed supports and resources.

Implications for Theory. As evidenced by this study, education debt is a useful lens to critically examine higher education in prison. Although education debt was conceptualized around the notion of an achievement gap in K-12 education, Ladson-Billings is ultimately concerned with educational inequity and its underpinnings; therefore the framework remains valuable to explore diverse points along the educational pipeline and to consider the educational experiences of different marginalized and disenfranchised student populations. The various elements of education debt also offer important entry points for engaging with the multifaceted nature of inequity.

This study also supports the use of student engagement theories and research in investigating higher education in prison. As evidenced by the study findings and by the research

and scholarship on college-in-prison, many programs lack what those of us outside of prison would consider to be the most basic elements of a meaningful college education and what we all take for granted on a daily basis (e.g., library access, peer learning, etc.). Decades of theoretical and empirical research support the critical nature of all of these elements for student development and learning at the postsecondary level. It is thus crucial to draw on these insights as well as others from the field of higher education to examine college-in-prison, improve practice, and provide recommendations for prison leadership and the DOC.

At the same time, it is necessary to incorporate research and knowledge from the field of higher education in prison for the obvious reason that higher education research and scholarship alone cannot account for the particularities, complexities, and nuances of educational programming in prison. It is also the field of higher education in prison that offers the voices, expertise, and lived experiences of justice-impacted students, scholars, advocates, and community leaders. As Scott (2013) noted, “Prison is one of the main things about which incarcerated students can teach the university” (p.26). One of the principal challenges is that the field of higher education in prison is still relatively new; thus there is not yet an extensive body of theoretical and empirical work from which to draw. At the same time, as evidenced by this study, there is rigorous and thoughtful work being done in this area and as the field and body of scholarship grows, it will be that much more fruitful to engage in studies of this nature.

Directions for Future Research. The present study highlighted various areas in need of further study. As previously noted, what is absent from this research is the student voice. To fully understand what kind of educational experiences college-in-prison programs provide, it is necessary to incorporate the student perspective. At the same time, to embark on research that involves disenfranchised populations such as incarcerated students, it is of utmost importance

that researchers first educate themselves about the problematic history of research in and on prisons and design studies with insight from experienced practitioners and scholars as well as those with relevant lived experiences. Further research is also needed on the experiences and perspectives of college-in-prison faculty in their own right. In this study, I explored their views and experiences as a means of examining the nature and quality of their programs. However, if we want to see college-in-prison programming grow and thrive, we must better understand and support multiple facets of the faculty experience. Cameron at RSU, for example, noted that research is needed on the emotional aspects and toll of teaching in prison. Lauren's comment that in her experience, prisons emphasize lack of care for students also points to potential avenues for research that explores how faculty (successfully) navigate the tensions between corrections and education. James Kilgore (2019) highlighted that prisons have "invisible educators"—incarcerated individuals who play a critical role in the educational lives of incarcerated students. Research that explores and honors the experiences of informal educators in prison is also needed.

Additionally, this research highlighted key differences among programs that are offered by different institutional types (four-year public, four-year private, community college). More work is needed on how these contexts shape and influence what distinct college-in-prison programs are able to provide. Furthermore, to support program development and operation, future research should prioritize in-depth examinations of particular processes. For example, how do programs develop their missions, goals, and philosophies? How have some programs successfully incorporated students in this process? Faculty training is also an area with many knowledge gaps. Research should highlight those programs that have rigorous and thoughtful faculty training to provide models for other programs. What do these programs do? What materials and resources do they use? How, if at all, have they collaborated with students? It is

important to approach this research both from the perspective of training facilitators and recipients. What have been the experiences of faculty in training? What did they find most useful? What suggestions do they have for faculty training? Finally, greater research is needed on the practice of incorporating students' subjectivities and lived experiences into programming. While I highlighted the potential positive impacts of this practice, experienced prison educators, practitioners, and scholars (e.g., Erzen, Gould, & Lewen, 2019; Scott, 2013) have also noted that done the wrong way or too much, it can also have negative implications.

