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The Never-Ending Sentence: An Examination of Policies and Programs Targeting Post-Secondary Education Among Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

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**The Never-Ending Sentence: An Examination of Policies and Programs
Targeting Post-Secondary Education Among Currently and Formerly
Incarcerated Individuals**

By

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THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

Honors Thesis

This is to certify that the Honors Thesis of

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THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

Abstract

Education serves as potentially the greatest instrument of change and self-improvement within the modern society. With higher education comes a variety of skills and opportunities that foster success within the modern world including lucrative employment, personal growth in relation to skills and knowledge, as well improved mental health, and sense of belonging (Runnel, 2015). Unfortunately, the university system within the United States is designed to exclude a large population of people, those with a felony convictions. As of 2019, the United States has an estimated 24 million individuals with a felony status on their records (Eberstadt, 2019). For these 24 million individuals, having a criminal conviction causes significant felony restrictions that limit their ability to succeed, including restrictions within higher education. While efforts have been made to ease these restrictions, there are still significant efforts that must be made to make higher education more accessible and inclusive to system-impacted individuals, both currently and formerly incarcerated. The intention of this research is to assess the educational barriers and existing opportunities for justice-involved individuals with felony convictions to advance their education. With the understanding of these barriers, this research seeks to assess the features of current programs and policies existing within the university setting with the intention of making recommendations on the development of inclusive and accessible programming of higher education for system-impacted students. |

Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States leads the world in rates of incarceration, a title the United States should not be proud to uphold (World Prison Brief, 2020). There are more than 6.4 million adults under correctional supervision in the United States, a rate 5-10 times higher than other industrialized countries (Maruschak et al., 2020). As of 2019, the United States had an estimated 24 million individuals with a felony status; roughly 20 million of those holding felony status have already completed their sentence and have started the process of reentry (Eberstadt, 2019). While this number seems low in comparison to the whole populace, individuals with felony convictions, both currently and formerly incarcerated, accounts for roughly 7.3% of the American people (Bronson & Carson, 2019). This large population of individuals face significant institutionalized discrimination and limitations that place boundaries and restrictions on their ability to improve their quality of life, subsequently increasing rates of recidivism (Gaes, 2008).

Felony restrictions exist within institutionalized policies at both federal and state level and cover an incredibly broad scope. While the level at which these barriers exists varies between states, felony restrictions typically present themselves through, voting restrictions, housing insecurities, workplace discrimination, and educational restrictions, the main focus of this research (Olivares et al., 1997). Within the multitude of felony restrictions, the most well-known restriction comes in the form of disenfranchisement. While the extent of these restrictions varies at the state level, each is characterized by the systemic prohibition of voting rights for individuals with criminal convictions. In 21 states, the right to vote is prohibited until the completion of one's sentence and any additional probational period. In these 21 states, the formerly incarcerated are often required to pay any outstanding fines in addition to the completion of one's period of incarceration before the right to vote is automatically reinstated. In

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

11 states legislation surrounding the prohibition of voting rights remains indefinite and does not specify the requirements necessary to attain the right to vote with a criminal conviction (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). Within the workplace, certain disciplines have federal restrictions for an individual with felony status. For example, under Federal law, those labeled as a sex offender cannot work within publicly funded schools. According to some state laws, many of those with felony convictions are barred from attaining private licenses (Wheelock et al., 2011). In addition to workplace restrictions and disenfranchisement, homelessness among the formerly incarcerated exists at extreme rates due to a multitude of systemic restrictions and policies within public and privatized housing (Herbert et al., 2015). Each of these systemic restrictions imposes complications and limits the ability of a system-impacted individual to successfully reintegrate (Olivares et al., 1997).

While each of these systemic complications influences the reentry process following a period of incarceration, the barriers specific to higher education create unique challenges for the formerly incarcerated. Restrictions to higher education present themselves through two main influences, administrative and application barriers, and financial aid restrictions. In a recent study, it has been shown that 60-80% of private institutions, 55% of public institutions, and 40% of community colleges ask about your criminal record in the admissions process (Clayton, 2017). While the scope of the disclosure of criminal convictions varies with each university, for many universities and institutions this question is a deal breaker and will lead to the denial of an applicant. In addition to complications within the application process, significant restrictions surround the available financial aid and monetary support for educational programming (Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994). This prohibition of financial support is important to consider due to the significant influence financial aid has on the accessibility of

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

university; in a report from the College Board, it was found that within the 2014-2015 academic year, two-thirds of college students relied on financial aid and grants to pay for college education (College Board, 2015). By revoking significant resources of financial aid and allowing for the discrimination of applicants within the application process, these institutions of higher education are denying system-impacted students access to one of the largest influences on improvement of quality of life.

The argument towards higher education of system-impacted individuals is shaped through the benefits and skills related to individual success as well as elements crucial to the betterment of society that are associated with higher education. In a series of interviews, formerly incarcerated individuals expressed that the most difficult barriers of reentry to overcome were their own struggles with financial competency, career readiness, mental health, and sense of belonging, rather than just the systemic complications of reentry (Runnel, 2015). The structure of higher education and the curriculum without is often characterized by the specific development of these skills.

