

HIGHER EDUCATION-IN-PRISON PROGRAMS:  
A MULTISITE CASE ANALYSIS OF PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS AND PRISONS IN NEW YORK STATE

by

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## Abstract

### HIGHER EDUCATION-IN-PRISON PROGRAMS: A MULTISITE CASE ANALYSIS OF PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND PRISONS IN NEW YORK STATE

Jerée Monique Matherson

For nearly three decades, the United States of America has been the consistent leader in incarceration rates worldwide. A number of structural social problems have contributed to this reality (e.g., the school-to-prison pipeline, the 1994 Crime Bill, and aggressive surveillance and policing of poor and minority neighborhoods). Recently, a number of structural solutions have presented themselves in effort to decarcerate prisons and consider pathways for returning citizens with emphasis on housing, healthcare, and education. This dissertation focuses on the education component with an eye toward higher education-in-prison programs (HEPPs). The last decade denotes an inflection point for mass incarceration and HEPPs in part due to increased funding from public and private sectors as well as bipartisan support for making higher education accessible for incarcerated people. In the midst of cross-sector support for these programs, the colleges and universities providing the core elements – teaching and learning – have been mostly silent actors.

This study looks at partnerships between prisons and higher education institutions and centers the voices and narratives of higher education faculty and administrators responsible for leading HEPPs. Drawing on the civic mission of higher education, as well as participants' conceptions of their work, this study considers how faculty and administrators describe the intent and function of their HEPPs and the extent to which they align with the civic mission of higher education. Through a qualitative multisite case analysis of three higher education institutions in New York State, the findings of this study reveal that these programs view themselves as being responsive to historical structures of inequity in higher education and broader society. They also conveyed a desire for their programs to become an institutionalized component of their college or university. There were five patterns, across cases, that provided insight into these programs and multiple levels including: (1.) program professionals, (2.) program place and space, (3.) programs in service to the institutional mission and civic mission, (4.) program attentiveness to external factors, and (5.) program conceptualization: the two-way partnership misnomer. These patterns might also prove relevant to university partnerships more broadly.

The study concludes with implications for theory, practice, and future research related to HEPPs with emphasis on the need to situate all aspects of these programs not, as they often are, in economic and workforce metrics, but rather in the experiences of faculty, staff, and students participating in college-in-prison as well as returning citizens attending college.

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JMM

## Dedication

For the first college student I knew – my mom, Weusi K. Berry.

## I – INTRODUCTION

### **Presentation of the Problem**

“We always talk about the school-to-prison pipeline and how young students of color - mostly male - get into that system at a very, very young age, but we don't talk about what happens afterward.” This statement comes from Anita, a participant in this study, who reflected on the value of higher education-in-prison as a response to structural inequity in education and the legal system in the United States. Anita points out that careful attention has not been given to what is possible for these students, only compounding the problem. Having access to and participating in higher education during incarcerations has been associated with positive outcomes for students, their peers, and their families (Davis et al., 2013; Western, 2018). However, only about 6% of incarcerated individuals have access nationally and only about 3% of incarcerated individuals in New York State are able to participate (Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011; Prison Reentry Institute, 2019). While this particular type of response – higher education-in-prison – is not a structural one, there are numerous efforts being implemented in response to mass incarceration.

On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021, President Joseph R. Biden signed an Executive Order entitled, “Reforming Our Incarceration System To Eliminate the Use of Privately Operated Criminal Detention Facilities.” The order emphasized the need to decrease the incarcerated population, of over 2 million people, by removing “profit-based incentives to incarcerate” and “prioritizing rehabilitation...[to] ensure that time in prison prepares individuals for the next chapter of their lives.” This action came on the heels of years-long public discourse on mass incarceration as a uniquely American societal problem. A report by the National

Academy of Sciences (NAS) explained that the consequences of mass incarceration extend beyond the individuals who serve time in jail or prison: “the increase in incarceration rates has also had broader effects on U.S. society—on civic and political participation, on fundamental notions of citizenship, on the allocation of public resources, and on the functioning of the polity and government” (p. 303, 2014). The Executive Order represents a narrow but corrective measure for past policy at the highest level of government. The analysis from the National Academy of Sciences points to the need for a more comprehensive set of considerations as it relates to the same policy according to the nation’s leading scholars.

In parallel, there has been heightened public discourse around higher education-in-prison programs (HEPPs) as a form of rehabilitation and as a means to reduce recidivism or reincarceration (Davis, et al., 2013, 2014; Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011; Ositelu, 2019). These programs denote a partnership between universities and prisons not unlike university partnerships with other social institutions such as hospitals, museums, and K-12 schools. Taken together – the federal government’s intent to reduce the size of the incarcerated population, the nation’s leading scholars’ evidenced based reporting on the societal consequences of mass incarceration, and the increased attention on colleges and universities as institutions capable of reducing reincarceration – these occurrences represent an inflection point for mass incarceration and an opportunity for the field of higher education to play a meaningful role in addressing this social problem. This study is designed to gather information on how colleges and universities view themselves in relationship to this societal context. More narrowly, this study engages higher education institutions that demonstrate awareness of broader social problems and a commitment to

engaging with external entities by administering higher education-in-prison programs. This study also incorporates perspectives from individuals situated within the field of higher education, which have largely absent in the broader discourse on higher education-in-prison.

This multisite qualitative case study gauges the extent to which higher education-in-prison programs are an institutional response – on behalf of higher education institutions – to the broader social problem of mass incarceration. While there is evidence of bipartisan support from policymakers (like the restoration of federal financial aid for incarcerated people) and substantial investment by philanthropic organizations including the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Lumina Foundation, little information is available from the purview of higher education researchers and professionals carrying out the actual work. Importantly, this dissertation examines whether or not the perspectives and narratives from participants map on to the civic mission of higher education – an ideal that grounds the practical purposes of higher education in being responsive to societal need and critical to societal cohesion and progress. To orient my study within the relevant social context, this chapter provides an overview of the role of higher education as a social institution, the social stratification of universities and prisons, and concludes with an introductory overview of my study.

### **The Role of Higher Education as a Social Institution in Society**

Social institutions serve as structured agents responding to a wide variety of social problems in a continuously evolving society (Schotter, 2008). Sociologist Emile Durkheim believed education to be a highly “dependent element in a slowly evolving web of institutions” and schools to be organizations that assert their morality in their function

(Clark, 2007, p. 5). Durkheim identified schools as crucial sites for helping individuals understand the complexity of the world, their part in society, and the development of a moral constitution rather than a self-serving disposition. Morality, in this sense, is characterized by (1.) orientation to activity that is not self-serving, (2.) acting in collective interest, and (3.) autonomous action that is not externally forced (Durkheim, 1973).

Durkheim's philosophy on moral education situates educational institutions as ethical operatives amongst other social, political, and economic institutions. This view invites critical inquiry as to whether or not HEIs contribute to collective social progress and if so, to what end?

College and university campuses have historically been sites that are home to open inquiry, discourse, and dissent. In particular, many social movements related to some of society's most complex problems (e.g., civil rights, public health crises, climate change, labor rights, etc.) can be traced back to activity on college campuses positioning HEI's as a conduit for society's evolution and social progress. This dissertation centers mass incarceration as a current social problem that HEIs are likely being responsive to through college-in-prison programs. For the last three decades, mass incarceration – or “extreme rates of imprisonment...[concentrated] among young, African American men living in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage” – has restricted Black men's ability to be stable members in their families, communities, and the workforce and therefore has hindered the collective social progress of American life (Alexander, 2010; Coley & Barton, 2005; Pettit & Western, 2004; Raley, Sweeney, & Wondra, 2015; Western & Wildeman, 2009; Wildeman, 2012, p. 1). The following quote comes from a study of returning citizens

- individuals transitioning from prison back into society - and situates education as a reparative measure and a social justice response to mass incarceration:

Incarceration denies the moral worth of the incarcerated...The principle of social justice demands that public policy not unduly burden any particular group and that it foster instead a fair distribution of rights, resources, and capacities for all groups in society...public policy intended for the common good has in fact had the reverse effect...one task for the acknowledgment of harm is education...education is a social justice project (Western, 2018, p. 183-188).

At the conclusion of the aforementioned study, sociologist Bruce Western proposes the need to employ expertise across multiple social institutions for holistic realization of just policy. This proposition considers how a collaborative and cross-sector approach might address the social harms of mass incarceration, which carry intergenerational consequences. It considers what reentering society from prison might look like with guidance and expertise from departments of housing, child services, public health, education, and labor - or full consideration of human need and capacity. This vision is compelling to me for a few reasons. First, it names education as a key sector to engage for redressing structural social harm. Second, it introduces morality and social justice as important components of this work. It also proposes a cross-sector, dynamic response that links human capacity with organizational resources. In summary, this idea complements the purposes and values of higher education expressed in its civic mission, which I discuss later in this chapter. In the introduction, I noted a recent momentum and heightened public discourse around higher education-in-prison programs. The following section brings



together the various sectors involved and how they have engaged in this topic a short period of time.

### **Higher Education as a Social Institution and Mass Incarceration**

This framing – of education institutions as sites that are capable of, and arguably responsible for, collaborating across sectors to address social problems – reinforces the interdependence of social, political, and economic institutions and offers a new, humanizing approach to consider higher education alongside mass incarceration. This topic has received increasing consideration in recent years with attention to higher education-in-prison programs (HEPPs) across political, philanthropic, media, and academic outlets (Castro et al., 2018). In the policy arena, this heightened attention is, in part, due to the 2016 Second Chance Pell Pilot Program facilitated by the United States Department of Education (USED) to enhance access to higher education for people in prison. A late 2020 stimulus package, primarily in response to COVID-19, restored federal financial aid for incarcerated people allowing those who qualify to take advantage of Pell grants to support their education. This federal funding is expected to be in full effect by fall 2023 and will reintroduce a financial infrastructure to increase access to higher education-in-prison. Philanthropic foundation support over the last 8 years have also bolstered HEPP activities. For example, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded more than \$73.2 million across 97 grantees for higher education-in-prison programs since 2015<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, the Lumina Foundation has supported related work by granting more than \$1.8 million to organizations working to produce more reliable data on HEPPs including but not limited to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mellon.org/grants/grants-database/>

quality assurance tools, building a database infrastructure for evaluating Second Chance Pell sites, and producing briefs on policies that support or inhibit college going for incarcerated students and returning citizens<sup>2</sup>. In the media, this topic has penetrated many platforms including print, broadcast, and digital communities. Perhaps the most popular was the 2019 PBS documentary *College Behind Bars* featuring the Bard Prison Initiative, executive produced by Academy Award and Emmy winner Ken Burns. Finally, there is newly focused attention in academic research through *The Journal of Higher Education in Prison* - the first and only peer-reviewed journal focused solely on the topic, established in 2019 and first published in 2021. This journal was supported by the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, whose efforts intended to collaboratively “...advance the field of higher education in prison by supporting practitioners and students, producing reliable data and research, and communicating the need, importance, and value of quality higher education in prison.”

In the midst of increased attention across sectors and bipartisan support for higher education-in-prison programs, there remains insufficient understanding of how American higher education views itself in relationship to mass incarceration – a uniquely American societal issue. American higher education has traditionally operated as a mechanism for research and knowledge dissemination in response to societal problems. The increasing popularity of higher education-in-prison programs provides a nexus for understanding how scholars and practitioners in the field of higher education report on the role and function of higher education in relationship to this specific societal issue. To date, the most

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.luminafoundation.org/resources/grants/grant-database/>

widely cited publications and reports on HEPPs are from scholars outside of the field of higher education.

### **The Civic Mission of Higher Education**

In order to glean field-based perspectives on this topic, it is first useful to situate higher education-in-prison programs as partnerships within the context of higher education's civic mission. The civic mission of higher education is a loosely defined but widely agreed upon concept that grounds the foundational purposes of higher education in being responsive to societal need. For the purposes of this study, I utilize the description of the civic mission put forward by Barry Checkoway (2001): "to prepare students for active participation in a diverse democracy and to develop knowledge for the improvement of communities" (p. 125). Similar to Durkheim's conception on moral education, this description places emphasis on HEIs developing students into individuals who will act in the collective interest of improving society.

Jongbloed et al. (2008) suggest that the civic mission or "third mission is not so much its own mission as it is a reflection of the unique stakeholders that fall outside of the traditional purview" (p. 312). Here, the authors elude to universities traditionally focusing on those who were able to gain access with little consideration for what their exclusionary practices meant for other groups and communities. Thus, the third mission is a pivot to acknowledge the structural limitations and inequality built into the traditional operation of HEIs. The *third mission* label encapsulates activity beyond traditional teaching and research and therefore has become a catchall of activities that require colleges and universities to engage in efforts beyond themselves. This is also characterized as *engagement* and may involve a number of undertakings that allow HEI's to demonstrate their relevance to

stakeholders (e.g., elected officials, tax payers, community residents, neighboring businesses, etc.) and convey their public responsibility (Jongbloed et al, 2008). A prevalent example of engagement is university partnerships, which I detail in the following section.

### **University Partnerships as a Mechanism for Civic Engagement**

In addition to producing research and sharing knowledge with broader society (Bok, 1984; Boyer, 1996), HEIs enact their civic mission through intentional engagement with external organizations that can lead to university partnerships (Kezar et al., 2019). University partnerships are “relationships characterized by cooperation or willingness to assist others often not connected with themselves; partners may be equal or unequal in their resources and power” (Checkoway, 2001, p. 139). What makes these partnerships different from recurring interactions with other institutions is their focus on and intent to contribute to minimizing or resolving a structural social problem. Traditionally, universities have partnered with community-based organizations such as K-12 schools, hospitals, and museums. More recently, university partnerships have been inspired by social problems that serve as a determinant for potential partners (Siegel, 2010). An example of this is Columbia University’s Columbia World Projects – an initiative that “mobilizes the university’s researchers and scholars to work with governments, organizations, businesses and communities to tackle global challenges<sup>3</sup>” including but not limited to maternal health, cybersecurity, income inequality, and climate change. This approach centers a societal problem, which garners the attention of relevant cross-sector parties interested in responding to the problem. This is a dynamic departure from

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<sup>3</sup> <https://worldprojects.columbia.edu/>

traditional university partnerships that placed emphasis on two institutions coming together to explore what mutually beneficial relationship might be established in service to their constituents.

The growing complexity of national and global social challenges requires cross-sector engagement as “the social problems in question are interconnected with other sets of problems [that] defy simple solutions by single organizations or sectors” (Siegel, 2010, p. 20). This echoes the earlier sentiments from Western (2018) and reinforces the promise of university partnerships as a practical mechanism for both cross-sector collaboration and executing the civic mission of higher education. Considering the civic mission of higher education and how university partnerships are increasingly stemming from societal problems, anchors the idea of higher education-in-prison as a promising cross-sector collaboration in response to a societal issue. To build on this understanding, the following section provides insight into the relationship between higher education and prison institutions by way of social stratification.

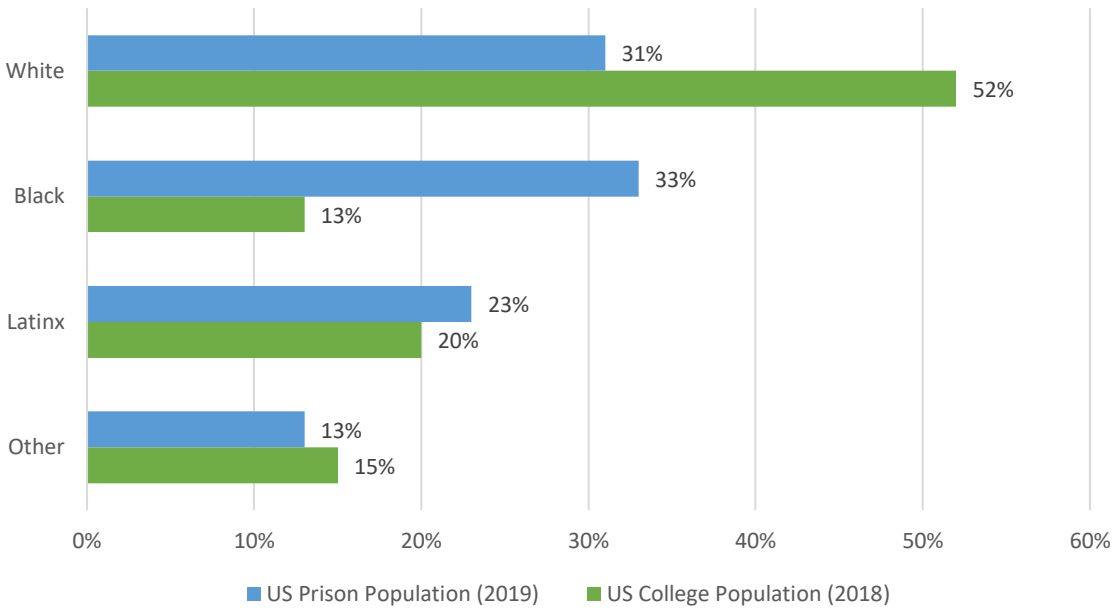
### **Social Stratification of Universities and Prisons**

Social stratification is the sorting or allocation of individual within a society into different hierarchal groups based on their social characteristics including but not limited to socioeconomic status, religion, race, and gender (Sadovnik & Coughlan, 2015). This section considers how universities and prisons play a role in social stratification by looking at sociodemographic patterns of students in college and people in prison. Part of what makes universities and prisons distinct social institutions is the sociodemographic differences among the populations these institutions were designed to serve. Beginning with higher education, college access has historically been tied to socioeconomic status and race in

favor of wealthy White students (Perna et al., 2008). By grade nine, 56% of students from high income households expect to graduate from college *and* obtain a graduate level degree; less than half of middle income students carry similar expectations (38%) and about a quarter of their peers in the lowest income quintile have the same expectations (27%) (Ingels et al., 2011). These self-reported expectations reflect students' sense of belonging in higher education and belief in their academic self-efficacy based on social class.

With regard to race, White students make up roughly half of the nation's college-age population (18-24 years) and hold 64% of the seats in the most selective institutions. Selective institutions are better resourced, spending nearly three times as much per student on academic and instructional support as open-access institutions. This increases the chances that their students will graduate (Carnevale et al., 2018). Comparatively, Black (15%) and Latino (21%) residents make up 36% of the college-age population and are overrepresented (43%) in open-access institutions, primarily community colleges where the highest possible credential is an associate's degree (Carnevale et al., 2018). Credentialing options matter since earning potential increases as degree attainment increases across gender and race groups; thus, students who do not acquire a bachelor's degree or higher, reap significantly fewer economic benefits from higher education than their counterparts (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). To consider these college going patterns alongside incarceration patterns, the Vera Institute offers a visual comparison of the U.S. college population and prison population by race/ethnicity (see Figure 1).

Figure 14. Race and Ethnicity of U.S. College Population and Prison Population



This figure reflects earlier discussion on White students being overrepresented in the college population and conveys that Black people are overrepresented in the prison population. I will extrapolate on the latter with a review of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomena in the next sections. Overall, this data suggests that quality higher education and its related benefits are reserved for those who are already socially and economically advantaged. Individuals who are socially and economically disadvantaged are less likely to access the same benefits and are therefore less able to contribute to society. Thus, they are doubly disadvantaged.

Individual characteristics of those who are least likely to enroll in higher education are explained by researchers as Black and Latino males from low income families whose parents did not attend college (Baum et al., 2013; Perna et al., 2008; Western & Pettit,

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Figure 3 in Chesnut, K. & Wachendorfer. A. *Second Chance Pell: Four Years of Expanding Access to Education in Prison*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2021.

2010). While there is no causal assumption, those who are least likely to enroll in higher education are also the most likely to experience incarceration as a life event based on their race and class attributes (Western & Pettit, 2010). At the end of 2017, Black and Latino men represented 58% of the incarcerated male population (34% and 24% respectively) (Bronson & Carson, 2019). However, Black and Latino residents collectively represent less than 32% of the US population (13.4% and 18.3% respectively) according to the United States Census Bureau (2019). Taken together, patterns in college enrollment and incarceration operate on complementarily stratified structures based on class and race. These structural inequalities substantiate the practical function of higher education-in-prison as a conduit between organizational resources (in higher education) and under resourced individuals (in prison).

The value of access to higher education-in-prison is evident when considering education levels among the incarcerated population. One shared characteristic among this population is their low educational attainment. For example, about 30% of incarcerated adults report not completing high school compared to 14% of the general population (USED, 2014). Because incarcerated adults have lower literacy and numeracy skills compared to the general population, this limits their ability to find employment, and in turn stability, when released from prison (Ositelu, 2019; Seashore & Haberfeld, 1977). Almost all incarcerated adults (94-95%) will be released from prison, with an estimated 700,000 people returning to their communities each year (Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011; Ositelu, 2019). Participation in higher education has proven to be a key factor for those who permanently transition out of prison (Davis et al., 2013) in addition to other social supports like guaranteed housing and access to healthcare (Western, 2018). In summary, higher



education's mission-based commitment to societal improvement, the socially stratified systems between higher education and prisons, and higher education's proven ability to enhance individuals' life chances suggest that the field of higher education has a leading role in responding to the social problem of mass incarceration. The following provides an overview of the landscape of higher education and corrections to contextualize the interplay between these distinct social institutions.

### **The Commingling of Higher Education and Corrections**

In the United States, there are roughly 1,950 prisons, more than 3,000 degree granting institutions of higher education, and 300 known higher education-in-prison programs (Royer et al., 2020; Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). Among those incarcerated nationally, only six percent have access to formal higher education opportunities and less than 25% of those individuals are on a pathway that will lead to an academic degree (Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011). To date, California is the first and only state to begin structural implementation of HEPPs partnering state run prisons with state run HEIs (Mukamal & Silbert, 2019). Opportunities to obtain an academic degree are critical if the incarcerated population is expected to find stable employment following release. Further, an academic degree provides access to the social and economic outcomes that benefit both individuals and their communities.

HEPPs offer another opportunity at education for individuals who likely had substandard education as youth. This notion is supported by the literature on the school-to-prison pipeline, which describes how racially-biased disciplinary practices in school introduce children to punitive based institutions (e.g., alternative schools, juvenile court, juvenile detention, etc.) and on a pathway to jail or prison. This "pipeline" consists of poor

students of color who attend substandard schools and are therefore susceptible to structural policies and practices that funnel them away from school and into juvenile justice and adult carceral spaces (Gould, Harkins, & Stevens, 2015). These students experience inequitable discipline for developmental misbehavior such as truancy, fighting, and disrupting class and may face suspension, expulsion, and even arrest as early as their primary and secondary school years (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Mallett, 2015). Such harsh school discipline policies lead to juvenile court involvement making it less likely that students will return to school and ultimately graduate. For example, if an arrest occurs on school grounds, the student is twice as likely to drop out; if an arrest occurs following a juvenile court appearance, the drop-out risk is four times more likely (Mallett, 2015). These punitive practices with children foreshadow the realities of prison where individuals are punished with no regard for their developmental needs.

Demographic trends presented in the research on the school-to-prison pipeline also foreshadow the stratified outcomes of college enrollment and incarceration discussed above. This body of research has offered insight into weakening this pipeline for current and future K-12 students but does not consider solutions for those who were previously part of the pipeline and are now adults in prison. In summary, the adult incarcerated population is generally an undereducated group who would overwhelmingly benefit from increased access to higher education. Therefore more attention can be devoted to better understanding how higher education institutions may engage in this context. The following section provides an overview of the study which guides my inquiry.

## Overview of Study

This study considers if colleges and universities engage in their civic mission by establishing higher education-in-prison programs. More narrowly, the study aims to illuminate the perspectives of higher education personnel to understand how they describe the function of these partnerships within their institutions and broader society. Following a review of over 95 academic articles, in a scholarly search of terms “correctional education,” “postsecondary correctional education,” and “college/higher education-in-prison,” there were no empirical overviews that express the purpose(s) or aims that undergird college-in-prison programs from the purview of higher education researchers or administrators. Further, while there is a rich literature on conceptualizing university partnerships broadly, the innerworkings of specific types of university partnerships that this dissertation seeks to explore are lesser known.

Currently, the most widely cited reports on higher education-in-prison are rooted in economic metrics (Davis et al., 2014; Erisman & Contardo, 2005). As a result, the dominant narratives offer a rationale for higher education-in-prison as a means to save federal tax dollars, bolster employment, and enhance tax revenues. Alternatively, the civic mission of higher education speaks to a social responsibility to public progress, arguably rooted in moral obligation. While there may be economic outcomes tied to the civic mission, they may not serve as the primary incentive for executing the mission. The risk of continuing research and practice through this lens is best characterized by Castro and Gould (p. 5 2018):

If higher education in prison can only be imagined through utilitarian paradigms, such as recidivism or return-on-investment, then the foci and promises of higher

education are broadly compromised, both in the context of the prison and on the non-carceral campus.

Put differently, the existing discussion of HEPPs is reductive to the field of higher education and the day-to-day efforts of colleges and universities.

To operationalize the civic mission of higher education and to incorporate notions of morality (Durkheim, 1973) and justice (Western, 2018) that were introduced earlier this chapter, I propose the utilization of a philosophical concept that may serve as a tool to extract the more abstract catalysts for higher education-in-prison programs: *ethical pluralism*. This concept accommodates the reality that there is often more than one ethical reason to be considered for action or inaction and that sometimes these reasons can be in conflict with one another within a given context. I also propose two additional lenses to provide insight into the individuals and the institutions involved in higher education-in-prison programs: *civic professionalism* and *engaged institutions*. I expand on these ideas as a conceptual framework to guide my study in Chapter II.

### **Methodology and Research Questions**

My dissertation considers higher education-in-prison programs, as a case of university partnerships, and examines how HEIs perceive their HEPPs function within the context of their institutions and broader society. Throughout the body of this paper, the term higher education-in-prison program should then be understood as a specific type of university partnership in which an accredited institution of higher education has engaged in a formal agreement with a state and/or federal prison. HEPPs represent an example of cross-sector university engagement (presumably) in response to one or more social problems that carries potential to improve social conditions for a specified community and

broader society. For all of these reasons, this complex arrangement deserves further exploration to make sense of the intent behind the partnerships, what function(s) they serve, and for whom.

I designed a qualitative multisite case study to yield an in-depth, contextual understanding of higher education-in-prison programs. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research is most appropriate when “a problem or issue needs to be explored...[to] identify variables that cannot be easily measured...[and] because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue” (p. 45). The nature of qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of how people within a specified context make meaning of their world and how they interpret their experiences within that world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Obtaining firsthand perspectives of individuals directly responsible for higher education-in-prison programs will generate insight into how they make sense of their programs within their institutions but also within the context of broader society. A case study provides an in depth investigation into contemporary phenomena “within its real world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). More specific information on these boundaries will be discussed in Chapter III. This study includes multiple cases to support the need for a complex understanding of HEPPs by way of cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to better understand how higher education personnel (e.g., academic leaders and program directors) make sense of their higher education-in-prison programs and whether or not these programs are in service to a broader civic mission. Since 2016, the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative has consistently expanded – making federal financial aid available to incarcerate people – to examine if

expanding access would increase higher education participation among incarcerated adults (Chesnut & Wachendorfer, 2021). Beginning in academic year 2023-2024, incarcerated students in New York will be able to pursue higher education with financial aid support from the government as a result of Pell and TAP restoration. As federal and state governments continue to invest in access to higher education for incarcerated people, the perspectives of the key providers – HEIs – will need to be considered. This study incorporates the voices of higher education personnel into this cross sector discussion. These perspectives can help inform the priorities around expanding access and highlight barriers related to implementation. Given my interest in capturing the narratives of higher education personnel engaged in HEPPs and discerning how institutions viewed themselves in the broader context of mass incarceration, I began this study by asking the following questions:

1. How do individuals from colleges and universities, involved at different levels of higher education-in-prison programs, describe the intention(s) of their programs?
2. How do individuals at colleges and universities, involved at different levels of higher education-in-prison programs, describe the function of their program, from its inception to present date?
  - a. How, if at all, do these individuals define or describe the program in relationship to the college/university?
  - b. How, if at all, do these individuals define or describe the program in relationship to matters outside of the college/university?
3. To what extent, if at all, do higher education institutions engage in partnerships as a response to specified contexts and/or defined social problems?

- a. What are the external factors, if any, related to defined social problems that contribute to these partnerships?

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed the long-held notion of higher education as a social institution contributing to the improvement and productivity of American society. I then put forward a specific societal problem – mass incarceration – that continues to garner attention specifically around its relationship to higher education. The origins of attention are diverse, yielding overlapping considerations from the political, philanthropic, media, and academic arenas simultaneously. Next, I explained that in addition to the collective enthusiasm and cross-sector support for higher education-in-prison, it is necessary to incorporate perspectives from people in higher education in this cross-sector discussion. I then reviewed patterns of social stratification between colleges and prisons based on race and class. Drawing on research on the school-to-prison pipeline, I described how disciplinary practices based on race and class in K-12 contribute to the demographic disparities in higher education enrollment and incarceration in a complementary manner.

This dissertation offers a field-based understanding of the aim(s) of higher education-in-prison programs within the context of mass incarceration and the civic mission of higher education. To support this inquiry, I applied ethical pluralism, civic professionalism, and engaged institutions as a framework for understanding how higher education stakeholders report on the function of their partnerships with prisons. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of the stated purposes of American higher education and American correctional facilities. I also discuss the existing literature on higher education-in-prison programs, followed by an examination of the existing landscape in the

United States. I conclude by elaborating on my conceptual framework as introduced in this chapter, suggesting that it might allow for a more comprehensive conceptualization of why and how institutions of higher education engage in partnerships with prisons.



## II – GROUNDING THE IDEA OF HIGHER EDUCATION-IN-PRISON: A LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### **Chapter Overview**

In the preceding chapter, I discussed the value of understanding how the social institution of higher education, as well as practitioners and researchers in the field, explain the role of higher education-in-prison programs within the context of mass incarceration and higher education's civic mission. I also discussed the increasing amount of cross-sector support for HEPPs and highlight that the a public narrative has been mostly absent of input from higher education scholars and practitioner leading these very programs. As higher education institutions continue to engage in partnerships with prisons, those who understand the purposes and value of higher education most intimately ought to contribute to conceptualizing the purposes and functions of these partnerships in relationship to broader society. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature on prison education and present the conceptual framework that will guide my study. To begin, I describe higher education and prisons as separate sectors to review their stated institutional purposes respectively.

#### **An Overview: The Stated Purposes of American Higher Education**

The American higher education landscape is large and diverse in its institutional composition. Of the 3,982 degree granting institutions, in academic year 2019-20, about 40% (1,625) were public, 42% (1,660) were private not-for-profit, and 18% (697) were private for-profit (USED, 2020). In spite of the public sector being smaller, public colleges and universities are more popular, accounting for about 80% of higher education students each year and grant the most degrees. In 2017, the federal government invested nearly \$75

billion (2% of its overall budget) in higher education programs, states invested over \$80 billion, and local investments were just over \$10 billion (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2019).

These expenditures include funding allocated to public, private nonprofit, private for profit, and students who attended these institutions; however, the data excludes student loans tax credits.

Given the large private sub-sector and the fact that public institutions receive the majority of their funding and oversight at the state level, it would be inaccurate to characterize higher education as having a unified or singular mission. Instead, the purposes and aims of higher education are numerous and have continued to evolve over time. Derek Bok (2013), offers a chronological synopsis of five stated aims of colleges and universities: 1.) to provide practical education that leads to a useful occupation with industrialization as the catalyst; 2.) to produce new knowledge by way of research; 3.) to provide a liberal education based in the humanities and produce scholarly works in literature, foreign language, history, and philosophy; 4.) to engage in service activity – lending specialized knowledge to solve complex problems in local businesses, government agencies, school systems, and other external entities; and 5.) to focus deliberately on local, regional, and national economic development. The first three aims articulate functions that benefit those who are directly involved in HEI's (students, researchers, faculty, etc.), while the latter two aims consider functions that have potential to benefit the broader public. Bringing these broad aims into focus, Kezar (2004) characterizes the public purposes of higher education as:

...educating citizens for democratic engagement, supporting local and regional communities, preserving knowledge and making it available to the community,

working in concert with other social institutions such as government or health-care agencies to foster their missions, advancing knowledge through research, developing the arts and humanities, broadening access to ensure a diverse democracy, developing the intellectual talents of students, and creating leaders for various areas of the public sector (p. 430).