Conclusion

Scholars in the field of higher education in prison have highlighted the need for more research examining the nature, scope, and quality of college-in-prison programs (Castro et al., 2018; Castro & Gould, 2019; Erzen, Gould, & Lewen, 2019). This qualitative case study explored the views, experiences, and practices of faculty and staff in three college-in-prisons as a means of interrogating the nature and quality of programs and the educational experiences afforded to incarcerated college students. In particular, I examined faculty and staff conceptualizations of the purpose of HEP, faculty training, the educational experiences made available to students, and staff and faculty advocacy. Further, I provided a critical analysis of findings through the lenses of education debt and scholarship from the field of higher education in prison.

Interviews with faculty and staff in this study revealed both correctional and non-correctional conceptualizations of the purpose of HEP. I framed select participants' anti-recidivist rationales for HEP as an extension of moral debt, citing critiques from the field of higher education that a focus on rehabilitation and recidivism distorts the primary responsibility of colleges and universities to provide a high-quality education to postsecondary students,

whatever the context. Study findings also highlighted the lack of formal faculty training in all three programs outside of training provided by the respective prisons on facility policies and safety. Drawing parallels between poor teacher preparation at the K-12 level to work with diverse—and often times underserved—students and lack of comprehensive faculty preparation to teach students in prison, I positioned the absence of faculty training from the individual programs as a form of historical debt. This study additionally found that all three programs provide academically challenging educational experiences that enable higher order as well as reflective and integrative learning, community-building, and opportunities for critical engagement with students' subjectivities and lived experiences. The findings also revealed that the three programs face similar and unique challenges with respect to peer learning and collaboration, student-faculty interaction, and resources and services for students. I highlighted historical and contemporary funding disparities that limit resources and services for incarcerated students as well as the absence of particular types of experiences that enhance learning in college and support the success of individuals post-incarceration (e.g., direct library access, student-faculty interaction outside of class) as examples of economic, historical, and moral debt. Finally, the findings demonstrated that select faculty and staff across programs have successfully advocated for students by pushing back on prison rules and culture, securing additional student support, and expanding academic offerings.

Perhaps nowhere is the persistent inequality in education that Ladson-Billings (2006) speaks of more apparent than in the prison context. Ultimately, the central tension in examining the nature and quality of the college-in-prison programs in this study are that they at once contribute to, and challenge, the education debt—on the one hand, college-in-prison programs represent a logical conclusion to historical inequities in K-12 education and a fundamentally

unjust criminal justice system. Lack of comprehensive faculty training, chronic resource constraints, and broader, societal beliefs about what kind of educational aims and supports are “reasonable” for carceral contexts bar college students in prison from accessing the same opportunities as their non-incarcerated peers. On the other hand, the programs in this study challenge the education debt—even though they operate in the brutal and resource-deprived environment of prison, students and faculty co-create rich spaces for exploration, learning, and community-building. In many ways, this has always been the history of education by and for marginalized populations, where under the most oppressive, inhumane, and violent circumstances, communities of color have fought to educate themselves (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Love, 2019). In an era of mass incarceration, there are no lasting and deep disruptions of education debt; HEP—at best—can offer momentary ruptures. Still, it remains no less critical for college-in-prison program faculty, staff, and students to collectively foster academically challenging and mutually humanizing postsecondary educational environments and experiences within prisons.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear <insert name>,

My name is Haruna Suzuki and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at North Carolina State University. I am writing to ask if you might be interested in participating in a study **exploring college programs in North Carolina prisons via the perspectives and experiences of program faculty and staff**.

As relatively little is known about college programming in prisons across the country, this study aims to shed light on an increasingly important area of higher education through the lens of faculty and staff—particularly regarding the purpose of college programming in prisons, faculty training, and pedagogy/classroom practices.