In addition to these personal complications associated with reentry, a recent study concluded that the inability to find work is a significant issue among those with felony convictions (Shannon et al., 2017). The unemployment rate between the formerly incarcerated and the general populace represents a significant discrepancy; the unemployment rate amongst a cohort of five million ex-offenders is approximately 27%, while the unemployment rate of the general population ranges anywhere from three to five percent (Shannon et al., 2017). While much of this can be attributed to the institutionalized regulations and restrictions within the workplace, the discrepancy in levels of education between incarcerated individuals and the general population actively contributes to the high amounts of unemployment. In 2003, the

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

Bureau of Justice reported that 41% of state and federal prison inmates have not receive a high-school diploma (Harlow, 2003). In a report conducted by the Prison Policy Initiative, it was concluded that, in comparison to the general public, formerly incarcerated individuals are twice as likely to have no high school education and are 8 times less likely to complete a college education. In this same report, it was concluded that, within the population of those 25 and older, 55.4% of the general public have completed at least one college-level course while only 23% of the formerly incarcerated populace had done so (Couloute, 2018). Within the workforce, lack of a college education decreases an individual's prospects of getting a well-paying job, necessary for financial security. According to the Prison Policy Initiative report, 25% of the formerly incarcerated populace still lack high school credentials and the presence of low-skilled work has diminished significantly since the 1980's (Prison Policy Initiative, 2018). Through this research, it is apparent that having a college degree can improve an individual's opportunities of lucrative employment.

In addition to the personal benefits education can provide for individual with a felony conviction, education of the currently and formerly incarcerated can provide significant cost-related benefits. According to a 2017 study, the total cost of mass incarceration, ranging from the legal system to the prison systems and to the costs of victim reparations, is around \$182 billion every year (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017). According to a long-term analysis of recidivism rates, it was concluded that within three years of release, 68% of those released from correctional facilities were arrested again (Alper et al., 2018). The Bureau of Justice reported that the estimated cost of each incarcerated individual is around \$22,650 annually (Stephen, 2001). According to recent findings, the annual average cost of tuition is \$41,411 for private institutions, \$11,171 for in-state students at a public university, and \$26,809 for out-of- state

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

students at a public institution (Farran et al., 2020). In a study conducted by the RAND Corporation, researchers found two significant findings relating to the cost saving benefits of post-secondary education of system-impacted individuals. In the RAND Corporation's study, it was found that with every dollar invested into correctional education five years' worth of incarceration costs are saved. It was also found that every year of post-secondary education reduces rates of recidivism by 40% (RAND Corporation, 2019). The combination of these two findings represents the significant cost related benefits that higher education of system-impacted individuals creates.

While the institutionalized barriers to Post-Secondary education are far from eradicated, there has been a recent development of programs designed to provide opportunities for higher education to this vulnerable population. Existing within correctional institutions, activist organizations, governmental policy, and on college campuses, these programs each address the multifaceted barriers of reentry through the lens of an educational approach. The intention of this research is to assess the educational barriers associated with reentry and existing opportunities for justice-involved individuals with felony convictions to advance their education. This research seeks to use the understanding of these complications of higher education to assess the features of current programs and policies existing within the university setting with the intention of making recommendations on the development of inclusive and accessible programming of higher education for system-impacted students.

Chapter 2: The Background of a Long-Running Issue

Criminological research has sought to understand the causes of criminal behavior and the factors that lead an individual to offend or reoffend. Research relating to criminal behavior has analyzed biological, psychological, and sociological factors that contribute to an individual's criminal behavior and have found that one of the most influential factors in criminal behavior are sociodemographic features including, but not limited to, socioeconomic status, social disorganization, and level of education (Mundia et al., 2016). Understanding education's influence on criminal behavior and the subsequent attempts at implementing educational programs, in a historical perspective, is integral to the understanding of the necessary services and practices that universities should provide to create a more inclusive and accessible environment for system-impacted students, both currently and formerly incarcerated individuals working towards the attainment of higher education.

The Correlation Between Education and Criminal Behavior

Education, or lack thereof, has historically been analyzed as one of the main components contributing to an individual's involvement in criminal behavior (Usher, 1997). Educational disparity exists widely within prison population and has been shown to have various influences on crime. According to a survey conducted by the Prison Policy Initiative, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals maintain one of the lowest educational standings, with only a quarter of incarcerated individuals having a high school diploma (Prison Policy Initiative, 2018). In 1997, research found that there was a relationship between education and the deterrence of crime, specifically relating to the level of educational attainment and moral understanding. Within this research, it was found that education serves as the main deliverance system for moral principles and the necessary tools of success in society. Each year of education equated to higher

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

moral understanding and a shift in individual preferences and behaviors. Subsequently, the shift in moral principles and preferences alters an individual's ability to make rational decisions and their involvement in criminal behavior (Usher, 1997). Level of education also has a direct relationship between the approval and disapproval of criminal behavior; empirical research suggests that those with higher levels of education and social status are far less permissive of crime than those with lower levels of education.. This approval or disapproval of criminal behavior is explained through the implementation of moral beliefs of the upper, more educated class (Lochner et al., 2004). Research has also shown the monetary relationship between education and criminal behavior. Educational attainment has a clear relationship with availability and desirability within the job market; by attaining higher levels of education, individuals are more likely to attain higher paying jobs with higher job security and financial stability, subsequently lessening the assumed need to commit crime (Lochner et al., 2004).

This educational disparity and its relationship to criminal behavior can further be seen when considering the relationship between educational attainment within prison and rates of recidivism. In a comprehensive study led by the United States Sentencing Commission, it was recorded that within eight years of release, 49.3% of those included within the study had been arrested again (United States Sentencing Commission, 2016). With this high rate of recidivism within the United States, it is important to consider the influential factors contributing to the reduction of these rates and their accessibility, particularly with education. In research conducted by the RAND Corporation, it was found that inmates who partake in any level of educational programming whilst incarcerated, are up to 43% less likely to reoffend and return to prison (RAND Corporation, 2019). In research relating to juvenile delinquency, it was shown that juveniles who achieved academic success during incarceration were 69% more likely to return to

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

school than those who were not as academically successful. As a result of the continuation of education, these students were far less likely to reoffend (Bloomberg et al., 2011).

