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College Administrator Experiences: A Phenomenological Study of Higher Education Leadership in American Prisons

Donavan Bailey

Winona State University, baileynation@outlook.com

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College Administrator Experiences:
A Phenomenological Study of Higher Education Leadership in American Prisons

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
of Winona State University

by
Donavan Bailey
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctorate of Education

19 March 2023

The Dissertation Committee for Donovan Bailey certifies approval of the following
dissertation:

College Administrator Experiences:


A Phenomenological Study of Higher Education Leadership in American Prisons

Committee:

Joel Traver, EdD, Committee chair

Mary Kirk, DSW, Committee member

Steven Baule, Ed.D., PhD, Committee member



Joel Traver, Chair



Mary Kirk

Steven Baule

Steven Baule

Date Approved: _____

Abstract

Higher education for the incarcerated (HEP) is a re-energized phenomenon in the age of criminal justice reform and social change. Following the 2015 Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative (SCP), which granted select colleges tuition funding for prisoners, HEP grew exponentially. The successes of the SCP laid the groundwork for the 2020 FASFA Simplification Act. In July 2023 the 2020 FSA begins, and all those imprisoned within America may access Pell Grant Funds for higher education. Despite momentous efforts to bring higher education to the incarcerated, HEP grapples with continued challenges and lacks unified, evidence-based competency equal to normative higher education. For this new movement to be successful it needs stronger foundations for its new growth. This study presumes that HEP leaders of the SCP Era have vital leadership experiences to lend to the journey ahead of HEP. This transcendental phenomenological research study explores the dynamics of the HEP leader experience, gathers their experiences within HEP leadership, and investigates what they believe is important for HEP's future. Thirty-five HEP leaders were interviewed to provide evidence related to their perceptions of the HEP experience and what is best for its expansion. The data equated to collective experiences dominated by Department of Corrections culture, practicalities of day-to-day needs in HEP leadership, a wealth of positive experiences that are vital to the profession and the need for foundational philosophies that guide HEP. The study revealed a style of persistent leadership that is required for HEP success and the future of its impending evolution.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the Baileynation, DJ and Mariah. There was a day in this blessed country that education was denied, if not unlawful, for those of African and dark pigmentation to attain. Education is power to you and all Americans; it, added to wisdom, is priceless. Enjoy it for your own prosperity and fight that all Americans have full and free access to its wealth. As Dr. Maya Angelou wrote in her infamous poem “Still I Rise”, you, my children, are “the dream and hope of the slave”. Never forget from whence you came and pay it forward. I love you...

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my holistic diet. To my 35 Participants, obviously your part in this study was integral. I thank you for your contribution; but mostly the privilege of learning about your competent, scholarly, and exemplary style of leadership to an issue that one of your colleagues called “the ultimate DEI issue of our times”. Above all, thank God... Again, too much to truly acknowledge but all imperative to my educational identity and this journey.

Chapter 1: Introduction

America is in the midst of a momentous evolution in higher education (Norweg, 2021). While the 1970s has been considered a “golden age” of education for the incarcerated (Davis, et al., 2014), America has another promising opportunity to cultivate and evolve higher education. In December 2020, the United States Congress lifted a 26-year ban on prisoners’ ability to access Pell Grants through the passage of *The FAFSA Simplification Act* (official start in 2023), which was passed as part of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021* (Collings & Dorch, 2022). The success of its predecessor, the 2015 *Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCP)*, led to this new law by allowing a select group of prison-based colleges and their students to access Pell Grants to fund higher education pursuits (Robinson, 2021). Due to this moment, higher education finds itself on the cusps of expanding to incarcerated adult learners, creating paths to successful re-entry and public safety, all while saving tax dollars (Martinez-Hill, 2021).

Despite this monumental time for higher education and the growth of college programs throughout the United States, higher education in prison (HEP) grapples with various challenges and a lack of collective, evidence-based competence that threatens its positive societal impact and cost-effectiveness (Burke, 2021). Further, given the adolescence of formalized in-person and government-funded HEP, which began in the 1960s and 1970s (Gehring 1997; Norweg 2021), there are various gaps in the research. Particularly there is an absence of research that leverages the leadership experience of prison college administrators and leaders to assist in finding solutions to the challenges of HEP and routes to its future. The following study aimed to examine the leadership experiences of college administrators and/or leaders during the *Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative Era (SCP Era)*, 2015 to 2023, as a potential area of knowledge to support the growth of college for the incarcerated. This chapter introduces the study by discussing the background of the study, the problem statement, the statement of

purpose, research methodology, theoretical framework, research questions, definitions of terms, limitations, and the dissertation organization.

Background of the Problem

The 2020s reintroduced the American landscape to a plethora of issues and challenges related to criminal justice, public safety, social change, and rectifying the vestiges of its racist past (Lo et al., 2020). In March 2020, the world witnessed again the failures of the United States criminal justice system, after George Floyd was murdered as the result of a police officer's senseless violence. This not only spot-lighted recurring themes of police violence but greater conversations and calls for a change in unproductive criminal justice structures (Freilich & Chermak, 2022). Consequently, a reignited civil rights movement for social change engulfed the United States and the world, demanding positive evolution in policing, criminal justice reform, and racial reconciliation (Burch, Harmon, Tavernise, & Badger, 2021).

While not as momentous as the 1960s Civil Rights Era, this new civil rights push had begun already with other senseless deaths of Black men, such as Trayvon Martin in 2012. Martin's death bore the 2013 Black Lives Matter Movement, which evolved into louder calls for American criminal justice reform (Roberts, 2018). Criminal justice reform blossomed after 2013 and through each presidential administration since (Davidson, 2020; Eisenberg et al., 2022; Raufu, 2020).

Prior to Covid-19 and amid a failing criminal justice system, America was experiencing a reduction in crime (Sharkeya, Torrats-Espinosaa, & Takyara, 2017). Yet, two years after the death of George Floyd and the scourge of the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic, America began to struggle with the trend of rising crime rates and a need to consider, again, harsher tactics for

curbing crime and violence (Barr & Broady, 2021). The 2020s brought America back to a place where it had to consider a “what next” scenario due to the rise in crime (Grawert & Kim, 2022).

Often when America faces an uptick in crime it contemplates reverting to harsh criminal justice practices in hopes of discouraging crime, which includes tougher policing and stricter measures and restrictions (Baumgartner, et al., 2021). The 2020s rise in crime challenged political leaders to reconsider reverting back to the 1990s harsh policies on crime (Herndon, 2022). Efforts to reduce crime include favorable methods and collateral methods, which hinder American freedoms and practical mobility (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022). This reality includes harsh consequences that disrupt the ability to vote, to buy a decent home, to find supportive employment, and to access a college education. These are *collateral consequences* (NICCC, 2022), which become so immense that they hurt the cause for public safety, crime reduction, corrective action, and even American equity and equality (Malcolm & Seibler, 2017). The consequences are causal to a cycle of crime and a deep quagmire that embodies and incites environments that foster excuses for inappropriate policing, overreaching consequences, and various other negative societal dynamics in communities most affected by crime (American Bar Association, 2018).

A vital area where this dynamic is evident is in the area of education. Collateral consequences can impact access to quality education from middle school through college and even graduate school (Gowen, Thurau, & Wood, 2022). Studies show that access to a quality education is not only an issue of assuring equity (diZerega, Postsecondary Education in Prison is a Racial Equity Strategy, 2020) but also ensuring public safety and the ability to live in a crime-free society (Swisher & Dennison, 2016). Yet, access to education is often restricted as a penalty for criminal behavior and even for minor offenses and mere arrests (Hattersley, 2016). This is

exemplified in the “Ban the Box” or “Beyond the Box” initiatives, which advocate for the elimination of criminal history questions on college entrance applications (Scott-Clayton, 2017).

American phenomena such as the School to Prison Pipeline (Mallett, 2016) and the Achievement Gap both have substantive implications for race and education (Morsy & Rothstein, 2016). Those implications are fostered in elementary and secondary education. Once compounded with the lack of access to quality education while incarcerated, individual and societal storms of collateral consequences intensify the need for criminal justice reform (Duwe & Henry-Nickie, 2021). Lack of education also impacts children of the incarcerated (Pearson & Heckert, 2020), is detrimental in the cycle of crime and public safety, perpetuates collateral consequences, and fuels unfortunate reactions often seen as a result of crime.

The 1980s into the early 1990s were an infamous era of crime, exhibiting a panorama of these issues and marking historic duration of a rise in crime and reactions toward the realities of crime and unsafe streets (Barr & Broady, 2021). Prior to this time, HEP programs were numerous due to the passage of the 1965 *Title IV of the Higher Education Act* (The HEA Act), which introduced the era of Pell Grants for incarcerated students. This began an era of foundational growth in higher education for the incarcerated. College programs soared to their highest peak in 1982 with 90% of US states offering HEP programs (Foster, 2005). The growth of crime that began to manifest in the 1980s, however, pushed political leaders to begin the “tough on crime” era, which increased policing and harsher tactics to try to curb crime (Levitt, 2004). This era also had a similar incident of infamous police violence. In 1991 the beating of Rodney King occurred, which sparked national outrage similar to what occurred on and after the March 2020 murder of George Floyd.

Among the various reactions to the growth of crime in this era was the passage of the 1994 crime bill, *The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act*. Within this bill, the United States Congress ended Pell Grants for the incarcerated. Essentially, this bill cut federal funds for a positive anchor that supported crime-free behavior and public safety, the very issues the bill was motivated to address (Gibbons & Ray, 2021). This new law not only hindered prison inmates from getting a college education but forced the closure of many prison college programs across the United States (Conway, 2022). The Prison Policy Initiative describes this time as well,

A 1992 amendment to the Higher Education Act made people serving life sentences without parole and those sentenced to death ineligible to receive Pell Grants. Then, the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act banned everyone incarcerated in prisons from receiving Pell aid, even though these grants made up less than 1 percent of total Pell spending. By 1997 [...] it is estimated that only eight college-in-prison programs existed in the United States.” The remaining programs were those that received financial and volunteer support from other sources (Sawyer, 2019).

For almost thirty years the federal government held a position on funding higher education that was counterproductive to efforts toward public safety, crime reduction, behavioral change, and equity in access to education.

The future of this issue, however, would prove to have a different outcome. In contrast to the 1990s reactions to crime, the 2020s and its era of rising crime featured the United States government leadership acting differently towards the idea of prison higher education. These behavioral differences responded to the growing demand and attempts for criminal justice reform and social change. On the heels of the success of the SCP, the United States government passed a law rescinding the 1994 ban on Pell Grants for prisoners in December of 2020 through the

previously mentioned *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021*, or more acutely *The FAFSA Simplification Act* (Robinson, From “Undeserving Criminals” to “Second Chance Students”: Pell Grant Eligibility and Incarcerated Students, 2022). Starting in 2023, incarcerated individuals can apply for Pell Grants to fund higher education pursuits in prison.

This updated law offers opportunities for higher education to persist toward the goals of its societal benefits (Baranger et al., 2018) and its purpose as an equitable right for all Americans (Johnson & Davis, 2021). The success of the SCP proved to be a vital precursor to the lifting of the Pell Grant Ban in December 2020 (Robinson, 2021). Such a moment in criminal justice history is foundational and pivotal given this successful initiative is adjacent to the previously described unfortunate moments and dynamics of the criminal justice system (Martinez-Hill, 2021). The SCP Era started in 2015 with the passage of the original SCP and extends through the actual beginning of the FAFSA Simplification Act in 2023.

Additionally, this moment for higher education history was crucial for closing gaps in consistent strength of and access to education (Weissman, 2021). Despite the researched strengths of HEP, the opening of Pell Grants to the incarcerated, and the growth of prison higher education since the initiation of the SCP, various foundational challenges remain. Access to quality higher education in prison is not available consistently across the United States (Dewey et al., 2020). For example, curricula and methods to produce high-quality education in prison are not consistent from college to college (Davis, 2019). Further, the training for prison education leaders is insufficient and inconsistent (Sanders, 2020). These are a few of the current challenges in HEP.

While announcing a contemporary scholarly research forum seeking “quality” and “equity” for the new era of HEP, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation research fellow, Catherine Suffern, synthesizes the strengths of this monumental moment and its adjacent challenges,

Higher education in prison programming has entered a period of great opportunity and promise. In December 2020, the nation lifted a 26-year ban on need-based Pell Grants to incarcerated undergraduates. Over the next several years, the restoration of this federal funding stream will propel the expansion of college programming to many of the estimated half million Pell-eligible incarcerated adult learners. However, nuts-and-bolts questions persist, such as how best to scale high-quality educational programming and incorporate educational technologies in the prison classroom (Suffern, 2021).

This study concurs and hypothesizes that much can be learned about the challenges and future of HEP from the successes of the SCP Era and the various colleges that existed and have grown since its inception in 2015. Further, this study contends that the leaders of these prison-based colleges during the SCP Era have important leadership experiences that are vital for the forward movement of HEP (Robinson, 2021). Consequently, this phenomenological study focuses on this pivotal timeframe in higher education through the leadership experiences of various colleges in the SCP Era and on the leadership experiences of HEP college administrators and leaders.

Problem Statement

While history shows the existence of higher education in prisons throughout American correctional institutions, the beginning of the original “golden moment”—when the federal government acknowledged and began to fund HEP—was when HEP began to proliferate (Gehring, 1997; Agarwal, 2018). Research also shows that this induced greater research, development, and evolutions of ideals around the operation and pedagogy of HEP. Given the

federal support due to the 1965 institution of government funding, the prevalence of the HEP movement is roughly 50 years old and thus considerably young compared to normative college education (Norweg, Higher Education in Prison: A Retrospective, 2021). A little over half of those years were marred by the 1994 Crime Bill's Pell Grant ban, which stopped HEP funding for the incarcerated and caused most HEP programs to close; at its worst, only eight programs existed in the United States (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2020).

The movement, therefore, lacks a collective, evidence-based foundation and structures for its growth. Furthermore, there is a gap in research that interprets the leadership experience of HEP leaders as a knowledge base that will mold and build this young era of higher education.

Davis et al. (2013) note in their metanalysis on HEP,

although our meta-analyses, as did previous meta-analyses, accounted for the strength of the research designs of the various studies examined, there are still a number of questions of interest to educators and policymakers that the current literature—with its variable research quality—does not permit us to address (p. 60).

Davis (2019) and Conway (2022) also support the need for clarity in pedagogy and the delivery of the prison education model. Gaskew (2015) refers to prison higher education as having a "pedagogical gap". Other researchers argue that HEP has civil rights challenges (Elena & Fine, 2005). Blake (2021) notes concerns about low-quality education programs and the need for better implementation and equity. The research speaks to many other issues within HEP that competent research and analysis can help address. Furthermore, voices of HEP leaders are not heard nor harvested; thus, their experiences can also help inform the challenges and future of HEP. Leaders of HEP have unique experiences and understand the challenges and issues of this branch of

education. Without the contribution of their expertise and experiences, HEP will likely continue to struggle with its growth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership experiences of college administrators and leaders during the SCP Era. This study presumes that their leadership experiences will be vital for the challenges and future of higher education in prison. Educational leaders play a significant role in the success of higher education, and there are various dynamics from which to ascertain leadership experience (Toker, 2022). Education leaders are vital components of a successful teaching and learning process (Frisk, Apelgren, & Sandoff, 2021), while effective staff development is attributed to good leadership (Woods, 2009). Specific to HEP, effective educational leaders are vital to carceral environments, which require leaders to manage many tasks with limited resources (Hambrick, 1987).

Sanders (2020), when referring to the evolution of the United Kingdom and its prison education systems, spoke of prison higher education leaders as leaders of “hope” and believers in rehabilitation. In responding to this new era of education, Conway (2022) notes that higher education in prison will become more accessible in a historic fashion and that this moment provides a unique opportunity for colleges and universities to respond to the vast problem of mass incarceration. Conway (2022) also suggests that andragogical teaching methods need to upgrade and highlight carceral settings, and that prison education settings should “respond to the diversity and breadth of life experiences common in prison classrooms” (p. 362). Former W.K. Kellogg Foundation president Dr. William Richardson (2000) provides holistic context for the significance of educational leadership,

As a social "construct" that derives from observations made about specific interactions within a society, [leadership] it is defined differently in each social circumstance.

Leadership is thus a property of culture and reflects the values – both stated and operating – of a specific society. The process of leadership can thus serve as a lens through which any social situation can be observed. Leadership – especially the ways in which leaders are chosen, the expectations that are placed on them, and how they manifest their authority – can provide remarkable insights into any community or group. It can tell us about how the group identifies itself, who and what matters to the group, how things are done, and what stories will be told about outcomes. Leadership can be more an active tool than a passive lens, allowing individuals, communities, institutions, and societies to narrow the gap between what they value and what their actions express, recognizing that the capacity to lead is rooted in virtually any individual and in every community.

Leadership is an integral part of the drama that plays out between the two (p.v).

This study proposes that the “active tool” of college administrators and their leadership experiences are a foundational piece of a social fabric that will better society and improve higher education for the incarcerated. Thus, their leadership experiences need to be extrapolated and included in the body of research. Davis (2019) gives relevant energy to the significance of this study,

With solid evidence showing that correctional education programs are effective—and cost-effective—at improving employment outcomes for participants and at helping to keep formerly incarcerated individuals from returning to prison, education is another lever that policymakers can use to help reduce recidivism rates (p. 12).

This study of prison higher education leaders is timely and important to the goals of a fair, just, crime-free, and productive society.

Theoretical Framework

The research methodology for this study was qualitative and focused on the experiences of HEP administrators and leaders. Phenomenology guided the study, with a transcendental approach. A transcendental phenomenological approach best suited the nature of the study, which was to understand the phenomenon of prison college administrators' experiences during the SCP Era.

Given the process of transcendental phenomenology, an outside theoretical framework for this study was inappropriate, thus transcendental phenomenology served as the framework of theory (Yuksel & Yildman, 2015). This theoretical framework considered the lived experiences of participants in the study and built on their experiences without the bias or influence of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). In this research methodology, it is imperative to conduct interviews without bias; therefore, no additional theoretical approach was added to this study because it would potentially obstruct access to participants' pure descriptions of the phenomenon.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the core lived experiences of HEP administrators and leaders during the era of the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative Era?

RQ2: Based on the experiences of HEP administrators and leaders, what are their opinions about HEP challenges and the future of HEP after the Second Chance Pell Grant Initiative Era?

Definition of Terms

Administrators and Leaders: Given the unique structures This refers to all HEP programs that existed and grew during the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Sites Initiative, 2015 to 2023. of HEP not all programs have traditional titles and roles for those that lead HEP programs. “Administrators and Leaders” refers to the various positions and roles that lead HEP.

Collateral Consequences:

Collateral consequences are legal disabilities imposed by law as a result of a criminal conviction regardless of whether a convicted individual serves any time incarcerated. These consequences create social and economic barriers for individuals reentering society by denying or restricting benefits otherwise available to all Americans. Collateral consequences are known to adversely affect adoptions, housing, welfare, immigration, employment, professional licensure, property rights, mobility, and other opportunities—the collective effect of which increases recidivism and undermines meaningful reentry of the convicted for a lifetime (Collateral Consequences of Criminal Convictions Judicial Bench Book, 2015).

Correctional Education (CE): All forms of education, including basic, remedial, GED, vocational programming, and post-secondary education in a prison setting.

DOC: (Department of Corrections or Corrections): “Corrections refers to the supervision of persons arrested for, convicted of, or sentenced for criminal offenses. Correctional populations fall into two general categories: institutional corrections and community corrections. Corrections data, with a few exceptions, covers adult agencies or facilities and adult offenders (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2023).

Evidenced Based Practices (EBP): “The objective, balanced, and responsible use of current research and the best available data to guide policy and practice decisions, such that outcomes for consumers are improved” (N.I.C., 2023).

Normative College Education: All post-secondary education outside of prison. Used in this study as a comparison to HEP.

Post-Secondary Correctional Education (HEP): All forms of educational programming exclusively focused on college and vocational programs earned after a high school diploma or GED in a prison setting (National Institute of Justice, 2014).

The Golden Age of HEP: This refers to the era that started with The Higher Education Act of 1965. This law opened a substantive growth in HEP and HEP research, which was foundational to the growth of formalized HEP across the United States (Gehring, 1997).

The SCP Era: This refers to all PSCE programs that existed and grew during the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Sites Initiative, 2015 to the present.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study is that it assumes effective leadership on behalf of the college administrators and leaders for programs during the SCP Era. Further, the study assumes that those leadership experiences are imperative to the body of knowledge surrounding HEP. The researcher founded these assumptions following the basis of experiential learning theory, which emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process and its role in leadership (Gitsham, 2012). Most research refers to the overall movement of this initiative as being successful and does not take into account how the leaders of the various colleges were a part of the success. This study assumed that part of the SCP Era’s success was attributed to

effective leaders; thus, their experiences and perceptions are invaluable to the challenges facing prisoner higher education and its future.

Assorted leadership styles inform effective higher education leadership. This study cannot propose what leadership styles were used in these various colleges. However, based on the overall success of the movement, the growth of HEP programs, the development of continued research and competent data on HEP, the passage of the FASFA Simplification Act, and supportive leadership theory, this study presumed that a majority of college administrators and leaders during the SCP Era were to some degree, effective and successful leaders within their specific HEP programs.

Narrowed Scope

As this study extrapolated, the correctional education (CE) movement is historic. Other successful education programs in United States corrections institutions existed long before the 2015 SCP movement towards funding and supporting carceral education. Administrator and leader experiences outside of the SCP Era will not be added to this study. As well, time would not permit examining all higher education institutions outside of and within this scope. Additionally, given the significance of the time and higher education laws between 1994 and 2020, the infamous and current criminal justice reform and social change movements, and the beginning of a new moment in higher education, this study focuses on the select college administrators and leaders within the SCP Era (2015 to the Present).

Generalizability

Given the limited scope, the conclusions of this study exhibited results particular to the participants involved in the study. While the experiences and perceptions of the participants will be invaluable to higher education, this study recognizes that these conclusions will not represent

the totality of past and present views of college administrators and leaders outside of this study on HEP.

Chapter Summary and Dissertation Organization

Chapter one provided context for the direction of this study. It reviewed the background of the study, the problem statement, the statement of purpose, research methodology, theoretical framework, research questions, definitions of terms, limitations, and dissertation organization. The dissertation is organized in five chapters. Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive review of the literature. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research methods for this study, including a description of the research design. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the main themes of the research. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the core themes and presents the limitations of the study followed by the implications and recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study examined the lived experiences of Post-Secondary Correctional Education (HEP) leaders and their unheard perspectives and experiences regarding their participation in leading prison college programs during the Second Chance Experimental Pell Grant Initiative Era and during and after the 2020 FASFA Simplification Act (SCP Era). The literature review provides a critical review of relevant research to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the literature, which substantiate the need for this study. This study seeks to fill an apparent gap in the literature that considers college leadership experience by exploring perspectives of this unique realm of higher education administration during the critical moment of the SCP and the full opening of Pell Grants for incarcerated education students in December of 2020.

The field of prison higher education is critical to democracy (Reddick, 2017), to rebuilding the lives of men and women (Baranger et al., 2018), to supporting safe American societies (Davis et al., 2014), and to assuring cost-effectiveness (diZerega, 2021). Research and support have grown since the 2015 SCP and *The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (FAFSA Simplification Act)*, yet HEP still lacks normative professional support and competent development (Castro et al., 2022). In addition to these shortcomings, American policy and infrastructure in this division of higher education often disregard the foundational equity of the incarcerated being potential students (Castro et al., 2015). Given these realities and the newness of formalized HEP, this literature review synthesized applicable literature to provide a competent context of prison higher education to augment the foundation for this study, which examines the critical role of the college administrator experience.

Somewhat similar to HEP, the general definitions of what leadership is and its role in various disciplines such as education and business have been thoroughly studied and researched (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2018). While leadership and higher education leadership have been substantially researched, conclusions on their experiences and effectiveness remain elusive (Kalargyrou & Woods, 2009). Comparatively, this study found that HEP leadership was also limited in its research, with gaps as to its role in higher education and specifically how influential leadership experiences can impact education positively.

This literature review was broad in scope to articulate an understanding of the research and then narrows to the focus on the purpose of this phenomenological study. To address these purposes thoroughly, the literature review includes the following categories: Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework, Historical Overview of the American Criminal Justice System, Prison Education History, Key Literature and Research Foundations, The Definition and Purpose of Prison Higher Education, The Positive Influence of Higher Education in Prison, Practicalities of Correctional Higher Education, Recommendations from Key Studies, Problematizing Prison Higher Education, HEP as an Issue of Equity, The Impact of Higher Education Leadership, and Gaps in Research.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The leadership experience of the college administrator is central to this study. Therefore, the qualitative research method was chosen to address this focus thoroughly. Various scholars have rationalized the use of qualitative methods as suitable for interpreting leadership experiences (Bryman, 2004). Parry et al. (2015) mention seven vital criteria for studying the relationship between leadership and qualitative research:

1. To explore a phenomenon that has not been studied before.

2. To add rich detail and nuance that illustrate or document existing knowledge of a phenomenon.
3. To better understand a topic by studying it simultaneously (triangulation).
4. To advance a novel perspective of a phenomenon well studied quantitatively.
5. To try to 'understand' any social phenomenon from the perspective of the actors involved, rather than explaining it (unsuccessfully) from the outside.
6. To understand complex phenomena that are difficult or impossible to approach or capture quantitatively.
7. To understand any phenomenon in its complexity or one that has been dismissed by mainstream research due to the difficulties to study it, or that has been discarded as irrelevant, or that has been studied as if only one point of view about it was real.

Bryman et al. (1996), speaking on leadership, note that qualitative review offers empirical leverage on the point of view of those being studied and the sensitivity to the context of their situations. Brooks and Normore (2015) posit that "qualitative research has been a strong and vibrant part of the educational leadership knowledge base" and enriches and deepens understanding of the dynamics of education. This is the foundation on which this qualitative method of leadership experience is developed.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) give a substantive perspective on the qualitative approach and why it best fits this research inquiry. Qualitative research is people-centric in person/profession. It is a people-focused nuance seeking to communicate experiences, the constructions of experiences, and the meaning of such experiences. Further, qualitative research best suits professions in areas of human services: social work, counseling, health, law, education, anthropology, sociology, and journalism.

Ngulube (2015) explains that the qualitative research method is used for interpreting facts from data, where the facts depend on the qualities that people actively use in gaining experiences of the phenomena. In this sense, qualitative research is an activity that is interpretive of the phenomena of the voices and experiences of the participants. Conducting qualitative research empowers individuals and shares their in-depth experiences, enabling their voices to be heard. Marshall and Rossman (2011) argue:

In short, the strengths of qualitative studies should demonstrate for research that is exploratory or descriptive and that stresses the importance of context, setting, and participants' frames of reference. A well-reasoned and convincing explanation for qualitative methods should include a concise but strong rationale that is firmly grounded in the conceptual framework and that justifies the specific data collection method (p. 92).

In synopsis, qualitative research methods, as Glesne (2006) elaborates, are used to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved (in this case the college administrator of prison higher education) to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political setting and to transform or change social conditions. This description is crucial to this study and is another foundation that supports this study. The role of HEP is both an educational experience but also key in its role as a personally transformative experience for its pupils; in many ways, HEP hinges on transformative pedagogic practices (Gray, Ward, & Fogarty, 2019). Prison educators are not only educators but also conduits of the life change experience (Wood, 2014), and thus the qualitative method was an excellent approach to conduct a study centered on HEP leadership experiences.

Phenomenological Research Approach

The phenomenological approach is built from the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859-1939), who focused on the human experience as a basis of description and analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl's philosophy suggests that the researcher attempts to achieve a deep understanding of "inner evidence" and interprets it without bias (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2013) defines phenomenology as "the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view", while Van Manen (2014) notes that "phenomenology is the way of access to the world as we experience it prereflectively." The approach of phenomenology is to then describe the depth and rudimentary elements of an experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26). Souba (2014) expounds on its relevance giving context to this study,

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena and the way in which they are experienced from the first-person point of view. It is based on the assumption that lived experience is irreducible-that phenomenal data cannot be derived from the third-person perspective. Phenomenologists ask: What is the nature and essence of the experience of the phenomenon for those who experience it? They are less concerned with the facts of a leadership situation (what actually happened and when, who did what to whom, etc.) and more interested in the first-person as-lived meaning and significance of the experiences of those involved.

Regarding leadership, Souba (2014) further argues that phenomenology doesn't study the attributes of leaders, as many studies tend toward, but the core of what makes a leader, the "human being" within the leader. Bradley-Cole (2021) while mentioning some of the difficulties in defining leadership, expounds that the phenomenological approach is helpful to qualify true

leadership by engendering in-depth and authentic meaning and outcomes "ecologically rooted" in "exploration".

Transcendental Phenomenology

Within the family of phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology specifically highlights this study. There are two divisions of phenomenology: hermeneutic phenomenology, and transcendental phenomenology.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is primarily attributed to philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived and focuses on illuminating details interpretively and creating meaning and understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991).

Clark Moustakas is credited for the qualitative method of transcendental phenomenology through his focus on the completeness of experience and a search for the essence of experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). He describes it as a “disciplined and systematic effort to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). Transcendental phenomenology is built on four major components: *epoche*, transcendental phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Further, transcendental phenomenology requires researchers to be open-minded and employ *epoche* to separate themselves from assumptions of the researched phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). *Bracketing* is another supportive practice in this method, through suspending barriers to understanding the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014, p. 215).

Historical Overview of the American Criminal Justice System

The role and benefits of prison higher education have proven to be a substantial platform to support its validity and necessity; however, a brief review of the criminal justice system’s

purpose is imperative for the context of this study. History will show various theories guiding crime and punishment and the very nature of incarceration and prison. These theories are foundational to what HEP would grow to become, while always being adjacent to whatever theory was cyclically prevalent within criminal justice history.

Grupp's (1971) study called for four theories that describe the history and present state of the ebb and flow of what crime and punishment are: retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, and integration. More recently, professor and prison activist Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) divides crime and punishment history and current practices into what she calls four prevailing practices: (1) incapacitation, (2) deterrence, (3) retribution, and (4) rehabilitation. Ellis (2014) speaks of the criminal justice system being defined in two basic categories: retributivist, and non-retributivist ideals. Retributivism leans towards punishment holding an offender accountable for crimes, speaking to consequences, and a "backward-looking" focus. Non-retributivist ideals lean toward punishment that is focused on crime reduction and changing behavior and is "forward-looking". Within his synopsis, retributivist theories are the Simple Desert Theory, Just Distribution Theory, Reform Theory, Expressive or Denunciatory Theory, and Victim Compensation Theory. Whereas non-retributivist theories align with the ideas of deterrence, incapacitation, reform, rehabilitation, the Assurance Theory, and as well Expressivist Theory. Polluck (2005) describes crime and punishment into two main theories as well, using the retributivist theory as the punitive philosophy and the consequential wing of punishment and utilitarian theory as the wing of deterrence and rehabilitation.

From a historical point of view, these converging themes can be seen in the international history that most of America guided its beginnings through, specifically its views of crime and punishment. Given America's Judeo-Christian beginnings and its central positioning in

American law and punishment, such positions can be seen in the historic documents on which it built its criminal law, the Christian Bible (Silver & Silver, 2017; Dreisbach, 2019). This historic document has been historically and contemporarily used to suggest personally and policy-wise that punishment should consist of an "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth..." (see, e.g., *Exodus 21:22, Leviticus 24:17, Deuteronomy 19:16*). This is the retributive focus that focused on punishing offenders at the level of their offense (Grasmick et al., 1992). Much of the American criminal law system was practically built on this concept of criminal punishment (Fish, 2008).

In contrast, within this document's New Testament leanings (previous descriptions from the Old Testament), it speaks to a behavioral change model of criminal accountability through a rehabilitation focus. Ephesians 4:28 notes, "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need." (Biblica, Inc, 2011, para. 8) This is the non-retributive focus. Bacote and Perrin (2019) argue for this non-retributivist view of American crime and punishment, emphasizing that Christianity promotes *Restorative Justice* and the *Good Lives Model*. While historic and contemporary theories exist and evolve to explain the systems of crime and punishment and their bipolar nature in implementation, these religious foundations are descriptive of America's historical course with crime and punishment in theory and practice.

Concerning the various theories that undergird the idea of crime and punishment history and its evolution into the modern criminal justice system and prisons, the two themes have led theory and practice of criminal justice, punitive measures, or behavioral change measures. America and various international criminal systems have been in a pendulum swing between both extremes (Fox, 1999; Goodman, Page, & Phelps, 2017). Correctional Education (CE) as a

whole and a component of crime and punishment have had to acquiesce to this continual historic ebb and flow (Rentzmann, 1996). The foundation and prevalence of non-retributive or rehabilitative theories date back to the first prisons in America (Higgins, 2021).

Prison Education History

Prison education in America in many ways followed the course of America's ebb and flow of societal issues or events. While research shows some scholars emphasize and omit certain aspects of its history, its major themes are similar. A review of the phenomenon of education in America's prisons manifests that it began and flowed from the purpose of religion, reform, vocational preparation, and then rehabilitation. This history manifested also as a pendulum previously mentioned, swinging back and forth between retribution and non-retributive theories, which often slowed education in prisons during times in history (Davis et al., 2014).

Before the late 1700s prisons' retribution ideology overruled the idea of incarceration and prison and "corrective punishment" was not open to education as an official option (Angle, 1982, p. 4). Soon after America declared its independence from England, however, correctional education started to implement faith as a first foundation to build education as a component of the criminal justice system. This idea followed the concepts of the Colonial Period philosophies of that period (Messemer & Assistant, 2011). Angle (1982) firmly notes religion was the first vehicle of educational instruction and suggests that the *Philadelphia Society of Alleviating Miseries of Public Prisons of 1776* was likely the first to begin this tradition, using Bibles as the curriculum to change the behavior of what they thought were people in need of repentance. Chlup (2005) suggests that the correctional education movement first began when clergyman William Rogers began offering instruction at the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia. This was the

era of the Sabbath Schools, which was about teaching inmates how to read so that they could read the Bible (Angle, 1982). Gehring (1995) establishes that if a prison had an educational emphasis between 1789 to 1875, it was run by a chaplain, and it was likely a Sabbath School.

From the foundation of religion, correctional education philosophy moved into the ideals of the “reform era” during the late 1870s (Messemer & Assistant, 2011). Gehring (1995) notes that this version of education was more secular, with one New York prison offering history, astronomy, physiology, and physical education. During this time, the *American Prison Association* was established and supported correctional education, suggesting that “The prime goal of prisons was not to punish but to reform by providing academic education and vocational training to prisoners” (Ryan, 1995, p. 60).

The next phase of correctional education coincides with the 1900s Industrial Revolution and assisted with the need to develop laborers for the growing capacity of America (Eggleston & Gehring, 1986). This phase of prison education evolved with the *Auburn Prison System*, which featured harsh systems of labor for inmates, which included working during the day and being forced into solitary confinement at night. These systems, however, did become more humane through policy reforms and later began to emphasize the goals of rehabilitation by preparing inmates for employment once they re-entered society (Rolfe & Tewksbury, 2018).

Rehabilitation underscores the last phase of prison education, as it became a dominant theme during the 1960s. Ryan (1995) notes of this period that “the place of education in corrections took a dramatic turn in the late 1960s as the concept of rehabilitation became a dominant factor in planning and implementing correctional systems in the United States” (p.60). From here a short but infamous era of HEP would grow and last into the 1990s. Hobler (1999) comments that CE in the 1970s was based upon a wide holistic ideal focusing on a non-

retributive focus that sought to build "law-abiding, socially adjusted, and productive members of society" (p.102).

This was the era where higher education became prominent and further was supported by federal government funding (Eggleston & Gehring, 1986; Gehring, 1997; Hobler, 1999; Ryan, 1995). *The Higher Education Act of 1965* was passed during this time, and it opened Pell Grants for the incarcerated (Hobby, Walsh, & Delaney, 2019). Gehring (1997) describes this as the previously termed "Golden Age" of post-secondary higher education. While forms of HEP were present in prisons before this time, Knott (2012) suggests that the first and oldest college prison program started in 1972 and was called the *Prison Education Program*. Research shows that college education efforts were apparent in stand-alone and minimal efforts prior to this time, but a majority of the literature note that formalized and foundational HEP started around this described golden age.

Despite the foundations of religion, reform, vocational education, and rehabilitation that described CE history, the punitive ideas of retribution impacted its success throughout American history. The decades of the late 1970s found the infusion of the "nothing works" philosophy which pushed for more of a punishment, retribution, and incapacitation focus on prison (Ryan, 1995). This began to be infused into education in prisons (Martinson, 1974) and continued into the 1980s (Ryan, 1995).

Enter the era of a rise in crime and the beginning era of mass incarceration in the late 1980s into the 1990s. The "nothing works" argument flowed right into *The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994*. This Act ended the momentum of the rehabilitation era and not only ended Pell Grants for inmates but led to most HEP programs ending (Davis,

2019). The Act was so impactful, for a time only eight HEP programs existed at one point in the United States as a whole (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2020).

The pendulum of criminal justice and HEP swung again in 2015 and would build momentum towards a new era of higher education. In 2015 the U.S. Department of Education started the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCP), which temporarily lifted the federal ban on Pell Grants to incarcerated individuals for specific prison education sites. The initiative was established by the Obama Administration to provide Pell Grants to people in state and federal prisons so that they could participate in postsecondary education programs. Under the initiative, Pell Grants could be used to help pay for incarcerated individuals' educational pursuits. Sixty-four colleges and universities in 26 states participated in this experiment, equating to thousands of students being able to receive Pell Grants to pursue higher education (Delaney & Montagnet, 2020). The program was expanded under the Trump Administration to 42 states and Washington, D.C. (Gravely, 2021). Further, under the Biden Administration, the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative was expanded to allow 69 more colleges and universities to participate (Gravely, 2021). The SCP expanded to 200 HEP programs in 2022 (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

In December 2020, the United States fully lifted the 26-year ban on prisoners' ability to access Pell Grants for higher education, solidifying another significant age for the ideals of HEP and higher education (Brink, 2022). Officially, the full ban ends and full Pell Grant opportunity begins on July 1st, 2023 (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The FASFA Simplification Act motivated by SCP and coupled with the successful growth of HEP program during after these laws, is what this study refers to as the SCP Era of higher education and another time for

prominence of HEP programming. This is the current state in which HEP programs find themselves at the time of this study.

Key Literature and Research Foundations

Historically, HEP has been embedded in prisons, yet its formalized history is relatively new, with most historians noting the 1960s and 1970s as the beginning of substantial and formal college programs. This was the era when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed *The Higher Education Act of 1965*. Wright (2001) notes that in 1965 only 12 HEP programs operated in America; by 1976, there were 250 programs; and then by 1982, 350 programs were operating. Thom Gehring (1997) refers to this as an immense period for HEP. Furthermore, to the understanding of HEP and the experience of the college administrator, it is important to underscore from a research, practice, and pedagogical framework that HEP is a young movement compared to the age of normative higher education in America dating back to the 1600s. More specifically, peer-reviewed scholarship, research, evidence-based practice, and supportive organizations blossomed during and after the golden age of HEP when federal funding and support was at its apex. Seminal research about HEP began during this time. Ironically, given the crime explosion and governmental reaction to crime, the 1990s were a time of considerable research, growing into the time of this study.