I am currently seeking faculty and staff who meet the following criteria:

- Have worked in the in-prison program for a **minimum of one full semester in the past two years**
- Are affiliated with an **accredited two- or four-year institution** of higher education in North Carolina
- Are willing to complete a brief **demographic and background questionnaire** (results to be aggregated)
- Are willing to participate in **one interview** (virtual or in-person), lasting 60-90 minutes, within one to two months.
- Are willing to **share documents** that provide insight into their in-prison program (e.g., course syllabi, orientation and/or training materials, program materials such as brochures or informational sheets, or any other document deemed relevant by the participant)
- Are willing to complete a **classroom description worksheet**, which asks you to sketch and describe the in-prison classroom.

If you meet these criteria and are interested in participating in the study or have further questions, please contact Haruna Suzuki by replying to this e-mail. I am happy to address any questions or concerns you may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Haruna Suzuki

Appendix B: Demographic and Professional Background Questionnaire for Faculty

1. Please indicate your current title.
2. In what discipline do you teach?
3. How long have you been in your current position?
4. Please briefly describe your professional background prior to your current position (e.g., 5 years industrial engineer, 15 years college faculty in industrial engineering)
5. How long have you taught college courses in prisons in the state?
6. Have you ever taught in prisons outside of the state? If so, where and for how long?
7. What course(s) do you currently teach in prison?
8. What course(s) have you taught in prison in the past?
9. How many hours per week do you currently spend in the prison classroom?
 1. How many unique courses do these weekly hours account for?
10. Is your in-prison course part of your regular teaching load?
11. How were you recruited to teach in prison?
12. How much support do you receive from your department to teach in prison?
 1. Please describe the nature of the support
13. How much support do you receive from your institution to teach in prison?
 1. Please describe the nature of the support
14. Please select the race/ethnicity that best describes you:
 1. Alaska Native or American Indian
 2. Asian
 3. African American or Black
 4. Hispanic/Latina/o/x
 5. Middle Eastern or North African
 6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 7. White
 8. Two or more races
 9. Prefer to self-describe: _____

15. What is the highest level of education you have earned?
1. First professional degree (M.D., D.D.S., J.D., D.V.M.)
 2. Doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Ed.D.)
 3. Master's degree
 4. Bachelor's degree
 5. Associate's degree
 6. Certificate
 7. High school diploma or GED
 8. No diploma or degree
16. Please indicate the areas of study you have completed at different levels of education (e.g., Certificate in Social Work, Bachelor's in Psychology)
17. What is your gender identity?
- a. Woman
 - b. Man
 - c. Trans Woman
 - d. Trans Man
 - e. Gender Queer
 - f. Prefer to self-describe: _____
18. Please indicate your year of birth: _____

Appendix C: Demographic and Professional Background Questionnaire for Staff

1. Please indicate your current title.
2. Please briefly describe your professional background prior to your current position (e.g., 5 years in college career services, 5 years in college diversity programming)
3. How long have you worked in higher education?
4. How long have you worked in the area of college-in-prison programming?
5. How long have you been with your current program?
6. Have you worked with a college-in-prison program outside of your current one? If so, which one and what was your role?
7. What disciplinary areas does your program cover?
8. Please select the race/ethnicity that best describes you:
 1. Alaska Native or American Indian
 2. Asian
 3. African American or Black
 4. Hispanic/Latina/o/x
 5. Middle Eastern or North African
 6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 7. White
 8. Two or more races
 9. Prefer to self-describe: _____
9. What is the highest level of education you have earned?
 1. First professional degree (M.D., D.D.S., J.D., D.V.M.)
 2. Doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Ed.D.)
 3. Master's degree
 4. Bachelor's degree
 5. Associate's degree
 6. Certificate
 7. High school diploma or GED
 8. No diploma or degree
10. Please indicate the areas of study you have completed at different levels of education (e.g., Certificate in Social Work, Bachelor's in Psychology)

11. What is your gender identity?

- g. Woman
- h. Man
- i. Trans Woman
- j. Trans Man
- k. Gender Queer
- l. Prefer to self-describe: _____

11. Please indicate your year of birth: _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Faculty

Start Time:
 Finish Time:
 Date:
 Location:
 Interviewer: Haruna Suzuki
 Interviewee Pseudonym:

Introduction

Begin interview with a re-introduction of myself and the study. Allow the participant to look over the consent form again and ask if they have any questions about providing consent.