A Brief History of Educational Programming in Prisons

Educational programming within prisons is far from a new practice but it has remained heavily influenced by the political and societal climate within the United States. Correctional ideology has been characterized by the balance of retribution and rehabilitation, ensuring that one's punished appropriately for the crime that has been committed as well as ensuring the eventual rehabilitation of those incarcerated (Esperian, 2010). Educational programs are one way that the goal of rehabilitation has been met throughout the history of the prison system. The ability to educate individuals who are incarcerated has long been met with the resistance of policy makers and has relied upon the assistance and support from post-secondary education institutions (Gehring, 1997).

Correctional education has been characterized by two main perspectives, rehabilitation and crime control, both of which shape the current state of the United States correctional system. Educational programming in prisons holds roots in religious ideology. In 1834, the first educational programming took root in Massachusetts State Prison with the religious education of prisoners led by Harvard Divinity School (Gehring, 1997). The first of its kind, Harvard Divinity Schools educational programming focused its intentions on the rehabilitation and betterment of the incarcerated, a stance Harvard Divinity School still stands by (Potts, 2017). From this point forward, rehabilitative practices were the main focus of the prison system. In 1916, the warden of Sing Sing prison, Thomas Mott Osborn continued the fight for a rehabilitative approach to incarceration within his Yale lectures; in this series of lectures, Osborn states that:

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

“no system that does not differentiate... that does not allow for the careful consideration, development and training of individuality and taking into full account each man’s personal needs, is a fit system of education for a prison any more than it is for a school or college” (Osborn p. 47).

This claim directly called into question the punitive ideology and its success within the correctional system and argued that human nature and its role in correctional practices is far more complicated than assumed at the time. In 1930, a significant advancement in correctional education developed with the establishment of the American Prison’s Association Standing Committee on Education, a committee focused on educational standards behind bars led by assistant warden of the United States Naval Prison, Austin McCormick (Gehring, 1997). In 1946, the American Prison’s Association Standing Committee developed the Correctional Education Association (CEA National, 2020). In 1988, the Correctional Education Association led the development of the first Standards for Adult and Juvenile Correctional Education Programs (CEA National, 2020).

The 1970’s saw the shift into the crime control perspective that shaped the United States correctional system for decades (Esperian, 2010). In 1974, pushback on the development of education behind bars began to arise with the funding of two major studies of correctional education by the Western Association of Higher Education (Gehring, 1997). The Martinson Report (1974) saw the scathing review of reform programs within United States correctional institutions. Martinson (1974) claimed that reform-based programming is ineffective and not significantly impacting rates of recidivism. This publication shifted public thought to crime control, under the premise that, if ineffective, any attempts to rehabilitate the incarcerated would be fruitless. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 reflected this

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

ideology. Through this act, significant funding towards correctional education and financial aid for currently and formerly incarcerated students were revoked and punishments for various offenses became significantly harsher ().

This crime control perspective characterized the corrections system for decades to follow. The most significant shift in the perspective of reform focused programming came with the establishment of the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative, in 2016, and the subsequent reinstatement of financial aid for currently and formerly incarcerated students within certain correctional facilities (Vera Institute of Justice, 2016). Despite the slight shift in public perception of reform-centered programming, education of system-impacted individuals remains a debated topic among policy makers and correctional facilities.

Personal and Societal Benefits of Post-Secondary Education for Those with a Felony Conviction

Access to and attainment of baseline education has been shown to have a statistically significant relationship with the involvement, or lack thereof, in criminal behavior (Usher, 1997). It was also found that with every year of post-secondary education, rates of recidivism decrease by 40% (RAND Corporation, 2019). While both of these findings provide positive insight on the effectiveness of education as a method of crime prevention, it is important to consider the vague nature of simply advocating for the education of those at risk for or already possessing felony convictions. Education at the post-secondary level provides opportunities and skills further than that of a high-school diploma, that actively contribute to the betterment of society as well as personal growth during or after a period of incarceration.

Higher education provides skill and means that can propel any individual and can also specifically address the barriers of reentry for those with felony convictions. As previously

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

discussed, barriers of reentry exist within state and federal regulations, as well as within the private sector, particularly in places of work. Many of these barriers of reentry are specifically addressed by the curriculum within a post-secondary educational institution without the demographic of system-impacted students in mind, effectively creating opportunity for universities to expand upon their existing curriculum to provide a more inclusive setting for system-impacted students.

One of the largest difficulties upon being released from a correctional institution relates directly to the ability of the formerly incarcerated to find lucrative employment (Hall, 2015). With the majority of the incarcerated populace having attained less education than that of a high school diploma, there already exists a steep disadvantage within the work force (Harlow, 2003). During the 1980's, the United States saw a significant increase in the wage gap associated with the possession of a high school diploma or a college degree; this wage gap was a direct reflection of a modernizing labor force's desire for highly skilled labor. Within this period of time, the amount of available jobs characterized by low-skilled labor became much harder to attain, creating an influx of individuals seeking a higher education as a means to the more lucrative work. Recently, this gap has remained relatively unchanged but is still characterized by a significant discrepancy between the income associated with low-skilled labor and high-skilled labor. (Valletta, 2016). As this would suggest, the current job market does not give the same value to a high school diploma as it once held, making the possession of a college level degree substantially more beneficial when joining the job market (Selingo, 2017). The diminished value of a high school diploma and the educational discrepancies that exist within system-impacted individuals put individuals with criminal convictions at a significant disadvantage within the labor force, often barring them access to lucrative employment.

