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Can You Help Me? What a Mid-West Land Grant University is Doing to Help Formerly Incarcerated Students in Higher Education

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CAN YOU HELP ME? WHAT A MID-WEST LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY IS

DOING TO HELP FORMERLY INCARCERATED STUDENTS IN HIGHER

EDUCATION

By

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Formerly Incarcerated Students (FIS) can be found enrolling in colleges and universities across the United States. When looking at the lack of support and resources available for FIS (who are currently enrolled at a collegiate institution) in higher education, a growing number of researchers identify the transitional experience as problematic for individuals with a criminal background. Although there is recognition of problematic issues for enrolling ex-offenders at any given institution because of safety concerns, lack of knowledge, and concerns of recidivism, one major problem still persists, and that is the lack of resources that are available in higher education. This particular study examines what is being done at the University of Edgewood, a pseudonym for a Mid-west Land Grant University, as FIS navigate through their collegiate experience.

Keywords: ex-offender, formerly incarcerated students (FIS), formerly incarcerated individuals (FII), higher education, inmates, and resources.

Dedication

To every man, women, boy, and girl who may have lost their way

To every voice that has not been heard

To every victim created directly and indirectly

I respectfully dedicate this thesis to each and every one of you…

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I would like to send out a special thank you to all my participants. Each of you shared your thoughts, opinions and expertise during my research process and I am internally grateful for that.

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in the trenches day in and day out. Thank you guys for answering the million dollar questions that I bugged each of you with on a daily!

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If this study is any indication for what's to come, than allow me to buckle my own seat belt and prepare for the ride of my life.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The United States (U.S.) prison system is reaching an all-time high of mass incarceration and shows no signs of decreasing. In 2011, the U.S. was ranked as having the largest incarcerated population in the world with over 2.2 million people in adult jails and prisons (Human Rights Watch, 2014, para. 5). According to Alexander (2012), "as inmates are released from a penal institution, former prisoners enter a hidden underworld of legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion" (p. 13). These exclusions can take on many forms, but the most notable exclusions are job placement, educational opportunities, voting and health care. According to Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey, and Byers (2007), "the stigma real or perceived, which inmates encounter once released is enough to keep many from developing social, professional or educational ties and seeking life enhancing opportunities," (p. 268).

Moreover, there is minimal research about formerly incarcerated students (FIS) in higher education, yet there are barriers in place that limit their acceptance into college. A question on college applications of whether applicants have been convicted of a crime is a barrier that turns ex-offenders away. Additionally, like other populations who were once stereotyped, excluded, or denied access to a college experience, such as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) students; students of color; women; and student veterans, FIS are now facing the same dilemmas as these other populations once did. Some of those dilemmas include, lack of academic support, limited access to resources, and a lack of social support. This qualitative research will begin to give voice to an invisible population because a large portion of universities across the

nation has FIS on their respective campuses (Copenhaver et al., 2007, p. 269). This research will allow for universities to think about effective ways to better assist a population who is in urgent need of our help.

Purpose

While reviewing the positive impacts universities have within their communities in areas such as employment, education, and the economy, there is evidence that suggests formerly incarcerated individuals (FII) appear to be excluded from the aforementioned because of numerous barriers. Gunnison and Helfgott (2013) attributed this problem to the number of obstacles (i.e., obtaining employment, obtaining housing, and obtaining admittance into higher education) that are in place for ex-offenders trying to successfully reintegrate back into society (p. 2). The purpose of this study is to examine what is being done to help Formerly Incarcerated Students (FIS) at the University of Edgewood (UE) a Mid-West Land Grant University.

Research Questions

To address the topic of what is being done to help FIS in one particular collegiate setting; this study will specifically explore the following research question supported by two sub questions:

1. What is being done to help FIS at a Mid-West Land Grant University?

   a. How are key functional areas (i.e. admissions, financial aid, housing, campus safety, and student support services) set-up to provide FIS with the necessary help and resources?

   b. What policies and laws are in place regarding students with criminal backgrounds within each functional area?

By examining what needs to be done to help FIS in higher education, the research questions presented will serve as a catalyst in examining if there is a lack of available resources for FIS in higher education.

Significance of Study

There are many factors that make this study about what a university is doing to help FIS in higher education significant. This particular study provides a body of knowledge to other communities who do not have the knowledge or expertise to deal with this population in higher education. Furthermore, this study is timely. It provides in-depth information on current issues and topics in the federal, state, local community and the higher education community at large. Last of all, this study sheds light on the barriers, the lack of resources available, and the existence of FIS in higher education.

Research Design

The methodology used for this research was a qualitative research approach. Creswell (2014) described qualitative research as having a different approach to research than quantitative. Although there are similarities between qualitative and quantitative research, "qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs" (Creswell, 2014, p. 183). The qualitative case study approach was chosen as the method for this study because this approach allowed me to focus on one institution and its participants rather than a plethora of institutions, it offers insights that are not easily used in other qualitative approaches, and it is a useful tool for exploratory research such as this particular study. This approach allowed me to build meaningful relationships with each individual participant who in return provided rich data through their own personal stories, experiences, and beliefs.

This case study was conducted at the University of Edgewood (pseudonym), a four-year, Land Grant public institution in the Mid-West. The researcher obtained contact information for eight participants (directors, assistant directors, counselors, and campus safety officers) within key functional areas (Admissions, Financial Aid, Housing, Campus Safety, and Student Support Services) to participate in a 1-on-1 semi-structured interview. Several participants provided policies and laws in a pre-meeting prior to the actual interview. Each participant participated in one 30 minute to an hour interview. Some of the topics discussed identified needs and resources, university inclusion and exclusion, barriers, and what their respective departments were doing to help FIS at their institution.

Definition of Key Terms

It is important to understand the definition of key terms that will be used within the context of this research. This qualitative research addresses what is being done to help FIS in higher education; therefore, the succeeding terms are used.

Academic Administrators—a branch of university or college employees responsible for the maintenance and supervision of the institution.

College Access—barriers that may limit acceptance into any given university or restricted resources for certain groups of students while on a college campus.

College Personnel—includes all faculty, administrators, and staff that work on a college campus.

Faculty—any professor or teacher in any given discipline. May include deans and department chairs.

Formerly incarcerated individual (FII): someone who has been previously incarcerated.

Formerly Incarcerated Students (FIS)—current student/s who identifies with having a criminal record.

Invisible Population—a group of students who are present on college campuses yet have no active voice or known visibility to the public at large.

Needs—something that is needed in order to live, succeed, or be happy; a necessity.

Resources—something or someone that can be used to supply, support, or aid when needed.

Staff—a person who works at a college or university as a support to faculty or administrators.

Delimitations

The delimitations present throughout this qualitative research study are boundaries that I have set for this study. The delimitations include choosing not to involve faculty or FIS because I only want to focus on directors and assistant directors of various offices within the designated key functional areas. Choosing to only focus on directors and assistant directors of various offices in key functional areas is appropriate because these individuals are directly involved within the areas they supervise making them the most appropriate candidate for this research study.

I will not be looking at any other institution or institution type other than UE a mid-west land grant university because focusing on one institution allows me to build a personal relationship with the participants and the institution. Furthermore, focusing on

one institution allows me to spend more time understanding the culture and the

environment of this particular institution rather than exploring several institutions and

institution types. Lastly, the exclusion of ex-offenders, inmates, or FIS voices also served

as a delimitation. Hearing from those who actually needed the resources would have

provided a different tone and a different lens to look through to better understand the

needs of these particular students.

Limitations

There were several factors that presented themselves as limitations in this

research study. Those limitations included participants' participation in the study, time

frame to conduct research, and participant censorship in interview. Participant's

participation was considered a limitation because the participants could choose not to

participate in the study from the start or they could opt to remove themselves at any time

during the process. Also those who were willing to talk to me may have been different in

some way than those who chose not to talk with me. Time was considered a limitation

because the participants could cancel the meeting at any given time, they could change

the date and time for the meeting, and they could reschedule based off their own busy

schedule without prior notice. Because I have no way of monitoring their calendar of

events, time was considered a limitation. Participant censorship was considered a

limitation because of various policies and protections that prohibit certain information

from being discussed with unauthorized individuals. Because I am not authorized to hear,

view, or obtain certain student information that may help inform my study, the findings

could be impacted and skewed. Therefore, this was also considered as a limitation.

Summary of Introduction

In this particular chapter, a brief outline was created to highlight what's to come in upcoming chapters. Chapter 1 however, provided the purpose and the significance of this study as well as research questions and a research design to help guide this study. Additionally, delimitations and limitations were covered in this chapter to provide context for boundaries that were in and out of my control. Furthermore, a set of definitions was provided to help guide the reader throughout this research study.

The next four chapters discussed in this research study plays a pivotal role in understanding what is being done at this particular university; each providing a perspective different than before. In chapter 2 of this thesis, the literature review provides a brief overview of mass incarceration and the disenfranchisement of FIS in higher education. In addition, chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework that helps inform this study and it provides a section on persisting problems and key findings throughout the literature review. Chapter 3 will explain in greater detail the research methods used in this qualitative research study. Chapter 4 will provide participant vignettes to introduce each participant. Additionally, chapter 4 will highlight emerging themes from each participant's interview and then it will conclude with the participants culminating thoughts. Lastly, chapter 5 will conclude with a discussion of the research findings relevant to the literature. It will also provide a summary of the emerging themes in chapter 4, limitations to the study, recommendations to help assist FIS in higher education, and will provide suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

To understand the broader issue of what a university is doing to help FIS in higher education, the topic of access will be the underlying focus of this literature review because of the limited access FIS have to various resources within higher education. In 1998, equal access to higher education was a highly stressed point in the written declarations that emerged from the World Conference on Higher Education. At this point, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) endorsed Article 26(1) within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, agreeing that access to higher education should be an equal opportunity for everyone (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009, p. 37). Article 26(1) clearly states that "everyone has the right to education" and that "higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" (United Nations, n.d.). Unfortunately, many scholars are finding that underrepresented populations, which include those who have criminal histories, are still being excluded from advanced educational opportunities (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009).

This literature review will provide a brief overview of mass incarceration, which will cover topics such as rates of mass incarceration, the war on drugs, racial disparities, incarcerated juveniles and adults, and recidivism. The purpose of the overview is to provide an understanding of the complex issues that FII face. Additionally, this literature review will examine the disenfranchisement of FIS within higher education. Topics such as the benefits to education, barriers to access and success, and a proposed framework

that helps explain the barriers within higher education will be covered. To conclude this literature review, a look at persisting problems and key findings of the literature review.

Brief Overview of Mass Incarceration

Much can be said about the state of the prison population and its systematic issues that each inmate faces once released from a penal institution. As it pertains to mass incarceration, Alexander (2012) explained the overall understanding of mass incarceration by stating, "The term mass incarceration refers not only to the criminal justice system, but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison" (p. 13). To better understand how people with criminal backgrounds can be included in higher education; a look at the many issues FIS are faced with will be examined below.