This characterization of higher education as a public good mirrors the concept of higher education's civic mission.

### **Bringing Formation to Higher Education's Civic Mission**

The most well-known scholars that have shaped the concept of the civic mission of higher education include Derek Bok and Ernest Boyer. In 1982, Bok – then President of Harvard University – called for a more “engaged university...that would help address basic social problems, better prepare more teachers, and play a role in societal moral development” (Fisher, Fabricant, & Simmons, 2004, p. 14). Similarly, in 1996, Boyer – the former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching – declared that the “missions of higher education achieved their greatest fulfillment when they served larger purposes such as building a more just society” (Fisher et al., 2004, p. 14). The shared ideal conveyed in both statements is a morally just society in which HEI's are key contributors and stabilizers of that eventual reality. Given these amorphous ideals alongside the interdependence of HEIs and other institutions, there remains some ambiguity around exactly what the civic mission looks like in action and whether or not certain social outcomes can be attributed to those actions (Pinheiro et al., 2015) or to higher education at all.

The literature speaks of the civic mission in two ways: the first is individual-centered and examines what students learn, how they are learning, and what they do with that knowledge after they graduate with regard to civic engagement (Banks, 2004; Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Evans et al., 2019; Hurtado, 2007; Kezar, 2004). The second is institution-centered and examines the ways in which colleges and universities interact with external entities to contribute to societal development (Evans et al., 2019; Holland, 2006; Kellogg Commission, 1999). The following offers an overview of both instances.

### ***Individual-Centered***

In the founding documents of the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson introduced education for a democratic society as one purpose of higher education, “[the purpose is] to instruct the mass of our citizens in...their rights, interests, and duties, as men and citizens...[and] to form the statesmen, legislators and judges, on who public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend” (Jefferson et al., 1818, p. 11). Today, the literature refers to these efforts as *civic education* or *citizenship education* denoting curricular and co-curricular activities that prepare students to become engaged citizens and civic leaders for the preservation of a now diverse democracy (Banks, 2004; Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Evans et al., 2019; Hurtado, 2007).

By way of civic education, students are expected to gain a broad knowledge base and understanding of society (Gutmann & Ben-Porath, 2014). More specifically, the aim is to “teach tolerance, recognition of cultural difference, deliberation, and modes of civil discourse” (Hurtado, 2007, p. 190). The programs that contribute to such outcomes (e.g., service learning, engagement/outreach offices, diversity initiatives, difficult dialogue forums, etc.) are not usually institutionalized on college campuses (Butin, 2006; Saltmarsh

& Hartley, 2011). Further, when one or more of these opportunities are available, they are situated at the margins of the curriculum making them accessible only to students who have the flexibility of time and other resources to opt-in to such learning experiences that are unlikely to count toward degree requirements (Butin, 2006).

Participation in civic education yields civic engagement or dispositions and behaviors that remain with students after college. Some of these include voting, volunteering, and donating various resources such as time, expertise, and funds (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Doyle & Skinner, 2017). Related, Boyte & Fretz (2010) put forth the idea of civic professionals who choose careers that serve the public and that allows them to work directly with citizens as part of their ongoing civic engagement. In summary, civic education opportunities lend toward students becoming civically engaged alumni. The culmination of civic education and civic engagement yield what is commonly considered the civic or public benefits of higher education. The Institute for Higher Education Policy (1988) situates public benefits of higher education in two categories: economic and social. Economic benefits contribute to the improvement of the broader national economy including increased tax revenue, increased workforce flexibility, and a decrease in reliance on public assistance programs. Social benefits contribute to the improvement of the quality of life for large groups and overall society including increased charitable giving, community service, civic engagement and social cohesion. The following section discusses institution-level characteristics, which suggest that institutions may require tailored approaches to adequately institutionalize the work that goes into fulfilling this broader mission.

## ***Institution-Centered***

The institution-centered view of the civic mission contemplates the ways colleges and universities engage with the public in a customary manner. Institution type and resources tend to inform the extent to which public engagement is a priority. For example, a mixed methods study measuring differences in civic engagement across institution types (n=275) identified four institutional characteristics as the strongest predictors of civic engagement: (1.) residentiality, (2.) elite status (both public and private), (3.) research mission, and (4.) private control (Evans et al., 2019). Together, these individual campus characteristics imply a greater amount of resources compared to schools without these characteristics and therefore more opportunities for students to become civically engaged. In 1973, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education<sup>5</sup> established what would become the leading framework for recognizing and categorizing institutional attributes for the purposes of research and policy analysis.

For the purposes of this study and to simplify the range of characteristics and institutional designations that may exist, I put forward three classifications for civically engaged institutions including those with an: (1.) explicit civic mission and a formal community engagement designation from the Carnegie Commission; (2.) explicit civic mission without a formal designation; and (3.) an implicit civic mission. What follows is a brief description of each. In 2005, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education

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<sup>5</sup> In February 2023, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Council on Education (ACE) announced their partnership for refining existing classifications “to better reflect the public purpose, mission, focus, and impact of higher education.” This effort was still in progress upon the completion of this study.

established an elective classification for Community Engagement allowing institutions to voluntarily apply for such a classification. The Community Engagement is explained as: “...collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.” As of 2020, there were 358 institutions holding this classification (Public Purpose Institute). Among this sample, 58% were public institutions (4% 2-year; 54% 4-year) and 37% were considered as having high/very high research activity. Summarily, the first type of civically engaged institution – holding an explicit civic mission and formal community engagement designation – is represented by mostly public institutions and in some cases institutions where research is a core function.

The next type – explicit civic mission without a formal designation – mainly consists of public and land grant institutions. Out of concern for the future direction of public universities, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities published a report (1999) on engaged institutions or those that utilize “teaching, research, extension and service functions to become even more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities, however community may be defined” (p. 13). Public institutions tend to have a better espoused civic orientation but private institutions are more likely to invest in the relevant resources such as a dedicated civic engagement office or a service learning curriculum (Evans et al., 2019).

This brings us to the third type – implicit civic mission – which is mostly represented by private and/or research institutions. In 2020, only 37% of institutions with the Carnegie Community Engagement elective classification were research institutions.

While they are not highly represented here, research universities are responsible for producing new knowledge and inherently provide more opportunity for civic engagement. These institutions receive billions in research funding each year from the federal government and therefore some of their efforts may be driven by competition for federal grants (Bok, 2013; Evans et al., 2019) and not engagement. The following delves deeper into how institutions determine their engagement efforts based on geographic proximity to societal concerns and community needs.

### **Contexts for Engagement.**

University engagement is characterized as a two-way relationship where both the university and the community benefit from the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and practices (Boyer, 1996; Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Checkoway, 2001; Dyer, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2012; Kellogg Commission, 1999; McDowell, 2003). The community in question is treated in two ways throughout the literature: (1) the local context of neighborhoods and cities and (2) the national context with emphasis on regions or the country as a whole.

The local context refers to a geographic range beginning with neighborhoods adjacent to a campus through state-wide localities. Focusing partnership efforts within these boundaries may be appealing to community colleges and public land grant institutions whose missions are rooted in serving local and state residents. Moreover, remaining within state boundaries allows HEIs to leverage support from elected officials by appealing to their shared responsibility for the social and economic development of their communities. Universities in urban areas are considered opportune sites of engagement since cities possess concentrated amounts of complex social problems (Fisher et al., 2004; Maurrasse, 2002). The relevance of urbanicity is reflected in the sample of universities



(n=358) who qualified for the Carnegie Community Engagement classification. After applying the 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes classification scheme to each institution's locality, the data showed that over 83%<sup>6</sup> of these institutions were in metropolitan areas.

As discussed, university engagement may be rooted in a mission that aims to address social inequality through both learning about the problem and affecting change (Boyte & Fretz, 2010; Facer et al., 2012; Siegel, 2010). On a structural level, this kind of engagement has the potential to engender mobility across social classes and geographic areas (Hurtado, 2007; Keller 2022). Additionally, a growing number of researchers have placed emphasis on establishing partnerships with socially disadvantaged and socially excluded communities (Benneworth, 2013; Fear, 2017; Robinson et al., 2012; Strier, 2011). Moxley (2005) presents the reality that many poor communities “exist in the shadows of great campuses and often suffer from the[ir] economic and political decisions...[but] while universities and colleges cast great shadows, often too they can create substantial positive externalities for communities struggling with poverty or limited resources” (p.237). This quote underscores the importance of mutually beneficial approaches to engagement and highlights physical proximity between universities and their communities as a salient factor for guiding engagement.

The national context for university partnerships involves wide-reaching social issues that attract regional and/or national entities who can serve as partners in response to an identified problem. A useful example of this work comes through in the organizational pursuit of ambitious but attainable goals known as university-led “Grand Challenges” or

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<sup>6</sup> 44% population = >1 million; 27% population = 250,000-1 million ; 12% population = <250,000

“moonshots” (Popowitz & Dorgelo, 2018). The Grand Challenges framework involves interdisciplinary expertise, partners outside of the university, and focus on a particular area (e.g., inequality, mental health, energy, environment) to “harness science, technology, and innovation to solve important national or global problems” (Lemann, 2019; Popowitz & Dorgelo, 2018, p. 1). As of 2019, roughly 40 research universities had launched projects or initiatives that were supported by their senior or central leadership utilizing this rubric (Lemann, 2019). Due to the wide-reaching nature of these partnerships as well as the interconnected constituents of HEIs, partnerships within the national context are likely to carry over into a global context (Fisher et al., 2004; Nelles & Vorley, 2010; Pinheiro et al., 2015; Reid, 2013).

While institution type and geographic location can be useful indicators, actual civic engagement comes down to the availability of institutional resources and willingness to commit resources to civic engagement efforts. The extent to which these efforts become institutionalized depends on additional organization-level elements including stated mission; leadership (i.e., presidents, vice presidents, deans, chairs); promotion, tenure, hiring practices; organization structure & funding; student involvement & curriculum; faculty involvement; community involvement; and external communications & fundraising (Holland, 2006). In conclusion, the civic mission will almost certainly present differently across institution types and the explanations for how and why the efforts have taken shape will vary. The following section pivots to consider correctional facilities as social institutions in American society.

## **An Overview: The Stated Purposes of American Correctional Facilities**

The landscape of corrections facilities in the United States is expansive with regard to control and funding. There's a federal system, 50 state systems, and thousands of local government systems accounting for 110 federal prisons, 1,833 state prisons, 3,134 local jails, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, and 218 immigrant detention centers among other types of facilities (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). For fiscal year 2014, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported about \$84 billion in correctional spending across public and private institutions (Hyland, 2016). The federal government contributes a small portion at 8%, while states invest nearly 59%, and local governments invest 33% toward overall spending. The decentralized nature of corrections, as a whole, conveys the significance of state and local legislation with regard to priorities and general operations. For example, elected official in one state may have a different valuation on college-in-prison compared to their peer in a neighboring state. This would result in dramatically different educational opportunities for each state's incarcerated population.

In spite of this variability, the stated function of correctional facilities across levels of control are relatively consistent. At the federal level, facilities are run by the Bureau of Prisons which explains its agency as follows: "We protect public safety by ensuring that federal offenders serve their sentences of imprisonment in facilities that are safe, humane, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure, and provide reentry programming to ensure their successful return to the community."<sup>7</sup> An analysis of 49 state-level department of correction mission statements found that multiple aims articulated at the state-level mirror

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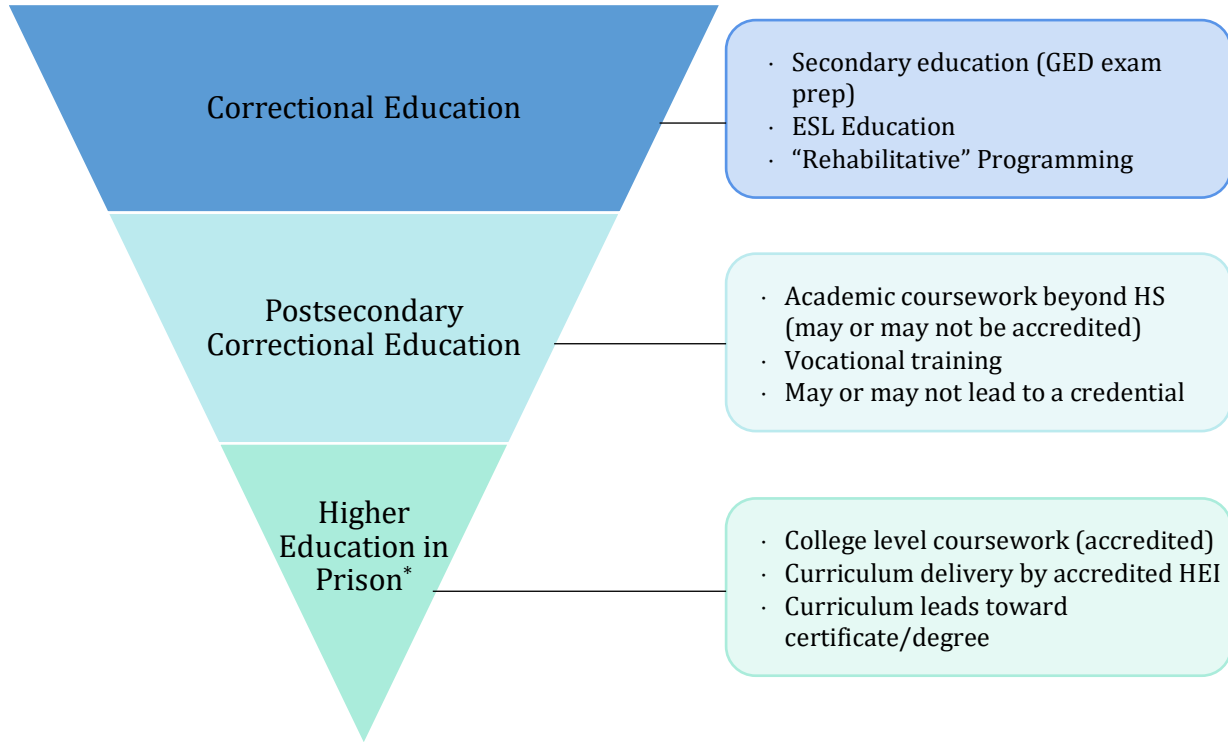
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bop.gov/about/agency/>

that of the federal level. Among the sample, 92% cited public safety as the primary aim followed by rehabilitation (51%) and reintegration (41%) (Graves, 2014). The same analysis found emerging aims among the sample that were less representative but also mirrored the federal priorities including humane treatment and dignity of the incarcerated population (39%) and cost efficiency (6%). This reporting reflects the institutions' stated purposes and therefore does not encompass critical perspectives that provide thoughtful counter arguments and dissents that may very well disprove what these institutions claim as their function and purpose. Following a review of each social institution – higher education and corrections – the following considers intentional partnerships between these institutions wherein the shared function is making education accessible for incarcerated people.

### **Toward a Typology of Higher Education-in-Prison**

As I draw on the literature to frame my study, it is necessary to distinguish the varied forms of educational offerings in prison that have been conflated in research and policy reports as “correctional education” more generally (see Davis et al., 2014; Erisman & Contardo, 2005). It is useful to isolate higher education from other kinds of prison education as it carries unique economic and social benefits (Baum et al., 2013; IHEP, 1988). In effort to distinguish the features of higher education-in-prison programs, I separated the activities of correctional education into three distinct classifications: (1.) correctional education, (2.) postsecondary correctional education (PSEC), and (3.) higher education/college-in-prison programs (HEPPs).

Figure 2. Types of Adult Education Offerings in Prison



\*Also synonymous with college-in-prison.

As shown in Figure 2, these three groups may have shared characteristics but are distinct with regard to oversight and intentionality. What follows is a detailed explanation of each based on their known features. I begin with correctional education, which has been utilized as an umbrella term for all prison education and conclude with higher education-in-prison, as a more fine-tuned conceptualization of college level education in prison for adults who have a high school diploma or the equivalent.

### **Correctional Education**

Correctional education is a widely used phrase in reference to education in prison across all levels. This term is described by the United States Department of Education (2017) as “rehabilitative programming offered in juvenile justice confinement facilities, most American prisons, and many jails and detention centers...[by] a wide variety of organizations” to eligible incarcerated people (Palmer, 2012). More specifically,

programming includes adult basic education (e.g., math, reading, writing, ESL) and adult secondary education (e.g., high school equivalency or GED exam preparation) (Davis et al., 2014). Correctional education is overseen by the United States Department of Education however the level of involvement is unclear as many correctional programming decisions are made at the state and local level. Further, the availability and quality of offerings vary by site since correctional education may be provided by an accredited or non-accredited external institution or the prison itself.

### **Postsecondary Correctional Education**

A phrase coined by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (2011), postsecondary correctional education (PSCE) is described as “any academic or vocational coursework an incarcerated person takes beyond high school diploma or equivalent that can be used toward a certificate or an associate’s, bachelor’s, or graduate degree” (p. 2). While coursework may count toward a certificate or degree, these programs are not necessarily rooted in a fixed curriculum or major that would lead toward a degree but instead consist of various offerings that carry college credit. Many of the features discussed in correctional education (above) remain but “postsecondary” serves as a modifier denoting a shift in curricular content. Hence, there still exists a rehabilitative intention but now in coordination with institutions of higher education.

A 50-state analysis conducted by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (2005), found that during the 2003-2004 academic year, 68% of PSCE instruction was provided by public community colleges. The second largest provider was public four-years institutions (16%) followed by private non-profit four-year institutions (10%), and a mix of other institutional types accounting for six percent of instruction. To carry out PSCE in a prison

facility, all logistics have to be coordinated and negotiated between the prison site and the education provider. Therefore offerings, accessibility, and continuity vary dramatically from site-to-site.

### **Higher Education-in-Prison**

Higher education-in-prison (also synonymous with college-in-prison) refers to a college curriculum offered within a correctional facility that is delivered by an accredited institution of higher education engaged in a formal agreement with a state or federal prison. Further, the for-credit coursework is part of a set curriculum that leads to a certificate, associate's, bachelor's degree, and/or graduate degree from an accredited institution. A departure from corrective notions, higher education-in-prison programs are focused on teaching and learning and the nuances that present themselves within the confines of a correctional facility.

This definition reflects a philosophical shift on prison education more generally and warrants more attention to how programs are described in research. Higher education-in-prison, as a descriptor, deemphasizes a rehabilitative function and emphasizes the education level being offered in a nontraditional setting. Castro and Gould (2018) argue that use of the word correctional alongside education is “dehumanizing, pathologizing, and inconsistent with authentic processes of teaching and learning that stem from the rich experiences and livelihoods of individuals and communities” (p. 3). The authors suggest that *correctional* education perpetuates political arguments around who deserves access to quality education and enables intervention- or treatment-based efforts inconsistent with the aims of higher education more broadly.

Thus, this phrasing makes negative inferences about the students, staff, and educators who engage in this work. A more humanizing qualification provides entrée into discussion of topics that are standard in higher education literature, more generally, including student centered approaches to program delivery (Wilson et al., 2019) and guidance on equity and excellence for higher education-in-prison programs (Erzen et al., 2019). This guidance presents seven core content areas for HEPPs to consider: program design; partnerships and collaborations; faculty recruitment, training, and supervision; curriculum; pedagogy; instructional resources; and student advising and support services. This reflects the evolution from a rehabilitative and/or correctional approach to education toward an approach that is concerned with teaching, learning, and student and faculty experiences. Finally, there are a subset of adult education programs that do not fit neatly into the groups above due their unbounded nature of operation. These miscellaneous programs show up as complements to or peripheral features of HEPPs and therefore are not covered for the purposes of this study.

### ***The Landscape of HEPPs***

Having focused in on higher education-in-prison as a distinct and specific type of educational offering, it is helpful to have a sense of program prevalence and their credential offerings. In a 2020 report, the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison identified 300 higher education-in-prison programs. Among these programs, 121 offered certificates, 119 offered degrees, and the remaining offered postsecondary, vocational, or career and technical education coursework for credit. Of programs that led to a degree, many offered at least two degree pathways: 95 programs offered associate's degrees, 39 programs offered bachelor's degrees, and 6 programs offered master's degrees (Royer et al., 2020).



The same report found that among higher education institutions hosting HEPPs, the majority (51%) were public two-year schools followed by private, non-profit, four years (27%), and public four year schools (21%). With regard to location, most programs were located in the southern region of the United States followed by the western and midwestern regions. The fewest programs existed in the northeast region. All but three states (Delaware, Kentucky, and Montana) were represented in the report's sample. The top five states, representing 42% of all HEPPs, included North Carolina, California, Wisconsin, New York, and Texas.

In summary, the classifications above convey the nuance among educational programs in prison that have been generally referred to as "correctional education" in existing research and policy reports. Moreover, the higher education-in-prison landscape matches the operational incoherence of both higher education and correctional institutions. The following section delves into rationales for prison education programs presented in the literature.

### **Explanations for Prison Education Programs**

*"...education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform...all reforms which rest simply upon the enactment of law, or the threatening of certain penalties, or upon changes in mechanical or outward arrangements are transitory and futile."*

-John Dewey (1897)

Similar to higher education, the explanations presented for prison education have evolved over time. The initial rationales centered on reform, which at the time, referred to improving the behavior of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, which was often made worse after they were incarcerated. The quote from Dewey quote above captures the embedded social responsibility of prisons and conveys the necessary evolution of prisons

as sites for the sole purpose of punishment to sites that are increasingly concerned with both public safety and reform. I interpret Dewey's use of the word reform being directed at the legal system (and not at incarcerated individuals navigating the system). Rehabilitation, resocialization, and reintegration later surfaced as explanations that varied on a theme of incarcerated people reentering society and having the necessary tools for a permanent reentry. More recently, the idea of reparation has emerged as new perspective to justify access to higher education-in-prison. I offer a brief description of each below.

### **Reform**

During the eighteenth century, there was a perceived correlation between lack of education and criminal tendencies. Reagen and Stoughton (1976) further explain the views of this time: "an individual without moral and religious ties to society is susceptible to criminal influence" and this school of thought fostered the beginnings of criminal reform (p. 37). The motivation for such reform was directly tied to public interest since upon release from prison, people demonstrated worse behavior as a result of their time incarcerated. A concerted effort toward reform was described as "first, for the benefit of the culprit, but primarily for the safeguarding of society" (Reagen & Stoughton, 1976, p. 35.) During this time, reform was rooted in rigorous labor, discipline, and the acquisition of a skill or trade that would lend toward employability.

General education in prison dates back to 1847 when the New York Legislature passed a law that appointed secular teachers in the state's prisons. By the 1930's, the philosophy of correctional education was based on socialization or the transformation of socially unacceptable values and attitudes into something more "socially viable" (Reagen & Stoughton, 1976, p. 43). This shift was due to influence from sociological and psychological

theories that considered social structures, the condition of those structures, and how individuals within those structures develop. This framing provides a philosophical approach to correctional education that views incarcerated adults as “primarily an adult in need of education and only secondarily as a criminal in need of reform” (MacCormick, 1931, p. 11). The earliest ideas of reform for employability along with more contemporary notions around human development are both present in more recent literature.

### **Rehabilitation**

Perhaps as an extension of what was then considered reform, rehabilitation is the broadest explanation for the function of prison education in contemporary literature. Rehabilitation occurs through education or job training with the intention of yielding a successful reentry into the social and economic context of public life. Establishing an environment for learning in prison provides alternative options to criminal trajectories and therefore can be a positive behavior management tool within prisons (Fine, et al., 2001). More specifically, there is evidence that participation in prison education reduces criminogenic effects or learned criminal behaviors during incarceration (Lagemann, 2015; Parlett, 1975). The direct link between education and crime continues to be a core component in rationales for prison education. For example, Karpowitz & Kenner (2018) published a report entitled *Education as Crime Prevention: The Case for Reinstating Pell Grant Eligibility for the Incarcerated* to make an appeal that federally funding education in prison would prevent and/or reduce crime. In summary, the idea of rehabilitation is responsive to concerns for public safety and social progress and education is a key mechanism for rehabilitation during and after incarceration.

## **Resocialization**

Resocialization speaks to a process that establishes norms, values, and attitudes that support a person's transition from one social role to another. Similar to the idea of rehabilitation, resocialization is supposed to contribute to successful reentry to society after incarceration. Partlett (1975) describes prison education as contributing to moral development or the production of more thoughtful individuals. Moreover, prison education lends toward a strengthened sense of agency and a responsibility for one self, those around them, and society more broadly (Fine, et al., 2001; Lagemann, 2015). This occurs through participation in a subcommunity where there is a culture of learning and contemplation (Lagemann, 2011).

## **Reintegration**

Reintegration is positioned as an intended outcome that is supported through rehabilitative programming and resocialization in prison education programs. This is often measured by the odds of recidivism and post release employment outcomes. Recidivism refers to a return to prison within three years of release through rearrest, reconviction, and/or technical parole violations (Davis, et al., 2014; Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011). The odds of recidivism decrease by 43% when someone has participated in correctional education (Davis et al., 2013) and decrease by 54% when someone has earned their college degree in prison (Kim & Clark, 2013). Education in prison also improves post release employment opportunities making the odds of securing a job 13% higher for those who have participated in correctional education compared to those who have not (Davis, et al., 2014; Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011). These outcomes reinforce the value of access to higher

education-in-prison for the individual and the public. Reintegration continues the theme of education as a means toward successful reentry into society.

## **Reparation**

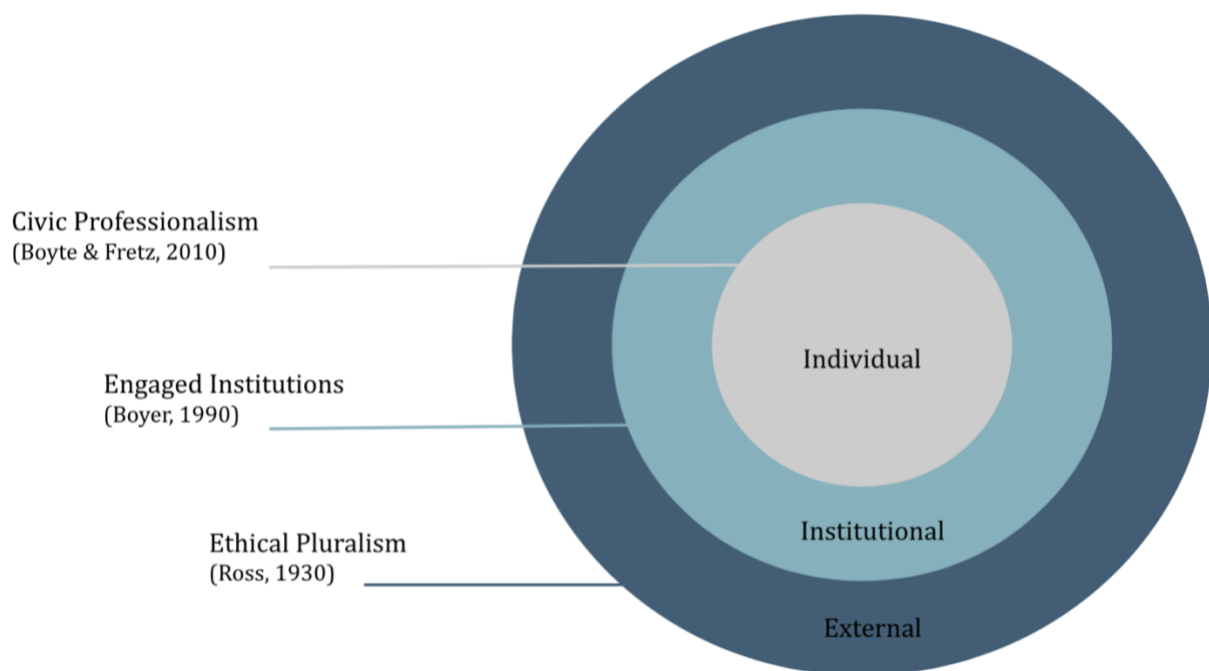
In contrast to reform, rehabilitation, resocialization, and reintegration, reparation has surfaced as recent explanation acknowledging harm that has been done *to* incarcerated individuals – such as structural racism that made a quality education out of reach for Black students. In this view, education is introduced primarily as a human right but also a tool that can be used to repair past structural harm. In his publication that contemplates the role of prisons in our current society, journalist Bill Keller devotes a chapter to college-in-prison, which he concludes by stating, “...the best college-in-prison educators I have met—share a conviction that their work is not just an act of kindness or even an investment in public safety, but a kind of reparations (p. 54, 2022). In particular, one HEPP leader that he interviewed believed the value of her work lied in the facilitation of transferring social capital to the most marginalized members of society. In summary, the literature offered a range of explanations for prison education that began with an interest in public safety, followed by an emphasis on reducing recidivism, and most recently as a matter of justice. The following section engages in discussion of my conceptual framework based on what I learned from the literature.

### **Framing a Study of Higher Education-in-Prison**

Higher education-in-prison programs represent one type of university partnership that links to a specific societal issue: mass incarceration and its intergenerational consequences on the incarcerated, their families, and broader society. As discussed in Chapter I, the civic mission of higher education speaks to an obligatory responsibility on

behalf of HEI's to intentionally contribute to American social progress. The following considers how I might operationalize the civic mission of higher education to better understand how and why HEI's engage in partnerships with prisons, according to individuals within the field of higher education. As shown in Figure 3, I established a conceptual framework drawing on three concepts that offer insight at various levels of these programs: the individual, the institutional, and the external contexts that inform institutional priorities. To begin, I employed *Civic Professionalism* (Boyte & Fretz, 2010) to highlight the individual characteristics and attributes of people who choose professions that are in service to the public good. Next, I applied the idea of *Engaged Institutions* (Boyer, 1990) to highlight the features and practices of HEI's that are productively engaged with external communities. Finally, I utilized the concept of *Ethical Pluralism* (Ross, 1930) to allow for an extensive, yet context specific, understanding of action or inaction as it relates to ethical obligation.

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework



## **Civic Professionalism**

There is an established correlation linking an increase in education to enhanced civic awareness and engagement among adults. For example, Doyle and Skinner (2017) found that each year of higher education increased the likelihood of individuals' voting by nearly eight percent in the 2010 election. In addition to voting, participation in higher education had lasting effects on individuals' orientation toward public responsibility, which presented in social behaviors such as volunteering and donating resources such as time, expertise, and funds to nonprofit causes (Doyle & Skinner, 2017). These behaviors can also extend beyond one's personal life into their professional commitments. Boyte and Fretz (2010) posit that civic engagement in higher education "engender[s] civic professionals who will renew a robust sense of the public purposes of their work and will develop and sustain a far more public culture for collaborative, visible, and open work" (p. 69). Here the authors put forward the idea of civic professionalism where individuals choose professions that allow them to align their orientation toward civic engagement with their work in service to the broader public. The enactment of civic professionalism among individuals within higher education is described as employing

...methods of practicing their crafts in public life and in public ways, using their academic skills to create powerful public relationships, and becoming culture-workers and facilitators of meaning-making in the public sphere (Boyte & Fretz, 2010, p. 79).