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

Upon reentering society, those with felony convictions are faced with imposed limitations and restrictions within the labor force at both an institutionalized and individual level, both factors contributing to the high numbers of unemployment in the formerly incarcerated populace. Research pertaining to the reentry into the workforce showed that within a period of 8 months after being released, less than half of the formerly incarcerated had found employment (Visher, 2011). It is important to consider that while the restrictions imposed against those with prior criminal convictions contribute to this statistic, the lack of education and skills highly demanded by the workforce contribute significantly to the unemployment rates within the formerly incarcerated population.

In addition to the personal growth and opportunities education can provide for those with felony convictions, the access and attainment of higher education can provide significant societal benefits, particularly on a financial level. As leaders in incarceration rates, the United States spends \$182 billion on the total cost of mass incarceration, including the costs of the legal system, prison systems, and costs of victim reparations (Wagner et al., 2017). Within the fiscal year of 2020, the United States maintained an annual budget of \$3.1 trillion (Congressional Budget Office, 2020). The Bureau of Justice Statistics recently reported that the estimated cost of each incarcerated individual at the federal level is around \$37,449.00 annually (Bureau of Prisons, 2019). While this high number can be attributed to a number of factors associated with the correctional system, a significant portion of the costs of mass incarceration can be attributed to the high rates of recidivism present in the United States. As previously stated, within three years of release 68% of those released will be arrested again (Alper et al., 2018). With each rearrest follows increased cost of incarceration, making the factors of recidivism an important consideration when assessing the national budget. According to the RAND Corporation, every

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

dollar invested into correctional education effectively saves five years' worth of incarceration costs in the United States (RAND Corporation, 2019). According to recent findings, in-state tuition in the United States has increased by 72% since 2008 with an annual average cost of tuition at \$41,411 for private institutions, \$11,171 for in-state students at a public university, and \$26,809 for out-of- state students at a public institution (Farran Powell & Kerr, 2020). This cost does not include any outstanding fee's in relation to housing, textbooks, and extracurricular costs that a university may require, making the cost of attendance often much higher than that of just the baseline tuition costs (Farran Powell & Kerr, 2020). According to the RAND Corporation (2019), it was concluded that with each year of post-secondary education, rates of recidivism decrease by upwards of 40 percent. While this tuition and cost of attendance remains high, an issue relating to financial aid restrictions, the cost of providing in-state tuition as opposed to incarceration is almost half of the cost of annual incarceration and can provide significant long-term cost benefits, an incredibly important monetary consideration when looking at crime prevention.

The Movement to Higher-Education

The multitude of complications relating to reintegration of those with felony convictions runs deep within the realm of higher education, creating increased difficulty in breaking out of the limitations and stereotypes surrounding a felony conviction. That being said, within the recent years, the United States has seen the development of various programs and practices to make education more accessible to those with prior felony convictions, each of which containing their own methods of addressing the complicated needs of this populace. This current study analyzes the individual components the various types of educational assistance programs, including program administrator, program focus, and available services to create a deeper

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

understanding of how these programs address the specific concerns related to educational felony restrictions.

Chapter 3: Navigating Post-Secondary Education with a Criminal Conviction

As seen throughout the history of educational programming in United States correctional institutions, the development of post-secondary educational programming within correctional facilities is not a new phenomenon, but it has historically been met with push back and has required support from activist organizations and institutions of higher education (Gehring, 1997). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, nine of ten state prisons offer some level of educational programs in attempts to increase literacy rates and create educational advancement and opportunities for their prison populations (Harlow, 2003). While educational programming exists in many correctional institutions, the scope of this provided education varies widely and depends on the available resources. External organizations and institutions of higher education have each developed their own programming designed specifically to make higher education more accessible to the populace of those with felony convictions and address the barriers to higher education.

This chapter will begin by establishing an understanding of the barriers relating to higher education and then will continue through an analysis of specific programming geared toward the provision of higher-education for justice-impacted students, currently and formerly incarcerated individuals seeking to attain higher education. This research intends to analyze five existing programs of higher education existing within universities or correctional facilities. Educational programming within correctional institutions has long relied on the support of institutions of higher education (Gehring, 1997). For that reason, this research is focused on programs with heavy influence within institutions of higher education. With the exception of one program, each of the selected programs is based on or led by a university; the exception, while not based on a specific university, works closely with these institutions of higher education. An additional

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

consideration while selecting organizations were the scope of services provided; each of the selected programs possesses services pertaining to administrative barriers, career and college preparation, community resources, and mentorship, each of which specifically target the individual complications related to higher-education and its accessibility.

Admissions Requirements and Limitations

Acceptance into a university is a common milestone among American youth; as a representation of one's academic achievement and high standing, universities maintain a high standard within their applicant pool, standards that, for many, are borderline discriminatory. The selective nature of university admissions teams has become a more common conversation and has seen the development of affirmative action. Affirmative Action first arose with President Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order 11246 in 1965. Through this order, universities were required to take affirmative action and active measures to ensure that universities were not discriminating within their application process. This was further solidified with the revised order No. 4 of 1972, in which universities were expected to set goals and timelines for the implementation of these anti-discriminatory practices (Fullinwider, 2018). While significant efforts have been made to make higher education more inclusive and accessible, there is still a significant lack of diverse representation within higher education. In research conducted by researchers Carnevale and Rose, it was found that, within the top 146 highly selective universities, this was not an accurate representation of the admissions process. Within this research it was found that 74% of admitted students at the top tier universities come from a family within the top socioeconomic class while roughly 10% of admitted students come from the lowest tier socioeconomic status. This research also found that black and Hispanic students are highly underrepresented within these top tier universities (Carnevale et al., 2013). This

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

underrepresentation within college admissions is an important consideration when analyzing the restrictions and limitations of admissions for those of felony status for a multitude of reasons but especially when considering the overrepresentation of black and Hispanics and those within the lower socioeconomic class within the populace of those with felony convictions (Mauer, 2016). College admissions offices have, throughout their history, created extremely strict standards that their applicants must uphold in order to receive admission into their institution, many of which are significantly underdeveloped within the populace of those with felony convictions due to the existing educational discrepancies within this population. With this underdevelopment of the educational standards and the underrepresentation present within the education system, those with felony convictions are already at a disadvantage, even before the disclosure of their felony status.