This research notes that there are substantial gaps in research and HEP as it relates to various aspects of the HEP system. This is key to understanding the lack of foundation undergirding the purpose of this study, which is to examine the leadership experiences of HEP college administrators. Moreover, given the dynamics relatively and comparatively of this newer era of education, it is also important to note the key foundations that HEP currently stands on for much of its research and scholarly vigor, as these limited foundations are adjacent to the

experience of HEP administrators. The foremost foundation currently is the Journal of Correctional Education, with many researchers using this as a constant resource to opine on issues of correctional education. This and others currently include the following:

The Correctional Education Association: The Correctional Education Association (CEA), was officially founded in 1945 as a professional association to assist educators and administrators who provide services to students in correctional settings. This organization partnered with the American Correctional Association to develop standards for professional activity and continuing development for correctional educators (Correctional Education Association, 2022).

The Journal of Correctional Education: This is currently the premier journal for all forms of correctional education, including HEP. Various seminal researchers have written through this source. Its parent organization is The Correctional Education Association. The journal was established in 1947 (Correctional Education Association, 2022).

The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (AHEP): Established in 2015, this organization's goal is to support the expansion of quality higher education in prison, empower students in prison and after release, and shape the public discussion about education and incarceration (The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, 2015).

The Journal of Higher Education in Prison: This journal was established in 2019 by the AHEP. This is a peer-reviewed journal that focuses on topics and issues affecting specifically the field of HEP, with the goal of being a "tool to facilitate conversation on theory, praxis, and teaching and learning in prison" (Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, 2022, para. 1).

The Rand Corporation: This is a non-profit research organization that has various foundational studies on CE as well as other current and critical socio-political issues. Their goal is to develop

solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier, and more prosperous (The Rand Corporation, 2022).

The Journal of Prison Education and Reentry: This journal began publishing in 2014. This peer-reviewed journal was “initiated by scholars from Norway, Ireland, the UK, and the US as an international journal for the publication of prison education research” (The Journal of Prison Education and Reentry, 2022).

These solid resources and research centers are growing to other scholarly sources in this new age of HEP. They are adding to the seminal and scholarly conversations on what HEP is and what it will look like post the powerful Pell Grant shift that the federal government enacted in December 2020. One example is The Corrections Education Leadership Academy of The Vera Institute—an academy started in 2021 that focuses on the current and future state CE leaders examining core issues in the field annually (The Vera Institute, 2022). Another example is the Higher Education in Prison Research Initiative. Supported by the Andrew Mellon Foundation and Ithaka S+R, this organization tout themselves as a “digital space centered around the creation of a robust, ethical, and sustainable higher education in prison research infrastructure (Ithaka S-R, 2022, para. 1).” Their work has built and is building a commendable scholarly ethic specifically around HEP.

Not highlighted for this study, international CE has much more growth and support and, therefore, is advanced in its research and foundations (Lockerd & Rankers-Robertson, 2011). The Prisoner Learning Alliance is a quality organization as an example of a scholarly resource internationally. This England-based organization focuses on providing “expertise and strategic vision to inform prison education priorities, policies and practices” (Prison Learning Alliance, 2022, para. 6). The European Prison Education Association is an organization of “prison

educators, administrators, governors, researchers” focused on promoting and developing CE (European Prison Education Association, 2002, para. 8). International literature, while different, supports a thorough research and resource base for American HEP because particularly with European HEP the research display that they are in practice of more expansive ideas of HEP, while American HEP is in many ways is grappling with evolving theory around the purpose and definition of HEP.

The Definition and Purpose of Prison Higher Education

Given the varied history of prison education, its definitions and purpose have changed with history. There are various definitions and descriptions of prison education and just as well various purposes of prison education. The US Department of Education defines prison education as the term correctional education (CE), noting, "Correctional education is a fundamental component of rehabilitative programming offered in juvenile justice confinement facilities, most American prisons, and many jails and detention centers" (OCTAE, 2022, para. 1).

Often prison education programs combine all of the different divisions of CE into one description and department (Castro & Gould, 2018). Dewey et al. (2020) describe six styles of prison education as remedial, vocational, reading and writing groups, art-based, peer education, and degree-granting education. The Bureau of Prison describes their education as literacy classes, English as a Second Language, parenting classes, wellness education, adult continuing education, library services, and instruction in leisure-time activities (*BOP: Education*, 2022).

While again most programs combine all education into CE, the descriptions and definitions of this study are focused on postsecondary education in prison and correctional settings, HEP. Different organizations define HEP differently. The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (2015) defines correctional higher education as:

meaningful, sustained, quality higher education in prison, designed in the best interest of incarcerated students and in accordance with the highest standards and best practices of the field of postsecondary education. The primary purpose of meaningful, sustained, quality higher education is academic in nature and includes consistent formal instruction with a curriculum designed for students who have earned a secondary credential, such as a GED, high school diploma, or equivalent credential, and may include college preparation (p. 10).

The National Institute of Justice gives another sufficient definition of what prison higher education is:

Postsecondary correctional education (HEP) is academic or vocational coursework taken beyond a high school diploma or equivalent that allows inmates to earn credit while they are incarcerated. The credits earned from participating in HEP may be applied toward an associate's, bachelor's, or graduate degree, depending on the program, and participating higher education institution. The goal of providing HEP is to advance inmates' educational attainment levels to improve their opportunities for employment following release from prison and reduce their odds of recidivating (National Institute of Justice, 2014, para. 1).

This view supports another basic definition of HEP, which is based on preparing an inmate for a successful release from prison and re-entry into society (Rose & Rose, 2017). While Castro and Gould (2018) and others argue against HEP being defined strictly through its personal and societal benefits and push for it to be equitable to normative HEP, the lens of its positive impact often defines what HEP is and its purpose.

Like its definitions and descriptions, the purposes for prison education differ but apply to all of CE, including HEP. Snarr and Wolford (1987) found various conclusions in their research that included factors relevant to inmates' lives after prison through vocational skills, changing personal values, reducing recidivism, providing work assignments, controlling inmates, and supporting operational needs. The National Institute of Justice (2014) emphasizes the same main purposes of preparation outside of prison and employment. “The goal of providing HEP is to advance inmates’ educational attainment levels to improve their opportunities for employment following release from prison and reduce their odds of recidivating (para. 2).”

While much of HEP definition and purpose in America focuses on its benefits to the imprisoned or its impact in society, there is growing debate in its foundational definition and purpose revolving around whether HEP is a privilege or a human right (Lockerd & Rankers-Robertson, 2011). Lockert and Rankers-Robertson (2011) propose that the current American model supports CE as a privilege, which then impacts its purpose and practice. They also speak to the contrasting notion of it being a human right. This delineation is critical as it impacts what HEP is, its accessibility, and its outflow.

This ideology is embedded and supported in European countries to the point where the United Nations has taken a stand on CE being a human right (Torrijo & DeMaeyer, 2019). Standing on European models, O’Brien et al. (2022) argue that CE is a practice of freedom and “is crucial to developing a more holistically conceived model of prison education” (p. 697). Castro and Gould (2018) purport that HEP purely defined and driven by themes of the betterment of prisoners and society miss the mark because then, it is not developed from the paradigm of normative education and correctional education thus becomes “dehumanizing” (p. 3). Vorhaus (2014) debates that there is need to clarify whether CE is a right or a privilege and

concludes that supporting CE as a human right will assure education that supports human dignity.

The Positive Influence of Higher Education in Prison

The benefits of HEP are well-researched as a clear positive to keep America safe, a strong piece to assist with behavioral change, and more cost-effective than just incarcerating offenders. At this point in HEP history, the research is overwhelming toward its positive benefits, too much to fully chronicle within this study. Yet as evidenced by the December 2020 rescinding of the Pell Grant ban, its use in the criminal justice system is universally accepted as an industry standard to support in criminal justice process and practice. Despite its vast proven wealth and acceptance, some review is necessary to assist with establishing and conceptualizing the leadership experiences of HEP leaders.

The most obvious benefit of correctional higher education is that it reduces recidivism, reduces crime, and increases public safety. This idea challenges the notion of using a purely retributive practice in changing criminal behavior. Karpowitz and Kenner (2003) make a bold statement that is supported by much research on this issue:

Prison-based education is the single most effective tool for lowering recidivism.

According to the National Institute of Justice Report to the U.S. Congress, prison education is far more effective at reducing recidivism than boot camps, shock incarceration, or vocational training (Karpowitz & Kenner, 2003).

Their report was produced from the infamous Bard Prison Initiative at Bard College and was careful to cite the National Institute of Justice and the Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council. The state of Texas provided significant research on the effectiveness of prison as they first studied the positive impact of college education on prisoners at the Texas Prison College System

(Gehring, 1997). Bozick et al. (2018) conducted a metanalysis that revealed that 48% of those that participate in correctional higher education are less likely to be reincarcerated than those who do not.

Aside from public safety outside of prisons, research showed that correctional higher education made prisons safer, assisting with better behaviors and lesser disciplinary incidents (Knott, 2012). Safe prisons are a consistent issue within the criminal justice system. Winterfield et al. (2009) conducted a study that showed that correctional higher education “motivated them [prisoners] to avoid prison conflicts”, “overshadowed the fact that they were incarcerated, kept them from thinking about doing time”, and “helped them to focus and set goals while incarcerated” (p.6).

There are also economic benefits of HEP. It promotes successful re-entry into society (Davis, 2019), helps the formerly incarcerated to find work after prison, along with higher paying jobs, which supports higher tax revenues from the formerly incarcerated who join the American workforce after being released from prison (Knott, 2012). Given the American taxpayer primarily supports the criminal justice system economically, HEP saves government spending on incarceration, saving \$4 to \$5 for every \$1 spent on correctional higher education (Bozick et al., 2018).

There are various benefits personally and publicly, bettering inmates and consequently society. CE promotes positive psychological benefits (Kallman, 2020; Pelletier & Evans, 2019) and positively impacts physical health (Nowotny et al., 2016). Further, it has an encouraging influence on families and children of the incarcerated (Erismann & Contardo, 2005) and, given the vast disparities seen in the American criminal justice system, HEP provides a significant foundation to assist with reducing the awful impact of the historic racial constructs of

intergenerational incarceration. Larson (2015) gives a definitive synopsis of the benefits of HEP noting that:

every person who leaves prison with an associate's degree is approximately 75% more likely to avoid reincarceration, less likely to victimize others, and more likely to be able to support families economically and breaking generational cycles of incarceration that negatively impact up to 70% of the children of the incarcerated (p. 9).

Practicalities of HEP: Pedagogy, Challenges, and Current Studies

As history notes, correctional higher education was first formalized in the 1960s and 1970s, and in 26 of those years, 1994 to 2020, America had a ban on Pell Grants to prisoners (which closed programs and vastly slowed its progress). Thus, it can be concluded that correctional higher education is fairly young in its processes and pedagogical development. Further, as this study contends, the opening of Pell grants to prisoners in December 2020 ignited another golden age not only to support higher education but to build the foundations of what competent correctional education is to be. Consequently, this is the purpose this study concentrated on—the experiences of this movement's leaders. Prison college administrators grapple with the infancy of what prison college education is while meeting a new era of education. As such, it is necessary to build a fundamental knowledge of what is now known about practical realities, processes, and pedagogy of this unique division of college education.

Program Difference

Variety and difference are a large part of HEP. One area is the fact that higher education in the prison setting is different than the normative settings for higher education (Zitko, 2017). Another reality is that delivery and practicalities differ from program to program (Davis et al., 2014). As mentioned previously, the American prison education programs break down into four

to six categories (Dewey et al., 2020). All of these details are unique and diverse in comparison to normative education and from program to program.

Pedagogy

Another avenue to understand the foundation of this study is through the unique pedagogy that prison higher education administrators have to manage. Erzen et al. (2019) in their report *Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison* notes that "program administrators help ensure quality pedagogy by recruiting highly skilled and motivated faculty and providing them with regular access to opportunities for professional development, and for collaboration and dialogue with colleagues." (p.26) Research shows that there are various themes that guide correctional higher education pedagogy. Also, speaking to the youth of this style of education there are many that opine on what pedagogical themes should guide HEP.

Research shows main themes of pedagogy are the abolitionist focus, critical pedagogy, rehabilitation, transformation, vocational support, and normative higher education. The abolitionist foundation takes on the themes of social change and equity, thwarting the historical impact of the prison industrial complex (Kilgore, 2011; Novek, 2017). This is similar to the idea of Critical Pedagogy, which emphasizes "freedom for those with limited freedom" (Scott, 2017, p. 71) specifically within prisons not limiting intellectual freedom (Ronda & Utheim, 2019).

Rehabilitation takes on the idea of using higher education to rehabilitate the imprisoned from a life of crime (Behan, 2014; Corcoran, 1985). The vocational approach focuses on preparing inmates to re-enter society from prison with specific and technical job skills and general skills of getting employment. Ward and Fogarty (2019) note that with *transformation pedagogy* personal transformations occur, with the addition of societal, community, and institutional changes happening.

Various other pedagogical themes have been contemplated for the uniqueness of prison. Wolf (2020) builds on the idea of a care pedagogy, where “care and compassion play a big role in the learning experience” (p.211). Columbia University (2018) through their *Center for the Study of Social Difference* workshopped and developed the idea of the pedagogy of dignity, which emphasizes “helping students to find intellectual joy and excitement in a difficult place, promoting self-respect and dignity, and discovering power in education” (para. 14). Kallman's (2019) study emphasizes a pedagogy of collective learning where the educational process builds accountability, peer-to-peer mentorships, and racial harmony with prison settings.

The physical environment of a HEP can impact pedagogy. The physical place in which education in prison occurs is important. The notion of space can be even more significant when establishing a learning environment. “In prison, education can take place in various spaces, and each space can entail the adoption of a different educational approach” (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2021, p. 63).

The normative approach to pedagogy seeks to take on the normal aspirations of non-carceral colleges and expect high pedagogical standards for all post-secondary institutions. The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (2016) notes this in their foundational formation as a HEP-focused organization:

Meaningful, sustained, quality higher education in prison is designed in the best interest of incarcerated students and in accordance with the highest standards and best practices in the field of postsecondary education. The primary purpose of meaningful, sustained, quality higher education is academic in nature and includes consistent formal instruction with a curriculum designed for students who have earned a secondary credential, such as

a GED, high school diploma, or equivalent credential, and may include college preparation (p.9).

They further indicate in their report *Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison* that pedagogically, education should be at the same standards in the prison program as they are on the main campus (Erzen et al., 2019).

Recommendations from Key Studies

Since the growth of this new era of HEP, various studies have been conducted on prison higher education during the young time of its existence. The hallmark studies provide a good look at the issues that may be shaping correctional higher education administrators' experiences and perceptions. The study *Higher Education in Prison: A Pilot Study of Approaches and Modes of Delivery in Eight Prison Administrations* conducted by Dewey et al. (2020) covers eight states (Arizona, Indiana, Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, North Dakota, and Washington D.C.) and recommended the following:

1. Prioritizing sustainable education in a humane institutional environment through the recruitment of skilled professional staff willing to engage in cross-professional dialogue;
2. Investing in a range of job-driven vocational partnerships as part of positive engagement and community collaboration with the public;
3. Incentivizing and celebrating successes to increase motivation as part of individualized education planning that centers prisoners' diverse needs and learning styles;
4. Fostering a collaborative, peer-driven learning environment by including current and former prisoners in education and programming initiatives;

5. Enhancing collaborations with local colleges and universities to provide advanced courses, credentialing, and meaningful engagement with professionals who work in fields outside of prison administration;
6. Utilizing state-specific research and evaluation as central aspects of decision making and policy implementation in conjunction with evidence-based practices determined elsewhere;
7. Providing educational opportunities for prisoners of all sentence lengths, ages, and conviction types to foster a positive, engaged institutional environment;
8. Increasing access to and use of technology to ensure that education and programming prepares prisoners for employment and success in a technologically based society;
9. Cultivating a holistic, team-based approach to education, mental health services, programming, reentry, and security among all prison staff to ensure continuity of support and services; and
10. Developing a clear mission consistently endorsed and adhered to by all prison administrators and workers to increase communication and receptivity to new ideas between facilities and central office (pp.57-58).

Simpkins (2015) performed a case study on a community college program, which are the programs that most commonly administer prison higher education, and notes these recommendations for HEP:

1. To challenge a lack of college interest and build the capacity to sell programming,
2. Have clearly defined goals,
3. Establish guidelines to ensure programs are complete,
4. Identify potential students that best suit the environment,

5. Identify funding resources,
6. And establish a relationship with the State DOC

Davis et al.'s (2014) Rand Corporation comprehensive evaluation, *How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here? The Results of a Comprehensive Evaluation*, suggest applying stronger research designs, measure program dosage, identify program characteristics, examine more-proximal indicators of program efficacy and examine more proximal indicators of program efficacy (pp. 85-87).

In a 2019 Rand Corporation evaluation of correctional higher education entitled, *Higher Education Programs in Prison: What We Know Now and What We Should Focus on Going Forward*, notes the following questions to be answered to support policy-oriented growth:

1. What amount of intervention (or dosage) is associated with effective college programs, and how does that amount vary for different types of students?
2. Who benefits most from in-prison college programs?
3. What factors moderate or mediate the effects of in-prison college programs?
4. What is the right balance between in-person instruction and self-study or computer-based learning?
5. What principles from adult higher education and learning might be applicable to college programs for incarcerated individuals? (p.11)

The *State Higher Education Executive Officers Association* put out a 2020 study called, *Postsecondary Education for Incarcerated Individuals: Guidance for State Agencies and Systems of Higher Education*. Their study recommended:

1. Advocate for the restoration of Pell eligibility at the federal level.
2. Conduct a policy audit to identify and mitigate barriers.

3. Ensure postsecondary programs are aligned and articulated to those outside of prisons.
4. Establish and maintain relationships with counterparts at state correctional agencies.
5. Charge a staff person with ownership of this policy area.
6. State agency and system leaders and staff should visit a program within a prison.
7. Organize a statewide convening to galvanize support for increased opportunities.
8. Craft and push a legislative agenda at the state level (pp.17-19)

Lastly, the most recent evaluation via the *Alliance for Higher Education in Prison* and conducted by Casto et al (2022), offers these recommendations:

1. Explore the effects of allowing incarcerated students to be eligible for institution-specific scholarships and grants and/or other forms of tuition subsidies (e.g., reduced tuition rates) as a first step towards establishing Pell as just one funding mechanism within a broader funding network.
2. Compensate and formalize the positions of higher education personnel who support programs operating in prison.
3. Ensure that higher education in prison programs has sufficient resources to provide robust student support services (pp.6-7).

Other recommendations from reputable resources include:

- The SCP needs an outcomes evaluation of its implemented educational programs (Davis, 2019).
- Equal resource efforts, comparable to normative higher education, are needed to assure the prison education process is competent (Balcer, 2020).
- Ascendum Education Group suggests, better technology in prison classrooms, and initiatives that center on incarcerated students' experiences, including a fellowship for

formerly incarcerated learners at the Education Trust, and an education policy think tank (Weissman, 2021).

- Community Colleges should be the basis for HEP (Larson, 2015).
- Increase in funding, expanded education opportunities, and evaluation for competence and discrimination in educational implementation and practices. (Weissman, 2021).

These studies and issues give a view of the practical world college administrators find themselves managing. Moreover, they may be descriptive of their leadership experiences.

Problematizing Prison Higher Education

Another avenue to view the practicalities of HEP leader experiences is through the unique challenges of HEP. It is of particular relevance because the official industry of prison education is young and lacks the development and support of normative HEP. HEP administrators are inundated with abnormal educational challenges and issues that highlight their leadership experience. Thus, HEP's uniqueness must be problematized for context.

In review of the literature, the challenges and issues are vast. The following themes were consistent themes throughout the literature and exhibited to be consistent and key challenges of this genre of education: administrative structure, classroom instruction, credibility, environment, funding, institutional dynamics, pedagogy and curriculum, philosophy of education, processes, resources, staffing and morale, students and morale, and equity.

Administrative structure pointed to HEP needing to be structurally housed in public safety departments of each State (Davis, 2019), educators having two different supervisors between correctional administration and educational administration (Gehring 1993), community college being the best fit for HEP (Larson 2015), and some facilities requiring instructors to have worked as department of corrections staff before becoming correctional educators (Frolander et

al., 2001). A main challenge with administrative functionality within HEP programs was the conflicting goals and mandates of an educational focus versus a correctional focus (MTC, 2003).

Classroom instruction was a key area of concern. Issues revolved around the low quality of education (Blake, 2021), lack of technology (Cooper & Tanaka, 2020), limited program offerings with time constraints that come with prison transfer or end of a prison sentence (Kaiser et al., 2022), lack of motivation from potential students and limited resources (MTC, 2003), and inadequate class time or teaching time (Osberg & Fraley, 1993). Patrie (2017) speaks to a consistent theme in the literature that the student bodies within HEP are too diverse in individual academic aptitudes and many lack adequate educational basics to successfully take HEP courses.

Credibility was a concern for both teachers and students. Those issues revolved around if credits will be transferable outside of prison education (Davis, 2019), institutional legitimacy (Kaiser et al., 2022), and education performance evaluations/recommendations being able to prove program competence compared to normative higher education (Weissman, 2021).

Circumstances around the physical and structural educational environment were a main area of challenge. Those issues noted difficulty with the inherent restrictive environment for education (McCarty, 2006; Spaulding, 2011), opposition and attitudes from correctional staff (Frolander, 2001; MTC, 2003), dealing with institutional lockdowns, substandard prison conditions (Kaiser et al., 2022), and limited out of class time for students (Osberg & Fraley, 1993).

Despite the end of the Pell Grant ban via The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (FAFSA Simplification Act), funding was still described as a challenge for HEP. Kaiser et al. (2022) and Weissman (2021) identify funding needs beyond Pell Grants. Additionally, a lack of

resources is a vital area within the funding problem, including insufficient libraries and competent technology (McCarty, 2006).

Institutional concerns were a central part of the challenges on issues of HEP. Those dynamics revolved around conflicts with other activities, lack of opportunities to pursue bachelor's degrees, lack of usefulness of course offerings, low graduation rates, and low quality of education (AACU, 2019). This also included a lack of information about courses, lack of relevant courses, procedural problems, scheduling problems, transportation difficulties (Kaiser et al., 2022), conflicting schedules (Kiser, 1987), standard evening schedules that tend toward long days for inmates, and extensive commutes for faculty due to mostly rural locations of prisons (Maher, 2004). These types of challenges also include problems with pedagogy and curriculum (Gaskew, 2015; McCarty, 2006).

Student and staff morale and needs were a key area. The literature spoke to teacher burnout (Gehring, 1993), teachers fearing a lack of credibility of their work (Gehring, 1997), opposition among educational colleagues (Gehring, 1997), lack of staff (Kaiser et al., 2022), lack of professional development, job stress that impacts staff retention, lack of support and recognition (Kamrath & Gregg 2008; MTC, 2003), and instructors struggling with boundaries and appropriate care for inmates (Wright, 2004). Concerning students, the literature notes a challenge with family support, inmates feeling too old for education, life circumstances, and a lack of motivation, interest, and enjoyment with education (Kaiser et al., 2022). This included what students experienced before incarceration and those socialized with the mentality that college is not important (Rose & Rose, 2014).

Equity was also consistent in the literature and an area of difficulty. Those ideals revolved around a presumed pedagogical racial gap (Gaskew, 2015), race being a significant

predictor of participation (Rose & Rose, 2014), and a lack of evaluations for equity (Weissman, 2021). This also included students of color having lower graduation rates than their white counterparts (AACU 2019) and women being less likely to attend programs due to their children, fewer programs for female inmates, and lesser quality (Rose & Rose, 2014).

The issue that highlighted all of the challenges in HEP was the dynamics around the philosophy of education in prisons. Those issues included an absence of a consistent and national systemic infrastructure that provides accredited programs and the overriding recidivist paradigm and its emphasis on certificate-based and vocational training hurting college-in-prison programming (Castro et al., 2022). This includes a consistent debate as to whether HEP should just include industry or vocational credentialing programs as opposed to full academic degrees (Davis, 2019). This debate involves the challenge of education defined through criminogenic norms (Karpowitz, 2005), the clash of prison culture versus academic culture (Gehring, 1997; McCarty, 2006,), and the intensely and overemphasized traumatic, transformative, and rehabilitative themes of prison culture (Patrie, 2017).

Gehring (1993) synthesizes the vastness of problems and issues within prison education and its relevance to HEP experience by emphasizing the challenges that teachers have with juggling the constraints of DOC culture and the culture of education. Richard highlights what develops as a central theme noting, “Educators typically have two different supervisors, one at the college and one at the correctional facility and must continuously balance the conflicting missions of security of the DOC [department of corrections] and the institution of higher education” (p.65) Different than higher education outside of prisons, this is the imperative challenge that has to be problematized by HEP leaders. Essentially, HEP leaders and their staff have to balance and fight the retributive nature and philosophy of prisons with the non-

retributive ideals of normative higher education. This is a continual challenge, and the battle impacts whether HEP is allowed in prisons, the extent of programs allowed, the practical measures within its disbursement, and the support and attitudes of educational and corrective staff. Hambrick (1987) considers this challenge eternal to the profession and states that effective CE leadership must have a style akin to the idea of the Situational Leadership theory, describing that it is critical that prison higher education leaders have the skill of accommodating and adapting to the unique conditions of carceral settings and even must have the skillset of using adaptation to various prison-based situations to one's advantage.

HEP as an Issue of Equity

The literature was significant in the research on equity as an imperative issue at the forefront of CE and the leadership of CE. The paramount equity themes in prison education include and engender thoughts of racial equality (Johnson & Davis, 2022) and gender equality (Ryder, 2020), the disparity in prisons (diZerega, 2022), abolitionism and the destruction of the prison industrial complex (Alexander, 2017), critical pedagogy (Kilgore, 2011), and radical teaching (Drabinski & Harkins, 2013).

International models give context to the evolution of equity as a growing American issue of higher education. The Council of Europe, recognizing that the right to education is fundamental and applies to prisoners, issued recommendations in 1989. These called not only for full access to education but held that education programming should be normalized to align to educational opportunities outside of prison (Lockard & Rankins-Robertson, 2012). In 1990, the UN General Assembly adopted Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners that included the right to an education or CE. While Europe has differing educational models, this is set as a

policy in their educational processes and provides an example of building equitable CE as an evidence-based practice (Costelloe & Warner, 2014).

The overriding theme presented a concept that normalizing CE to education outside of prison was the most imperative issue with equity (Glover, 2019). The Alliance on Prison Higher Education (2019) adopted a foundational focus on HEP, which gives direction to the growing issue of equity with HEP in America. They note that HEP should:

1. uphold the same high standards and opportunities that exist in other qualified higher education contexts, despite students' incarceration status.
2. maintain sustained attention to how race, gender, ability, economic status, and other dimensions of identity, status, and experience impact every dimension of the field, from teaching and learning to curriculum development to partnerships and program structure (Ezren et al, 2019, p. 2).

Ezren et al (2019) highlight and describe these objectives in an overriding theme in terms of the importance of “equity and excellence” within HEP programming (p. 38).

These notions of equity in CE partners with the foundational ideas of education as a fundamental right and akin to American democracy. According to John Dewey, an individual's sense of self is only fully developed in association with others, and participation in a democratic culture recognizes that individuals contribute to social well-being to the degree that they have been afforded opportunities to reach their full capabilities in life (Saltmarsh, 1996). Dewey (2004) argued that education was a necessity of life and that society's survival depended on the transmission of knowledge via formal education.

The Impact of Higher Education Leadership and Gaps in Research

Leadership is a well-studied field that explores many concepts of leadership while providing few conclusions as to what leadership truly is (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2018). As well, the role of higher education is a well-referenced field of leadership, and likewise, various conclusions exist on what is effective leadership in education. Collectively, while conclusions vary and various ideals abound, the research on leadership and educational leadership highlight similar leadership styles that are effective and imperative for leading. Some of the key theories on effective leadership are the transformational, great man, trait, transactional, laissez-faire, process, and situational leadership concepts (Khan, Nawaz, & Khan, 2016). While this is a study of leadership experiences, it does not assume or presume what leadership style is the most effective in higher education or HEP. Further, and no matter what style was assessed, as the Limitation section suggests, given the success of the 2015 SCP and its influence on re-opening Pell Grants to the incarcerated, this study presumes a majority of the HEP administrators were effective and successful leaders.

Despite this, this study concludes that there is a significant gap in researching the impact of leadership in higher education in general and specifically to HEP leadership. Research speaking to higher education leadership experience also is minimal. Bryman (2007) in his literature review on effective leadership in higher education notes that many writers have expressed that there is little research directly investigating leadership effectiveness in higher education, and he uncovered this reality throughout his literature review on leadership in education. Jenkins and Owen (2016) speak to many concepts and various disciplines that fail to focus on a central concept of leadership, noting “affirmatively, those who teach leadership hail from a variety of disciplines and bring with them a mixed bag of personal, professional, and

educational experiences” (p. 98). Jenkins’ (2019) phenomenological study revealed themes around characteristics to become an education leader and aspects of being an educational leader, while noting that the literature on educational leadership is “sparse” (p.142).

Additionally, there is minimal research that speaks to HEP leadership and what leadership is necessary to effectively lead HEP programs. Similar gaps exist in research about HEP leadership as normative higher education leadership. More specifically to this study, there is an absence of research that speaks to leadership experience in higher education and HEP. Sanders (2020) synthesizes this gap and the need for HEP leadership and leadership development, “Leadership is underdeveloped in prison education. While there are some good opportunities for very senior leaders, generally training and support start too late in careers, when people already have significant responsibility” (p.103) Despite the deep and undergirding context of HEP presented in this literature review, the definition, practicalities, and experiences of HEP leadership is not as well-founded and presents an enormous research and scholarship gap in this field of higher education study.

Chapter Summary

Given the unique realities of HEP in the realm of normative higher education and the distinct challenges of HEP, this Literature Review took a broad scope to explain the foundations and what may define HEP leadership experiences. This chapter explained the foundational research methodology and theoretical foundation of the focus of this study. Further, this chapter built a backdrop and bedrock of the history, foundation, philosophy, practicalities, and challenges of HEP. It also tied these dynamics to the implications of HEP leadership and current research on HEP experiences in leadership. Lastly, this chapter revealed the significant gap in research about higher education leadership and specifically HEP leadership and the experiences

of HEP leaders. Chapter 3 will focus on the practicality of the research methodology that built this study on the leadership experiences of HEP administrators.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The role of post-secondary correctional education (HEP) is at a crucial point where college leadership experience is constitutive to assist with its current challenges and evolution. To give context to the study, the Literature Review built a substantial foundation on which to understand the significant dynamics that undergird the experiences of a HEP college administrator and this study. The forthcoming chapters concentrate on the crux of this research, interviewing, analyzing, and extrapolating the voices of college administrators and leaders, particularly those that participated during the Second Chance Pell Grant Experiential Initiative Era (SCP Era). This chapter focuses on the research methodology for this study.

The research methodology for this study is qualitative and guided by the methodology of phenomenology, primarily the method of transcendental phenomenology. As a process of the transcendental phenomenological approach, this researcher utilized one-on-one interviews with SCP Era college administrators and leaders. After the interviews were completed, the researcher organized, analyzed, and coded the data, then drew conclusions from a phenomenological review of the interviews and research.

Transcendental phenomenology demands an unadulterated and unbiased review and analysis of experience (Love, Vetere, & Davis, 2020). The concepts of Epoch and Bracketing, as this chapter will explain later, were used to assure these ideals. Additionally, the analysis and results were formulated by the textual and structure experiences of the participants, building the essence of the phenomenon of HEP leadership.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the core lived experiences of HEP administrators and leaders during the era of the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative Era?

RQ2: Based on the experiences of HEP administrators and leaders, what are their opinions about HEP challenges and the future of HEP after the Second Chance Pell Grant Initiative Era?

Participant Selection Criteria

During the Obama Administration, the U.S. Department of Education started the 2015 Second Chance Pell Grant Experiential Initiative (SCP) that temporarily lifted the federal ban on Pell Grants to incarcerated individuals in select college programs throughout the United States. The initiative was established to provide Pell Grants to people in state and federal prisons so that they could participate in postsecondary education programs. Under the initiative, 69 colleges and universities in 26 states participated in this experiment, totaling 12,000 students who were to receive Pell Grants to pursue higher education (Delaney & Montagnet, 2020). These HEP programs were featured across the United States (See Appendix A).

While the initiative expanded to 200 colleges for the 2022-23 timeframe (Press Office, 2021), this study's agenda focused on all HEP administrators and leaders that led programs during the SCP Era. Not all HEP programs participated in the SCP as the program was intentionally selective, given it was a pilot program. Two hundred colleges applied to the SCP and 64 were originally accepted, leaving out some who wanted to be a part of the program (Wexler, 2016). Participants in this study revealed that other HEP programs decided not to apply to the SCP, as it was not a part of their program's focus or needs. When the FASFA Simplification Act is fully implemented in 2023, all institutions will have access to Pell Grant funds.

Most of the participants in this study are from SCP colleges. This study considered programs inside and outside of the SCP given the initiatives impact on HEP growth and because non-SCP programs provide vital experiences that relate to the SCP Era. Participants in this study included all administrators and leaders from all HEP programs in the SCP Era. Collectively, these institutions and their leaders offered a rich perspective on HEP practicalities and evolution and its implications for the future of college education in prison.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Data collection for this study involved interviewing college administrators and leaders of SCP Era colleges. The interview process featured semi-structured interviews, which were centralized and founded on key, structured research questions to assist with generating discussions around participant experiences in their specific HEP programs (See Appendix B). Supported by a qualitative and phenomenological approach, HEP administrators were requested for semi-structured interviews. Cohen & Crabtree (2006) said of this process, “using semi-structured interviews enables the participants the freedom to express their views in their own terms” (p.2) and allows for structure and flexibility (Balushi, 2016).

The purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews was to produce data that was personal to the educational practitioner and content-rich in regard to college administration of HEP programs and what it means to the greater body of work within higher education. In concert with the qualitative approach and phenomenological ideals, the semi-structured interview process of this study assisted with acquiring “in-depth data of participants’ perspectives and make sense of their lived stories/experiences as told by them” (Balushi, 2016, p. 731).

Each interview was recorded and was supported by check-ins that took place before and after interviews to assure validity. Additional questions that developed during the study were

generated for all participants, but the semi-structured questions were the foundation of the interviews. Considering proximity dynamics with the various SCP Era colleges within this study, the online computer conference program, Zoom, was primarily used for participant interviews. Three interviews were conducted by phone and coordinated with Zoom technology to assure that a transcript was created for review. With the goal of understanding the experiences and perspectives of these college administrators and leaders, the researcher collected essential data and compared it to the research literature. Discussions and conclusions of that data follow in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Recruitment Procedures, Gaining Access, and Data Collection

After obtaining approval from the dissertation committee of this study and from the Institutional Review Board from Winona State University (See Appendix C), participant recruitment began from various SCP Era colleges. Each administrator and leader were initially contacted for an interview via appropriate medium. All initial contacts started with an email to each leader explaining the study in brief, with a request for their participation in this study (See Appendix D).

After each administrator agreed to be a part of the study and accepted the interview, a second email was sent, which explained the study in more detail (See Appendix E). This email also included an informed-consent form, a statement of confidentiality, a statement for validity assuring check-ins with the participant before and after the interviews and provided scheduling procedures for the interview. In total, these described the parameters of the inquiry that entailed the purpose of the study, selection criteria, potential risks and benefits, and methods to maintain confidentiality. Lastly, an email was used to confirm the time and date of the interview and to send the participant the Zoom Link.

All 200 SCP colleges were contacted for participation. Additionally, private and public HEP programs outside of the SCP were contacted to be a part of the study. Given natural, logistical realities, not all of the participants contacted decided to be a part of the study. Thirty-nine participants originally agreed to be a part of the study; however, due to individual circumstances, four of the 39 had to back out of the study, totaling 35 participants for the study. The results were adjusted toward the number of participants that participated in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

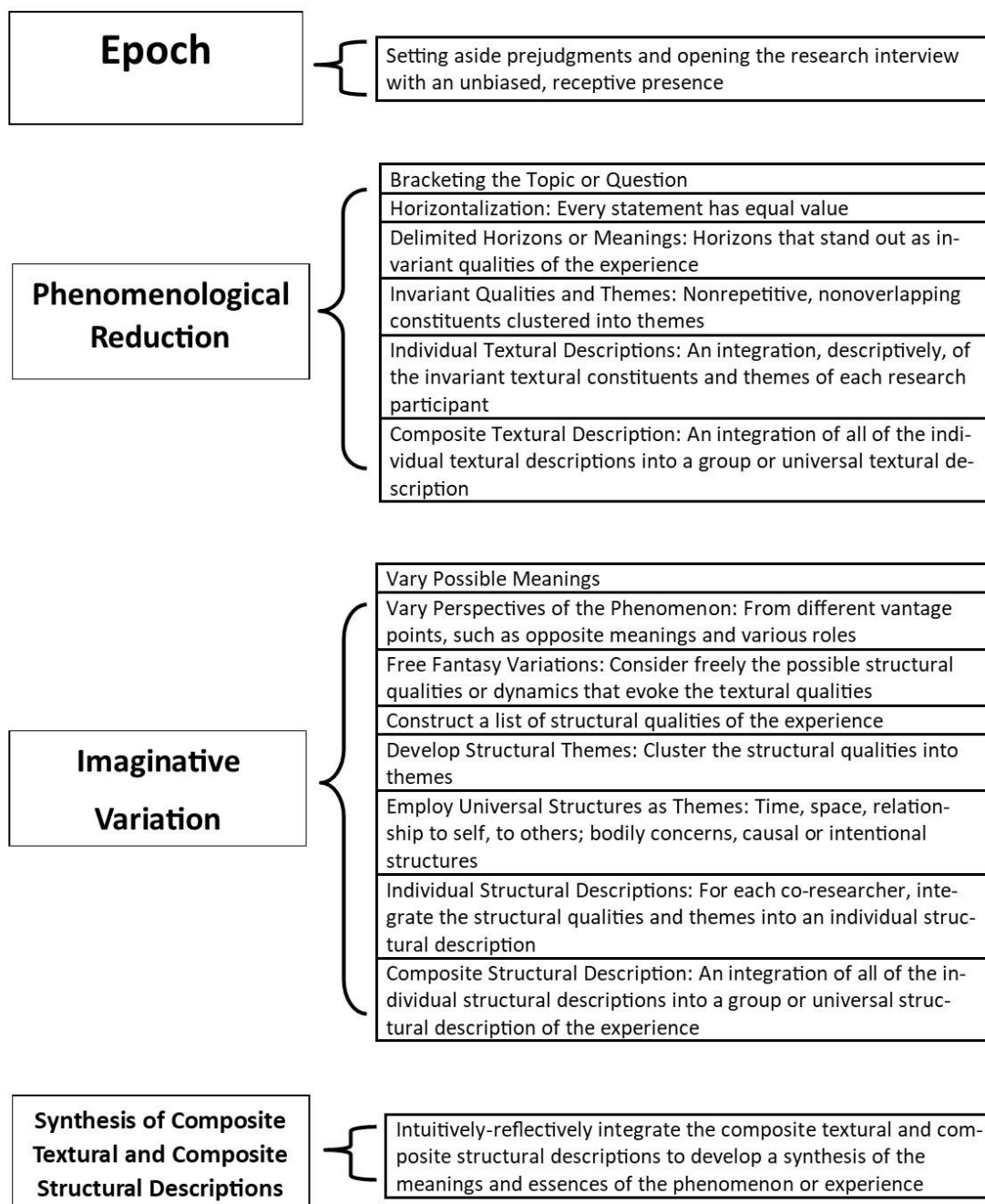
As Roberts and Hyatt (2019) suggest, the researcher collected and analyzed the data for insights. The analysis consisted of identifying themes that emerge from the raw data, and the insights derived from the analysis are reported in Chapter 4. Following analysis, data were then organized to support emergent themes, and those results were woven in concert with the focus of the study, however they manifested its results.