Individuals engaged in civic professionalism and university partnerships might also be understood as "boundary spanners" or leaders who have the capability of bringing different kinds of people together to solve problems and establish reciprocal partnerships

(Adams, 2014; Murtadha, 2016; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Boundary spanning work extends beyond a singular job description and reflects institution level priorities and strategies for engaging with external partners (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Thus, boundary spanning roles may present differently across institutions in terms of hierarchy, priorities, and responsibilities. The civic professionalism frame allows for insight into the individual characteristics and attributes of people who choose to lead or manage higher education-in-prison programs. More narrowly, considering their efforts as part of institutional boundary spanning situates these civic professionals within the context of their mission driven universities. Given the public orientation of civic professionals, they well positioned to speak to their own understanding of their work as well as how they view or understand their institution's engagement at the organizational level.

### **Engaged Institutions**

The engaged institution describes HEI's that intentionally utilize their teaching, research, and/or service practices to become "sympathetically" and "productively" involved with external communities (Kellogg Commission, 1999). This concept was influenced by Ernest Boyer's (1990) conceptualization of scholarship as an endeavor that could be motivated by and responsive to current and future social problems. Boyer (1996) explicates on what this means for institutions that host scholarly endeavors:

...the scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems...what's needed...[is] a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction in the nation's life... (p. 27).



Further, the engaged institution establishes mutually beneficial partnerships, which allows for external realities to influence priorities for engagement (Holland & Gelmon, 1998). The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1999) added that these efforts should also intentionally contribute to students' learning by responding to the needs of students and enriching student experiences by incorporating engagement into the curriculum.

The features of the engaged institution imply that relevant efforts and support needs to be institutionalized if it will succeed. To gauge institutional commitment to engagement, Holland (1997) outlines eight components to assess: mission, leadership, promotion/tenure/hiring, organization structure, student involvement & curriculum, faculty involvement, community involvement, and external communication & fundraising. Each component is scaled from 1 (low relevance) to 4 (full integration) as they relate to the institution's full operation. This frame serves as an instrumental guide for collecting institution-level data across cases and further clarified how institutional features (e.g., control, location, size) map on to engagement efforts.

### **Ethical Pluralism**

Finally, I incorporated ethical pluralism – a derivative of Deontological Ethics – which acknowledges numerous reasons for carrying out an action and that sometimes these reasons can be in conflict with one another. This concept is derived from the Greek word *deont-* which is perhaps best translated into English as “duty that is binding, obligatory, and/or necessary.” Deontology is based in traditional philosophical conceptions of ethics, which involves identifying the moral principles of a society that people within it act upon. Moreover, these ethics are concerned with notions of good or bad/right or wrong,

in terms of individual actions or inactions that contribute to the fabric of society. Immanuel Kant believed that the barometer for what was right or wrong was rooted in whether or not the nature of the action was based in goodwill (Broad, 1930). Thus, Kant placed emphasis on intent and motive undergirding action instead of the outcome or consequence of the action. Under this framework, goodwill comes from a sense of moral duty and that intrinsic motive makes the action inherently good.

This absolutist view was later complicated by W.D. Ross who introduced pluralistic deontology or ethical pluralism. Ross presented seven *prima facie* duties to take into consideration when deciding which duty would be acted on: fidelity, reparations, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, non-maleficence (Shafer-Landau, 2009). These duties are better understood as moral considerations for determining whether and which duty should be acted on, implying that there are environments with competing demands and often more than one moral consideration. This pluralistic view accommodates the reality that there is usually more than one ethical reason to be considered for carrying out action or inaction. In other words, specific contexts will determine how and why an action is taken. In this study, the action is engagement. This framework complemented my qualitative multisite case study design, which intended to gather an in-depth, contextual understanding of higher education-in-prison programs. It also provides a lens to discern if HEIs engage in these partnerships as part of their duty to respond to/solve for broader social problems. This last frame felt particularly important to include since it speaks directly to a number of concepts that have already surfaced in my earlier chapters including morals/ethics, justice, and reparations. Each component of this framework

provides a unique window into HEPPs and collectively, it remains true to the core ideals of the civic mission of higher education.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the literatures most relevant to my study. Based on what was and was not available in existing literature, I put forward two groupings – classifications for civically engaged institutions and types of adult education in prison (see Figure 2) – to ground existing knowledge in the field of higher education in a way that would be conducive to my study. Next, I introduced three separate but complementary frameworks that together, provided a conceptual framework to guide the execution of my study. In the next chapter, I outline the study design and the methodology I utilized to answer the research questions presented in Chapter I.

### III – DESIGN AND METHODS

#### **Chapter Overview**

In the prior chapters of this dissertation, I explained that there is a potential problem with higher education-in-prison programs being conceptualized absent input from the field of higher education itself. While this carries practical concerns, it also leaves a gap in our ability to discern why institutions of higher education engage in partnerships with prisons and how they view these partnerships within the context of broader society. I suggested that one way to better understand the role of HEPPs, through a field based perspective, might be to consider the idea of the civic mission of higher education or higher education’s responsibility to be responsive to societal problems. In the preceding chapter, I outlined a framework for a study that aims to understand why institutions of higher education engage in partnerships with prisons and to gauge whether or not their explanations map on to the civic mission of higher education. In this chapter, I describe the study’s design and methodology, including: the research questions that guided the study, the study’s design (including details on site and participant selection, data collection, processing, and analysis), and study limitations.

#### **Research Questions**

In the first chapter, I presented a set of research questions to guide my study. Following data collection and preliminary analysis, I made minor modifications to my research questions to ensure alignment with findings. The adapted questions are as follows:

1. How do individuals from colleges and universities, involved at different levels of higher education-in-prison programs, describe their intention(s) and that of their programs?
2. How do individuals at colleges and universities, involved at different levels of higher education-in-prison programs, describe the function of their program?
  - a. How, if at all, do these individuals define or describe the program in relation to the college/university?
  - b. How, if at all, do these individuals define or describe the program in relation to matters outside of the college/university?
3. To what extent, if at all, do higher education institutions engage in partnerships as a response to specified contexts and/or defined social problems?
  - a. What are the external factors, if any, that participants describe as relevant to their programs?

To answer these questions, I conducted a multisite case study that engaged a carefully selected set of cases and multiple participants within each case.

### **Study Design**

Qualitative inquiry provides an avenue for gaining complex, detailed understandings of social structures and an opportunity to make meaning of social environments based on the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of the participants in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). More narrowly, a case study approach to qualitative research yields an in depth investigation into contemporary phenomena “within its real world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). I conducted a multisite case study to illustrate

different representations and perspectives on the same topic. Consistent with qualitative research in the social sciences, I utilized a purposeful sampling strategy to identify sites and participants that would intentionally inform my research topic. The following sections explain my approach to site selection, participant selection, data collection, processing, and analysis plans.

### **Site Selection**

My study included a minimum of three case sites to sufficiently lend toward explaining features about the programs being explored. I determined these sites through a combination of maximum variation sampling and criterion sampling strategies. Maximum variation sampling intentionally allows for differing perspectives – an ideal feature of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I employed this strategy by selecting higher education institutions under different types of control (i.e., public or private) since institutional control can influence funding streams, academic priorities, and mission autonomy. Additionally, this collection of sites ranged in terms of age or the length of time they have been operating. This indicator allows for variance in how programs might explain their program’s origins in relationship to internal and external factors at the start of the programs.

Criterion sampling incorporates quality control across case sites by introducing specific standards to be met by each case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As explained in Chapter II, higher education-in-prison refers to a college curriculum offered within a correctional facility that is delivered by an accredited institution of higher education engaged in a formal and mutually beneficial agreement with a state and/or federal prison. Further, the for-credit coursework is part of a set curriculum that leads to a certificate, associate’s,

bachelor's degree, and/or graduate degree from an accredited institution. This definition provided the key criteria for considering site selection. To gauge my approach, I referenced the sampling criteria used for national data collection by the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, a national network dedicated to improving the equity and quality of higher education-in-prison programs. Their criteria was more inclusive and captured programs that: provide postsecondary education; are formally affiliated with a college and/or university; and use a secondary credential (e.g., a High School degree or GED) as a requirement for admission. To further ensure that the sites of my study would be relevant for a field based study in higher education, I required each site be able to identify students who had "successfully" completed the program. The intention here was to give programs an opportunity to define what success meant for their students and to use their conceptions to flesh out the concept of alumni – a group commonly tracked in higher education to showcase institutional outcomes. This study acknowledges that matriculation rates and degrees granted are not always the primary measure of success among these programs. However, I added this criteria to ensure that, at minimum, the programs were yielding higher education credentials for their students.

Each case for analysis was bound to the college or university hosting the program. The collective set of cases were geographically bound to the state of New York for a few reasons. First, among the top five states<sup>8</sup> with active higher education-in-prison programs (Royer et al., 2020), New York offered the most amount of reasonable access given my geographic proximity. I also restricted the cases to the boundaries of one state since the

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<sup>8</sup> North Carolina, California, Wisconsin, New York, and Texas

operations of both prisons and higher education institutions are determined at the state level. By containing this study at the state level, I was looking to control for incidental variables that might vary across state lines and impede my ability to draw conclusions across cases. An example of such a variable that surfaced during data collection was the restoration of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) funding for incarcerated individuals. TAP eligibility is limited to residents of New York state and thus will only have implications for HEPPs within New York State. To get a sense of the landscape, I utilized the National Directory for Higher Education in Prison Programs and filtered by state. Based on information in the database, as of December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, there were 19 programs within New York State. Four of these programs, while hosted within New York State, were affiliated with higher education institutions in Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina so I excluded these from the sample given my state level boundary. I was able to corroborate the number of remaining program through a report by the Prison Reentry Institute (2019) that described the current landscape as “15 college-in-prison programs in New York State, which operate through partnerships with 30 colleges and universities at 25 DOCCS facilities. Of the 15 remaining programs, I utilized the list of criteria explained earlier to identify qualifying cases. Utilizing public information made available on university websites as well as in the national directory, I extended invitation to four sites to participate in my study. Following informal conversations to confirm each site met my list of criteria, I engaged in the process of data collections with three of these sites.

### **Participant Selection**

Across the case sites, I met with at least three kinds of participants who were willing to engage in a semi-structured interview: a program leader, an institutional leader, and a



program affiliate. The first, or priority, participant was the leader of the HEPP. These individuals sometimes held director titles and were responsible for the operational aspects of the program on behalf of the higher education institution. In some instances, these individuals were program founders and/or faculty members who were responsible for leading the program's strategic efforts. Upon securing contact with the program directors, I used snowball or referral sampling to identify an institutional leader or similar individual who be able to speak to the higher education institution more broadly and who may also be responsible for high-level oversight of the program. This included personnel at the executive level (i.e., President, Provost, Board of Trustees/Directors), senior level (i.e., Assistant/Associate/Vice Provosts, Assistant/Associate/Vice Presidents) and/or faculty (i.e., Deans). Speaking to multiple individuals within the same site complemented my intention to have maximum variation within and across sites since individuals within the same case can offer relatively unique perspectives (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Finally, I requested a referral to a third type of participant who could provide insight into the HEPP based on their direct interactions with the program. I refer to this group as program affiliates, which was inclusive of program instructors, (former) staff, donors, alumni, and boundary spanners (as discussed in Chapter II). This third group provided an opportunity to engage relevant participants that I may not have been able to independently identify as valuable resources. Across participant type, I interviewed a total of 13 participants for this study (also see Table 2).

### **Data Collection**

This in depth case study was informed by three streams of data collection including extensive pre-interview data inventories of institution and program level documents, semi-

structured interviews, and detailed field observation memos before, during, and after each interview. It was important to orient myself to each case by acknowledging historical and contextual information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I did this by collecting and thoroughly reviewing pre-existing documents and artifacts before engaging in interviews with participants. Some of this information included organizational documents (e.g., reports, strategic plans, organizational charts, and mission statements) and public documents (e.g., news stories, announcements, alumni newsletters, and annual reports). I relied on these materials during my analysis, in tandem with participant interviews, to provide institution- and program-level context for each site. (See Appendix E for list of document collected from each case.)

To engage in an interactive method of data collection, I conducted one-on-one two-hour interviews with participants both in-person and remotely. Due to the fluctuating public health guidance during the pandemic and the related protocols at each HEI and their respective IRB offices, some interviews were held via Zoom as a health and safety precaution. For in-person interviews, I met participants in their campus office or a work-related location of their choosing. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) describe interviews as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world...[where] knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 3-4). The semi-structured interviews were guided by a pre-determined set of questions (Appendix A) designed to capture key ideas that would be responsive to my research questions. The interview protocol was also flexible enough to adapt to a line of questioning that followed the participant’s line of thinking in instances where individuals were loquacious. I was able to

refine the interview questions and incorporate prompts by conducting pilot interviews with individuals selected on the basis of convenience and access (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition to my written notes, I audio recorded interviews (with participants' consent) and subsequently transcribed each interview to ensure the full extent of the exchange was documented for analysis. In spite of some limitations related to the pandemic, I was fortunate to be able to visit each site in-person where I maintained observation notes in the field before, during, and after interviews to capture the participants' working environment and relevant features. Both document analysis and field observations supplemented my interviews, which served as the primary source of data.

### **Data Processing**

The initial stage of data processing involved a substantial amount of time listening to interviews, keeping notes in the margin of resources referenced by participants, and cleaning the transcription text to ensure that acronyms, jargon, participants' accents, as well as their speaking cadence were accurately reflected in written form. I also took this opportunity to remove filler words, which proved to be disruptive when reading participant narratives. Importantly, I reviewed each transcript with the intent to deidentify participants and their institutions to protect the confidentiality of the data. In addition to cleaning and organizing 13 interview transcripts, I arranged the supporting documents and relevant artifacts by case site. This resulted in three electronic folders inclusive of artifacts for each respective case and one folder inclusive of all interview transcripts.

For each type of data collected (i.e, documents, notes, and transcriptions), I uploaded clean versions into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. To protect my data as well as the confidentiality of institutions and participants, I took several actions to

ensure security. First, I maintained all hard copy materials in a locked file cabinet within my locked office. I shredded all hard copy materials that were no longer needed following electronic preservations and data analysis. To manage electronic materials – including audio recordings – I uploaded the information to an external hard drive, which was password protected. Managing data on an external hard drive (instead of my desktop or a cloud management system) minimized the risk that any data will be compromised from a malicious source. The external hard drive was stored in the secure location with hard copy materials. The data stored on this external hard drive was deleted upon conclusion of this study.

### **Data Analysis**

Given that this was a multi-site case study, I first analyzed data at the case level followed by a cross-case pattern analysis. For each case, I generated a detailed description to capture the case-specific context and features of both the program and its host institution. Utilizing the data collected, I reviewed each set and made annotations that could be grouped in categories. Utilizing NVivo allowed me to code both structured and unstructured information utilizing a consistent coding scheme. I used a combination of deductive coding, based on key features of my conceptual framework, and inductive coding to allow for participant narratives to shape the analysis and findings. For example, with deductive coding, I utilized the following codes and subcodes:

- Civic Professionalism
  - Boundary Spanning
  - In Service to [insert participant's word]
  - Public Orientation
- Engaged Institutions
  - External Communication & Fundraising
  - Faculty Involvement

- Leadership
- Mission
- Organization Structure
- Promotion/Tenure/Hiring
- Research
- Service
- Teaching
- Student Involvement & Curriculum
- Ethical Pluralism
  - Beneficence
  - Fidelity
  - Gratitude
  - Justice
  - Non Maleficence
  - Reparations
  - Self-Improvement

With inductive coding, I revisited source materials and transcripts to identify naturally occurring themes that emerged more so from the participants than my study design and applied them with and across cases as appropriate. Example of codes in this instance include:

- Alumni
- Advocacy
- Abolition
- Campus Partner
- Cultural Competency
- Curriculum
- Degrees
- Education Quality
- Goals
- Mass Incarceration
- Intentional Language
- Intersectionality
- Meaningful Work
- Pandemic
- Social Justice
- Student Affairs
- Success

I applied both inductive and deductive codes as appropriate and, from there, was able to identify themes within each case followed by patterns across cases. Housing my data in Nvivo allowed for the software to substantiate emergent themes that I identified during the process of data collection at the analysis stage. The software also enabled me to run queries that might surface less obvious patterns within and across cases.

### **Study Limitations**

My study, like all studies, presents some methodological limitations. A case study approach to inquiry provides an in depth understanding of a case within its real-life, contemporary context (Yin, 2009). The context – or setting – can be broadly conceptualized to include historical, social, and/or political issues, or narrowly conceptualized to consider the individuals, physical location, and/or timing of the study (Stake, 1995). My study was bound to New York State and the data collection period happened to be in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, this study design limits my ability to draw generalizable conclusions about why American higher education institutions partner with prisons nationally. The pandemic context limited my ability to hold all aspects of data collection in-person. While my findings will not be applicable to every higher education-in-prison-program, I hope this study will instead serve two purposes. First, I hope this study will be one of few contributors to the academic discussion about higher education-in-prison from the perspective of a higher education researcher. Second, I hope my study will yield theoretical and practical implications – about the functional intent of higher education-in-prison programs – that subsequently offer a bridge for cross-sector decision making that often happens in parallel.

This study was designed to collect information from institutional and program leaders actively engaged in HEPPs. While it does not present a flaw in study design, it presents a methodological limitation since this is a study about higher education-in-prison that does not explicitly include narratives of the students enrolled in these programs. This inherently limits what might be learned about these programs from the student perspective, which is a critical perspective in all aspects of decision making for the field of higher education. One participant in this study disclosed her past participation in a college-in-prison program and was therefore able to include her own student experience into administrative work at her HEPP but also into our interview. While student experience is beyond the scope of this study, I reflect on how student perspectives may also be captured as regular practice with a similar intent to strengthen this narrative within the field of higher education in Chapter VI.

Given my research questions and my interest in understanding institutional partnerships more broadly, I chose not to explicitly collect the social identities of participants. Rather, I noted identities that participants self-disclosed and that were therefore most significant to them (see Table 2). While conducting my analysis, I realized that the racial dynamics of staff in these programs is an important piece of context that future studies might want to explicitly focus on. Moreover, the racial/ethnic makeup and gender makeup incarcerated students, returning citizens, and program staff is deserving on further investigation to decipher relevant motivations of staff and directors of these programs.

## **Researcher Positionality**

Beyond the surface of the study design, it is important to acknowledge that in spite of every effort to be an objective researcher, I bring my own assumptions, interpretations, and experiences to this inquiry. Creswell and Poth (2018) characterize the process of qualitative research as “flowing from philosophical assumptions, to interpretive lens, and on to procedures involved in studying social or human problems” (p. 43). This is a reminder that my positionality not only influenced how I might reported on findings but also influenced what questions I chose to ask and what frameworks I employed to make sense of answers to those questions. As the primary interpreter of the data, it is necessary to acknowledge my assumptions and personal experiences related to my research study.

My positionality stems from my experiences as a Black woman, a higher education administrator, an educator, and a family member and friend to individuals who have been directly affected by the school-to-prison pipeline and mass incarceration. Through my experiences in academia – as a student and as an administrator – I have developed ideas and opinions about why higher education institutions choose to engage marginalized groups following a history of exclusionary practices. Having personally experienced marginalization in academia, I am cognizant of and interested in the experiences of other marginalized individuals and groups who are directly and indirectly interacting with higher education institutions. Through personal relationships, I have observed the long-term consequences of the school-to-prison pipeline as well as incarceration that reach beyond individuals and into their homes, families, and communities. Thus, I have my own conceptions that can potentially lend toward a biased analysis of my data which highlights my beliefs over that of the participants. To minimize this outcome as much as possible, I



engaged in peer analysis where I shared my emergent themes with peer colleagues to assess the credibility of my findings. Additionally, I used member checks or provided participants with an opportunity to review case descriptions to ensure that I accurately captured their narratives as it pertained to their programs. Finally, my identity – or how I present to others – was also a factor as I was interacting with a diverse set of participants who were sharing their perspectives with me as an outsider. For example, my conversations with women and women of color may have been more revealing than conversations that I had with men during the data collection phase. This in turn impacted the variety and volume of data that I was able to apply to my analysis.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I described the methodology of my multi-site case study to consider how and why higher education institution engage in partnerships with prisons. I began by restating the research questions that guided the study. I then transitioned to explain the overall study design including my approach to site and participant selection, data collection, processing, and analysis. I conclude the chapter by acknowledging the study's limitations and my own positionality as the researcher.

## IV – PRESENTATION OF CASES

### **Chapter Overview**

Of the qualifying sites in New York State, I present below three cases of higher education institutions that are actively engaged in a partnership with one or more prisons to offer college degree programming to incarcerated students. The first case, Acacia College, represents a mature higher education-in-prison program based at a small private liberal arts college in a metropolitan city. The second case, Maple University, depicts a relatively new higher education-in-prison program housed at a large private research university in the western region of the state. The third, Birch College, exemplifies a complex and evolving higher education-in-prison program based at a large public university in a metropolitan city. For each site, I offer a case description to situate the program within its campus context. I then discuss themes within each case that are responsive to my research questions (and informed by my conceptual framework). Next, I offer a summary of structural similarities and differences across the cases. I then provide an analysis of patterns across all of the cases in this study and that may have implications for similarly situated programs in New York State.

## Cases

### Case I: Acacia College

#### *The Institution*

The first higher education-in-prison program case is based at Acacia College, a historically Catholic women's college that became coeducational and nonsectarian in the 1960's. This private liberal arts college offers bachelor's degrees with a focus in the arts and sciences and has roughly 2,000 full-time students with a student-to-faculty ratio of 11:1. Among the instructional faculty, about 75% are part-time or non-tenure track. Since its founding, Acacia College has taken pride in its "commitment to providing higher education for diverse populations" in its metropolitan community.

Acacia College has a mission statement that situates curricular and cocurricular experiences as mechanisms that enable its diverse student body to become leaders who are capable of advancing society. But it is perhaps its inclusivity statement that best reflects the institution's view of itself in relationship to an evolving broader society – an important part of this study's inquiry:

[Acacia College] respects and honors the dignity and value of every human being...We recognize the regrettable role that higher education has played in reinforcing inequality in our society, and we believe that our College has a special responsibility to prevent those same inequalities from being perpetuated in our campus community...and in advancing the cause of social justice. We are dedicated

to creating a learning environment...that maximizes each person's capacity to learn, work, and make meaningful contributions both here and beyond.

This excerpt addresses matters beyond a traditional mission statement at three levels: individual, institutional, and societal. First, at the individual level, it sets an expectation that all members of the community have inherent value and should therefore be treated accordingly. Second, at the institution level, it recognizes a history of structural inequality in higher education and acknowledges its institutional responsibility to prevent this inequality from being a part of their campus community. Third, at the societal level, it commits to advancing social justice which speaks to a fairer distribution of resources and opportunities in society. Taken together, it is not surprising that an institution that prioritizes human dignity, equality, and social justice would be administering a higher education-in-prison program. Among the three classifications<sup>9</sup> that I put forward for civically engaged institutions in Chapter II, Acacia College represents an institution with an explicit civic mission but without a formal designation.

### ***The Program***

The prison education program at Acacia College represents a mature program with an established reputation and history with its institution. Starting in 1997, and under the leadership of Acacia College's then president, a consortium of local colleges and universities collaborated to offer college courses at a women's prison facility. This

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<sup>9</sup> (1) explicit civic mission and a formal community engagement designation from the Carnegie Commission; (2) explicit civic mission without a formal designation; and (3) an implicit civic mission

coalescence was in response to a forced closure of a college-in-prison program at the same facility after 15 years of operation. The program ended following the 1994 Crime Bill, which made Pell grants inaccessible to incarcerated students and in turn eliminated financial support to administer the program. The consortium that followed reintroduced college coursework at the prison and Acacia College became the degree granting institution. By 2004, the program was reconceptualized into what is today – an extension of Acacia College’s main campus where incarcerated students have access to the same core course offerings and faculty as traditional students majoring in Sociology and Politics and Human Rights. To strengthen the program’s financial stability in the absence of Pell grants, the College established an endowment in 2007 through a \$1 million gift. To operate, the program currently draws on the College’s operating budget, the program endowment, donations, and grant funding.

The influence of Acacia College’s history and mission are reflected in its prison education program, which offers its degree programs solely at women’s prison facilities. The program currently awards an Associate’s degree in Social Sciences and a Bachelor’s degree in Politics and Human Rights. It enrolls roughly 175 students each semester and has more than 245 graduates. For the last 18 years, the program operated in a maximum security facility where women served long term sentences. In 2019, the program expanded to its second site, designated as medium/minimum security. The expansion to this additional site was intentional as women were usually transferred there toward the end of their sentence, which disrupted their academic progress. Offering coursework at both sites allows for continuity in students’ pathways towards a degree when they are transferred. As part of the program expansion, the program partnered with a third party non-profit that

provided logistical coordination of the academic programs and services to facilitate students' transition and eventual reentry. Both facilities are operated by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) and are about 40 miles away from the main campus or a one-hour drive.

The program is led by a director who has held her position since 2004 and also taught English courses in earlier iterations of the program. Her background was strongly rooted in academia having completed her master's degree and all but her dissertation in English. She described her director responsibilities as "soup-to-nuts" including a range of tasks and interactions that would typically be shared across offices in a traditional student engagement setting. Some of these included purchasing textbooks and supplies, designing curriculum, advising students, hiring instructors, and bargaining for space at the prison facility. The program had no additional personnel nor did it have a dedicated physical space on the main campus. The director spent most of her days working at one of the women's facilities and spent evening and weekends on work that could be handled off site.

While the program operated in a decentralized manner, there was a core team of individuals who met regularly to manage the day-to-day operations at both sites. These people included the vice president for academic affairs (Marvin), the director of the program (Diana), and a third party coordinator who was helping with academic programs at the medium/minimum security facility. For more strategic planning and coordination, there was what some participants referred to as an "all hands" meeting where key individuals met on a more periodic basis. In this case, meeting attendees included those mentioned above as well as faculty advisors (Joss), the executive director of academic operations (Anita), institutional advancement, academic advising, and the registrar. I had

an opportunity to meet with members of the core team and the extended team including Marvin, Diana, Anita, and Joss. What follows is a set of themes that emerged from my time at Acacia College.

### ***Within Case Themes in Response to Research Questions***

#### **Describing Intent**

***Theme 1 – “Rehabilitation is Limiting.”*** As discussed in Chapter II, rehabilitation is the most widely used explanation for prison education programs. Acacia College was no exception – the program’s website linked education as a vital component for rehabilitation and utilized this as a basis for why the College offered college-prep and degree programs for incarcerated women. I presented this text from the website to each participant and asked them to share their thoughts on its accuracy and asked whether they would modify it. All four participants expressed an aversion to the word “rehabilitation” as the explanation for the work occurring in the program since it did not accurately convey their individual or collective beliefs about why their program was in place. Further, if rehabilitation were to be agreed upon as the motivating force, the consensus was that it would be an insufficient and limiting framework to operate from.

One participant noted that this could not be the primary intent since many of their students will never be released “so it’s not about setting them up for when they get out. It’s [about] the value in education to any human being.” As participants responded to this language, they began to explain their program’s intent largely by articulating why rehabilitation was *not* enough. Two participants cited education as a human right as an alternative rationale. The vice president for academic affairs explained: “... linking it to

rehabilitation is limiting...It's not the only reason why we offer college prep programs and degree programs to incarcerated women... everyone has the right to education regardless of their life condition.” Similarly, the program director shared: “You know, I just don't like the word rehabilitation either. I understand why it's there, but I don't care for it. I would say [Acacia] believes that education is a human right, which is why.” In both quotes, the participants do not dismiss rehabilitation entirely but reposition it as a background feature. These sentiments were echoed by the executive director of academic operations who believed that the program, and education in and of itself, had to be about more than rehabilitating a person. In this instance, among others, she centered equity as a driver for the work she does and how she believed the program also might use equity as a guiding lens:

The mission should be more than rehabilitation. I think it should just straight out say equity, period. Like I'm not doing this just to rehabilitate someone. I mean education is more than that... If we move away from the very basic rehabilitative talk and focus more on education as a form of providing and sustaining equity, we can make it into a world model for education as well.

This administrator self-identified as an international and first-generation college student and regularly referenced her own lived experiences as an underrepresented and marginalized student as the impetus for her working in higher education with an eye toward equity. She expressed a belief that her “purpose in education” was to open doors for others and to ensure that students knew their “stories mattered” in the context of the larger institution and its priorities. Having spent her career in public facing and equity-focused work, this participant represents an example of civic professionalism or someone



who chooses to work in service to a greater good. This participant affirms my use of civic professionalism as a lens to better understand some (although not all) of the individuals administering prison education programs.

Finally, the department chair and faculty advisor likened rehabilitation to assimilation and therefore it was not an idea that she recognized in relation to why she or her fellow faculty engaged in the prison education program:

I see [rehabilitation] as an assimilationist kind of ethos, which is totally to be expected in our culture and within our institutions. It's not like a big surprise or anything...So there's some kind of just critique of education full stop...So that bothers me sometimes....I can't think of a single faculty member who's involved at Acacia, whose main concern would be rehabilitation.

The faculty member expressed that for the purposes of fundraising and conveying the program's work externally, that word might be used in institutional narratives. However, with respect to her own intent she shared: "[I'm] Not teaching to assimilate folks. I'm teaching those who are coming to [Acacia] because I think what they've endured is highly unjust." In her reflections, she draws on broader structural forces that she believes the program is intended to counteract. This will be discussed in further detail with theme three of this case. In summary, while the participants at Acacia College did not wholly reject rehabilitation, they were reluctant to embrace it as the basis of their program. Instead they presented more philosophical intentions including providing education as an invaluable human right, education as means to promote equity, and education as a corrective measure for injustice.

## ***Theme 2 – Preserving Education Quality and Generating “Intellectual Passion.”***

Participants who had been involved with the program since the beginning were intentional about maintaining the academic rigor and “richness” of the experience for their students.

This maintenance presented itself in a few ways: (1.) prioritizing in-person teaching and learning; (2.) careful hiring of instructors; and (3.) bridging the outside to the inside.

Running a quality program was central to empowering the women in terms of how they viewed themselves but it also enabled them to develop what the director called

“intellectual passion” or a love for learning. I offer examples below on how these actions to ensure program quality were tied to cultivating students’ experience and ideally, their

intellectual passion. With regard to in-person teaching and learning, one participant shared:

I think at the core of our philosophy is these women need the same kind of in-person in-classroom engagement with faculty, [and] with each other, right? ... from the perspective [of having] taught there: to understand how these women feel when they're treated as students and they're in a classroom and they're treated as intellectuals, they're not a number, that is probably just as important as whatever the topics that they're learning in the classroom is.

These in-person interactions provided an environment for students to engage each other and their faculty purely as students – a deviation from their socialization in prison as inmates. In turn, this made them feel valued and helped them to see themselves as contributors to the intellectual space. The director shared this perspective: “We really believe in in-person [learning] and that what happens in the classroom is important.”

These reflections speak to a special classroom dynamic that was compromised during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, it was during the pandemic that the program doubled down on the importance of maintaining in-person teaching as its primary modality within the prisons. For the first time, the sites were equipped with WebEx for virtual classes but they are used very sparingly (e.g., if a faculty member is sick and must teach remotely).

With regard to careful hiring practices, the director shared that often well-intentioned people showed up to volunteer as teachers: “they assume that the program is needy and that we have our hats in our hand looking for teachers and I have to say no, a lot.” She was adamant that all instructors hold a Master’s degree or higher and have experience teaching at the college level. Not only did she look to hire instructors with relevant academic credentials but she also looked for instructors who would bring a certain level of respect for the teaching and learning experience and for the students:

You just want them not to think that this is, ‘Oh, the poor women. Let’s go give them a degree.’ Instead, you want them to come in and say let’s share, let’s have a learning experience, let’s keep that bar high because [the students] don’t want to be condescended to.

This view on hiring was not limited to instructors. When speaking about her own role and an eventual successor, the director said it “first and foremost [had to be] an academic...It’s got to be somebody who respects learning, not just the practicality of a degree but the learning process.” Part of what she was speaking to is the co-curricular support that enhances the learning experience, which brings us to the idea of bridging the outside to the inside.