Rates of mass incarceration. For years there has been a problem with mass incarceration in the United States. According to the most recent prison data available from 2012, there are over 2 million people (and counting) incarcerated in "1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 2,259 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails, and 79 Indian country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, and prisons in the U.S. territories" (Wagner & Sakala, 2014, para. 2). Glaze and Herberman (2013) reported, "About 1 in every 35 adult residents in the United States was under some form of correctional supervision at year end 2012" (p. 1). It is estimated that one in five Americans have some type of a criminal history with "over seven million people under the active supervision of the criminal justice system" (Geiger, 2006, p. 1193). Each year approximately 650,000 to 700,000 people are released from a penal system with challenges of re-entering society in a healthy, meaningful, and

productive capacity (Geiger, 2006; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010; Pager, Western, & Sugie, 2009).

  The war on drugs. One of the key factors in the increasing rate of imprisonment in the US is the war or drugs. With profits exceeding well over $350 billion, the drug trade world remains enormous and continues to be a lucrative business (Malinowska-Sempruch, 2014). According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (2014), nearly 50% of individuals incarcerated in the United States are in prison for drug related offenses. This is a huge increase since the 1980s when the number was only 6% (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2014; Malinowska-Sempruch, 2014). In a recent report, Miles (2014) noted, "America's prisons are dangerously overcrowded, and the war on drugs is mainly to blame" (para. 1). In fiscal year 2013, the top three drug trafficking offenses included those involving cocaine totaling 24.1%, methamphetamine totaling 24%, and marijuana totaling 21.5% of all drug trafficking offenses (United States Sentencing Commission, 2013).

  Racial disparities. Highlighted as one the most inauspicious facts of racial inequality in the United States, African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately impacted by crimes, violence, arrests, and incarceration in comparison to Whites (Miller, 2010). Tsai and Scommegna (n.d.) stated that in year 2010, "Black men were incarcerated at a rate of 3,074 per 100,000 residents; Latinos were incarcerated at 1,258 per 100,000, and white men were incarcerated at 459 per 100,000" (Tsai & Scommegna, n.d., para. 2). Statistical data indicated, "African Americans and Latinos make up 70% of the incarcerated population" (Cole, 2009, p. 1).

    The disparities are greatest where race and class intersect—nearly 60% of all
    young black men born between 1965 and 1969 who dropped out of high school

went to prison at least once on a felony conviction before they turned thirty-five. And the incarceration rate for this group—black male high school dropouts—is nearly fifty times the national average. (p. 1)

Furthermore, Western (2007) added, "If you are a black unemployed high school dropout, are convicted of a crime, and spend a few months in jail," your probability of remaining "unemployed, untrained, and under-educated and of returning to jail more than once over your lifetime" is extremely high (p. 594). These issues of racial inequalities not only pose a problem within the legal system, but also contribute to the low enrollment of minority students within higher education.

In addition to racial inequality, the challenges of reentering society from a penal institution are compounded for many by racial stigmas, prejudice, and discrimination (Pager et al., 2009). Because there are many variances of racial stigmas, prejudice, and discrimination "this increased opportunity to discover criminal offending is thought by many to be a significant reason for the disproportionate rate of arrest and incarceration of African Americans" (Coker, 2003, p. 835).

Incarcerated juveniles. In 2011, U.S. law enforcement agencies made nearly 1.5 million arrests of persons under the age of 18 (Puzzanchera, 2013). According to the Children's Defense Fund (2014), children of color represent 16% of the total child population ranging from the ages of 10-17 as well as 34% of children arrested. Hing (2013) claimed the decrease on juvenile imprisonment has not occurred equally, arguing that "Black youth are still nearly five times as likely to be incarcerated as their white peers. And Latino and American Indian youth are two to three times as likely as white boys and girls to land behind bars" (para. 5). Wagner and Sakala (2014) indicated that more than 3,000 children are incarcerated for "status" offenses such as running away,

truancy, and incorrigibility (para. 5), which poses a problem because it exposes them to the destructive nature of the penal system at an early age.

  Incarcerated adults. Incarcerated men make up 90% of the prison and local jail population and are 14 times more likely to be incarcerated than women. Many of the men who are incarcerated are between the ages of 20 and 30. In addition, 70% of prisoners do not obtain a high school diploma and tend to have a lower level of education, averaging around a 10th grade comprehensive level of understanding (Tsai & Scommegna, n.d.). In a report written by Ajinkya (2013), 85-90% of women incarcerated had a history of being victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or child abuse before being incarcerated (para. 6). Ajinkya (2013) went on to say, "Girls of color who are victims of abuse are more likely to be processed by the criminal justice system and labeled as offenders than white girls" further arguing that these disparities are "devastating for girls who are gender nonconforming" (para. 6).

  Prior to the 90's, females who committed crimes were less likely to be charged with serious crimes or violations because law enforcement and courts focused on their sexual behaviors as well as their morality (Office of Juvenile Defender, 2012). However, in the early 90's, the percentage of girls entering the juvenile justice system began to increase due to the change in juvenile justice policy and practices (Office of Juvenile Defender, 2012). Since the 90's, approximately 13,000 women were incarcerated in some type of federal or state penal institution. Since that time, "the rate of growth of women in prison has exceeded the rate of increase for men, rising 646% from 1980 to 2010, compared to a 419% increase for men" (Mauer, 2013, p. 9). Women now make up 7% of the prison population.

Recidivism. According to Gunnison and Helfgott (2013), ex-offenders are trying to reintegrate back into society and their communities, but successful reentry seems to be an "evasive goal for many" (p. 1). When looking at the most recent data on recidivism rates between the years 2005 and 2010, "67.8% of the 404,638 state prisoners released in 2005 in 30 states were arrested within 3 years of release, and 76.6% were arrested within 5 years of release" (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014, p.1).

Jengeleski (1984) stated, "High recidivism rates can never be reduced until meaningful opportunities are developed and expanded for ex-offenders" (p. 90). It is important to know that ex-offenders play a regular role in society with approximately 30% of the adult population having a criminal conviction. This fact suggests that higher education has a pivotal role in allowing an ex-offender to rehabilitate him or herself through the use of education (Davies, 2000). Some research literature has suggested that informal exclusions from certain resources such as education, healthcare, jobs, etc. increase recidivism amongst ex-offenders while others suggested that correctional education provided doesn't work nor does it reduce recidivism for juvenile and adult prisoners (Chiricos, Barrick, Bales, & Bontrager, 2007; Batiuk, Moke, & Rountree, 1997). According to Haberman (2006), it is relatively easy for society to forget individuals in a penal system do get out of prison eventually. He also stated, most ex-offenders seek redemption but ultimately need a hand to obtain it once they are released (para. 5). According to Ford and Schroeder (2010), education provides access to "conventional role models and opportunities" that create strong bonds which allows for ex-offenders to conform and change their criminal or deviant behaviors (p. 36).

With the prison system continuing to be a problematic issue in the United States, ex-offenders often find it difficult to acclimate back into society and get decent jobs due to society's mistrust for people with criminal backgrounds (Clear, Rose, & Ryder, 2001). One of the programmatic recommendations given by Clear et al. (2001) is to provide quality training and education to ex-offenders because "training and education are the foundation of quality employment" (p. 346). In addition to training and education, ex-offenders need assistance in solving their legal problems (Clear et al., 2001). With these programmatic recommendations given by Clear et al. (2001), the reduction of recidivism can continue to happen at an exponential rate (p. 346).

Kubrin and Stewart (2006) noted that inmates leave prison facing a plethora of challenges which include "finding housing, securing employment, receiving treatment, and complying with the terms of supervision" (p. 167) and many ex-offenders rely on the resources provided by their local communities to reintegrate back into society. Therefore, without these resources they are likely to re-offend (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006). Ford and Schroeder (2010) argued that having role models or "conventional others" likely reduces recidivism. They also mentioned the fact that:

> Strong attachments to conventional others makes criminal behavior less likely, because of the likely negative impact crime would have on valued social relationships. Education also reduces criminal involvement by establishing a strong commitment to conventional goals, as well as the socially approved means of achieving these goals. (p. 36)

These established relationships not only serve as a resource to acclimate ex-offenders back into the community, but it also reduces recidivism rates amongst those who were formerly incarcerated.

Disenfranchisements of FIS in Higher Education

The historical context of mass incarceration laid the foundation for understanding the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated population within education. Due to limited research on the topic of FIS within higher education, this section will cover the benefits of education, barriers to access, and barriers to success.

Benefits of education. Education is considered one of the most essential elements to reducing recidivism. However, "Few inmates leaving prison today have received any education or vocational training to address these deficiencies, almost guaranteeing their failure to release" (Petersilia, 2003, p. 16). In a report written by MacKenzie (2000), a large amount of research confirmed that "Vocational programs are effective" (p. 465), however, budget constraints dismantled those very programs within state correctional departments (Petersilia, 2003, p.16). Furthermore, Petersilia (2003) identified several effective programs that reduced program participants' recidivism rates from anywhere between 8-15% (p. 17). These effective programs include, "Therapeutic communities for drug addicts and substance abuse programs with aftercare for alcoholics and drug addicts," additionally it includes, "Cognitive behavioral programs for sex offenders" and "Adult basic education, vocational education, prison industries for the general prison population" (Petersilia, 2003, p. 17).

When addressing the factors of limited access to educational opportunities for those currently and formerly incarcerated, these limited opportunities contribute to the problematic issues of recidivism although research has proved there are benefits to an education. Moreover, as this formerly incarcerated population enters back into society, institutions of higher learning can play a pivotal role in transforming the lives of those

with criminal histories because "Education can improve in-prison behavior and promote reentry success by changing students' thinking patterns, attitudes, and behaviors" (Brazzell et al., 2009, p. 17).

  Barriers to access. Institutional policies play a significant role in terms of who accesses higher education; often times these policies serve as barriers to access for individuals with criminal histories. For example, before admittance to a college institution, a prospective student may be required to answer questions pertaining to their violent or criminal histories, convictions, or misdemeanors. Depending on offense type prospective students may be denied admittance to the institution or required to fulfill extra criteria (Weissman et al., 2010, p. 17). Because there are no stringent policies in place for anyone with a criminal background when it comes to admissions, these decisions are made solely at the discretion of the institution.

  Currently there are no state or federal statutes that require any college or university to conduct background checks on prospective students. At the same time, there is no statue that prohibits any institutions from asking for a background check before or after admissions (Dickerson, 2008). According to Dickerson (2008), universities have the opportunity to make their own admissions decisions when it comes to students with criminal backgrounds. Institutions can use their own discretion in terms of academic freedom, substantive due process, and the admissions process (Dickerson 2008, p. 455). In research conducted by Weissman et al. (2010), utilizing Criminal Justice Information (CJI) for admissions varies by institution. Additionally, the authors noted 61% of schools reported that they considered criminal history information in the admissions process, 40% stated they don't admit students who have outstanding legal commitments such as

probation or parole, and a quarter of the schools who participated in the study indicated

that they had created an automatic bar to admission if applicants were found to have

criminal or violent history. In addition to admissions procedures, Weissman et al. (2010)

noted, "Convictions for a violent or sex offense are the most likely to trigger an automatic

denial of admission" (p. 17).