More broadly explained, Moustakas (1994) is a scholar that is recognized for his seminal and respected instruction on phenomenological qualitative research. He developed and described an exhaustive model (See Figure 1) that builds a thorough ethic of unbiased analysis and interpretation. These concepts are widely used to analyze phenomenological research, and his methods of analysis and interpretation were employed in the evaluation of this study to give an unbiased, thorough, and full representation of this study's results. The following are key concepts of his ideology that were followed to develop the data analysis from a phenomenological viewpoint:

1. Epoche/Bracketing: This process is purposefully setting aside any preconceived knowledge or everyday beliefs that might be used to explain the phenomena being investigated (Gilstrap, 2007). Moustakas (1994) describes it as setting aside "our

- prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things”, disqualifying one’s former knowledge (p. 85).
2. Phenomenological Reduction: This is “describing in textual language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object but also the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 65). Van Manen and Adams (2010) call this process a “direct and primal contact” with life experiences as they actually manifest and not how it might be initially conceptualized (para. 1).
 3. Imaginative Variation: This process assists the researcher in extracting meaning from structural themes highlighted by textual descriptions. Moustakas (1994) notes that this is “seeking possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (pp. 97-98).
 4. Synthesis: Moustakas (1994) describes this as the “integration of the fundamental textual and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100). This process will bring focus to the experiences of the study.

Figure 1: Steps of phenomenological data analysis by Moustakas (1994, pp.180-181).



Researcher Bias

An aspect of qualitative research is that it can inherently introduce bias because the researcher collects data based on interaction with the study participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative researcher, therefore, should seek to limit bias throughout the process of the study. The following practical steps were used in this study to ensure that bias was eliminated from the study:

1. Taking thorough notes during interviews and sending interview transcripts to each participant for member-checking following the end of the interviews (Maxwell, 2013).
2. Repeatedly having member check-ins with participants, before and after interviews. (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013).
3. Considering results that supported any hypotheses or concepts introduced by prior influence (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013).
4. Consulting with advisors/committees to provide feedback throughout the study to ensure that no data were inadvertently ignored (Maxwell, 2013).
5. Using bracketing techniques, assuring constant awareness of pre-judgments not to interfere with the participant's interview, also describing own experiences and closeness to the study, focusing on separating bias from the data collection (Moustakas, 1994).
6. Using participants' own words as the data collection and then through analysis and synthesis, then using that data to augment the full study (Moustakas, 1994).

Moreover, in displaying the researcher's role in the study or bias, Creswell (2014) notes that personal background and prejudgments must be considered. This study was upfront about obvious researcher bias and its impact on the conclusions of this work. Given this researcher is embedded in the work of the criminal justice system as a Public Defender Social Worker and

Mitigation Specialist and thus has knowledge of prison dynamics such as HEP, this bias was clear and thoroughly mentioned throughout the interview process to make sure the interviews were not slanted toward bias, as well as the analysis, coding, and conclusions that were ascertained from the interviews. The bias and bio of this researcher was mentioned in the initial set-up of the interview and additionally at the beginning of every interview of the participant group.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the practical outlook of the research methodology of this study. It provided information about the study participants and gave context for how the study would move forward regarding data collection, analysis, coding, and interpretation. Further, the chapter addressed the researcher's bias and processes for eliminating bias. Chapter 4 reports the results of the study and categorizes the various themes revealed through the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of higher education in prison (HEP) administrators and leaders that lead prison college programs during the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative Era, 2015 to 2023 (SCP Era). Using the qualitative transcendental phenomenological method, the leadership experiences of college administrators and leaders revealed substantive qualitative data. This chapter reports that data and further organizes the data within the transcendental phenomenological method and the implications of those results.

This chapter presents participant demographics, tables to complement the summary, and participant narratives to provide a context to the shared experiences and consequent themes that represent the findings of this study. It is also important to note that the data analysis results and theming will use the nomenclature of transcendental phenomenology to be reflective of this research method and its theming process.

Research Questions

This chapter communicated the findings of this study to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the core lived experiences of HEP administrators and leaders during the era of the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative Era?

RQ2: Based on the experiences of HEP administrators and leaders what are their opinions about HEP challenges and the future of HEP after the Second Chance Pell Grant Initiative Era?

Data Collection

After obtaining approval, participant recruitment began from various SCP Era colleges. Each administrator and leader were contacted through email explaining the study and requesting their participation in the study. After each administrator agreed to be a part of the study and accepted the interview, a second email was sent out explaining the study in detail. The second confirmation included an informed-consent form, a statement of confidentiality, a statement for validity assuring check-ins with the participant before and after the interviews, and a scheduling procedure for the interview. Final correspondence confirmed the time and date of the meeting and format of the meeting. All of the meetings were conducted through the online conferencing program, Zoom, including three meetings over the phone that were recorded on Zoom to create a transcript of the interview.

All of the current 200 SCP colleges were contacted for participation. Public and private HEP programs outside of the SCP were contacted to be a part of the study also. A total of 35 administrators and leaders agreed to be a part of the study.

Participant Demographics: The “Who” of the Experience

Given the uniqueness of this field of higher education and how HEP fluctuates in the different states within America, a full view of the demographic data is necessary to give imperative context to this study (Table 1). To preserve the confidentiality of the study participants, all study participants were assigned a number for data coding and identification in this report for purposes of reporting the findings of this study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), researchers need to protect the anonymity of the participants by assigning numbers or “aliases” to them to use in the process of analyzing and reporting data (p. 174). Participant numbers were based on the order in which the researcher conducted participant

interviews, but the numbers have no correlation or relatability to the participants that would make them otherwise identifiable.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

Characteristics of Participants	Percentage (%)
Average Years of HEP Experience	
1 to 5 years	57
6 to 10 years	23
16 to 20 years	11
21 years and beyond	9
SCP AND NON-SCP Colleges	
SCP	66
Non-SCP	34
Education Level of Participants	
JD	3
EdD Candidate	3
PhD Candidate	3
Bachelor's	3
Master's	20
EdD	8
PhD	60
Gender of Participants	
Female	74
Male	26
Culture of Participants	
Euro-American (White)	86
African American (Black)	11
Asian American	3
Formerly Incarcerated Participants	9
Prior Experience working in DOC	9

This researcher conducted 35 semi-structured interviews in this transcendental phenomenological study. Individual participants worked as administrators in HEPs throughout the United States, representing 23 distinct states. The state an HEP program resides in is significant given that HEP policies and course/degree offerings fluctuate from state to state. In

alphabetical order (not in order of participants) the range of participants covered leaders and administrators from the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin (See Appendix F). The participants were from SCP recipient colleges and public and private colleges that were not a part of the SCP.

All participants possessed professional experience and post-secondary education, and a majority of them held advanced degrees. None of the participants had a specialized degree that focused just on HEP leadership preparation; further, research revealed that this type of higher education preparation or focus as a formal discipline does not exist within the United States. As described at the beginning of the study, this research focused on administrators and leaders, given those who lead HEP programs have various titles, positions, and roles within higher education in prison, with some being employed by DOC. As a result, leadership titles and responsibilities vary from HEP-to-HEP program. Examples of these titles are Academic Dean, Director, President, and Dean of Corrections Education (See Appendix G for a full list of titles).

Per their reports of HEP experience, the participants possessed over 224 years of collective leadership experience in this unique field of education. The years of individual work experience for each participant reflect leaders having worked in HEP from one year to forty years. Over 50% of the participants have worked five years or less in HEP and few with over ten years in HEP. These amounts are of unique significance given that SCP only started in 2015, and then given the 26-year Pell Grant ban via the 1994 Crime Bill. Sixty-six percent of participants were from SCP colleges and 34% were non-SCP colleges. The level of educational attainment of these leaders reflects that 60% of the participants had a PhD, six percent had an EdD, and three

percent (one participant) had a JD. Twenty-two percent of leaders had attained up to a master's degree and one participant up to a bachelor's degree.

Given the American demographic dynamic of prisons being majority male, with State and Federal prisons averaging around 90% men and seven percent women (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2023; Kaeble & Glaze 2015) it was important to reflect the gender of the participants. Gender demographics in this study reflect that 75% of participants identified as female and 25% identified as male. No participant identified their gender type outside of the female and male genders, while having that option.

Culturally, 82% of participants identified as Euro-American (White), 13% African American, and 3% Asian American. These demographics are significant in respect to the cultural disparities issue within prisons and the criminal justice system, which reflect a high percentage of American minorities within its populations (Wang et al, 2023).

Lastly, the demographics reflected that nine percent of the administrators and leaders within the study were formerly incarcerated, and another nine percent formerly worked in the DOC prior to their HEP leadership. Both of these demographics developed as significant issues from the Literature Review and are adjacent to many participants' collective concerns.

Participant Narratives: The HEP Experience “Raw” and in Their Words

This researcher determined that a brief profile and narrative of each participant would facilitate a deeper understanding of the overarching essence of their individual and collective experiences. The transcendental phenomenological method calls for a data analysis method that secures the rich and raw experiences of participants, as described in their own words. Mentioned previously, Van Manen and Adams (2010) call this process a "direct and primal contact" (para. 1) with the experiences as they manifest within the study. In other words, this method and data

analysis require an explanation of a phenomenon as they appear and from a “first person point of view” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2013, para. 1).

The researcher’s goal is to present verbatim expressions of experience from interviews and then build meanings in a narrative that represent an understanding of participants' experiences (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). These 35 narratives are an eye into the participant interviews that were conducted. The 35 narratives and the individual experiences they express in reference to the Research Questions became a narrative lexicon of each participant and the collective group and from which the data of this study is built. Through each interview, participants added substantive individual and experiential information, expressed in powerful words and thoughts that reflected the HEP leader experience. Given the depth of each narrative those descriptions are in Appendix H and serve as the foundation to the following data analysis.

Data Analysis

Participant Textual Themes: What is the Experience?

Data analysis and revealing themes according to the transcendental phenomenological method require textual descriptions of participants’ perceptions of a phenomenon. This data is built from the raw words and narratives previously described within this study. The composite textual experiences bring together themes from all of the textual experiences expressed in the participant interviews and narratives. Composite textual descriptions manifest the "what" of the phenomenon and build a base and themes for extracting and defining the data. They are organized according to each research question.

Research Question 1 Textual Themes

Extracted from the participant interviews, and as the narratives reveal, were 546 individual expressions that resulted in 115 shared textual experiences related to Research Question 1. The

data pulled from the participant interviews and the participant narratives is included in Appendix I.

Research Question 1 Composite Textual Themes

The themes organized around the textual descriptions revealed nine composite textual descriptions. The nine collective descriptions show experiences around Leadership Styles, Working with DOC, Joys of Working in HEP, Teambuilding Dynamics and Challenges with Stakeholders and Bureaucracies, HEP Philosophy, Staff-Related Experiences, Student-Related Experiences, HEP Challenges, and Professional Motivations to Work in HEP Leadership.

Experiences around Leadership Styles were consistently revealed as a "how to" manage the unique and unpredictable environments of HEP. These often were spoken about in a reactionary fashion given the challenges of HEP or leadership skills that evolved due to learning how to lead a HEP program. Participant 3 gives an example when speaking about culture-building needs in HEP leadership:

“If you drag people kicking and screaming, they're going to fight you, and they're not going to want to do it. And so, the name of the game of what we've been doing is culture building, right? We are trying to change the culture [of DOC] such that we can convince people that education is the way...”

Joys of Working in HEP were expressed by each participant in various ways. Despite the challenges of leading HEP, participants noted how their work was a positive experience for them. Participant 30 mentioned HEP as "God's Work" and was moved to tears during her interview. Participant 5 said of her HEP leadership in a maximum-security prison that she has had positive experiences, "pretty well, every time I go into the classroom". She displays this by speaking of her students' depth of education:

“So, I’m teaching a Shakespeare course, and I can allude to previous Shakespeare courses. I can allude to things we’ve learned in completely different classes and be well aware that probably three-quarters of my students were in that class. Which does not happen [in normative college education] ...The shared reference is much stronger, particularly from a man who’s in his 8TH year, he’s read...probably a hundred works of literature with me. So, if I say, can you remember what Dickens says about this, more than half of the class will remember what Dickens said.”

Teambuilding Dynamics and Challenges with Stakeholders and Bureaucracies were revealed experientially as a phenomenon both positive and negative. Participants spoke specifically to its impact when seeking to collaborate with DOC and on working in higher education, and they often spoke of it as a collective challenge working with both DOC and higher education bureaucracies. It is also referred to when collaborating with communities, taxpayers, politicians, and state administrative bodies. Participant 32 describes the challenge of teambuilding between the DOC and higher education:

“It’s where an open system, and a system that aspires to be as open as possible [higher education], meets a closed system, a system that aspires to be as closed as possible [DOC]. And it’s just absolutely the distrust, the suspicion...All the things that I’ve been taught to do well, and problem solve are the very things that are looked upon with suspicion...So it’s onerous, the systems are onerous. “

Further, as a challenge, teambuilding motivated leaders as a positive to reach and build support on behalf of HEP and its students. Participant 14 describes this by noting how she enjoys changing minds about HEP, “I personally find it very exciting and inspiring to be able to evangelize”. Participant 20 describes this aspect by noting it as a strategic endeavor, “I like

planning on strategic matters. I like trying to develop the highest degree of a student-centered education program in a prison setting."

HEP Philosophy was exhibited throughout the participant interviews describing "how to" and foundational frameworks experiences in building, operating, sustaining, and assessing their HEP programs. Participant 16 speaks to a philosophy of humanization. Various others, such as Participant 31, refer to a student-centered modality of managing and experiencing HEP programs. Participant 6 speaks to a common philosophy shared by most participants, which equates HEP to normative higher education, saying of leadership, "the main goal is to bring as much normalcy to these students as possible when they walk into the Education Building."

Participant 10 shows an example of this by referencing a significant philosophy she believes all HEP programs should consider:

"Correctional education is based in a criminological framework. It is based on the thought individuals have some kind of deficit...and that they need some kind of correction, and that education can be used as one way to do that...Higher education is not predicated upon people having deficits of character or moral judgment, or criminality. When folks come to a college or university, they enroll in higher education to better themselves, to learn something, to get a job, to become productive members of their community, to transform their lives. Those are the exact same reasons we should be enrolling incarcerated people. And so, for me, there's a very clear line between what correctional education is intended to do from the prison, from the custody institution, but higher education is not that...What we do really well is that we introduce people to knowledge, and we provide them ladders of social mobility, and that's what we should do in the prison, we should not get confused as to what it is that we do. We don't do

correctional ed. We're not good at it. We're not qualified to do it. We are qualified to do this other thing, though.”

Participant 27 speaks to this as well by addressing a contrast between the infamous positives of seeing student transformation in HEP juxtaposed to seeing system transformation. He notes,

“On the topic of transformation...we often say in our program that the most transformative thing that's happening in college and prison, it's not necessarily the transformation for the students, it's the transformation for the institution. The University going from an institution that doesn't have their hand in this work, to one that is fully invested and broadening its vision of what education is, and who education is for, that is transformative. What the students are going through, we shouldn't say that the student's experience in our classes is any more transformative than for the outside students. I don't want to exoticize their experience by saying, 'well, students on the outside, they just go through and get their degree. But for students on the inside, it's transformative!' It can feel that way sometimes, and occasionally I'll use that rhetoric when I need to. But I do think that transforming institutions, in the long run, is the way to de-carcerate and achieve abolition...One student at a time is good, one institution at a time is also really good and maybe even better. “

Staff-Related Experiences range from negative experiences with HEP staff to positive experiences. The majority of these experiences were positive with many leaders noting their gratitude for having great staff in their programs. Those experiences revolved around the naivety of working in DOC, managing lack of morale or negativity, developing staff, enjoying hiring diverse staff, strategizing and addressing complications of hiring the formerly incarcerated into HEP leadership, strategizing hiring competent staff, the positives of working with a great staff,

faculty, and teams, and how the HEP professional experience revitalizes former normative higher education faculty experiencing burnout and builds positive morale.

Participant 12 boasted how she has “great professors” and a “great team”. Participant 15 gives context to the quality of having the formerly incarcerated as HEP leaders because of their developed skillsets with adaptive-positive skillsets,

“[HEP] is not going to be like anything you've ever expected, it is a constant battle...people need to have the right expectations...somebody that's been incarcerated or just lived in an impoverished environment, they are generally more adaptable and resourceful just because they had to, and so they get it intuitively, more so than someone that's hasn't had to deal with that and may create havoc.”

Student-Related Experiences included negative expressions about staff but were overwhelmingly positive in their descriptions. A majority of participants related the idea that the HEP student is “better” than the normative higher education student. Participant 6 gives life to this shared experience by noting that HEP students are “more hungry for their education than the traditional students”.

Several participants spoke about the power of seeing students transform intellectually and personally. Participant 25 gives word to this by describing her experiences with achieving students,

"Many of them have, because of the lives that they have lived, picture themselves as being people who aren't quite capable of big things, [remarking] ‘that’ll probably never happen for me like’ Once they're finished with that class. They're just like, [remarking] ‘Wow! Ha! I did all of this stuff. I did all this work that I thought I would never be able to do. And now my vocabulary has like exploded...’”

Advocating for students was a shared experience. Participant 11 notes of this, “I feel a lot of responsibility to advocate for them where they can't advocate [for themselves].” Participant 7 says of his HEP, “my students have absolutely no voice, so I have to be the loudest voice in the room for them.” Participant 21 also expressed, “The classroom is a safe space for them [HEP students]. It's a place where they can step away from prison for two and a half hours. And my job is to protect that space which is really difficult...”

Participants also spoke about seeing students grow beyond the HEP experience.

Participant 18 speaks of these experiences,

“It's rewarding for me following through with guys who have returned home...I think it's important to show them that follow through...I think that that to me is really rewarding, and providing full wraparound and returning home services, I think that's just huge because they need to know that we don't want to just enroll you while you're here and get your tuition money. I mean, we're really here for your long-term success. That's the message, I think, is important to get through to them.”

HEP Challenges are an entrenched foundation to the leadership experience. As the literature supports, the *HEP Challenges* are multiple and entrenched in HEP. Most of those challenges are found in DOC and refer to many things such as dealing with difficult correctional officers, lack of technology, DOC timelines, and misunderstandings about HEP.

A majority of challenges revolve around dealing with the dual bureaucracies of DOC and higher education. Participant 15 gives a perspective of how he has experienced this, saying, “from the correctional side they're unnecessarily cautious, and from the educational side they're very naive.” Participant 35 also speaks to this consistent issue by noting of both bureaucracies, “they poke holes in each other”. He develops a consistent perspective on the HEP and its

challenges in DOC, “It makes sense on its face. All Prison administrators say it would be great if we could educate them, but they realize it poses threats to the way the system is built.”

A theme throughout the narratives of each Participant is the challenges of leading in an unpredictable, unknown, and difficult environment. Both veteran leaders and newer leaders speak to this challenge of leading in the unknown and how it requires adaptability, creativity, and persistence. Despite being a veteran leader in higher education, Participant 2 speaks to the idea of being “naïve” to HEP. Participant 3 describes this atmosphere of HEP also by noting,

"A lot of the work that we do it feels like it's inventing the wheel. Everything's new. So there literally doesn't exist an answer to most of the problems that we're trying to solve.

So, we have to make that up every time, and that's its own form of challenge."

Participant 4 describes HEP as “starting a mini college”. He further notes of his HEP leadership that he’s had experiences of dealing with “nothing but politics”, “playing the game”, dealing with “give and take”, “realizing the limits”, “knowing my place”, managing experiences that “temper idealism”, “going to bat for his students”, and dealing with challenges of unpredictability, technology, changing administrations, and chain of command issues. Participant 7 notes, “every single thing we are doing we are kind of like building the ship” and that “you have to think outside of the box for everything that happens for translating people in prison to colleges.” Veteran leader, Participant 8 says, “this job is just so vast that there's no way to be prepared for it.”

Regarding her experience, Participant 11 says, “I have no history working with a criminal justice system. So, I've had to learn all of the ropes when it comes to how this works” and explains “I feel like I don't know what I'm doing...I'm just making it up as I go. No one gave me an instruction manual to make this work.” Participant 27 says, “College in prison often feels like

an organ transplant, that the body of the prison is like projecting college doesn't fit within the carceral logic.” Participant 28 describes HEP leadership challenges as being on a cliff, describing, “we're standing on a cliff and what happens is throughout a couple of months you find yourself on the edge of that cliff. And you get to the edge of that cliff, and just the smallest thing just ruins your day.” Participant 35, who was formerly incarcerated and holds a PhD, notes that he “didn't know what to expect” when he began work in HEP leadership.

Participant 30 explains,

“You have a lot of bosses that you have to keep happy...Everyone is coming from a different perspective, and you have to understand and respect that perspective. You don't have to agree with it, but you have to understand it, and you have to be able to manage it...you have to be able to live with a high level of ambiguity.”

Veteran HEP leader, Participant 31 speaks of HEP leadership feeling like a "guinea pig" and "It's like trying to weld underwater".

Participant 9 describes this HEP collective concept of unpredictability and concludes that leaders in HEP have to be “flexomistic”, having the leadership skill combination of being “flexible” and “optimistic”. She also gives a collective thought of these challenges that relate to a majority of the participants, "It's highly inconvenient work. It's hard, you know. You have to be really flexomistic, and I think it takes special people to do it”.

Lastly, there is the textual theme of *Professional Motivations to Work in HEP Leadership*. Many of the sentiments around HEP work being motivating revolve around the ability to witness student intellectual growth and personal transformation. Participant 9 expresses these collective feelings thoroughly when describing her staff, saying that they “love it”, are “honored to do the work”, and find HEP “highly rewarding work”.

The challenge of leading an HEP program is a motivation to do the work. A good example is Participant 31 who describes a motivation for her work in HEP in thoughts of the greater system of inequities that create the need for HEP, “inequity irritates the crap out of me” and this “drives” her to do her work. Also, for many participants, HEP is a mission, calling, or purpose-driven pursuit for them to do the work of HEP. Participant 5 says of her work, “this is the greatest privilege of my life”. Participant 9 says, “this is my life's work”. Participant 27 says of his “calling” to do HEP work, “this is my jam”. Participant 35 notes of his experience, “I'd probably do this for free, which means I found a career”. Participant 32 calls HEP, “the most important work I've ever done”, while Participant 30 says of HEP, “this is literally God's work”.

Participant 18 speaks about how she changed her role in higher education. She wanted something more meaningful and found a passion for HEP. Amid the challenges of HEP, she describes her calling to the work, “I'm working within a system that I don't agree with, but I'm still trying to make it better.”

Prior to her work in HEP, Participant 23 had extensive work and leadership experience in DOC. She synopsised a collective of motivations to be in HEP leadership:

“Running a prison education program, even though I have a great partnership with the DOC, there are days where I just want to scream. I just want to. But I always say to myself, this work is too important. This work is so important, and it is really my love...”

Participant 26 adds to this comment, and in the same realm of thought, says of her mission to pursue HEP leadership, “I think if you know where you're going, or you know what you're trying to do. If there's a sense of purpose to your work, it makes a lot of things that would otherwise be intolerable, tolerable.”

Research Question 2 Textual Themes

Extracted from those Participant narratives were 124 individual expressions that resulted in 39 shared textual experiences related to Research Question 2, speaking specifically to views about the future of HEP. The textual perspectives are found in Appendix J.

Research Question 2 Composite Textual Themes

The themes organized around the Textual perspectives on Research Question 2 revealed three Composite Textual perspectives. The three themes showed expressions on the future of HEP around the thoughts of Fears of the Future, Systems Change and Needs, and Positive Outlooks.

Fears of the Future covered 12 of the 39 perspectives on the future. Those expressions are as follows (Table 2).

Table 2. Fears of the Future Expressions

Expressions
Fear of Predators within Pell Grant Growth
Full Dependence on Pell Grants is not Good for HEP/Build Self-Sustaining Programs
HEP Should Guard Against the “it’s better than nothing” philosophy
Pell Grant Process Too Cumbersome/Limiting
Anxious about New Rule that Comes with Pell Grant Growth
Concerned with DOC Influence over HEP
Fears 1994 Crime Bill Philosophy Coming Back
Fears that Old Systems of Marginalization will be Created with New Pell/HEP
Fears Uniformity of Programming might weaken HEP
Territorial Challenge Needs Improvement
Warns against Tablet or Online Only Models
Concerned with HEP Influence over DOC

The fears that educational predators coming into the opening of Pell Grant funds would hurt the future of HEP overwhelmed the concerns for the future of HEP. Fifty percent of the expressions about the future revolved around this concern for the future of HEP. Participant 11’s views represent many participants’ concerns:

“Everyone needs to be in it [HEP] for the right reason...I mean it's no secret that there is literally an enrollment crisis in all of higher Ed right now. So, everybody is looking to get students where they can, and I think this is such a vulnerable population that we have to remember that this is not your key to enrollment. This is a community good. And so, this is something we're doing, not to make money off the backs of people, but to actually help them be productive members of society to come back into their communities and give back...it's just super important as we head into this next era, where there's more access.”

While a majority of participants speak to this issue, Participant 29 gives a holistic and sociological systems view of why she thinks educational predators coming to HEP is a concern:

“So, I think in the next couple of years there is going to be a lot of talk around it [the growth of HEP adjacent to the opening of Pell Grants in 2023], and initiatives started, and a lot of grandstanding and photo ops. And then, when the cameras go away and the fanfare dies down it's going to be the same people left that we're already doing the work before the money and the attention came about...I'm very worried that once Pell grants become more accessible, we are now going to have a new form of...not a New Jim Crow, but we're going to have a new form of debtor's prison.”

Participant 35 gives a view of a unique notion that couples fears and positives for the future:

“I think we're about to see that all change, though I think there's two things that are gonna happen. Capitalism has this gross underbelly where ‘Trump University’ is going to try to push into prisons because they realize there's a big market. Hopefully, we're ready to deal with that. And there's people in the programs that stick around, and the public hopefully doesn't hear ‘they're taking your taxpayer dollar and teaching people how to...Lord knows, right?’ The goal would be, these programs get big and people start to see prisons

emptying out and prisoners not going back once they're released. And then what choice is the public gonna have? It's cheaper. They're paying bills. They get out and now help you pay taxes to incarcerate other people. That's hard to argue with. “

The concern for *Systems Change and Needs* revealed most of the expressions of the participants. It had 27 of the 39 comments that were displayed from the participant interviews. Those are found in Table 3.

Table 3. Systems Change and Need Expressions

Expressions
Corrections Officers Offered HEP
Improved Accountability of HEP Programs
Improved Attitudes in Community Growing About HEP
Improved Course Offering Due to Growth
Improved Funding Needed for HEP
Improved Structure Needed for HEP
Improved Tracking of HEP Success in DOC/Data Collection
Improved Organization and Management of HEP are Needed
DEI Expansion or Needs to Expand
DOC Needing to Provide Better Support Services Post Release and HEP
DOC Preparation Needed for HEP Growth
Evidence-Based Standards Needed
Expansion of HEP Technology/Need for Better Tech
Fear of Predators in with Pell Grant Growth
Full Dependence on Pell Grants is not Good for HEP/Build Self-Sustaining Programs.
Growth/Need of 4-year Colleges in HEP
HEP Should Guard Against the “it’s better than nothing” philosophy
More Research for HEP
Need for Formerly Incarcerated Leading HEP Programs
Need for HEP to Better Become an Extension of the College as another Campus
Need or Responsibility with Pell Funds
Normalization of HEP Growth and Need
Pell Grant Process Too Cumbersome/Limiting
Student-Centered Programming
The success of American K-12 and Societal Issues will help HEP
Take Advantage of New Trends and Build on Them
Vision Needed for HEP
Use Puritan Ethic Values to Support HEP

Participant 8 speaks to this idea of systems change as it relates to issues of DEI and its place in HEP:

“[HEP] it's just good business. We know that the demographic of college students is shrinking, and we know that students don't value a college education... College education is not as valued as it used to be. It's priced itself out of the realm of possibility for a lot of students...It's going to look a lot different in five years...here is a completely untapped student that we could be addressing that needs to be addressed, which creates so many benefits...”

Participant 28 speaks to the growth of a need or systems change by noting how the opening of Pell Grants demands changes in how HEP is led, “Pell is going to make us ask a lot of new questions about how corrections education is done, a lot of new questions. And that may require us to start thinking about different ways of leadership...”

On the emphasis of the “Puritan ethic” of a tough-on-crime ideal, Participant 35 spoke of a need to rebrand HEP into puritan values to support HEP. He emphasized using the thoughts of “pull your own weight”, “bootstrap mentality”, and “redemption”, and of defining HEP through those same ideals to support the sustenance of HEP publicly.

Seventy-two percent of participants spoke to *Positive Outlooks* for HEP despite its challenges and needs. Ten of the 39 expressions spoke to this dynamic. The collective mood of most participants was "cautiously optimistic", as Participant 20 described her mood about the future of HEP. Those positive expressions are mentioned in Table 4.

Table 4. Positive Outlooks Expressions

Expressions
Improved Course Offering Due to Growth
Expansion of HEP Technology/Need for Better Tech
Normalization of HEP Growth and Need
Bipartisan Support is Good and Foundation to Future
Build on Stories of Success
Community College Ideal for HEP
Hopeful about Pell Grant Growth
Life Sentence Students have more access to HEP
More Students Impacted with HEP
Positive about Equity for HEP

Participant 1 calls the future a "180-degree change". Participant 27 compares the growth of HEP to its former growth in 1964, calling its coming an "amazing golden era" of HEP. Participant 16 says of the growing positive attitudes towards HEP, "people see the advantage of education, and it helps". Participant 17 regards the future as a positive "explosion" of HEP programs. Participant 18 calls the future a positive "emerging" of programs, a "turn", and a "sea-change". Participant 24 calls the future of HEP a "great opportunity". Participant 25 is positive about the future, saying it's "fabulous" and she's "very happy" about the growth of Pell Grant for prisons coming in 2023.

Participant 4 spoke to the fears of the ebb-and-flow of how criminal justice goes back and forth between rehabilitation and retribution practices, referencing the 1994 Crime Bill and saying of HEP positively:

"I'm optimistic this time that we have so much research and momentum behind the idea of that [HEP]. I think there's enough arguments to go around...and so we have that this time. So, it would look way more foolish for people to get 'tough on crime' and cut this specific type of program because it actually makes crime worse..."

Participant 14 captures the collective mood of the participants on the positive growth of HEP, noting:

“I’m excited, and I’m heartened by the level of enthusiasm that we do see from folks who want to offer what we're offering, and they want to teach for our program, and they want to get involved in the ways that we envision...Pell coming back, Pell being reinstated is a sign that attitudes towards this are changing in a positive way...”

Participant Structural Themes: The “How “of the Experience?”

The purpose of the structural narrative is to provide a description of the “how” of the experience. The structural themes that manifest evolve from context, time, beliefs, and feelings that impact the phenomenon. Structural themes, determined through data analysis and after the creation of the textural narrative as previously developed, may either be direct statements or through imaginative variation of this method’s transcendental phenomenological approach. Imaginative variation allows the researcher to identify themes that may not have been revealed in the direct participant statements and narratives. Through analysis of the interview data, four primary structural themes were identified to answer the structural questions of "how are these experiences possible". Those structural themes are experiences with The Dominance of DOC, The Practicalities of Leading a current HEP, The Positives Outcomes of HEP, and The Philosophy of the HEP.

The Dominance of DOC experiences match both the Literature Review and the participant interviews as the main theme of HEP leadership experiences. The dominance of DOC and the challenges and practicalities it poses exhibited experiences of participants with consequences of challenging this issue, collaborating with this issue, teambuilding within this dynamic, and mostly acclimating and compromising to its reality. HEP leadership experiences

are defined by working in a DOC environment and the success of a HEP understands this reality according to participants.

Various Participants described this structure as "being in their [DOC's] house". Participant 4 called it "knowing my place" and "tempered idealism". Participant 17 calls this "dancing to the tune of their beat", while Participant 26 describes this reality:

“Flexibility is a huge thing...if you are somebody who has to have everything cut and dried, and you need to know what's coming next, it's not going to be a good fit. You have to be able to roll with it and you also have to be somebody who has a pretty strong anchor and is willing to take instruction from those in the correctional setting. You know, things that you may not think are a big deal, a student comes in and says, ‘hey, I don't have my pencil’, [HEP leaders/teachers] loaning them one. There's a process within the prison role. Use the process. You're a guest in that house. Do what the processes are so that you don't become part of the problem.”

Participant 33 describes the reality of HEP by saying, “If you do not have commitment at the highest levels within the DOC for education and specifically for higher education, it's not going to work.” While mentioning this, Participant 33, who is a lifelong educator, was open to the idea of change, but emphasizes that “If you don't recognize how all of these parts work together and respect how all of these parts work together, it's going to be really hard to really make change within the DOC.”

Experiences and Practicalities of Leading a Current HEP were also a main structure for participants within the HEP leadership experience. This is predicated on the previous theme, which constitutes that HEP leadership must acquiesce to a DOC environment. The hallmarks of what DOC is, having philosophies that range from retributive practices to rehabilitative practices,

is the context through which HEP leadership experience operates. This includes dealing with DOC philosophies, its emphasis on security, the idea of working with prisoners (not students), to working with local wardens, staff, and correctional officers that are committed to the DOC philosophy. This also entails an unpredictable environment that always leans toward security. HEP leaders must successfully lead with higher education philosophy and ideals in an environment that various participants say is the opposite of education.

Participant 32 describes this structure and theme as "perspective-taking" as an HEP leader. She explains and uses the context of the abolitionist movement to abolish prisons:

“I have to bite my tongue all the time...day to day I have to use constantly perspective...know your audience, and just get over yourself...Anyone who's like, you have to be abolitionist in a particular way...I'm an abolitionist in the way that I am getting in [the prison]. I'm getting inside. And some people who just want to pound the gavel or whatever they're not getting inside, and the people are in there who I care about...That's who we care about, our students and this education.”

The Positive Outcomes of HEP are defined by a group of leaders that find fulfillment in performing and leading against the odds and for a greater purpose and change to society. Many of these educational leaders are mission and purpose-driven. It also involves educational professionals that love higher education. This affirmative theme and structure are also brought about due to the dynamic nature of DOC culture and its mission and purposes. Based on the participant interviews HEP leaders find enjoyment in the challenge of leading higher education in DOC and finding strategies toward success in the face of towering odds. According to participant experiences, HEP leaders are student-centered higher education professionals that see the incarcerated as students that need to be reached. Other participants noted the DEI issues of

HEP and reaching the vulnerable or those that made mistakes, and they take pleasure in the opportunity to change the plight of many minorities and those seeking a second chance as a positive experience or mission.

Participant 25 epitomizes this theme or structure as an HEP leader with a PhD who has taught in normative higher education and has run all versions of HEP programs in state and federal prisons for men and for women. Unknown and not requested by this researcher, she was insistent to note at the end her interview that she was once in prison and that it was a prison education staff that motivated her to go to college. She notes that this experience she had while in prison was pivotal to her current professional life. In her participant interview, she mentioned the same type of opportunity of her HEP leadership experience:

“There is [one student] who I remember going in the first day doing the [student] information session...she came up to me afterwards. She said ‘I’m not very smart, but I will work really hard. And I said I bet you’re way smarter than you think you are...I was just there a couple of weeks ago [after two years of coursework], and she said to me...I gotta tell you. It dawned on me the other day (talking to her daughter on the phone) and she said, I realized, as I was talking, that I had so many more words to use...There’s so many things about my daughter that I understand now...I just feel like my mind has just expanded so much. I understand so much more about myself and the world, and I can speak Spanish’...she started crying as she was telling me how she said, ‘You just have no idea how much it means to me because I never saw myself as someone who would ever go to college’...Now she’s just got so much confidence, so much confidence, and that just I love, that feeling that just feels so good to see people growing. It’s like I have this great position where I can see the people growing in these huge ways...”

The Philosophy of the HEP is another main structure or theme in the HEP leadership experience. Like the former structure, this is led by the main structure of operating higher education in a DOC environment. This structure entails the day-to-day experiences of HEP leadership life but looks forward to building Evidence-Based Practices, Systems Reform, and what the future of HEP will evolve to be. For instance, this structure deals with the question of, “is Correctional Education the same as Higher Education”? It grapples with the question, “should students be offered just courses or have the ability to attain a certificate, associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, or graduate degree?”. It deals with the discussion of whether an offered course should be vocational higher education, which prepares students for the workforce, or liberal arts-based education, which broadens the minds and perspectives of students who have limits put on them. It answers the question of whether maximum-security students should get higher education when they will not get out of prison. It also wrestles with the “how-to” of HEP in a carceral environment with hope toward future systems change for HEP, DOC, and criminal justice systems.

Participant 31 develops her concern about philosophy as an example of this theme around the ideal of student-centered education:

"It's so interesting because I think for a long time, I thought there was such a thing as sort of an education mindset that would characterize any educational institution or system. And what I've realized now...I think there are people who it's not just that they think about education, or they're responsible for education but they think from the standpoint of the students and of the student's educational needs. So not just that they think learning is good or education, but that they understand that for education to be effective it has to be kind of crafted or designed and administered with the needs of the individual student in

mind...I used to think there's education and then there's corrections and now what I realized it's really a spectrum that goes from one end of the spectrum that recognizes the individual student, the individual incarcerated person as a human with particular educational needs. And then, the other end of the spectrum is pure bureaucracy. It really sees the students or the prisoner as a kind of widget, it's part of an assembly line that has to be somehow managed or abated. And what I've noticed is that in educational bureaucracies, educational institutions that are driven by a bureaucratic mindset are often very similar to corrections, not necessarily that different...I feel like the educational philosophy that we are driven by and kind of guided by, and what HEP should be guided by is really that our primary commitment and responsibility is to understand every student as an individual and ensuring that their educational experience is genuinely responsive to their particular needs."