Do you agree to participate in the study?

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this research. The goal for today is to explore your perspectives and experiences teaching college courses in prison. I anticipate that this conversation will last between 60 and 90 minutes. Before we get started, I want to go over a few key points.

First, I want to emphasize that any insights you provide today will be valuable in understanding higher education programming in NC prisons. That said, please feel free to refrain from answering any questions that you prefer not to discuss.

Second, as outlined in the consent form, I will be audio recording our conversation today. If at any point, you would like me to turn off the audio recording, please feel free to make that request—there will be no questions asked or any negative consequences to you as a participant.

Third, anything you share with me during this interview will be reported out using a pseudonym of your choice. I will also only use general descriptors (e.g., professor of social sciences, public four-year institution, etc.) and aggregate responses (e.g., The majority of faculty participants in this program have taught for 3-5 years in NC prisons, the median age of faculty respondents is 34, etc.) to further protect your confidentiality. Care will be taken to ensure that any identifiable information you reveal about other people will also be modified for confidentiality.

Fourth, I will provide the opportunity for you to review and offer feedback on the findings from interviews to ensure that your perspectives and experiences have been accurately captured.

Do you have any questions or concerns about anything that I've covered so far?
 To get started, I'm going to begin recording our conversation. Before we jump into the questions, can you please share with me a pseudonym that you would like me to use to refer to you in this study? I am also happy to assign you one if you prefer.

I'd like to begin with some broad background questions.

1. What initially drew you to teach in prison?

2. Is your teaching in prison guided by any particular teaching philosophy?
3. How do you view incarcerated students/what are your beliefs about your students?
 1. Does the fact that students are incarcerated impact the way you approach your teaching in prison? If so, how?
4. What do you wish others knew about the work of teaching in prison?
5. In your opinion, what is the purpose of higher education in prison?

We're now going to transition to talking about training and supervision.

6. Can you talk about any training you received before starting to teach in prison?
 1. If none, what kind of training would be helpful/do you wish you could have?
7. Can you tell me about any kind of supervision you receive to teach in prison?
 1. If none, what kind of supervision would be helpful?

At this time, I'd like to move to talking about pedagogy and your prison classroom practices.

8. What knowledge and skills do you emphasize in your course? (e.g., writing, public speaking, etc.)
9. Can you tell me about any peer-to-peer work that you include in your course?
10. What types of topics do you talk to your students about? (e.g., academic, career, industry connections, and/or further education, etc.)
11. Can you talk about a lesson plan or teaching approach that you think worked particularly well in your prison courses?
12. Can you talk about any challenges with teaching your course in prison?
13. Can you describe the key differences, if any, between the courses you teach on campus and the courses you teach in prison?
14. Can you describe the key differences, if any, between the educational experiences that your on-campus students can have and those your incarcerated students can have?
15. Are there any changes to your course and/or program that you've advocated for with your program and/or DPS?
16. Would you like to add anything else?

Thank you very much for our conversation today. I've appreciated hearing your insights. Do you have any questions or concerns that you'd like to address?

As you know, as part of this research, I am requesting that faculty and staff share documents that offer further insight into some of the things we talked about today. Would you be willing to share any materials that you think help to enhance understanding of your course and program? If so, you can share those with me via Google Drive over the next few weeks?

I'm also going to put a classroom description worksheet in the Google Drive folder. This worksheet asks you to sketch and describe the prison classroom.

I'm going to stop the audio recording. Thank you again for your time and I will be in touch should I have any follow-up questions about the interview.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Staff

Start Time:

Finish Time:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer: Haruna Suzuki

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Introduction

Begin interview with a re-introduction of myself and the study. Allow the participant to look over the consent form again and ask if they have any questions about providing consent.

Do you agree to participate in the study?