Financial aids also serve as a barrier to success because of the financial

stipulations associated with certain crimes. Offenses such as sexual offenses may limit

eligibility according to the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) federal student aid

frequent asked questions website page regarding incarcerated individuals. The webpage

states that "if you have been convicted of a forcible or non-forcible sexual offense, and

you are subject to an involuntary civil commitment upon completion of a period of

incarceration for that offense, you are ineligible to receive a Federal Pell Grant" (U.S.

Department of Education, n.d.).

As it pertains to students convicted for possession or sale of drugs, the Anti-Drug

abuse Act of 1988 allows for federal benefits to be denied according to The U.S.

Department of Education (2013-2014) federal aid handbook. Convictions only penalize a

student for aid eligibility purposes if the offense occurred while a student was enrolled

and receiving federal student aid and it doesn't count if the offense was not during a

period of enrollment unless a federal or state judge denied federal benefits to a student for

trafficking drugs. It is also important to know that "a conviction that was reversed, set-

aside, or removed from a student's record does not count, nor does one received when

she was a juvenile, unless she was tried as an adult" (U.S. Department of Education,

2013-2014).

Conviction or selling illegal drugs as asked on question 23 on the Free

Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) according to the U.S. Department of

Education (2013-2014) states:

> Students convicted of a federal or state offense of selling or possessing illegal
> drugs that occurred while they were receiving federal student aid should still
> complete and submit the FAFSA because they may be eligible for federal aid, and
> even if they aren't, they may be eligible for state or institutional aid. Students who
> fill out their FAFSA online and answer "Yes" to question 23 will immediately
> receive a series of questions to determine their eligibility. (p. 64)

Barriers to success. These barriers include a lack of familial or administrative

support and mentorship, various types of stigmas and stereotypes, and limited resources.

For example, many researchers indicated that support and mentorship had a significant

effect on formerly incarcerated individuals' ability to adapt and adjust back into society.

When mentorship or support did not take place, many FIS found themselves reoffending

or returning to old habits and lifestyles (Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, & D'Ambrosio,

2011; Strayhorn, Johnson, & Barrett, 2013; Livingston & Miller, 2014).

In addition to support and mentorship, stigmas and stereotypes also served as

barriers to success. According to Maroto (2014), once a person obtains a criminal record,

"It becomes a lasting marker and a normatively acceptable basis for unequal treatment in

a society that purports to treat people as equals" (p. 3). Furthermore, "a previous

incarceration then becomes a status that works ascriptively by determining the

distribution of resources" (Maroto, 2014, p. 3). These stigmas and stereotypes often

discourage the individual, leaving them to feel guilty or ashamed of their criminal

history.

Lastly, limited resources serve as a barrier to success because there is limited

knowledge about this population on college campuses. The lack of resources requires FIS

to fend for themselves while navigating through the unfamiliar collegiate experiences and expectations. According to Livingston and Miller (2014), adjustment to college life is a challenge for formerly incarcerated individuals "especially for those whose precarceral lives did not expose them to the social and cultural capital taken for granted in university settings" (p. 6). Moreover, these limited resources preclude FIS from benefiting from the rigors of a successful college education and career.

Barrier Model: A Conceptual Framework

The Barrier Model is a conceptual framework developed by the researcher. This model seeks to explain the many barriers encountered by either a FII or a FIS trying to obtain resources while transitioning from the penal system back into the community. This conceptual framework is informed by research in this literature review. Furthermore, this model highlights the process of bypassing resources due to an inability to overcome the potential barriers, stipulations, and policies in place for ex-offenders trying to reintegrate back into the community. More specifically, the current model will address the barriers within the context of pursuing higher education after serving time in a penal system. Depending on the barriers, an individual may bypass resources due to the obstacles associated with accessing those resources. Those obstacles include but are not limited to, criminal history questions on college applications, housing restrictions because of offense type, and financial restrictions. This model helps where barriers are created for a specific organization or institution. To further understand this model the reintegration process is listed below.

Areas within model.

1. Resource: Anything that provides a distinct service to individuals within the community. (e.g., jobs, healthcare, legal, government access, education)

2. Gatekeepers: Gatekeepers provide access or restrict access to the many benefits the main resource provides. These secondary resources may also serve as a gatekeeper to that main resource or organization and may limit access based off set criteria, personal bias, procedures, and laws. **Gatekeepers cannot be identified until the resource has been recognized as a resource.*

3. Bypass: a route that specifically bypasses resources once barriers are identified.

4. Barriers: Anything that hinders access to available resources.

5. Reintegration**:** The process of re-entering into society from a penal system.

Reintegration process without barriers.

1. Penal System: An individual is released from a penal institution back into the community (e.g., Juvenile detention centers, jails, and prisons).

2. Identified Resources: The individual identifies lists of available resources.

3. Gatekeepers: Once resources are identified, gatekeepers are generated based off the identified resource.

4. Access No Barriers: Successful reentry into the community with access to resources and no barriers.

5. Reintegration into Community: Successfully reenters society with no barriers to resources

Barrier Model: A Conceptual Framework
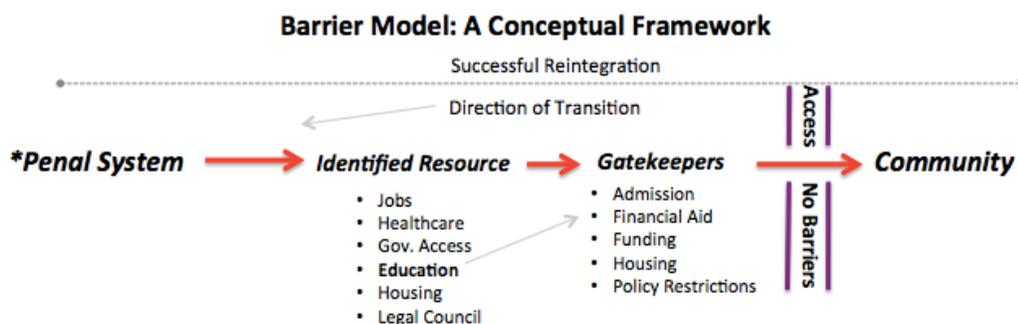
Figure 1. Barrier model: A conceptual framework without the bypass.

Reintegration process with barriers.

1. Penal System: An individual is released from a penal institution back into the community (Juvenile detention centers, jails, and prisons).

2. Identified Resources: The individual identifies available resources through the assistance of case managers, parole or probation officers, family, school officials and other entities present in the individual's life.

3. Gatekeepers: Gatekeepers are generated based off the identified resource.

4. Barriers: Barriers are identified based off the requirements that the gatekeepers have generated.

5. Bypass: The Bypass occurs when barriers are present

6. Community: The individual then reintegrates back into community with no resources.

7. Recidivism occurs: Individual may re-offend and re-enter into the penal system.

Barrier Model: A Conceptual Framework

Recidivism

Reintegration with Barriers

Direction of Transition

Penal System → *Identified Resource* → *Gate Keeper*

Identified Resource
- Jobs
- Healthcare
- Gov. Access
- **Education**
- Housing
- Legal Council

Gate Keeper
- Admission
- Financial Aid
- Funding
- Housing
- Policy Restrictions

BARRIERS

Community
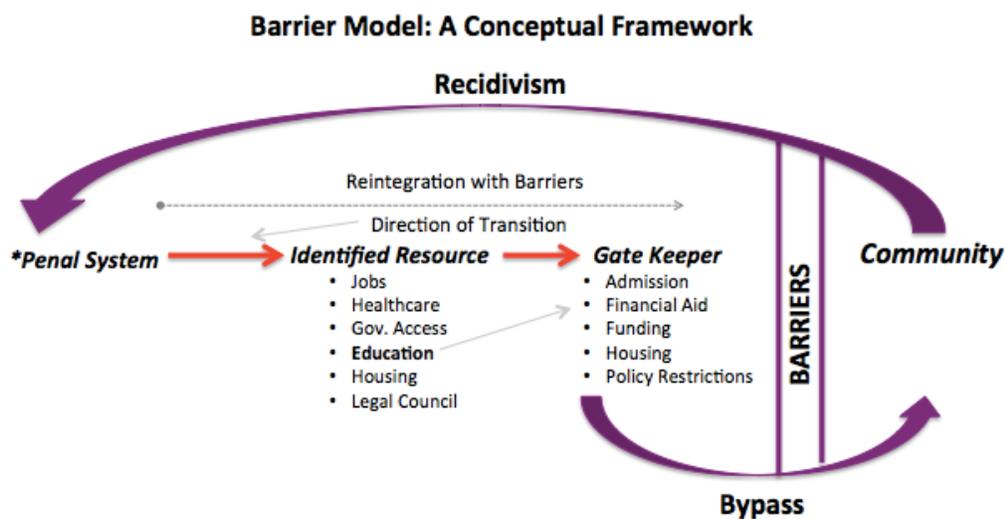
Bypass

Figure 2. Barrier model: A conceptual framework with the bypass.

When the ex-offender or the incarcerated individual has chosen a resource, gatekeepers are then generated. Once gatekeepers are generated, potential barriers are discovered and identified by the individual trying to utilize the services. Once the resource has been discovered, acknowledged, or pursued, depending on the many barriers associated with that particular resource, an incarcerated individual or ex-offender may choose to bypass the resource because of stipulations, hurdles, time, etc. At this point the bypass occurs.

Persisting Problems and Key Findings from Literature Review

Two key problems that are persistent throughout the research are racial disparities and the lack of college access for persons with criminal backgrounds. According to the Center for Community Alternatives and National H.I.R.E Network (2008), "exclusionary policies and practices prohibit people with criminal histories from participating in one of the most effective crime prevention interventions - a college education" (p. 1).

Unfortunately, many scholars are finding that underrepresented populations are still being excluded from advanced educational opportunities (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). In terms of college access, "racial disparities figure prominently in our criminal justice system, the practice of excluding college applicants who have criminal histories will inevitably impact prospective students of color more than their white counterparts" (Center For Community Alternatives & National H-I-R-E Network, 2008, p. 1). Thus, the use of criminal records to screen out prospective students is not race neutral, but rather encroaches on the civil and human rights of people with criminal records (Center For Community Alternatives & National H-I-R-E Network, 2008).

According to a study conducted by Weisman et al. (2010), 75% of universities adopted additional procedures to determine the admissions fate of applicants who identify as having criminal backgrounds on their college application. The researchers found two common procedures for evaluating applicants with a criminal background. The first procedure included a committee constructed of campus police, faculty, staff, and administrators (who have little to no knowledge about admissions or criminal histories) and excludes people from the committee such as persons from legal counsel, counseling or mental health staff or risk assessment personnel (who do have knowledge). As a result, the outcome is likely to end in a denial of admittance from the committee because of negative recommendations from campus police (Weissman et al., 2010). The second procedure requires applicants to fully disclose and provide a complete and full history of their offenses, a letter from either their parole or probation officer, and an essay on

various topics. At that point, most if not all, prospective students with criminal backgrounds withdraw from the application process (Weissman et al. 2010, p. 14).