Bridging the campus communities – incarcerated and non-incarcerated – was a core facet of this prison education program and is part of the College’s strategic plan (see Pattern 4). The plainest example of this is their choice to offer the same curriculum inside the prison that was offered on the main campus for the same major. Another example of this occurring is the annual academic conference at the women’s maximum security prison, which is a day-long convening where all students and faculty have an opportunity to come together to present academic and creative works. It was in this context that the director said students “learn intellectual passion. And also, they learn that they’re holding their own. It’s very confidence building.”

Students who were released from prison and continued taking courses also had similarly affirming experiences when they enrolled in combined classes (with neighboring colleges). Combined classes were often taught by faculty from other schools and included traditional students from other schools, which meant that this space would likely be the first time these students are taking college classes outside of the Acacia prison education context. The director stated that up “until then, they only have our word for it really that they’re getting a quality education” but once they are in the room with outside peers and instructors, they are able to see for themselves:

They can hold their own with very privileged students like from [other private liberal arts college nearby] or something. What we’re teaching them and what they’re learning and teaching themselves to an extent matters and is important and that they can be part of this larger conversation.

Importantly, bridging the outside to the inside was not just about exposing incarcerated students to facets of higher education they would otherwise not experience. It was also

about inviting main campus constituents to engage in the prison education program for their own education and development. All participants believed that the main campus constituents who did engage felt a “commitment and a connection” to the program and some believed it to be life changing in terms of their world view. When asked if there was anything she would like to share that had not been discussed, one participant stated:

I've grown a lot... Really, I'm the one who's learning so much. And I'm really extraordinarily thankful for the students who have given me their time and their experiences and the opportunity to learn about their lives. So I am just really grateful for that.

Bridging the outside to the inside benefited individuals on both ends of the metaphorical bridge. This will be explored further in Pattern 5.

In summary, one clear intention among those administering this program was to preserve its education quality and, in tandem, generate intellectual passion among its students. There were three distinct ways that this came up in interviews: (1.) prioritizing in-person teaching and learning; (2.) careful hiring of instructors; and (3.) bridging the outside to the inside. Maintaining academic rigor and a rich experience for students seemed to be the foundation for building students' confidence as intellectuals and their ability to develop a love for learning – or intellectual passion. Being held to the same standards as their main campus peers was confidence building and allowed the women to view themselves in a positive new light.

***Theme 3 – “A Way to Kind of Make Things Right.”*** In addition to the intentions expressed above, a common thread throughout the materials and interviews was a shared belief that the prison education program was the “right thing” for the College to be doing.

This was based on participants' individual beliefs but also rooted in the institutional mission. In general, these sentiments were often tied to moral and ethical justifications. To help parse through reasons why higher education institutions might engage in such partnerships, I incorporated ethical pluralism into my conceptual framework which articulates seven "duties<sup>10</sup>" that are more accurately described as moral considerations. Of the seven, two became prominent in discussions on program intent: justice and reparations. Justice – in the context of ethical pluralism – speaks to attempts at distributing resources fairly. Reparations speaks to repairing or correcting wrongs that have been done. I do not suggest that justice and reparations have always been the intentions nor do I suggest that these are the primary intentions of the program and its leaders. Instead, I put forward these two components, as part of a framework, that presented themselves in multiple ways to help offer insight into moral considerations of the program.

At Acacia College, social justice is an institution-wide priority and framework for the work they do. This holds true in the prison education program, which is characterized as an extension of the main campus. As a result, some of the views expressed in relation to social justice also reflect the Justice component of ethical pluralism. Moreover, participants talked about their social justice efforts in the context of the U.S. legal system<sup>11</sup>. One participant shared that part of their responsibility was in:

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<sup>10</sup> fidelity, reparations, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, non-maleficence (Shafer-Landau, 2009)

<sup>11</sup> In keeping with best practices on intentional language use, I refer to what is widely known as the criminal justice system as the legal system. This naming acknowledges that the system is not inherently just or designed for justice-oriented outcomes.

...understanding just the way the system is now: higher rates of incarceration for longer periods of time for people of color...you have to deal with the [legal] system and make sure that you don't kind of ignore that whole area and just say 'we're just going to help you but we don't really care how you got there, or why you're there for that long.

This participant believed it was necessary for the program leaders to have some fundamental knowledge of bias and inequality in the legal system and that they be prepared to hold relevant conversations amongst themselves and with others. Put differently, she expected mass incarceration to be acknowledged as a shared social problem or at least as part of the context in which they were administering the program. Another participant mentioned the legal system with an explicit focus on fairness, or lack thereof: "It's about changing unfair systems of penalization, right? I think [we are] way more focused on what laws are unjust, and how those laws are unjustly enforced." In her view, the program intended to directly counter some of the inequality of the legal system by providing quality education – or distributing resources – to people who probably did not have access to the begin with. She was sympathetic to incarcerated students and familiar with the various social forces that leads one to incarceration as a result of her own experiences growing up in a poor rural town: "I knew about structural inequality just from life experience. And that you get into situations sometimes that you don't intend, right? And it has devastating consequences on your families and your community." Here, she acknowledges structural inequality that can lead to encounters with the legal system, which would likely yield unfair or unjust outcomes for poor people and people of color. Her commitment to the prison education program was her way of working against an unjust

system by providing resources to people who had endured these circumstances. The program director echoed some of these sentiments but without naming the legal system explicitly:

[We are] providing education to people who might not have had that opportunity.

People who land in [prison institution], they'll write me and say... 'I've waited all my life to go to college'. I'm thinking and you had to come to prison to go to college.

What does that say? So yes, yes, I think that it definitely has to do with social justice.

These excerpts convey the program's intent to acknowledge and to be responsive to the broader legal system that their students had to navigate. They also reflect the idea of justice in a sense that they are attempting a fairer distribution of resources, even if only on a small scale. The presence of injustice implies that an individual or a group has been wronged and as a result, some action(s) needs to take place to correct the injustice. This brings us to the idea of reparations, which presented as an embedded, but much less fleshed out, partner alongside their social justice mission.

With respect to reparations, or repairing past wrongs, this component came through in the institution's inclusivity statement as well as in participant interviews. The College makes clear that they are aware of their contributions to social inequality and their hope to prevent that reality in the future. Part of their statement reads: "We recognize the regrettable role that higher education has played in reinforcing inequality in our society, and we believe that our College has a special responsibility to prevent those same inequalities from being perpetuated in our campus community..." This acknowledgement highlights another unfair system, in addition the U.S. legal system, that compounds the very inequality they now aim to prevent. Past and current exclusionary practices of higher



education admissions (see Chapter II) are part of why such social inequality is a prominent reality. Taken together – the unfair legal system and exclusion of admissions in higher education – one way Acacia College might take a reparative measure is through the very existence of their prison education program made up of students who were unlikely to attend college based on their social circumstances. Further, the program is open admissions as long as the applicant has a high school diploma or GED. The director shared how she explains this to prospective students: “We do give them placement exams. And I explain very carefully ‘they’re not entrance, they’re placement. You’re in. If you don’t pass, we have pre-college. Get your skills up.’ So we don’t turn anybody away. And I think that’s really important.” This conveys a very intentional manner of being inclusive in a context that has been traditionally exclusive and outright discriminatory toward women, low-income people, and people of color. While participants did not use the word reparations, their responsiveness to injustice serves as an explicit example of what reparations might look like. One participant summed up their intent from her perspective concisely: “This [program] is kind of a way to make things right” alluding to the need for some reparative action. Overall, the institutional documents and participant perspectives deliver on themes of fairness, justice, and righting wrongs. Moreover, these do not translate as abstract ideals but come through in practical ways which might be attributed to the institution level support for the program and the program’s alignment with the institutional mission.

### **Describing Function**

***Theme 4 – Institutional Commitment in Mission and Practice.*** Part of this study looked to gather a better understanding of how prison education programs existed in relation to their campus context as well as external entities. In this case, Acacia College

showed a tremendous amount of commitment to the program and the program's long-standing operation gave the institution's social justice mission some legitimacy. There was a genuine synergy between the institution's priorities and the program's practical efforts. One place where this was evidenced was in the 2022-2024 academic strategic plan. The plan presented nine strategies to strengthen the academic enterprise – one of which was devoted to connecting the prison education program with the main campus more deeply. Specific taskings included:

- Examin[ing] the relations among mass incarceration and higher education, particularly as it pertains to [Acacia College].
- Increas[ing] the inclusion of [incarcerated] students in annual traditions based at [the main campus].
- Increas[ing] opportunities for trans-disciplinary collaboration between [incarcerated] students at and [students on the main] campus, including course links and co-curricular programming.
- Build[ing] partnerships with organizations in New York City that engage justice-impacted individuals.

These tasks convey the institution's investment in the program and offers complementarity between its core academic operation and its social justice mission. It echoes the earlier theme of "bridging the outside to the inside" while also aiming to expand their engagement with other organizations to enhance their existing knowledge and capacity.

Another way to consider this institutional support might be through the lens of the *engaged institution*, which speaks to an institution's ability to cultivate relationships with external partners and the extent to which that engagement becomes an embedded part of

the institution's fabric. Holland (1997) proposes eight components<sup>12</sup> to assess an institution's commitment to engagement and all of these components showed high relevance or full integration to the prison education program's operation at Acacia College. Among these, two were recurring themes in interviews: faculty involvement and promotion/tenure/hiring. These two themes were interlocked: faculty members were deeply embedded in the program since its origins and part of what made that a sustainable reality is the institution's decision to treat teaching in the prison the same as they treated teaching on the main campus with respect to course load and consideration during promotion and tenure reviews. The Vice President for Academic Affairs discussed how this was an intentional decision:

It was a marginalized thing and we've done a lot of work over the years to make it much more of a real living part of our community. Many more faculty teach there than ever have before... I think one of the reasons why more faculty have got involved in teaching is teaching there did not count as part of your regular course load here...that was a structural change that was important and necessary. So that is how in a very literal way, teaching there counts in the same way as teaching here. But then beyond that, in terms of your teaching portfolio, your service portfolio, right? Any work that's done in relation to the prison program would count just as any other service in the college.

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<sup>12</sup> mission, leadership, promotion/tenure/hiring, organization structure, student involvement & curriculum, faculty involvement, community involvement, and external communication & fundraising

Another participant echoed the importance of this when asked what she thought was a core attribute of their program:

... that faculty can be released from a [main campus] course to teach at [prison partner site 1] and [prison partner site 2]. I think that's really generous and great of the College. Our community is small enough to support us. We have faculty across departments. It's definitely not just politics and human rights or the sociologists. It's many, many more.

This comment conveys how valuing faculty's teaching and service in the prison education program enabled greater participation among faculty across academic departments. It also acknowledges that this kind of institutional support may in part be due to the small size of the organization or fewer degrees of separation between senior administrative leaders and those engaged in the program. Moreover, participants credited their fellow faculty and the College for bringing them into the fold of the prison education program, which they did not seek out on their own. These accounts underscore the program's embeddedness to the institution:

I was not familiar with prison education programs prior to being at [Acacia]...And so my interest in the program very much came about by being a faculty member at [Acacia]...I would really credit [Acacia] and their kind of advocacy for the program as the source of my interest in it, and working with the students directly.

I didn't know when I first actually went to [Acacia]...I didn't go there knowing that they had this program or that I would work in any way with it at the time. I was definitely interested to know more once I got there. So, from the very beginning, I

was kind of in the loop as to how the program is running [and] how it's expanding. I definitely got a chance to go to [prison partner site 1] and [prison partner site 2] at least a few times. So I guess yeah I'm glad that I did have that access and that experience.

What got me hooked into the program initially is [the academic] conference [at prison partner site 1]. I'd say the seeds were planted by faculty interest...So it was not something that was intentional from the leadership down, it was something that happened as faculty became more connected and looked for ways of continuing to grow those connections.

Overall, participants expressed that by way of institutional backing, faculty members were key leaders and drivers of this program. In addition, the institution's commitment to the prison education program made it likely that members of the College community would directly or indirectly be exposed to the program and that their participation would be encouraged. In summary, Acacia demonstrated commitment to the program at the highest levels - through their institution's social justice mission and academic strategic plan - and in a practical manner that made it possible for faculty involvement in meaningful and sustainable ways. The patterns discussed thus far are useful for gaining a sense of how individuals understand the program they help run and what this program means to the broader institution. Pattern 5 provides insight into what this program means to those who are less directly involved.

***Theme 5 - "A good college program has a ripple effect."*** All participants shared a belief that the program had a wide reach and benefited people who were not necessarily

involved in the program. The two groups that were commonly identified included others at the prison partner sites and the children of the incarcerated students. The director shared that being a part of the program disincentivized negative behavior among enrolled students and others as well. In turn, the prison staff had a positive orientation toward the program:

The DOCCS personnel...they've been incredibly supportive of the program. They want it. They want the college programs. They want them very much in the facilities. They know it works. They also know that a good college program, a strong one, has a ripple effect on the rest of the general population.

Another participant shared that enrolled students become “model” citizens within the prison partner sites and through that collective identity, they have a positive ripple effect on the culture of their community:

They are models within [prison partner site 1]. They become leaders. They're impacting their...community inside. Other [incarcerated women] aspire to the program, right? So in terms of constituents and who's being impacted by what we do, the fact that we are running a program that has an impact on not just our students in [prison partner site 1] but all of that entire community, right? And not just all the incarcerated people, the guards, the administration...

Through their student status, the incarcerated students were able to have a positive influence among other incarcerated people in the general population. This was so clear to participants and prison personnel that they came to view them as leaders amongst their peers.

The program leaders also believed that the program had a way of bolstering parental legitimacy and strengthening ties between parents and their children. One participant shared that receiving their bachelor's degree was "a way for [mothers] to actually like make a living and legitimize themselves as a parent when they leave." This participant implied that holding an academic credential put these women on better footing as parents perhaps through the lens of officials who might make decisions about custody and parole. The degree was viewed as "something to offer their families right away" and therefore had social implications for their lives. Another participant shared how she witnessed parents bonding with their children through the shared experience of being students, albeit in very different contexts:

They will talk about talking with their children about math on the phone. Suddenly they're sharing being students together. Or they'll talk about a story they've read or something. Or they'll gripe about a teacher together! [laughter] It enriches the relationship they have with their children when they talk about school. And also, they now know their children could go to college and should go to college, so I think that the children are definitely beneficiaries.

In addition to bonding, this quote points to the academic aspirations and expectations of the children being raised as a result of the parent's college going experience. In summary, the "ripple effects" reach into the social contexts of the prison partners sites by influencing positive behavior and into the familial context of the students' lives by strengthening the parent-child relationship.

## **Describing Relevant External Factors in the Current Context**

In response to what, if any, external contexts of social problems might have influenced the program's operation, two distinct but related events were raised during interviews: the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, commonly referred to as the 1994 Crime Bill and the Second Chance Pell Experimental Site Initiative (SCPESI). The 1994 Crime Bill was acknowledged as part of the program's origins and motivation for existence. One repercussion of the Bill was the removal of eligibility for Pell Grants among incarcerated individuals. Prior to the Bill, Acacia College was part of consortium that offered courses to incarcerated students but at the time, they did not offer degrees. With the elimination of Pell funding, the consortium dissolved but Acacia faculty and administration worked to establish new degree granting programs through other funding sources.

After 25 years of successfully operating without government support, Acacia College was one of 67 higher education institutions selected to participate in the Second Chance Pell Experimental Site Initiative for the 2016-2017 award year making it possible for 98 incarcerated students to utilize Pell grants for the academic year. The SCPESI has continued and its extension made it possible for Acacia College to reallocate operating funds and redirect some of their efforts toward supporting reentry for women who wish to continue their education on the main campus. While women only make up 7% of the prison population, a summary report in the fourth year of this experiment found that 12% of SCPESI funds were designated for women showing promising utilization rates among a minoritized demographic (Chesnut and Wachendorfer, 2021). The exact data was



unavailable at the time of this publication but Acacia College is one of few institutions employing the SCPESI to assist in offering degrees in women's prison facilities.

## Case II: Maple University

### *The Institution*

The second higher education-in-prison program case is based at Maple University, a large research-active private university in western New York. This comprehensive university has a student population of about 12,000 of which  $\frac{3}{4}$  are undergraduates and a student-to-faculty ratio of 9:1. A report by the Center for Governmental Research named Maple University the largest employer in its region and the seventh largest employer in New York State offering insight into the social and economic prominence of the University with its community (2021). As of 2020, Maple University was designated as part of the Carnegie Foundation's Elective Classification for Community Engagement – a way for colleges and universities in the US to be formally recognized for institutionalizing community engagement with respect to curriculum, outreach, and partnerships.

The mission of Maple University is concise: “Learn, discover, heal, create – and make the world ever better.” The enactment of this mission is rooted in their values-driven motto: *Meliora* – a Latin adjective meaning “for the pursuit of the better” or “ever better.” The word has been translated into an acronym by the University to further explicate its embedded values: meliora, equity, leadership, integrity, openness, respect, and accountability. The institution pairs these values with a vision of itself continuing to “frame and solve the greatest challenges of our future” and as an institution that is “inclusive, equitable, sustainable, and [a] responsive organization at every level.” In Chapter II, I put

forward three classifications<sup>13</sup> for civically engaged institutions. Given its espoused mission, values, and elective classification for community engagement, Maple University represents an institution with an explicit civic mission and a formal community engagement designation from the Carnegie Commission. It is the only case in this study that fits this classification. There are 10 state and federal prisons within a 90-minute drive from Maple University's main campus providing ample opportunity for university-prison partnerships.

### ***The Program***

The prison education program at Maple University represents a young but voracious program working to establish its reputation and impact at the University and in the broader community surrounding its campus. Initiated by a tenured faculty member and now program director, Maple University's prison education program started in 2015 through seed funding from the University and two modest grants from external foundations. The program began teaching college courses in five neighboring prisons. By 2020, the program received a \$1 million grant from the Mellon Foundation and formalized a partnership with a neighboring community college to offer associate's degrees in two nearby prison facilities. In this case, Maple University facilitates the logistics and delivery of academic programming, ensures credits earned are transferrable, and the community college grants an Associate of Science (A.S.) in Liberal Arts to students who complete the degree requirements. At the time of this study, the program was also in the process of

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<sup>13</sup>(1) explicit civic mission and a formal community engagement designation from the Carnegie Commission; (2) explicit civic mission without a formal designation; and (3) an implicit civic mission.

building an infrastructure that would enable bachelor's degree offerings at one of its two sites. Maple University would be the degree granting institution for the eventual bachelor's degree. Regarding the importance and value of a bachelor's degree offering, the found stated, "Offering a bachelor's degree to a highly motivated, qualified, and committed group of students will place [Maple] University among the vanguard of higher education in prison." In 2022, the Mellon Foundation renewed its support for the program with a three year, \$1 million grant and remains the program's primary source of funding. The continuation of the grant will allow the program to expand to a possible third prison site and realize its goal for a new bachelor's degree offering at one of its sites.

The program is administered by seven positions, which are mostly held by people with multiple roles at the institution. For example, the director of the program is also a tenured faculty member and interim department chair. Other roles included: an assistant director of community outreach , an assistant director of programming, a director of regional initiatives, a faculty coordinator, a faculty director of campus and community engagement, and a program assistant. As leader of the program, the director shared that his role was "to include, entrust, and empower" his team to do their work and his responsibility would be to ensure it gets funding and institutional support. The program had an established culture of collective decision making, shared ownership, and was described as a "flat organization." In terms of ethos, one assistant director described the program and its staff this way: "We truly believe in serving incarcerated individuals as a matter of justice. We're a particularly abolitionist-minded program. I think a lot of programs are not necessarily as driven by abolitionist politics as we are." This was a consistent take across interviews as some participants "envision[ed] a world without

prisons” and felt that their work was to contribute to making the need for college-in-prison programs “obsolete.” The director believed that this program, and others like it, served as one of many ways to “whittle away at the distance and dehumanization on which mass incarceration depends.” In this case, the program views itself as a direct response to mass incarceration, which I characterize in Chapter I as the extreme rates of imprisonment of already disadvantaged people in the United States.

The hallmark of the program is its Justice Scholars program, designed to provide opportunities for formerly incarcerated people to continue their education at the program’s home institution or another area college or university. The program recruits new cohorts each year and any formerly incarcerated individual who has completed an associate’s degree is eligible for consideration. In collaboration with other academic institutions, the program takes an individualized approach with each scholar to map out a pathway toward their degree on a part-time or full-time basis. To support the scholar’s academic progress, the program provides free laptops, dedicated on-campus work space, coordinates resources like work-study or other employment, technology training, transportation, and provides a \$2,000 stipend each semester to support expenses related to continuing their education. These stipends were made possible by a generous local resident who wanted to make a donation that would benefit formerly incarcerated individuals. The Justice Scholars program conveys the program’s commitment to its local community as it actively engages the justice-involved population to include them in the university community facilitating a local prison-to-college pipeline. Further, the program views this work as “model[ing] the impact a Research I university can have in its community with respect to prison education, post-prison education, and decarceration

work” in hyper-incarcerated communities. The assistant director of community outreach shared her wishes for the scholars to eventually become mentors to those who come into the program after them.

To help answer my research questions, I interviewed five participants across the University. These participants included: the associate dean of arts, sciences, and engineering (Sam); an associate professor in of religion and founding director of the prison education program (Al); an associate professor of anthropology and faculty director of campus and community engagement for the prison education program (Tina); the assistant director of programming (James); and the assistant director of community outreach and engagement (Whitney). What follows is a set of patterns that resulted from these interviews as well as institutional documents and relevant source materials.

### ***Within Case Themes in Response to Research Questions***

#### **Describing Intent**

This prison education program’s intent is expressed in two broad ways: (1.) make higher education opportunities available to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals and (2.) champion social, economic, and education justice at Maple University and in its surrounding community. In its eight years of operation, the program has accomplished objectively challenging milestones including securing more than \$2 million in external funding and teaching more than 40 credit bearing courses to 150 students in 4 correctional facilities. However, because it was still a very young program, the program’s administration believed that they still needed to make big strides if the program were to eventually become institutionalized. This meant that in addition to their externally focused intentions, a lot of their strategic energy was spent with the intent to establish the program

as an embedded part of the university. The faculty director of campus and community engagement reflected on the speed of their work:

I would say that my colleagues, we dream big in the sense of building it...I mean, ambitious in terms of like [we] wanted to do a lot and build fast. And, if anything, sometimes I worry that we're building too fast...I want us to do it right. I know we all wanna do it right.

Her sentiments convey the program's momentum, collective sense of pride, but also its cautiousness. The assistant director of programming expressed a similar awareness and characterized his day-to-day work as "building the bus as we're driving it." Both the speed and the success of the program was attributed to its founding director and his ability to navigate the institution's bureaucracy and leverage resources. His prowess was characterized in two ways: institution building and hustling.

***Theme 1 - "Institution Building" and "Hustling" to Leverage Power.*** According to participants, institution building by definition meant building enduring structures of power - by way of leveraging resources and relationships - that would strengthen the program's work and eventually make the work of the program essential to the operation of the university. More specifically, the director was compelled "to leverage university resources toward justice" which complemented one of the university's five priorities to have intentional "community engagement for racial and social justice." In spite of this high level alignment, the director and others described his approach to institutional building as a hustle in part because it involved unrelenting engagement to maintain momentum and also because it was secondary to his primary role as a faculty member. The associate dean of

arts, sciences, and engineering, who was viewed as both an ally and a gatekeeper, experienced it this way:

[The director] deserves a lot of credit for pushing this and putting it front and center as a priority for people...harassing me is a part of his job...to get me to be responsive, but you know, I think he's masterful at kind of keeping this on the front burner. And he deserves a lot of credit for that because we do get pulled many ways.

This relationship is one of many that has been leveraged to overcome bureaucratic hurdles and implement nontraditional operations, like tuition waivers for incarcerated students. The director described this particular administrator as “a good person, like he cares. And he tries to use his power [for good].” The administrator found value in this working relationship since he believed much of his time was otherwise spent on “spreadsheets, policy issues, or people’s complaints” but this gave him an opportunity to have more of an impact on the university and the broader community.

If the program was to become deeply implicated with the institution, the faculty director believed it was everyone’s responsibility to “institutionalize connections through individuals on campus” or identify friendly allies who were also in a position of authority or on a trajectory to be in authority. This also held true for the assistant director of programming whose role was more like deputy director, which required him to engage in some of the politicking. He shared that one skill he developed was “figuring out the levers of power, [which] requires a sort of slipperiness and flexibility to figure out where you need to bend and where you need to hold firm.” The director shared an example of his institution building or hustling efforts that conveyed his desire for legitimization in a way that would likely make their operation run more smoothly in a practical sense:



I've actually been trying to get [the dean's] attention and push her so that she would see me, see us as an administrative structure. Rather than, as like free floating and extraneous...with the primary motivation to make an honest department. Make an honest program out of us so that we can have like a proper departmental budget. Being established in this way would allow for more seamless transactions with campus partners (e.g., bursar, registrar, advising) and enable the program to be part of the institution's operating budget. There were also externally focused institution building efforts. While these also carried practical realities, these had more reputational and symbolic weight in terms of the program and university's ability to successfully engage and show commitment to the community. For example, the faculty director of campus and community engagement referenced a "spirit of collaborative institution building with other area colleges" – this work is reflected in the earlier description of the Justice Scholars program. The university administration was aware of the director's intention to expand to as many correctional facilities as possible and therefore anticipated growth of the program. This growth would be an intentional "part of the footprint of university but extended" instead of a satellite operation. His take on scalability and reach was that "the more representation you have, the more institutions you have, the more buy-in you have, the more you can do."

The director considered himself "privileged" with regard to his work and said that he would have hustled to do this work even in the absence of university level support. From an organizational standpoint, that privilege might be tied to his status as a tenured faculty member (versus a purely administrative director) and that is what enabled his hustle – and willingness to throw what he described as a "tantrum" – for institutional

support for the program. The assistant director of programming shared his take on the director's positionality:

He has a lot of freedom to move about the institution and like hustle. And be sort of a mover and shaker kind of person because he has job security. He has a sense of institutional stability that he worked really hard to get... If the Deans aren't supporting our program to the extent that they need to be he just tells them to their face. [He] has the freedom to piss off people. I don't think he does but I think that he pushes the limits in ways that he can because of his position.

While participants characterized their institution building work as leveraging the power and resources around them, this quote conveys that the director is actually leveraging his own power and status to build more on behalf of his program. When asked how he might gauge the program's success with institution building, the director stated: "I guess the dream of any institution building project is that it ceases to become legible as anything other than like what this institution does. Right? That it just becomes an essential operation of the institution." While I present the above as one pattern, the hustle ethos is present throughout the other patterns and every facet of the program. Understandably so, the director and his team are capitalizing on their current moment to build meaningful foundations on campus and beyond.

### **Describing Function**

*Theme 2 - "Like a Vessel" for the University's Mission.* All participants believed the program was in alignment with the institution's broader mission and values and that their program was one way for the university to exhibit those values. As discussed earlier, Maple University was formally designated as part of the Carnegie Foundation's Elective

Classification for Community Engagement. Because of its explicit mission and orientation toward community, the higher education-in-prison program was able to inextricably link its work with the University's mission:

As a Research I university with a mission of making the world Ever Better, [Maple University] is an institution that embraces its commitments to the region around it. That region includes the nine state and federal correctional institutions located within a ninety-minute drive of the University's [main campus]. We pursue [our program] goals with an eye toward transformative social change, and we hope that our work can contribute toward the decarceration of our campuses, our city, and our region.

Importantly, this language is published on the program's website implying institutional support and buy in. It also incorporates accountability for the university to deliver on its stated mission. In addition to the institution's values and motto discussed earlier, the University has a dedicated Office of Equity and Inclusion dating back to at least 2007 when it published its first annual report on diversity and inclusion. This office framed the drivers of their work around five institutional priorities:

- Developing and sustaining an infrastructure to support equity, diversity, and inclusion;
- Enhancing the recruitment and retention of representational diversity of faculty, staff, and students;
- Cultivating an inclusive climate, culture, and university community;
- Weaving diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the University's mission to learn, discover, heal, and create; and

- Community engagement for racial and social justice

Presumably through the efforts of this office, the university has received external recognition for being an exemplar on diversity and inclusion efforts. For two years in a row (2020-2021), Maple University received the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from *INSIGHT Into Diversity* magazine, the oldest and largest diversity-focused publication in higher education. To date, this is the only national award that “measures an institution’s level of achievement and intensity of commitment” to diversity and inclusion initiatives including community outreach; student recruitment, retention, and completions; and hiring practices for faculty and staff. The program director expressed concern that Deans and other institutional leaders might view the program’s work through a “diversity framework” in terms of how they might nest it with broader institutional priorities. Their perspective was that enrolling formerly incarcerated students would enhance the diversity of the student body. This was an oversimplification and perhaps mischaracterization of the program’s purpose and intent, which was not focused on enhancing aspects of the university itself but instead positioning the university to be a contributor to improving the community. The assistant director for programming echoed this concern but signaled that they could leverage that perspective:

Universities know which way the winds are blowing in our culture and the broader social discourse. Institutions talk a big game and have set up entire offices around diversity, equity, access, and inclusion...there's a shared understanding at the university level that they have to put money where their mouth is - stuff has to happen, things on the ground, tangible things have to happen that demonstrate that value. I think that we've done a pretty good job at positioning ourselves as a good

way for the university to demonstrate that commitment. So we just sort of play into that.

Here, the assistant director references broader social movements that can influence the institution's priorities but also hold them accountable for taking action on campus and in the community. Further, he implies that while the program does not view itself as a diversity initiative, he is tolerant of this framing since it can work to their advantage. More specifically he believes the program enables the institution to follow through on its commitment to community: "our program is like a vessel to accomplish that part of its mission." At the school level – where the program is housed – the Dean provided her take on the program's institutional value: "By serving one of our society's most marginalized communities— and helping them to be a part of our learning experience and associated opportunities as well, [the program] is vital to the University's mission to make the world ever better." Consistent with the program's framing of itself, the dean maps the program's work and value onto the broader institutional mission and reinforces its external focus to serve the community. The associate dean shared his view on the program's value at the institution but also at the school level:

It's certainly really important to the university's mission and [the school's] mission to have community outreach and to provide some sort of positive change. And typically that's thought about as in the [neighborhood] community...It's a good kind of reminder to the Dean's office not to be too siloed in our administrative silliness each day.

Once again, he's expressing his appreciation of being involved in work that is making a broader impact beyond the school that he's, in part, responsible for leading. While these

takeaways demonstrate strong alignment between the program, its school, and the university mission, there were two specific tensions highlighted by participants that seemed to chip away at the seemingly unifying mission. The first was a misinterpretation of the work itself. The director and faculty director of campus and community engagement shared that they had heard from fellow faculty members about their program being the “do-good-thing” and drawing a false equivalence to the program’s work with volunteering. They had been openly called “Do Gooders” and jokingly referred to themselves as such. The faculty director recounted another faculty member’s take on her work: “I volunteer at my church and you teach [in prison],’ you know what I mean? And they see those things as parallel. So I think there's still work to be done for it to really be integrated.” This beckons back to the program’s desire to be more institutionalized and in turn better understood across campus communities. The director stated that from the beginning of his time teaching in prisons, he believed it to be “labor and it should be compensated like labor.” This take introduces structure to the work and with that, something to be considered on par with other academic labor that would be essential to any university operation.