This discrimination within the applicant pool becomes more apparent with the addition of restrictions based on criminal records. According to recent studies, it has been shown that 60-80% of private institutions, 55% of public institutions, and 40% of community colleges ask about criminal record in the admissions process (Clayton, 2017). While this question is common within the workforce, the scope of questions regarding felony status often is much broader. Within the Common Application, a platform used by many post-secondary educational institutions, questions regarding experiences with the correctional system extend further than just felony convictions and include misdemeanors as well as run ins with the juvenile justice system (Scott-Clayton, 2017). Institutions that do not use common application often include questions that are far more expansive than that, sometimes including questions pertaining to pending convictions (Scott-Clayton, 2017). Questions regarding criminal records often lead applicants to refrain from completing the application, for they fear that whatever offense that is on their record may not be

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

excusable in the eyes of the University. Through recent efforts, Louisiana, Maryland, Washington, and Colorado have prohibited questions pertaining to criminal history on college applications. With the success of the prohibition of the disclosure of criminal convictions on college applications, similar efforts are being made within 18 states, to remove questions pertaining to justice involvement (Operation Restoration, 2014). This inherent lack of representation within higher education and questions pertaining to justice-involvement create barriers to higher education outside of the university experience. The disclosure of criminal convictions and lack of belonging often prevents system-impacted individuals from applying for universities (Runnel, 2015).

Financial Aid Restrictions

Aside from the ability to get accepted and enrolled into a university or state institution, the formerly incarcerated continue to face barriers that impede their college experience. The College Board, distributors of Advanced Placement Programs and the SAT, reported that in the 2014-2015 academic year, two-thirds of college students paid for their college tuition through the help of financial aid in the form of grants and scholarships (College Board, 2015). Despite this knowledge, the Get Tough on Crime Era saw the legislative blocking of financial aid, in the form of Pell Grants to incarcerated and many formerly incarcerated individuals, actively prohibiting them from supporting themselves through receiving a higher education (Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994). The 1965 Higher Education act was amended in 1998 and again in 2001. In 2001, amendments were made to the Higher Education Act that effectively prohibited those with a drug conviction from receiving federal student aid for up to 2 years after their conviction. Federal Student Aid, from its origin, was designed to provide opportunities for individuals in lower-income, traditionally disadvantaged areas. It was designed to give people in

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

these areas the opportunity to receive higher education to then propel them into a better future (Lovenheim et al., 2013). According to the 2020 statistics released by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, 72,927, or 45.6%, of all convicted offenders were serving time for drug related offenses (Bureau of Prisons, 2020). At the state level, 14% of incarcerated individuals were serving time for a drug offense (United States Department of Justice, 2019). In a report released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, it was stated that 35% of drug offenders have no criminal history prior to their drug offense. In this study they also released that around three-quarters of drug offenders identify with a minority population, the same populations that the Federal Student Aid targets (Dorsey, 2010).

The Higher Education act of 1965 effectively discriminated against the very population that the Federal Student aid funds were designed to support. Since the enactment of the Higher Education act of 1965, financial aid access has been characterized by various complications that make it inaccessible for many of those with criminal convictions. The official Federal Student Aid requirements explain that any individual who applies for federal aid with a drug conviction will be asked to complete a comprehensive worksheet explaining their convictions. The information on this worksheet will then determine which of the persons convictions would limit their financial aid. This denial of financial aid is specific to individuals who faced a drug conviction while receiving federal aid. They also explain that if applicant is denied financial support, they can become eligible after completing an approved rehabilitation program and passing two unannounced drug tests by the approved rehabilitation program (Federal Student Aid, 2020). This shows that this may represent positive change in the abilities and opportunities for the formerly incarcerated, but it is still apparent that these limitations still exist and while these opportunities exist, they are not easily accessible for all those who would need it.

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

In an effort to better serve this vulnerable population and provide financial aid support, the United States Department of Education lead the creation of the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative in 2016, an experimental program that saw the provisions of Pell Grants for currently and formerly incarcerated students at participating institutions. Upon its onset, Second Chance saw the participation of 64 institutions but with a recent expansion of the program Second Chance Pell is now active within 130 institutions and 42 states (Vera Institute of Justice, 2020). Each participating institution will then further provide educational programs and resources geared towards Second Chance students, in the form of specific degree programs and other support systems within the university. While generally effective, it is important to note that Pell Grant is still not available for majority of currently and formerly incarcerated students and many of these students may not have easy access to Second Chance institutions.

Creating More Accessible Higher Education: An Overview

As previously mentioned, this research considers the structure and features of five programs in the United States, each geared towards making higher education more attainable for the currently and formerly incarcerated, despite the boundaries and restrictions imposed at an institutionalized level. In the consideration of which programs to include within the study, it was important to address Of these five programs, one works outside of the university setting, two offer programming and policies directly at a post-secondary institution, and two work in partnership between a university and a correctional facility. Each of these individual programs seeks to address the barriers of reentry, directly relating to attainment of higher education but each program has features unique to itself. Table I depicts an overview of each program and their services provided to system-impacted students.