One of the key findings presented in this literature review is recidivism. Recidivism is a big issue and higher education can be a key way to reduce recidivism while ensuring that formerly incarcerated students (FIS) can become productive members of society. Taking into account the importance higher education plays and the high cost associated with recidivism, "it behooves us to improve the academic outcomes" of those incarcerated (Wexler, Pyle, Flower, Williams, & Cole, 2014, p. 36). Unfortunately, there are a number of barriers to college access and success for FIS, which is a particularly disturbing issue considering how this disproportionately impacts Black and Hispanic men, an already disadvantaged population in higher education.

In addition to recidivism, Strayhorn, Johnson, and Barrett (2013) identified labels, supportive networks, and resilience as three key findings in research that focused on Formerly Incarcerated Black Males (FIBM) (p. 84). First, the labeling associated with ex-offenders posed both as an "obstacle as well as a motivation" in the transitioning and adjustment phase as it pertains to higher education. The "ex-offender label" as described by participants within the study stated the associated label "posed serious problems for FIBMs in college," which affected peer interactions, limited options for campus involvement, and all-too often shaped faculty members' perceptions of students (Strayhorn et al., 2013).

Secondly, the research suggested the importance of supportive networks and the role supportive networks played in their (ex-offenders) persistence in college. Strayhorn et al. (2013) alluded to the fact that supportive social networks in college were needed

across the board for FIBMs but was hard to come by. This poses as a problem because

the type of help or support needed for FIS, ex-offenders, or FIBMs is a special or unique

form of help which includes unique or specialized forms of advice, information, or

guidance often resulting in students going at it alone or withholding information (p. 87).

Thirdly, the participants in the research agreed that the art of transitioning and adjusting

from a penal institution to an institution of higher learning in and of itself is challenging.

The need for resilience and grit not only helps ex-offenders as they transition, but it

allows for individuals to overcome obstacles and setbacks that may arise as a result of

having a criminal past (p. 89).

Summary of Literature

This literature review highlighted several topics providing a foundation for

understanding the historical context of ex-offenders as they transition to become FIS in a

world filled with marginalization's, stereotypes, and limited resources. The introductory

portion of the literature review focused on the historical context of inmates and ex-

offenders to gain a better understanding of the penal system, statistics, and issues

pertaining to mass incarceration. The latter portion of the literature review focused on the

benefits of education, the barriers to success and access, and a bypass model, which is a

proposed theoretical framework that was developed from the literature and key findings

of this study.

Moreover, in order to truly understand what a university is doing to help FIS in

higher education, there must be an understanding of the root of the problem, which lies in

mass incarceration. Many of the persisting problems start with the issues of mass

incarceration and continue to effect other areas such as jobs, institutions of higher

learning, and communities to name a few. This literature review provided context of two separate institutions to better understand FIS and the obstacles that make it difficult for FIS to obtain admittance and resources while enrolled within a university setting. Furthermore, the literature review played a pivotal role in providing an overall understanding of higher education's role for access for an invisible population within higher education.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Restatement of Purpose

While reviewing the positive impacts universities have within their communities in areas such as employment, education, and the economy, there is evidence that suggests FII appear to be excluded from the aforementioned because of numerous barriers. Gunnison and Helfgott (2013) attributed this problem to the number of obstacles (i.e., obtaining employment, obtaining housing, and obtaining admittance into higher education) that are in place for ex-offenders trying to successfully reintegrate back into society (p. 2). The purpose of this study is to examine what is being done to help Formerly Incarcerated Students (FIS) at the University of Edgewood (UE) a Mid-West Land Grant University.

Research Questions

To address the topic of what is being done to help FIS in one particular collegiate setting; this study will specifically explore the following research question supported by two sub questions:

1. What is being done to help FIS at a Mid-West Land Grant University?

    a. How are key functional areas (i.e. admissions, financial aid, housing, campus safety, and student support services) set-up to provide FIS with the necessary help and resources?

    b. What policies and laws are in place regarding students with criminal backgrounds within each functional area?

By examining what needs to be done to help FIS in higher education, the research

questions presented will serve as a catalyst in examining if there is a lack of available

resources for FIS in higher education.

Methodology

The methodology used to conduct this research was a qualitative case study

method. The case study was used to study one particular institution rather than a large

number of institutions and institution types. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative

research first starts with some type of assumption. The researcher uses frameworks to

inform research problems that address the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a

particular type of problem or situation (p. 44). The reason we use qualitative research is

to fully ascertain and understand "in depth the rich lives of human beings and the world

in which we live" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 2).

The purpose of this study is to find out what is being done to help FIS at one

particular university. In order to determine what is being done, I chose to utilize a case

study approach. Merriam (2001) suggested "the single most defining characteristics of

case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case" (p. 27). She further

categorized case studies as either "a thing, single entity, or, a unit around which there are

boundaries" (Merriam, 2001, p.27). With that being said, I chose to focus on a single

entity, "One institution in the mid-west" which Jones et al. (2009) would classify as a

bounded system (p. 51).

I chose the case study approach as the preferred method because it allowed me to

look at what one institution is doing to help FIS rather than looking at several institutions

in different regions. Looking at one institution allowed me to develop a close relationship

with my participants. It also allowed me to focus on the issues that are present within this institution rather than being stretched thin and trying to decipher the issues at multiple institutions. Additionally, this case study allows me to spend adequate time researching, developing relationships, and investigating literature that would support this case study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used was Bronfenbrenner's theory on developmental ecology. According to Evans et al. (2010), Bronfenbrenner first developed and introduced developmental ecology in 1979 as a way to explain early childhood growth and development. As time progressed, this theory underwent several modifications to adapt to new "empirical studies and sociocultural changes" (p. 160). Bronfenbrenner's theory now examines the interactions between individual people and their environments to determine what and how certain things happen (p. 161). Bronfenbrenner's model consists of four main components (process, person, context, time, or PPCT) and the "dynamic, relationships among them" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, pp. 765). Table 1 identifies and defines the four main components of Bronfenbrenner's model.

For the purpose of this research study the component of context, specifically the exosystems within and beyond the university setting, will be analyzed to understand the interaction between certain exosystems, environments, and FIS. Table 2 defines and identifies the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems that are under the component context in a very explicit and detailed manner. Each system plays a key role in the development process of the student's environment while at a university, whether it's through direct contact with the students environment such as friends, family, peers, etc.

Table 1

The 4 Components of Bronfenbrenner's Model

Components	Definition
Process	Process is the center of the model and "encompasses particular forms of interaction between organism and environment, called *proximal processes* that operate over time and are posited as the primary mechanisms producing human development" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795).
Person	"The attributes of the person most likely to shape the course of development, for better or for worse, are those that induce or inhibit dynamic dispositions toward the immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 11).
Context	"In developmental ecology, the person remains the focus, with the surrounding context understood as a critical location for interactions (the process) between the individual and the environment. Four levels of context surround him or her: the microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems" (Evans et al., 2010, p.162).
Time	"Three successive levels describe time: micro-, meso-, and macro-. Mircotime refers to continuity versus discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal process. Mesotime is the periodicity of these episodes across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks. Finally Macrotime focuses on the changing expectations and events in larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by, processes and outcomes of human development over the life course" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796).

(microsystems), through the reinforcement of networks within those environments as a result of the microsystems such as clubs, organizations, peer groups (mesosystems), through the indirect influences that influence the student such as policy makers, policies, administration, etc. (exosystems), or through the overall environment of the university (macrosystems).

The exosystems level will be the focus of this study because it deals with all the stakeholders within the institution who make decisions on behalf of students without necessarily coming into contact with them. Furthermore, exosystems help inform this research study because of the indirect influences certain policies and policy makers,

Table 2

Systems & Definitions

Systems	Definition
Microsystems	"A pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit, engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 15.).
Mesosystems	"Comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person. Special attention is focused on the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 22).
Exosystems	"Comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings , at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 24).
Macrosystems	"Consists of the overarching pattern of micro- meso- and exosystems characteristic of given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such overarching systems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 25).

institutional decision makers, and departments within a university have on FIS. These policies can directly or indirectly impact FIS or any prospective student with a criminal background.

Research Site

In order to fully understand this research study, a description of the research site will be provided. The name of the university was replaced with a pseudonym to protect the participants throughout the research process. Research was conducted at a Mid-West land grant university referred to as the University of Edgewood (UE). According to UE's 2013/2014 fact book which is available and published publicly on the university's official website, the undergraduate student population totaled 19,376 students, the graduate

student population totaled 4,554 students, and the professional student population totaled 515 students, collectively totaling 24,445 students at the end of fall of 2013.

Under the direction of the Chancellors Office, three of the seven departments houses one of the key functional areas. These areas include (a) The Office of Student Affairs, (b) The Office of Academic Services and Enrollment, and (c) The Office of Business and Finance.

The Office of Student Affairs. Houses two key functional areas such as housing and student support services. This department is responsible for providing essential campus services, programs, and facilities, which contributes to enhancing student's diverse experiences.

The Office of Academic Services and Enrollment. Houses two key functional areas such as admissions and financial aid. The Office of Academic Services and Enrollment is responsible for strategically planning, implementing, and evaluating the many services and programs that facilitate student enrollment and success.

The Office of Business and Finance. Houses one key functional area such as campus safety. The Office of Business and Finance is responsible for facilities construction and management, accounting, audit, human resources, security, and auxiliary business services associated with UE's budget that supports 22,500 students and 5,000 faculty and staff.

Data Collection

The data collection process consisted of several data collecting methods, which include semi-structured interviews and the collection of artifacts. Data was collected using the semi-structured interviews to obtain information from participants (Merriam,

2001). This method provides interaction and observation that otherwise would not be granted using other platforms such as telephone or email. This research study also used artifacts as a way to gather rich and meaningful data. Those artifacts include the use of documents or physical artifacts, i.e., written policies, written laws, and annual handbooks. The use of artifacts provided additional insight to this case study that was not otherwise covered in the interviews. Additionally, Merriam (2001) defined semi-structured interviews as, "the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time" (p. 74). The semi-structured interview allowed for the researcher to expound on certain questions, topics, and issues without being stuck using a highly structured interviewing method.

The methods used to recruit participants for this case study was the university's staff directory. The following areas were recruited:

- Admissions: Director or Assistant Director of Admissions

- Financial Aid: Director or Assistant Director of Financial Aid

- Housing: Director or Assistant Director of Housing

- Campus Safety: Campus Chief of Police or Police Officer

- Student Support Services: Director or Assistant Director of Student Life, Counselor from CAPS, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, and the Director of Judicial Affairs (Dean of Students).

The researcher identified these areas as key functional areas because each functional area is responsible for providing specific services to every student that attends the university.

The researcher located their office and physically walked over to their office to schedule a pre-meeting, which was designed to explain the research study, to answer any initial questions about the research study, to review the approved Informed Consent Form to obtain their written participation, and concluded with the scheduling of a meeting for the actual interview if they were interested in participating. During this time, physical artifacts were obtained for data collection and analyzing. A reminder email was sent reminding them of the specified date, time, and location of the interview as agreed upon at the pre-meeting.