The second tension was institutional funding or lack thereof. There is no operational budget from the University to support the program in spite of the leadership’s general support. This seemed to be a pressure point among program participants who could not make sense of why a program that was aligned with university and school level priorities could not rely on institutional funding to some extent. When asked about her perspective on support from the university, the assistant director of community outreach and engagement said, “I don't have any disillusion about the University providing resources. I think [the program] will provide the resources and the university will say, ‘okay, we got

you.” The assistant director is acknowledging that the university support may be genuine but it is mostly symbolic. An administrative perspective helps to ground the practical decision making behind why this might be the case. The associate dean shared the tension around supporting one great initiative means not supporting another one: “There are lots of priorities, always. Nobody will say that the prison program is a bad thing here. The question is really, there's like always 25 wonderful things, so which one makes it to the top right?” Put simply, financial resources are limited and the amount of work worth funding only continues to grow. Therefore, it is a tough reality to accept that there can be organizational mission alignment but budget misalignment. The theoretical question undergirding this study is whether HEPPs are considered as one avenue in which HEIs might enact their civic mission. For this case, the short answer is yes. But what this pattern has also exposed is that the enactment of the civic mission – at Maple University, at least – is not led or implemented at the university level. Instead, initiatives present themselves in a way that may align neatly with the broad priorities and values and inadvertently reinforce the institution’s espoused mission.

***Theme 3 – “Decarceration” as a Framework for “Enrich[ing] human connection.”***

The prison education program at Maple University was deeply attuned to its local community and its capacity to improve opportunities and outcomes for residents in the community. When the director described how he viewed his work in the program, he stated: “I think decarcerate is the framework I would use. So thinking, like, what does that mean to work toward decarceration? It's not an open and shut case that doing college-in-prison is an answer to that question.” Decarceration might best be understood as the opposite of incarceration. The leaders of this program describe it as “reducing or

eliminating dependence on systems, ideologies, and logics that cage and confine [people].” This ideology is borrowed from political activist and scholar Angela Davis who describes decarceration as “a constellation of alternative strategies and institutions, with the ultimate aim of removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society (2003, p. 107).” The above quote from the director surfaces two things. First, he is thinking about his work and the program’s impact at a structural and societal level; and second, he does not believe that higher education-in-prison programs are *the* answer to societal problems like mass incarceration. Appropriately so, he is implying that much more would be required to work toward decarceration. This perspective is important as it centers the need for humanization and opportunities for individuals and positions the academic credential as a mechanism to help do that work but not as a tool to fix the problem entirely. The scalability and human reach of the program matters more to them than the awarding of degrees. This sentiment was shared by the Associate Dean who believed the program functioned in a way that:

...provided opportunity for people. And the institution itself is rewarded by having them present and engaged and bringing that perspective and that background to the place. I think it enriches human connections and reinstates the value of human beings in some way. To me, that’s really important. Obviously, they go out and get jobs and they do other things but it seems predicated on the first part.

Their decarceration framework and human-centered approach meant that the program had to be innovative – offering coursework and degrees in prison was just a starting point. The assistant director of community outreach and engagement shared, “We really want communities, not incarceration. We have to imagine something better for people.” Having



been involved in the legal system herself, she felt it was important not to just “cage” and “erase” people. When reflecting on the function of the program, the assistant director of programming also centered human connection:

I don't think a college degree makes you a better citizen or a better neighbor. I think, having had the input and the trust and support of people who meet you where you're at while you're incarcerated and see you for who you are and believe in you, like that is much bigger than a degree.

The faculty director of campus and community engagement shared that the program's and University's “obligation to [incarcerated students] does not end upon their release from prison.” Here she implied an intentional need to establish relational continuity as part of their institution building efforts.

In terms of their function more broadly, or perhaps how their work might be perceived externally, the assistant director of programming shared:

Part of what we're doing by putting the university's stamp and seal on this is saying this is something that a top 40 research I university does with its resources and money and regional power. So that normalizes it to an extent. So I like that I like the fact that we're just making college-in-prison just be normal.

This echoes the director's earlier take on how the higher education “sector can contribute to decarceration” but also presented a tension with unintentionally giving credibility to prisons institutions. Many participants shared this concern around that was perhaps best encapsulated by the faculty director:

We want these prisons to be shut down. It's like the reformist versus abolitionist tension. It's actually hard to articulate it in a sense that I feel a little bit at odds

institutionalizing something that then buttresses the strength of the institution I don't like.

### **Describing Relevant External Factors in the Current Context**

With respect to whether this program operated in response to a specified context or social problem, the case presented affirmatively in three key ways: proximity to prisons, mission, and external funding. Proximity to prisons was a major piece of context in terms of the program's justifying itself as part of the institutional mission. Given the institution's proximity to numerous state and federal prisons and its mission to make the world "ever better," the program was well positioned to advocate for itself and its community simultaneously. The assistant director of programming shared: "[One prison site] is right in [our] backyard. This is our region, our community, our responsibility as a university... Our operating mindset is that this work is inherently part of the University's mission." As discussed earlier, the program has masterfully interwoven their function with the university's expressed mission. In addition to its commitment to "celebrat[ing] connections to the [local] community, the University prides itself on taking part in the "fram[ing] and solv[ing] [of] the greatest challenges of the future" and promise to "always be an inclusive, equitable, sustainable, and responsive organization at every level." Their choice in language reflects the priorities that undergird their prison education program: making meaningful contributions to the local community and using its resources to be responsive to societal problems, like mass incarceration. The assistant director of community outreach shared that part of why her job was so important to her was that it was "bringing mass incarceration as a topic to our university" and generating more educational awareness among people who were unaware and unimpacted by the legal system.

Finally, external funding played a critical role in the program's ability to operate and accelerate so quickly. More specifically, the Mellon Foundation awarded over \$73.2 million to higher education-in-prison programs since 2015 - \$2 million of that went to Maple University. The Associate Dean speculated that Mellon, among others, expressed aggressive interest to push the reinstatement of Pell, which will ultimately be reinstated after the successful implementation of the Second Chance Pell Experimental Site Initiative (SCPESI). Without the funding from Mellon, the program would not have been able to have the reach and impact that they achieved in such a short period.

### **Case III: Birch College**

#### ***The Institution***

The final case is situated within Birch College, a public liberal arts college that is part of a broader university system including 25 college campuses throughout the region. This university system is recognized as the largest public university in the United States and the first free public institution of higher education. The long-held university-wide mission is to “provide a public first-rate education to all students, regardless of means or background” with the intent to be “a transformative engine of social mobility” for residents within the region. Since more than 80% of their graduates remain within the state, the university system considers itself to be a critical contributor to the region’s economy, cultural life, and workforce. Each year, the university enrolls more than 243,000 students in degree-granting programs and awards roughly 55,000 degrees. Birch College accounts for about 15,000 of these students, most (87%) of which are undergraduates. With more than 1,300 faculty members, the student-to-faculty ratio is about 12:1.

The mission of Birch College expands on the University’s emphasis on inclusivity by conveying its dedication to “educating traditionally underrepresented groups” and stakes its purpose in educating “fierce advocates for justice.” The College offers bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees and holds the theme of justice “at the heart” of all academic programs. Their guiding values in pursuit of advancing justice include: diversity, equity, integrity, justice, learning and scholarship, and respect. The College’s prison education program was housed within one of the school’s research centers. This particular center, in keeping with the institution’s justice-centric mission, focused on providing infrastructures for currently and formerly incarcerated people to access opportunities to pursue higher

education. Importantly, the Center's priority was *not* to develop a strict pathway to Birch College but to connect people with education opportunities across the region. This meant their efforts required coordination and relationship management at their home institution, across the university system, and beyond.

In mission and in practice, the Center complemented the priorities and espoused mission at both the University and College level. One participant, the special projects coordinator, reported directly to the executive director of the Center and worked in collaboration with staff members of the prison education program. Her core responsibility was to identify policies and practices within the university system that created barriers to education and employment opportunities and to then take that knowledge to implement programs and services that would at minimum, reduce those barriers and at best, create pathways to higher education. She explained her perspective of the Center's efforts this way: "Our institutions [of higher education] have excluded students from the dawn of time, since we created like formal structures of education, and this is a way to address that and open up more doors of opportunity." Her statement positions their work as a reparative measure for past inequity within higher education. Taken together, the University's mission, the College's mission, and the Center's efforts present three (of the seven) *prima facie* duties: beneficence, justice, and reparations. These duties help convey why college-in-prison programs are in place. More narrowly, the Center's focus on providing access to higher education for individuals impacted by the legal system made it a valuable site for this study.

At the time of this study, the Center had three distinct paths or "a continuum of services within correctional facilities and in the community that engage[d] with system-

impacted people wherever they are in their academic journey.” One of their paths was designed to support adults (25 years and older) who were considering college but needed to complete their high school equivalency as a first step. This program was made available in the community and did not require past interaction with the legal system.

The second, and largest, path provided formerly incarcerated individuals with academic counseling, peer mentoring, and wraparound support services while applying to college and throughout the duration of their enrollment. Since 2015, this pathway supported nearly 400 students who went on to receive one or more degrees within the state’s university system but also at private institutions in the region. This yielded a strong alumni network that fulfilled peer mentoring needs in the program. Wraparound support services included but were not limited to legal counseling (addressing housing and employment discrimination), writing workshops, community events, and career counseling. One participant considered whether the Center might be doing too much in their attempt to support students across the continuum, “it's impossible for us to be everything to every student and if we do, we're going to burn out. Then we're not going to be able to reach more students.” Another participant shared how she respected the “ambition” of the Center but also her desire for them to be more focused, “Because they do this advocacy work and policy work. Sometimes I would like them to do less and do it better. Or to do fewer things better.” Both participants elude to capacity concerns but also bureaucratic barriers that might be inevitable given their organizational complexity. The third pathway was the higher education-in-prison program, which served as the case for this site.

## ***The Program***

This higher education-in-prison program was established in 2011. It grew out of volunteer work by an English professor who ran writing workshops at a prison. With the full support of the College's president at the time, the program was formalized and designed around re-entry. The academic director characterized it as "start your college inside, [and] continue when you come out." Modeling the program this way was partly influenced by the campus location – they were not in close proximity to many prisons but home to many people returning from prison. The program began by offering full credit-bearing Birch College classes to incarcerated students at a medium security correctional facility about 90 minutes away from its main campus. The program prioritized general education requirements (set at the university level) to ensure that students were accumulating coursework that would eventually fulfill partial degree requirements in any school or program within the university system. As a program modeled around re-entry, they only recently began to consider offering a specific credential as part of the program. This new priority was in part due to students advocating for a degree while inside but also supplemented by the quickly changing landscape of college-in-prison programs where degree offerings were becoming customary.

At the time of this study, the program was piloting its first degree offering in the prison – an Associate's degree in Liberal Arts. Since Birch did not offer two-year degrees, they partnered with a community college in the university system to serve as the degree granting institution. Because of its focus on re-entry, the program did not have reliable data on student matriculation and graduation after release. This was also in part because they did not work directly with students after they were released and therefore they were

unable to track to their enrollment or progress toward degree completion. However this was a priority as described by the program's director: "We're not particularly great at tracking all this work but we're trying to get better at it. We do have students who come home and have very, very successful careers in public, private and nonprofit sectors."

Participants described the program as "tiny" and run on "bare bones" or a "shoestring," which made it hard to focus on anything beyond operational matters. Its first cohort consisted of 14 students and they offered one class per semester. A decade later, the program enrolled about 55 students and offered 7-10 courses each semester. More than 215 students have enrolled in the program since 2011. The academic director attributed the possibility for growth to the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative and pinpointed that as the marker for when "everything changed." Not only did the Initiative generate some funding for tuition, it was also a catalyst for a better connected and strategy oriented group of professionals administering these programs in New York State to collaborate. The newly formed New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison (NYCHEP) was organized in 2015 in response to the possible reinstatement of Pell grants for incarcerated individuals as part of the pilot program. NYCHEP is self-described as a "coalition of administrators, educators, and alumni from more than two dozen higher education institutions and organizations that offer college programming to over 1,400 students in over 30 prisons and jails in New York State." Birch College is one of the proud founding members of this collective. In addition to its complicated structure within its university system, Birch's re-entry model and public orientation meant a multipronged partnership approach for carrying out its work. This will be discussed more in the case theme below.



The program was staffed by three tight knit colleagues including the director (Selena), a coordinator position (which was vacant at the time of interviews), and the faculty/academic director (Vanessa). This group planned and maintained all academic activity happening within the prison site. As students prepared for release, this core group of staff would partner with other colleagues within the research center who they referred to as the academic reentry planning (ARP) team. Given its complex organizational structure, I conducted interviews with members of the core team – including the program director and the faculty/academic director – as well as what I consider to be program affiliates. The program affiliated participants included a special project coordinator of the research center (Stephanie) and a former employee of the program and institute (Lauryn) whose former title was director of statewide educational initiatives (for higher education-in-prison). At the time of interviews, this person had only been gone from their role for about two months. Prior to leaving, they held the role for more than three years and was responsible for hiring and mentoring the current director. What follows is a set of emergent themes about this specific case that are responsive to my research questions. These themes are derived from participant interviews, document analysis, and site observations.

### ***Within Case Themes in Response to Research Questions***

#### **Describing Intent (RQ1)**

***Theme 1: Providing Access to Higher Education Opportunities.*** Consistent with its university and college level missions, the program’s intent was to provide access to higher education opportunities for students in the region who had previously faced barriers to college going. All participants spoke to removing barriers and creating opportunity when

asked about the program's efforts. The program's director spoke more specifically to this work in relation to the population it served:

We work in prison educating people in order to level the playing field when students come home. I think [our program] helps contribute to that as well and limit some of the barriers that are brought about, simply because you are an incarcerated person with a conviction history. We educate underrepresented groups...Men are underrepresented in college...Our incoming class this semester is 100% males of color - mostly black and then Latino so...we really are educating traditionally underserved populations that are also representative of the racial makeup of the incarcerated population.

This reflection does two things. First, it speaks to the embedded mission of *justice* at all levels of the organization. This mission yielded a cognizance and awareness of broader social structures that participants were able to bring into their conceptualizing of work. It also echoes reporting in Chapter II on the social stratification of students by race in class with regard to who is on a trajectory for college versus prison. This participant described the program's focus on Black and Latino males as not "on purpose" but instead what was required in response to the given population.

While participants conveyed genuine passion and pride for the work of the program, they were careful not to credit themselves. For example, the faculty/academic director had the following take on her role in creating opportunities for others: "I don't even know that I open doors. I show people that there are doors or I suggest that there's a door over there and if you turn the handle this way, it could open for you." The program staff had an intentional way of centering students and positioning themselves as resources. The

director described a “student centered approach to program design and priorities” as a guiding framework. An example of this is the new associate’s degree offering, which was requested by the students. An important tool for executing student centered work was to “mirror college in the community as much as possible” for students enrolled in the prison. The director shared that students on the inside wanted a spring break during the same time that their fellow students in the community were taking a spring break. The staff made the necessary schedule changes so that the school’s academic calendar would also be applicable to the HEPP. Other examples included student input as a determinant for co-curricular workshops that would be offered at the prison as well as establishing a process for students to participate in faculty evaluations at the end of the semester. Given the limitations of the prison, these small adjustments had a deep meaning for the students’ experience and their ability to identify as college students.

### **Describing Function (RQ2)**

***Theme 2: “Our job is to prepare them for release.”*** With respect to the program’s function or role, participants believed they were primarily responsible for getting students ready for release and as part of that work, supporting their sense of agency and identity development. In terms of process, this meant that students would be introduced to an academic reentry planning team who would work with them to develop an individualized academic plan approximately one year before their release date. This plan is designed to address students’ immediate needs as well as their broader academic goals. Collaborating on this plan with students was an intentional part of supporting their agency and exposing them to the decision making process that they would encounter in the community. The director explained, “the work that we do is strictly on the inside” making it critical for

students who they had worked with for years to receive a “warm handoff” to others who would support them during their transition. The “warm handoff” reflects the continuum of support that is provided at the Center level where the HEPP is homed. The faculty/academic director shared that the broader community played an important part in the handoff. Before COVID, the head of admissions had a standing rule that any student from the HEPP did not need an appointment to meet with them. This allowed for the team to execute their warm handoff in a special way by stopping by the office at which point the head of admissions would give the student a bag including school branded t-shirts, hats, and other “swag” as a way to say “welcome to Birch!”

As mentioned, part of preparing students for re-entry involved intentional work around developing their sense of agency and identity. These very things are taken away from people in prison since they are in environments where they have no ability to make decisions nor are they able to express themselves as individuals. The former program directors said, “the whole experience that we're trying to provide for these students should be helping them to understand what they're entitled to when they go to campus.” The current director echoed this by sharing how they intentionally incorporated agency building and experiences that emblematic of being a student on the main campus:

It is very important for us to incorporate agency. Students can choose their courses and they can also choose how many courses they want to take...We like to honor students' ability to choose for themselves because they're grown and they don't have any choice in the prison. So it's very important for us to have choices built into every aspect of our program.

Students also had one-on-one advising sessions each semester with the faculty/academic director similar to academic advising in the community. She reflected on those moments with them as “beautiful to watch. Just for them to be able to have that sort of agency, I guess is the word I'm looking for.” She also spoke to regularly seeking ways to “cultivate their confidence” – something students grappled with while having to simultaneously navigate the prison and classroom cultures.

Each person admitted to a prison facility is assigned a departmental identification number (DIN) that, in essence, replaces their names while in prison. Thus, the re-entry work required some unlearning of habits and general ways of interacting that had become a way of life for incarcerated students. With respect to students’ identity development, the director shared that, “you might be the only person who's called this person by their first name in years” by interacting with them as a student first. The faculty/academic director shared an interaction with a student who wrote his DIN in the name field on one of his papers:

I just gave him his paper back and said, “you don't need to use that.” And he's like, “Oh, well that's our prison number.” And I said, “I know but you don't need to use it here. This is Birch College.” And he's like, “Oh, okay. We do it with everything.” And I said, “when are you coming home?” And he's like, “two years from now.” So I said, “that number's gonna be less important at some point in your life. Start learning how to let it go now.”

These examples make clear that preparing students for re-entry is an entire resocialization effort in addition to carrying out the academic teaching and learning responsibilities of a HEPP. Through structured (e.g., academic advising) and unstructured (e.g., calling students

by their name in class) manners, the program executed the work of preparing students for what would ideally be a less turbulent re-entry upon release.

***Theme 3: "Harnessing all the enthusiasm."*** Another role that participants believed the program served was to be the place that could take advantage of the cross-sector engagement and opportunities being made available for HEPPs. Put differently, participants believed they were existing during a moment in time where they felt responsible for capitalizing on various synergies to improve and expand on the foundation they had built before HEPPs were part of the public discourse. The program director believed it to be "a great time to be doing this kind of work because, whether or not people's intentions are in the same place as yours. There seems to be overwhelming support for college-in-prison." Working in this context bolstered excitement among the program's staff. Many of the efforts were rooted at Birch but reached much further than this campus into the University system.

In relation to the College and University systems, the special project coordinator was positioned to be a liaison across the University. In the fall of 2020, she helped establish a learning collaborative – a community of faculty, staff, and students across the 25-campus university system – to "create a more equitable and accessible university system for students impacted by the criminal legal system." This group met bimonthly to share details on their respective programs in service to this student population. They also discussed "climate changing policy" or university-level policy modifications that would enable a more welcoming campus climate for formerly incarcerated students. Examples of these internal policies included the application of risk management and background check policies in relation to students with a conviction history. She appreciated her work in the

sense that it was action oriented and involved relationship building. She characterized it as “harnessing all the enthusiasm across the university to bring all those individuals together so that we can create a more inclusive university system.” Their work manifested in more concrete ways such as educating academic advisors on misconceptions about employment licensure for students with a conviction record and making resources publicly available online for students that would help them navigate the various program offerings within the university system.

Within the College, there was a Learning Exchange program, which brought students together from the main campus and the prison campus for a monthly seminar. This program had been a long time key element of the program that faculty and students felt they benefited from. Through increased interest and with the support of Second Chance Pell funding, the program began offering two sections of the Learning Exchange each year to meet the demand among students on the main campus. The faculty/academic director was responsible for leading one section of the Learning Exchange and referenced how she incorporated recently legislation<sup>14</sup> requiring the word “inmate” to be replaced with the words “incarcerated individual(s)” in state law. In this instance, she is sharing how external policies are influencing dialogues within the Learning Exchange and beyond:

It's actually a state law. So it's not just like, oh, I'm a bleeding heart liberal over here using the words ‘incarcerated individual.’ Like this is codified in state law now. So those kinds of moments that I'm able to bring that stuff back [to] other professors

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<sup>14</sup> (NYS Assembly Bill A9273 and NYS Senate Bill S8216)

even casually or as a formal part of their courses. And [for] the learning exchange students, I think there's a huge ripple that comes back into the college.

These examples convey how the program's efforts to harness enthusiasm related to improving the HEPP and the experience of their students who participate remains complex. The director commented that one demanding requirement of her work is being able to "adapt the same message for different audiences at all moments." The special projects coordinator also reference the complexity of engaging multiple stakeholders:

I think the work can get really messy. I think there are a lot of different stakeholders to consider and that continues to make it messy. What I try to remind myself, at the end of the day, is that we're opening up doors for students. And that doesn't just mean providing access to higher education, it means changing practice and being vocal out in the world about why we need to change practice.

This reflection nicely connects this third theme on harnessing enthusiasm to the first theme about providing opportunities. In other words, it connects their functional activities to their program's intent.

### **Describing Relevant External Factors in the Current Context**

With respect to how this program may have operated in response to a specified context or social problem, the case presented a number of external factors by nature of being homed at a public higher education institution in a metropolitan city. However three specific realities were present across interviews and written materials including: COVID, external funding, and racial injustice. The pandemic demanded a new level of agility in all educational settings to maintain academic continuity. This was especially true for this HEPP, which operated with a small staff whose responsibility was to make teaching and



learning possible within the walls of the prison that came with its own limitations. Since COVID halted all in-person activity in New York State, the program had to adapt in a way that “thwarted” their priorities and reduced their operational scale. The faculty/academic director shared that “things really shifted with COVID. We [had] 75 students in the fall of 2019 and we're at 44 now.” The lower enrollment was partially due to the fact that DOCCS was no longer reassigning people to their prison site so the application pool simply wasn't there. Also, some students were not interested in participating in remote teaching and learning, which was the next best option.

The former director's “Herculean efforts” were credited for acquiring a Mellon grant in spring of 2021, which allowed the program to install the necessary hardware in the prison to hold remote advising and instruction via WebEx. Just as they were preparing to return to in-person operations for the spring 2022 semester, the Omicron variant required them to put that plan on hold until further notice. The faculty/academic director reflected on her agility at the moment she learned that they would have to shut down due to Omicron, “within 20 minutes of a subway ride, I had figured out like four different ways that we could accommodate what we needed to do.” She characterized this work as swiveling:

They shut us down with Omicron and we had to not pivot, but we [had to] swivel is the word we've come up with. We had to swivel to WebEx and then swivel back to in-person. We had 12 classes, only eight WebEx setups. So I had to swivel one class a day to the AM [slot]. And I wonder why I'm tired...

The pandemic also meant that the Learning Exchange program could no longer operate since the prison would not allow access for beyond faculty and staff. Even when the

primary courses were returned to in-person mode, there were new social distancing capacity limits on each classroom. Before COVID, they could have a full class of 20 students in one room but the new limits only allowed for 10. The director shared how much of her time had to be spent translating the impacts of COVID to their funders and stakeholders. While the pandemic placed new burdens on the staff, it also strengthened their ability to “swivel” and make sure the program would remain agile going forward.

The matter of external funding was another common topic when participants were asked to discuss external social forces in relation to their program. As a public institution, Birch College was able to draw on funding from government offices within the city and state. They specifically noted that a portion of their funds came from the District Attorney of New York’s (DANY) office as well as the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ). Participants also cited financial support from the Pell Initiative as being a meaningful addition to their financial profile. At the time of interviews, the state was considering a restoration of its Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for incarcerated students. Participants felt confident that this would move forward given the political support for college-in-prison programs in recent years. In April of 2022, one month after participant interviews, the New York State Legislature restored access to TAP for incarcerated New Yorkers. Taken together, the program benefited from public investment at the federal, state, and local levels, with two streams of funding – Pell and TAP – to specifically support tuition for eligible students. Importantly, the program could comfortably rely on the local level investment (from DANY and MOCJ) without competition since they are the only HEPP in the university system. The intentional partnering and interaction with all campuses also made that seem like a reliable constant. Finally, the HEPP at Birch was also able to draw on

the influx of foundation support for these programs with significant grants from the Mellon Foundation and the Lumina Foundation. While these funds were generous, they were also time bound. The pandemic also made it such that grant funding went toward operational costs (e.g., WebEx installation and personnel) instead of more innovative work that would allow the program to improve and/or grow.

Finally, participants all spoke to what I am framing as racial injustice as an external force that influenced the program's work. The program director referenced the murder of George Floyd, and others, as a moment that forced the nation to pay attention to racial injustice. She also attributed this attention to COVID, which forced the country to take in national events in a less distracted manner: "...so many different murders, at the same time, [during] COVID and there was a lot happening in the climate that I really still haven't conceptualized. But I do think that more people who didn't care or think about social justice issues started to." Another participant shared how the racial climate tied into the program's work:

[There is] newfound attention to racial justice issues and I really hate that I'm even saying that because it's not newfound. It's just that people are forced to finally confront it. And I think it's put a lot of fire under agencies and governments and institutions to think about the ways that they perpetuate educational and racial inequity. In that way, I think the moment that we're in is creating like a renewed interest in higher education-in-prison, given that 80% of incarcerated people are Black and Brown.

Three participants cited mass incarceration as a key feature of racial injustice in the country. The faculty/academic director shared how she brought the topic into her

classrooms, “in the senior seminar, [I] really focus on issues related to mass incarceration and what those are. Or policing issues. Police brutality issues, all those kinds of things. And I kind of see them all connected.” The program director characterized mass incarceration as something that had become an obvious policy failure: “There's also the fact that we decided to take up this experiment of mass incarceration and then we locked up all these people, for nonviolent drug offenses and then we were like ‘oh, we're kidding...we're going to legalize marijuana.” Another participants discussed how mass incarceration offered a through line across multiple kinds of social inequity, “as more reports come out [that are] looking at the devastating impact of mass incarceration, there has been more clear connections to [see] like, this is connected to racial equity, this is connected to educational equity, like trying to make those lines more clear.” The fact that most of the participants in this case named mass incarceration as part of the environment they are working in demonstrates their orientation toward justice and ability to situate their individual roles within the broader societal context.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented an overview of each case and explored my findings at the individual case level. Within each case, I identified a number of themes that felt specific to each case and that connected to both my research questions and conceptual framework. More specifically, I used the full data set to summarize how participants, and their overall programs, described program intent, program function, and external factors they identified as influential or relevant to their program. To the extent possible, I used language directly from participants and source materials to articulate these themes in the words and voices of the participants.

V – PATTERNS FROM ANALYSIS OF A MULTISITE CASE STUDY OF PARTNERSHIPS  
BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND PRISONS IN NEW YORK STATE

**Chapter Overview**

Taken together, I selected these three cases to offer maximum variability in my findings. Their structural differences provide insight into similarities and differences with respect to their programs' intent, program function, and external factors they reported as relevant to their programs' work. In this chapter, I illustrate the structural variance of these programs to bring forward fundamental feature that distinguish one program from another but also to convey how much they had in common. Next, I introduce a set of patterns that presented across all cases and that serve as responses to research questions but also go beyond the research questions to detail emergent patterns across cases. I conclude this chapter by identifying patterns, across cases, that were specifically responsive to my research questions.

**Overview of Structural Variance Across Cases**

Following a review of these three higher education-in-prison programs within New York State, their structural commonalities and differences were evident. As shown in Table 1, these cases had much in common structurally, while also remaining true to their respective points of views and institutional missions. The upper third of the table represents structural variance that I intentionally introduced during the site selection process including institution control and type, the age of the HEPP, and the existence of degree offerings. The following section provides a summary overview of each case's structure including their age, degree offerings, an estimated total of students served,

funding patterns, treatment of faculty workload, prison partner facility type, membership in the statewide consortium for higher education-in-prison, and participation in the Community Engagement Carnegie Classification. I conclude the section by highlighting the core facets or unique features of each program.

Table 1. Structural Variance Across Cases

	<b>Acacia College</b>	<b>Maple University</b>	<b>Birch College</b>
Control and Type	Private Liberal Arts	Private Research I	Public Liberal Arts
Founding Year	1997	2015	2011
Degree Offering(s)	A.S. and B.A.	A.S.**	A.A. (piloting)
Students Served (Total)	245+	200+	215+
Tuition Waivers	Y	Y	Y
2 <sup>nd</sup> Chance Pell Site	Y	N	Y
Mellon Grant Recipient	Y	Y	Y
On-load Teaching	Y	N	Y
Medium/Max Facility	Y	Y	Y
NYCHEP* Member	Y	Y	Y
Carnegie Community Engagement Classification	N	Y	N

\* New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison

\*\* Since data collection, the bachelor’s degree offering at Maple University was approved by the state of New York for implementation.

These programs ranged in age of operation with the oldest site celebrating its 26<sup>th</sup> year and the youngest site in its 8<sup>th</sup> year at the time of this study. None of the sites had a shared definition of alumni or shared processes for tracking student progress. Instead, each site offered a rounded estimate of students served including those who had received degrees and those who had not. This number ranged from 200 to 245 students across sites. With respect to degree offerings, all sites were offering an associate’s degree at the time of this study. Acacia had a well-established bachelor’s degree program and Maple was in the planning process for establishing their own. Across degree granting programs, Acacia was the only site where both the program administration and degree were housed at the same institution. Both Maple and Birch partnered with neighboring community colleges to grant associate’s degrees for their HEPPs. I discuss partnering with other higher education

institutions further in the pattern three of the following section on across case patterns and analysis.

While this study did not seek to understand budgetary aspects of HEPPs, a number of funding patterns became apparent as participants reported on their program's challenges and supports. The patterns of financial support across sites included the institution's participation in tuition and fee waivers for incarcerated students as well as substantial grant funding from the Mellon Foundation. This allowed for sites to direct their limited funding toward personnel, supplies, and similar operational needs. It is important to note that tuition waivers were applicable while students were incarcerated but did not carry over after they were released. This often had negative consequences for students' ability to matriculate after release without accumulating debt. While participants at all three sites discussed Pell as an exciting and new reliable funding stream, only two – Acacia and Birch – participated in and benefitted from the Second Chance Pell Experimental Site Initiative.

A critical structural feature that emerged from data analysis was whether and how HEPPs were institutionalized in a way that made them accessible for faculty participation. This could be done in a few ways but the most notable was allowing faculty to teach in the program/at the prison facility as part of their existing workload. For tenured and tenure-track faculty, this practice was in place at both Acacia and Birch Colleges. Further, their participation in the HEPP was value added during promotion and tenure reviews. This practice was still being negotiated at Maple University but seemed to be at the Dean's discretion. I explicate on the value of this structural feature more in Chapter VI in the section on implications for practice.

With respect to partnering with prison facilities, the degree granting programs were only offered at medium or maximum security prisons. Security level classifications can have implications for the length of an individual's sentence as well as how much flexibility they have to interact with their peers and in education programs and education. Partnering with a medium or maximum security facility meant that students would have a reasonable amount of time before their release date to work toward their degree. Time to degree can be longer inside of prisons due to limitations like space and regularity of course offerings. These highly secure sites came with many bureaucratic hurdles including but not limited to having curriculum content approved by DOCCS and challenges advising students in between class sessions.

Beyond the prison sites, there were two external organizations that provided symbolic value more than structural import. This included the institution's membership in the New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison (NYCHEP) and having acquired the Community Engagement Carnegie Classification. Beginning with NYCHEP, two of the three cases were members and one of these (Birch College) was a founding member of the organization, which launched in 2015. This organization served a deeply meaningful networking function for HEPP staff, particularly during the initial COVID years. It also serves as a collective voice for the HEPPs across the state in advocacy efforts related to legislation. As for the Community Engagement Carnegie Classification, only one of the three cases – Maple University – had this designation. Again, this is a symbolic but meaningful attribute for a study seeking to understand whether and how HEPPs are part of their college's or university's civic mission.