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this research. The goal for today is to explore your perspectives and experiences working within a college-in-prison program. I anticipate that this conversation will last between 60 and 90 minutes. Before we get started, I want to go over a few key points.

First, I want to emphasize that any insights you provide today will be valuable in understanding higher education programming in NC prisons. That said, please feel free to refrain from answering any questions that you prefer not to discuss.

Second, as outlined in the consent form, I will be audio recording our conversation today. If at any point, you would like me to turn off the audio recording, please feel free to make that request—there will be no questions asked or any negative consequences to you as a participant.

Third, anything you share with me during this interview will be reported out using a pseudonym of your choice. I will also only use general descriptors (e.g., Program Officer, public four-year institution, etc.) and aggregate responses (e.g., Staff participants have worked 3-5 years in college-in-prison programs in NC or The median age of staff participants is X) to further protect your confidentiality. Care will be taken to ensure that any identifiable information you reveal about other people will also be modified for confidentiality.

Fourth, I will provide the opportunity for you to review and offer feedback on the findings from interviews to ensure that your perspectives and experiences have been accurately captured.

Do you have any questions or concerns about anything that I've covered so far?

To get started, I'm going to begin recording our conversation. Before we jump into the questions, can you please share with me a pseudonym that you would like me to use to refer to you in this study? I am also happy to assign you one if you prefer.

I'd like to begin with some broad background questions.

1. What initially drew you to work in the area of college-in-prison?

2. What are your day-to-day responsibilities?
3. In your opinion, what's the purpose of higher education in prison?
4. What are the main challenges?

Now I'd like to transition to talking about faculty recruitment, training, and supervision.

5. How do you recruit faculty?
6. What are the minimum requirements for faculty to teach in prison?
7. How does your program train faculty to teach in prison?
8. How, if at all, do faculty get supervised to teach in prison?

At this time, I'd like to talk about the classroom and educational experiences provided by your program.

9. Are students able to interact with faculty outside of the in-person class meeting? If so, how?
10. Are students able to interact with each other about coursework outside of the in-person meeting? If so, how?
11. What resources and services do students have access to (e.g., library, Writing Center, tutoring, laptops, etc.)?
12. Which resources and services, if at all, is your program looking to put in place?
13. What can students do if they need accommodations?
14. Are there any differences between on-campus and in-prison offerings that we haven't covered yet?
15. What kind of program data do you keep?
16. Would you like to add anything else?

Thank you very much for our conversation today. I've appreciated hearing your insights.

As you know, as part of this research, I am requesting that faculty and staff share documents that offer further insight into some of the things we talked about today. Would you be willing to share any materials that you think help to enhance understanding of your program? If so, you can share those with me via Google Drive over the next few weeks?

I'm also going to put a classroom description worksheet in the Google Drive folder. This worksheet asks you to sketch and describe the prison classroom.

I'm going to stop the audio recording. Thank you again for your time and I will be in touch should I have any follow-up questions about the interview.