Each participant received the approved informed consent (Appendix A) form to verify and sign at the preliminary meeting, which introduced the topic and answered any questions. Contact information was given for IRB, my adviser, and me in case any questions arose during the research process. Participants also scheduled a time to participate in the study. Once the interview concluded, a thank you email (Appendix B) followed the interview as well as the transcribed interview, which was proofed by the participant before it could be used for actual research.

Participants participated in a 1-on-1 semi-structured interview consisting of a series of open-ended questions (Appendix F). There was no set time limit for the participant's interview; however, each interview lasted between 30 minutes and an hour based on the participant's knowledge of the topic and engagement with the research interview. After the interview was completed, a formal thank you email thanking the participants for their participation in my research study was sent. In addition, the participant's interview was transcribed and then it was made available to them for review and edits.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis consists of three steps described by Creswell (2007). These steps consist of preparing and organizing the data, reducing the data into themes, and representing the data (p. 180).

Preparing and organizing the data. I prepared and organized "text data," i.e., the transcripts of each individual participant's interview and the "physical artifacts," i.e., policies, laws, and annual handbooks (Creswell, 2007, p. 180; Merriam, 2009, p. 216) by grouping like topics and relevant information. The actual data analysis process started when each individual interview was completed. Immediately following the completion of their interview, a pseudonym was assigned to that specific participant. I began to transcribe the interview in its entirety so that I could begin to make sense of the information provided. Transcribing helped me to pin point important data I may have missed during the interview itself.

Reducing the data into themes. The second step consisted of categorizing the transcriptions into smaller groups and categories, which is also known as "coding and condensing the codes" (Creswell, 2007, p. 180). This step allows the researcher the opportunity to break down the data into smaller pieces of information and then assign them to a category or group with the same similarities (Merriam, 2001, p. 180). Coding and reducing the data into organized themes helps with clarity when presenting that data. The coding labels I chose derived from the exact wording from the participants, also known as *in vivo codes* (Creswell, 2007). I examined each participant's transcribed interview and provided a code highlighting subjects, words, and phrases. I then compared like codes with the other participants and started creating themes.

Representing the data. The final step consists of simply presenting the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. For this final step, I chose to represent the data using the discussion and the tables/charts method. The use of a discussion helps with interpreting and drawing "conclusions from the results for the research questions, hypotheses, and the larger meaning of the results" (Creswell, 2014, p. 162). Creating tables and charts aid in the discussion and allows for visual representation of common themes and trends throughout the interpretation process.

Trustworthiness & Goodness

To create trustworthiness and goodness, I chose to utilize several methods and techniques to achieve and maintain validity and reliability throughout the duration of this research project. According to Merriam (2009), research needs to be conducted in an ethical manner to ensure validity and reliability (p. 209). To ensure that this happens, Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers use recognized validation strategies to "document accuracy" of the research study (p. 250). It is recommended by Creswell (2014) to utilize several methods to validate the research study (p. 201).

The methods that I chose to ensure trustworthiness were Creswell's (2014) methods, which include triangulation, clarify the bias, and peer review or debriefing. Triangulation was chosen as a method because it allows for different sources of information, participant perspectives, and data to be compared with one another to ensure themes are consistent with one another. Clarifying biases was chosen as a method because it allows researchers to acknowledge their biases. Because I identify with this population, expressing my biases helps with understanding my interpretations of the data collected. Lastly, peer review or debriefing was chosen as a method because it allowed

for an outside person to ask questions about the qualitative research study to ensure that

the research resonates with others outside of the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Creswell,

2014).

Within my research reflexivity, I was able to clarify my own biases by describing

my experiences, my relationship to the population, and my overall knowledge of the

research. This reflexivity allowed for individuals reading my research to understand my

positionality in regards to the research. I used peer reviewing or debriefing by recruiting

an interested reader (who had nothing to do with my research or the population) to read,

analyze, and make sense of my work. This method allowed for validation to occur

because the reader confirmed my findings, challenged my findings, or asked questions for

clarification purposes.

Researcher Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge my own background and positionality in regards to

the research topic and the population. As the researcher of this particular case study, I

identify as being a person who was formerly incarcerated. Based off my own personal

experiences and encounters with those who also identify with the population, I recognize

that individuals with criminal backgrounds struggle with access to college. Furthermore, I

recognize there are special needs and resources needed for FIS to thrive in a collegiate

setting.

At the age of 13 the summer prior to entering 8th grade, I was incarcerated for 2 ½

years and unbeknownst to me that was the start of a downward spiral in my academic

career. After being released from a penal institution, I was immediately fast tracked to the

11th grade; however, my learning ability was that of a 6th grader. Within the same year of

being released, I dropped out of high school because of a set of unfortunate events and my inability to quickly adjust and adapt back to societal norms causing me to withdraw academically and mentally.

After dropping out of high school, I decided to pursue my General Education Diploma (GED) a few years later and was successful; however, entering college with a criminal background posed a bit of a challenge. In my pursuit of higher education, I was denied admittance to a public university three times because of my academic background and perception that I would not perform and graduate, or the perception that I was going to re-offend. Fortunately, due to grit and perseverance, it would be two years later before I would be accepted at another public 4-year institution after spending 2 years at a community college before transferring.

My personal experiences and background influence the way I interpreted the data and findings of this study. Furthermore, it influences the questions that I ask and the information that I seek to find during the interview process. I handle this by utilizing the methods outlined in the trustworthiness and goodness section of this chapter. I debriefed with my peer reviewer and I speak about my biases and interpretations of the data. This is to ensure that I am not skewing the data or misleading any reader during this research study.

Summary of Methodology

This chapter explained the methodology used for this study, the reasoning behind the selection, and the researcher's connection to the research. Chapter four will explain in great detail the findings of this study using the coding methods discussed earlier in this

chapter. In chapter five, a complete analysis of the findings will also be discussed in great

detail and implications for future research will be given.

Chapter 4

Findings

To understand what a university is doing to help formerly incarcerated students (FIS) in higher education, I interviewed seven current employees at the University of Edgewood (UE). These participants held a director, assistant director, or an officer title and worked in one of the outlined key functional areas: admissions, financial aid, housing, campus safety, and student support services. Using a prescribed interview protocol, I attempted to establish a discussion that would expound upon the following research questions: (1) "What is being done to help FIS at a mid-west land grant university?" (2) "How are key functional areas set up to provide FIS with the necessary help and resources?" and (3) "What policies and laws are in place regarding students with criminal backgrounds within each functional area?"

Participants Biographies

Eight participants were recruited to participate in this research study; however, because of time and other commitments, only seven of the eight participants were able to fully participate in this study. To introduce each participant, brief bios of each participant's general job duties, job title, and time appointed to their respective positions were given so readers could have a general understanding of these participants. Because of confidentiality reasons, each participant's name has been replaced with a pseudonym and will remain this way here and throughout this research project.

Black's brief biography. Black is the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and has been working at the university for seven years. As acting Director of the Student Affairs division, Black is responsible for collaborating with 15 other departments and

ensuring that all services that students need are provided. Furthermore, safety, food, and shelter are the Vice Chancellors main concerns.

Brown's brief biography. Brown is the Associate Director of Residence Life and has been at the university for 25 years. Brown is responsible for all of the Resident Directors, Resident Assistants, desk and night workers, and anything that pertains to the inside of the residence halls. There are approximately 450 student workers and 33 full-time staff who work in the residence halls.

Golden's brief biography. Golden is the Director of Student Involvement and has been at the university for four years. Golden is responsible for supervising student organizations, the LGBTQA Resource Center, campus night life, and a host of other organizations under her direction.

Pinkston's brief biography. Pinkston is the Dean of Academic Services and Enrollment Management and has served in this position for 12 years. He oversees Student Enrollment, the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid, the Registrar's Office and Student Information Services. Pinkston is responsible for providing guidance and leadership for enrollment management's day-to-day operations and programs for a large university.

Silver's brief biography. Silvers is the Associate Director in the office of Scholarships and Financial Aid. Silver's has been at the university for 22 years and is responsible for supervising client services staff, outreach efforts, and providing basic information about financial aid packets to students.

Tanner's brief biography. Tanner is a university police officer and has been with the university for 20 years. Prior to becoming a police officer he served as a

community service officer, which is a security officer for the residence halls. Tanner's responsibilities include patrolling campus property and looking for university policy and law violations.

Whiteler's brief biography. Whiteler is the Dean of Students and has been at the university for 11 years. Whiteler's office staff members consider themselves problem solvers when dealing with behavioral misconduct, academic misconduct, or issues of campus safety and security. In addition, Whiteler's office looks at federal laws and mandates as they pertain to students.

Participants Experiences with FIS

Each participant had a range of experiences in dealing with FIS at UE. Some participants indicated that they did not have any recollection of dealing with FIS at UE while some participants indicated they had quite a bit of experience dealing with FIS. Golden, Silvers, and Brown all stated that to their knowledge, they had never had direct contact with FIS on campus. As Silvers explained, "You know, I don't know that I've personally have had a lot of dealing with formerly incarcerated students, and I think part of that could be that maybe I have, I just didn't know." On the other hand, Tanner, Whiteler, Black, and Pinkston all stated that to their knowledge, they have had quite a bit of interaction with FIS on campus. As Pinkston stated, "We have had a number of FIS that have attended the university and there have been some students who have taken distance courses as well while incarcerated in the past." To this end, the range of experience varied tremendously and impacted the support and services provided to FIS at this institution.

"I Couldn't Tell You Who They Are"

"No, I couldn't tell you who they are" (Golden). Golden's comment speaks to a major theme that seemed to reverberate amongst most of the participants: the idea that no one seemed to know who FIS were or how to identify them while they used the resources in key functional areas. As I began to examine this theme on a deeper level, I began to take notice to the fact that quite a few of my participants simply were unaware of FIS within the university and its departments. During one of the interviews, Silvers continued to reiterate that the biggest key to the problem stemmed from not knowing who these students were. She did however; state that she remains hopeful that the university was helping FIS in the same way any other student would be helped despite not knowing. Other participants such as Black confirmed not knowing about FIS and even stated, "You know it would be better if they let us know. Sometimes we don't know that these students are here" (Black). Even as an officer for the university, Tanner stated, "I probably deal with incarcerated students or formerly incarcerated students and I got no idea of knowing who they are or if they ever been incarcerated" (Tanner).

There seemed to be a resounding consensus amongst the participants about not knowing who these students are, so much so, it started raising other questions and concerns about how to identify a person who identifies with this population. "Do we ask the question if you've ever been incarcerated [on college applications]? I mean I don't know if we do or not. What are you obligated to disclose and what can we legally ask you to disclose" (Golden)? In an indirect manner, Whiteler sort of answers the question by posing potential problems.

> Part of the problem is there's a lot that may have enrolled that we don't know about because again we don't ask them to disclose that information [on college application] and it really comes to us on a more piecemeal kind of basis. (Whiteler)

Whiteler's comment indicated that the problem goes far beyond not knowing who FIS are, but rather, the large amount of FIS slipping by unnoticed and unaccounted for during the enrollment process.