### **Core Facets: What made one program different from the other?**

Each program came with its own set of core facets. For example, Acacia College was intentional about making their educational and degree offerings accessible to incarcerated women. Acacia also happened to be the oldest and most established program among these cases. The maturity of this case is exhibited in its endowed fund dedicated solely to the HEPP as well as their ability to deliver a spectrum of academic offerings including pre-college coursework, an associate's degree, and bachelor's degree. The program did not operate primarily on its endowment but to represent a long term investment in the program on behalf of the institution. Maple University, in contrast, was the newest program among the cases and had accomplished quite a bit in a short period of time. While they were still "institution building" and establishing their reputation, this program seemed the most stable as it was founded and led by a very devoted tenured faculty member. In contrast, other cases in this study were established and led by administrative leaders with support from faculty. Finally, what made Birch unique was its fundamental focus on re-entry. This meant that they were quite knowledgeable on how to best support students following their release, whether they wanted to pursue higher education or not. Their access to a broader research center that could lend wraparound services and help execute a "warm handoff" provided for a unique continuum of support for students returning home that was not built into other programs.

### **Across Case Patterns and Analysis**

In Chapter II, I presented a conceptual framework that would offer insight into HEPPS at a few levels: (1.) the individual to highlight the individual characteristics and attributes of people who work in HEPPs, (2.) the institutional to provide an understanding

of the features and practices of colleges and universities that host HEPPs, and (3.) the external to allow for an extensive, yet context specific, understanding of external matters that inform these institutions and their programs. In keeping with this framework, I present five patterns that offer insight into one or more of these levels including (1.) program professionals; (2.) program place and space; (3.) programs in service to institutional mission (and civic mission) (4.) program attentiveness to external factors and (5.) program conceptualization: the two-way partnership misnomer. For each pattern, I offer a description followed by evidence of the pattern across each case. I conclude this section with discussion of how these patterns, and their sub-patterns, relate to my research questions.

### **Pattern 1: Program Professionals**

Across programs, participants demonstrated a professional commitment to service, brought compassion to their work, and emphasized care and collaboration as important components of getting work done. These findings are best summarized by answering three questions (1.) who does this work?, (2.) what do they bring to their work?, and (3.) what does it take (from them) to do their work?

#### ***Who does this work?***

The participants in this study represent a highly educated group of individuals who have acquired a wide spectrum of expertise holding degrees in Art History, Anthropology, Biology, Criminology, English, Gender Studies, Human Development, Nutrition, Psychology, Social Work, Sociology, and Religion. All participants had spent their careers in the non-profit sector. In addition to their work in academia, they held other service oriented roles like school counselor, community health care worker, re-entry client advocate, human

rights volunteer, and disability services coordinator. While articulating their backgrounds, some participants began to share other attributes that they believed to be relevant to their career path and current work commitments (see Table 2).

Table 2. Participants

	Participant	Role	Title(s)	Educational Attainment	Career Sector	Other Self Disclosed Attributes
Acacia College	Marvin	Institutional Leader (Admin)	VP, Academic Affairs	Doctoral Degree	Non Profit (Academia)	
	Anita	Institutional Leader (Admin)	Exec. Director, Academic Operations	Doctoral Degree	Non Profit (Academia + Public)	First-generation international student Person of Color
	Diana	Program Leader (Admin)	Director (of HEPP)	Master's Degree (ABD)	Non Profit (Academia)	
	Joss	Program Affiliate (Faculty)	Assoc. Prof., Sociology Dept. Chair, Politics and Human Rights	Doctoral Degree	Non Profit (Academia)	First-generation college student
Birch College	Stephanie	Program Affiliate (Admin)	Special Project Coordinator	Master's Degree	Non Profit (K12+Academia)	
	Selena	Program Leader (Admin)	Director (of HEPP)	Master's Degree	Non Profit (Academia + Public)	Woman of Color Child of Immigrants
	Vanessa	Program Leader (Faculty)	Assoc. Prof., Sociology Academic Director (of HEPP)	Doctoral Degree	Non Profit (Academia)	First-generation college student Abolitionist
	Lauryn	Program Leader (Admin)	Former Director of Statewide Educational Initiatives	Master's Degree	Non Profit (Academia + Public)	
Maple University	Sam	Institutional Leader (Admin)	Assoc. Dean College of Arts, Sciences and Engineering	Doctoral Degree	Non Profit (Academia)	
	Al	Program Leader (Faculty) Institutional Leader	Assoc. Prof., Religion and Classics Founder of HEPP	Doctoral Degree	Non Profit (Academia)	Religious Abolitionist
	Tina	Program Leader (Faculty) Institutional Leader	Associate Professor of Anthropology and Faculty Advisor (of HEPP)	Doctoral Degree	Non Profit (Academia)	Abolitionist
	James	Program Leader (Admin)	Assistant Director of Programming (of HEPP)	Doctoral Degree	Non Profit (K12+Academia)	Religious
	Whitney	Program Affiliate (Admin)	Assistant Director of Community Outreach and Engagement	Master's Degree	Non Profit (Academia + Public)	Formerly Incarcerated Abolitionist Advocate

For example, four of the participants described themselves as abolitionists or abolitionist-minded. One participant stated, “I don't talk about this but in my heart of hearts, I'm a true abolitionist” while another shared, “I've come to think like an abolitionist.” Three participants identified as first generation college students and another identified as a woman of color and child of immigrants. Selena highlighted these attributes in relation to her work this way: “My parents are immigrants and I know that my privilege comes from [my] education. So if I can contribute to providing that to more people who have often been neglected in spaces that were supposed to be nurturing, then that makes me feel good.” One participant considered his religious background as a part of orientation toward work, “...it's sort of deeply Jewish in a way in origin. There's a sort of like a rabbinical principle<sup>15</sup> that to save one life is to save the whole world. And so I have that in mind. [What] we can do for this one student speaks volumes about what we can do for everyone.” Importantly, one of the participants, Whitney, shared that she had been formerly incarcerated for 19 years and that being able to attend school provided meaning for her life during a challenging time: “Being incarcerated for years is very debilitating. Other than the college program and the children's center program, for me, prison didn't have any other meaning.” Whitney credited her educational experience to her ability to be resilient in general.

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<sup>15</sup> “Tikkun Olam” is a concept in Judaism, which refers to various forms of action intended to repair and improve the world. In Hebrew, תיקון עולם, it translates to 'repair of the world.' In the American Jewish community, the term is understood to mean that Jews are called upon to make the world more just, peaceful, and equal through social action.

Finally, all participants, with the exception of Al, described their entrée to this work as unintentional or unplanned. They had been exposed through colleagues or attended an event on campus that made them aware of it. In most instances, their initial exposure was enough to make them commit to being involved in work related to college-in-prison. One participant was exposed as early as her undergraduate years when she accidentally registered for an inside-out course: "I had no idea what it was. And then I begged them to let me take a second semester, a different course at another facility. It's shaped the trajectory of my career." Another administrator shared that she accepted a job in academic administration not realizing that the institution's HEPP would be part of her work: "I didn't go there knowing that they had this program or that I would work in any way with it at the time. I was definitely interested to know more once I got there...I'm glad that I did have that access and that experience." A faculty member talked about going to teach one time and becoming hooked: "I did one guest teaching day at [the prison] - sort of fell in love with it. [It was] fall 2014, I believe, when I taught my first full class at [the prison] and it was transformative." The singular participant who had always wanted to teach in prisons had done so on a voluntary basis during his graduate school years. He became close friends with some of his incarcerated students and felt a deep sense of commitment to continue the work: "prison teaching became a vocation. I promised my incarcerated friends that going forward I would strive to earn the trust that they had placed in me." He brought this spirit of dedication with him to Maple University where he established its HEPP. This overview of participant profiles helps shape their orientation toward their work and the diversity of their backgrounds. The following section delves into what these individuals bring to their work or what they describe as valued attitudes and dispositions.

***What do they bring to the work? “A real spirit of compassion.”***

Participants in this study consistently demonstrated deep care and concern for their students. One participant said her work required “a real spirit of compassion” and “a non-judgmental” attitude. Another participant, Stephanie, believed that “relationship building [was] at the core of [her] job” highlighting the importance of interpersonal skills and communication. These dispositions map onto the characteristics of boundary spanners (discussed in Chapter II) and also complements the work of civic professionalism. These professionals bring a public orientation to their work and maintain awareness of the ways their work can contribute to the greater good. A faculty member at Birch shared, “I’ve always wanted to be somebody that left the world better than I found it. So those kinds of [interactions] are just incredibly rewarding and can’t be quantified. And just making human connections with folks that often don’t get a lot of it is just very rewarding.” An administrator at Acacia eluded a sense of responsibility for supporting marginalized students that contributed to her investment in her work: “I always felt that my purpose in education was to create more equity, not necessarily equality but equity, and making sure that doors that could be opened, are opened.” Another administrator talked through how she believed she showed up at work, “[I consider] how do I leverage [my] skillset that I have to open up doors of opportunity for all people? ...I’m doing it now in the realm of supporting students with conviction records. How do we continue to open up doors so that the next stigmatized group of students has access to opportunity? And so that’s usually my lens.” These quotes show that individuals doing this work bring their own moral and purpose-driven constitutions that keep them engaged and makes work meaningful to them.

**Skill sets.** Participants also shared a number of skillsets they valued among their colleagues and that might be considered when looking to hire new colleagues. One participant believed that the necessary skills to get work done were “trainable” so she looked for specific orientations among candidates that she did not believe could be taught: “When I was responsible for hiring for positions at the [Center], I wanted to try to ascertain first and foremost, if they respected the dignity and worth and right to self-determination of the people we were serving. Because an alarming number of people don't.” This reflects the earlier discussion on compassion and introduces respect as another key disposition.

When asked about valuable skill sets, the most commonly used words across cases included: flexible, imagination, organized, patience, and understanding. The notion of flexibility was based in the reality that there would “always be fires in this work” no matter how much planning and organizing took place. An example of this was shared in the case of Birch College’s third theme where the faculty member said they had to “swivel” to get work done during COVID. Another participant at Maple University said, “ I think that some of what needs to be done in order to do this job well is figur[ing] out how to exist at that intersection which requires flexibility, a lot of creativity, a lot of sort of imagination.” This participant connected flexibility and imagination as complementary skills to bring to the work. The program director at Acacia College, Diana, discussed imagination this way: “It’s got to be somebody who respects learning...and also have imagination, a lot of imagination. Do not think you can't do this because it's in a prison.” They were speaking to one’s ability to be driven by what is possible and not by the limitations put in front of them. Moreover, I interpret they are also signaling that it has to be someone relatively driven and not discouraged by being told “no.”



The idea of being organized was perhaps the most straightforward. One participant described the director of the HEPP at Birch College as “incredibly organized and detail oriented” which was important to navigate the culture of multiple institutions. With respect to organization, another participant shared, “nobody knows how hard this is except other people that do it...just the day-to-day coordination of it.” The idea of patience often came paired with another skill set. For example, one participant listed the following “requirements” together: “patience, creative problem solving, collaboration coupled with proactive leadership, ability to balance contrasting interests, needs, and demands.” She seemed to place all of these on equal footing or as complementary skill sets. Another participant spoke to patience in terms of context, “... we work in different spaces, with different objectives so...communication, flexibility, patience - a lot of patience.” In advance of leaving the main campus for the prison site, the academic director at Birch College shared that she and her colleagues would humorously remind each other “everybody, pack your patience!” Finally, the idea of understanding was often appended to other social constructs. Participants thought it was important for people in this work to understand “structural inequality,” “public university systems,” “the lived experiences of their students,” the complexity of bureaucratic systems,” and “organization theory.” These might be more accurately characterized as types of expertise. While not comprehensive, this section captures some of the interpersonal skillsets that participants bring to their work and that they value in their fellow colleagues. The following takes into account what participants say is required to get the work done.

***What does it take to do the work? “People who give a shit” and have “a collaborative spirit.”***

The work of HEPPs has been described as “really, really hard,” “tough,” and may call for having a “thick skin.” Overall, participants described the kind of people and working environment that makes it all possible in two ways: (1.) “people who give a shit” and (2.) people who have “a collaborative spirit.” The former is characterized by people who are passionate about their work and find it meaningful or fulfilling beyond the professional transactions. This also exhibited itself in how much participants gave of themselves to get work done. The second component refers to working collaboratively as the default method for executing the program’s priorities.

James, from Maple University, explained his thinking around the idea of “people who give a shit” and why it mattered: “Some of the best work I see being done in this field is not being done by people with traditional administrative backgrounds. It's being done by people who, for lack of a better way of describing it, give a shit. I feel like giving a shit gives people...like adrenaline to do this work well.” James went on to bifurcate the “give a shit people” from “bean counters and spreadsheet[makers]” noting that the latter should not be responsible for decision making at HEPPs. His perspective echoed some of the above analysis on what people bring to the work, “... so much of what drives this work is passion, care, [and] social responsibility and that cannot be outsourced to the drier departments.” A similar sentiment was expressed by a faculty member at Birch College, “[You need] someone who is intimate with our program...who isn't just like administrative. You need someone who knows the discourse, and theory, and [about] structural inequality. They can't just be admin to put up paperwork.” The director of the HEPP at Birch College shared

that “people often tell me that they notice that I'm very passionate about what I do.” A participant at Acacia College shared that improving “women’s access to higher education ha[d] always been a passion of [hers].” Another participant shared that her passion laid in improving “higher education systems and policies and bureaucracies” beyond the stage of admissions. As a collective, all cases were led by personnel who were passionate and cared deeply about their work.

This care and commitment also presented itself in how much of their time and energy was devoted to their work. A faculty participant at Maple University shared that “all of [her] intellectual commitments [were] about understanding alternative modes of justice.” This meant that her engagement with the HEPP was not a hobby or side job but it instead synced with decades of her intellectual inquiry. This was genuinely fulfilling work for her. Another faculty participant, at Birch College, referenced the timing of her cancer diagnosis to recount her teaching timeline: “I was going through chemo[therapy] when I was teaching [the prison]. So I remember being bald in a hat at [the prison]. Even yet another hat that I've worn in this organization!” Another participant reflected on how she felt when she received her job offer to work for the HEPP:

I was thrilled to join. I took a big pay cut but what was exciting to me [was] being able to be the person that I'd never had when I was going through college.

Somebody who was really reaching out. Or be[ing] the agency [and] the support to people that I wish that I'd had when I was young and going through school and very, very, very lost.

This instance shows the participant’s passion and willingness to sacrifice some income to be part of this HEPP. It also captures *why* she was so devoted – she was certain this role

would be value-added for students as this was a role she did not have access to during her time as a student. Her work would have meaning. Another faculty participant drew on personal aspects of his upbringing and how it translates into his work:

I came of age during the era of mass incarceration. So, I understood - I didn't have the language - the criminalization of poverty. I would also say the other big ideological current as I grew up was the moral processing of the legacy of the Holocaust. So kind of [a] fascination with and revulsion for machineries of state violence. I had a strong, moral hunch about those things. Like ideologically, I'm particularly focused on American institutions in the era of mass incarceration. And what does it mean to like step up and meaningfully respond to the historical moment?

Whether teaching while battling cancer, taking a cut in pay to be a part of the work, or dedicating one's career to justice, this group was certainly among the category of individuals "who give a shit" about their work.

The second feature of what it takes to do the work – a collaborative spirit – is in reference to the shared responsibility and collective decision making that occurs at each HEPP. Participants across cases described their programs as "teams" or "families" due to a sense of connectivity and shared investment. They also believed their programs provided a "sense of community" within the larger campus community. A participant from Maple University shared, "We make decisions collectively. There's a really good team ethos of connectivity. We all know each other. We do more or less make decisions based on not full consensus, but pretty close to that." Another participant from Birch College believed that "a collaborative spirit" was important and went on to explain:

None of us do this work alone. There's nothing that just *I* do... That's both within our team, within the [Center], within the College, across [the university], at DOCCS, across New York state with different partners. We all have to communicate.

I will further discuss the reality of collaborating with multiple partners in pattern three.

Another participant reflected on what worked well within her program:

I think [what] our team does really well is that we do this collectively. [We often ask one another,] 'what do you think?' It takes a village, right? It takes all of us. It's not just one person sort of making decisions. And I don't know if that's just the way we've done it and that's our culture, or if that's something that you find across the board. But I think it's really important.

Each program did, in fact, operate as a tight-knit group or with a “collaborative spirit.” This might be an inherent feature of justice-oriented work compounded by limited financial and human resources. However, their mission-driven work and team ethos contributed to highly functioning programs even in the midst of a pandemic.

In summary, pattern one helps us understand who the people are behind higher education-in-prison programs and who makes them run. Across cases, these people were highly educated across the humanities as well as arts and sciences. They had all dedicated their careers, in some cases unknowingly, to research and jobs that allowed them to be in service to others or contribute to improving unfair systems. They were generally mindful of how their program was situated in broader social context and how their impact may only be a “drop in the bucket” but incredibly worthwhile. These people cared deeply about their work, their students, and had a “whatever it takes” approach to showing up. They brought a wealth of interpersonal skills and the ability to navigate complex, bureaucratic

environments. They were the essence of boundary spanners and relationship builders. Finally, they were selfless in a sense that they valued the collective nature of their work. They credited one another and rarely took individual credit or acknowledgement. They were teams who demonstrated respect for one another and their shared work. The following pattern considers the relevance of geographic location and space on campus as context for the program's operation.

### **Pattern 2: Program Place and Space**

Participants across cases believed that their geographic location influenced their program's approach to their work and they expressed strong sentiments about having a physical space on campus to support the collaborative nature of their work. The following discusses the geographic influence of each case followed by a review of sentiments around physical space on campus. The program at Acacia College was contained to one prison site and remained deliberately small for over two decades. The College campus was not in close proximity to many medium or maximum security prisons, which are most conducive to a college degree program. They were further limited in their prison partners since they intentionally wanted to have their program in a women's prison and there are just eight of these facilities in the entire state. As part of the College's historical mission, the program was dedicated to making higher education accessible to incarcerated women. In this case, their geographic location *and* mission influenced the program size and ability to scale up beyond one site for most of its existence.

The program at Maple University was perhaps most intensely influenced by its geographic proximity to 10 prisons. The prisons were a large employer for the region making it a prominent feature of the local community. Upon reflecting on establishing a

HEPP at Maple, the program leader shared: "...it seemed pretty obvious from the geography of the state that I thought [Maple University] would be the right institution to fill that gap...this is a big fish in this part of the pond." Another participant stated that "the university is surrounded by prisons" and therefore, prisons were part of the community the institution was in service to. Among cases, this site had engaged with the most prison facilities in formal and informal manners.

The program at Birch College was not located near many prisons but instead "home" to many returning citizens who might benefit from re-entry support connected to higher education opportunities. Therefore, they made a conscious decision to model their program with a focus on re-entry. This program was the only program in the study that partnered with just one prison facility. This was due to the lack of options as one participant explained, "the problem with expanding our programs at other prisons is that there is not another prison anywhere near [this] city that doesn't already have a college-in-prison program through another college. And we try not to step on each other's toes." This takeaway makes clear the geographic limitations of possible prison partners and implies that only one HEI can work with a prison facility at a time. Importantly, for Birch, many of their re-entry supports were available to returning citizens, whether or not they were enrolled. Their program's existence within the prison facility provided a "pipeline" of students who would soon be able to take advantage of the resources and support on the main campus. However, their program's existence within their city and their orientation toward "helping people come home" is what served its purpose.

With respect to space on campus, none of the programs had a dedicated office or suite on campus as their central hub. Interviews and site observations took place in the

spring of 2022 – a time when colleges and universities across the country were navigating the Omicron variant of COVID-19. In this context, working in-person and in shared spaces was not a high priority. However, in all cases, participants expressed the need for this very thing. The founder of the HEPP at Maple University shared, “One of my long term hopes is that we will have a space of our own...but the normalization of Zoom and stuff has taken pressure off of that particular issue.” As discussed in pattern one, the nature of the work in HEPPs is collaborative and the staff believed there would be value in having a shared space. Beyond their own work culture, participants expressed a need for space that would ultimately serve as a resource center and gathering place for returning citizens and program alumni. Some of these resources would include access to land line phones, computer, library and e-library access for research, tutoring support, and general advising. A participant at Acacia College explain why not having a place to direct students to could be challenging, “They're transitioning and they're going to need extra help with Brightspace or Blackboard or whatever it is. And then it's on that adjunct faculty [member], typically. You have to [provide] a place. My chair is the place. But I'm not always there.” At Birch College, one participant discussed the need for a more student centered space given the large volume of their population: “We've always served hundreds of people through that program...not only does it mean more staff, but also you have a huge influx of students who aren't actually college students yet coming into the building.” Overall, participants believed having a dedicated space on campus for both staff and students was important to carrying out their work. The next pattern explicates on how the work of these devoted individuals served their institution's broader missions.



### **Pattern 3: Programs in Service to Institutional Mission (and Civic Mission)**

Part of this study aimed to understand whether HEPPs were an avenue for colleges and universities to enact their civic mission. And further, to gain a sense of whether this enactment was intentional or perhaps driven by other circumstances. What this study made clear was that each HEPP was in and of itself working toward a greater civic mission and placed a social responsibility on itself. Their work was not necessarily induced or required by their institution in a top-down sense. In all cases, the programs were conceptualized and led by one or more faculty members who reflected similar profiles as the individuals depicted in pattern one. These faculty members did significant legwork to get their institution's buy in and support across stakeholder groups. A key mechanism they used across cases was their institutions espoused missions in tandem with higher education's more abstract social responsibility or civic mission. They did believe their home institutions were responsible for supporting their work even if there was not top-down oversight and management. This was actually ideal as it allowed the leader to build the program through their own vision with the institution playing a hosting role. More succinctly, these programs supported, strengthened, and even legitimized their college or university's stated missions.

At Acacia College, the program was tied to the institution's historical commitment to serving women and providing higher education to diverse populations. Further, the institution articulated their "special responsibility" as an institution of higher education "in advancing the cause of social justice." Their willingness to acknowledge their role in broader contexts was conducive to a college-in-prison program that made education available to incarcerated women. Following more than 25 years of successfully operating,

the program became a feature of the institution's social justice efforts and an example of their engagement in societal problems. This was detailed in the institution's strategic plan at the highest levels of leadership. This particular case also garnered regular engagement from the school's president, which was perhaps a benefit of being housed at a small liberal arts college.

At Maple University, the program was able to capitalize on the university's community focused mission as well as its Community Engagement Carnegie Classification. As discussed in the case description, Maple University is the only site in this study with an explicit civic mission and a formal community engagement designation from the Carnegie Commission. Being a younger program, only eight years of operation, the program leaders and affiliates had a "put your money where your mouth is" approach to gaining institutional buy-in for their work. They presented their program to administrative leaders as an opportunity for the university to engage its mission and as a way to "push the university to be accountable to the community" they claimed to serve. In this case, "the community" referred to the local region which happened to be surrounded by prisons. This was another lever the program pulled since they described one prison to be located in their "backyard." While somewhat new, the program had accomplished a great deal and had been featured in the university's 2022 alumni magazine with a supportive quote from the school dean. The university's choice to feature the program with such an important external audience implies that this is work they are willing to showcase as part of their community impact. Put differently, the institution is able to use the work of the program to reinforce and legitimize their commitment to improving their local community as stated in

the intuition's mission, values, and elective classification for Community Engagement with the Carnegie Commission.

At Birch College, the program was perhaps less positioned in a way that it needed to articulate its relationship and value to the institution. This HEPP was homed at a public college within a public university system whose espoused missions included "justice" and "social mobility." They existed within a series of concentric circles where the core focus was making quality higher education accessible for all residents in the region and upward mobility for marginalized populations. While it did necessarily make their work easier, this case demonstrates genuine alignment with their institutional mission. In turn, the college and university could highlight the program's work as one of the many ways in which it worked to improve the lives of people in the region. Further, the program was also something that was highlighted among other public state and local entities who had made financial investments such as the District Attorney of New York's (DANY) office and the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ). This holds symbolic value since both parties – the higher education institution and the government – are able to convey a partnership and shared responsibility for the public good. When asked about why their institution continued to host such a challenging program in the midst of other challenges, one participant answered this way:

It's crass but I think there's a lot of [individual] egos in it. Which for better or worse keeps people doing it, even though it's really, really hard. And for some, I think it's mission alignment. I think for the college, it's gotta be about mission alignment.

[Birch is] not even trying to advertise [that] they have this program, so it's not like they're doing it for ego or advancement or anything like that.

This quote reinforces the finding that the programs, in this study, operate from a place of mission and social responsibility. This pattern helps us to understand HEPPs in relation to their HEIs with respect to mission alignment and related dynamics such as how institutional missions can be leveraged to get buy-in for these programs. The following pattern explores external factors that participants identified as relevant to their programs.

#### **Pattern 4: Program Attentiveness to External Factors**

Participants across cases cited a number of external factors that they believed to influence the way their program worked and/or relevant context to bear in mind as they executed their work. This pattern conveys how prison education programs are both vulnerable to their current sociopolitical context and simultaneously poised to capitalize on factors that may be in their favor. Specifically, there were three interrelated, external factors that were most relevant: (1.) public opinion and policy agendas, (2.) external funding, and (3.) social movements.

##### ***Public Opinion and Policy Agendas***

Participants experienced public opinion, or the general public's orientation toward college-in-prison as increasingly positive. They referenced local and national media publications as well as policy agendas as their sources for gauging public opinion. In terms of influence on operations, one participant attributed their program's fundraising success to college-in-prison becoming part of mainstream discourse, "[it's] like riding a wave of public opinion, you know, like college-in-prison and reentry has gotten like cooler." By "cooler," she meant that college-in-prison had become a shared topic of interest across groups (i.e., researchers, philanthropists, policymakers) and therefore something that people wanted to learn more about. The philanthropic interest and support was something

each program was attuned to and managed to take advantage of to support their efforts. Another participant underscored the connection between public opinion and funding: “there seems to be overwhelming support for college-in-prison. Not just like ‘I support this and I’ll vote for it’ but also like people are throwing a lot of money at it.” A third participant explained why she believed college-in-prison had become a topic of favor in public discourse, “it’s like this perfect storm of attention around higher education-in-prison. It meets this educational need [and] it addresses some systemic racial issues.” In this instance, the participant is drawing connections between how this work might be relevant to discussions in bipartisan settings or within the policymaking context. More specifically, the reinstatement of Pell eligibility had been under consideration for years with bipartisan support. Similarly, New York State’s Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) – designed to assist New York residents with tuition at HEIs in New York State – was also pending reinstatement for incarcerated individuals. This amalgam of public support represented a special window for these programs to reach their potential. The following section focuses more narrowly on the influx of external funding and how that makes these programs cautiously optimistic about what lies ahead.

### ***External Funding***

HEPP’s that remained open during the pandemic were carefully attuned to the reinstatement of Pell and TAP eligibility for incarcerated individuals as well as increased funding support from the Mellon foundation in response to COVID-19. Together, these presented three possible new streams of external funding in the context of the pandemic, that required colleges and universities to trim expenses as much as possible. The following offers insight into how program participants viewed each of these funding sources,

beginning with Pell and TAP. One participant, at Maple University, summed up the possibility of these returning as “new opportunities and new problems” for HEPPs. An influx of state and federal dollars, at face value, was an objectively good thing. However, participants across sites expressed concerns about the potential for misuse and predatory behaviors, among education providers, that may come along with the restoration of Pell on a national level. A participant at Birch College shared, “We're all very afraid. Even though everyone wanted it, we're all very afraid of Pell reinstatement.” The following statement conveys how HEPPs are both vulnerable to this particular external factor but also prepared to take advantage of it:

I think that if appropriate safeguards are not put in place, there is a chance that predatory institutions can come into the fold and take advantage and have students use Pell dollars on programs that wouldn't necessarily meet their educational aspirations when they come home or that wouldn't necessarily articulate to credit when students come home.

Here we see participants anticipating their student population being taken advantage of.

Across all three programs, at least one participant cited the same example of predatory practices that they had endured during the pandemic by another HEI, Ashland University. This University offered fully virtual “correctional education” programs<sup>16</sup> utilizing secure tablets in partnership with JPay, a prison telecommunications company. At the time of this study, this company was responsible for providing phone service and tablets at state-level prisons in more than 35 states. While many HEPPs were forced to

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ashland.edu/correctional-education>

operate remotely or not at all during the pandemic, this provided an opportunity for Ashland University to make state level appeals with DOCCS to have their fully virtual programs replace pre-existing higher education-in-prison programs. According to a participant at Birch College, there was a collective response against this idea, “When COVID hit, a bunch of us in NYCHEP were trying to come up with a document about why in-person [courses] mattered.” Ashland’s attempts to insert themselves were motivated by incentives for both their institution and their corporate partner: it would increase profit margins for JPay and it would also increase enrollment counts for their University. One participant characterized Ashland University as “sharks in the water” in terms of what they were capable of doing following Pell reinstatement.

As a result of TAP and Pell being reinstated, participants across sites predicted an impending increase in the number of college-in-prison programs in New York State. They also cited dwindling enrollments in higher education institutions more generally as a possible motivation for colleges to engage these programs. A participant at Birch College stated,

... this is usually my last rationale for supporting college-in-prison, but college enrollment is declining. This is also a way for colleges to increase their enrollment numbers and have more students enrolled in their academic programs. So I think colleges stand to gain by including incarcerated students into the fold.

A participant at Maple University shared this perspective but was on the fence about whether it was something to resist:

...enrollment is the big crisis in colleges right now. There's a cynical part of me that's like okay great let's leverage that, however impure I think that motivation is, it could

serve the needs of our students, therefore, we will figure out a way to leverage it.

Because at the end of the day, if that means that the students at [prison site], have an amazing Professor from a well-regarded University... that [also] means that faculty can come in and have an amazing time teaching and the students learn a lot. That's all for the better.

Another participant described this possibility as “dangerous” since some institutions “are not well meaning and are going to come and take money and provide crappy non meaningful or transferable education to students.” Overall, there was optimism and a great deal of angst about what the return of TAP and Pell would mean for existing programs who wanted to ensure the value and quality of HEPPs more generally. One participant believed this external funding would offset their program’s need to rely on grants, “Pell and TAP are going to change things dramatically because they’re going to make it possible to do this work more sustainably and maybe we’ll need donor money a lot less in future.” The following provides an overview of how critical grant support has been for HEPPs in the last few years.

Each case in this study referenced individual donors and philanthropic organizations as critical external funding sources. However, one particular philanthropic organization was the most prominent and even considered the “backbone” of one program’s financial structure - the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Since 2015, the Foundation has been awarding higher education-in-prison grants through its Higher Learning program. Each case benefitted from these grants to support their basic operations. At Acacia College and Maple University, this funding made it possible to fund additional faculty and administrative support. At Birch, this funding made it possible for



them to install new technology in the prison classrooms for remote teaching and learning during the pandemic. However, participants were wary about relying on grants for fundamental needs. A participant at Birch shared her concern about their reliance on grants this way, "...private funding won't sustain this work. There has to be some sort of government investment. If not, you're just going to be chasing grant after grant [and] you're gonna have mission drift. You're gonna be chasing dollars and changing your deliverables based on what those dollars are versus ingraining yourself in an institution." This participant believed government funding should provide the baseline support for their operations. This perspective may be in light of the fact that they were based at a public institution that already received grants from the District Attorney of New York's (DANY) office as well as the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ).