Table 1: Overview of Existing Educational Programming

Program Name	Program Administrator	Main Focus	Headlining Services
From Prison Cells to Ph.D.	Advocacy group, active in 22 states	Educational Counseling, Career Development, and Mentorship	Standardized Test Preparation, Application Assistance, Financial aid Assistance, Career and College Readiness Trainings, Leadership Opportunities in the form of Mentorship and Internships.
Berkely Underground Scholars	University of California, Berkely	Recruitment, Retention, Advocacy	Transcript Analysis, Major Preparation, Counseling, Personal Statements, Application Assistance, Weekly Tutoring, NavCal Class, Underground Scholars Initiative, Research and Leadership opportunities
Project Rebound	San Francisco State University	Admission Assistance and Campus Support	Admission Exceptions and Pathways to Admission, Advocacy for Parole/Probation complications, Academic Program Advising, FAFSA Assistance, Health Center and Psychological Counseling, Project 20 Alternative Sentencing, Mentorship
Prison Education Program at NYU	Partnership between Walkill Correctional Facility and New York University	Access to AA level courses, Bridge Program for reentry resources	Free College Courses, Living Stipends, Bridge Program with Network of Post-release Resources
Florida Prison Education Project at UCF	Partnership with University of Central Florida and surrounding correctional facilities	Provision of transferrable courses and opportunity to continue education upon release.	Transferrable College Courses, Curricular Support, Civic Engagement

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

From Prison Cells to Ph.D.

The first of these programs works outside of the university setting and serves as a nationwide advocacy program. With a presence within 22 states, From Prison Cells to Ph.D. actively serves over 100 currently and formerly incarcerated individuals and supports them through their journey to attaining a post-secondary education. From Prison Cells to Ph.D. “seeks to reach, touch, and change the lives of people with criminal convictions through advocacy, mentoring, and policy change” (From Prison Cells to Ph.D, 2020). According to their website, From Prison Cells to Ph.D. has seen a 97.5% registration rate at a post-secondary institution within its yearly participants, with an overall average GPA of 3.75 (From Prison Cells To PhD, 2020). From Prison Cells to Ph.D.’s high rates of registrations and high grade point average are a direct reflection of their wide range of services they provide for program participants.

With focus in two major categories, college and career preparation and mentorship, From Prison Cells to Ph.D. strives to address the wide scope of college and career preparation. From Prison Cells to Ph.D. begins its advocacy with the development of test taking skills and strategies necessary to be successful on standardized tests such as the GRE, SAT, and ACT. This test preparation is unique in the fact that it is individualized for each individual, rather than a set list of standards (From Prison Cells to Ph.D., 2020). In addition to this, From Prison Cells to Ph.D., provides application assistance with college applications, FAFSA, and privately funded scholarships (From Prison Cells to Ph.D.). These services effectively combat the administrative errors that make higher education inaccessible for those with criminal convictions.

On a larger scope, From Prison Cells to Ph.D. strives to address the necessary competencies to be successful in a modernized labor force. The competencies From Prison Cells to Ph.D. holds workshops and trainings in are as follows: critical thinking and problem solving,

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

oral and written communications, teamwork and collaboration, technology, leadership, professionalism and work ethic, career management, and global and intercultural fluency (From Prison Cells to Ph.D.). These eight competencies, established by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, represent the skills necessary for successful integration into the labor force (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2020). Through the development of these skills and knowledge and the access to paid internships and leadership roles, From Prison Cells to Ph.D. seeks to “inspire people with criminal convictions to excel beyond what society and life circumstances have set to be the norm” (From Prison Cells to Ph.D., 2020)

Another significant component of From Prison Cells to Ph.D. is the inclusion of a mentorship program. According to their program description, each scholar is provided with two years of mentorship from program alumnus (From Prison Cells to Ph.D., 2020). This combination of educational counseling and mentorship is specifically geared towards the advancement of career prospects rather than just the attainment of temporary employment (From Prison Cells to Ph.D.,2020).

Berkeley Underground Scholars

The next program structure comes in the form of university-based organizations and programming. Berkely Underground Scholars is an organization based at University of California at Berkely focused on the creation of “a pathway for incarcerated, formerly incarcerated and system impacted individuals into higher education” through efforts in recruitment, retention, and advocacy (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2020). At UC Berkely exists two separate organizations, Berkely Underground Scholars and the Underground Scholars Initiative, that work interchangeably to address the specific needs of system impacted students (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2020).

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

The program at UC Berkley is unique due to its attention to recruitment as well as the transition into university. Underground Scholars provides admissions assistance to system impacted students with intentions of transferring into UC Berkely; within these services, system impacted students are provided transcript analysis, major preparation, counseling, personal statement support, and assistance in completing the application process (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2020). For system impacted students, interested in joining the program, Berkely Underground Scholars also offers campus tours led by program participants and fellow system impacted students. This personalization of the initial introduction to the university provides opportunity for these students to see someone else who has been in their position and attain information specific to their educational experience (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2020). The Berkely Underground Scholars program also takes into consideration the administrative issues currently incarcerated students may face upon starting their higher education experience and provides the mail-based Incarcerated Scholars Program in which incarcerated students are provided with transcript analysis and academic advising in a manner that is more accessible to them (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2020).