The vast majority of participants in this study indicated that they had no clue about FIS. These indications of not knowing who FIS are is an integral part to understanding exactly what a university is doing to help FIS in higher education. This theme, I couldn't tell you who they are, leads to the next theme which covers admission eligibility.

Discovering Who's Eligible to Be Admitted

Many of the participants in this study questioned if FIS were eligible to be enrolled at their institution because of criminal offenses and the type of offenses committed. When speaking to Whiteler, he mentioned that only a select few would qualify for admissions into the university because "a lot of people who are incarcerated aren't particularly well educated" (Whiteler). Whiteler's remarks reaffirm the fact that many FII are uneducated because they do not finish school or because there is a disruption in the learning process when someone is incarcerated. He posed a rhetorical question asking, "There's a direct correlation there right" (Whiteler)?

> So the biggest chunk of work has to be trying to identify who would be eligible to be admitted. But if we could find those that met our admissions requirements, then I would certainly be in support of trying to find ways to attract them to the university. (Whiteler)

When speaking with other participants about admissions eligibility, Pinkston stated, "The decision regarding admission is solely going to be based on academics [not criminal history]. Why are we asking a question if we're not going to use it in admission decisions?" (Pinkston). To support his statement, Pinkston provided a scenario that helps with understanding his point of view:

> If I'm a formerly incarcerated student and I was convicted of a crime and I served my time and now I'm ready to make a fresh start and I'm ready to go to the university and I'm all excited about doing this and I got the application online and I'm filling it out and it comes to the criminal history question and I stop and I pause and I think criminal history question? I could be denied because I have to tell them that I was formerly incarcerated?

According to Pinkston, being denied admittance into UE for criminal offenses is not going to happen despite the negative connotations that exist with asking about criminal history on various types of applications such employment and schooling applications.

During Pinkston's commentary, I noticed that he mentioned asking questions about criminal history during the application process. I became curious about this criminal history question during the admission process so I inquired with several other participants and one participant mentioned, "There is some interest in doing that and frankly, I have an interest in doing that with certain safe guards to make sure that we're not keeping out folks that has every right to be here (Black).

Each participant's comments seemed to point in the direction of admissions. As it pertains to the research questions of this study, there seems to be some reservation as to whose responsible for enrolling FIS into UE, what legally can be done, and who's eligible to be admitted based of the admissions criteria. Based on each participants comment, discovering who's eligible to be admitted has not been easy feat. However, according to Black, there is some keen interest in adding criminal history questions to the

college application because of safety concerns. This leads to the next theme of exploring

what's being done.

Perception vs. Reality

In speaking with my participants, I began to notice certain rules and regulations

that seemed to govern the way each key functional area operated within UE. The topic,

"there are things that we do" (things each key functional area is doing in their respective

departments) kept emerging throughout each participant's interview which led me to

believe that the participants perception of the actual things that they did in their

department was not the actual reality in most cases. Many participants spoke about the

things that their individual departments were doing procedurally as it pertains to FIS at

UE. Silvers and Tanner stated that each of their respective departments had specific

guidelines on what they could and could not do, but there was nothing that specifically

talked about FIS in any of their policies. Others such as Whiteler and Brown indicated

that there were things that each of their departments did when it came to dealing with FIS

or providing campus safety to the campus community.

> There are things that we do when it comes to assessing campus safety and security
> risk that we'll do together with the police department. But there really isn't
> policies per say because if a student has been admitted to the university and
> they're matriculating then we don't really have anything that says your restricted
> from certain activities there's not policy in that regard. (Whiteler)

Brown brought up cross campus partnerships that naturally exists between key functional

areas as it pertains to policies that exist across the campus in a whole.

> Ugh yea, well we ask, we make that [asking about criminal history] part of the
> housing contract and then like I said we work with the Dean of Students Office
> and the police department and if we feel like it's not a good fit depending on what
> they have going on than we would look to deny the contract. (Brown)

Many of the participants provided information about the things that they do procedurally (their perception), but many of the key functional areas have no policies or rules in place when dealing with FIS at UE specifically (reality). This theme provided information for understanding "What policies and laws are in place regarding students with criminal backgrounds within each functional area." The next theme to be covered is being "iffy" about sex-offenders.

"Iffy" About Sex-offenders

Assumptions about criminal histories are usually vast because of the different types of criminal offenses that exist. However, during each of my participant's interview, I began to take notice to majority of my participants using sex-offenders as their basis for giving examples, telling a story, or as a point of reference while other criminal offenses were very rarely brought up. As I sat and ruminated on the following comments, I started to see an ongoing trend about being "iffy" about sex-offenders. This eventually turned into a theme.

Several participants such as Black, Silvers, and Brown expressed their reservations about allowing sex-offenders into certain departments at UE. Black gave an example of one particular department stating, "If we do know that they have certain backgrounds that we're careful who they are allowed to mix with. For example the more specific one is in the residence hall, particularly those with sexual criminal history things" (Black). In an interview with Silvers, she expressed her concerns as a parent about housing sex-offenders and the safety concerns associated with doing so. During a conversation with Brown, he used registered sex-offenders choosing to major in teaching

as his example. He described it as not being a smart choice on the universities part if they were to allow sex-offenders to major in teaching.

> Depending on what they did, I would argue that for some of them they could be wasting time choosing certain majors that you know, [long exaggerated pause] that you won't pass what you need to pass [criminal background] in order to attain certification to do it. (Brown)

Sexual criminal histories are a concern because of the safety risk associated with the crime and individual. The proceeding comments given by Silvers indicate the concerns about FIS who have sexual criminal histories in higher education despite her own personal feelings about second chances. Though these are Silver's personal comments, all of my participants share her sentiments about safety concerns. According to Silver's, sex-offenders deserve a second chance despite her own personal feelings and biases. She said she hoped someone would give her a second chance and not hold that crime against her if she messed up. "I would assume that somebody who is formerly incarcerated coming back to school is trying to better their situation I guess and I don't have issue with that" (Silvers).

Based off the responses of my participants, having these individuals on campus can create fear and leave the college community feeling uncomfortable with sex-offenders' presence on campus. When exploring each research question, each one can have a significant role in determining how FIS are treated and handled when enrolling into any university. To this end, Silvers point about second chances for FIS leads me to the next theme about inclusion verse exclusion at UE.

Inclusive vs. Exclusive

There seemed to be conflicting arguments between each of my participant's about whether or not UE was an inclusive environment for FIS. Interestingly enough, this

theme seemed to coincide with the thoughts about sex-offenders and the policies that

exist on their respective campuses. Below Black, Pinkston, and Whiteler talked

separately about the vast majority of the institution being very supportive of FIS.

Collectively, they all agreed that the university was pretty inclusive. Pinkston went as far

to say "the reality is the professors, the staff, no one is going to be aware of the student's

former incarceration unless that student decides to confide that information" making the

university an inclusive place (Pinkston). Pinkston also assured me that not being aware of

their incarceration is one of the ways the university is able to ensure FIS are being treated

fairly and not in a way that makes them feel discriminated against. When talking with

Black and Whiteler, they both stated the university would have an open mind about FIS.

> I think a large part of the reservation would be the kind of offense. Here's an
> example, if we're talking about somebody who was a serial rapist that's going to
> raise a lot of concerns. That kind of background would be difficult to overcome.
> So depending on the nature of the offense I think you'll find greater or lesser
> support. But in general I would imagine that most would be supportive. (Whiteler)

Because "we don't do a lot to keep them out and the fact that we have quite a few that we

don't even know about suggest in that regard we're pretty inclusive" (Black). Blacks

comment suggests that because of the reasons of not screening individuals with criminal

histories, the university is inclusive.

The following comments indicated that the research site was not inclusive

because of the lack of awareness that existed around FIS. According to Brown, Golden,

and Silvers, they all agreed that the institution might not be accepting of FIS on their

campus. This differed from the other participant's points of view. For Brown, housing

probably wouldn't be inclusive because "you're talking about a concentration of a lot of

students and so it's not just the university, it's an issue of the parents who are sending

their students here" (Brown). While Brown indicated that the university, more specifically housing, wouldn't be an inclusive environment, Golden also said the same thing.

> (Laugh out loud) Well, ugh, if they're all as naïve as I am than sure I mean you can go like both ways with that right? Am I inclusive, maybe but not intentionally? Am I exclusive but intentionally because I never really gave it any thought? So are we inclusive intentionally I would probably doubt it. (Golden)

In addition to Golden's statement, she asked, "Well, how can I be an advocate for college access and they say except for this this this and this and so really? She goes on to say, "You know you made your mistake or a perceived mistake or you've done your time and so should you be given those same rights that I think we "try" to give everyone else" (Golden). "I'm guessing that some other people maybe [would not be inclusive] based on their biases on their own personal biases" (Silvers).

The university is a large place filled with many thoughts, ideas, and opinions. Participants expressed themselves and proved that there is a difference in opinion at UE when it comes to inclusion and exclusion. These differences reflect what's being done to help FIS at this particular higher education institution. This leads into the next theme, which covers what's needed and what the university can actually supply as a resource.

What They Need and What We Can Supply

During individual conversations with each participant, there seemed to be a reoccurring theme about different resources that were offered at the university for students in general. Some participants mentioned the copious amounts of resources that the university had for their students while some acknowledged that the resources that were available at the institution were not designed to help FIS at all. All in all, there seemed to be a general consensus that FIS required some type of special assistance while

attending UE. Majority of participants who participated in this study acknowledged that the many services provided to all students were not tailored or designed to help FIS. However, there seemed to be a list of non-traditional services that each participant thought could be used or transformed to help FIS. The most talked about was mentorship and positive role models.

> There's a lot of positive mentors and role models. So that would be the other thing that I think is important not only for the group of students your studying [reference to FIS], but students in general is to try and find some positive, you know, positive like mentors that you can look up to that you can go to and ask advice for. Because I would probably say that people who tend to be incarcerated maybe didn't have a lot of positive role models and people they could go to that would help them stay more on a more positive path. (Brown)

Majority of my participants shared in Browns sentiments and really spoke about the importance and benefits of positive role models and mentorship.

While many participants highlighted resources that were available on campus, some began to talk about the needs that FIS needed. Tanner identified "getting into the system" as a resource because of the many free services that a penal system has readily available. While laughing out loud, Tanner acknowledged that the criminal justice system has flaws, but he still saw the penal system as a way to get people the help they needed. Though many rattled off resources on the campus, both Whiteler and Tanner assumed that there wasn't a large need for this population due to low numbers or FIS were not recognized as a problem in their eyes.

> You know, I don't know that there would be a large need, but yes certainly there is a need. And by that let me sort of parse that out a little bit. Because we don't have a large number, it's hard to identify a large need. But for those small numbers those individuals yes there is a need. (Whiteler)

I don't see that population as being a problem you know, or needing additional assistance or help at this point. If they do I'm not aware of it. It there's truly a need out there I would think that the university needs to provide a place for these people to go. (Tanner)

Both Whiteler and Tanners provide rational as to why there is not a large need for resources and needs for FIS at UE. But both do recognize if there was a larger population than the university would definitely need to provide the necessary resources to support FIS at their institution.