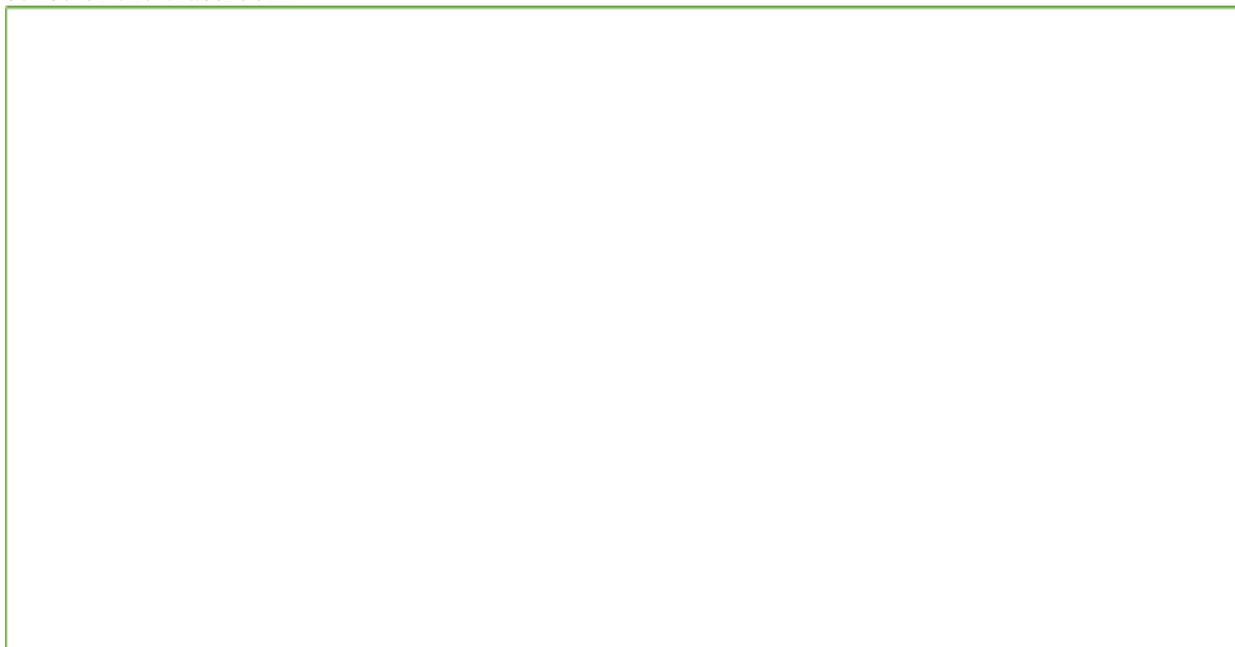
Appendix F: Classroom Description Worksheet

In this worksheet, I'd like to ask you to describe the prison classroom in which you have taught (or in which you've most taught if you've taught in several).

Note: Please feel free to work on the worksheet in the way that is most convenient for you. You can print it out or handwrite the information on any 8.5x11 sheet of paper. To return it, please scan or take a photo of the worksheet and upload it to the google drive folder I've shared with you.

Location: _____ Correctional Institution (Note: The name of the institution is for internal purposes only and will not be shared out in any final writeups or presentations)

In the space below, please draw the classroom. Please capture the layout, location of faculty and students, features like windows and doors, and anything that you feel helps to give a good sense of the classroom.



Descriptive observations

Please share your observations about the physical space of the classroom. Feel free to use bullet points or any other format that is most convenient for you.

e.g. It's quite spacious.

There's nothing on the walls.

Reflective observations

Please share observations about how the physical setup and/or environment of the classroom impact teaching and learning. These might include general statements that students have previously shared with you (as indicated in the second example below). However, please do not reach out to students for their direct observations or reflections. Feel free to use bullet points or any other format that is most convenient for you.

e.g. It's hard to create a comfortable environment for discussion because we can't rearrange the desks.

Some students have told me that it's a depressing environment to learn in because there's no natural light.

Thank you for completing this worksheet!

Appendix G: HEP Faculty Training Table of Contents

This “HEP Faculty Training Table of Contents” is a collaboratively-developed resource resulting from multiple virtual conversations hosted by the Second Chance Educational Alliance (SCEA) and involving some 40 HEP practitioners (per meeting). It is an evolving document that outlines HEP faculty training priorities and recommendations. With permission from Dr. Erin Corbett, Founder and CEO of SCEA, I have included it here.

I. Educational Framework

- Background of the United States prison system and cradle to prison pipeline
 - Important to have a state specific focus in addition to larger, macro picture
 - PREA training on campus and then debrief
 - Include facility specific data points: population numbers at a prison - age, race, religion, educational background, etc.
 - Resource: [Incarceration rates by states](#)
- Discussion of the perpendicular nature of education & corrections
- Trauma responsive teaching, impact on learning
- What else is happening in the field of HEP?
- Transition from inside to free campus
- How to bridge learning sites?
 - Reducing stigma & fear could increase ability to recruit & retain high quality staff/faculty

II. Scope

- What is the scope? What should it look like? What should be discussed before instructors go into the work?