The second pillar of Berkely Underground Scholars is Retention, the ability to keep students in the university setting. Retention of students is directly related to the ability and motivation to continue (Alarcon et al., 2012). These factors are of increasing importance to system affected students due to the nature of the barriers of reentry these individuals face. To increase rates of retention and sense of belonging, Berkely Underground Scholars offers targeted programming and assistance in various different realms. Scholars within the program are provided weekly tutoring sessions as well as continues support and assistance through applications to graduate level study and scholarships. Program participants are also enrolled in a

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

NavCal class, a class designed to encourage and engage marginalized and vulnerable students within the campus population (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2020).

Berkely Underground Scholars program actively seeks to change the language and expectations of system impacted students. Through the formation of a prison-to-school pipeline, a direct contradiction to the school-to-prison pipeline that characterizes the United States education system, this program intends to create greater opportunities of educational attainment and an escape from the many barriers of reentry already present (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2020).

Project Rebound

Project Rebound is an admission-based program at San Francisco State University focused on “supporting the formerly incarcerated on their journey through successful reintegration in a college” (Associated Students, 2019). Project Rebound serves a dual purpose of community and campus liaison as well as providing admission, or path to admission, to students who may not have traditionally attained the credentials required for admittance (Associated Students, 2019). As previously mentioned, the credentials necessary for admittance into the university system are far out of reach for the currently and formerly incarcerated due to institutionalized policies and practices; Project Rebound creates a personalized plan of admittance for each applicant. These plans ease the weight of standardized test scores and other means of admittance for prospective students. Support provided by Project Rebound continues in a more wholistic approach upon admission in the university. Upon admission to San Francisco State University, Project Rebound continues to provide a network of resources including campus introduction, academic advising, FAFSA assistance, health and psychological counseling, Project 20 alternative sentencing, and mentorship programs (Associated Students, 2019).

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

Within its 53 years, Project Rebound has expanded to seven additional universities throughout California, effectively creating significant opportunity and access to higher education (Kandil, 2016). With recent news publications, Project Rebound reported that only 3% of its program participants return to prison (Kandil, 2016). These positive statistics represent the programs efforts to combat the revolving door policy of incarceration (Associated Students, 2019).

The Prison Education Program of NYU

The last two programs are unique due to their focus on in-prison education, rather than post-release programming. Both of these programs exist on university campuses but actively serve as partners between a public, post-secondary institution and local correctional institutions, focusing most of their efforts behind bars. Each of these programs, while unique in their own right both serve to provide transferrable credits to institutions of higher education in their area, while incarcerated, in hopes of creating the desire and opportunity to advance their education after their release.

The Prison Education Program of NYU seeks to provide the means to attain an associate of arts degree whilst incarcerated or shortly following an individual's release. The Prison Education Program of NYU works directly with Walkill Correctional Facility to provide free college level courses to approximately 60 incarcerated individuals each semester; since its start in 2015, the Prison Education Program at NYU has granted 280 incarcerated individuals transferrable credits to NYU, 14 associates degrees, and five bachelors of arts degrees after release (Prison Education Program, 2015).

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

While the Prison Education Program of NYU has heavy ties with prison-based education, it also provides community-based resources as well as financial assistance to recently released program participants. Through its Bridge Program, students are guided to community resources regarding housing insecurity, professional development, continued education, health care, food insecurity, legal services, and employment opportunities (Prison Education Program, 2015).

While the Prison Education Program itself has significant ties to the education of the incarcerated populace, its accompanying Bridge program is characterized by a more wholistic approach to the barriers of reentry. This more wholistic approach allows for program participants to bridge the gaps in the deficiencies that would prevent a successful education for system impacted students.

Florida Prison Education Project at University of Central Florida

The final program of consideration follows a similar structure to the Prison Education Program of NYU, with the majority of its programming being focused on the provision of transferrable college credits to currently incarcerated students. The Florida Prison Education Project at University of Central Florida seeks to “provide educational opportunities to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in Florida” through the provision of college-level courses and providing opportunity for the formerly incarcerated to continue their education (Florida Prison Education Project, 2020). According to the program’s description, Florida’s Prison Education Project is characterized by the heavy focus in the creation of strong social bonds and relationships, the matriculation of students, and preparation for future employment. The curriculum includes classes focused on the arts, wellness, and social relationships in order to provide both a college-level education as well as the development. The Florida Prison Education Project provides courses in a number of local correctional institutions, each with transferrable

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

credits following the Florida general education requirements (Curriculum – Florida Prison Education Project, 2020).

Finding a Common Ground

While conducting the analysis of the components of each of these programs, it became apparent that some common services were seen throughout these programs. The features of these programs can be sorted into four main categories: administrative assistance, college and career preparation, community assistance, and mentorship. Of the five programs examined, each program encompasses some element of administrative support. This support typically presents itself as application and loan assistance but can be seen more in depth within some of the included programs. For example, within the recruitment stages of the Berkely Underground Scholars program, prospective students are provided transcript analysis, major preparation, counseling, and support with personal statements, each service addressing some of the unforeseen barriers of attaining a post-secondary education (Recruitment — Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2014). Additionally, Project Rebound expands upon the initial application assistance and provides streamlined pathways of acceptance for those who may not have traditionally qualified (Associated Students, 2019).

Of the five examined programs, from Prison Cells to Ph.D. is the only program with heavy ties in college and career readiness and advancement. While it could be argued that the deficiency in skill based programming is a minor consideration within post-secondary educational programming, it should be recognized that each of the services provided by Prison Cells to Ph.D. are based on long term solutions with the hopes of “building a career as opposed to attaining temporary employment” (From Prison Cells to Ph.D., 2020). Due to the fact that the inability to find stable employment is a significant barrier to successful reintegration, the

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

inclusion of skill development is integral within higher-education programming for system-impacted students.