The Essence of the Phenomenon: The HEP Leader Experience Defined

The Essence of the Phenomenon brings together textual experiences and structural themes to define or describe the phenomenon. According to the participant interviews, the textual and structural themes they reveal, and given the historical dynamics of HEP described in the Literature Review—the culture of DOC, HEP’s collective start in 1964, its fall in 1994, and its restart with the 2015 SCP, one foundational essence is apparent in this study: that leader experiences revolve around the notion of a “flexomistic” phenomenon of HEP leadership experience in the SCP Era. HEP leaders describe the essence of the phenomenon in various ways:

- Participant 1: “It's inventing the wheel.”
- Participant 4: “It’s like starting a mini-college.”

- Participant 7: “Everything single thing we are doing we are kinda-like building the ship, how does this work, how do we do this?”
- Participant 9: "There are things that you're going to encounter on a day-to-day basis that you can't predict, that might be totally outside of your control. That worked one week but didn't the next.”
- Participant 11: “I'm just making it up as I go.”
- Participant 15: "[HEP] is not going to be like anything you've ever expected, it is a constant battle.”
- Participant 18 "I'm working within a system that I don't agree with, but I'm still trying to make it better.”
- Participant 21: “It's like running a university by yourself...You're responsible for funding that university, for Registrar, the Bursar Office...You are all of the points of access for students.”
- Participant 27: “College in prison often feels like an organ transplant, that the body of the prison is like rejecting college doesn't fit within the carceral logic.”
- Participant 27: “It’s building the bus while you are driving it.”
- Participant 31: "It's like trying to weld underwater”.

While these expressions do not describe the total HEP leadership experience, collectively they give way to a theme of leadership style or requirements that leans towards the essence of what HEP leadership is currently. Participant 9 coined this experience when a student of hers described to her leadership as being “flexomistic” given its range of unpredictability and challenges. Her student said flexomistic is being flexible and optimistic. While not an original word, for this study it adequately describes the unpredictability, challenges, obstacles, and,

despite known challenges, it's the positive and persevering leadership that a majority of the participants spoke of in their HEP leadership experiences.

The words and experience of a former correctional officer and DOC leader give greater context to the phenomenon. Participant 23 says:

“Running a prison education program, even though I have a great partnership with the DOC, there are days where I just want to scream. I just want to. But I always say to myself, this work is too important. This work is so important, and it is really my love...”

It is also illuminated well by Participant 26, “I think if you know where you're going, or you know what you're trying to do. If there's a sense of purpose to your work, it makes a lot of things that would otherwise be intolerable, tolerable.” Participant 15 uses his experience as a formerly incarcerated individual, his experience leading through the ranks of HEP, and his expertise of being a leader with a PhD to rationalize the current phenomenon of HEP. He develops the foundational plight of HEP and the phenomenon of the HEP leader that has to lead in a discipline that has amazing premiere growth but that is also young and without collective foundational structure. Over a discussion of the lack of Evidence-Based Practices in HEP, how to best move forward, and what he deems is an “illegitimate dependence on evidence-based strategies” he expresses:

"I think those things are good [EBP], because I'm confident that correctional education and the appropriate kind of education will continue to have positive benefits individually and collectively, but it hinders things also if the expectation is that any new program must be evidence-based, well, then it's the chicken or the egg. It's like you can't try out a program if it's not evidence based. But how do you get it to be evidence-based without trying it out?"

According to this study and the data that evolved from the participant interviews, the phenomenon of HEP leadership in the SCP Era is described by a type of leader who, as Participant 31 notes, is leading by “welding under water”, and as Participant 15 develops, is leading while discovering and building evidence-based policies for HEP. Further, it is a leader who can “codeswitch” as Participant 27 prescribes, and then as Participant 20 says, is a leader who finds enjoyment in a strategic multi-systems approach who can translate and build teamwork between various stakeholders’ and systems that don’t speak the same language. Participant 34 defines this characteristic when describing difficult correctional officers, “a little kindness will go a very long way”, “it’s not hard to be kind” and “at an individual level, we just try to win people over”.

Moreover, the phenomenon of HEP leadership in this HEP era displays an essence of a mission-driven leader that is passionate and positively motivated to lead by dynamics such as student academic transformation (Participant 5), systems change (Participant 11), or the power of a second chance (Participant 13). As mentioned, many of the Participants were driven to their work. Participant 35 states, “I’d probably do this for free, which means I found a career, right, something fulfilling about teaching in general, teaching to people that are thirsty for it.”

The idea of being flexomistic also takes on the collective idea of being persistent and having a hospitable grit or tenacity towards the goals of leading and HEP. Participant 33 gives a collective view of this idea when she notes of the challenges within HEP, “When somebody tells me ‘you can’t do that’...there’s something internally that says, ‘Watch me’. You have to be willing to look at a ‘no’ as a challenge versus looking at a no as a defeat.”

Collectively, the experiences and essences of HEP leaders can be defined by this study as being flexomistic, which, for this study, is defined as a purpose-driven higher education leader

who understands and intentionally leads through unpredictable circumstances and difficult odds to achieve educational success for incarcerated students. The future needs and growth of HEP is seen through such a description, desiring a sustained and growing HEP.

Chapter Summary

This chapter developed and described the results of the participant interviews for this research study. It further divulged the themes of the 35 Participant interviews through the research method of transcendental phenomenology. Also, through the collective experiences of the participants, this chapter concluded the essence of the research or phenomenon to give a data-analyzed conclusion to the foundation of this study and its application to the Research Questions. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a discussion of the findings from this chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

As stated throughout this study, higher education is in the midst of expansive growth to incarcerated learners. The 2015 Second Chance Pell Grants Experimental Initiative (SCP) combined with the 2020 *FAFSA Simplification Act* (passed as part of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021*) built the momentum of the Second Chance Pell Grant Era (SCP Era) and now inaugurates the new movement in 2023 where all students in prison will have access to Pell Grants.

Further, while this movement is currently evolving, HEP grapples with various challenges and a lack of collective evidence-based competence that hurts its efficacy and full potential. The purpose of this study was to address this challenge through the prism of the college administrator and leader experience. In this chapter, the implications of the study findings are discussed. This discussion revolves around the structural themes and the essence of the phenomenon, highlighted by the research questions. The limitations of the study are also addressed in this chapter, and it concludes with recommendations for HEP leadership and recommendations for future studies.

Research Questions

The following discussion will be extrapolated with respect to the study's research questions.

RQ1: What are the core lived experiences of HEP administrators and leaders during the era of the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative Era?

RQ2: Based on the experiences of HEP administrators and leaders what are their opinions about HEP challenges and the future of HEP after the Second Chance Pell Grant Initiative Era?

Structural Themes

The Dominance of DOC

Through the literature review and participant interviews, experiences with the dominance of DOC inundate the profession and practice of HEP and its leadership. Like other entities or large American public organizations, DOC is seen in its history, foundational philosophy, practices, hiring practices, and how it assesses itself and judges its outcomes. Additionally, it is a substantive wing of the American criminal justice system as the establishment that follows through on the ideals of crime and punishment. This immersion of HEP in DOC as the participants describe involves the reality of constant conflict. Patrie (2017) explains this reality by emphasizing that education in prison “straddles” correctional and educational structures and clashes over philosophy, policy, and practice (p.17). In the original HEP golden age, Horvath (1982) describes that the nature of DOC and education were in such conflict that it impacted the quality of education in prison.

Additionally, as the literature review expounded on, DOC is an outgrowth of the retributive and punitive focus to crime, equating to an "eye for an eye" mentality of offending another person or their property (Reznik, 2021, p. 163). This defines the prison setting with the idea of security, punishment, and deprivation from societal norms (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020). It is built on a lack of trust for inmates and a need for them to correct their behavior and pay for their crimes to society (Visher & Eason, 2021).

This researcher would assert that DOC systems will always be needed in some form given normal human proclivities toward criminal behavior and the need to correct criminal behavior. Despite that, and given average recidivism rates, which are the rates at which former prisoners return to criminality after being released from prison (N.I.C., 2023), and consistent historic disparities within DOC and the criminal justice system (Kovera, 2019), it can be thoroughly argued that DOC is failing in its purpose and it is well overdue for systems change. Further, it can be argued that to better American society, DOC and the criminal justice system must change.

Some argue that DOC not only was created to house, rehabilitate, and punish those convicted of crimes, but that DOC has been a historic intentional system set up to keep subcultures stuck in an American caste system that residually impacts minority populations, emboldens poverty, and challenges access to quality education. Michelle Alexander (2020) argues this infamously in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, which points out how the American criminal justice system has been intentional in its incarceration of African Americans throughout American history. DeFina and Hannon (2013) develop evidence that the mass incarceration era was significantly causal to increased poverty in the United States. The Abolition of the Prison Industrial Complex Movement is a current and revitalized movement that is seeking to dismantle contemporary prisons due to these issues and other negative aspects of prison culture (Martensen & Richie, 2021).

More recently in its overall history, in more evolved DOC settings prison has become a place of rehabilitation and efforts towards re-entry (Behan, 2014). Efforts include cutting-edge DOC departments that work towards chemical health, mental health, physical health, holistic life

improvement, basic and remedial education, and building vocational skills, and the subject matter of this study, HEP.

DOC is an entity that is about retribution and/or rehabilitation. It swings between both extremes historically, and it is subservient to whatever the current politics are around crime and punishment (Goodman, Page, & Phelps, 2017). Many argue that even in its efforts to embrace rehabilitation, it still has a retributive underpinning throughout its culture (Rhetoric, 2011).

Collectively, these various dynamics of DOC and the criminal justice system overwhelm its practicalities, outcomes, and impact on American society. This is the place of HEP and consequently, it highlights and dominates the HEP leadership experience. Moreover, as Participant 28 referenced in the words of various participants, HEP operates “in their house” and if HEP is to be successful, it must acclimate to the dominance of DOC philosophies, culture, and practices.

However, as Participants 8, 11, 28, 27, and 29 noted, the HEP leadership experience can be changed by efforts towards focusing on holistic systems change. This is to say, DOC is a system of its environment, being a part of the American criminal justice system and also guided by the ideals that guide and undergird the criminal justice system. Systems change at this foundational level will evolve the HEP leader experience and the future of HEP.

Strategically, as various participants mentioned, HEP can be an influence to facilitate and exemplify the need for systems change as results reveal that HEP leads to behavioral change, better societies, safer prisons, all while saving taxpayer dollars compared to the current American expenditures on criminal justice and the DOC. HEP leaders should build on this momentum and unify efforts to stand on its positive impact on society. Participant 10 spoke to

this saying that she believes the movement should build on the “stories about the impact” of HEP to “incentivize” its growth.

The future should consider competent HEP models that teach systems-change in classrooms, not in opposition to DOC but in the correction of America's criminal justice system failure adjacent to the need for a fair and just society. As participants revealed, teaching systems change is difficult in DOC. That invokes another study on how to manage systems-change successfully while not fighting DOC and losing student-centered focus. Such endeavors will not be easy, but Participant 29 gives a competent rationale for this type of mindset for HEP leadership in fears of DOC opposition to teaching about systems change:

“I can't say we're not going to talk about that. That is not what education is about. It's about talking about things in a way to improve understanding. You can't say that my talking about history and trying to bring about complex understanding is going to cause a riot. Misunderstanding will cause a riot.”

HEP leaders must acquiesce to the current culture of DOC but if there is a desire for change in the HEP leader experience and HEP as a whole, HEP must strategically consider how to invoke systems change while assuring a student-focused higher education model. As long as DOC is guided by its historic and truncated philosophies the vast challenges that HEP leaders encounter will continue. There must be a change in how DOC operates, not only for HEP and its leadership experiences but for the actual success of a competent and functional criminal justice system.

The Practicalities of Leading a Current HEP

According to the participants in this study the plight of managing and leading the current HEP is about unpredictability, sacrifice, adapting, resourcefulness, persistence, creativity, hard work, patience, emotional toil, politics, bureaucracies, working alone or isolated,

misunderstanding, rejection, archaic or no technology, leading uphill, and sometimes managing HEP against mission-driven, society-supported hostility and mistrust towards those that have made life mistakes. Each participant had puissant and pungent words that gave reality and essence to the phenomenon of HEP leadership. The participants noted: “It’s inventing the wheel”, “It’s like starting a mini-college”, it’s “building the ship”, it’s “making it up as I go”, it’s unique and a “constant battle”, it’s “working within a system that I don’t agree with”, “It’s like running a university by yourself”, “[HEP] is like an organ transplant, that the body of the prison is like projecting college doesn’t fit within the carceral logic”, “like trying to weld underwater”, and the ability to “build the bus while you are driving it”. These expressions speak to a high degree of practical challenge in the day-to-day experience of an HEP leader.

Conversely, according to the participants of this study, the HEP leadership experience is about positive elements such as witnessing the essence of pure higher education, changed lives, working in a rewarding profession, doing purpose-driven work, changing American systems, experiencing tears of joy, seeing student enlightenment, being a part of a movement, teambuilding, and mountain-top experiences. HEP also aligns with America’s Constitutional commitment to equality and equity, research-based dynamics that improve societies, and its ability to reverse the ugly scourge of racism, being, as Participant 8 called it, “the ultimate DEI issue of our time”.

Participants had powerful euphoric words about these positive aspects of HEP leadership, describing it as “very rewarding work”, “the greatest privilege of my life”, “this is my life’s work”, a “calling”, “the most important work I’ve ever done”, and “literally God’s work”.

According to this study, HEP leadership has a previously described dichotomy of positive and negative realities in its practical livelihood. According to the literature review, participant

interviews, current peer-review studies, and the current positive societal momentum for HEP, it could be argued that the good outweighs the bad as it relates to HEP leadership. However, this researcher would argue that this is mostly due to the outcomes of how HEP impacts its students and not to the HEP leadership experience in and of itself.

This study supports the vast positives that HEP staff and leaders get from the work. That reality and practicality are just as abundantly clear and entrenched in the HEP experiences as the challenges that are adjacent to HEP leadership. Nevertheless, and using participants' tendencies to use analogies to describe the profession of HEP leadership, this researcher would conclude on the current experiences and realities of HEP leadership is much like Participant 28 stated in her comparison of HEP leadership to being on a “cliff”. This researcher would add to that analogy to conclude that HEP leadership is more comparable to a mountain-top experience.

Climbing a mountain or even easy hiking up to a mountain-top view is strenuous, and even for the avid climber, it is arduous with various pitfalls, unpredictable moments, and setbacks. Yet, once a climber reaches the apex of their goals, the mountain top and its amazing views metamorphosizes the challenging experiences to be just as positive, joyful, and worthwhile.

HEP leadership in its current situation and according to this study are continuous mountain-top experiences that include the apex of the experience and the continuous challenges that come from seeking to reach the apex. Participant 26 describes it well, “I think if you know where you're going, or you know what you're trying to do. If there's a sense of purpose to your work, it makes a lot of things that would otherwise be intolerable, tolerable.” Further, as the essence of the phenomenon reveals later in this chapter, this dynamic of leadership speaks to leadership quality, style, or type. The realities of HEP leadership aren't an unfortunate reality or

so unique in their functionality that they aren't professionally relatable. This study establishes HEP leadership as a phenomenon to be researched and cultivated.

The future of HEP should not run from these current realities and practicalities but should prepare its leaders for the realities of this type of leadership. It also needs to hire leaders that possess the proper skillset to lead HEP programs or offer training that prepares them for HEP leadership. HEP should have a track of training and graduate-level degree emphasis that prepares HEP leaders, which includes building capacity for formerly incarcerated individuals to ascend into HEP leadership.

The Positives Outcomes of HEP

The literature, various research, and participant interviews show that the positives of HEP are plentiful. HEP impacts numerous aspects of society (Oakford, et al., 2019), while the positives of HEP impact the student, staff, leaders, correctional institutions, and families of inmates. As various participants note, this overwhelming reality tipped the balance for HEP's growth, solidifying it from experiencing future tough-on-crime legislation such as the 1994 Crime Bill. The various positives of HEP are fueling its growth from the 1994 Crime Bill to the SCP Era, to the new era that starts in 2023, when the FASFA Simplification Act opens Pell Grants for every prisoner who desires higher education in prison.

Its main positive is how HEP changes or educates its students. The research on this area is overwhelming, noting that HEP impacts its students in many ways by changing behavior, building self-confidence, and transforming students into law-abiding and productive citizens (Vandala, 2019). HEP is an answer to real and holistic public safety and is a tough-on-crime endeavor because it lowers crime (Magee, 2021). Lagemann (2017) argues that it is a key to democracy, while Gibbons & Ray (2021) speak to HEP advancing racial equality.

Perhaps more important than impacting the student and society positively is the fact that HEP is cost-effective (Davis et al, 2014). Public investment in HEP not only makes communities safe but also it saves taxpayer dollars. Tough-on-crime legislatures can vote on its support knowing it is a positive investment.

Participant interviews referred to HEP's impact on students' families as well as the students themselves. Interviews further highlighted the positive impact of HEP on its staff, faculty, and leaders. One participant noted HEP being so impactful on higher education that it revitalizes faculty from normative environments where they were experiencing burn-out. Participants spoke of finding their calling in HEP, of it being "God's work", of euphoric joy when witnessing student enlightenment, of seeing families motivated and breaking generational consequences of a lack of education, and of the challenge of the work being rewarding.

HEP is as advertised through the litany of articles and research on its benefits. This researcher contends that HEP is so impactful it should be an entity of its own as a *public good*, and thus not under DOC but in partnership with DOC. Furthermore, it would be advantageous for DOC to focus exclusively on its strengths within the criminal justice system, and HEP as a higher education function should then focus on its strengths. This would dramatically change the HEP leader experience down to the classroom and even the infamous challenges HEP leaders have with DOC officers, realizing that HEP is central to the criminal justice framework and thus operated independently while partnering with the necessities of DOC. HEP should be federally established and each state should establish its positioning as a tax-supported public service.

However, DOC's dominance still exists and defines the HEP experience and current future, including its barriers and unpredictability. The future must leverage the positivity of HEP to thwart the dominance of DOC over HEP. This is not to say DOC should not exist for its

necessary purposes but to suggest as one maximum-security participant said of her program, DOC does not interfere with her higher education program and her program does not interfere with DOC.

The positives of HEP must also be viewed from the chasm of depravity. Participants warned against the exoticized plight of the incarcerated and the conditions that were causal to their situation. The phrase “white savior mentality” was invoked various times by HEP leaders and their faculty as a negative dynamic that can influence and motivate HEP work. One participant noted that the condition that brings about the idea of HEP students being “better” than normative higher education students and the joy in making a difference through HEP is solely created because these prison students come from holistically impoverished conditions and continue to live in those conditions in prison.

The positivity is substantial within HEP and its influence, revitalizing the student, their families, HEP staff, and society, while being fiscally advantageous. This establishes HEP as a public good. But there must be a mission to break the cycles of intergenerational incarceration and intentionality to change the conditions that caused the need for HEP in the first place. Systems change should be an objective in the mission of every HEP leader and program. Otherwise, HEP collectively or as a movement will always have a segment of its work that settles for an “it’s better than nothing” philosophy and fail to fully experience HEP equity with normative higher education.

The Philosophy of the HEP

Philosophy for education and higher education is not the focus of this study, and its subject matter is too vast to cover in this study. However, it is important to underscore that higher education philosophy informs higher education practice and consequently defines the

HEP leader experience and the future of HEP. Tisdell and Taylor (2000) give foundation to its importance by writing in regard to adult higher education philosophy:

We believe that defining one's education philosophy is important, not only because our beliefs impact what we do in the classroom but in defining our educational philosophy, we examine our practice critically. In so doing, we often become conscious of some of our unconscious beliefs or behaviors that affect our practice (p. 6).

As Participant 10 noted, philosophy is important because philosophy impacts how programs are run and how HEP leaders desire or are driven to run their programs. The philosophies or ideals of what HEP is or should be were numerous according to this study. Participants spoke to ideals of humanization, to student-centered philosophies, and to the transformative component of HEP and how imperative that is to HEP. Most participants spoke of an ethic of building equality of HEP to normative education, though not a formal philosophy. One participant spoke about a gender-focused philosophy that isn't just predicated on the needs of men, while others spoke to an HEP focused on breaking intergenerational incarceration, changing the systems of oppression, and supporting social justice.

While HEP philosophies are not always defined, even the lack of this foundation is evident in how HEP programs run or in the fact that some states and prisons do not have an HEP program. Whether a prison has HEP and the extent to which it operates depends on DOC, and, to a lesser degree, higher education administrations, according to participants. As defined, DOC has a powerful influence on HEPs, but this idea of philosophy speaks more to higher education being insistent on defining its purpose and practice.

This study consistently showed an unpredictable atmosphere of leadership, and it also showed a consistent leadership experience in the unknown. From this study, it could be argued

that the vast unpredictability (not excusing DOC's reality in this equation) and unknowns of this work are due partly to the fact that most HEPs do not have foundational philosophy. This is with the assumption that HEPs are mostly run from philosophies, norms, and procedures of normative higher education. The HEP movement is young, beset with unique inherent challenges, and overwhelmed with positive public service; therefore, while not intentionally, it may operate with an "it's better than nothing" philosophy or a "white savior" mentality that is more about saving students than educating students.

The movement may also speak to a professional and good-hearted "rushing in" to provide HEP without building models that are conducive to DOC frameworks and/or higher education frameworks. Participants alluded to this regarding the new growth of Pell Grants for prisoners, which they equated it to the HEA of 1964 in reference to the strengths of the movement and the potential hindrances due to lack of formalized capacity.

Participant interviews exhibited that HEP leaders often experience frustration with higher education bureaucracies. Many mentioned that this frustration often occurred in tandem with DOC bureaucracies. The question that arises from this frustration with higher education bureaucracies is, could this leadership experience of frustration be alleviated if HEP had better philosophy and evidence-based structures that guided its place in higher education?

As noted, the demographics of leadership titles and responsibilities vary greatly from program to program. This study exhibited HEP leadership experiences ranging from the main responsibilities being the managing of registration for student courses and/or overseeing the Pell Grant process for each student, to fully functional colleges having state-level administrators, Deans, and, as in one HEP, a President running an HEP college. This brought in a debate about whether HEPs should be called a program or college. This is where one participant noted that

HEP in the future needs to function as a college campus of its institution and not just a program inside DOC.

The philosophy of an HEP is often reflected in course and program offerings. Some believe that HEP programs should only offer tablet-based courses, traditional courses, or programs that offer certificates but do not equate to licensure. One example is barber training and certificates being offered in prison but not a full licensure certification that would be necessary to operate as a barber outside of prison. More towards the HEP focus, other programs offer degree programs from associate's degrees, to bachelor's degrees, to graduate degrees. Some participants expressed beliefs that HEP should be vocationally-focused while others believe in a liberal arts foundation for HEP. Moreover, some participants operated in programs where the belief was that HEP should create America's next workforce, and others believed in greater choice and options for HEP students.

The difference in leadership titles and responsibilities and, for that matter, what courses are offered to students, are not the issues argued here. These issues, however, point to a collective fluctuation of programs and suggest what philosophy and practices, or lack thereof, are guiding HEP programs and how they are led. What constitutes an HEP program's leadership structure and its course offerings? Various participants spoke to the fact that this is contingent upon funding or the Pell Grant, but if so, is funding, or a lack thereof, a philosophy of HEP in and of itself?

Some participants believe in "free world college" (a phrase used by Participant 3) model where all students, including HEP students, do not pay for their higher education. As the literature and participants support, community college is the basis for HEP, though others believe that private college offer more autonomy, while others believe there should be more public 4-

year colleges. Some participants believe that maximum-security inmates should get HEP, and others do not believe they should.

One key area most participants spoke about was the issue of HEP being a "right" or a "privilege". Participants noted that DOC sees higher education as a privilege, yet most HEP leaders believe education is a right and must be equal to normative higher education. A good example of why this is important is when one participant spoke about how DOC wanted her to leverage opportunities to participate in her HEP as a motivation for good behaviors or to punish bad behavior by taking HEP away. This was a consistent concern among various participants in using HEP for the behavioral modification efforts of DOC.

This researcher asserts that HEP is or should be the equivalent of higher education and that it is the goal within the carceral setting that normative higher education occurs in all DOC organizations. Education is a right and a necessity if HEP is to be true higher education. The Literature Review references how Europe has already codified HEP as a right, and assuredly this philosophy impacts their practice, while America still grapples with the idea of a right to higher education. Whether a right or a privilege, such a qualification will inform how HEP programs are run and even funded.

On the notion of equality and given the frameworks that HEP operates within—being subservient to DOC and working with incarcerated students, both responsible for their unique challenges—is striving for normative higher education equality a competent philosophy and model for HEP leaders to strive for? Various participants spoke of a leadership focus on running HEP programs with equivalence to normative higher education. Is this the right philosophy given the practical realities of HEP's?

For instance, few noted within the interview process and at this juncture that there is not much literature to support this topic, but Participant 17 and Participant 27 noted two distinct issues with the HEP student that didn't go along with the many positive experiences that most said about the HEP student. Both participants noted that there are challenges with the lack of remedial education HEP students have and the consequent need to prepare for that to get them ready for college-ready work. Participant 27 was the only interviewee that mentioned dealing with negative and manipulative behaviors of students towards him and spoke about an ethic in dealing with that experience. This is not to minimize the collective positive experience of many saying the HEP student is "better" than the normative college student. But from a standpoint of specialty, an education discipline, and education science, should his concerns be warranted in a philosophy of education and consequently be built into proper evidence-based practices for HEP programs? If true this would necessitate HEP as a particular discipline that while needing equity to normative higher education, its peculiarities are so definite it demands a different philosophy and requisite practices for its administration.

Rehabilitate or Educate.

Another exemplary area where philosophy plays a key role in the practical roles of a HEP is around the idea of rehabilitation and its impact on recidivism. The Literature Review spoke to this issue, challenging an overemphasis on this focus within HEP. This overemphasis was also a fear of some participants, while other participants felt it was not a concern and that rehabilitation is a part of HEP. Given rehabilitation's impact on inmate transformation and lowering recidivism, HEP finds itself often as a wing of "rehabilitation" within DOC and consequently the philosophy it fosters. The Missouri Department of Corrections displays this type of philosophy in the explanation of all their education programs, including HEP. They describe of their agency,

“The Department of Corrections Division of Offender Rehabilitative Services provides education services in classroom settings” (The Missouri Department of Corrections, 2023). The Texas Department of Criminal Justice displays this, by having HEP within its rehabilitation department:

The purpose of offering post-secondary programs in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) is to give inmates an opportunity for rehabilitation by developing their mental skills and providing marketable job training skills so they can re-enter society as successful productive citizens. Career and technical training also address the TDCJ's need for qualified inmate workers (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2023).

Other states such as California, Arizona, and Ohio have HEP under their department of rehabilitation.

In Europe, where education has been declared a right, some countries are grappling with the idea of HEP being rehabilitation. Higgins (2021) writes about Ireland and European HEP:

While education may be conducive to supporting desistance and its capacity to aid the rehabilitation process is not a bad thing, such aims may be contrary to the philosophy of adult education as espoused by the Council of Europe's 1990 report on Education in Prison, if the model of rehabilitation we are speaking about does not reflect a similar ethos (Higgins, 2021).

It is understandable that DOC, society, and political bodies would consider HEP as a wing of rehabilitation efforts. However, is an HEP philosophy founded or described in a rehabilitation motif the best category for HEP? As some participants noted, and as some DOC departments ascribe, HEP is a wing of efforts to rehabilitate. Others such as Participant 10 believe it is not, and that HEP is to be compared only to normative higher education. She discussed this in her

experience by boldly noting that she does not consider higher education or HEP as Correctional Education (the consistent term used to describe all education within DOC). Participant 10 notes:

“Correctional education is based in a criminological framework. It is based on the thought individuals have some kind of deficit...and that they need some kind of correction, and that education can be used as one way to do that...Higher education is not predicated upon people having deficits of character or moral judgment, or criminality. We don't do correctional ed. We're not good at it. We're not qualified to do it. We are qualified to do this other thing, though.”

Rehabilitation within DOC builds from the same framework. This is not to say this type of philosophy isn't needed within DOC—it clearly is given the clientele—but does HEP belong under this philosophy? The National Institute of Justice defines rehabilitation as:

This practice includes programs that are designed to reduce recidivism among adult offenders by improving their behaviors, skills, mental health, social functioning, and access to education and employment. Offenders may become Participants in rehabilitation programs during multiple points in their involvement with the criminal justice system. This practice is rated Promising for reducing recidivism among adult offenders (National Institute of Justice , 2020).

Forsberg and Douglas (2022) describe this aspect of criminal rehabilitation in five potential concepts that give context to what this word means in the criminal justice environment. They note it as either being, “rehabilitation as anti-recidivism”, “*rehabilitation as harm-reduction*”, “*rehabilitation as therapy*”, “*rehabilitation as moral improvement*”, or “*rehabilitation as restoration*” (pp.110-116). Should HEP be under these types of terms within DOC?

Rehabilitation verbiage, as the Literature Review explains, is a part of the pendulum that DOC and criminal justice swing towards. An example is the Arizona Department of Corrections (AZDOC) and its name change to the Arizona Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry (ADCRR). In January 2020, Governor Ducey signed this name into state law to rebrand this organization's focus (Swenson, 2020). Part of its mission reads, "Facilitating structured programming designed to develop inmates' personal responsibility for their successful reintegration to the community through rehabilitative opportunities for change" (ADCRR, 2023, para.1). Arizona is an example of other state DOC departments re-branding such as North Dakota, Ohio, and California.

This is a debate for another study, but it brings to light the culture that HEP leadership and its future find itself in. If HEP is rehabilitation it will be coupled with its philosophy and potential tendency to fluctuate with its emphasis, or lack thereof, in DOC culture. Regardless of presence or lack of a philosophy or model, it guides the HEP model. Additionally, this ties into evidence-based modeling of HEP and what that should be.

"It's Better Than Nothing" Philosophy

Based on the plight of HEP leadership experiences and how that reflects the greater HEP experience, another area of philosophy to consider is what this research will call an "It's better than nothing" philosophy of HEP. This idea came to light with Participant 31 via her thoughts about the combination of events that birthed the current Pell Grant movement and what might be challenges to the future. She notes how the needed and noble "receptivity" for the reinstatement of Pell Grants at the beginning of the SCP Era became sloganized and opportunized by non-higher education and non-HEP leaders, such as advocates and funders trying to maximize the movement, which led to the lack of competent preparation of the reinstatement for Pell Grants.

She described that these “well intentioned folks” who didn’t assess proper operational structures on what HEP needed may have produced a foundation for “low quality” expectations for HEP.

To answer this initial SCP Era problem, she mentioned the need for “high-quality” and non-SCP dependent “alternative” models that exemplify what a HEP is. Further, she argued the “it’s better than nothing” philosophy being a culprit of low-quality HEP:

“...This is one of the things that's the most exciting for me about us becoming a college. It is that we are not a program. I think one of the things you see is...In other words, one of the things that interested me is, what is it that makes us think it's okay to bring this completely different standard...to run a program in a prison that we would never want our kids to go? Setting aside the fact that it's in a prison, right, but in terms of a pure educational standard. You would never want to go to that college. You would never want your kids to go to that college. But it's just the ‘it’s better than nothing’ concept...It's the old ‘it’s better than nothing’ routine...My feeling is simply, that as human being and as students, I don't care where they live, they are entitled [to high quality HEP], and this is the piece, you have to articulate what that minimum standard is, what education is supposed to look like, what higher education actually is... We have to actually create models.”

Participant 34 also spoke to this philosophy. She mentioned an aspect of an "it's better than nothing" mentality towards HEP from the outside and inside of programming and how there needs to be the same standard of excellence that is demanded for normative higher education. She explains it when referring to the Pell Grant process and within the DOC:

"That's a real issue when you start talking about tablet programs, and correspondence college, just crap...it's just one bucket of crap...I think that there's both on the outside,

'this is better than nothing', which is very dangerous because if you're burning up Pell eligibility, it sure should be better than that, right? Because these men and women don't get a second shot at being Pell-eligible, and so we should be giving them the best we can while we're using their federal funding to pay for their college education, period, that's the bottom line! But then there's this faction...over in the DOC, where sitting idle is bad, and I get that sitting idle is bad...but tablets...just whatever they can do, classes on tablets, 'That's better than doing nothing'. And what happens then...the incarcerated men and women, as well as...DOC officials, administrators, whatever, I think they're deceived into believing that 'this better than nothing' bucket of crap is, you know, college, and it's not college. I don't want men and women to sit around idle any more than the next person, but the programming has to be good. It just does...You can't lead people to believe that they have taken a freshman composition class when they can't write their way out of a brown paper bag. That's so unethical on so many levels.”

Aside from the dominance of DOC, this philosophy may be the greatest challenge within the HEP leadership experience and define all current experiences in HEP leadership. Inadvertently because of the previously described historic mentality towards the imprisoned, it may define efforts to lead HEP as a whole.

This is not a formalized or peer-reviewed philosophy but an outgrowth of this study and could explain various reasons for HEP leadership experience. This idea could be found in the thoughts of the infamous best-selling leadership book, *Good to Great*, where Collins (2001) argues and explains that “good is the enemy of great” (p.16). He gives premise to his focus in this way:

Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great. We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don't have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life (Collins, 2001, p.1).

This book is about leadership, intended to inspire leaders to be great at their leadership. While this thought is motivational but benign, within the context of HEP leadership, this mentality or philosophy could be hindering the ideal of equity for HEP students. HEP leaders should build normative education within prisons that doesn't settle for what Collins (2001) describes as good. This ideal should further highlight HEP leadership experience and HEP growth into the future.

This philosophy could be fueled by what Participant 31 argued, which is that well-intentioned leaders love the cause of making a difference but don't take time to build necessary infrastructure for actual successful operation of a HEP. This philosophy might be bred through what participants described as a "white savior" mentality, which as Aronson (2017) describes is the emergence of practices and processes that reemphasize historical inequities and validate white privilege. Or this philosophy could equate with the previously mentioned "HEP is a privilege" mentality. Lockard and Rankins-Robertson (2018) address this issue and compare it to international models of HEP, pointing out that the privilege mentality impacts the quality of HEP in prisons. Further, this could evolve with programs that do not assure that they have competent philosophy and best practices, and due to the undercurrents that guide the dominance of the DOC, the idea of privilege becomes a default philosophy.

A good example of this mentality is found in another discipline adjacent to the subject matter of prisoners, which is the public defender and its Constitutional mandate to assure all

Americans adequate criminal defense. A phrase used in this profession to describe the “it’s better than nothing” philosophy is the name “public pretenders”. As this researcher is a public defender, this is a derogatory name given to this area of law practice because many think or believe that this brand of criminal defense is substandard due to it being focused on primarily defending the poor and criminals, which implies the legal defense is substandard. Additionally, this negative term is the thought that public defenders get paid less, have overwhelming caseloads, and do not take the jobs as seriously, and therefore do not provide the same level of law practice as prosecutors and private criminal defense lawyers. Public defense is a constitutionally bound right that requires the same amount of education and outcomes of competent legal practice.

Whether the name is true or not, this discipline fights this mentality towards its work. This issue goes beyond this study, but it is an example of this “it’s better than nothing” philosophy where it suffers from a mentality that criminals and even those that are America’s “innocent until proven guilty” are lucky to get what they get for legal defense, and they need to be happy because “it’s better than nothing”.

The Literature Review is not only supportive of this type of mentality, but the participant interviews display how this ideal is truncated in society, with correctional officers, with correctional administration, and even among higher education administration, leaders and faculty. It can be seen in how participants often deal with the dual bureaucracies of the DOC and higher education where educating the normative higher education student is not questioned like that of the HEP student. Given the issues of crime and punishment and their tendency to swing with the pendulum of retribution and rehabilitation, it is likely that the debate of what prisoners deserve or don’t deserve will continue and find its mentality within society, DOC, and HEP.

Given the carceral settings that HEP is housed in, the philosophy of DOC, and then the resultant challenges of HEP operating in its culture, HEP should consider whether it's a part of that philosophy and build therein, or if not, grapple with what its philosophy is and then partner with DOC in the future rather than being under DOC. HEP should not just settle for a normative higher education philosophy because that may not clearly equate to the HEP student and also might breed a lack of philosophy that defaults to an "it's better than nothing" mentality, which fuels substandard education. Further, given the acclaimed benefits of HEP, there should be formal philosophies and evidence-based models that better guide what HEP is and how it operates because its dividends equate to a better society. Competent philosophy and residual practices are integral to the future success of HEP and define the HEP leader experience.

The Essence of the Phenomenon Discussion

As stated in Chapter 4, according to this study the essence of the phenomenon of HEP leadership experience in the SCP Era is described by the coined idea of Participant 9, the attribute of being "flexomistic". For this study, it is defined as a purpose-driven higher education leader that understands and intentionally leads through unpredictable circumstances and difficult odds to achieve educational success for incarcerated students. The leadership of HEP's present experiences and future evolution revolves around this understanding according to this study and is concluded as competently applicable by this researcher.

As this researcher completed the data analysis and sought to formulate the essence of the phenomenon by the data this question manifested, is an HEP leader's ability to understand and intentionally lead with success through unpredictable circumstances and difficult odds a reactionary product of higher education leadership in DOC environments or is it a leadership style? In the review of this study, this researcher concludes that a majority of HEP leaders

exhibit a certain leadership style that isn't defined by the dominance of DOC as the HEP programs currently are and have to be. Further, HEP leaders within this study are defined by the phenomenon as previously described.

Each participant described this leadership style in different but consistent structures that have to adapt to many situations. Participant 1 described this style as “appealing” to government officials and getting “in the head of the legislature and to think how they are thinking”. Participant 2 described it as not feeling supported by higher education administration, while being the “most meaningful education experience”. Participant 3 described it as the ability to create “small wins”, “buy-in”, and “playing the long game”. Participant 4 called it the ability to be “nuanced” and “witty”, operating flexible skillsets to manage various collegial and political relationships. Participant 5 called it being “polite but persistent” and leading like a “very slow bulldozer”. Participant 6 called it a leadership style that “forces you to explore creativity” and find “alternatives”. Participant 7 called it being “the loudest voice in the room” for HEP students and sometimes working with “hostile” correctional officers. Participant 8 called it leadership “so vast that there's no way to be prepared for it.” Participant 9 called it being “flexomistic”. Participant 10 calls its leading staff who work in “deep emotional labor”. Participant 11 called it “the ability to speak different languages” choosing “languages that ‘appeal’ to the various audiences”. Participant 12 called it being “a champion of the underdog”. Participant 13 described it as multi-faceted work that “inundates” an HEP leader. Participant 14 described this leadership style as the “exciting” and “inspiring” leadership opportunity to “evangelize” stakeholders that don't understand or consider appropriately HEP students.