Alternatively, a participant at Maple University felt their institution should provide the baseline support for personnel and related benefits. He also discussed how Mellon's support carried both financial and political capital at their institution:

I think that we've won over the people in power. No one in the president's office of the provost office or anywhere else in the university's administration, like everyone believes that this work is valuable. The endorsement of powerful outside institutions like the Mellon foundation play a large roll in that. We always have something to point to where it's like that legitimizes the work that we do. We're not radicals working on the fringe. We're university bureaucrats, with the blessing of one of the largest philanthropical philanthropic organizations in the country. So that kind of that kind of helps.

Mellon's influence was likely more significant at Maple University since it was a research I school that relied on external funding to execute its research mission. Alternatively, Maple and Birch were liberal arts schools with greater emphasis on teaching and service which are funded as operational. Overall, participants viewed grants out to be an enrichment tool and not baseline funding.

In June 2020, Mellon along with four other major foundations, announced<sup>17</sup> they would increase their existing commitment to help non-profits continue their work during the pandemic. This made it possible for HEPPs to apply for emergency grants to continue their work. Elizabeth Alexander, President of the Mellon Foundation stated the following:

Together, we are experiencing the extraordinary pain of a pandemic, an economic depression, and relentless violence and racial threats against African Americans. The transformative and provocative power of artists, cultural institutions, and humanities scholars will prove even more essential to our country's future vitality. Mellon is the nation's largest funder of arts, culture, and the humanities, and we are dramatically increasing our grantmaking to organizations that are systemically under-resourced, guided by diverse and imaginative leadership, and fueled by the courage and vision we need in full force.

Alexander's statement weaves together a number of contextual matters that provided a backdrop for the environment that HEPPs were operating in including a pandemic,

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<sup>17</sup> [https://mellon.org/media/filer\\_public/c2/4e/c24ef85d-43e8-47c3-87a4-3c01cf2a5335/press\\_release\\_for\\_philanthropiesjoin\\_forces\\_final61020\\_1\\_1.pdf](https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/c2/4e/c24ef85d-43e8-47c3-87a4-3c01cf2a5335/press_release_for_philanthropiesjoin_forces_final61020_1_1.pdf)

economic instability, and ongoing racial violence and injustice. The following expands on how participants experienced this environment in relation to their work.

### ***Social Movements***

When asked about current, external factors that influenced their work, participants named a range of events and social movements including, Black Lives Matter, defund the police, decarceration efforts in response to mass incarceration, and COVID-19. In general, these concurrent events generated a shift in institutional focus toward racial inequities. One participant reflected on a moment in time where his University was compelled to be responsive to these social moments: “there was a moment sort of in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor where the discourse became even more heightened and we all saw this sort of explosion of every possible institutional and corporate actor figuring out how to express [their] values.” At Maple University, this emboldened the program staff to hold leadership accountable for actions in addition to statements or symbolic responses:

...the nationwide protests in 2020...the summer of social justice...I'm putting that in quotes with a little bit of an eye roll because obviously these things have been going on forever. But instrumentally the political moment that happened, we tried to leverage that as much as we could to say to the institution, 'if you're serious about this and you're putting out a statement about [about how] we're gonna do better, one way to do that is to not just like put a land acknowledgement out for the university - [which is] also really important - but to also like support these kinds of programs. Like this is actually like work that needs to happen.' And so we've pushed pretty hard on that.

This used external social movements as a tool for accountability and pressure among institutional leadership. They did not believe their prison education program addressed all of the social justice concerns represented in the 2020 discourse but they did believe they were carrying out the type of action-oriented work that could be expanded to address many of the concerns.

At Acacia College, one participant shared how this impacted their curriculum offerings: “I had students come to me when I was associate dean to express their disappointment that we didn't have a Black studies major or minor... And that conversation about the curriculum didn't budge or move anywhere. And then Black Lives Matter happened and it became a huge issue again so they came up with an antiracist minor...” In this instance, it seems student advocacy in tandem with the external social movements contributed to a response from the administration that otherwise would not have happened. A faculty member shared how the external context served as a bridge for students on the main campus to engage with their students at the prison campus:

I've seen it change with Black Lives Matter. I've seen it with my own eyes. I've seen the student body change...something about it being an art school and private, and a little more affluent makes it difficult to sew the seeds of the prison [education] program sometimes. [But], Black Lives Matter has made a big difference in the participation of the program. The whole defund the police movement that was happening at the same time also made a difference. So a growing awareness of police brutality and how authority is [misused]...

The program director at Birch reflected on a collection of events that she believed required the general public to consider structures of racial inequity and social justice issues:

The murder of George Floyd really set the nation into a frenzy... and not just the murder of George Floyd but so many different murders, at the same time, and then also everyone was locked up [due to COVID]... There [was] a lot happening even before that, like decarceration. You have California who is overcapacity [in prisons] and was like 'hey, this is a problem, this is unconstitutional, you need to let people out...'"

Another participant expressed her view on the general public coming to accept that mass incarceration had become a social justice issue and required a structural response:

Given this mass experiment that our country decided to undertake of mass incarceration, we have all these collateral consequences and education helps mitigate that. Not just for that person, both direct and indirect benefits of that spill into their families, their communities etc.

Finally, all programs were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, many participants were able to highlight positive pandemic outcomes for their programs in spite of the intense instability. The most notable positive across cases was the emergency funding from Mellon. The program director at Acacia shared how she believed her students were affected:

...a lot of the women lost people in COVID. They don't tend to buy the idea that when you're suffering, if you bury yourself in something else, that's going to help. It's a way of dealing with the pain, they don't buy that. They suffer, they really truly suffer and it's hard to watch...Somebody's dying from COVID. They weren't able to talk to them to see them. I mean that's hard under any circumstances, but COVID really

made it worse. Just really made it worse. That impacts their ability to participate in college; it doesn't impact our ability to offer [the program].

The director's ability to center her students' experience over that of the program demonstrates the commitment and care among program staff that was discussed in pattern one. Another administrator at Acacia noted that they experienced an increase in enrollment among their formerly incarcerated student population since they were able to enroll in remote coursework. This was more convenient for those who lived far from the campus and did not have the resources to navigate transportation costs.

Birch College was able to engage in remote academic advising through a secure messaging system as a result of the pandemic. They were also able to continue utilizing their WebEx platform after returning in-person, providing an avenue for more hybrid engagements between the main campus and the prison site. As explained by one participant, these complex external factors seemed to have a galvanizing effect within each program that brought them closer and strengthened their work, "I think a lot of external things that happened forced us to work together better in many different ways. And [in] better ways I would say, more efficient ways as well." The next and final pattern highlights the organizational complexity of these programs in terms of their positionality of their campus as well as how they engage with partners off campus.

#### **Pattern 5: Program Conceptualization: the Two-Way Partnership Misnomer**

This study is premised on the idea that university engagement is a way for HEIs to practically engage their civic missions. University engagement is characterized in the literature as a two-way relationship where both the university and the community benefit from the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and practices (Boyer, 1996; Boyte & Hollander,

1999; Checkoway, 2001; Dyer, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2012; Kellogg Commission, 1999; McDowell, 2003). This two-way relationship is also synonymous with “university partnerships.” One pattern that emerged from the data is the fact that university-prison partnerships are not as simple as a two-way relationship. This idea is an oversimplification of the organizational complexity that is required to execute higher education-in-prison programs and perhaps a forced framework in the literature. In practice, HEPPs manage relationships with multiple partners within and external to their institution. In the sections that follow, I describe these various partners as presented across each case and then provide an organizational overview of each case to convey the two-way partnership misnomer. There were three distinct types of partners that participants identified as critical to their operation: (1.) campus partners, (2.) HEI partners, and (3.) other external partners.

### ***Campus Partners***

Campus partners refer to all people and departments within the HEI that support operational matters of the HEPP but do not work *for* the HEPP. The first iteration of this was an academic and/or administrative leader who could serve as the decision maker and power broker, when necessary. These people had the navigational capital and authority to cut through bureaucratic barriers and authorize unconventional workarounds. In all cases, the institutions applied tuition waivers for their incarcerated students. This is an example of a decision and implementation of practice that could only be done at this level or by this type of campus partner. The other iteration of this was administrative departments. Participants named the registrar, bursar, admissions, and financial aid as the “minimum of campus partners to engage.” These offices worked very closely with the programs and

often required some innovation on their ends to keep track of students who were incarcerated. One participant acknowledged how this could present as extra work for them, ... it's simply extra work for them. They don't get extra staff members to help run the financial aid pieces or the admissions pieces of it. They do it on top of everything else they're doing. And at least at [Birch], they are deeply committed to the program and wanna help the students.

Other important campus partners included institutional advancement, grants and foundation relations, librarians, and academic departments. One participant positioned advancement as having the ability to “move the program forward” and “make it more visible.” Another participant viewed advancement as being charged with providing “funds for the program” and “pitch[ing]” it to donors. As for grants and foundation relations, one participant expressed his gratitude for their support, particularly since they did not have that skill set within the program itself, “I don't know where we would be without the foundation relations people who shepherd us through the process of applying for Mellon foundation grants and preparing grant reports. We don't have an internal grants person.” Two of the sites were grateful to their institution’s librarians who were helpful with sourcing materials for students’ research papers and liaising with the HEPP to make those resources available to students. Finally, the academic departments were key partners with regard to academic advising and the recruitment and hiring of professors to teach in the HEPP. Isolating campus partners from the others is necessary as these partnerships represented close relationships rooted in trust, gratitude, and shared mission that had been cultivated over time.



## ***HEI Partners***

Beyond their campus, each case maintained relationships with other colleges and universities who served as networking partners and/or degree granting partners. Networking was increasingly important in the combined contexts of college-in-prison having bipartisan support and the attention of foundations and the pandemic. What had previously been informal networking became formalized in 2015 through the New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison (NYCHEP). The consortium provided a central avenue for HEPP administrators to share resources and ideas. With respect to the pandemic, one person shared, “We’re part of NYCHEP...we wouldn’t have survived without finding out different strategies that have worked for other programs.” This networking also led to collaboration in terms of sharing faculty for instructional support and partnering with another school to offer a degree that was not offered at the HEPPs home institution.

One participant described the benefits of partnering with a community college, “our rationale for partnering with the community college [is that] we’re [then able to] offer an associate’s degree, which then provides a pathway to a [4-year] college degree when students come home or even inside.” In this case, her home institution did not offer two year degrees. This also benefitted the community college as they were able to count these students as part of their enrollment. Another participant believed these partnerships to be attractive to funders and thus saw that as an additional incentive:

It also is true [that this is] what Mellon likes, like the consortium model. So we have our community college partner [for degree granting support], we have [another college] involved [for instructional support]...this is the kind of the building power model. Like trying to bring as many institutions as possible.

This quote conveys the open-ended nature of these partnerships and the possibility for multiple HEI partners within one arrangement.

### ***Other External Partners***

Other external partners include any formally involved organization not mentioned above. The most obvious would be the prison sites where the incarcerated students are learning. One participant stated, “the prisons are the boss” in a sense that they hold more power than the HEI in this partnership. While this was true, another participant from Acacia College cautioned against having combative disposition when interacting with the prison personnel:

There are some very fine people working in corrections at all levels. It's not always them against us. I mean there's some of that, of course, but it's certainly not at the top levels. The DOCCS personnel, most of them in my experience, they've been incredibly supportive of the program. They want it. They want them very much in the facilities. They actually don't want people to come back to jail. And they know that the most effective measure to combat recidivism is higher education. They know it works. They also know that a good college program, a strong one, has a ripple effect on the rest of the general population. And that's because you can't go to college if you're [in trouble] or in solitary.

A sub theme that emerged from looking at commentary on external partners is that each case in this study believed they had a positive working relationship with their prison site partners. This is notable as multiple participants self-identified as abolitionists experienced some tension with having to “coordinate with an institution that [they] loathe[d].” At Birch, a participant remarked,

We've been really lucky at [the prison]... the superintendent and the deputy superintendents have all really been engaged. They care about the program, they value the program, they want the program. So it's way easier to work with them as partners. But still, they're like a paramilitary agency. And they do not see a lot of things the same way that we do.

This quote also acknowledges some inherent tension with this kind of partnership even in a supportive dynamic. A participant from Maple University drew a comparison across to prison sites that they worked with:

The relationship at [prison site A] is harder than the relationship at [prison site B], which is very surprising. The relationship at [prison site A] requires a lot of management and you're sometimes like, they're headwinds that we're fighting. ...maybe we're in a honeymoon period, but the education supervisor at [prison site B] has just been incredibly solicitous. Again, like against expectations.

These accounts across sites demonstrate just how complex the relationships with prison partners can be and the amount of relationship management required on behalf of the HEPPs to work with one or more prisons.

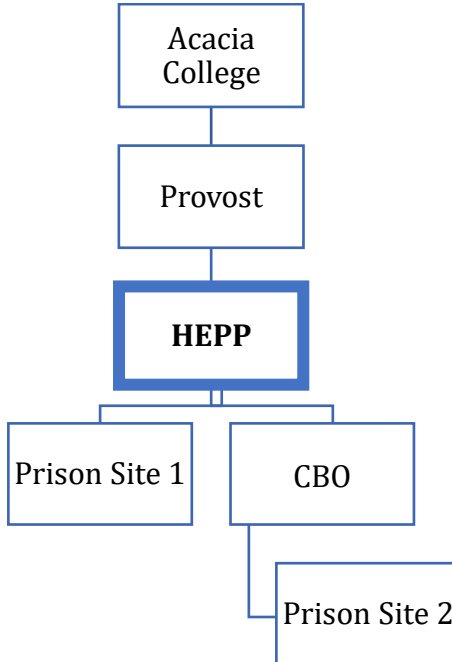
Another example of an external partner is community based organizations (CBO's). Acacia College managed their operation in-house – or without external partners – up until 2019, when they were looking to expand to another facility. By partnering with this external organization, whose focus was in administering college-in-prison programs, they were able to leverage the existing relationships that were established to start working in another facility. They were also able to offset personnel costs as part of their agreement. The HEPP at Maple University had intentionally developed close relationships with CBO's

by inviting them to the various public dialogues and lectures hosted on campus. Birch College spoke to being more intentional about building relationships with CBO's in a way that might alleviate some of their workload related to re-entry: "how do we lean in to what we do really well define what it is that we do really well and then develop intentional relationships with housing providers or with programs that support students that are receiving public assistance to offset some of those supports that we would provide." Overall, CBO's were understood to be valuable external partners but underutilized among these cases. The three types of partnerships discussed – offer insight into why the skill sets discussed in pattern one are so critical. They also shed light on the organizational complexity of these programs, which I will consider in the section below.

### ***A Look at Organizational Complexity***

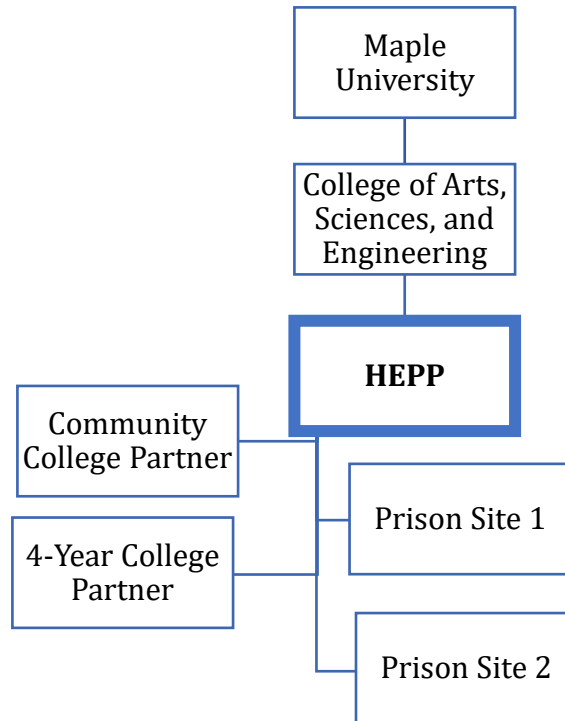
Upon review of the various components above, it is useful to consider a visual representation of each case to see the variation in their organizational structures and how their organizational complexity makes the concept of a two-way partnership inaccurate. Starting with Acacia College, Figure 4 depicts a high level view of where the program is situated with its campus context and how their external partners fit into the picture. The program reports directly to the provost, who has been actively involved in the program in various capacities during his time at the institution. This is perhaps the simplest structure among the cases since the history of the program's work has been executed in house. The program's decision to partner with a community based organization in 2019 introduce a new external partner and a new prison site (see bottom right). The CBO is responsible for administering the program at the new prison site, which means the only external relationship to be managed is between the HEPP and the CBO.

Figure 4. Acacia College Organization Chart



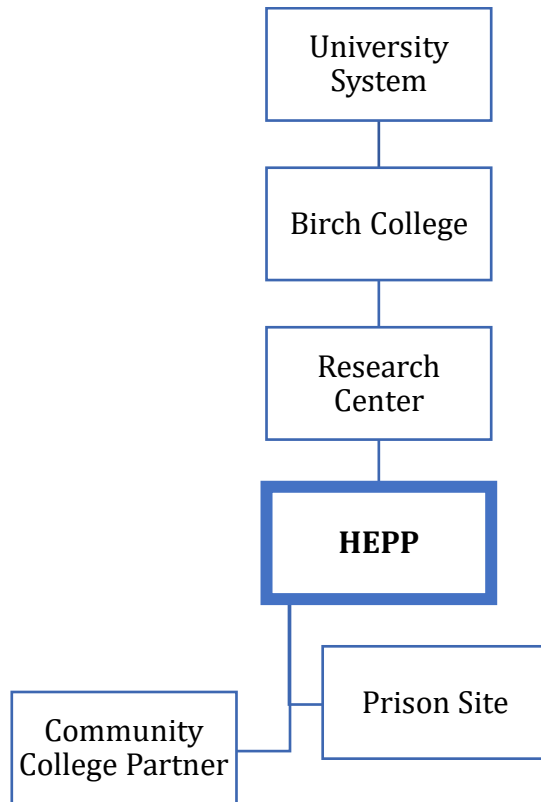
Next, Figure 5 shows a high level view of how the HEPP at Maple University is situated. In this case, the program is reporting to the dean of the College of Arts, Sciences and Engineering. The program's higher education external partners include a community college that serves as the degree granting institution for the associate's degree as well as a four-year college partner, that provides instructional support for the program. In addition, the program is formally partnered with two different prisons. This makes four distinct relationships to be managed.

Figure 5. Maple University Organization Chart



Finally, Figure 6 conveys the structure at Birch College with respect to its HEPP. As described in the case description, this program is nested within a research center at a liberal arts college that is part of a broader university systems with 25 campuses. Among all cases, this structure inherently has the most complexity and likely requires the greatest amount relationship management up and down the chart. With respect to external partners, this HEPP has partnered with one community college to be the degree granting institution for its associate's degree. The other external partner is their singular prison site.

Figure 6. Birch College Organization Chart



As shown in figures 3-5, two-way partnerships are more of an ideal than what's actually happening in practice. This third pattern offers insight into the multiple partnerships within and external to the institution and in turn the multiple relationships that need to be managed and preserved for the program to operate.

### **Patterns in Response to Research Questions**

My research questions were formulated to understand three aspects of higher education-in-prison programs: (1.) individual and programmatic intent, (2.) program function, and (3.) external factors that program staff believed to be relevant to the operation of their program. In the following section, I draw on within case themes and across case patterns that were most responsive to these questions.

## **Describing Individual and Programmatic Intent**

1. *How do individuals from colleges and universities, involved at different levels of higher education-in-prison programs, describe their intention(s) and that of their programs?*

Capturing intent was important to hone in on what programs were *trying* to do and what the people running the programs actually cared about. This can differ from what is actually happening and how people experience their work. As discussed in Chapter III, I met with participants who were involved at various levels of their program including three institutional leaders, seven program leaders, and three program affiliates (see Table 2). Following thirteen one-on-one semi-structured interviews and in-person site visits, the individual participants and their intent for their programs were clear and consistent. Participants were committed to making higher education accessible to marginalized populations and contributing to something greater than themselves such as “leveling the playing field” or “opening doors for people who often have been neglected.” Based on their academic and professional experiences, these participants would likely be doing professional work that fits within this framework whether or not they were employed by their college or university. Therefore, they were committed to their work more so than their institution. These individual dispositions were woven into the programs and came through in how participants spoke to the intent of their program.

Across cases, programmatic intent included *not* rehabilitation; preserving education quality and generating intellectual passion; making things right; institution building and leveraging power; and providing access to higher education. I provide a brief explanation of each of these. Despite the word being in their program’s descriptive overview, the idea of “rehabilitation” did not accurately convey individual or collective beliefs about the



program's intent at Acacia College. Instead, participants articulated more philosophical intentions including providing education as an invaluable human right, education as means to promote equity, and education as a corrective measure for injustice. In spite of its common use in public discourse, rehabilitation was an insufficient and limiting framework to operate from. Across cases, none of the participants used this word to describe their program's efforts. All sites believed their program intended to "preserve" or "provide" a "high-quality education" to incarcerated individuals. They wanted their students to have the same quality of instruction and services as their peers on the main campuses to the extent possible. Participants believed this was critical to developing students' "intellectual passion" or love for learning, developing their sense of "agency and identity" as college students, and generating "human connection."

The idea of making things right, as an intention, highlights how programs were cognizant of historical structures of inequity in higher education and broader society. One participant shared, "I very much believe and know that people who are incarcerated for the most part didn't land there at random." It also directly and indirectly oriented their work around social justice and demonstrated how participants and their institution felt responsible for addressing injustices. One faculty member explained that she taught in the program because she believed what her students had "...endured is highly unjust" while another administrator believed the program was "kind of a way to make things right" or counteract structures of inequity. The intention around institution building spoke to building enduring structures of power - by way of leveraging resources and relationships - that would strengthen the program's work and eventually make the work of the program essential to the operation of the university. This was more relevant at Maple University,

which had the youngest program. However, all cases expressed the need for institutionalization of their programs, which I will explicate on further in Chapter VI. Finally, these programs simply wanted to provide access to higher education to marginalized groups. Part of the values statement at Birch College conveyed their intent toward “disrupt[ing] biases, stereotypes, and discrimination by creating and implementing opportunities for equal access and success for underserved communities.” A participant at Maple University shared, “We're not in this for like the glory of the university. We're in it because there are students who we think are going to benefit from a higher education and who we know benefit from a higher education, because they tell us they do.” These responses to intent offer insight into what individuals and their programs were aiming to do and what they cared about in their work. The next question offers insight into what functions these programs actually served, whether or not those functions were intended.

### **Describing Program Function**

2. *How do individuals at colleges and universities, involved at different levels of higher education-in-prison programs, describe the function of their program?*

Focusing on programmatic function helps us to understand what function these programs serve in their campus communities and beyond. This is a more practical posture than intent to convey what is happening in practice.

- a. *How, if at all, do these individuals define or describe the program in relation to the college/university?*

With respect to program function among the campus community, each program believed their program was a concrete manifestation of their institution’s espoused missions. At Acacia College, the longevity of their program gave their institution’s social justice mission

legitimacy. At Maple University, the program's intent to become institutionalized tested the seriousness of the institution's mission and the extent to which institutional leaders were willing to lean into action related to their mission. Programs also viewed themselves as hubs or gravitational centers that brought people together – across stakeholder groups – who had a shared interest in mass incarceration, social justice, and college-in-prison. This is perhaps best exemplified at Birch College where this singular program was the only HEPP across 25 campuses but also intentionally engaged students, staff, and faculty who were interested on all campuses.

*b. How, if at all, do these individuals define or describe the program in relation to matters outside of the college/university?*

With respect to program function beyond the campus community, participants articulated a “ripple effect” into the community as a result of their program's efforts. This effect was presented most clearly between students and their immediate family members. Being a student provided a new avenue for connection with their children and making progress in their education had significant meaning for the partners, spouses, and other family members of students. In addition to strengthening familial relationships, participants believed their students ability to be present (following release) in the neighborhoods, churches, and other community contexts was inherently value added to those spaces. Participants also believed their programs served as an example to the broader public of *how* HEI's can engage in broader societal problems like mass incarceration.

Overall, they viewed the function of their work at a structural and societal level but also understood that higher education-in-prison programs could not fix the problem of mass incarceration entirely but instead be a humanizing mechanism in support of

decarceration efforts. They were hopeful that their work would eventually “normalize” college-in-prison as a matter of fact. Finally, all participants believed they were preparing their students for release or to be returning citizens in society. This most evident, as a program function, at Birch College where their HEPP was modeled around the practical realities of re-entry. As discussed, part of preparing students for re-entry involved intentional work around developing their sense of agency and identity and engaging in resocialization practices that lend toward a smoother transition. Examples of this included educating students on what they were entitled to in their capacity as a student on campus as well as their rights and resources available to them as returning citizens. An example of resocialization involved strengthening students’ decision making skills, which would be required of them after release from an environment where they had no choices and therefore little room to exercise decision making.

### **Describing Relevant Social Problems**

3. *To what extent, if at all, do higher education institutions engage in partnerships as a response to specified contexts and/or defined social problems?*

As a social institution that is vulnerable to its external context and whose work has been framed as contributing to the greater good, higher education institutions do engage in partnerships as a proactive and/or reactive response to their current context and related social problems. As written, this question implies that the institution itself is initiating and steering these partnerships. This study clarifies that is not always the case, particularly with regard to HEPPs. In all cases, these programs were initiated and sustained by faculty members who worked to establish these programs in addition to their core responsibilities.

- a. *What are the external factors, if any, that participants describe as relevant to their programs?*

The variability across cases, such as the program's age or length of operation, their home institution type (i.e, public/private control; research/liberal arts focused), and their location, surfaced a continuum of sociopolitical events to consider in terms of external factors that influenced these partnerships and ultimately the programs' outputs. The fundamental features lent toward each institution's espoused mission as well as their responsiveness to their external climate. Participants, at all sites, discussed the following relevant external factors: geographic location; the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994; the Second Chance Pell Experimental Site Initiative (SCPESI); external funding streams; the COVID-19 pandemic, and racial injustice. (Also, see discussion in Pattern Four above.)

With regards to geographic location, programs demonstrated an awareness of their institution's proximity to prisons and a sensitivity around whether those prisons were already partnered with another HEI in some way. Proximity was an indicator of partnership opportunities and also served as a measure for the extent to which prisons were social and economic contributors in their local community. In the case of Maple University, there were 10 state and federal prisons within a 90-minute drive from the main campus providing ample opportunity for university-prison partnerships. In cases like Acacia and Birch College, they were not in close proximity to many prisons and therefore focused on building strong relationships with a singular prison partner that allowed for in depth engagement with students during incarceration as well as their transition to returning citizens. The 1994 Crime Bill was relevant for all sites as they functioned during a

period of time where incarcerated students were ineligible for Pell grants as a result of the Bill. Nearly 30 years later, in the present day context, Pell eligibility for incarcerated students will be reinstated as a result of the Second Chance Pell Experimental Site Initiative. Beginning as a pilot in 2015, the SCPEI garnered bipartisan support and was quickly followed by significant philanthropic support.

Therefore, the lack of or influx of external funding remains a constant and relevant external factor. This encapsulates federal funding (i.e., Pell); state funding, city funding, and philanthropic funding. Following the announcement of Pell reinstatement, New York State considered and approved the restoration of its Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for incarcerated students. As a public institution, Birch College was able to draw on funding at the city level from the District Attorney of New York's (DANY) office as well as the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ). Finally, all programs in this study cited the generous support of the Mellon Foundation, which made grants available during the Pell experiment and additional emergency grants available during the COVID-19 pandemic. This external funding, in particular, is what made it possible for Acacia to expand to a second site, for Maple to initiate and sustain its program, and for Birch to continue operating its program during the pandemic. Finally, participants across sites identified the pandemic, itself, as a relevant external factor as well as racial injustice as a broader social problem that has influenced their work. The pandemic presented a new set of practical challenges for each program to overcome. In terms of racial injustice, participants named a range of events and social movements including, Black Lives Matter, defund the police, and decarceration efforts in response to mass incarceration as concurrent events that generated a shift in institutional focus toward racial injustice. Because these national events had the attention

of all institutional stakeholders, participants experienced this time as an external validation of their work and an opportunity to situate their work in this broader context for institutional leaders and donors. In summary, these external factors demonstrate the relevance of past, current, and even future contexts as it relates to these partnerships' operations and what they are capable of.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the structural variability among these cases. I then presented five patterns that emerged from taking each case and participant narratives into consideration simultaneously. I conclude the chapter by revisiting my research questions and draw on within case themes and across case patterns that were responsive to these questions. Overall, this chapter offers insight into similarities, differences, and the structural complexities of the programs in this study. In Chapter VI, I take the discussion beyond the research questions to consider how my findings can inform future inquiry and practice for higher education-in-prison programs.

## VI — INSIGHTS FROM THEORY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

### **Chapter Overview**

In this chapter, I take the opportunity to consider my full set of data and related findings beyond the scope of my research questions. As intended, this multi-site case study provided insight into structural realities of HEPPs, and rich narratives from professionals running them, that can be considered beyond my analysis. I begin by reflecting on my conceptual framework as both a guide and container for much of the data. Next, I summarize practical implications for institutionalizing these programs that are likely applicable to non-profit HEIs, regardless of their location. I conclude by offering considerations for future research based on my own research in preparation for this study as well as what I have come to learn by conducting this study on HEPPs.

#### **Implications for Theory: Reflecting on my Conceptual Framework**

My conceptual framework was constructed with the intent to operationalize the civic mission of higher education in a way that would offer insight into university partnerships. I hoped this framework would allow me to better understand the extent to which university partnerships are tied to the civic mission and how the people leading these partnerships articulate the role of their partnership on campus and beyond. This required insight into partnerships at three distinct but interrelated levels including, the individual, the institutional and the external contexts that inform institutional priorities. The first frame, *Civic Professionalism* (Boyte & Fretz, 2010), was used to highlight the individual characteristics and attributes of people who choose professions that are in



service to the public good. The second frame, *Engaged Institutions* (Boyer, 1990), provided an understanding of the features and practices of HEI's that are productively engaged with external communities. The third frame, *Ethical Pluralism* (Ross, 1930), allowed for an extensive, yet context specific, understanding of action or inaction as it relates to ethical obligation. The following sections considers how my findings aligned with this framework as well how this framework might be modified based on my findings.

Starting with civic professionalism, this frame revealed participant priorities and motives for the work they chose to commit to. It distinguished individuals' commitment to work in service to people rather than working in service to their institution. This frame also shed light on the necessary dispositions and skill sets among participants that made the work of their programs possible and successful (see Pattern One in Chapter V). In the case of HEPP's, having individual-level ability for boundary spanning was a critical asset among personnel that helped their work flourish on campus and in the community. Based on participant narratives, boundary spanning involved "liaising," "compromising," "communicating," "translating," "advocating" and "relationship building" with different types of stakeholders on and off campus. These efforts met people where they were and therefore made the work of the program coherent and inclusive from multiple standpoints.

Employing the engaged university frame enabled me to take a closer look at the institution level features with respect to their external engagement and situated my findings in the context of broader campus values and priorities. Much of this data conveyed how each institution marketed itself in relation to the broader public and ways in which they demonstrated their espoused missions. (Also see Patterns Two and Three in Chapter V.) Additionally, this frame highlighted the innerworkings of each institution – practical

and conceptual – in relation to their programs. It surfaced a set of key internal campus partners, a variety of external partners, and underscored the organizational complexity of these partnerships (see Pattern Five in Chapter V). I discuss these findings in more detail in the next section on implications for practice.

The third frame, ethical pluralism, offered a range of possible explanations as to why HEIs were engaged in this specific kind of partnership in the current context. This frame complemented the moral and ethical obligation of HEIs to demonstrate themselves as a public good by offering seven facets that could help explain why and how HEPPs were a priority for their HEI considering their complex environments with competing demands. Of the seven facets, beneficence, justice, and reparations were recurring explanations as to why HEPPs, in particular, were significant university partnerships at each institution in this study. Among these programs, beneficence presented as institutions feeling responsible for engaging in broader social problems in a way that offered improvement for the broader good of their local communities. One participant described this as believing in “second chances” while another felt they had an obligation in “preparing this generation of students to go out and make the world a better place.” This reflects Ross’s (1930) idea of beneficence, which centers on kindness and improving the wellbeing of others.