According to each of my participants, very little is known about FIS and there are no tailored resources being provided. While each key functional area recognizes that FIS has very special needs, no functional area is currently providing or seeking to provide FIS with resources because of low numbers at UE.

Culminating Thoughts on FIS

As I prepare for the culmination of this chapter, I asked each participant if there was anything they wanted to add to the interview that wasn't asked already or if there were any lingering thoughts that weren't addressed. I leave you with these final thoughts of each participant who participated in this research study.

We're finding out more and more that some were incarcerated for wrong reasons and so we have to be careful of how we handle that. And so we try to balance being fair to the student versus making sure that were not posing some threat to the rest of the community. (Black)

I'd be curious to get a copy of what you come up with. And if you ever find out how many formerly incarcerated students we have or what kind of jobs they can get, I'd be curious to know. (Brown)

"I'm intrigued by this topic, I haven't even thought about this." (Golden)

I think as a society we need to be doing everything that we can to support a previously incarcerated students educational goals; as we show with the different chart and things we like to throw out, a student who gets a bachelor's degree is

going to be earning a lot more money over the course of their lifetime and certainly is going to be a lot more employable. (Pinkston)

I mean just personally, I don't know why we would want to restrict and get into that business of saying "you can do this but you can't do this" I don't know why we would want to do that for any student. If we find a student admissible to the university, then I don't know why we would want to direct where they're going I guess. (Silvers)

I would just say I don't have any way, I think we as a campus maybe if they're going into the Office of Admissions and they are asking if you've ever done this or if you've done that they may know about it. (Tanner)

It's hard to know what to do when you have low numbers. There's a lot of the squeaky wheel gets the grease kind of stuff that happens on the campus. Bigger numbers leads to bigger programs and support services, now that's not to say that that's right or fair that we should ignore a population of students, and we're not trying to ignore a population of students, it's more a matter of uncertainty about what we're dealing with. So how do we know and then how do we marshal the resources to meet the needs if we are not aware of the needs? (Whiteler)

According to each participant representing their respective functional areas, FIS have a large number of complex issues, often leaving participants questioning exactly what is being done to help FIS in higher education.

Summary of Findings

This chapter covered the major findings of this study and utilized themes and participant comments to address this study's research questions. Those themes included: (1) I couldn't tell you who they are, (2) discovering who's eligible to be admitted, (3) there are things that we do, (4) Iffy about sex-offenders, (5) inclusive vs. exclusive, and (6) what they need and what we can supply. Throughout this findings chapter, participants expressed their personal opinions, beliefs, and knowledge about FIS in their respective departments at UE. The following chapter will provide context for understanding what a university is doing to help FIS, how key functional areas are set-up

to help FIS, and the policies and laws in place at UE. Chapter 5 will also discuss a

summary of the findings, suggestions, implications, as well as future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

In this case study, seven participants who work in various key functional areas at the University of Edgewood (UE) were interviewed to examine the purpose of this case study, "What a university is doing to help formerly incarcerated students (FIS) in higher education." Because the need to reduce recidivism has become a national topic, many state officials are now trying to figure out effective ways to reintegrate ex-offenders back into society while reducing the likelihood of re-offending; higher education is one tool that may help combat this problem of recidivism. This chapter will include a discussion of the findings as it relates to each research question and relevant literature. I will then conclude this chapter by providing implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Restatement of Purpose

According to Gunnison and Helfgott (2013), ex-offenders are trying to reintegrate back into society and their communities, but successful reentry seems to be an "evasive goal for many" (p. 1). When looking at the most recent data on recidivism rates between the years 2005 and 2010, "67.8% of the 404,638 state prisoners released in 2005 in 30 states were arrested within 3 years of release, and 76.6% were arrested within 5 years of release" (Durose, Cooper, Snyder, 2014, p.1). While reviewing the positive impacts universities have within their communities in areas such as employment, education, and the economy, there is evidence that suggests FIS appear to be excluded from the opportunities college attendance promises because of numerous barriers. Gunnison and Helfgott (2013) attributed this problem to the number of obstacles (i.e., obtaining

employment, obtaining housing, and obtaining admittance into higher education) that are in place for ex-offenders trying to successfully reintegrate back into society (p. 2). The purpose of this study was to examine what is being done to help Formerly Incarcerated Students (FIS) at the University of Edgewood (UE) a Mid-West Land Grant University.

Discussion of Findings

Research suggests that educated inmates and ex-offenders are less likely to participate in criminal behaviors after being released from a penal institution (Erisman & Contardo, 2005); however, barriers still exist within universities for this group (Escobar, Jordan, & Lohrasbi, 2015). In this study, participants (housed under one of the five key functional areas) discussed what their department is currently doing to help FIS through participation in semi-structured interviews and through submission of artifacts such as student handbooks. They discussed the current policies in place for students with criminal backgrounds and they also expressed their concerns about enrolling FIS with certain offenses at their institution. Additionally, the participants pinpointed and specified ways to tailor available resources that FIS could benefit from while attending UE. The findings of this study align with the literature in chapter 2, it shows the inconsistencies within the literature, and it provides new insights on identifying measures and enrollment eligibility.

Themes & Existing Literature

This chapter provides an overview of the emerging themes that emerged from the participants representing various key functional areas that were highlighted (see Chapter 1). Those key functional areas include: admissions, financial aid, campus safety, & student support services. The six emerging themes are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Themes

Themes	Summary
"I couldn't tell you who they are"	Participants discuss not knowing who FIS are or how to identify them within the campus community.
Discovering who's eligible to be admitted	Participants discuss eligibility requirements and the role admissions play in admitting FIS into the university.
Perception vs. Reality	The participant's perception that things are being done when in reality the things that they do are not geared towards FIS.
"Iffy" about sex-offenders	Participants discuss their reservations about sex-offenders within the campus community. They outline specific settings where sex-offenders should not go or majors they should not apply to. They also discuss the safety risk associated with enrolling sex-offenders at the university.
Inclusive vs. Exclusive	Participants discuss their own thoughts about whether or not the campus community would be accepting of FIS at their institution.
What they need and what we can supply	Participants discuss what resources are available, what resources are not available, and how they could be altered to support the needs of FIS at their institution.

A major finding in the present study was participants not being able to identify

FIS at their institution. Several participants indicated that they didn't know who FIS were

and there was not way to identify students with criminal backgrounds. The basis for this

theme, I couldn't tell you who they are, spoke to Weissman et al. (2010) research on

higher education institutions having the discretion to ask about criminal histories on a

college application, which in return would identify students with criminal backgrounds.

Participants also spoke about who gets admitted into the university, another theme

covered in chapter 4. Participants constantly referred to admissions as the gatekeeper to

student enrollment. They also acknowledged the fact that FIS posed some academic

challenges. Participants confirmed Tsai and Scommegna (n.d.) research about offenders

having a lower level of education, which affects the type of students getting admitted. This affects college access for FII because they are not able to meet the minimum academic qualifications set forth by the admissions office due to a lower level of education.

Another theme that participants spoke about was things that each of the key functional areas did as it pertained to FIS. Participants spoke in detail about procedures that each of their areas followed when coming into contact with a FIS. Participants also acknowledged not being aware of current policies for FIS at their institution. This theme spoke to the many policies that preclude FIS from obtaining resources at their institution. The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) mentioned the many barriers around financial aid and the lack of funding for students with certain criminal offenses. Weissman et al. (2010) and Dickerson (2008) also specified certain policies that institutions were bound by when it came to admitting students into their institutions.

Being iffy about sex-offenders was another theme participants spoke about. Participants expressed their concerns about enrolling sex-offenders into their institution (even though I did not ask them about sex-offenders specifically) because of fear or assumptions about the sex-offense. Participants even mentioned certain key functional areas where they had reservations about such as housing and certain college majors, more specifically teaching. In chapter 2, Morato (2014) spoke about stigmas and stereotypes associated with certain crimes. The researcher acknowledged that stigmas and stereotypes determined the distribution of resources available for those particular students.

What they need and what we can supply was another theme covered in chapter 4. In this chapter, participants addressed the number of needs needed by FIS to thrive in a

collegiate setting. Participants also acknowledged that there were no programs available for FIS; however, they did mention the possibility of creating and altering current resources to fit the needs of FIS. One of the major needs talked about in chapter 4 was the need for mentorship and positive role models. Several researchers spoke in great detail about the positive impacts of having mentors and positive role models especially when re-entering society (Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, & D'Ambrosio, 2011; Strayhorn, Johnson, & Barrett, 2013; Livingston & Miller, 2014).

The last and final theme that was covered in chapter 4 was inclusive vs. exclusive, which talked about whether or not the university was an inclusive atmosphere for FIS at their institution. Participants in this study had varying outlooks and opinions as it pertained to whether or not the institution was an inclusive environment. Unfortunately, due to a lack of research about the inclusive environments of FIS in higher education institutions, this area was not addressed in research. The lack of research on this topic suggests a new area of research is needed to talk about the climate of higher education institutions as it pertains to FIS. There also seemed to be quite a few stereotypes and biases toward FIS in the data, which also suggest new areas of research.

Recommendations for Practice

In response to the findings of chapter 4, I am proposing four recommendations that may provide support for educators and researchers who are trying to help FIS, ex-offenders, or inmates acclimate into higher education. Below is a brief rationale for each recommendation:

1. Expertise: The first recommendation I would recommend is to seek out
   experts who understand and has the knowledge to help formerly incarcerated

individuals. This will not only minimize any bias or any malpractice, but it will help higher education institutions make the right decisions to assist this particular population in higher education; especially now that there is pressure from the state and federal government to decrease the prison population. This recommendation stemmed from the limited amount of knowledge and expertise displayed or communicated by from the participants who participated within this case study.

2. Policy and Law: My recommendation would be to establish an understanding of what is required from the state, federal, and higher education institutions to remain in compliance with policies, procedures, and federal mandates while providing equal opportunities that does not in any way hinder academic achievement. Furthermore, I recommend establishing more uniformed policies that will help guide prospective students who identify with being formerly incarcerated and help guide university employees who may encounter an individual who identifies with this population. This eliminates bias and exclusionary practices. This recommendation stemmed from certain key functional areas responses about having procedures that they followed rather than uniformed policies for the institution.

3. Inclusion: I recommend inclusionary practices in which we intentionally include FIS and ex-offenders. This helps with developing new programs, services, and educational needs. In addition, hearing from those who need help allows institutions of higher learning to get a gist of what they need rather than making irrational decisions that may damage or lead to recidivism

in the future. This recommendation stems from participants responses on whether on not their institution was an inclusive environment.

4. Programming and Resources: Another suggested recommendation is for specialized programming and intentional resources to be created. Because FIS have specialized needs such as academic needs, counseling needs, mentoring needs to name a few, it is imperative that programming and resources are provided for this population. This stemmed from the many participant responses indicating that there were no specialized programming and intentional resources available for FIS because of low enrollment numbers.

Limitations

This case study provided rich and meaningful research that helped answer my research question, "What is being done to help FIS in higher education." However, there were some evident limitations within this study. These limitations included time, the number of participants selected for the study, a single institution in the mid-west, limited prospective, institution type and limited knowledge about the population. In this section, I will give a brief explanation of each limitation and why I consider each situation to be a limitation.