Participant 15 called his leadership a “constant battle”. Participant 16 called it a “balancing act” and the need to understand the “subsets” of prison culture. Participant 17 called

it leadership that deals with “conflicting interests and understandings, programmatic rejection, and the requirement of flexibility”. Participant 18 called it “working within a system that I don't agree with” while “trying to make it better.” Participant 19 called it leading in a “suppressive environment” and work that can emotionally “hurt”. Participant 20 called it a love for “strategic management” and seeking “first to understand, then be understood”. Participant 21 described it as leadership with the required skillset of coming up “with workarounds”. Participant 22 called it the skills of “navigating” the separate bureaucracies of DOC and higher education. Participant 23 called it working within a DOC environment with a “lack of appreciation for academic integrity”. Participant 24 called it leadership that must keep it “fresh”, needing to “motivate” and “advocate” for her HEP program. Participant 25 called it leading in work that’s “too much for one person”. Participant 26 described it as leading in a way that makes the “intolerable, tolerable”. Participant 27 called it building “the bus while you are driving it”. Participant 28 called it leading off a “cliff”. Participant 29 called it leadership with a “cool head” and understanding social capital and the “emotional labor of this work”. Participant 30 called it having “a lot of bosses that you have to keep happy” and with “different perspectives”. Participant 31 called it “welding under water”, and Participant 32 called it, “being sacrificial in choosing what values to set aside for the greater good of a HEP program”. Participant 33 spoke to it as the ability to “recognize how all of these parts work together and respect how all of these parts work together”. Participant 34 noted of this the requirement of “investing” in DOC and stakeholders. Participant 35 expressed the need for an understanding of the challenges of other stakeholders in the process of HEP, noting, “they are just people punching a clock just like the rest of us”.

As mentioned earlier in this study, leadership styles are many and qualifying a researcher-based style is difficult. This collective leadership style for HEP leaders was also hard to quantify. As the previous quotes show, there is a shared experience with the conclusions of what this study calls the essence of the phenomenon. Contingency leadership theory is a leadership explanation that would apply to this style of leadership. The APA describes this as a style:

any theory or model based on the generalization that there is no universal, ideal approach to structuring organizations and managing people. Rather, the most effective approach will depend on factors such as the nature of the task, the culture and environment of the organization, and the characteristics of the people involved (APA, 2023, para. 1).

Situational leadership theory is also a theory that likely applies to the essence of the phenomenon theme. As its founders note, this style of leadership is “choosing the right leadership style for the right people” (STU Online, 2023). The APA describes this leadership theory as:

varying amounts of directive (task-motivated) and supportive (relationship-motivated) leadership, depending on the job maturity (e.g., experience, ability, knowledge) and psychological maturity (e.g., level of motivation, willingness to accept responsibility) of followers (APA, 2023, para. 1).

While these styles specifically relate to this described collective style of leadership, and there are leadership qualities, examples, and professional fulfillment in taking on difficult tasks and goals, few professional experiences or researched leadership styles equate to intentionality and enjoyment of taking on difficult leadership with the type of opposition and unpredictability that is found in criminal justice, DOC culture, and for those who have committed crimes against

society. However, using the previous analogy of the public defender, their profession has a similar exemplary aspect. Borg (2021) describes this similarity:

I want to posit that in our society the role or existence of the public defender is a unique aspect of the Rule of Law. By unique I mean that out of most of all characteristics of the Rule of Law...it is the public defender that is the only actual additional component not already existing for the privileged. The powerful people of society...can protect their property and generally expect fair treatment from the government. But the position or idea of providing learned and qualified counsel to those without resources or power and with the express job of resisting the urges of the state, I posit, is unique (p. 27).

These descriptions of another profession could be replaced with the titles of HEP leaders and characteristics of the dominance of DOC culture, and it would describe a key aspect of this leadership experience as being flexomistic.

Participants used a consistent meaning to describe their leadership experience and its need, using either the word persistence or perseverance. Merriam (2017) in her description of the combination of leadership and experience defines this leadership quality with positive psychology describing it as “the voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action in spite of obstacles, difficulties, discouragement, boredom, tedium, or frustration” (p.338).

Another description that applies to this leadership type is what Lomas and Schimschal (2019) call a combination of “grit” and “positive leadership” (pp.1450-1451). They describe that “grit” has two characteristics, consistency of interest and perseverance of effort and further is the ability to “maintain focus on activities over long periods of time despite challenges, setbacks, and adversity” (Lomas & Schimschal, 2019, p. 1450). They note that positive leadership is empirically founded and refers to the ability to lead with a “positively deviant performance”

(Lomas & Schimschal, 2019, p. 1452). In combination, these qualities can lead to achievement in leadership.

At this juncture, there is no official leadership type that necessarily applies to a style of leadership that consistently goes against the odds, that is unpredictable, unknown, and against historic culture and philosophy set against those that are considered felons. However, contingency leadership theory, situational leadership theory, persistent/perseverance, grit, and positive leadership are good combinations found within this style of being flexomistic. This study exemplified leaders with these shared common leadership variables that are unique to this type of profession. The majority of the participants described this essence of the phenomenon, and it was the overriding experiential theme that was shared among the participants.

Conclusively, it collectively describes the HEP leadership experience in the current climate of HEP in the United States and speaks forward to the future as to what type of leaders are needed for this profession.

Limitations

There were five key limitations discovered after the completion of this study. One limitation is that this study was limited to 35 participants. Compared to the growing number of HEP programs that exist, there could be different experiences and perspectives that were not noted in this study. Over 200 HEP leaders were contacted for this study and only 35 responded to participate.

Another limitation is that all the interviews were conducted via conferencing technology and not in-person. Three of the participant interviews were completed by phone. The majority through the online conferencing technology, Zoom. The phone interviews were substantive but nullified the ability to pick up on the visual expressions of the participants and gauge what those

expressions might reveal. While Zoom provides an opportunity to see the interviewee, it may create barriers in extracting true expressions of experience due to the distance of the interview.

In addition to Zoom technology used, a similar limitation is that all interviews were dependent on one interview and follow-up interviews additional Zoom follow-up meetings were needed. All follow ups were through email. The method of transcendental phenomenology relies heavily on actual words and expressions of participants, so it is understandable that some may not have fully expressed all of their experiences given they were unfamiliar with the researcher. Multiple interviews may have been needed for some interviewees to feel comfortable revealing their experiences and true feelings about the phenomenon.

Given the depth of experience the transcendental phenomenological approach calls for, it might have been easier to use a different research method with this number of participants. Not alluding to any particular research method, outcomes would have been understandably different per whatever method might fit with a large number of participants, and thus not building in the experiential nature of this research. The transcendental phenomenological method from this writer's experience demands in-depth contact and interpretation of the participant experience and thus it is crucial to give leverage to the ebb-and -low and uniqueness of what qualitative interviews reveal. Time is of the essence; while within this process adequate time was given to each participant it was also demanding to assure quality of each interview and the review of each interview. The opportunity to record and review each interview assisted in quality interpretation of participant experiences. Perhaps better suited for this type of study is to have fewer participants for this research method coupled with the time allotted for this study. Not only could there have been multiple interviews of the participants, but it could have revealed more experimental data from which to extract the data analysis. Thirty-five participants may have been

too many interviewees to fully appreciate each participant's experience balanced with the time allotted for this research.

As mentioned in the study, HEP leadership has various titles and responsibilities. Much of that depends upon how HEP is defined from state to state, the fact that it's a young movement that lacks collective evidence-based practices, and because there are different philosophies on what HEP is. Therefore, perspectives on HEP experiences and their future may reveal different results. Currently, this is the plight of current HEP and HEP leadership. However, as HEP evolution continues and assumes its better collective descriptions and definitions, the study might reflect different results in the future.

Lastly, transcendental phenomenology is a substantive research qualitative method that extracts rich and actual experiential data for data analysis. Its theming method requires in-depth scrutiny of participant interviews and input through Epoche, which minimizes bias. Additionally, the necessity of check-ins with participants produces an exacting of data for research, offering the participant the chance to scrutinize the researchers' conclusions. Therefore, textual descriptions produced from this method are exact to the data. The process calls for imaginative variation to build structural themes; textual and structural themes then combine to conclude the essence of the phenomenon, which what this researcher will call the ultimate theme or collective themes of the data analysis. Ultimately, these conclusions could be subjective. While the textual themes will bring similar thoughts and may build similar themes for any researcher, the ability to conclude on structural themes and the essence of the phenomenon could conclude differently from researcher to researcher.

Recommendations To Leaders and Practitioners

Research Question 2 asked the question, based on the experiences of the HEP leader in the 2015 SCP Era, what are their perceptions of the future of HEP. The participants and Literature Review cover many future suggestions for the future of HEP. Based on this particular study, this researcher suggests the following as they relate to HEP leader experiences and the future of HEP in America:

1. Take advantage of this unique moment: This sentiment was referred to by Participant 10. Despite the challenges it may present, this time is like that of 1964, another “golden moment” for HEP. Given the tendencies of crime and punishment and their ability to swing back and forth from retribution to rehabilitation, it is a pivotal time not only to build HEP programs but to research competent philosophy, evidence-based practices, and then collective unity around HEP to assure its foundation and future sustenance.
2. Build HEP as an equal partner with DOC not under DOC: Echoed by various participants, DOC is an entity of its own that needs to evolve. As it evolves or whether it evolves, HEP is best positioned as a partner and not a wing of DOC.
3. Do not settle for an “it's better than nothing” philosophy toward HEP leadership. HEP is serious work that has serious results. It requires equity with normative higher education while being built on an evidence-based discipline consistent with its practicalities. Settling for anything other than this breeds the continued lack of predictability with HEP and leadership experiences.
4. Do not settle for a lack of technology: Many participants noted technology as a challenge to HEP. Participant 17 noted that it actually compromises HEP operating at the level of normative higher education. This study displayed that some HEP programs have

developed adequate technology for HEP through the idea of an “intranet” specific to the needs of students or with a secure server process. The “technology” to have the secure technology DOC needs is available. It is a cost issue and a DOC culture issue, but it is a HEP quality issue as well.

5. Demand that proper philosophy undergirds HEP programs: As Participant 10 described, philosophy influences practice. Is HEP just a privilege or is it a human right, does a program only offer certificates and courses or substantive degree or licensure opportunities, is HEP a product of corrections, rehabilitation, or its own higher education structure within penal systems? The answer to these questions and more impact the HEP experience.
6. Expand HEP but be realistic about course and degree offerings: HEP should be equated to normative higher education and it should be student-centered with student choice. However, HEP is about higher education for students with entrenched challenges within and outside of prisons. HEP should understand the trends of society and the workforce and then administer degrees and course offerings that are realistic towards employability for those students that will re-enter society. Additionally, all degrees should be built to transfer to institutions outside of prisons.
7. Push for or seek to build statewide models that are not in competition with each other: All HEP institutions within a state should work together to build a collective web of degrees that assists HEP students. Each institution can specialize in applicable degree offerings, but they should not compete with other state institutions doing the same. If necessary, state policies and laws should require this unity.

8. Always link HEP to future job opportunities: Participant 35 alludes to this when he notes, “we gotta give them something to use in the world”. While supporting various higher education options, HEP is practically ineffective if it doesn’t result in building employability after prison and upon re-entry into society.
9. Call for foundational evidence-based philosophy and policies that every HEP abides by: Predators for Pell Grants funds were a collective concern within this study. Requiring evidence-based philosophy, procedures, and policies will minimize the opportunity for education predators.
10. Seek to be a self-sustaining HEP program: The Pell Grant should be seen as a starter, not a sustainer. Federally and state-wide systems need to make this a budget item that does not fluctuate. As well, programs should seek additional funding sources.
11. Lobby that HEP has its own department within DOC and higher education: Many reports and research prove HEP is a competent practice in higher education and is a vital component to safe societies, criminal justice reform, lowering racial disparities, and saving taxpayer dollars. It is a public good and educational science that should have structured status in higher education and be a partner with DOC.
12. Seek for systems change and not just change with DOC or with students: Participant 27 described this larger idea of HEP work. While crime is a personal choice and DOC is needed, it is evident that there are intentional, outdated, trauma-inducing, and racialized systems that require a change to truly lend toward the public safety argument and American ideals. Not seeking for systems change means the HEP leadership experience will always be riddled with unnecessary challenges.

13. While respecting the needed individuality, unify the HEP movement: Participant 32 mentioned the philosophy of “community” and how HEP is in “peril” without unity. HEP is unique, and while America has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the world, around 2 million in jails and prisons (The Sentencing Project, 2023), not all of those individuals will attend HEP. Additionally, compared to the 16 million that attended American colleges and universities in 2022 (Welding, 2023), the movement is small compared to normative higher education. Add in the challenging dynamics of HEP and its relative youth, the movement needs unity to flourish. Mostly, HEP needs common core, evidence-based goals and outcomes to build on its success and leverage that for support.
14. This is about incarcerated students and not a cause: Various participants spoke about student-center HEP, advocating for students, and as Participant 21 described, it is the job of the HEP leader to protect the "safe place" of the classroom. This study was open about systems change rather than just student change; however, that was with the focus that systems change will better the HEP experience. Participant 17 spoke of a lack of technology and Participant 23 spoke of an “inferior education” that sometimes occurs because of DOC barriers. Both compromise equity of the HEP model of education with normative higher education and require systems change. Leaders might have to step back and better the foundational structure before they can fully run competent HEP programs, but students should not be used for a cause.
15. Build pro HEP trainings for faculty and staff: Participant 20 speaks of having a staff development model that educated about both DOC and higher education cultures in HEP. HEP is a unique part of higher education and therefore training is needed. Leadership

outside of HEP or even having an advanced degree does not mean a leader or faculty is good for HEP. Training is important.

16. Insist on education for correctional officers: If “free world college” is not an option, at the very least assure that correctional officers can get a free college education just like HEP students. This is a necessary professional gesture to effective HEP programming and given the dynamics of why many choose the profession of correctional officer, it can be just as pivotal to their desires for educational success.
17. Insist on free college for all students: Participant 3 spoke of this and had it as a part of her HEP philosophy. There is a legitimate argument that asks the question, why should felons get a free education when someone who hasn’t committed a crime can’t get a free education? This researcher would argue that this question is just as valid for the reasons why the incarcerated should get a free education. Both are valid questions or dynamics. This brings up the idea of systems change. Should education be a capitalistic-infused system that is only afforded to the elite? Or should higher education systems be free because of what they produce for a functional and fair society? These questions produce an ongoing debate, but it is clear that lack of education is highly common for those in prison. Racial inequities equate to a historic lack of education, and free college gives America an opportunity to reverse historic racism. It is also clear that access to quality education is often financial, and this includes HEP. In 1994 America cut Pell Grants to prisoners, which nullified the “golden age” of HEP. Changing how education is funded will assist with this issue never occurring again.
18. Refuse a “defund the police” mentality: Participant 19 speaks of an ethic of celebrating DOC, and various participants call for building positive relationships with DOC. The

abolition of the prison industrial complex is a valid movement, but the side of it that tends toward a “defund the police” mentality is not realistic. DOC and prisons are necessary, and the best focus is finding the best structure, philosophy, and EBP in partnership with DOC.

19. Do not settle for the state-by-state model; demand a federal oversight for the HEP movement: This study exemplified how HEP is different from state to state and often prison to prison. Uniformity and a federalized HEP system in many ways may not be good or work in America’s state autonomy system. However, if HEP is as integral as this study concludes it is, being a public good, it should be an equal right in all states.
20. Assure that the formerly incarcerated have attainable tracts to get into HEP leadership: Participants 15, 16, 23, 25, and 29 spoke of this critical need for HEP. It is important for the purpose of HEP. It also assures that HEP has its best leaders.
21. Codify HEP as a formal higher education discipline, education science, and a normal part of higher education. Most Participants spoke to this need. Participant 10 spoke to it best by arguing for HEP to be defined best first and not within the culture of DOC. The best path to HEP’s normalization is how it is defined, its philosophy, and how that informs its necessary practices. This is an endeavor for higher education. Higher education needs to recognize this as a competent higher education discipline and codify it as so within higher education governance and practice. It will be a prolonged and challenging process that should result in a strategic partnership with DOC to recognize it as the same.
22. Push for upgrades to the Pell Grant process that is specific to incarcerated students: Various participants mentioned that the Pell Grant process is too cumbersome for

incarcerated students. The Pell process must understand the plight of the incarcerated student and the ability or lack thereof to actually access Pell Grants.

23. Research, research, research: Participants 10 and 23 spoke about how vital research is to HEP. Peer-reviewed research needs to continue, and it should expand as the movement expands. HEP is young comparatively, and as this study notes, lacks collective competence and evidence-based philosophy and practice. It is an educational science and needs continual research to reach its apex. The research will support and demand this and should include the following:

- a. Support current peer-reviewed journals.
- b. Support for current pro-HEP organizations.
- c. More dissertations and more scholarly research are needed.
- d. College IRBs being more open to studies with HEP students inside prisons.

Recommendations For Future Research

As noted in this study, HEP is currently developing and needs more evidence-based competency. As well, this study revealed there is not much research comparatively on HEP as there is on other educational or higher education subjects and dynamics. This makes it difficult to rely on qualified peer-reviewed studies that reveal quantitative and qualitative views on the movement of HEP and specifically the HEP leadership experience. Therefore, various dissertation studies are needed to address all aspects of HEP. However, for this study and its specificities, the following are further study recommendations:

- Studies that only focus on HEP leader experiences who have been formerly incarcerated.
- Studies that focus on former DOC professionals that lead HEP Programs.
- Studies on student experiences in HEP.

- Studies on wardens and correctional education staff/administrators experiences in HEP.
- Studies on faculty experiences in HEP.
- Studies on correctional officer experiences and/or perceptions of HEP.
- Studies on how HEP leaders can commit to true student-centered higher education while being committed to systems change.
- Studies that discover the best philosophies for HEP.

Chapter Summary

Like many dynamics of the criminal justice system, HEP reflects American society. It reflects aspects of America that are necessary for providing public safety through the DOC, while at the same time holding on to historic, racialized, and cumbersome practices that hurt its very purpose as a government and state institution that upholds public safety. It also reflects the gaps in the American public education system, showing that a majority that are sentenced to prison do not have a high school education prior to incarceration. Sadly, it also reflects the *School to Prison Pipeline* phenomenon that argues America's K-12 system is a direct route to incarceration for minorities. It reflects a higher education system that is subject to capitalism where some will never have the money to afford what is deemed a "quality education". College, vocational and advanced degrees often equate to employment and status, and those that can't attain such education are often within the walls of prisons.

HEP also reflects scientific evolutions in America to where once a dynamic is discovered, researched, found to be a public good, and cost-effective, America often embraces and supports said dynamic for a better society. College courses in prison were discovered before the 1964 HEA Act, but after this legislation to fund HEP, it began to flourish in a formalized fashion not recorded in American history. Even amid its near destruction after the 1994 Crime Bill, studies

continued and proved it was a viable cost-effective entity for the betterment of society. The SCP Era pushed HEP to the forefront of higher education evolution and now it dawns a new age supported by Pell Grant funds for all prisoners, equating to what occurred in 1964. America is now or again embracing the societal evolution of HEP.

As HEP moves forward it is still beset with challenges with respect to where it operates and who it educates. Given average attitudes towards crime and punishment, it may always be an upward battle and therefore be defined by its tragedies and triumphs and through the chasm of college for the incarcerated. Despite its uniqueness and policy-oriented support of what it is and what it means to society, it should no longer be captive to how it is viewed because of who it serves. The HEP leader experience is a wealth of qualitative information to competently mature HEP in its collective youth and will assist in this age of growth beyond the SCP Era into the new era of what the HEP movement will become.

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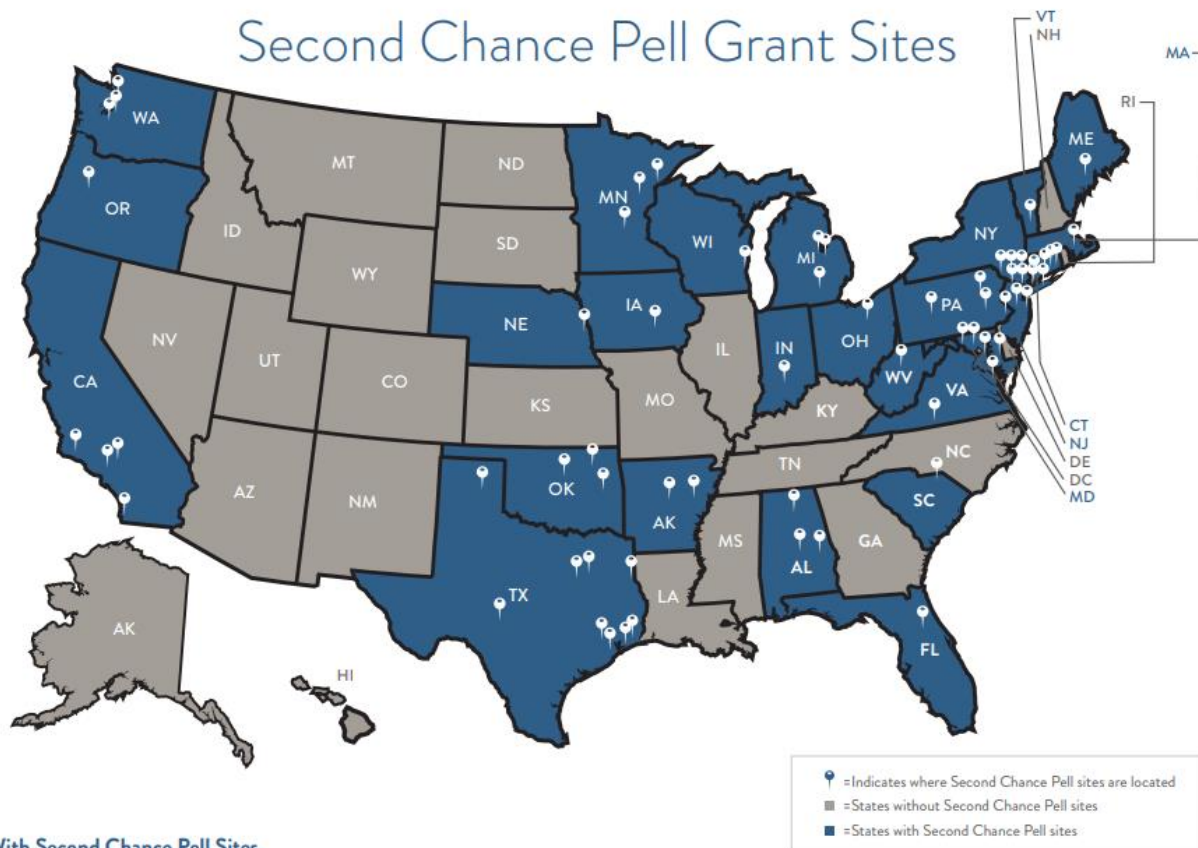
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Appendix A

Beginning Second 2015 Chance Pell Grant Sites



(Prison Fellowship, 2015)

Appendix B

Prison College Administrator Experiences: Phenomenological Interview Questions

- How long have you been a prison college administrator or leader? What program or programs did you lead?
- What unique experiences have you had as a prison college administrator/leader?
- What contexts or situations have influenced your experiences as a prison college administrator/leader?
- What positive experiences have you had as a prison college administrator/leader?
- What negative experiences have you had as a prison college administrator/leader?
- Do you consider your leadership as a college administrator/leader different from normative college education administrators/leaders? If so, how is your experience different from normative college administrator experiences?
- From your experience what characteristics or skills are best in a successful prison college administrator/leader?
- Where you a prison college administrator/leader prior to the 2015 second chance Pell Grant initiative? If so, how have your experiences changed after this initiative?
- Where you a prison college administrator/leader prior to the 2020 FASFA simplification act (repeal of 1994 Crime Bill/Pell Grant ban)? If so, how have your experiences changed after this initiative?
- What have your experiences as a prison college administrator/leader informed you about the future of prison college beyond the 2020 opening of Pell grants to the incarcerated?

Additional Questions stemmed from Interviews:

- What are your experiences dealing with non-student focused issues that are necessary to manage a quality prison higher education program?
- What is your experience working with correctional staff, administration and with the sometimes-competing philosophy of Corrections against usual educational philosophy?
- In your experience, do you think the retributive or historic puritan ethic of punishment will overrule the many studies, growth, and support for prison higher education if the current rise in crime influences governmental policy to revert back to the 1994 policies of canceling Pell Grants for prisoners?
- What is your experience with diversity in the field higher education in leadership and administration and your thoughts its place in this genre of education?
- What is your experience dealing with staff moral issues within prison college education?
- In your experience do you believe the emphasis on education's impact on recidivism detracts from the outcome of quality higher education in prison or is this emphasis good for quality higher education in prison? What are your experiences here?

Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter



Winona State University Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Human Protections Administrator
Maxwell 155
Winona, MN 55987
507.457.5519 or bayers@winona.edu

DATE: October 24, 2022

TO: Donovan Bailey

FROM: Winona State University IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1973907-1] College Administrator Experiences: A Phenomenological Study of Prison Higher Education Leadership during the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative.

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The Winona State University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk to benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

For expedited category studies, continuing review and annual reports are required when mandated by the IRB. For full board review studies conducted longer than one year, continuing review is required on an annual basis or at a period specified by the IRB.

Changes in the study must be reported and any revisions to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. In addition, serious and unexpected events, non-compliance issues, or complaints must also be reported to the IRB.

For all reports, please use the report form in IRBNet Forms and Templates Document Library and refer to the "How to Do Everything" document for instructions.

Remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of Participant understanding using a consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research Participant. Federal regulations require each Participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

If you have any questions, please contact the Human Protections Administrator at 507.457.5519 or bayers@winona.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within the Winona State University IRB records.

Appendix D

Initial Contact Email

Distinguished Prison Higher Education Leader,

I am conducting a phenomenological research study to identify and understand the experiences of college administrators/leaders about their leadership of prison colleges and its implications on the challenges and future of education in prisons. Given your work and expertise in the area we ask for your participation in this dissertation study.

This study hopes to learn about important implications for the challenges and future of post-secondary higher prison education after the lifting of the Pell Grant ban in December 2020 (The FAFSA Simplification Act). There are no appreciable risks or benefits from participating in this study. This study is being conducted by me, Donovan Bailey, Ed.D candidate at Winona State University in Winona, MN.

The study will begin in October 2022 and conclude by February 2022. We estimate participating in the study will require 40-60 minutes of your time via a Zoom interview (or other appropriate medium), including follow-up emails or check-ins to assure validity and clarity of your participation. If you decide to participate in this study, we will ask you to complete an Informed Consent form, an information-gathering survey, and then participate in an interview flexible with your schedule. More information will follow upon your agreement to participate.

I am the main researcher for this study at [REDACTED]. The Winona State University faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Joel Traver, [REDACTED]. You may ask any questions you have about the study and your participation now or later during the study.

Donavan Bailey, MS, LGSW
Ed.D Candidate- Winona State University

Appendix E

2nd Follow-Up Email with Attachments

Thank you for being willing to be a part of this study and overall dissertation! As mentioned, I am conducting a phenomenological research study to identify and understand the experiences of college administrators/leaders about their leadership of prison colleges and its implications on the challenges and future of education in prisons. This study hopes to learn about important implications for post-secondary higher prison education during the Second Chance Pell Grant era and after the lifting of the Pell Grant ban in December 2020 (The FAFSA Simplification Act).

My Bio, my bias...is that I am a Capital Mitigation Specialist with the Maricopa County Public Defender Office. I have worked in this capacity for 15 years in Arizona and Minnesota, as well as other areas in the criminal justice system. I am a Licensed Social Worker in Minnesota and Colorado. My Public Defender work has extended both inside and outside the office and courtroom, advocating within the community and conducting trainings on behalf of my clients and criminal justice reform. I have a Masters in Educational Leadership and I'm currently an Ed.D doctoral candidate at Winona State University in Winona, Minnesota.

The previous was mentioned for your information and also to adhere to a fundamental principle of phenomenological research and that is admitting my bias, so that that bias is recognized and further removed from this study. I am a criminal justice practitioner and advocate and therefore I am knowledgeable about various issues within this realm. However, that bias is and will be consciously and regimentally removed to focus on your experiences as a prison college administrator and leader.

To now move forward with your **appreciated participation** please complete and sign the attached forms. Also, please let me know what days and times work for you in the coming weeks. Once I receive those, I will confirm the Zoom interview you and send you the questions that will guide our semi-structured interview. As a reminder, I will check in with you as the study goes forward to clarify your participation and its piece in the greater concert of this study. Your information will be anonymized for this study and your interview will be destroyed post completion of the study.

Please be aware that I am currently having technical problems with my college email, so you will see my personal email as a back-up email with our correspondence. Lastly, if you have any issues with the process or need further information above myself, please contact my lead and faculty advisor Dr. Joel Traver, [REDACTED].

CONSENT FORM

College Administrator Experiences: A Phenomenological Study of Prison Higher Education Leadership during the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative.

This research study is designed to identify and understand the experiences of college administrators/leaders about their leadership of prison colleges and its implications on the challenges and future of education in prisons. **We hope to learn** about pertinent implications for the challenges and future of post-secondary higher prison education after the lifting of the Pell Grant ban in December 2020 (The FAFSA Simplification Act).

The study will begin in October 2022 and end by February 2022. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a Zoom Interview and follow-up check-ins about your interview via email. Participation will require approximately 1 hour of your time.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop at any time. You may decide not to participate or to discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Data collected during this study will be kept confidential and anonymous. If the results of this study are published or presented, no names will be associated with the data cited. All data collected for this study is anonymous and will not be linked back to any of your identifying information. All data collected from this study will be securely stored on the password protected computer of the co-investigator, and that computer is always kept in a secure and locked location. All data collected and analyzed for this study will be destroyed upon its completion.

The main researcher conducting this study is Donovan Bailey at 507-251-9793, donavan.bailey@go.winona.edu. The Winona State University faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Joel Traver, [REDACTED]. You may ask any questions you have about the study and your participation now or later during the study.

If you have questions or concerns about your participation in the study, contact the Human Protections Administrator Brett Ayers at 507-457-5519 or bayers@winona.edu. This project has been reviewed by the Winona State University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in the study described above. Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, had an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and have decided to participate.

Signature

Date

Signature of witness (if appropriate)

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

College Administrator Experiences: A Phenomenological Study of Prison Higher Education Leadership during the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative.

Your Name: _____

Additional Contact Info (if needed):

- Phone _____
- Email _____

What is your ethnicity or race (for instance Euro-American, Native American, Latino-American, African- American, Asian-American, etc...)?

What is your gender (male, female, nonbinary, etc...)?

What is the highest educational degree you have attained (for example Bachelors, Masters, Ed.D, Ph.D., DSW, etc...)

The College and/or Program you work for? _____

The US State your Program is in? _____

The number of years your college/program has been operating? _____

What post-secondary programs does your college/program administer?

Just Courses _____ Certificates _____ Licensure _____
2-year Degree's _____ 4-year Degree's _____ Graduate Degree's _____

Did your or does your college participate in the Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Initiative Program? _____

How long, What year or years? _____

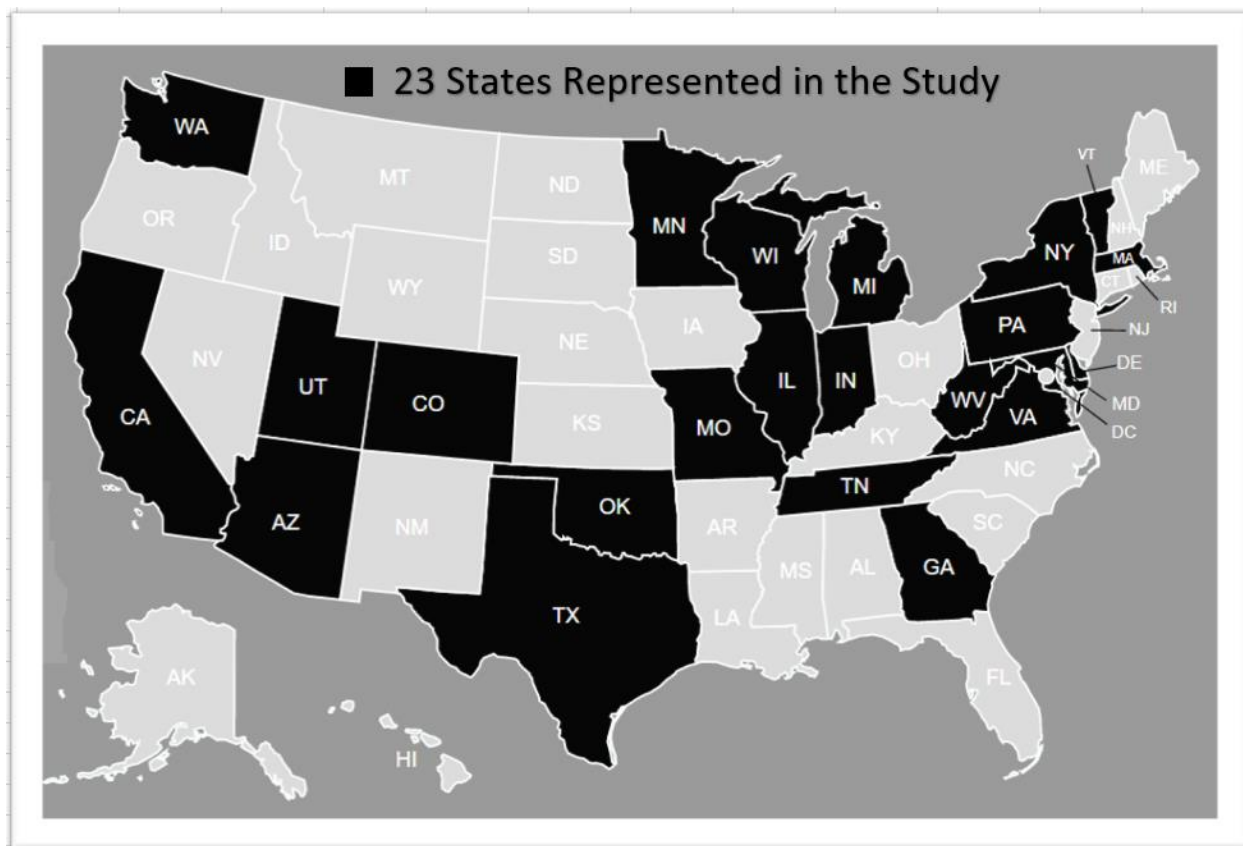
Your Position/Title in Prison College Program? _____

The number of years you have been in Prison College leadership?

Additional Information you think I need:

Appendix F

States Represented in the Study



Appendix G

Participant Titles (not in order of interviews)

- Academic Dean
- Academic Program Manager
- Acting Director of Education
- Assistant Director of Programming
- Assistant Professor; DE Inside-Out Coordinator
- Associate Provost
- Associate Vice President
- Associate Vice President of Student Affairs
- College Director of Admissions
- Coordinator of State Correctional Ed. Programs
- Dean of Corrections Education
- Director
- Director of Advancement
- Director of Correctional Education
- Director of Reentry Services and Adjunct Instructor
- Director of Workforce Programs
- Executive Director
- Executive Director and Professor
- Former Dean and Current Faculty
- Founder and Former Director
- Lecturer/Manager
- Manager of Humanities Outreach
- President
- Program Director

- Re-Entry Specialist
- Second Chance Pell Grant Coordinator
- State Coordinator Correctional Ed. Programs
- Vice President of Instruction

Appendix H

Participant Experiences and Textual Narratives and Descriptions

Participant 1

Participant 1 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in a southern state of America. She is a trailblazer in HEP and an experienced veteran in the SCP Era. She holds a master's degree and has been in senior higher education leadership and HEP work for many years. Her program is a part of the original programs in the SCP and offers up to associate's degrees. The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as it relates to this study displayed various experiences in the leadership of HEP. In this regard, she spoke of being a trailblazer in HEP working to build her program, "probably twenty years ago, it wasn't the sexy thing to work inside prisons. So, you really had a lobby. You had to provide data."

Her professional HEP career divulged thorough experience working with legislatures, education and corrections leaders, funding sources, and taxpayers. In working with and for taxpayers she noted that she has to constantly manage a key anchor to assure that her program is supported by consistently answering the question, "how is this [HEP] cost-effective for our folks that pay state taxes?". On working and "appealing" to government officials she said she has to "get in the head of the legislature and to think how they are thinking" to get support for her program. She described that she had to harness a situational leadership style that tapped into everyone's interests in HEP to assist with "the good of all".

When mentioning the challenging experiences she faces, she noted that working with the powerbrokers that influence HEP is "challenging". The reasons for this challenge were because of a lack of understanding about HEP and then not understanding why it's important to reach prison populations with higher education. She also said, "working with a big bureaucracy and

keeping the needle moving forward is really difficult.” Navigating the stoic paramilitary or security culture of corrections was also challenging.

As a longtime HEP leader in education, she had substantive positive experiences. Those experiences revolved around seeing students graduate from various college programming. She enjoys seeing the experiences of students who never thought they could be a college graduate, their families seeing their incarcerated loved-one doing something positive, students having a feeling of doing something positive in their lives, and seeing students who “persist” through the rigors of gaining a college education.

On the future of HEP, Participant 1 noted that the FAFSA Simplification Act was a “180-degree change” for HEP positively. She sees a bright future of equity and fairness for incarcerated students. She also built a full-circle feature in her HEP program that has a re-entry and alumni support component. One of her former students graduated from her program then gained a Ph.D. and now runs that segment of her HEP program.

Participant 2

Participant 2 is a Euro-American male working in an HEP program in an eastern state of America. He has been in HEP leadership for six years. He is a veteran in the SCP Era, has an earned PhD, and is experienced in normative higher education leadership. His program is a part of the SCP and offers certificates.

The textual descriptions or the essence of his HEP experiences as it relates to this study embody experiences of initial naivete or being “green” to HEP. He describes that he was very naïve when he first started HEP, which includes not being able to relate to criminal justice structures personally and professionally. In one excerpt of his interview, he noted:

Now I'm going to tell you even more about my naivete, I somehow thought [the HEP student body reflected normative student demographics], you know one of our goals in higher ed is to make sure that the students were serving look like the constituents of the communities we serve...we are failing dramatically at this.

While being of the majority race in America, Euro-American, within prisons he experiences the feeling of being a minority American. His experiences with the secure elements of prisons, the difference in diversity, and how correctional structures operate were all new and surprising to his beginning professional experience in HEP.

As a leader he experiences the frustrations with the “bureaucracy” of HEP and describes, “public higher education bureaucracy was terrible, prison bureaucracy is even worse”. He also experienced a lack of support in his program, with the main culprit being a lack of technology for HEP. A positive of his experiences in HEP, however, is that his program is “self-sustaining” and does not depend on Pell Grants. He also noted that a main positive experience of his work is seeing his students graduate. He commented that he has had students move on from their HEP program; two were highlighted, with one earning a PhD and another earning a master’s in social work. Of his staff, he noted that HEP presents the “most meaningful education experience”, highlighting that the HEP student is a more enjoyable student to teach. Coupled with that, he said that this educational euphoric experience is good for staff morale and development.

On the future of HEP, he relayed from his experience that “the vision going forward is important”. For example, his program may be best suited as a partner to community college HEP programs. He also feels that HEP will become a “normalized” part of the higher education process, but that will take place after potential predators of Pell Grant funds get into HEP and realize that HEP is not a lucrative venture.

Participant 3

Participant 3 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in a southern state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for two years and operates in a senior level of HEP leadership as an “architect” and oversees various HEP programs. She noted that she has a lot of experience at the intersection of education and politics and said her personal political party “is the party of education.” She believes in the idea of “free world college” and molding the prison industrial complex into that model. She holds a master’s educationally and is experienced in all levels of education professionally. She is also familiar with the criminal justice system, and as she described, is from a “justice impacted” family. The programs she oversees offers up to bachelor’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study demonstrate competent holistic success comparable to other HEP programs in the United States. In her work, she went from “what was supposed to be a [Pell] grant funded program for three years to state appropriations in one year.” While some of her programs do access Pell Grants, most of her programs do not.