- What does this mean for what training looks like?
- What are the immediate needs for when faculty go into facilities or do their virtual instruction?
- What are the areas that should be discussed immediately before instructors go into the work?
- What, if any, should be part of the ongoing development of the instructors?
- What are the debrief reflection pieces that should happen as they potentially exit the work or at least wrap up a cycle of instruction? Giving instructors the opportunity to potentially think it through and debrief, for both the organization that they're working with, but also for themselves.
- How best to help instructors connect with each other? Building infrastructure that makes staying connected & communicating easy/normal
- Is professional development requirement needed to maintain the ability to teach in HEP?
 - Thinking about CEU
 - Could we offer these through national organizations (especially corrections/justice orgs b/c those are what get promoted most in those organizations)?

III. Philosophy Statement

- Create a philosophy statement around service and activism
- What is the difference between doing education for incarcerated people from a place of service and doing education for incarcerated people from a place of activism? How do you approach it?

IV. Cultural Competency

- What is the culture that you bring, your own personal culture?

- Corrections culture is paired with prison culture
- Where does prison culture, race and power dynamics, gender, and corrections culture hit each other?
 - Provide specific examples
- Realities of prison system for students (gender, race, sexual orientation, class, status regarding conviction)

V. Pedagogy & Training

- What does it mean to be an educator and learner in this space?
 - How college in and of itself was created to create the gentleman scholar.
 - College is very Eurocentric, colonized, and imperialistic.
 - Ways to disarticulate the above...are there things we should keep?
 - Universities function as a vehicle of social mobility because of its history in creating the gentleman scholar. What are the standards and/or outcomes that determine success in society?
 - Resource:
 - Twisted at the Root: The Intransigence of Inequality in U.S. Higher Education by D.L. Stewart
 - Dr. Edwin Nichols “Frameworks for Philosophy of Knowing in Cultural Competence in American Schools book
- Teacher vs. Educator
 - Programs need to be clear about their stance (philosophy/ideology)
 - Is your program from an abolitionist stance?
 - Is your program from a more humanistic perspective?

- Pragmatic perspective?
 - Being clear about values comes from having codified values
 - Need organizational support and language that is written to help with those conversations and be something that you can refer back too
- Faculty training element: What is your stance? Be particular around how we hire teachers and being selective on who we allow to come into this work. Instructors must come into this work with a lens of social justice and humanity.
- List of criteria of who should be faculty in these programs.
- Criteria for non-academic support staff in programs.
- Who is capable of teaching in these programs?
- How do we look at credentials of potential faculty?
- What are the broader outlines of teaching in carceral spaces? Adults and juveniles - what are the crossovers? The distinctions based on gender?
- How do cultural narratives growing up inform your work?
- What is the curriculum of a higher ed in prison instructor?
- What is your narrative around learning?
- Understanding and negotiating the relationships between instructor/student, institution/program and understanding messaging
- For the teachers we are training, what is their connection to incarceration? What do they know about it? What is the lens through which they are coming to incarcerated peoples?
 - How do you catch your own implicit biases?

- How do you approach/perceive your students in general? How is that different or the same as in the prison classrooms?
 - Parallels between those who are incarcerated are being viewed and the same way students are being viewed in school buildings
 - Becoming an accomplice with your students
- Disabuse the notion that you are saving incarcerated folks.
 - What is society telling you your role is? And is that to your benefit or to your detriment? And what role are you then playing in being complicit in the power dynamics that society then puts on us?
- Train on curriculum by having participants participate in the curriculum. Put people on the other side of it and have them reflect.
- Tools you wish you had before stepping into a prison classroom.
- For the students, what is their connection and experience to education? Students may bring some narrative and even residual trauma into this classroom as adults. How do you as a teacher even begin to rewrite that narrative so their full selves show up? And how do you catch your own implicit biases as you're trying to teach them beyond where they even thought they could go?
- Teaching philosophy construction
 - What is your teaching philosophy?
- Syllabus:
 - Being strategic about how to build your syllabus
 - Syllabus construction for print correspondence (within a transformational justice framework/values)