Community assistance, within the scope of the five programs included in this research, is of heavy focus for two of the five included programs, Project Rebound and the Prison Education Project at NYU. Project Rebound, as mentioned earlier, focuses the majority of its programming on the admission and enrollment of system-impacted students (Associated Students, 2019). Upon enrollment, Project Rebound serves as a liaison for campus and community resources such as health and psychological care and travel assistance (Associated Students, 2019). Similarly, the Prison Education Project at NYU has a specific program dedicated to community liaison services for the formerly incarcerated. Being centered in downtown New York City, an area with a high presence of recently incarcerated individual, the Prison Education Program's Bridge Program provides a network of post-release resources integral for the success of their students. These resources include housing, professional development, continued education, health care, food, legal services, and employment (*Bridge Program – Prison Education Program*, 2018). By providing means outside of just academic success, these two programs can subsequently further ease the barriers of reentry outside of academics.

The final subset of programming, mentorship, plays an active role within three of the five programs, with two having significant programming based on mentorship programs. For Prison Cells to Ph.D., mentorship serves as one of the two pillars of its programming. These mentors are fellow program participants and alumnus, providing a unique perspective to the complexities of reentry (From Prison Cells to Ph.D., 2020). Project Rebound also features their own mentorship programming on the various campuses, structured specifically to address issues of reintegration into a school setting for system impacted students (Associated Students, 2019).

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion

When assessing the makings of an effective post-secondary educational support program, it is incredibly important to address the multitude of factors that contribute to barriers of reentry that exist within correctional institutions and within the formerly incarcerated population. Reintegration into a modern society, after years of incarceration, is often met with administrative issues, financial insecurity, homelessness, and subsequently recidivism (Gaes, 2008). While attaining a post-secondary education will not eradicate these issues, it can provide the means and opportunities to propel themselves out of these dire situations.

The diverse nature of the existing organizations and their provided services depicts the complexities of reentry and the various methods that can be used to address these. While the five selected program's features can be categorized into four different categories, each program still is unique in itself. Through the analysis of these features and how each organization chooses to implement their services can be referenced in the creation of a more inclusive program of higher education.

Recommendation

While these programs provide ample assistance in making higher education more accessible within the currently and formerly incarcerated populations, their scope remains relatively small. This small scope makes it unlikely that they would make a large impact on the 49.3% recidivism rate (United States Sentencing Commission, 2016). That being said, it is integral that this research, and any subsequent research, contributes to the development of university-based programming, geared towards making higher education more accessible and inclusive of system-impacted students.

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

In the starting of a university program, there are important factors universities should consider in regard to administrative policies. In a report conducted by Corrections to College California, it was determined that in order for a program to be successful, the program must have a significant presence on campus both within the student body as well as on the campus itself. To accomplish this significant presence, a successful program should have regular meeting times in a regular location as well as an official office of operation on the campus. In addition to this campus presence, a more inclusive program should be characterized by clear representation within their staff; a successful program for system-impacted students should be managed by system-impacted individuals due to their understanding of the systemic issues these students would be facing in the university setting (Corrections to College California, 2017).

Each of these programs' methodology varies based on their overarching focus, but each provide services that are integral for a system-impacted students success both academically as well as for a successful reentry post-release. In the making of an inclusive program, there should be elements of each of the four main categories of services provided by these external programs but should mainly focus within the realm of college preparation, administrative assistance, and community resources. Berkely Underground Scholars structure of recruitment, retention, and advocacy should be referenced as a strong foundation for any successful program. Programing should begin within correctional institutions particularly in the form of exposure and administrative assistance. Similar to Berkely Underground Scholars and Prison Cells to Ph.D. currently incarcerated students should be given specialized assistance in standardized test preparation as well as with application and loan assistance. Through the provision of pre-release assistance, prospective system-impacted students can view education as something attainable and within their reach, helping them to excel further than the societal expectations held of them.

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

While administrative assistance is crucial, the establishment of a university program with the intention of creating a more accessible and inclusive post-secondary education experience for system-impacted students should have significant focus on community resources and factors of retention. The reality is that no level of educational assistance can be useful if the student is not provided external means of success including, but not limited to, health care, housing, food, and psychological counseling. In the series of interviews conducted by Lindsey Livingston Runell, it was found that many of the system-impacted students struggled with post-secondary education due to the personal limitations and struggles associated with reentry, including mental health, homelessness, and sense of belonging (Runell, 2015). An inclusive program should take these factors into consideration when developing a program that is to be successful. For this, a future program should reference the services provided by Berkely Underground Scholars, Project Rebound, and the Prison Education Project at NYU. A successful program should provide hands-on tutoring and mentorship, directly pertaining to the specific needs of system-impact students, similarly to Berkely Underground Scholars. It should also provide a network of external resources that assist in the external factors of success, such as housing and food insecurity as well as mental and physical health care, similar to that of Project Rebound and the Prison Education Project's, Bridge Project.

Conversations pertaining to the successful reentry of system-impacted individuals and the benefits associated with the attainment of post-secondary education should be continued at both the university and legislative level. Universities should continue to strengthen their efforts to create diverse and inclusive environments for higher-education and personal advancement. This goal is not attainable unless universities make a conscious effort to examine the impact their policies and practices within the population of system-impacted individuals. Through this

THE NEVER-ENDING SENTENCE

examination, universities should make continuous efforts to advocate for the education of this vulnerable population, in hopes of the subsequent betterment of society.

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