Time was considered a limitation because of the minimum time allotted to complete this study. Participants also had a hectic schedule making it difficult to schedule meetings. In addition to meetings, there were a select few who were chosen to participate in this study. This is considered a limitation because a select few were selected to give their prospective about the functional area in its entirety. Although these administrators represent key functional areas within the institution and were able to

provide information about those areas, they do not necessarily represent the perspectives of all faculty or administrators on campus.

Furthermore, I chose to conduct a case study in which I only examined one university in the mid-west. This is considered a limitation because of the many regional differences that exist. For example, there may be a larger population of formerly incarcerated individuals in other regions that weren't assessed here at this particular institution. In addition, many institutions handle said populations differently according to their own policies, laws, or state mandates. Although a case study of one institution may provide insight into the challenges that FIS may face in higher education more broadly, the findings may not be transferrable across the wide range of institutions in the United States. Moreover, institution type was considered a limitation within this case study because of the large variety of institutions that exist within the U.S. Certain institution types may attract certain student populations, therefore, making them equip in a way that is different from other institutions.

Examining the perspective of administrators was another limitation that I found. This is considered a limitation due to the fact that institutions are made up of staff, faculty, and other entities outside of administrators. Solely excluding other participants from this case study could be considered a limitation because they could have provided valuable insight to help answer my research question. Lastly, having limited knowledge about the formerly incarcerated population is a limitation as well as a reality because administrators who are unaware cannot provide the necessary resources to this population.

Implications for Future Research

The topic of FIS in higher education is an area that is limited in research. Researchers such as Strayhorn (2013) have begun to explore the experiences of formerly incarcerated Black male at predominantly white institutions (PWI), but additional research is needed to better ascertain effective ways to not only include this population but to provide this population with the necessary tools to succeed in the community and in college. Therefore, I have made several suggestions on future research areas and ideas based off the findings provided in chapter 4.

College access is an area of research that I believe has not been examined in a way that provides the best results and suggestions for FIS. Thus, the need for college access is an area that needs exploration because of the many stipulations within admissions and college programs. College access concerns come from the research provided in the literature review, which spoke in depth about the issues of access into higher education for those who were formerly incarcerated. In addition to college access, needs and resources are another area to be explored and researched. Many of my participants verbalized that they didn't know what this particular population needed, so this is another area to consider for future research. Reaching out to this population to identify their needs would also be beneficial because you can hear first-hand what they need rather than speculating.

Other areas of future research include academic programs, policies and laws, and support systems. Academic programs are an area that needs researching especially with so many people within the penal system lacking a high school diploma. As suggested in the literature review, this could be for a number of reasons. Exploring best practices and

effective ways to teach and advance this particular population academically is something

that needs further investigation. Furthermore, policies and laws is another area that

requires research. Because policies and laws vary state-by-state and institution-by-

institution, it behooves researchers to explore this area especially when there are a lot of

legal implications regarding those who have been formerly incarcerated. Lastly, support

system is another area that I believe should be researched. As discussed in chapter 2

literature review and in chapter 4, strong support systems have many advantages to

student growth and development. Researching effective ways to provide support systems

or how to implement healthy mentorships, support systems, etc. is something that can be

benefited from.

Though there are numerous research areas that can be explored within higher

education, I hope these few ideas will spark other areas of exploration concerning FIS

and those who have been formerly incarcerated.

Summary of Discussion

In this study, I provided a brief introduction introducing the problem at hand in

chapter one. I also provided research and supporting data in chapter two. I outlined a

detailed method of how I would conduct this research study in chapter 3. In chapter four,

I provided the voices of my participants and presented the findings. And in chapter five I

provided a culminating discussion about this case study in its entirety. Each chapter

helped answer this case studies main research question, which asked, "What a university

is doing to help FIS in higher education?" In addition to the main research question, I

also asked two supporting research questions such as, "How are key functional areas (i.e.

admissions, financial aid, housing, campus safety, and student support services) set-up to

provide FIS with the necessary help and resources," and "What policies and laws are in place regarding students with criminal backgrounds within each functional area?" Both of these research questions helped inform this case study.

Through these research questions, I was able to discover that there is very minimal being done at UE to support FIS while they attend this institution. I did find interest about helping this particular population in higher education. Furthermore, through the explicit information provided, I believe that this research study met its goal in providing researchers, administrators, and FIS with the exposure they need to make effective changes at UE.

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Appendix A

IRB Consent Form

Nebraska
UNIVERSITY OF
Lincoln

Informed Consent Form

Introduction

This study attempts to collect information on what universities are doing to help Formerly Incarcerated Students in higher education.

Procedures

This study will be conducted in a confidential one on one interview that will tape and record your responses. This interview is expected to last approximately 30 minutes to an hour. You may opt to meet within the comforts of your office or a space will be provided to conduct the research study. Once you consent to take the study, you will be asked to sign and date the consent form acknowledging your rights as a participant in this study. Once you confirm and sign the consent form, you will be asked a series of questions regarding your position and your thoughts about Formerly Incarcerated Students. After answering all of the questions, your information will be saved and secured on the taping device. Once transcription is completed, you will be asked to review the transcript to make any additional comments or edits. After your approval, the recording will be erased.

Consent to Audio Recording & Transcription

(You have the right to request that the tape be stopped or erased during the recording.)

This study involves audio recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recording or the transcript. Only the research team will be able to listen to the recordings.
The audio will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

By checking the box below, I am allowing the researcher to audio tape me as part of this research.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Risk/Discomforts

There are no known risks to participate in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for participants. However, the benefits of this research will help with future research and programming for Formerly Incarcerated Students. It is with high hopes that this research will spark further conversation on how to actively support an invisible student population on college campuses across the nation. This research will also help with finding resources to actively aid Formerly Incarcerated Students from relapsing while aiding in their retention, progression, and graduation.

Confidentiality

All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will replace the real names and identities of those who participate in this study. All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the primary investigator will have access to them. The data collected will be stored in a password locked external hard drive until it has been deleted by the primary investigator.

Compensation

There is no compensation provided for this study.

Participation

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You must be at least 19 years of age or older to participate in this study. You must currently be employed as an employee at the University of Nebraska Lincoln in order to participate.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, the University of Nebraska Lincoln, or in any other capacity. You will not receive any penalty or any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Nebraska
UNIVERSITY OF
Lincoln

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Terrence S. McTier Jr., principal investigator, at 404-644-8966, tmctier1@huskers.unl.edu or secondary researcher Dr. Elizabeth Niehaus at 402-472-4236, eniehaus@unl.edu

Please contact the University of Nebraska Lincoln Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

By signing below, you are indicating your consent to participate in this research. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

X _____   X _____
Print & Sign Name   Date

Appendix B

Thank you Email

Subject line: Thank you from [Terrence S. McTier Jr.]

Dear [Participant Name],

Thank you for the opportunity to interview you on [Date]. I really enjoyed your insight

on effective ways to help this invisible population on college campuses as well as hearing

your personal thoughts about Formerly Incarcerated Students.

I really appreciate that you took the time out of your busy schedule to accommodate me

in my research endeavors. Your department is very lucky to have someone like you.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me as needed.

Again, [Participant Name], I really appreciate you and your staff for taking the time to

talk to me about my research.

Sincerely,

Terrence S. McTier Jr.

Appendix C

Reminder Email

Dear [Participant Name],

Recognizing your busy schedule, I'm sending you this email as a reminder to our

interview we have scheduled on [Date] at [Time] to be held at [meeting space]. This

interview is regarding research on what is being done at a university to help Formerly

Incarcerated Students in Higher Education.

Please feel free to contact me if you require further information.

Thank you and I look forward to meeting with you.

Warmest Regards,

Terrence S. McTier Jr.

Appendix D

Email Invitation

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Terrence S. McTier Jr. and I am a graduate student in the Educational

Administration Department. I am currently conducting research (IRB Approval #) for my

thesis and would love for you to participate. The purpose of this study is to. This study

will attempt to examine five key functional areas (i.e. admissions, policy & law, housing,

college access, and money) and what is being done to help Formerly Incarcerated

Students (FIS) on a collegiate campus.

Your insight and expertise will be very valuable in helping with my research endeavors.

If you are indeed interested in participating in a 30-minute to 1-hour interview with me

please feel free to contact me at tmctier1@huskers.unl.edu or   so that we

can schedule a time to meet.

Attached above is the Approved IRB Consent Form and contact information.

Again thank you for your time and efforts and I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Appendix E

Initial Verbal Script

Initial Contact Verbal Script for Obtaining Informed Consent

(Graduate Student Investigator)

"Hello, my name is Terrence McTier. I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska Lincoln in the Education Administration Department, and I am undertaking research that will be used in my thesis.

I am studying the needs of Formerly Incarcerated Students at a Mid-West Land grant university…

I would like to ask you a series of questions about your perceptions and your broader understanding of how policy decisions at the university influence resources for FIS. I am very interested in your opinions and interpretations of how why FIS are not being helped, and what you think needs to be done.

The information you share with me will help support my research findings in my thesis. Hopefully the information you will provide will help spark future research and programming for FIS…

This interview will take about 30 minutes to an hour] of your time.

[Insert the following depending on whether participant identifiers are collected]

>   There is no risk of a breach of confidentiality. I will not link your name to anything you say, either in the transcript of this interview or in the text of my thesis or any other publications.

Participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can, of course, decline to discuss any issue, answer any question, etc., as well as to stop participating at any time, without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any additional questions concerning this research or your participation in it, please feel free to contact me, my thesis advisor or our university research office at any time.

Insert the following when taping the interaction

"I would like to make a tape recording of our discussion, so that I can have an accurate record of the information that you provide to me. I will transcribe that recording by hand, and will keep the transcripts confidential and securely in my possession. I will erase the tape after I transcribe it."

"Do you have any questions about this research? Do you agree to participate?

If yes

Can we schedule a time and place to meet?

Can I email or drop off the Informed Consent Form?

If no

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Appendix F

Interview Questionnaire

Questionnaire

1. What is your position and how long have your worked at the university?

2. Can you tell me about your general job duties?

3. What experiences have you had with FIS?

4. Can you identify some needs of FIS that you think might help them in their collegiate endeavors?

5. Do you think that your department is set-up to provide FIS with the resources that they need?

   a. Please explain

6. Can you explain how your department is set-up to help FIS?

7. Outside of your particular department, do you think there are resources to help FIS on campus currently?

   a. If so please specify

8. Within your department, are there any policies in place regarding students with criminal backgrounds or FIS?

9. How do you feel about recruiting FIS into the university?

10. Based off what you currently know about FIS, do you feel there is a need to provide specific help for FIS?

11. Do you think FIS should be able to pursue ANY academic program as traditional students?

    a. If yes please explain

     b.   If no can you give a more detailed explanation of the programs they should be excluded from and why?

12. What else do you think the university could do to support FIS?

13. What is your department currently doing to help FIS or students with criminal backgrounds?

14. How inclusive do you think the university is for FIS?

15. Do you think the university community would be accepting of FIS?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add that I haven't asked you about?