Her experiences around seeing success involves creating “small wins” and “buy-in”, “playing the long-game”, bringing people to the table, and creating “bridges not barriers” with HEP partners and stakeholders. On dealing with the challenging differences in corrections philosophy and educational philosophy, she said, “More seats at the table are the way, bring everybody in, and then we all win”. Participant 3 also noted experiences facilitating teambuilding and promoting the idea of culture building with the department of corrections. She explained in working with corrections and the philosophy differences:

If you drag people kicking and screaming, they're going to fight you, and they're not going to want to do it. And so, the name of the game of what we've been doing is culture building, right? We are trying to change the culture [of corrections] such that we can convince people that education is the way...

When describing challenging experiences, she noted that much of her work is trailblazing. Of this, she said:

a lot of the work that we do it feels like it's inventing the wheel. Everything's new. So there literally doesn't exist an answer to most of the problems that we're trying to solve. So, we have to make that up every time, and that's its own form of challenge.

One of her professional challenges was going from face-to-face leadership into HEP, where she is no longer doing frontline work with students. She described that the most challenging experience she deals with is with technology, about which she boldly and emphatically noted, “technology behind the wall is the worst, it’s a constant battle...always our biggest struggle, always”.

Positive experiences revolve around students graduating from her programs. She described, “graduations are hands-down what keeps us all alive...there is no better feeling than, seeing your students inside the walls know that they have an option...the valedictorian speeches just have everybody in tears, it’s so great.”

On the future of HEP, Participant 3 mentioned the aspect of predatory practices when the FASFA Simplification Act is instituted; however, she explained that her programs have been strategically built not to feel the impact or lack thereof of the Pell Grant process. On the pendulum swings of criminal justice, Participant 3 noted, “we try not to speculate but prepare”

and advocates building HEP structures that can withstand the ebb and flow of corrections and political influence.

Participant 4

Participant 4 is a Euro-American male working in a HEP program in a midwestern state of America. He has been in HEP leadership for two years. Like various fellow participants in this study, he is the passionate visionary for his HEP program and its beginning architect. His program is a specific outgrowth of Pell funds via the SCP Era and The FASFA Simplification Act. His program does not offer any formal degrees but offers courses for students.

The textual descriptions or the essence of his HEP experiences as they relate to this study revolve around experiences of trailblazing an HEP program, building an educational model that is about humanization, strategically managing the many aspects of running an HEP, providing HEP that is not “hierarchical” but “dialogical”, doing education built around connecting with “relationships”, and building a culture of “substantial community partnerships”.

Participant 4 noted that “it's been interesting to have to start a program from scratch” and called it “starting a mini-college”. In doing so and while operating his program, he’s had experiences dealing with “nothing but politics”, “playing the game”, dealing with “give and take”, “realizing the limits”, “knowing my place”, managing experiences that “temper idealism”, “going to bat for his students”, and dealing with challenges of unpredictability, technology, changing administrations, and chain of command issues.

Administratively he describes a good part of his work as being a connector or mediator between various bureaucracies to assure the best for his HEP program. Of this experience he noted, “...it’s been up to me to connect them all in the ways I need them [HEP Bureaucracies] to be connected...maybe that's a plug for ed leadership”. Within this experience, he noted that HEP

leaders need the skill of being “witty” and “nuanced”, operating flexible skillsets to manage the various collegial and political relationships. He described of one HEP leadership experience with other leaders, “I was the voice for humanizing higher education.”

One experience he enjoys is how different the HEP student is, noting that they are a more dedicated student. He also enjoys experiencing the strategy of leading his program. Of these experiences, he noted “it's a lot of hard work...It's more work than non-incarcerated college, but it's so much more rewarding.”

On the future of HEP, he fears the potential resurgence of the 1994 “tough on crime bill”, which shut down most HEP and noted it’s “top of mind”. However, he is very optimistic about the future of HEP saying:

I’m optimistic this time that we have so much research and momentum behind the idea of that [HEP]. I think there's enough arguments to go around...and so we have that this time. So, it would look way more foolish for people to get “tough on crime” and cut this specific type of program because it actually makes crime worse...

Participant 5

Participant 5 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in an eastern state of America. She is experienced in normative higher education and HEP. Unique to her program of eight years is that she works in a maximum-security prison. She is the co-founder of her program and also teaches. She holds a PhD and runs an HEP program that is a privately funded liberal arts college. Her program is a part of the SCP and offers associate’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibited authentic higher education delivered to “a sizable proportion” of students who “will never be released under current laws”. Of this experience and of the students who will never be

released from prison, she positively expressed that “I’m looking for them to be able to take their education to a level that allows an intellectual freedom.”

In a description of this maximum prison program pedagogically, she said, “we have worked on developing ongoing education for the men who may never get out...and we have collaborated with other people who have the same experiences, or who are desirous of developing this kind of ongoing education.” Within this experience, she further described that pedagogically this program has a much more in-depth program and student:

Now in our eighth year, we've got some men who been with us since the beginning. So, there's a real reservoir of academic experience, and some of our students are now very advanced...they have accumulated between them a shared pool of reference that you cannot anticipate college students to have...

She develops this as a positive experience for her, noting that she has positive experiences, “pretty well, every time I go into the classroom”. She gave an example of this by describing:

So, I'm teaching a Shakespeare course, and I can allude to previous Shakespeare courses. I can allude to things we've learned in completely different classes and be well aware that probably three-quarters of my students were in that class. Which does not happen [in normative college education] ...The shared reference is much stronger, particularly from a man who's in his eight year, he's read...probably a hundred works of literature with me. So, if I say, can you remember what Dickens says about this, more than half of the class will remember what Dickens said.

Of the challenges in HEP, she noted running her program on a “shoestring” budget. She also described the infamous experiences working in corrective and secure settings, noting, “the fact of carceral surroundings has a negative impact on the ability to deliver a quality education in a

timely way.” While being open about the challenging experiences of HEP, she tempers that by noting positively that a skillset, adaptability, and acceptance are needed to lead a HEP program. She noted the experience of being “polite but persistent” and leading like a “very slow bulldozer”. She also strikes a tone of needed balance within leading in HEP:

I understand completely that the prison's first concern is security. I understand that my first concern is quality education. It is my job to find a way of delivering quality education within the restrictions of a secure facility. The Department of Corrections does not interfere with my curriculum, or my choices and I don't interfere with theirs.

While she fears predators getting into HEP after the opening of Pell Grants in 2023, on the future of HEP, Participant 5 has a positive outlook, noting that HEP has enough positive evidence to stay “political expedient and grow”. Further she described of her HEP experience, “this is the greatest privilege of my life”, she has positive experiences “pretty well every time she goes into the classroom”, and that HEP is “very rewarding work”.

Participant 6

Participant 6 is an African-American female working in an HEP program in a southern state of America. She has in normative higher education prior to her experience in HEP. She has led her program for four years, and it has been a part of the original set of HEP programs of the inaugural 2015 SCP. She has a master's degree, and this is her first HEP leadership experience. Her program awards associate’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study describe a leader that has harnessed a leadership style that is acute to the various unique dynamics that leading an HEP program demands. Throughout her interview, she described various practical, creative, and administrative skillsets that showed adaptability to the challenges

of HEP, akin to a Swiss-army knife and its ability to provide the right tool for different scenarios. Of this style of HEP leadership, she noted in dealing with barriers:

Where there's a will, there's a way...there's more than one way to skin the cat. So, it forces you to explore other creative ways which I am very notorious for. I just try to make it work...I never take no for an answer. There's going to be an alternative way.

On dealing with stakeholders and the competing philosophies of corrections, she spoke of experiences of rapport building and describes how she has made it her priority to get to know the key players in her program in order to run her HEP program well. She mentioned having collegial relationships with corrections officers, wardens, her team, and family members of her students all to run a strong HEP program.

The challenging programmatic issues Participant 6 experiences revolve around technology, outdated resources, finding staff that want this job, the constant rotation and turnover of wardens, and difficult correctional officers. Despite these challenges, she referred to having a good team and the relationships she's established. She noted that this helps her get ahead of challenges and gives her the ability to problem-solve the usual challenges that arise.

Participant 6 also noted in her experiences that there is a lack of diversity in HEP leadership. She noted that it is a "vital" aspect needed in HEP. Given the usual disparities of the criminal justice system, she feels that students need to see leaders that look like them and that can relate to them.

She enjoys her students and noted that they keep her going because they are "more hungry for their education than the traditional students". She especially enjoys the graduations and says it's a "tear-jerking" experience "to see them achieve something that they never would have thought they would have ever achieved."

She highlighted that her “main goal is to bring as much normalcy to these students as possible when they walk into the Education Building.” From her various descriptions, it appears her main experience is creatively leading, mediating, and navigating the challenges of an HEP program so that the students get the best experience in her program.

Participant 7

Participant 7 is a Euro-American male working in an HEP program in a southern state of America. He has a PhD and has been in HEP work since 2011. He has been in HEP leadership since 2019. His program is privately funded and currently does not use Pell Grant funds. His program offers up to associate’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of his HEP experiences as they relate to this study are highlighted by experiences of being industrious, creative, and adaptable in doing his work. He described about leading HEP “every single thing we are doing we are kind of like building the ship” and that “you have to think outside of the box for everything that happens for translating people in prison to colleges.”

As part of this, he described experiences of advocating for his HEP at the university level, fundraising, expanding his program into a new prison, and various other roles. He noted that the HEP leader needs skills of patience, flexibility, and persistence after being “denied often”, a “sense of grounding” and values, the ability to handle your mental health, creativity, and foregrounding the voice of those impacted. He also explained that this includes building diversity and making sure there is diverse representation in HEP leadership.

Participant 7 also noted that he believes in building an HEP experience around empowering the voice of the student. Of this he said, “My students have absolutely no voice, so I

have to be the loudest voice in the room for them.” In practice, his program showed this HEP philosophy by intentionally hiring a program director who was formerly incarcerated and of minority descent.

Participant 7 highlighted various challenging experiences. He mentioned experiences working with “hostile” correctional officers, a sense of being surveilled all the time, dealing with educational and corrections bureaucracies in tandem, dealing with politics, challenges in getting the formerly incarcerated into HEP leadership, and dealing with a slow Pell Grant process.

He described that the positive experiences he has had in HEP are mostly due to the students. He noted the higher level of dedication of the HEP student compared to the normative higher education student:

They’ve [normative higher education student] kind of been trained by years of education to just like jump through the hoop, so I can get my job at some point, whereas the students in prison, they generally are curious about the subject matter, and so like they care about getting a degree. But it’s just not their primary focus... Basically, their education doesn't get in the way of their learning, whereas I think, for the student on the outside, the education gets in the way of their learning because they’re like, well, how do I get an A? Whereas the students on the inside, they don't really care about that. To be honest, they usually get A’s, because they're so curious.

Positively, Participant 7 also described that HEP is an incubator to re-energize the burned-out instructor. His program often advises normative higher education instructors to join HEP, and as he described, it is often the “best teaching experience” they have “ever had”.

On the future of HEP, Participant 7 fears the backlash of some of the 1994 “tough on crime” philosophies and higher education predators getting into HEP after full Pell Grant access

is granted via the FASFA Simplification Act. However, through the growth of the Pell Grant process, he is hopeful for growth and better HEP coalitions.

Participant 8

Participant 8 is a Euro-American male working in an HEP program in an eastern state of America. He has a PhD and has been in HEP leadership for four years. In his career, he has experienced education from every level, including normative higher education leadership. He is in HEP in senior-level leadership and his program was a part of the original SCP. His program offers up to associate's degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of his HEP experiences as they relate to this study can be described by a significant level of HEP leadership successes while displaying a competent philosophy to successfully manage the various challenges within HEP. His HEP leadership has developed an experiential ethic around working in unpredictability, building structures that are foundational to the rhythm of HEP, diversity and inclusion, managing bureaucracies, breaking the cycle of prisonization, building relationships, “bending over backward to be extremely positive and enthusiastic” with stakeholders, building on student success and having a solid framework and outlook for the future of HEP.

The challenging experiences Participant 8 has dealt with have been issues with technology, noting that this issue is difficult for students and staff. He also speaks of challenges in getting leadership engaged. He speaks of the difficulty of managing with the default of an unpredictable environment noting, “this job is just so vast that there's no way to be prepared for it.” He also noted how it can be challenging working with correctional leaders that are set in old frameworks of criminal justice. He also mentioned that the current conditions of COVID-19 and divisive politics have posed a challenge. The main area of challenge he mentioned is the

challenge of not taking this current opportunity with HEP and its ability to impact diversity seriously. He noted of HEP:

This is the ultimate DEI issue of our time...that's what my negative would be is that we're missing this opportunity. And it's a huge opportunity. Not only is it the right thing to do, it's the right thing to do for multiple reasons. The really least of which is DEI...It's breaking that cycle one student at a time, seeing the differences in the family. That's where I see it.

Positive experiences, he said, revolve around his students. He spoke of the HEP student as a better student and that their successes have the ability to boost holistic morale in the HEP context. Uniquely, Participant 8 spoke of the experiences of having a positive impact on corrections structures. To that he noted:

Overall, the wardens we've dealt with have been in the restorative justice and look at the Pell Grant as a "shining star". They truly do, and they've been very engaged with it...We've turned the page on the thought that, "we're wasting our time educating these guys". I think everybody sees the research and understands that education makes a difference in recidivism, and it makes a difference not only for that student but for that student's family. That's the powerful piece. It's breaking that cycle, and then that is slowly but surely trickling to the guards, and I think part of that is just our relationship in the community.

On the future of HEP, Participant 8 is "cautiously optimistic" due to the bipartisan support for HEP and given what he's seeing in its impact with corrections. While he alluded to community colleges being the ideal place of HEP, he also sees a growth in more 4-year colleges getting into HEP. He believes the growth of Pell Grant access will residually foster better HEP technology.

While he fears predators coming into HEP to gain Pell Grant funding, he noted that Pell Grant's RSI requirement (Regular Substantive Interaction) will stunt the impact of "bad actors" because their services must extend beyond online education. On enrollment challenges, HEP, DEI, and the role of colleges, he rationalized:

[HEP] it's just good business. We know that the demographic of college students is shrinking, and we know that students don't value a college education...College education is not as valued as it used to be. It's priced itself out of the realm of possibility for a lot of students...It's going to look a lot different in five years...here is a completely untapped student that we could be addressing that needs to be addressed, which creates so many benefits...

Participant 9

Participant 9 is an Asian-American female working in an HEP program in a western state of America. She is an established and experienced leader in HEP, and her program and her years of service in HEP extend back to being in the original programs of the 2015 SCP. She holds an EdD with experience in normative higher education, is an experienced administrator in other fields, and has worked extensively in the community. Of her work, she described, "This bridges all my previous experiences, this is my life's work. It's the most important thing to me." Her program is a part of the SCP and offers bachelor's degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study displayed various experiences in the leadership of HEP that focused on a "value-driven" approach to HEP leadership. She emphasized value-centered leadership that spoke of leadership qualities that require the focus of being "relational, persistent, and empathic". She spoke of programmatic values that are dedicated to minority students and of building a legacy through

HEP work noting, “our values are that we believe that this is about breaking cycles of intergenerational incarceration.”

Embracing an HEP education model that rivals normative higher education was also a value of her HEP experience. In this she noted:

That’s a value... it’s all very values-driven...so for us it’s really important that they’re getting as good as, if not better of an education than the same students on our main campus. In fact, when our students transferred here from outside of the prison, and they finished their degrees, they were like, “oh my God, it was so much harder in prison, like the expectations on us were much higher...It was more like a graduate-level seminar than it was like an undergraduate kind of degree program.” The quality of what we provide is the same.

Participant 9 also highly emphasized the leadership experiences of what she termed, “flexo-mistic”. She noted that this is a term she received from one of her students and explained that the word combines “flexible” and “optimistic”. She described on the value of being flexo-mistic:

The relational part is really key because we’re dealing with so many different, completely different stakeholders. You have to be able to massage the people on campus to get them to do what we need them to do. You also have to be able to assure Corrections and specifically on the ground, correctional officers...in a way that doesn’t get the hairs on their neck standing up. You have to be able to relate to the students in a way that’s genuine and authentic...And then...being able to also talk about this with funders and being able to talk to faculty. You really have to be relational, and very genuine, authentic, and in an empathetic way, and I think empathy is really important. There are things that you’re going to encounter on a day-to-day basis that you can’t predict, that might be

totally outside of your control. That worked one week but didn't work the other and you just have to kind of put your ego aside and just really learn how to be flexo-mistic.

The challenges that Participant 9 encounters are problems with a lack of technology and how that residually impacts research. She also noted the challenge of leading in unpredictability. She was open in describing HEP as “the work is hard, it's complicated”. In a warning for would-be Pell Grant predators getting into this work, she noted, “it's so much work...if you are not committed to make this happen, it's not going to happen in a really productive way. There has to be an investment by the institution in order for it to happen.” Despite these challenges, she noted another of her values in that of being able to thrive in challenges, “it's highly inconvenient work. It's hard, you know. You have to be really flexo-mistic, and I think it takes special people to do it”.

On positive experiences, she boasted of her staff that they “love it”, are “honored to do the work”, and find HEP “highly rewarding work”. She also enjoys administrative experiences with a state corrections department that has adopted HEP and bipartisan legislative frameworks that embrace HEP.

On the future of HEP, she noted that the success of the SCP birthed the FAFSA Simplification Act and current HEP growth, noting, “It's been huge”. She fears educational predators will try to capitalize on this growth. She also respects the often ebb and flow of the criminal justice system and regarding the future, noted that HEP leaders need to “take advantage of this great window of opportunity” and “ride this wave and try and get as much done as we possibly can and make it as sustainable as we can for now.”

Participant 10

Participant 10 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in a mountain western state of America. She is an established and experienced leader in HEP on various levels, including being a research expert, a teacher in normative higher education, a writer, a trailblazer, and an administrator. She holds a PhD and created her program, which is not a Pell Grant-dependent program. Her program offers just courses to HEP students.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study displayed a depth of knowledge about HEP and a scholarly dedication to its normalization with higher education outside of prison. In one area, she explained these characteristics by highlighting a distinct philosophy that guides her educational experience and leadership; when asked about her thoughts on publishing for “correctional education” research, a term used by this researcher to describe HEP in this specific context, she explained that what she leads is not correctional education. While being supportive of the ideals of correctional education, she relayed this thought:

Correctional education is based in a criminological framework. It is based on the thought individuals have some kind of deficit...and that they need some kind of correction, and that education can be used as one way to do that...Higher education is not predicated upon people having deficits of character or moral judgment, or criminality. When folks come to a college or university, they enroll in higher education to better themselves, to learn something, to get a job, to become productive members of their community, to transform their lives. Those are the exact same reasons we should be enrolling incarcerated people. And so, for me, there’s a very clear line between what correctional education is intended to do from the prison, from the custody institution, but higher education is not that...What we do really well is that we introduce people to knowledge,

and we provide them ladders of social mobility, and that's what we should do in the prison, we should not get confused as to what it is that we do. We don't do correctional ed. We're not good at it. We're not qualified to do it. We are qualified to do this other thing, though.

This extended to her position that HEP students should just be college students and have the same rights to education. She explained while supporting the overall impact of HEP on lowering recidivism:

I also think we need to keep pushing for the idea that incarcerated people are deserving of higher education period, not because they demonstrate that they will go back to prison, not because it has some impact on criminality, like all those things, can be true, and regardless of that, they're still worthy of being college students.

She is a firm believer that a proper or improper emphasis and promotion on what HEP is impacts the HEP experience. Further, she believes that a normative view of HEP will "influence" the "perception" of the work. She noted when training her staff, "Yes, you are teaching in a prison, and yes, there are restrictions, but hold those students to the highest standards that you would on campus because it's no different." Of her leadership, she also noted, "we have to as non-incarcerated people work our asses off to ensure that incarcerated people are afforded the kinds of access to resources to the extent that we possibly can, that off-campus students have."

When speaking of challenges, Participant 10 noted issues, such as HEP being very isolating for staff, "there is a deep emotional labor to this" and that burnout is real. She also described that most challenges are with "correctional norms and culture". To describe this, she mentioned the interference of correctional officers, correctional turnover of wardens, a lack of staffing, and a gap in understanding of what higher education is. She also noted that these same

types of challenges from a structural administrative standpoint were an impetus for her to get into HEP as a graduate student.

Her positive experiences highlighted the quality of staff that are drawn to HEP work; she is particularly inspired by their persistence through HEP obstacles. She also mentioned the student base in HEP is better, noting their dedication to college work. However, she cautioned against an overemphasis on the “better student” joy and motivation because the idea of them being “better” is because they have been deprived and naturally will be more dedicated to HEP. She alluded to not forgetting the deprived environment of prison that creates a thirst for “better”.

On the future of HEP, she mentioned that there should be more public, 4-year, land-grant colleges. She also noted a need for structural changes, better funding, more research in higher education journals not specific to HEP, a dedication to DEI, a commitment to getting the formerly incarcerated into HEP leadership, and that corrections need to report on the evidence on post-secondary attainment of students to support HEP. She also acknowledged the political shifts in support for HEP and the growth of Pell Grant access will be positive. However, she commented, full dependence on Pell Grants is not a sustainable or responsible model for successful HEP.

Participant 11

Participant 11 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in a midwestern state of America. She is experienced in normative higher education but new to HEP. She is the originator of her mostly online HEP program, which is a part of SCP since 2022 and solely is dependent on Pell Grant funding. She holds a master’s degree, and her program offers up to associate’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibit experiences of a new trailblazer in HEP work and programming that is undergirded by her passion for criminal justice reform and the greater internal and societal benefits of HEP for its students. While new to HEP leadership and her experiences of starting a program, Participant 11 noted sentiments that seasoned leaders experience with the unpredictability of leading HEP programs, noting, “I have no history working with a criminal justice system. So, I've had to learn all of the ropes when it comes to how this works” and described “I feel like I don't know what I'm doing...I'm just making it up as I go. No one gave me an instruction manual to make this work.”

In her experiences she has observed the necessity to lead as a “good communicator” to “balance” and “juggle” “between the actual facility, the instructors, the students, the State level, DOC, other colleges”, and her executive team. She explained that the ability to speak different languages is important and feels HEP leaders must choose languages that “appeal” to the various audiences adjacent in HEP leadership. She also noted that “persistence” is a consistent experience that a HEP leader has to harness and communicate to students:

It will get hard, and there will be things that are not fun, and you just have to keep pressing and being willing to keep moving forward, even with setbacks, and realizing that always keeping the mission of what you're doing at heart, that what you are doing is giving someone an opportunity they may never have had, or would have if they stepped out of even when they released because they never would have thought of it as something they could do right...the ability to persist through difficult challenges [is needed].

Participant 11 also believes in the values of “sustainability” and being a “visionary” with HEP programming and leadership. She mentioned of her work, “It really requires future

thinking...about how you can sustain and grow your program.” While her program is solely reliant on Pell Grant funding, she said that is not a sustainable model and vision is needed to take HEP to another level of growth. She described that “the Second Chance Pell Experiment really wasn’t that experimental; all it did was take that [1994] ban away. It didn’t change anything else that was going on”.

Participant 11 also believes in providing a competent program that equates to normative higher education. She admitted this brings a measure of pressure as an HEP leader, expressing:

I feel a lot of responsibility for these guys and knowing that I could be somehow the stop gap between success and failure for them. It’s a lot to take on...I want to make sure they’re getting every access that we would give a student on the outside that they’re getting, all of the same quality of education. And so, I feel a lot of responsibility to advocate for them where they can’t advocate [for themselves].

On the challenging experiences, she noted that dealing with the red-tape of Pell Grants is a tough process. She has to do all application preparation for her students because they don’t have the access to resources to complete the necessary processes and any troubleshooting that might be needed. She also mentioned the challenges of dealing with DOC at the micro level, describing:

It's a difficult line to navigate because we're trying to keep the Department of Corrections happy so they keep allowing us in because at any point they could say, 'we don't want you here anymore'. We're really lucky that the director of our Department of Corrections at the State level is very supportive of this, but at an individual facility level, we struggle...You have to get lower-level employees to buy into this. It can't just be a top-down initiative...I do think there's some hesitation on the role of our facility or staff

members at the facility to fully support this initiative just because it almost seems like they're getting a special opportunity which I don't think is true at all. We're just trying to help society...

Of positive experiences, Participant 11 mentioned that her program is “lucky” because her State DOC Director is supportive of HEP. She also experiences beneficial staff morale, noting of her instructors, “They love it. They love the interaction. They love getting to be part of this, and honestly, I've had more and more instructors reach out, saying, ‘Can I teach for the program?’”

On the future of HEP, Participant 11 is hopeful because there is bipartisan support for HEP. She also hopes for the growth of modern-day criminal justice reform and its impact on racial disparities in HEP and the criminal justice system. She spoke of her concerns about educational predators getting into HEP with the growth of Pell Grant access and the need to make sure that vulnerable students are not taken advantage of:

Everyone needs to be in it [HEP] for the right reason...I mean it's no secret that there is literally an enrollment crisis in all of higher Ed right now. So, everybody is looking to get students where they can, and I think this is such a vulnerable population that we have to remember that this is not your key to enrollment. This is a community good. And so, this is something we're doing, not to make money off the backs of people, but to actually help them be productive members of society to come back into their communities and give back...it's just super important as we head into this next era, where there's more access.

Participant 12

Participant 12 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in a northwestern state of America. She is an established and experienced leader in HEP on various levels, including working in juvenile HEP, an “In-and-Out” program, as a teacher, and as an Academic Dean of two adult HEP programs. She holds a PhD and works in an original 2015 SCP program. Her program offers up to associate’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibit experiences that illuminate a competent and practical application of her HEP leadership. They also show experiences highlighted by a work mentality that is “a champion of the underdog” and what she calls a “misplaced identification” with her students that motivates her. Of this, she explained:

I hated school. The only time I liked school was in my Master’s program. I avoided school at all costs. I didn’t like it. I thought it was boring. I didn’t see the use in it and so to be able to work with like-minded students... And then, all of a sudden, the light ball goes off, and they’re like “I’m smart, I can do this”...It’s the acknowledgment and the discovery that I’m not a cast-off, I’m not a failure. I’m not what I have believed for so many years. Most all of our students have not had positive academic experiences.

She further described of her practical worldview of HEP work that “just the excitement and discovery of learning” are positive experiences that keep her going. Other positive experiences she noted are having “great professors” and a “great team”, “better” students that “work harder” than the normative higher education student, and graduations. Specific experiences she pointed to are when students discover they are provided the same academic rigor as off-campus students, as well as when she had a former student testify to the state legislature various times on behalf of HEP and actually saw an HEP-supportive bill get passed.

Of challenging experiences, Participant 12 noted a struggle with staff morale, explaining, “My staff are pretty battered and bruised right now”. She noted that the Covid-19 Pandemic was especially challenging and impacted staff morale more than anything, producing “unpredictability” and an “inability to plan”. She also mentioned challenges with DOC and correctional staff, a difficulty with collaboration amid the unknowns of HEP, interstate HEP competition and a need for a statewide plan, student competition with the correctional industries wing that produces work for the state, Pell Grant funding issues compared to off-campus student access to Pell Grants, and technology.

On the DEI issue inherent in HEP, she called for a balanced and consistent stabilization of DEI where it’s a normal daily process for HEP and not an overemphasis that is impractical for implementation. When asked about DEI and its role in HEP, she described:

I’ll quote one of my master professionals who said, “You don’t have to be a chicken to know what an egg is, but it helps.” I think there is a role, but ...I’m getting weary of being bombarded with equity, diversity, and inclusion...There is a need for it. My concern is that the overemphasis on it, there is a point of diminishing returns...I have found, at least for myself and in my own practice, being authentic and being curious, has helped me to facilitate conversations in the classroom and to resolve conflicts when there has been an issue around that. I think it has been so neglected for so long that the emphasis on it now is trying to make up for all that lost time. We’re watering the garden with a fire hose, and I think we need a soaker hose every day and every day we make these practices. We make them part of who we are, part of what we do, instead of this six-hour training that you must attend.

On the future of HEP, Participant 12 fears predators with the growth of the Pell Grant process. She also fears this growth will eventually be too much for DOC agencies as the HEP “gatekeeper”, and they will seek easier routes that may include choosing one educational provider for statewide efforts. However, she is optimistic that the upgrade in Pell Grant access will demand a normalization of HEP in prisons throughout the United States.

Participant 13

Participant 13 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in a midwestern state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for many years in a program that is not dependent on Pell Grants. She has taught in normative higher education and currently teaches in HEP but has retired from the directorship of her program. She holds a PhD, and the HEP program she led offers certificates and associate’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibit experiences highlighted by a veteran leader that has led a longstanding HEP program. Having led in community affairs as well, she brings a community aspect to HEP and is passionate about re-entry. Her experiences also show a leader who is dedicated to the transformative component of HEP, noting, “we are impacting lives and making a change for people”, and when speaking of her successful students, “I truly believe that education was their ticket to a more stable life”.

The challenging experiences Participant 13 has dealt with include societal and programmatic attitudes that believe inmates should not receive a free education with tax dollars. She spoke about how multi-faceted and involved the work is, saying it “inundates” an HEP leader. She also spoke to the DOC's challenges with officers being negative, harassing, and how “they resented us.” Like many of her fellow Participants, she also talked about the impact of a

lack of technology and to describe, she used the example of having to grade hand-written papers and difficult ways of submitting assignments.

The positive experience Participant 13 spoke about was seeing how education changed the lives of her students. She mentioned that her students “talk about how the classes have opened their minds...how it is changed the way they think”. She also speaks about the “amazing things” she was able to create for HEP programming. Participant 13 also agreed with a popular sentiment in HEP work, being that the HEP student is a “better” student compared to the normative higher education student. While Participant 13 is optimistic about the future, she noted some concern with the influence of DOC over HEP.

Participant 14

Participant 14 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in a midwestern state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for two years in a program that is not dependent on Pell Grants. She has a PhD and a strong humanities background. Her program offers college courses.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibit experiences highlighted by building and sustaining a “student-centered” experience, building collaborative relationships with DOC, and advocating among administrative stakeholders about HEP.

When describing the challenges of HEP work, Participant 14 noted dynamics such as dealing with the residuals of the Covid-19 pandemic, students not being able to express their education needs properly, being considered “non-essential” on the DOC priority list, working with students not acclimated to common resources of education such as technology, assuring that the HEP business model is not designed around Pell Grant access, and having to adapt to staffing

shortages with DOC. On dealing with the common stressors with DOC, she noted, “we cannot do what we do without the partnership, collaboration, and cooperation of the Department of Corrections.”

Participant 14 experiences the positives of HEP such as seeing students go through an educational transformation, their persistence in learning and seeing them build an identity of being an actual college student and the self-confidence that dynamic fosters. Administratively, she enjoys the positive experience of advocating, or as she describes “evangelizing” stakeholders on what HEP is about and its influence. Further, she enjoys the residual creative environment that develops, explaining:

I personally find it very exciting and inspiring to be able to “evangelize” in all these different places to be like, let me tell you who you’re not thinking about when you make this change. So, if I can be the loudmouth in the room that is speaking on behalf of our students when changes occur that will impact them, I find that to be very exciting. And that makes me happy as a professional...Also, it requires us to think really creatively, and I can count so many different challenges where I’ll get on the phone with a colleague and be like, “Okay, we’re facing this and how do we move forward, how do we invent a new system, how do we develop a workaround, how do we advocate, how do we bring in these folks so that they can make a change that’s going to benefit our students?” And so, it allows me to think very flexibly and very creatively. As a professional I think that that’s always very beneficial...And in that role, I appreciate the opportunity that I have to work with other folks to explain how they might also start thinking creatively, or how they might also start thinking about the incarcerated student when they’re making “XYZ”

decisions. And I also get to use a little bit of my educator side to educate professionals on how they can work with students in prison.

On the future of HEP, Participant 14 fears predators taking advantage of “the Pell Grant wave” and not being student-centered in their course and degree offerings. While being concerned about the advancing new era of Pell Grant access, she positively noted:

I’m excited, and I’m heartened by the level of enthusiasm that we do see from folks who want to offer what we’re offering, and they want to teach for our program, and they want to get involved in the ways that we envision...Pell coming back, Pell being reinstated is a sign that attitudes towards this are changing in a positive way...

Participant 15

Participant 15 is a Euro-American male working in an HEP program in a southern state of America. He has been in HEP work for 10 years and in HEP leadership for six years. His program was one of the original programs in the 2015 SCP. He holds a PhD, has led in various aspects of his HEP program, and currently leads the re-entry wing of his program. His program offers up to associate’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of his HEP experiences as they relate to this study describe a holistic and competent perspective of what HEP is and what it can grow to be.

Participant 15 was formerly incarcerated, formerly in the program where he now holds a leadership position, graduated from the program with his associate's degree, and post his release from prison, proceeded to earn two master’s degrees and a PhD. His experiences are a wealth of true understanding of HEP. For the purposes of this study, it should be noted that Participant 15 completed his study with one of his staff to highlight the full spectrum of HEP, Participant 16, who also grew within the program and is also now in HEP work.

When describing the necessities of a successful HEP leader, Participant 15 listed the need for mediation skills to navigate the bureaucracy of higher education and DOC, the need for adaptability, the ability to lead in chaos and unpredictability, the skillsets of assertiveness, being agreeable, good communication skills to justify program needs, leadership appropriate perspective, good character judgment, creativity, and being open.

Participant 15 has experienced various challenges in HEP, including DOC being too focused on career and technical education rather than liberal arts HEP, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, challenges from those that formerly knew him while incarcerated, top-down administrative structures that need to build from the micro level, and the tandem of dealing with bureaucracies of higher education and the DOC.

He explained and developed a deeper dual reality that is needed for DOC and HEP administration, “from the correctional side they're unnecessarily cautious, and from the educational side they're very naive.” In this, Participant 15 draws on his experience as a former HEP liaison, employed to translate programmatic issues to differences in HEP bureaucracies. He further explained:

We [HEP Educators] should assert the need for openness and creativity, but also not being so naive that nothing could possibly go wrong. And then Corrections kind of needs to meet us in the middle by allowing for more openness and vulnerability on their part.

That's the only way. Otherwise, you're in constant gridlock.

Participant 15 uses his experience to rationalize the current climate of HEP youth compared to normative higher education's long history of speaking of Evidenced Base Practices (EBP) in HEP. He is bold in saying that HEP has an “illegitimate dependence on evidence-based strategies”. He further practically explained:

I think those things are good [EBP], because I'm confident that correctional education and the appropriate kind of education will continue to have positive benefits individually and collectively, but it hinders things also if the expectation is that any new program must be evidence-based, well, then it's the chicken or the egg. It's like you can't try out a program if it's not evidence based. But how do you get it to be evidence-based without trying it out?

The positive experiences that he described are seeing students change to having positive identities, positive feedback from staff and former fellow students that knew him when he was incarcerated, experiencing a State DOC agency that is supportive of HEP, and bipartisan legislative support for HEP.

On the future of HEP, Participant 15 is hopeful and sees HEP growing. He backed this by noting the growth in bipartisan legislative support for HEP and the growth in HEP research. On the growth of HEP, he noted, "I only see it growing. The number of students touched, the kind of access people have in terms of internet or resources and libraries, the kind of degrees being offered. I only see it growing". He also promotes a premium on having future HEP leaders that have been formerly incarcerated because of their developed skillsets with adaptive-positive skillsets:

[HEP] is not going to be like anything you've ever expected, it is a constant battle...people need to have the right expectations.... somebody that's been incarcerated or just lived in an impoverished environment, they are generally more adaptable and resourceful just because they had to, and so they get it intuitively, more so than someone that hasn't had to deal with that and may create havoc.

Participant 16

Participant 16 is an African-American male working in an HEP program in a southern state of America. His program was one of the original programs in the 2015 SCP, and he has worked for one year in his current HEP program. He works in HEP re-entry, creates curriculum, and is an adjunct instructor. He is completing a master's degree in 2023 and has two associate's degrees and a bachelor's degree. His program offers up to associate's degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of his HEP experiences as they relate to this study embody a growing HEP leader that has been formerly incarcerated while working in different roles in HEP. His experiences and perspectives on HEP leadership stem from an individual actively growing into HEP leadership, with real-life understandings of the role of HEP. For the purposes of this study, it should be noted that Participant 16 completed his study with his manager, Participant 15, who is a HEP leader with a PhD and vast HEP experience.

Participant 16 noted that HEP leaders should see their students as humans, they must not be timid in their leadership style, they should value diversity and representation, and they should be adaptable. He also noted that HEP leaders need to better understand the culture of prisons and further established an ideal around having representative leadership that has been formerly incarcerated:

people forget that prison is a society or an environment of its own. It has its own subsets of culture...a lot of times, even individuals that are in prison from the DOC...know that a prison really runs itself. It has its own like sort of system...Educators can come in sometimes and not understand certain things about prison. The context is a lot different, and sometimes you could have the administrative side, which is, of course, a security mindset is public safety is the first mindset in prison. But sometimes, you know, trying to find that balancing act. I think having individuals that do have lived experience we see

just a little bit of administration or security, how they look at things, but we also know from the other side and trying to balance that. I think you know you need individuals who have been there in order to give a good, rounded perspective of how to navigate that system.

Participant 16 positively noted that DOC is changing and understanding HEP. He also said that he is motivated by seeing changed lives. He further established that the redemptive component of education is a “very helpful component”, a way to “do better” and a way to “achieve something”. In the future, he believes there are good studies to support HEP and “people see the advantage of education, and it helps”.

Participant 17

Participant 17 is an African-American male working in an HEP program in a southern state of America. His program has been a participant in the SCP for six years, and he has run the program for three years. Prior to HEP, he has vast experience in K-12 education as a teacher and principal. He has an EdD and teaches in his program aside from administrating the program. His program is a part of the SCP and offers associate’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of his HEP experiences as they relate to this study display a leader that has a full spectrum of understanding on the essence of the HEP student. In particular, he mentioned the frequent linkage of a lack of education in his students’ formative years and that dynamic being a risk factor that likely led them to imprisonment. One area that builds this experiential outlook is his prior work as an alternative school principal. This in turn has given him an experiential perspective and knowledgebase on the average HEP student. From this perspective, he explained that he is able to see:

Where the disconnect possibly happened, and not only able to see but here the guys tell me, “Hey, I was this type of student when I was in elementary or middle school or high school, and I noticed that I’m still struggling in this area.” So, it afforded me that opportunity to say, you know what, as I think, back on some of the experiences that I had with my kids at the elementary, middle school and high school level, I’m able to connect the dots and see okay, here’s where they fell off. So, we have to take them from point A to point G or point K, whatever the case may be, and we were able to do that by providing them the opportunity to participate in the development coursework so that it can get them ready for the college level coursework that they will be doing

This perspective highlights his experiences as a HEP leader. It also gives him a unique advantage in developing appropriate education and supportive services for his students and staff. As he describes, the previous is a positive experience he enjoys.