- How to build a syllabus that includes philosophy and inclusivity
- Relevant teaching models such as “rich tasks”
- Assessment
 - What does that look like in the age of COVID-19?
- In addition to course evaluations, students evaluate instructors and instructors complete evaluations, too—and both student feedback and faculty feedback is helpful in continuing to shape hiring practices.^[P]_[SEP]
- Social Justice/Inclusivity
 - Combating the Eurocentric model of who is qualified to teach a course
 - How social justice is related to their humanity?
- Must have cooperative learning so that folks aren’t pigging back off each other.
- How to produce packets and materials that can be mailed to the prison?
- Resources:
 - Ted Talk: Hip hop, grit, and academic success: Bettina Love at TEDxUGA
 - We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom by Bettina Love

VI. Technology

- Leverage the framing or need of closed network systems around having access to learning management systems (Blackboard, Canvas, and Brightspace) Can we use these LMS with closed networks?
- OER/libraries
 - Use OER sites to build this training

- Logistics of correspondence courses as well as technical support for funding those programs

VII. Building a Learning Community

- What can I do right now to build a learning community?
- How do you build this learning community during COVID-19?
- Decenter ourselves as the people given the authority, educators, and instructors
- Find ways to work in partnership and learn
- How do we work with a liberative abolitionist lens within a classroom space that is looking to make the very existence of a prison system a punishment?
- How do we make prisons obsolete and a thing of the past? How do we build the communities now to facilitate that process?

VIII. Mental Health

- The psychology of teaching inside a prison.
- We normalize things that are NOT normal and there is a toll that it takes on instructors.
- How does trauma intersect in this space?
 - There is so much trauma to work through and it should not be siloed to counselors or therapists. We need relationships for healing. The classroom is a space for facilitating relationships and can be a space for healing.
 - Having a direct discussion with students (or peers or whoever) about trauma, being transparent with why we are doing things "this" way, can be helpful.
 - What does it mean that as educators we're healers? How do we think about ourselves as educators, as being healers?

- Psych and educational neuroscience: particular focus on how emotion drives cognition and learning and how learning happens in a socio-emotional context.
- Resource: [Approaching Trauma Work: Points of Entry](#)

Appendix H: College-in-Prison Faculty and Staff Reading List

This is by no means an exhaustive reading list, but a good starting point. Happy Reading!

Student Engagement

- Anaya, G. & Cole, D. (2001). Latino/a student achievement: Exploring the influence of student-faculty interactions on college grades. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(1), 3-14.
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- Chickering, A. & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3-7.
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- engagement among African American Undergraduates at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(3), 271-284.
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- Soria, K. M., Fransen, J., & Nackerud, S. (2017). Beyond Books: The Extended Academic Benefits of Library Use for First-Year College Students. *College & Research Libraries*, 78(1), 8–22. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.1.8>
- Strayhorn, T., & DeVita, L. (2010). African American males' student engagement: A comparison of good practices by institutional type. *Journal of African American Studies*,

Umbach, P. D., & Wawrzynski, M. R. (2005). Faculty do matter: The role of college faculty in student learning and engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 46(2), 153–184.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-004-1598-1>

Higher Education in Prison

Castro, E. L. (2018). Racism, the language of reduced recidivism, and higher education in prison:

Toward an anti-racist praxis. *Critical Education*, 9(17), 1–19.

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Castro, E. L., Brawn, M., Graves, D., Mayorga, O., Page, J., & Slater, A. (2015). Higher Education in an Era of Mass Incarceration: Possibility Under Constraint. *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs*, 1(2), 1.

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http://www.higheredinprison.org/uploads/1/0/8/0/108008195/equity_excellence_in_practice.pdf

Evans, D. (2019). The Elevating Connection of Higher Education in Prison: An Incarcerated

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