Justice was undoubtedly the most prominent rationale and, in this case, spoke to the need for making educational resources accessible to populations who have historically been prevented from accessing them. This was characterized as institutions doing their “fair share” or “sharing resources more broadly as an ethic.” Justice also grounded the programs’ intention toward humanizing incarcerated individuals. One participant explained it this way:

Regardless of what harm they have caused in the world or were found by our society to have caused, whether or not they did [it], they're deserving of our human-to-human respect. And they all have inherent dignity. They all have desires and ambitions that we're capable of serving.

Having an individual and professional orientation around justice allowed participants to situate their work in the broader society and contemplate their program's value-added in relation to societal problems. In this way, it shed light on the extent to which participants were knowledgeable of and engaged in external social problems (as explained in Pattern Four in Chapter V).

Reparations addressed reparative or restorative action in response to past wrongs or making amends. Among these cases, the idea of reparations highlighted structural deficiencies in K-12, higher education, and the legal system (as discussed in Chapters II and III) for which HEPPs were responsive to. Participants shared that their students often had not had an opportunity to have a quality K-12 education and that their HEPP engagement was the first positive educational experience. With respect to structural discrimination in higher education, one participant shared: "our institutions have excluded students from the dawn of time since we created like formal structures of education and this is a way to address that..." Another participant shared the importance of her program's attentiveness to structural inequality related to arrests and mass incarceration, more generally, "you have to deal with the [legal] system and make sure that you don't ignore...how [students] got there or why [they]'re there for that long." This sentiment conveys how participants believed their programs were, in fact, a response to a broader societal problem. (Also see Theme Three in Case One.) An unexpected takeaway from employing this framework is the

extent to which benevolence, justice, and reparation were indistinguishable from one another in how participants described their program's ethical footing. For example, participants commonly identified matters of equity and justice that were intended to amend historical and structural harm or rooted in reparation. I interpreted this as "social justice" likely being part of campus colloquialisms whereas "reparation" was not, at the time of this study.

While my conceptual framework yielded useful data that provided insight into the functions, intents, and externally relevant factors of this type of university partnerships, my findings also conveyed how this framework might be expanded or modified. By considering each case at three levels – individual, institutional, and external – I was able to identify how findings at each level could be strengthened and explored further through additional frameworks. At the individual level, participants highlighted internal personnel challenges (e.g., turnover, burnout, lack of management) as a challenge in their work. My existing framework (civic professionalism) channeled the personal and professional dispositions of individuals but did not consider their individual- or team-level operational challenges. Introducing a framework that could clarify organizational roles, responsibilities, and apertures at the program- and institution-level might offer some strategic direction for program personnel and their campus partners.

At the institution level, participants discussed complex and bureaucratic organizational structures that they were up against as a regular part of their job. Unfortunately, the time and resources dedicated to overcoming these hurdles limited the programs' ability to engage in more meaningful work, like archiving historical records and related institutional knowledge and contemplating ways to strategically improve their

operation. In this regard, introducing a framework that could help determine types of work that are better off centralized versus decentralized could be beneficial. The institution level framework – the engaged institution – unearthed a number of critical campus partners who were already handling specific administrative efforts centrally. This brings into question which types of work should remain within the program and which types might be better executed centrally, with the intent to preserve program-level capacity for more meaningful kinds of work.

At the external level, my findings pointed to concerns around program continuity in the event of external upsets beyond the control of the program or the institution. Examples include major shifts in funding regulations (e.g., 1994 Crime Bill, Pell restoration, and TAP restoration) and the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, employing frameworks that consider environmental risk management (ERM) and/or academic continuity could be beneficial since HEPPs, and university-partnerships more generally, are required to navigate multiple entities to execute their work, even in the most stable environments. Further, it would be helpful to understand the extent to which ERM and academic continuity planning might differ from what is already in place at programs' home institution. This additional frame could help program proactively consider how they might respond to future external matters that are beyond their control.

Overall, my findings pointed to some significant challenges faced by each program. Participants felt these were areas of vulnerability without strategic direction at the program level. Expanding my original framework to better understand some of these dynamics could shift them vulnerabilities into action-oriented work. My initial framework helped to ground some of the vague and often intangible realities of these partnerships.

Expanding on this has the potential to generate some strategic direction with respect to individual, institutional, and external contexts. After analyzing the full set of data, it became evident that participants had practical ideas for improving, growing, and institutionalizing their programs, which I explain these in the following section.

### **Implications for Practice: Institutionalizing Higher Education in Prison Programs**

All programs in this study expressed a desire to be deeply embedded in the mission and operations of their college or university. Taking into account what participants believed worked well, in addition to what they wished for in the future, there were four considerations for institutionalizing higher education-in-prison programs: (1.) program leadership, (2.) relationship management between the program and the university, (3.) program delivery or mode of instruction, and (4.) managing and tracking the student life-cycle. I provide a brief description of each in connection with the relevant cases below.

#### **Program Leadership**

In this study, HEPPs were successfully led by full-time faculty members who were able to lean into their political capital (via shared governance) and job security (via tenure) to navigate institutional bureaucracy and generate varying kinds of support from internal and external stakeholders. This implies that a purely administrative leader would not possess the inherent power that comes with being a tenured faculty member and therefore is less likely to overcome bureaucratic hurdles and generate the same momentum as a faculty leader can. This is best exemplified in the discussion of Case Two's first theme. Programs looking to institutionalize their programs can begin by ensuring that the leader is a tenured faculty member with expertise in relevant subject matter as well as someone with boundary spanning capabilities. This does not mean that administrative leaders could

not have the same success. Instead, it suggest that administrative leaders would have to be positioned strategically so that they were empowered to leverage institutional relationships and ensure that they have the autonomy to take risks in the best interest of their program and institution. An example of this might be to endow a named chair that is open to administrative chairholders. In this case, the administrator would likely have a relationship with the benefactor introducing political capital an external buy-in that the administrator can leverage. It also introduces some amount of job security since that position is externally funded.

Having an academic leader in place was also key to gaining buy-in from other faculty at each institution. Faculty participants in this study credited their fellow faculty members for introducing them to the programs. An underlying theme that emerged, from learning about program origins, was that full-time faculty members were the heartbeat of these programs. In all cases, the programs were initiated by (formally or informally) and sustained through the efforts of faculty members. Moreover, these faculty engaged in the programs voluntarily in addition to their full-time core responsibilities (i.e, research, teaching, service). This has implications for how leading a program can offset some of these duties, similar to when faculty become deans or appointed as leaders of centers or institutes. When asked what else might be considered for leading these programs, the faculty director at Birch College said, “there needs to be much more representation of people who have been incarcerated in the running of these programs.” This presents a challenge for two reasons. First, this would require HEI’s be intentional about hiring and developing formerly incarcerated people, which comes with its own challenges around disclosure. Second, while there are formerly incarcerated people that have gone on to earn

their Ph.D. and other terminal degrees, going back into a prison can be a uniquely challenging experience for them. This brings into question the extent to which program leaders need to be physically present on site and how HEI's can support their wellbeing as they navigate the personal and professional challenges of their work. Overall, these takeaways demonstrate the value-added by positioning an academic leader as the head of these programs and related nuances to consider when selecting a program leader.

### **Relationship Management Between Program and University**

While emphasis is often placed on the university-prison partnership, HEPPs require intentional relationship management between their program staff as well as campus colleagues. These relationships are critical to decision making around more practical matters (ie., teaching loads, tuition waivers, course registration) as well as establishing shared responsibility and building goodwill. As discussed in Chapter V, Pattern 5, campus partners – including but not limited to academic and/or administrative leaders, the registrar, bursar, admissions, and financial aid, institutional advancement, grants and foundation relations, librarians, and academic departments – are critical to day-to-day support for HEPPs. Participants understood that their program generated “extra work” for central offices as they were often tasked with developing new processes that aligned with DOCCS restrictions without compromising institutional standards. They also emphasized that it took time and intentional work to get the program and campus partners on the same page. Moving away from “what is this and why are we doing it?” to establishing a shared responsibility in service to *all* students. While there was no individual formally responsible for managing these relationships, it was clear that this invisible work was necessary and also had to be sustained when staff turnover occurred in administrative offices.



As mentioned, these relationships can have implications for the practical implementation of HEPPs. More specifically, making the program accessible to faculty for participation required buy-in and support from central administration. In all cases, an academic leader (i.e., provost or dean) was responsible for deciding whether teaching a course in the program counted toward a faculty member's work load or if it was treated as something else, like service. One participant reflected on the value of this in relation institutionalizing the program:

...it's better rendering it more institutionalized and therefore sort of permanent and part of the culture on the campus. I think the only way to do that is by having there be more on-load teaching so that it actually counts as people's work day and it counts as some of their teaching and it gets built into the fabric of stuff here.

These leaders also weighed in on the extent to which adjuncts could engage in the program and how much they would be compensated. A faculty participant shared her reservations about relying on adjuncts too much:

I have a real discomfort with the model [of] all adjunct[s] because a.) the labor conditions are less good and b.) then I don't actually know what about it is [Maple University]. And so if this is actually a [Maple University] program, then I think what makes that really work is to have [Maple University] faculty.

In this study, two of the three sites allowed full-time faculty to teach within the HEPP as part of their existing work load. The other site required a case-by-case review and only one faculty member, so far, had been able to get approval as part of a retention agreement. This example conveys how two sites were able to convince their academic leaders that this would work to the benefit of the program *and* the institution. Meanwhile, another site's

academic leaders viewed on-load teaching as a perk. One expressed concern was whether teaching on-load at the prison would negatively impact the availability of full-time faculty on the main campus and inadvertently increase the need for adjuncts on the main campus. With respect to relationship management, this site would have to continue to lay the groundwork for why on-load teaching is valuable to the program, to the institution, and negotiate resources to allay concerns about potential shortages on the main campus.

### **Program Delivery or Mode of Instruction**

Students and faculty in HEPPs benefit from in-person teaching and learning over virtual or hybrid options. Participants believed that the in-person modality was critical to carrying out their expressed purposes (e.g., building human connection, developing intellectual passion, preparing students for re-entry). One faculty member explained why this mattered so much, “Cuz it's the informal moments. It's the chatting to the side before lesson or after class where a lot of the magic happens.” This takeaway was particularly salient in year three of a pandemic since various modalities had been tested for continuity during COVID-19. In spite of their schools acquiring the appropriate technology to conduct virtual classes, students at Birch and Acacia were less interested and unenrolled from their programs for the remainder of remote learning. Sharing space, in-person, was important to students as well as faculty and all participants felt this modality ought to be preserved to maintain their program's quality.

This has implications for ensuring that teaching in-person remains possible for faculty (e.g., ease of commuting, on-load teaching credit). It also implies that these programs may only need to invest in technology as a supportive measure and not as a routine tool. Additionally, as part of practice, it is necessary to gather more information and

evidence on exactly what is happening in-person as preventative measure against corporate interference from companies pushing remote learning as an alternative to HEPPs (see Pattern Four in Chapter V).

### **Managing and Tracking the Student Lifecycle**

HEPPs can benefit from additional support that intentionally focuses on the student lifecycle from the point of enrollment and beyond. All cases expressed the need for a student affairs-equivalent function for co-curricular support. Additionally, all cases expressed the desire to have an alumni network as a mechanism to keep students engaged during matriculation and after graduation. While the motivations for these additional supports would be to improve students' experience, it would also introduce an avenue to collect and maintain informative data on students. This was a challenge in each case due to capacity limitations. Participants expressed how much of their time was spent "keeping the train on the tracks" and how they would value the opportunity to focus on intentionally collecting data to better support their students but also to inform future practices. Tracking students also proved challenging for other practical reasons such as students being transferred to another prison, students stopping out, and students graduating and moving on without having a home base outside of the prison or alumni network to belong to. Students willingness to remain in touch is optional but there was a dearth of information on what happened to students in both successful and unknown cases since there was no role or resources in place to focus on tracking this information. Participants shared that it was especially challenging to keep up with students who had been released since some just "disappear." These challenges are not atypical of the traditional student population, which implies that an additional set of campus partners (e.g., institutional research, student

affairs, alumni engagement) might be approached to help fill in the gap. Alternatively, programs can hire personnel who have expertise in student affairs, enrollment management, and alumni engagement who are capable of navigating the bureaucratic hurdles at their institution and among external partners.

In summary, these implications for practice have an eye toward institutionalizing HEPPs within their college or university. While there are undoubtedly numerous approaches to this work, this study's findings pointed to four specific areas to focus on: (1.) program leadership, (2.) relationship management between the program and the university, (3.) program delivery or mode of instruction, and (4.) managing and tracking the student life-cycle. Collectively, these areas clarify what can often be invisible but critical work that may contribute to symbiosis between the program and the institution. The following section delves into considerations for future research.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The findings in Chapters IV and V of this study bring forward areas of focus for future studies. In particular, I have identified four relevant areas that could serve as a continuation of research following this dissertation: (1.) utilizing intentional language, (2.) rethinking success and alumni in HEPPs, (3.) centering students' agency, and (4.) investigating and identifying best practices for funding HEPPs. Future research in each of these areas can strengthen the existing literature on higher education-in-prison, further distinguish it from correctional education, and provide a foundation for improving on how incarcerated students and returning citizens are understood and treated in the broader public discourse.

## **Utilizing Intentional Language**

Being intentional about how students are described during and following their incarceration is critical to public discourse and has policy implications for how students who were vulnerable to the school-to-prison pipeline and/or mass incarceration are treated in educational institutions. Throughout this study, the importance of human connection, humans' right to education, and inherent human value have surfaced as contributing beliefs in support of HEPPs. Therefore, a human first approach to language or people centered approach would be invaluable to correcting for existing language (i.e., prisoner, inmate, felon, convict) that has characterized students a criminals or less than human (Cox, 2020).

More practically, having a shared language is necessary to improve the specificity of future metanalyses and to help stakeholders understand the distinctions between correctional education and higher education-in-prison (see Figure 2). This points to the need for more coherence in how these programs are described and what relevant attributes are inherent in their descriptions. In this study, I use higher education-in-prison and college-in-prison synonymously to center the higher education components involved in these programs. Existing literature has used college-in-prison synonymously with correctional education, which does not always carry the same higher education components. Reaching alignment in these descriptors can strengthen research outputs, which inform decision making for policies and funding at the federal and state level. Intentional language may also help articulate donor impact, which can inform future giving.

## **Rethinking “Success” and “Alumni” in HEPPs**

At colleges and universities, matriculation rates are a standard metric for student success. Relatedly, once students receive their academic credential, they are counted as alumni. In the case of HEPPs, the concept of success and the definition of alumni is more complicated. Because these programs are responding to broader social problems, success for students can look many different ways. Similarly, who gets to be considered among program alumni can also vary. Put differently, matriculation is not an adequate metric in this context. Existing literature relies heavily on language like rehabilitation to rationalize HEPPs and cites recidivism rates as data based justifications. Individuals leading these programs, in this study, do not talk about their programs in the same way. As discussed, participants believed rehabilitation to be a “limiting” rationale and that recidivism was “not the point” of why they do what they do.

Future research can better capture these perspectives – first, by reconsidering the language used to explain the value of these programs and second, by allowing those working most intimately with these programs to describe their understanding of student success. For example, one participant shared:

For me success is [asking], do our students get to come out and live meaningful lives of their own creation in a way that makes them happy? Or that they get to have survived their prison experience and be able to come out and create lives that they want? ...staying out of prison is a piece of that [so] that should be something.

This participant’s take on student success echoes the earlier sentiments of a human first approach. It conveys how future research can better capture the nuance of success within the context of HEPPs by relying more on those who work within these programs instead of

externally-derived metrics. Additionally, future research can help explain the variations of alumni, as a concept, in these programs as the definitions differ from the use of this terminology in higher education more broadly.

### **Centering Students' Agency**

The students who enroll in college-in-prison programs make a choice to do so and their agency ought to be reflected in characterizing their experiences and overall success. For example, when there are positive outcomes, it is important that research not attribute those solely to participation in higher education. As one participant reflected: "These are people who self-designated, like [saying] 'I want to do better. I want positively oriented goals.' So to say, 'oh, college made that happen' is probably not the whole story." While there is rarely one variable to explain any phenomena, these programs demand another level of scrutiny in how research gets reports on outcomes for two reasons. First, HEIs are compelled to position and describe themselves as a public good and second, HEPPs believe their work to be in direct response to social problems. As a result, it may be easy to think about higher education and students outcomes in a causal manner when their outcomes are actually dependent on numerous correlating variables. Importantly, student agency should be a central variable in future research as they are opting into these programs while some of their peers are not. They are also choosing to persist or stop out, which is also worthy of more research and understanding.

### **Investigating and Identifying Best Practices for Funding HEPPs**

Since funding can be contingent at the institutional and external contexts, it is necessary for these programs to have strategic approaches to how they fund and sustain their programs. Future research can introduce frameworks to better understand funding

streams and budget optimization given the multiple funding sources within and external to the institution. The administrative leadership at Acacia College hoped to one day operate their program solely from their endowment, which would provide relief to the College's annual budget, but they did not have a strategy to get there. As a public institution, Birch College was able to draw on different kinds of government funding compared to their private counterparts. This brings into question how institution type can strategically influence funding strategies for programs. Additional research may also offer insight into quelling some of the inevitable bureaucratic hurdles tied to finances. Another arm of this research could focus on the appropriateness of funding utilization. One participant reflected on a question she regularly asked herself, "When is it appropriate to use government dollars versus foundation dollars and for what function?" Her question seeks to understand whether there is a more strategic approach for how their program thinks about spending, based on the funding source. In summary, future research on higher education-in-prison programs can focus on (1.) utilizing intentional language, (2.) rethinking success and alumni in HEPPs, (3.) centering students' agency, and (4.) investigating and identifying best practices for funding HEPPs. Together, these outputs can strengthen the foundation that this work is being built on with respect to scholarship as well as practice.

### **Closing**

I designed this study after having spent nearly a decade focused on higher education leadership, studying the civic mission of higher education, supporting the development of a university-school partnership at a large research university, and contemplating how institutions of higher education show up in their communities. I was intrigued throughout



by the evidential benefits of university partnerships as well as the challenges that presented themselves when two (or more) unique institutions came together. I was struck by the focus on how challenging university partnerships were to build and sustain in juxtaposition with how meaningful they could be to universities and communities when executed well. I wanted to understand more about why colleges and universities made the choice to engage in community partnerships and how the people who led them characterized their work. This study focused on university-prison partnerships as one case of university partnerships, writ large. I chose to focus on this type of partnership upon realizing the scarcity of information available inclusive of input from scholars and practitioners in higher education. Further, I was compelled to bring forward qualitative features of these partnerships in the midst of statistical metaanalyses on recidivism and public discourse on rehabilitation.

Through this study, I have tried to ground the often opaque work of university partnerships through the narrative of participants actually doing the work. I also tried to situate the work in the field of higher education to make the cross-sector discourse relevant to scholars and practitioners in academia who are already working in HEPPs or considering these partnerships at their institution. It is my hope that this study not only conveys the complexity of university partnerships but also their value-added for individuals, the institutions who host them, and the broader community.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A: Consent Form**

Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
www.tc.edu

Higher Education-in-Prison Programs: A Multisite Case Analysis of Partnerships Between American Universities and Prisons in the Context of Mass Incarceration

#### INFORMED CONSENT

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH:** You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted as part of a dissertation project at Teachers College, Columbia University. The purpose of this research project is to examine specific cases of higher education-in-prison programs to better understand how individuals from the field of higher education describe the purpose(s) of their programs within the context of their institutions and beyond.

As part of this study, you will participate in a two hour interview with the researcher. Approximately 15 people will be interviewed for this study. At any time during this interview, you may elect to discontinue the interview or reschedule to continue at a later date.

The interview will be conducted by the researcher, Jerée Matherson, and it will take place at a location mutually agreed upon by the researcher and the participant. Participation in this study involves one interview that will take approximately one to two hours to complete, with an opportunity to conduct a follow-up interview if agreed upon by the participant. This interview will be audiotaped and transcribed.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** This is a minimal risk study which means that participating in the research includes risk similar to what you might encounter during a conversation with a trusted colleague about their professional experiences. There is the possible risk of discomfort that sometimes results from reflecting on aspects of your program and your personal, lived experiences with the program. You are free to decline and discontinue participation in the study now or at any time. Declining or discontinuing participation in the research will have no negative repercussions. As a participant in this study, you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to, or to stop the interview at any time.

Further, it is always possible that someone, particularly someone who knows you well, may be able to discern your identity, even though I will mask it to the fullest extent. It is important to note that every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of the institutions

and the participants. Toward these efforts, all writing, documentation, and communication regarding this project will identify the institutions in broad and generic terms.

**COVID-19 RISK:** Due to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are inherent risks with in-person research. Person-to-person exposure is the most frequent route of transmission for infectious viruses and occurs via direct inhalation of respiratory droplets during close contact. Infectious diseases are transmitted from person to person by direct or indirect contact. Certain types of viruses, bacteria, parasites, and fungi can all cause infectious disease.

**WAYS TO MITIGATE RISK:** Simple preventative measures, such as frequent hand washing, wearing a face covering, maintaining social distance, disinfecting the workspace can cut down on disease transmission. If you have flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, etc.) please reschedule any in-person meetings. If you experience flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, etc.) during the study activity, please immediately alert the researcher. The researcher will then stop all study activities. The researcher may provide you with information on where to get a COVID-19 test, or other safety and health information.

**(LIMITED) MANDATED REPORTING:** When required by law, information (including individually identifiable information) related to a research subject's COVID-19 tests results may be reported to a public health authority.

- If you find out you have tested positive for COVID-19 and recently participated in a research study, please contact the researcher at your earliest convenience. If applicable, your name and contact information may be shared with the Environmental Health and Safety Office (EHS) to initiate viral contact tracing. The researcher will not share your research data with anyone outside of the research team.
- When communicating with anyone other than the IRB or the researcher about your symptoms or your concerns about a potential viral spread, you **DO NOT** have to disclose the study title or topic. The researchers will only share your name and contact information, if appropriate for viral contact tracing.
- The researcher will keep you, the research participant, updated on any next steps as they become available.

There may be no direct personal benefit from your participation in the study, but an indirect benefit may be that the interview process will allow you to reflect on your experiences and conceptions of higher education-in-prison programs, and allow you to contribute your knowledge to enhance the broader understanding of these programs for others in the field of higher education as well as relevant cross-sector partners.

**PAYMENT:** There will be no payment for your participation.

**DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your responses will be recorded using an audio recording device. To ensure confidentiality of all participants in this study, all

audio-recorded interviews will be used only for the purposes of this study. All interview audio recordings and accompanying transcripts will be stored on the researcher's external hard-drive with password protection, accessible only to the researcher. At the conclusion of the study, all recordings, transcripts, and other notes will be destroyed. To mask identity, the names of all participants and their respective departments, programs, and campuses will be replaced with pseudonyms and codes in transcripts and papers. Final study reports will not include any aspect of your identity that you do not want disclosed.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation in the interview will take approximately one and a half to two hours. This time included brief discussion before the interview as well as the audio-recorded interview itself. If you are involved in a follow-up interview, that will last approximately one hour.

**HOW RESULTS WILL BE USED:** The results of the study will be analyzed for the purposes of writing a dissertation as part of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Results may also be reported by way of academic or professional presentations and/or publications.

## **Appendix B: Participants Rights**

Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
www.tc.edu

### PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

Researcher: Jerée Matherson

Research Title: Higher Education-in-Prison Programs: A Multisite Case Analysis of Partnerships Between American Universities and Prisons in the Context of Mass Incarceration

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's email address is: [jmm2321@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:jmm2321@tc.columbia.edu).
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board/IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.

- Audio taping is part of this research.  
I  consent to be audio taped.  
I  do NOT consent to being audio taped.

The written and audio taped materials will be viewed only by the researcher. Written and/or audio taped materials

- may be shared in an educational setting outside the research.
- may NOT be shared in an educational setting outside the research.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study as described above.

Participant's Signature : \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name (print) : \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Invitation Letter

Dear <Name>,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study. The study, entitled Higher Education-in-Prison Programs: A Multisite Case Analysis of Partnerships Between American Universities and Prisons in the Context of Mass Incarceration, aims to illuminate the perspectives of higher education personnel involved in higher education-in-prison programs to understand how they describe the function of these partnerships within their institutions and broader society. The study will include participants at three different higher education institutions that host active higher education-in-prison programs. I am conducting this dissertation study as part of work as a doctoral candidate in the Program of Higher and Postsecondary Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.

If you agree to participate, your involvement will include an in-person interview that will take approximately 2 hours to complete. To further clarify key features of your program as well as your conception of your program, it is possible that I will ask you to participate in a follow-up one hour interview. In order to understand how the program is organized, I may ask for an organizational chart of the program as well as other documents that convey how the program fits into the broader university landscape.

Interview questions may involve your commenting on aspects of your current or past experience related to higher education-in-prison programs, including your understandings of the reason(s) why your institution pursued or agreed to such a partnership, who/what may have facilitated the partnership, and what function(s) these partnerships service within and external to the institution as it is being carried out.

Your privacy and confidentiality are important to me and to the integrity of the study. I will treat the interview and supporting materials with the utmost confidentiality, and only I will have knowledge of your identity. Your identity and the identities of any individuals you mention will be masked, as will your university's name. I will not share your name or the names of any study participants with anyone within your institution or elsewhere. Pseudonyms and other identity-masking techniques will be used in all presentations and written aspects of the study. In addition, I will ask you if you want to further mask other features of your identity or work and personal experiences, and I will ensure that I have followed your preferences.

I hope that you might be willing to participate in the study, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of higher education-in-prison programs for the field of higher education as well as externally relevant partners. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider participation. I will follow up in a few days or please feel free to contact me directly at [jmm2321@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:jmm2321@tc.columbia.edu) at any time.

Sincerely,

Jerée Matherson, M.A., Ed.M.

## Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Higher Education-in-Prison Programs: A Multisite Case Analysis of Partnerships Between American Universities And Prisons in the Context of Mass Incarceration

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### Participant Information

Interviewee Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone & Email: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Researcher Information

Interviewer Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Date & Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes on preferences, identifiability concerns, other:



Interviewee Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of setting:

[Review Project Overview and Informed Consent]

Hello and introductions ...

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Through this study, I am exploring how individuals within higher education-in-prison programs describe the function of these programs from the purview of higher education. I hope this study will help those within the field and our relevant partners understand these programs from the perspective of key providers of the partnerships. I especially hope these perspective can inform broader decision making that may occur at the institutional level as well as through related public policy. Is there anything more you would like to know about the purpose of the study?

As I explained, I will treat this interview as strictly confidential. If during the interview you say something that you consider as especially sensitive or revealing of your identity, please let me know.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to respond to any questions and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. I also want to be clear that I am in no way trying to evaluate your work; nor am I evaluating the institution where you work. Rather, I am trying to understand how you have come to understand the purpose of your work and your institution's involvement in this work.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record this interview in order to have a complete record of our conversation. Do I have your permission to record?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

*If Yes:* Thank you. If at any time you are uncomfortable with what's being recorded, you can ask me to exclude that content or consider it off the record.

*If No:* I will take notes by hand as you speak to the best of my ability, which may extend our time a bit.

[Present consent form.] This form details what I just reviewed about confidentiality. Can I ask you to read and sign this form, and let me know if you have any questions?

I will also give you a copy of the form for your records.

[Collect forms ensuring signature and indication of taping preference.]

## BACKGROUND

I'd like to begin by getting some background information about you and your role.

*[Note: Most of this information will be obtained in advance from the institution's/program's website. If so, in this section interviewer will verify this previously collected data and use questions to establish rapport.]*

1. It is my understanding that your current title is \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ <program name> at \_\_\_\_\_ <college/university name>?

Prompt:

- And how long have you held this position?

2. Can you, briefly, explain the core responsibilities of your role to me?

3. Tell me about your background and what led you to this role.

Prompts:

- Have you held other roles at the university?
- What prior educational or professional experiences, if any, were relevant to carrying out this role?
- Are there specific skillsets that you believe are required for this work?

4. Whether it pertains to this role or others, can you explain what makes work meaningful to you?

Prompt:

- Can you share a meaningful moment/experience related to the work that you do?

## INSTITUTIONAL ORIENTATION

5. Is there another individual or department that you report to directly?

Prompts:

- If Yes: Who are they? How would you describe their involvement?

6. Would you say that there are individuals or departments that you report to informally?

Prompts:

- If Yes: Who are they? How would you describe their involvement?

I'd like to talk about the program and how it is situated within the university. I am interested in learning a bit about how the program came to be and what role it plays both on and off campus.

7. This program was established in \_\_\_\_\_ <year>. Is that correct?

Prompts:

- Can you tell me what you know about its origins?
- What do you make of the timing?

8. If at all, to what extent is this program part of the broader institutional mission or set of priorities?

Prompts:

- Would you say the program and university are in alignment in terms of mission and purpose?
- If Yes: How so?
- If No: How might they be better aligned?

9. Since \_\_\_\_\_ <year>, how has the program changed or evolved?

Prompts:

- Who or what contributed to this evolution?
- How so?

10. Does the program work closely with others on campus?

Prompts:

- If Yes: Who? In what ways? Is this intentional?
- If No: Is this intentional? Do you have ideal campus partners in mind?

11. If you could draw on more resources or support from within the university community, what would they be?

Prompts:

- Who could authorize these resources or make them available?
- Is there a reason why these resources are currently not in place?

12. If you could draw on more resources that are external to the university community, what would they be?

Prompts:

- Who could authorize these resources or make them available?
- Is there a reason why these resources are currently not in place?

## PROGRAM CONCEPTIONS

13. What would you describe at the core facets of your program?

Prompt:

- What makes this program different from other higher education in prison programs?
14. [Hand participant copy of program's stated mission/purpose.] The program's purpose/mission states: <mission/purpose>. Are there functions of the program that are not conveyed here?
- Prompt:
- Would you describe its function differently?
15. Universities exist within broader environments that are often influential on institutional priorities and decision making. Put differently, what might be thought of as our external environment can directly or indirectly influence work happening within the campus setting. So what is it about this institution, at this point in time, that makes this program possible?
- Prompt:
- Can you name specific external factors?
16. In what ways, if any, do you expect the program to evolve over the next ten years?
- Prompt:
- What do you expect will be contributors to future changes?
17. If the program were to be described as a success by future generations, how would you characterize that success?
- Prompt:
- What might be said about what was done? What was achieved? To what end?

#### CLOSING

18. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences related to the university or the program that we have not talked about?
19. Can you please share with me the names of any other individuals involved in the program that it may be valuable for me to meet with as part of this research study?

## **Appendix E: Case Level Documents and Materials Collected**

### **Acacia College**

Institutional Mission Statement  
Institutional Inclusivity Statement  
President's Charge to Strategic Planning Steering Committee (2016)  
Strategic Plan Progress Report (2019-2021)  
Academic Strategic Plan (2022-2024)  
Program Mission  
Program Summary

### **Maple University**

Institutional Mission Statement  
University Values Statement  
University Organization Chart  
Institution Office of Equity and Inclusion Mission Statement  
University News Article (December 2022)  
Program Mission  
Program Summary  
Alumni Newsletter (Spring 2022)  
Alumni Newsletter (Fall 2022)  
Maple University & Affiliates New York State Economic Impact Report (2019)

### **Birch College**

University Mission Statement and Statistics  
Institutional Mission Statement  
Institutional Values Statement  
Institutional 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Timeline  
Research Center Annual Report (2020-2021)  
Program Mission  
Program Summary