Participant 17 also believes in a student-center focus and in high standards for his HEP and his instructors. He noted of this:

Your students come first, and in this essence, even though they’re incarcerated they’re still your students. So, you’ve got to have that mindset of, I will not make compromises when it comes to the learning of my students, and what I mean by that is, I can’t water down the curriculum. I have to help high standards and high expectation for these guys, just because they are incarcerated, does not mean that they are second class citizen.

That’s number one to me. The next thing you have to uh have, Donovan is. You have to have high expectations for your instructors. Your instructors must understand that your goal or your vision for your department should be clear to them.

The challenges Participant 17 spoke of primarily relate to a lack of technology to do HEP programming, noting that “prisons are far behind when it comes to technology”. He said that a lack of competent technology is a deterrent and “it places students at a huge disadvantage”. He also mentioned experiences dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, DOC staffing shortages, his staff having conflicts with DOC processes, the need to revert back to old ways of teaching with less of the technological tools seen in normative higher education, and then working with various stakeholders, dealing with conflicting interests and understandings, programmatic rejection, and the requirement of flexibility, having “to dance to the tune of their beat”.

On the future of HEP, Participant 17 noted that there is a lot of work to do in the future regarding equity and “leveling the playing” field. He believes there will be a positive “explosion” of HEP programs when full access to Pell Grants starts via the FAFSA Simplification Act implementation date of July 2023. Coupled with that, he believes that there will be a paradigm shift in prison “lifers”, opening up access for them to get HEP. In what he deems as key to the future, he also believes that legislatively there are leaders on board who want to see HEP work.

Participant 18

Participant 18 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in a midwestern state of America. She is a veteran in HEP, being in an original SCP program, and is its first administrator. Academically, she has a master's degree and is currently in ABD status with her doctoral degree. She is experienced in normative higher education leadership but stepped down from that area because she desired more “meaningful” work and developed a “passion” for HEP.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibit experiences of a veteran leader in HEP, a leader that understands the “big picture” of

crime and punishment and criminal justice reform needs. They also display a leader that is about a holistic HEP that reaches beyond higher education in a sense of a “wraparound services” mentality, and a leader that is providing HEP in an area of the United States where DOC is a large, historic, and established public structure and source of employment.

When speaking to challenging HEP experiences, Participant 18 mentioned that “Covid was a game-changer”, “technology is awful”, the politics of dealing with DOC is challenging, and maintaining politics with stakeholders is challenging. Dealing with DOC is described as the largest challenge in her HEP experience, and as noted, she serves in HEP leadership in an area where DOC is a truncated and established industry. Of these challenges, she explained that she has to deal with frequent turnover of wardens, staff, and correctional officers, and her biggest challenge is dealing with relationships with correctional officers. Of this she noted:

Pardon my language, but a lot of the CO’s [Correctional Officers] are just assholes...I go in there [prison], and they barely give me a glance...some of them are very nice, but most of them just don't care...I just go in and smile, and I'm like, “Hey, hi! How are you doing today?”...sometimes they give the students trouble...The biggest challenge is just maintaining positive relationships with CO’s, so that they don't harass us at all, and harass my students. It's gotten better over the years. I think and I’m hoping what the CO’s recognize is that when you bring education into a facility, it reduces the tension. It reduces violence...I hope that’s what's happening behind the scenes.

Of this and working with the greater challenges with DOC and the current criminal justice system, she exhibits a personal foundational ideal of working in HEP, “I’m working within a system that I don’t agree with, but I’m still trying to make it better.”

The positive experiences Participant 18 noted include working with a more dedicated and better student than normative higher education, positive and supportive staff and morale, a high success rate of student achievement with 100% of her students graduating with honors, and the rewards of seeing students change. A unique area that she finds rewarding is keeping relationships with her former students in a “wraparound services” motif:

It's rewarding for me following through with guys who have returned home...I think it's important to show them that follow through...I think, that that to me is really rewarding, and providing full wraparound and returning home services, I think that's just huge because they need to know that we don't want to just enroll you while you're here and get your tuition money. I mean, we're really here for your long-term success. That's the message, I think, is important to get through to them.

On the future of HEP Participant 18 feels with the growth of Pell Grant access that HEP programs need to be prepared to be fiscally aware and responsible to Pell Grant regulations. “It’s not cheap to run these programs” and educators need to be in this for the “right reasons”. She also feels DOC needs to be prepared to regulate the growth, and HEP needs to have more degree offerings. She also believes there will be a huge positive “emerging” of programs, “turn”, and “sea-change” with Pell Grant access opening. In this, she feels that there is a positive growth in the mentality towards crime and punishment and that the younger generation with their evolving views will prove to be supportive of HEP.

Participant 19

Participant 19 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in a western state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for many years and in a program that is not dependent on Pell Grants currently. She has a master’s degree and has worked from being a

support staff in her HEP program to now being its current director. Her program offers certificates and associate's degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study are those of a leader who has seen all phases of an HEP program and is a longtime leader in her program. She displays a competent, compassionate, and practical/human perspective of her experiences in HEP leadership.

When speaking of qualities of an HEP leader, she described the need for flexibility, understanding, perspective, hiring and relying on quality staff, providing a normative higher education environment, and the ability not to take work home with you. She also emphasized that HEP leaders need to keep in touch with their staff noting, "If you don't stay in touch with your staff, then they start to think they work for the Department of Corrections, and so they start to sometimes lean towards those policies and procedures as opposed to [HEP policies and procedures]...". Participant 19 also described the need for good relationships with DOC. She explained:

One of the biggest things that helps you inside the prison is the relationships.

Relationships with the Department of Correction Staff is huge because they can make or break you. And so...we have potlucks. We invite the officers to come to our classrooms. Oh, it's this day! Here you go, here's some brownies. Here's some donuts. There's still those ones out there that don't like us...So I just rely heavily on [my program managers to assist with this]...

The challenging experiences she spoke of are dealing with staff turnover, working in a suppressive environment, and challenges with DOC officers. She described her challenges with DOC officers by saying, "we have a lot of officers who don't believe the inmates deserve

education because they had to pay for theirs. They view it as the inmates are not paying for their [education]...”. She also said that “one of the biggest challenges is reminding your instructors daily that they work in a prison.” She spoke to an example of a faculty member that lost his position because he brought candy in for students, even though he was advised not to.

Participant 19 opened up about the fact that sometimes HEP work hurts. She described this through a professional experience she had with one of her staff when she first started in HEP work. She explained:

I hired a young lady who had been incarcerated for about ten, twelve years...she would come and tell me she was going to lunch, sometimes she'd come back. Sometimes she wouldn't. And I remember relaying so many stories to her with my husband, and at one point he looked at me, and he said, you know she's on drugs again. And I said, no, she's not. He said Okay. So, a few weeks would go by, and he'd say, how's Jane doing? And so, I tell him how Jane was doing, and he'd go. You know she's doing drugs again. Well, then, one day she came in my office and said she had to go to the dentist. I said, Okay. So, she left for the dentist, and I didn't hear from her for a month. Well, guess what, she was doing drugs again and she had to go back in [prison] and finish her sentence. And I remember that being so devastating to me because you put your time and your effort and your love, thinking you are doing the right thing, regardless of what you do, people are still going to make choices...

The positive experiences Participant 19 spoke about were mostly staff related. She enjoys hiring great staff. She also has great staff in her programs, particularly speaking of her two program managers, one that runs the male program and one that runs the female program. She said of them, “I'm very fortunate in that I have two super program managers”. Participant 19 also

finds encouragement in seeing students continue their education, transform, and then grow into professionals. She described seeing the students grow as something that is “beyond words”.

On the future of HEP, Participant 19 is encouraged by the growth of the Pell Grant offerings starting in 2023, saying, “I can only see it as beneficial for the students and the public at-large.” She also said, “Pell Grant growth will help students, but we still need to educate the public.” She also feels the growth of Pell Grants for HEP programs will help with building future workforces in America.

Participant 20

Participant 20 is an African-American female working in an HEP program in a southern state of America. Her program is an original 2015 SCP member, and she has run the program for two years. She has vast experience in the criminal justice system prior to HEP as a probation officer, administrating in community corrections facilities and teaching within corrections. She has a master’s degree and teaches within her program aside from administrating the program. Her program offers associate’s degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relates to this study show an HEP leader with perspectives and experiences that exhibit a competent grasp on HEP that is uniquely and rarely seen in HEP, according to this study and its literature review. This appears in large part because of her prior successful professional history in corrections. Further, Participant 20 displayed a professional philosophy on the ideals of a multi-systems approach, stakeholder partnerships, and a strong understanding of the various community and governmental systems that relate to DOC, higher educational structures, and HEP. Moreover, her experiences presented her as a competent mediator because of the multiplicity of levels of HEP relationships from student to state administration.

When speaking about challenging experiences in HEP, Participant 20 noted challenges with corrections officers, technology, and mediating between the bureaucracies of higher education and DOC. She also mentioned challenging experiences with education staff and faculty and their often naivety with working in a prison. She described,

I have faculty with good hearts but you have to remind them we're in the prison setting.

We're not on campus so there are some other parameters. It's not just our policies and procedures, DOC has a set of policies and procedures [that must be followed].

When talking about this experience, Participant 20 broadens this leadership into her experiences as a mediator and staff developer while showcasing the necessity of understanding both education and DOC cultures to build her HEP program. First speaking of a real experience with faculty, she described, "I know you have a great heart and I know you want to help. But we cannot give our phone numbers and contact information to these individuals... You cannot do that." She then develops a leadership ethic with these experiences:

I have had to have some hard conversations. If you're going to teach out here. This is the way it's going to be. If you can't, you just can't teach out here [HEP program]. But I am that person who understands how both systems operate and the challenges. When I see people struggling on either side. Whether it's the college side, the academic side, or whether it's the DOC side, I can say, Okay, this is it...because it really is when you're trying to marry the two. My staff and faculty, they do so well at cultivating students, but we can't forget we're in a prison setting. But they do so well that you want to go that step further so I've asked them to help me imagine, what that space would look like if we had the highest level of student involvement around these [DOC] parameters... What can we build?

The previous also displays a positive experience that Participant 20 enjoys, which is the ability to provide strategic management and creativity. She said of this, “I like planning on strategic matters. I like trying to develop the highest degree of a student-centered education program in a prison setting”. She also enjoys the positive experiences of building relationships with students and collegial relationships with stakeholders such as DOC, state-level, and educational leadership.

Participant 20 is cautiously optimistic about the future of HEP but noted that HEP has to “put things in place” so that the issues that happened to HEP in 1994 don't happen again. She emphasized the need to make sure data is collected and that there are creative partnerships such as offering correction officers the same free education the HEP students get. She emphasized evidence-based standards are needed but not to create uniformity. She believes there needs to be a strong DEI presence and the humanizing element of teaching against the full tablet models. As she noted about HEP in general, she underscored on the future the need for a multi-systems approach, student-centered programming, using the Steven Covey principle of “seek first to understand, then be understood”, and a sense of unity, and then concluding, “We're all in this together. We all want to be successful in what we do.”

Participant 21

Participant 21 is a Euro-American female who works in an HEP program in an eastern state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for seven years. She has a master's degree, is a social worker by trade, and has been in criminal justice work for almost 20 years. Her program is an SCP program in a maximum-security prison. Her program offers bachelor's degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibit experiences that display a competent skillset highlighted by her social work expertise and

her substantive history as an HEP leader in the SCP Era. Her experience noted that leaders in HEP should be flexible with the various student challenges, knowing that “part of this job is to come up with workarounds”. She also described that HEP leaders are leaders that enjoy relationships and connecting, and that HEP leaders have a “special” quality of persisting and knowing how to “roll with the punches”. She noted that creativity and imagination are vital to being able to come up with solutions to the various unpredictable challenges. Further, she is a leader who believes in and works on employing a culturally diverse staff.

Uniquely, Participant 21 was passionate to note that HEP leaders protect the classroom as a “safe place” for her students. She explained, “The classroom is a safe space for them [HEP students]. It’s a place where they can step away from prison for two and a half hours. And my job is to protect that space which is really difficult...”

The challenging experiences Participant 21 noted are challenges working with the bureaucracies of education and the DOC, dealing with tough DOC officers, protecting the safe place of the classroom, dealing with a lack of services when students are released from prison, working with insurmountable workloads, the DOC timeline which at times does not gel with the education timeline, and technology, saying that her HEP is “in the dark ages when it comes to technology”.

She also develops challenging experiences, which she described as “being all the access points for students” in an entity that is like running a “mini college”. She explained about leading HEP programs:

It’s like running a university by yourself... You’re responsible for funding that university, for Registrar, the Bursar Office... You are all of the points of access for students. And

that is really, really difficult...I had a teaching load as well and I no longer have the requirement, which is great. But there is no possible way to get all of the work done.

The positive experiences Participant 21 speaks of are seeing students' educational development, building "incredible" relationships with teachers, DOC staff, and students seeing staff positively impacted, some saying of teaching in a HEP, "this is what they thought college would be".

She spoke of the experience and the opportunity to see educational legacy. She described a family member being inspired to get an education because of her uncle's education accomplishments in a maximum-security prison. She also mentioned the positive experience of the students and their dedication to the college. She described one student who "was paroled, but he asked the parole board to let him stay inside [Prison] for a few more months to finish his semester." Further saying, "So that's a big sign that this is working, it does have an impact on people's lives."

For the future of HEP, Participant 21 noted that the Pell Grant process is too cumbersome and needs to change for HEP students, there is a need for better technology, there are sometimes territorial issues amongst HEP that need to discontinue, and that HEP needs to become normalized, using the Texas system as an example where they have an HEP superintendent. Positively, she believes that HEP will return to be like its golden age before the 1994 crime bill. To support this, she noted that there is a bill pending legislation before the federal congress that is pushing for a federal office of prison education.

Participant 22

Participant 22 is a Euro-American female who works in an HEP program in a western state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for six years in a program that is not dependent

on Pell Grants. She has a PhD, and while leading her program she also taught within her program. She was the founder of her program, and it offers certificates.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibit experiences highlighted by the common and current challenges in HEP. Those challenges are highly consistent in the literature review and consistent with the thirty-plus interviews in this study. Ultimately, Participant 22's program was closed by some of these challenges. Those challenges relate to difficulties with the bureaucracies of DOC, and ultimately, the common fear that a majority of HEP leaders have expressed in these studies, which is the fear that in-person higher education programs are being systematically replaced with on-line options that may not fully meet the needs of all of the incarcerated students her program was designed to serve. As we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, there are some students who thrive with on-line educational models—usually the most self-motivated and focused students, those with positive experiences with education in the past. The population of incarcerated students, almost by definition, often does not fall into that demographic. So in-person education is especially necessary for prison classes on all levels.

While she was leading and growing her program, the state DOC department decided to discontinue it. While she was never given a reason, she suspects that they decided to replace in-person volunteer programming completely with the on-line alternative higher education program mentioned above. That program only offers tablet-based courses. She described:

The success or failure of these programs has everything to do with the local administration. Not just the Wardens, but the Deputy Wardens who are in charge of the specific places where you're going to go in. When we started, we had a wonderful, visionary Deputy Warden, who was fully dedicated to the well-being and learning

opportunities of the incarcerated people under her supervision. She really wanted them to succeed when they got out, and she saw us as helping them do so, so she opened every door for us. We developed a strong working relationship with her over the following two years. But then she was rotated out, and we had to start all over again with a new Deputy Warden, who was in turn replaced after a year, and then again. Same was true of the Correction Officers. Some of those people believed in our mission, but some clearly did not, and when that was the case, everything we did became much more difficult. It felt like we had to start all over again from zero. But we kept at it, and over the years, we got some real momentum: four repeat classes on two separate prison yards, workshops, and a number of lectures on all kinds of different topics, often with as many incarcerated people filling the room as the prison administration would allow. And then when Covid hit, the gates closed and we were locked out altogether. And just when we thought the worst of it had passed and we could restart our classes, we got word that our whole program had been closed down.

Participant 22 did contemplate running her program on Pell Grant funds but given the cost of her institution's tuition, her institution decided that the Pell Grant funding would not be financially sufficient to sustain her HEP program.

Participant 22's challenging experiences also highlighted other issues shared by other participants regarding the difficulty in navigating the dual bureaucracies of DOC and higher education. She noted, "It's been challenging trying to navigate these two separate bureaucracies, and they've each got their own rules, and they don't understand one another."

The new mode of talking about prisons and mass incarceration on college campuses revolves around the concept of abolition. On the one hand, this is widely adopted in academic

publications, and is used by the students, faculty, and even administrators who might support our project. Within the prison system, on the other hand, the language of our education mission tends to be couched in a logic of reformism, with the ultimate goal being to reduce recidivism. The interface between those two logical frameworks, which are actually quite at odds with one another, often introduce major friction.

Participant 22 also spoke of challenging experiences dealing with the problem of constant staffing changes in DOC. She said, “they’re constantly cycling in new people, new corrections, officers, new wardens...you can have a great relationship and have a great program. And then somebody new comes on board. And suddenly...all doors are closed.”

When addressing positive experiences in her HEP leadership, she noted that her state’s politics have grown positive towards the potential growth of HEP. Participant 22 expressed a commitment to starting her program again. The main positive experience she spoke of was “working with the men themselves.” She expressed “I have found them so inspiring, it’s just meaningful work.”

On the future of HEP, Participant 22 noted that there needs to be collaboration and partnership with community colleges due to their ability to provide a lower cost for courses. She also mentioned that there is a need for “human interaction” in HEP and against learning that does not have a face-to-face component. To better the HEP model, she believes that HEP needs to offer classes to corrections officers to assist with those challenges and to provide them the same advantages of higher education. Lastly, she noted that HEP needs structural independence to do their work well. She described:

I love working at the prison, but I think it’s really important that higher education faculty maintain their connections to outside colleges and universities, rather than working

directly with prison administration. There are educational authorities on the inside, of course, dedicated to the mission of providing incarcerated folks with English as a Second Language skills where needed, basic literacy, G.E.D. training, that sort of thing. There's also a state-funded program in vocational education, with connections to the local community college; they actually have a campus on the prison site. But because those classes and the people who work there are generally perceived as part of the prison world, they have a different mode of interacting with the students than we do. We bring in something from the outside world, the possibility of a future that might involve college or university. We bring in lecturers who are performing cutting-edge scholarly research; once my students were really excited to tell me that they'd seen someone who had recently given a lecture on the stone sculptures on Easter Island on TV, on the National Geographic channel. Within the prison system itself, on the other hand, there's a whole world of incentives and punishments, and when the education program is part of that world, it gets wrapped up in the carrots and sticks of that life. I like to think that we provided something that wasn't fully incorporated into that incentive logic.

Participant 22 also noted "there needs to be a change in how prison operates." She described:

In this country, over the past 40 years or so we have taken away funding for the institutions that used to care for the mentally ill, the addicted, the helpless and desperate among us. We stopped paying for the social workers, family therapists, addiction specialists, nutritionists, mental health providers, nurses and doctors, who used to staff those institutions. Instead, we built a whole fleet of massive prisons, and we locked millions of people up, and we replaced all those who used to help them with corrections officers who are miserably underpaid and given no training in how to deal with the many

very serious problems that those in their care struggle with. Not surprisingly, many of those C.O.s end up getting pretty traumatized themselves. In my ideal world, we would pay C.O.s to take classes, to learn the many skills that are actually needed to help people who have fallen through the cracks get back on their feet again.

Participant 23

Participant 23 is a Euro-American female who works in an HEP program in an eastern state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for five years in a program that has a 50-year history of operating and is not dependent on Pell Grants. She has a wealth of experience in corrections prior to her HEP leadership. She has a PhD, has taught in normative higher education, and while leading her program, she also continues to teach in her HEP. Her program formerly offered a bachelor's degree and now offers associate's degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study not only not only display experiences of a veteran HEP within the SCP Era but also a unique expertise and competence in HEP due to her 24 years as a correctional officer and leading in prisons prior to her HEP leadership. One area in which she exhibited this prowess of knowledge was in her descriptions of how she is dealing with what the literature indicates as the number one challenge for an HEP leader: the DOC relationship with HEP. She described that given her experience she has a great relationship with DOC, and it allows her to navigate this consistent challenge. She described:

I come at it with my eyes wide open, having twenty-four years of experience working in prisons. There are so many prison education leaders who are just so frustrated by the correctional system, and I think it gets in the way of their work. I understand corrections, and I think that's what makes me a good leader because I truly feel like I have a strong

partnership with [DOC]...when they throw at me roadblocks about why I can't do this. Why I can't do that, I get it, and I've worked with them, and sometimes I work around them. But I'm getting the job done. I understand corrections, and I see a lot of prison education leaders so frustrated by this, and they're alienating their DOC partners when it comes to prison education...[Our] education program is one teeny, tiny bit of a hundred other things that they do. I'm not on the top of the list. I'm not their first priority. I'm one of one hundred other things or a thousand other things that they're doing. So, in other words, I understand my place. I don't have a lot of demands on them. So, I think that is important in terms of really developing a strong partnership. My sense is that DOC and prison education leaders, they are truly my partner, and I am their partner.

When speaking to the leadership she believes in and develops, she noted that HEP leaders should be patient, creative, positively relational, able to see both the educational and DOC side, open-minded, and committed to developing a culturally diverse staff that includes the formerly incarcerated. She also says that HEP leaders must be resourceful "You got to figure out how to deliver a great academic program. In spite of the restrictions".

When speaking about challenging experiences, Participant 23 mentioned that DOC is a challenge to work with because of their lack of appreciation for academic integrity, restrictions on education materials, and as a barrier to research. While not operating a program built on Pell Grants, she fears its possible future because managing HEP is a cumbersome process. She is also bold and honest to speak to an apparent HEP leadership conundrum, which is administering an inferior education model. She gave voice to this by saying:

It would kill me if a student got an inferior education, because it's being offered behind the walls, and I feel like sometimes that happens. And again, the perfect examples are the

limits on academic materials and things like that...Our course is four credits, which means we need three hours of three contact hours per week, and sometimes the most we can get due to prison protocols and schedules is two and a half...The academic integrity is being degraded because of those kinds of limitations.

Of positive experiences, she noted the opportunity to witness student transformation, gratifying and satisfying work, work with “some of the best students I’ve had in my life”, and seeing the impact student education achievement has on their families. Regarding positives, she noted that her correctional officers are offered education on scholarship, and her students get free education without Pell Grants. She also talked about witnessing the safe place of the HEP classroom, noting:

I think they get to experience true freedom...they get to be with each other in a prison classroom that they can’t in other ways in terms of like debating, arguing a point...if a correction officer walks by and sees two guys arguing over something [they are like] “Hey, what’s going on? Let’s break this up. Move on”...but that’s encouraged inside the prisoner classroom. So, I think it brings a certain amount of freedom and just rich, rich thinking and consciousness, and opening your mind...It’s when you’re opening your mind. You get to sort of escape the confines of your environment, and I think that is something that is unique to prison education.

On the future of HEP, Participant 23 spoke to a positive future, believing that because programs have grown to “critical mass” and there is a growth of research “evidence”, the future looks promising, saying “I think it's here to stay.” When speaking of motivating her staff, she concluded with her views of HEP, saying:

Running a prison education program, even though I have a great partnership with the DOC, there are days where I just want to scream. I just want to. But I always say to myself, this work is too important. This work is so important, and it is really my love...

Participant 24

Participant 24 is a Euro-American female who works in an HEP program in a midwestern state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for many years and works with an original SCP program. Participant 24 has a master's degree and is in ABD status with her doctoral degree. Her program is a part of the SCP and offers certificates.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study display experiences of an educator who is an HEP veteran in a program that is a "second chance" institution that is ideally and mission-matched for HEP. Her experiences are also defined by a leadership structure that is committed to HEP, but at the same time there is no formal HEP leadership structure. Consequently, management of the program falls on Participant 24 to lead mostly because she is the most experienced with HEP. Of this, she described the sentiment of her leadership toward her college's HEP program, "You should just be in charge of this...No, I'm not, I'm just the one who's been here the longest that knows some of the different steps we have to take."

When describing leadership that is ideal for HEP, Participant 24 noted the need for a leader that is consistent with communication on all levels with DOC and higher education administration, and always has ongoing plans, especially if the HEP program is dependent upon Pell Grant funds. She also believes that an HEP program should have "good systems".

When speaking about challenging experiences, Participant 24 noted, the impact of Covid-19. She also referred to her challenging leadership structure, asking who is responsible for the

leadership of HEP and identifying who is the lead person within DOC education staff and higher education staff to administer the program. She mentioned that her HEP program had great teamwork initially, and then assumptions were made that hurt segments of managing her program. Participant 24 also finds herself in the place of “keeping it fresh” and motivating and advocating for her HEP program. She also noted an example of where there was an issue with a student grievance process that wasn’t handled correctly.

Coupled with that, she mentioned trying to figure out systems without electronics and figuring out how many staff are needed for admission, registration, and financial aid. The financial part of HEP is also challenging due to assuring that HEP courses equate with allotted Pell Grant funds and because of working with students who have debt from other institutions.

The positive experiences Participant 24 addressed are seeing her students that come back after release from prison to finish their degree at her college. She also noted a positive experience when the college president attended an HEP student graduation.

Participant 24 is optimistic about the future of HEP because she believes it is a “great opportunity” because HEP fits their mission. She feels that there needs to be more challenge with DOC to provide quality HEP, and there is a need to continue to “challenge on how we deliver support services”. She is passionate about HEP and advocates for its future. She described this:

At times I have people say to me, why are we doing this? We're giving people a free ride that hurt our society. Blah blah blah! And it’s like well, the difference for me is that we need to look at people as individuals. People make choices that they might not make if their lives have been different, and the best thing that we can do is have people be productive. So, how is that a problem? I don’t know...we need to help them be ready to get out. That’s our job...

Participant 25

Participant 25 is a Euro-American female who works in an HEP program in a midwestern state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for many years, which includes running an Inside-Out Program, two male programs, and one female program. She cofounded all of these HEP programs. She has taught in normative higher education before HEP and teaches in her current program. Participant 25 has a PhD and leads a program that is a part of the SCP. Her program offers associate's degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study highlight experiences of a veteran educator who is a trailblazer in HEP and a professional who is well-versed in all aspects of HEP. She is guided by a philosophy of providing “strong and intensive liberal arts education” that is transformative and with a perspective as an individual that was formerly incarcerated and positively influenced by an educator while incarcerated.

In describing leadership in HEP, Participant 25 mentioned how “frantic” the work can be. She conferred with the research and previous participants that HEP work demands that you wear many hats in leadership, different from other normative higher education experiences. She shared sentiments of other participants, saying, “it’s too much for one person” and reverberated a consistent view of HEP and its relative newness and unpredictable nature for a majority of HEP leaders, “it’s a new role and I’m the guinea pig”.

The challenging experiences Participant 25 spoke to address experiences in dealing with COVID-19 and the challenging environment and the “head-butting” that goes on when working with DOC culture. Concerning DOC challenges, she mentioned how DOC will censor some education, specifically pointing to an example where DOC took down student assignments/displays on human anatomy while the class was taking place. This includes DOC

attitudes that reflect the belief that HEP is a privilege—in contrast to her program philosophy, which sees it as a right—and DOC wanting her HEP program to help them leverage HEP to incentivize behavioral modification. She explained:

Well, there's so many things built into it that I've learned over the years. One is that they have this expectation that people in prison, anything they get they should be extremely thankful for because they shouldn't really get anything. They don't deserve anything, so that's kind of one part of it. And then there's...this focus on small petty things as being monumentally important and reflective of somebody's character...And then I guess there is just the assumption that all of them are manipulative and deceptive. Well, they literally tell you that when you have to do the [orientation] trainings...It's so hard to get them to reconsider or think of people differently...

The positive experiences Participant 25 noted are how different the HEP student is compared to the student in normative higher education, saying and describing how they are “So incredibly engaged”. She also said it's exciting and satisfying to see her students connect with others through the educational process and how that enlightens the humanization of the student. She said seeing people's understanding of the incarcerated change is “one of the best things for me that I see happening as a director”.

She also noted the encouraging dynamic of seeing students transform as a positive experience. She described:

Many of them have, because of the lives that they have lived, picture of themselves as being people who aren't quite capable of big things. And you know...[quoting the student] “that'll probably never happen for me like” Once they're finished with that class.

They're just like, "Wow! Ha! I did all of this stuff. I did all this work that I thought I would never be able to do. And now my vocabulary has like exploded into it."

To highlight this, she described an experience with one of her students:

There is [one student] who I remember going in the first day doing the information session...she came up to me afterwards. She said "I'm not very smart, but I will work really hard." And I said I bet you're way smarter than you think you are...I was just there a couple of weeks ago [after two years of coursework], and she said to me..."I gotta tell you. It dawned on me the other day" (talking to her daughter on the phone) and she said, "I realized, as I was talking, that I had so many more words to use...There's so many things about my daughter that I understand now...I just feel like my mind has just expanded so much. I understand so much more about myself and the world, and I can speak Spanish"...she started crying as she was telling me how she said, "You just have no idea how much it means to me because I never saw myself as someone who would ever go to college"...Now she's just got so much confidence, so much confidence, and that just I love, that feeling that just feels so good to see people growing. It's like I have this great position where I can see the people growing in these huge ways...

Participant 25 is positive about the future, saying it's "fabulous" and she's "very happy" about the growth of Pell Grant for prisons coming in 2023. But she fears that educational predators coming into HEP and charging "as much as they can" and providing "as little as they can" is "concerning" and it makes her "nervous". Participant 25 ended her interview by noting that she was formerly incarcerated and that if it were not for higher education she would not be where she is today. She noted of her experience in prison, "It was Education Director actually at the facility

who I worked as her assistant for a little while, and she encouraged me to go to college, and I never thought I would think of doing until she said that.”

Participant 26

Participant 26 is a Euro-American female who works in an HEP program in an eastern state of America. Her college has been in HEP for over twelve years; she has been in HEP work for three years and has overseen her HEP program for two years. She has a PhD and teaches in normative higher education while teaching in and leading her HEP. Her program offers associate’s and bachelor’s degrees and is an original member of the SCP.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study speak to the need of an ethic or competence in being flexible as an HEP leader. She described about HEP and flexibility, “the need for flexibility at the same time adhering to really rigid structures is the thing that’s most unique about teaching in the prisons.” She also described this as being a leader with a “strong anchor” in dealing with the DOC culture HEP is housed in. She explains:

Flexibility is a huge thing. I know. I’ve said that before, so I feel a little bit about harping on it. But if you are somebody who has to have everything cut and dried, and you need to know what’s coming next, it’s not going to be a good fit. You have to be able to roll with it and you also have to be somebody who has a pretty strong anchor and is willing to take instruction from those in the correctional setting. You know, things that you may not think are a big deal, a student comes in and says, “hey, I don't have my pencil”, [HEP leaders/teachers] loaning them one. There’s a process within the prison role. Use the process. You're a guest in that house. Do what the processes are so that you don't become part of the problem.

She also believes that HEP leaders should be believers in redemption and able to shift their focus while not causing problems. She also mentioned that HEP leaders need to be purpose-driven in lieu of the various challenges that HEP brings, “I think if you know where you’re going, or you know what you’re trying to do. If there’s a sense of purpose to your work, it makes a lot of things that would otherwise be intolerable, tolerable.”

The challenging experiences Participant 26 described were working with prison staff that do not believe in HEP. She also spoke about working with university staff that do not believe in HEP. COVID-19 was another challenging experience especially in how it was disturbing to the educational process.

The positive experiences she spoke about were how the HEP student is “better” than the normative higher education student, saying, “they are some of the best students we have in our university.” To explain the difference in students, she mentioned a situation in which there was a delay in students getting their grades, and one student complained because he couldn’t send his grades home to his family, “as his way of showing them how hard he’s working, and how much he’s trying to turn his life around”. She also is encouraged by how her students continue their education outside of prison, calling it “really cool” to see those students attain degrees. She also spoke to having a great staff, “I’m really very lucky that we have a lot of extremely good teachers. These are some of our best university-wide teachers who are teaching in the program.”

On the future of HEP, Participant 26 mentioned that she is concerned about the future predators that might be attracted to HEP with the growth of Pell Grants. She also “anxiously” awaits the updated rules for programs seeking continued Pell Grant access and that are already engaged in SCP, and how this will impact her program, which is already following many of the potential and proposed new regulations.

Participant 27

Participant 27 is a Euro-American male who works in an HEP program in an eastern state of America. He has been in HEP work for six years and in HEP leadership for three years. He has taught in normative higher education prior to his HEP leadership. Participant 27 has a PhD and leads in a program that is not a part of the SCP. His program offers students associate's degrees. Participant 27 also was an original founder of his current program.

He describes that HEP for him is a “calling” and “this is my jam”. This was motivated by his early work with students, seeing their persistence and resilience. He described one student who had his family send him five pages of a research article at a time from the outside of prison so that he could finish a course assignment as an example of what inspired him to this work. He was careful not to fetishize this but noted it was “impressive” and the kind of dynamic that “drove” him into HEP.

The textual descriptions or the essence of his HEP experiences as they relate to this study highlight experiences of an HEP administrator competently sensitive to the bigger picture of HEP in the criminal justice system and its historic framework in American society. He also spoke with a sensitivity not to “exoticize” the plight of the HEP experience, with a passion for building and providing a normalized higher education environment. He also looks at his leadership with a “begin with the end in mind” type of philosophy in seeking to build a model of HEP that topples the historic negatives of the prison industrial complex and its linkage to the necessity of HEP. Through this type of mindset, Participant 27 is more passionate about system transformation than student transformation. He explained:

On the topic of transformation...we often say in our program that the most transformative thing that's happening in college and prison, it's not necessarily the transformation for the

students, it's the transformation for the institution. The University going from an institution that doesn't have their hand in this work, to one that is fully invested and broadening its vision of what education is, and who education is for, that is transformative. What the students are going through, we shouldn't say that the student's experience in our classes is any more transformative than for the outside students. I don't want to exoticize their experience by saying like, "well, students on the outside, they just go through and get their degree. But for students on the inside, it's transformative!" It can feel that way sometimes, and occasionally I'll use that rhetoric when I need to. But I do think that transforming institutions, in the long run, is the way to de-carcerate and achieve abolition...One student at a time is good, one institution at a time is also really good and maybe even better.

Participant 27 believes that HEP leaders should be leaders that can adapt, "code-switch", build partnerships and alliances, be like a "Swiss Army Knife" or "jack of all trades", hustle, be able to "build the bus while you are driving it", work hard and "able to put in the hours and try and fail, and get up again", be a risk taker, persistent and pushing, and able to build diplomacy. He also spoke to being able to navigate and understand the "cultural hump" with education in a carceral environment. He described this with a metaphor, "College in prison often feels like an organ transplant, that the body of the prison is like rejecting college doesn't fit within the carceral logic."

He further developed that the HEP leaders have to be able to work with students with educational deficits and build them to college-level students. He described this dynamic by noting:

Many of our students on the inside have visible, palpable deficits in their prior educational experience that they are working to overcome. They haven't necessarily been acculturated yet into the formal structures of higher education...I consider my own phenomenological bias. I grew up middle class...Everyone in my high school graduating class went to college...When I look at what our students on the inside don't have and the tools they don't have, and I look at like how much work it's going to take to give them what many campus students...start with...it's a heavy lift... It points to structural deficiencies in our primary and secondary education system that our students on the inside don't have all the resources they need when they start our program...

He mentioned the challenges of working with DOC bureaucracies and educational bureaucracies by noting that it should be understood that both are built with similar hierarchical frameworks and have their own systems and “nomenclature”, “not speaking the same language necessarily”. Concerning that, the HEP leader has to be a translator between both of them:

And so, there's ways in which the university and the prison, they don't speak the same language necessarily; but, like the language they do speak, have the same structure. If that makes sense. And so often what I have to do as a prison and education administrator is...translate between those languages...

The challenging experiences Participant 27 spoke to are the “dispiriting” and unpredictable DOC scheduling, student dismissals, and student transfers that take students out of programming prematurely. He also said that working with DOC is a challenging experience, saying that “prison administration is very, very difficult”. He described that reaching the greater goals of HEP with DOC can be challenging due to the need to compromise and settle for small gains because the greater concepts of higher education are too hard to understand within DOC culture.

The infamous technology challenge is additionally referenced by Participant 27 in how it can hinder educational research.

In addition to the previous challenges, Participant 27 spoke to the rare but real challenges of working with difficult students. He developed this reality unlike any of the participants in this study, acknowledging that he has dealt with “a bit of a hustle” by students, but he understands the systems that foster the need for their attempt to hustle and the other survival tactics that are due to the “extreme deprivation” his students have and do experience in DOC environments. He said, “it's hard to navigate those situations”, managing DOC philosophy that will hinder HEP and punish the student from HEP and also break down trust. He faces this difficult experience by working through such scenarios by describing his posture towards such students:

What I want to tell this student face to face...don't put me in a situation where I have to sort of act out the sort of effect of distrust that the prison expects me to have about you. I don't want that, you don't want that from me...Let's draw clear lines and I'll stay on this side, and you stay on that side. Not because we don't see each other as humans, but because of the trouble that can result because the system is keeping both of us in place. The trouble that can result is so not worth the minor benefit...I don't like being put in situations like that. It's rare. It's very rare, but it's distressing.

The positive experiences Participant 27 described are how much better engaged the HEP student is in their education compared to students within normative higher education. He also spoke of the positive experience of working with students when they come back to his HEP program after what can be unfortunate transfers and dismissals of a student's program within the DOC progress.

Participant 27 is cautiously optimistic about the future of HEP saying that Pell Grant growth will be “hugely valuable” and breed an “amazing golden era” of HEP. He fears predators coming into HEP due to increased funding. His “utopian” vision of the future of HEP is that “it won’t exist because there won’t be prisons, as we know them now.” Realistically, however, he hopes that the future of HEP will develop into structures where “prisons are an extension of the college campus”, as colleges have various campuses, and HEP will be a campus and extension of the normative higher education institution.

Participant 28

Participant 28 is an African-American female who works in an HEP program in a northwestern state of America. She has been in HEP work for seven years and specifically leadership for five years. She runs two female facilities that have been in the SCP since 2016. Her program is also supported by state grants. She has a PhD. She has taught in and has served as director and dean of her program. Her program offers up to associate’s degrees. She worked in normative higher education prior to working in HEP.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibit experiences highlighted by looking at HEP from a feminine perspective, respecting the disparate marginalized groups that frequent the criminal justice system, and running a program philosophy based on generational restoration and transformation. Participant 28 has always had a passion for marginalized groups and has brought that strength to her practice. She has experienced how female programs do not get the same support as male HEP programs, is passionate, and advocates that female HEP is equal to that of male HEP programs. She also understands the unique generational aspect of women in prisons and how HEP changes the

potential negativity of being incarcerated. She noted about marginalization and the idea of generational impact:

One of the things that I really thought about since I've been here is this idea of generational restoration...especially when I'm talking about women because women, they leave here, they've got kids to raise...We have babies on site. So, they have kids. So, to me, this isn't just about kind of elevating a person. It's about bouncing off those historical things that have put women in here [prison]. All of them have very traumatized educational experiences and it's about putting them in a position where they not only can be successful for themselves but that they pull the kids with them, you know, so it's generational. That's what I mean when I say generational, it's not just about this one person. It's about the impact that that one person's success has on their family, their kids, the next generation, their communities by extension.

She continued this by referring to the marginalization of women's HEP programs:

I think that is something that is a very powerful thing that's being overlooked...Women are a minority in the prison world but the problem with that is that they get overlooked. They get pulled into the idea of what works in prison. But that's a male model...there can't be one more instance where women are ignored. We continue to see the consequences of doing that in our society. But we don't learn the lesson...So, being able to kind of spark that belief itself, because that's what we see...women who did know they could be leaders, who are mentors, who are excelling in ways that they never thought they could. And that's important because it's not just the academics, it's about transforming the way someone sees themselves and how they imagine their future.

Participant 28 described her leadership experiences in various ways, noting replicating the normative higher education experience in HEP, the need to be able to lead in unpredictable logistics, being a professional role model for the dearth of African American presence in HEP, and assuring quality staff given the uniqueness of the DOC environment. She also describes HEP leadership as being on a cliff. She explained:

we're standing on a cliff and what happens is throughout a couple of months you find yourself on the edge of that cliff. And you get to the edge of that cliff, and just the smallest thing just ruins your day. And you go home, and you, you rant and rail, and you, you know, you do what you gotta do to kind of get to that moment. And then you have to reset, focus in on why I'm here and why I think this is important and why I think it's necessary to have someone here who's advocating for the students, and I feel that me, my team, that's what we're doing here. We're advocating for our students. So, we have to kind of figure out a way to reset and back up away from the edge of that cliff...But three months later you find yourself at the end of that cliff again, because there are so many pressures and frustration...

Other challenging experiences Participant 28 mentions are adjustment to DOC logistics, fighting for equality of HEP for women students, and dealing with stakeholders that don't understand HEP.

The positive experiences she spoke about are working with great staff, being a minority in her job giving her more freedom, her upbringing that prepared her for this work, technology where her students have laptops, and being a veteran leader, which gives perspective. She also noted that she enjoys the transformative moment when a student finds her power.

On the future of HEP, Participant 28 noted that the growth of the Pell Grant will help HEP stay solid as a growing movement. However, she is fearful if not run well it could cause problems. She commented there are unknowns about how the process will look when the FASFA Simplification Act takes hold in 2023, and she finds that “disconcerting”. She believes there needs to be management of the new Pell Grant that oversees what programs can access it, as well as oversight on who actually manages the Pell Grant process. She said, “Pell is going to make us ask a lot of new questions about how corrections education is done, a lot of new questions. And that may require us to start thinking about different ways of leadership...”

Participant 29

Participant 29 is a Euro-American female working in an HEP program in an eastern state of America. Her program is a part of a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). She has been in HEP work for a decade and leadership for two years in programming that is not dependent on Pell Grants. She has a PhD and ran an Inside-Out program. She is both an instructor in HEP and in normative higher education. Her programming works toward all levels of higher education degrees including associate’s, bachelor’s, and graduate levels. She is also a trailblazer, having started her program with another colleague.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study display a leader with a firm grip on HEP from a sociological and criminal justice perspective. Many of her experiences and comments towards HEP came from a level of depth in sociological systems and how criminal justice and HEP fit into those systems. She also is a leader that has had recent challenges with the future of her program, thus her experiences exhibited a practical view of HEP and its structural challenges and what it takes to sustain a program long-term. She

also looks at HEP from a diverse perspective, as she has various levels of students in her program, including those with life sentences.

Participant 29 admitted to bringing her personal past into her work in HEP. She noted that her international familial upbringing around non-American disparate groups impacted her view of life and injustice and influenced her into HEP and an understanding of HEP. She said that since an early age she was “always motivated around justice issues” and this impacts her perspectives on HEP. She also noted growing up within these various frameworks while battling depression, which made her a person who wanted to succeed sometimes out of spite and to overcome challenges.

She had various views on how to manage and sustain HEP. One view revolved around a question that grew from a discussion on HEP and the criminal justice cultural disparities problem. She asked, “Can you truly decouple retribution and rehabilitation?” She answered the question by noting “sometimes”, and it depends on who is leading and the particular dynamics of the situation. Also, in a conversation about the unpredictability and lack of Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) in HEP, she noted that to truly reach EBP, HEP leaders need to define what it is first. Within this conversation and based on the literature and participant interviews, this researcher likened HEP in a general and collective construct to “Jello”; in response Participant 29 noted:

So that makes sense. and on one hand, I kind of agree with you, but I’m going to push back and be a little critical in the analogy. Right? I would say that “Jello” has more form and consistency in education in prisons. Okay? And so, at best we may have a jelly.

Many of her foundational views were displayed when she described the HEP leadership experience. She described that the HEP leader needs to be proximate, authentic, balanced,

empathetic, skilled in how to “package” HEP for its promotion, a leader with social capital, promoting the idea of the formerly incarcerated becoming HEP leaders, and having a “cool head” when dealing with the “emotional labor of this work”.

She also spoke to the idea that HEP should be about a depth of teaching that is sometimes challenged in carceral environments. She noted that when teaching on social justice issues such as Black Lives Matter, prison abolition, racial disparities in criminal justice, and racism she has to be strategic but nonetheless forthright in her instruction. Of this, she noted the greater fears of DOC will be realized without true education:

I can't say we're not going to talk about that. That is not what education is about. It's about talking about things in a way to improve understanding. You can't say that my talking about history and trying to bring about complex understanding is going to cause a riot. Misunderstanding will cause a riot.

Participant 29 also talked about what the research and other participant interviews developed in that HEP leaders' specialty is that they lead in unpredictability and with few resources. She repeated a common HEP leader comment referred to in different ways from new and veteran leaders, “I don't know like I'm learning as I go. Me and my colleagues have joked, it's like moving a wagon down the road before it's built.”

In another way she pushed back on this HEP leader skillset, noting while it's “flattering”, it should be normative, and others need to “hurry up and catch up”. She promotes an HEP leadership style with good coalitions and social capital, saying that a “one-man-band” idea as not realistic:

I love the idea of like, is it Dick Van Dyke and Mary Poppins when he's got like you know, all the symbols, and he's like the one-man-band. I love that idea, and I've always

joked like oh, that's what I'm going to be when I grow up. But it's not realistic. We need a round table, and lots of different people at the table with different social capital, different life, experience, and perspectives.

When referring to challenging experiences, Participant 29 spoke about the financial challenges to sustain her program and grappling with the best road forward after her program was stalled. With this, she described how higher education bureaucracy is challenging. She also talked about working with DOC, specifically how changes in wardens can impact program efficacy.

When speaking about positive experiences, Participant 29 referred back to her professional philosophy of leading against the odds for success for her students and program. She enjoys leading uphill but engages in collaboration and adapting for success. She likes to "succeed as an f--you" and said, "Yeah, the middle finger is just an added bonus, it's the sugar on top sometimes." She also enjoys how the HEP student is a better student to work with and compared that to how it's hard to motivate normative students to attend class, but the HEP student classroom is a coveted safe place of escape for students.

On the future of HEP, Participant 29 spoke to the need for student-centered education in meeting students "where they are". She also talked about being careful about uniformity in HEP noting, "rising tides raise all ships, haven't taken the time to fill the holes in some of those ships." She referred to her own experience in that HEP can't be in the hands of one bureaucracy and that coalitions need to be built. While supportive of Pell Grant availability and growth, like her other colleagues, she fears predatory schools getting into HEP education. She also fears that the opening of Pell Grant access for HEP and incarcerated students might continue the same structures that hold people back from success in society currently. She explained:

So, I think in the next couple of years there is going to be a lot of talk around it [the growth of HEP adjacent to the opening of Pell Grants in 2023], and initiatives started, and a lot of grandstanding and photo ops. And then, when the cameras go away and the fanfare dies down it's going to be the same people left that we're already doing the work before the money and the attention came about...I'm very worried that once Pell Grants become more accessible, we are now going to have a new form of...not a New Jim Crow, but we're going to have a new form of debtors prison.

In describing her professional passion and the HEP experience, she said of her commitment to HEP amid its various challenges:

I can't just walk away...it's just they are incredible, brilliant people that are locked up in there, and not to say that they all are, right, but people have a lot more potential than we give them credit for, and I think that counts for us as well. And like we just have to like water each other's garden sometimes.

Participant 30

Participant 30 is a Euro-American female who works in an HEP program in an eastern state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for just under two years and her expertise focuses on development for her HEP. Prior to HEP work, she was in the higher education field for 25 years. Participant 30 has a JD with prior lawyer experience. Her program offers HEP up to a bachelor's degree and is minimally dependent on Pell Grants.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study display an HEP leader that comes to this work with strength in prior competent work in higher education and development but a newness to HEP that brings fresh perspective on HEP leadership. Participant 30 was candid about what she saw as challenging experiences, referring to

the infamous challenges working within DOC, to positive experiences about HEP, saying of HEP, “this is literally God’s work”.

She had various thoughts on what makes a quality HEP leader, noting that an HEP leader should have the qualities of being a “phenomenal manager”, be well-versed in higher education systems, be a good connector and builder of the various HEP stakeholders, have patience, have a high premium on education first and reducing recidivism second, be mission-driven, be able to professionally “code-switch” to speak to different audiences, be understanding of DOC’s predominance, be tough-skinned professionally to deal with a challenging field of work, be a client advocate, and be able to keep the peace with the obvious realities of the “rigged system” determined by those who consistently frequent prisons: the minority and the poor. She also noted the need to be versatile with the unpredictability of working in HEP, saying:

You have a lot of bosses that you have to keep happy...Everyone is coming from a different perspective, and you have to understand and respect that perspective. You don’t have to agree with it, but you have to understand it, and you have to be able to manage it...you have to be able to live with a high level of ambiguity.

The challenging experiences Participant 30 spoke to revolve around working in a DOC environment. She noted the challenge that dynamics are different from prison to prison, and leaders must adapt to each. Technology is a challenge, noting how they copy student-requested research articles outside of prison and then bring them back to prison for students. She also spoke to dealing with fluctuating rules day-to-day and scheduling conflicts.

The positive experiences Participant 30 highlights are growing bipartisan support for HEP, her HEP program being academically equal to normative higher education standards, and

working with “pay-it-forward” types of the alumni. She also boasted about how her HEP is educating and creating a pipeline of leadership for the future of the HEP workforce.

On the future of HEP, she mentioned a fear of predators getting into HEP as the Pell Grant process grows. She also has a bigger picture view on how to improve HEP and the future of HEP, noting that the education systems of America are failing, and if they begin to succeed, HEP will also succeed because her students are a product of failing US education. She synopsized that HEP is like the puzzle game Rubik's Cube:

I think everybody wants to solve the problem. So, I think we will solve the problem. But It's like a Rubik's Cube, okay, if we do this, then we have to do this testing and turning and figuring...all of these things are solvable.

Participant 31

Participant 31 is a Euro-American female who works in an HEP program in a western state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for many years and runs a college that is not dependent on Pell Grants. She has taught in normative higher education prior to her HEP leadership; however, she has also taught in HEP programming while being in HEP leadership for the majority of her career. Participant 31 has a PhD and leads a program that works exclusively with prison students, noting, “the prison is our campus”. Her program offers bachelor's degrees.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study highlight experiences of a seasoned HEP administrator who has professional experiences from volunteering, trailblazing, birthing, beginning, and full maturation of a premier HEP college. Coupled with that, she is a systems-oriented thinker and has a larger perspective of criminal justice reform and societal dynamics that feed into prisonization, education, and HEP. Her experiences are also highlighted by what motivates her leadership. Of that she noted that the

inequities seen in HEP and the full context of the criminal justice system motivate her, noting, “inequity irritates the crap out of me” and this “drives” her to do her work.

Student-centered HEP is a collective ideal of where Participants 31 experiences emanate. She expounded on this:

It’s so interesting, because I think for a long time, I thought there was such a thing as sort of an education mindset that would characterize any educational institution or system. And what I’ve realized now...I think there are people who it’s not just that they think about education, or they’re responsible for education but they think from the standpoint of the students and of the students’ educational needs. So not just that they think learning is good or education, but that they understand that for education to be effective it has to be kind of crafted or designed and administered with the needs of the individual student in mind...I used to think there’s education and then there’s corrections and now what I realized it’s really a spectrum that goes from one end of the spectrum that recognizes the individual student, the individual incarcerated person as a human with particular educational needs. And then, the other end of the spectrum is pure bureaucracy. It really sees the students or the prisoner as a kind of widget, it’s part of an assembly line that has to be somehow managed or abated. And what I’ve noticed is that in educational bureaucracies, educational institutions that are driven by a bureaucratic mindset are often very similar to corrections, not necessarily that different...I feel like the educational philosophy that we are driven by and kind of guided by, and what HEP should be guided by is really that our primary commitment and responsibility is to understand every student as an individual and ensuring that their educational experience is genuinely responsive to their particular needs.

Other ideals that describe her leadership experiences are the needs for HEP leadership to be “principle-driven”, guarded against “demonizing anybody” or the various stakeholders in managing HEP, understand inclusivity, human with the educational need, and able to work in unpredictability. She also spoke to partnering with DOC, noting “the Warden’s got to be okay with you or you’re doomed.” She also spoke to an HEP leader that understands the financial piece of HEP and knows how to “generate and preserve...financial independence” because it “will serve you [the HEP program] incredibly...the more beholden you are politics or anything, the harder it is to ultimately live out the values that you set out to fulfill.”

The challenging experience Participant 31 spoke to are difficulties dealing with DOC environment, saying, “It’s like trying to weld under water”. She also spoke of technology, inequity with criminal justice, the “emotional tax” that HEP can create on staff, Pell Grants funding that isn’t worth what it used to be in the sense of how many courses it can fund, and the negatives of the growing and promising SCP movement that failed to consider the sustainability needs of HEP.

Above these things, she noted that fundraising is the biggest challenging experience in HEP leadership. In this, she used a rhetorical question to bolster the idea of being able to be student-centered through achieving financial independence, “How do we get philanthropy to help us cut through all this red-tape...If you fund these things privately, you don’t have to have these arguments about what they deserve, right? You just do it. You just do it.”

In regard to positive experiences, Participant 31 noted the joy of witnessing student educational growth despite the challenging environment to receive a higher education. She described this main positive experience juxtaposed with the inequalities of the American criminal justice and educational systems:

The joy of just witnessing the students' experience of the work, and of the field. That's the biggest piece. It's the excitement of the individual...It's not just their gratitude, but what they do with it... It's not just the positive experiences that drives me, but it's just the awareness of the brutality of the current away things are laid out...understanding where people come from, what they've been through. And then, seeing their excitement and their gratitude given the opportunity. I just think, Wait! This is crazy. Somebody's got to do something...

Participant 31 said she is "rabidly optimistic" about the future of HEP. She believes that HEP should strive for more than the "it's better than nothing" philosophy. She also believes while the community college structure is good for HEP, it should not be solely relying on Pell Grants funds, and if so, it will find itself beholden to the funding and the predatory in its practices (much like the feared private predatory schools seeking HEP funds). She also believes that there needs to be greater accountability of HEP. Ultimately, she thinks the Pell Grant model is not the best, and HEP should be about free education. With the growth of HEP, she noted a lack of sustainability of quality student-centered education and suggested that "alternative models" need to be built to exhibit a better way of running HEPs. She also believes the movement should build on "stories about the impact" of HEP to "incentivize" its growth.

Lastly, Participant 31 brings perspective to HEP and to the deeper challenges it faces in its opposition by noting larger societal issues that need to improve the plight of HEP. She explained:

I think the vindictiveness has its root in grief and envy. I think that when we solve the problem, when we get a handle on the fact that in the United States higher education is a luxury, it is a privilege. If we can handle on that, we're going to get a handle on the

prison system. But right now, they are [opposers to HEP] right. It isn't fair right? So, in other words what I think is that life in the United States is terribly unfair and I think that prisoners and prisons have become the sort of dumping ground. Not just that the people we fail, but of all our rage and resentment, the bitterness, the grief...when people hate incarcerated people without even knowing them usually they're telling you a story about what their own lives have been like directly or indirectly...what's coming up our old feelings that have absolutely nothing to do with the people inside [prison]...until we start taking that seriously and start listening to average citizens...Until we really listening and asking them, Why are you so angry...I used to hate the people that hated us, but now I just feel like my job is to love them unconditionally, and to try to understand them and try to help them find an outlet for what it is they're really trying to say...so I feel hopeless at times, in the moment, but I actually think...no, no, we just have some serious problems to solve and to confront and then nothing's hopeless.

Participant 32

Participant 32 is a Euro-American female who works in an HEP program in a midwestern state of America. She has been in HEP leadership for five years and before HEP work had a career in normative higher education. She has a PhD and teaches in her HEP program while leading the program as well. Participant 32 was motivated to go into HEP work through the intellectual inspiration of the article, *On the Uses of a Liberal Education: As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor*. She was also motivated to go into HEP work due to personal motivations from seeing a family member go through the criminal justice system unjustly, while she or immediate her family had never experienced the criminal justice system. Participant 32 is also a trailblazer, having started her program with two other education colleagues.

The textual descriptions or the essence of her HEP experiences as they relate to this study exhibit a veteran in HEP leadership who views HEP from a positive and negative experiential way while expounding on competent views, ideals, and practices of HEP. She also emphasized the experience and need for “community” for successful HEP.

When speaking of leadership qualities, she noted the need for being a consistent student, persistent, relational, flexible, a team player, having the necessary soft skills to lead not only with knowledge but socially mobility, visionary beyond Pell Grants, having a problem-solving approach, and committed to the same level of education that’s within normative higher education. She also spoke to the idea of being sacrificial in choosing what values to set aside for the greater good of a HEP program, “...we work in prison. Choose the value you’re going to compromise. We’re all going to compromise our values in some way.”

Coupled with being sacrificial, she also emphasized the necessity of “perspective-taking” as an HEP leader. She explained and used the context of the abolitionist movement to abolish prisons:

I have to bite my tongue all the time...day to day I have to use constantly perspective...know your audience, and just get over yourself...Anyone who’s like, you have to be abolitionist in a particular way...I’m an abolitionist in the way that I am getting in [the prison]. I’m getting inside. And some people who just want to pound the gavel or whatever they’re not getting inside, and the people are in there who I care about...That’s who we care about, our students and this education.

A large part of the theme that Participant 32 spoke to was the idea of creating or maintaining community in HEP and among its various stakeholders. In responding to an idea of recidivism being overemphasized in some HEP debates, she described:

In my core, I believe that we are in a community of people who have different values and that we have an audience and that it's respectful to the audience to speak to them as if we see them. So, I think we're at our peril if higher ed practitioners only speak to our own values...You don't build something by disrespecting the people who can help you build it. You don't have to agree with them, but you have to affirm their humanity...

The challenging experiences Participant 32 spoke to are the “irritating” lack of unity that is sometimes in the HEP movement, DOC challenges, technology being a “massive problem”, COVID-19, and barriers with state regulations. She also expounded on the challenge of dealing with higher education and DOC bureaucracies together and defined this experience as the following:

It's where an open system, and a system that aspires to be as open as possible [higher education], meets a closed system, a system that aspires to be as closed as possible [DOC]. And it's just absolutely the distrust, the suspicion...All the things that I've been taught to do well, and problem solve are the very things that are looked upon with suspicion...So it's onerous, the systems are onerous. So really, a 180 degrees, and I mean and it's not just like a different set of rules... I said this before, but I just sort of can't wrap my head around it because it's really true that the things that are good about what I do, like my competence...my optimism, or my belief in humanity...all of the things that I feel like our assets in this world [higher education] work against you in this world [DOC]. Or the people who are built making this want me to hate my students or not hate them, maybe not hate them, fear them.

The positive experiences Participant 32 noted are working in the beautiful space of the HEP classroom which she describes as hard to get to via the various HEP challenges but once there it

is a thriving space, likened to “flowers blooming”. She also spoke about the great support she has from her host college, the great teamwork of her HEP, mentors that helps her in building her HEP, faculty that “love” the work, and statewide support for HEP that is getting better. She also spoke to her fondness for HEP, saying, “it’s the most important work I’ve ever done.”

Concerning the future of HEP, Participant 32 said that she has a positive outlook on its future, noting, “we are in slightly better times”. She believes that Pell Grants will assist with expanding “high-quality education” and allow faculty to make HEP a part of the faculty load. She advises that HEP programs should not be solely dependent on Pell Grant funds, as they are short of what many colleges cost in current times. She concluded on the various dynamics of running an HEP by noting, “there’s so many things to fix, all I can do is make a really, really good classroom situation...”.

Participant 33

Participant 33 is a Euro-American female HEP leader from a midwestern American state. She has been in education for 30 years and correctional education for 15 years. She recently became an HEP administrator with DOC. She has a EdD and has taught and led in various educational arenas. Her administration covers many programs, which offer up to bachelor’s degrees.

The essence of Participant 33’s textual experiences revolved around an accomplished leader and veteran leader who has led HEP from inside of the structures of DOC, only employed as a DOC staff and administrator. Her experiences also reflect a leadership style that demands the ability to collaborate within operational systems and with the different people who navigate those systems.

One area she spoke of is that HEP leaders must understand the needed commitment and collaboration with DOC, saying, “If you do not have commitment at the highest levels within the DOC for education and specifically for higher education, it’s not going to work.” While mentioning this, Participant 33, being a lifelong educator, was open to the idea of change but emphasized that “If you don’t recognize how all of these parts work together and respect how all of these parts work together, it’s going to be really hard to really make change within the DOC.” She also stressed:

The way to make those kinds of changes are through collaboration...safety and security is always going to be number one in a prison system, that's all there is to it. We have to make sure that not only our staff stay safe, but also the incarcerated persons who are, it's our job to protect and keep safe. And so there are certain restrictions that have to be in place, and there are certain security measures that have to be in place. And so it's always that challenge of how do you find that balance of maybe looking at how some of those restrictions can be adjusted a little bit to allow for some of the things that have to happen for individuals to be able to attend college classes, not lose the safety and security that, quite honestly, is not only needed for our incarcerated population, but for staff to be willing to work.

Participant 33 also believes that for an HEP to be successful, there must be a person who “champions” the program. Of this she noted:

What I found about higher education in prison is that in order for it to work, there needs to be kind of that champion at the college level...you kind of have to find that person within the college...at a higher, low, high enough level who is really going to champion this...for the most part...You have to have that person, kind of that coordinator level or

director level, who is just really committed to it and is able to work things on the college side. And then that person...equally able to work it on the DOC side.

Participant 33 said that her largest challenge concerning leading HEP is building collaborative relationships between DOC and educational administration. Of this she noted:

I think that the biggest challenge that I see is just kind of trying to come up with the balance of the understanding on both sides in this regard. You know what it is that the college's mission is, and what it is the DOC's mission is, and trying to kind of respect both of those sides. That's definitely something that both sides have to be very, very open to and learning about.

A positive experience Participant 33 enjoys is when students find an educational identity they never knew they had. This involves seeing students reaching education goals and breaking negative generational cycles.

She also finds enjoyment in the various leadership challenges that HEP presents, particularly with the various struggles within the relationships between DOC and HEP. She embraces a mentality of perseverance and described, "When somebody tells me 'you can't do that'...there's something internally that says, 'Watch me'. You have to be willing to look at a 'no' as a challenge versus looking at a no as a defeat."

On the future of HEP, Participant 33 spoke about the goals of normalizing HEP to college education outside of prison and warned against that idea by saying normative education is the goal, but as she described, "Students who are taking courses within the DOC have the same right to everything that a college student would have...that would be great, but it's just not reality, because we have to ensure safety and security."

Regarding the new era of HEP, she is encouraged, saying, “I love the fact that we have the full restoration of Pell”. But she fears a too-fast-too-soon growth and that ultimately DOC will be challenged to lose its focus, noting that DOC might “lose control over the understanding of what it means to be Corrections.”

Participant 34

Participant 34 is a Euro-American female HEP leader from a midwestern American state. She has been in HEP work for 20 years, 11 teaching, and nine years as an HEP administrator. She has a PhD and formerly taught and led in normative higher education. Her program offers associate's and bachelor's degrees.

The essence of Participant 34's textual experiences revolved around a seasoned leader that had a firm understanding of leading liberal arts education in a prison environment. Of this, she noted an emphasis on an HEP model that equates to normative higher education promoting “rigor and equity” and a student-centered focus. She also said that her program provides an “excellent undergraduate liberal arts education, that’s what we love and do”. Her experiences also display a leader that places a high premium on relationships and building team structures that allow an HEP program to function efficiently. Also, her administration emphasizes an HEP experience that holistically betters conditions in the DOC. She notes of that experience that HEP improves things “on so many levels”, “we are improving the facility for everyone”, and “we find ways to invest in staff”. She also possesses a good understanding of the substance that makes a good HEP and what the overall HEP movement needs for its future to flourish in its upcoming new era.

A positive experience Participant 34 spoke of was student graduations. Specifically, she enjoys seeing families at the graduations and the positive impact the graduations have on non-

HEP educational professionals that attend the graduations. She also spoke of an annual baseball game that the students play in and attend. She said that this opportunity encouraged the students as it gives them a chance to disconnect from the prison environment and reconnect with a simpler time in their lives. She also spoke of how the structure of HEP allows flexibility as an administrator not to have to struggle with ineffective faculty that are not good for the program, giving her the ability to dismiss them when and if needed. She said that this gives her the ability to hire faculty that are “excellent with our students”.

For challenges, Participant 34 mentioned an aspect of an “it’s better than nothing” mentality towards HEP from the outside and inside of programming and how there needs to be the same standard of excellence that is demanded for normative higher education. She explained it when referring to the Pell Grant process and within the DOC as follows:

That’s a real issue when you start talking about tablet programs, and correspondence college, just crap...it’s just one bucket of crap...I think that there’s both on the outside, “this is better than nothing”, which is very dangerous because if you’re burning up Pell eligibility, it sure should be better than that, right? Because these men and women don’t get a second shot at being Pell-eligible, and so we should be giving them the best we can while we’re using their federal funding to pay for their college education, period, that’s the bottom line! But then there’s this faction...over in the DOC, where sitting idle is bad, and I get that sitting idle is bad...but tablets...just whatever they can do, classes on tablets, “That’s better than doing nothing”. And what happens then...the incarcerated men and women, as well as...DOC officials, administrators, whatever, I think they’re deceived into believing that “this better than nothing” bucket of crap is, you know, college, and it’s not college. I don’t want men and women to sit around idle any more

than the next person, but the programming has to be good. It just does...You can't lead people to believe that they have taken a freshman composition class when they can't write their way out of a brown paper bag. That's so unethical on so many levels.

Another challenging experience Participant 34 spoke of is dealing with changing DOC administrations. She has had four wardens over her program in nine years. She also spoke about dealing with the few correctional officers that are negative. Of this she mentioned that she is able to offset this challenge by offering correctional officers various benefits from her HEP and said in doing so, "a little kindness will go a very long way", "it's not hard to be kind" and "at an individual level, we just try to win people over".

On the future of HEP, Participant 34 expressed concern about the Pell Grant process and its growth. She notes that HEP programs can become complacent with the Pell Grant and not ensure that programs are rigorous. She further noted that no program can exist completely on Pell Grants, and programs should diversify funding. She believes "it's unethical when you admit only Pell-eligible students", further noting that "it's a dangerous game" and "it's playing with fire". She spoke to an example that no normative higher education college would admit on Pell eligibility only. She also feels that it is likely that less rigorous programs rely heavily on Pell Grants. She fears that an over-dependence on the Pell process can lead to a substandard program model, equating to a mentality of "it's is better than nothing". This then could be influential in the future, allowing a low standard for HEP to exist. She also spoke of frustration in the Pell Grant administration in that it did not have one HEP leader from an SCP school when making a decision about the future of the Pell process. Despite these issues, Participant 34 is cautiously optimistic. She believes the success of HEP and its experiences will push others to see the need for thorough and competent HEP programs.

Participant 35

Participant 35 is a Euro-American HEP leader from a mountain west state. He has been in normative higher education for five years and in HEP work and leadership for two years. He has a PhD and teaches in HEP and normative higher education. His program offers courses that lead to bachelor's degrees and graduate degrees.

The essence of Participant 35's experiences revolved around a well-rounded systems perspective of HEP and views of HEP as a formerly incarcerated individual. He views the HEP experience from a standpoint of understanding the centrality of positive identity development and its place in the process of HEP. He also spoke of how his state DOC is evolving toward the ideal of "normalization" and how that has a potential impact on HEP leadership experience. Participant 35 also finds HEP a place of calling and noted, "I'd probably do this for free, which means I found a career, right, something fulfilling about teaching in general teaching to people that are thirsty for it."

Participant 35 finds strength in being able to relate to the HEP experience because of his personal background, which, in combination with his training and being a professional with a terminal degree, gives him a successful foundation of leverage to do his work. He described:

I go back in prison, and I snap back into my life experience because I learned how to really navigate that space from a position of low power. Those are great tools to have when you have almost equal power with them because they just play well, they love me. I get along.

Despite this personal experience with DOC, Participant 35 expressed a similar experience that most participants have had about leading and teaching in HEP in that he "didn't know what to expect" when he began work in HEP.

Participant 35 also believes in an HEP experience that is practical in the sense of giving students skillsets applicable to the real world that they will face once they are released from prison. He noted this:

You got a guy that's getting out in six months that is jittery and doesn't know what to do with this new identity, and is worried he's going to recidivate...And you got another guy that's like "I'm trying to buckle down and do my time, but also better myself". You gotta give them both something that they can use. Because if we're just teaching, you know, simple math that they can only use in their head, we gotta give them something to use in the world, and that's this normalization thing, too, is figuring out, even if you're in prison...with our movement that hopefully keeps going towards normalization, I would hope they figure out how to do that.

A positive experience Participant 35 spoke of is being able to experience student graduations. He also enjoys when students begin to discover their identity through their academic achievements and then realize that "there is more after this". Like many participants, he experiences a "better" student in HEP as opposed to normative higher education, saying, "they're the most interested, dedicated engaged students you will ever find..."

A challenging experience Participant 35 spoke of was the difficulty of technology. He also spoke about dealing with the reality of difficult correctional officers, but he stressed a systems and holistic perspective on their plight, understanding what they are charged to do. He promotes an idea of empathy towards their work, saying, "they are just people punching a clock just like the rest of us".

He also was candid about dealing with the tandem of DOC bureaucracy/philosophy and higher education bureaucracy/philosophy and noted that systematically "they poke holes in each

other”. He develops a consistent perspective on the HEP and its challenges in DOC by saying, “It makes sense on its face. All Prison administrators say it would be great if we could educate them, but they realize it poses threats to the way the system is built.” He further noted an example of systems challenge with DOC when referring to growing sexual identity norms and DOC’s challenge with growth to its evolution, “It’s a legitimate challenge to a system that doesn’t have any room to bend in that space right now.”

On the future of HEP, Participant 35 spoke to the issue of education predators coming to the HEP due to the growth of Pell Grants. Although, he sees growth to the place where HEP will assist in breaking cycles of normal recidivism and lowering the prison population, which will challenge current systems dependent on DOC and its clients. He described both in the following:

I think we’re about to see that all change, though I think there’s two things that are gonna happen. Capitalism has this gross underbelly where “Trump University” is going to try to push into prisons because they realize there’s a big market. Hopefully, we’re ready to deal with that. And there’s people in the programs that stick around, and the public hopefully doesn’t hear “they’re taking your taxpayer dollar and teaching people how to...Lord knows, right?” The goal would be, these programs get big and people start to see prisons emptying out and prisoners not going back once they’re released. And then what choice is the public gonna have? It’s cheaper. They’re paying bills. They get out and now help you pay taxes to incarcerate other people. That’s hard to argue with.

He further spoke to his state’s focus on normalization and the bigger picture of what that might look like:

If we start reducing recidivism and 80% of incarcerated people, don’t keep coming back within five to ten years we’re gonna have to lay off CEOs, we’re gonna have to lay off

parole officers, tether agents. Companies are going to lose value in their stock. We have this whole industry that's built. Not only that, like fast-food, the jobs that we have to take because of the stigma. Those are going to be in a bind and have to pay more. Because what if we get pride when we get out of prison? So right back to the systems kind of built to get real scared of growing pains because it means normal good people lose their jobs.

Participant 35 also spoke of the idea of using the Puritan ethic that supports a punitive mentality regarding criminal justice and then using pro-HEP and pro-Puritan values to support HEP and possibly thwart any negative growth toward the tough-on-crime mentality. He talked about branding HEP around the puritan ethic of "Pull your own weight", "bootstrap mentality" and "redemption" and defining HEP through those same ideals to support the sustenance of HEP publicly.

Appendix I

Textual Experiences of Participants: Research Question 1

Participant Textual Experiences	Total
Assertive in Leadership	1
Education Timelines not Matching with DOC Timelines	1
Feedback Positive from Staff/Students	1
Feminine Perspective on Leadership	1
Good Managerial Skills Understanding DOC and Higher Ed.	1
Hard Work of HEP	1
Isolating HEP Experience	1
Lack of Support	1
Managing Personal Mental Health	1
Maximum Security HEP	1
Pedagogy Origination for HEP	1
Personal lack of passion/success with Education is motivating to Lead HEP	1
Pipeline Creating the Next Workforce	1
Protecting the Safe Place of the Classroom	1
Rejection of Program Needs or Proposals	1
Research/Writing to Better HEP	1
Staff Challenge: Naivety working in DOC	1
Staff Development Experience	1
Staff: Hiring Diverse Staff Enjoyment	1
Staff Moral: Managing lack of Morale or Negativity	1
Staff Recruiting Challenges	1
State Policy Problems	1
Student Deficits Work	1
Student Morale and Issues	1
Student Positive Experience when they Return to HEP Program	1
Support from Higher Ed. Institutions	1
Surveillance during Work	1
System-Change Led not Student-Change Led	1
The feeling of being a minority	1
Understanding Needed in Leadership	1

Work with Taxpayers promoting HEP	1
Working with HEP Alumni	1
Working with Troublesome Education Administration	1
Challenging Transitional from Normative Higher Ed. to HEP	2
Competition Within the State HEP Programs	2
Complicated Work of HEP	2
Continuing Relationships with Students after HEP/Re-entry	2
Driven by Passion for the Underdog	2
Empathic Leadership	2
Expansion and Building of HEP Program	2
Good Staff Leadership Needed/Challenging	2
Hiring Formerly Incarcerated into HEP Leadership	2
Managing with a limited HEP budget	2
Persuading/Advocacy about the positives of HEP	2
Prior Education Leadership in K-12 Helpful in HEP Experience	2
Problem-Solving Skillset Experiences	2
Relational Leadership	2
Rewarding Work in HEP	2
Soft-Skills in HEP Leadership	2
Staff: Hiring Good Staff	2
Staff Moral Built through HEP Experience	2
Statewide Support for HEP is Good	2
Strategic Management Experience	2
Student Centered HEP	2
Student Relationship Building	2
Students being a Challenge to Work With	2
Technology Positives	2
Witnessing Students After Graduation/Re-try Positive	2
Witnessing the Impact of HEP on Others Outside of Prison	2
Against the Odds Management and Enjoyment	3
Balance and Perspective in Leadership	3
Bipartisan Teamwork Positive	3
Emotionally Laboring Work	3

Lack of Understanding with DOC what Higher Education Is	3
Perspective and Balance in Leadership Needed	3
Positive impact on DOC and Criminal Justice	3
Positively relating of Justice impacted personal history into leadership	3
Prior Correctional Job Experience Helpful in HEP Experience	3
Student-Centered HEP Experience	3
The positive influence on their staff	3
Values or Principled Driven Leadership	3
Enjoys strategy or challenge of leading an HEP	4
Optimism Consistent Despite Challenges of HEP	4
Patience/Balanced Leadership	4
Pell Grant Free Programming	4
Sacrifice for the Greater Good/Agreeable	4
"Evangelizing" Stakeholders about HEP	5
Practices/Promotes Teambuilding with DOC/Stakeholders	5
Programmatic Success	5
Self-Sustaining programming not dependent on the Pell Grant	5
Advocating for Students	6
Breaking Cycles of Intergenerational Incarceration HEP Leadership	6
Formerly Incarcerated Leadership/Leader	6
Funding and Fundraising for HEP/Visionary Beyond Pell	6
Pell Grant Process/Funding Challenging	6
Overwhelming Work	7
Senior Level Experience	7
Wears many Hats	7
Work with Government Officials/Politics	7
Bureaucracy of Higher Ed. is Challenging	8
Graduations Inspiring/Positive Experience	8
COVID-19 Challenging	9
Creativity/Resourceful in Leadership Style	9
Mission, Vision, and/or Purpose Driven in HEP Leadership	9
Naivety to HEP or working in the Unknown	9
Jack of All Trades Leadership	10

Persistence Leadership and in HEP Program	10
Turnover of staff and staffing challenges with DOC	10
DEI Challenges and Work in HEP	11
Dual Bureaucracy of DOC and Higher Ed. Challenging	11
Mediating/Managing/Translating in DOC and Higher Ed. Bureaucracies	11
Staff Positive: Working with Great Staff/faculty/team	12
Witnessing Discovery/Expansion/Transformation of Student	12
Teaches in HEP	13
Trailblazing or beginning the program	13
Correctional Officers in Prison Challenging	14
Stakeholders Teambuilding	14
Unpredictability Leadership or Work Management	14
Student Superiority over “normal” higher education students	15
Teambuilding/Positive Relationships with DOC	15
Flexibility/adaptability in leadership Style	16
Normalizing: Creating a Normative Higher Education Experience	17
Technology Challenges	17
Veteran of HEP	18
Bureaucracy/Philosophy/Policies/Practices of DOC Challenging	22

Appendix J

Textual Themes- Research Question 2

Textual Themes: Research Question 2	Totals
Concerned with DOC Influence over HEP	1
Concerned with HEP Influence over DOC	1
Evidence Based Standards Needed	1
Fears that Old Systems of Marginalization will be Created with New Pell/HEP	1
Fears Uniformity of Programming might weaken HEP	1
Growth/Need of 4-year Colleges in HEP	1
HEP Should Guard Against the “it’s better than nothing” philosophy	1
Students with a Life having more access to HEP	1
Need or Responsibility with Pell Funds	1
Positive about Equity for HEP	1
Take Advantage of New Trends and Build on Them	1
Use Puritan Ethic Values to Support HEP	1
Corrections Officers Offered HEP	2
Anxious about New Rule that Comes with Pell Grant Growth	2
Improved Accountability of HEP Programs	2
Improved Tracking of HEP Success in DOC/Data Collection	2
Improved Organization and Management of HEP is Needed	2
Build on Stories of Success	2
Build Self-Sustaining HEP’s	2
Community College Ideal for HEP	2
Expansion of HEP Technology/Need for Better Tech	2
More Research for HEP	2
Need for Formerly Incarcerated Leading HEP Programs	2
Student Centered Programming	2
Success of American K-12 and Societal Issues will help HEP	2
Warns against Tablet or Online Only Models	2
Improved Attitudes in Community Growing About HEP	3
Improved Funding Needed for HEP	3
Bipartisan Support is Good and Foundation to Future	3
DOC Preparation Needed for HEP Growth	3

Vision for HEP	3
Improved Structure Needed for HEP	4
Fears 1994 Crime Bill Philosophy Coming Back	4
Full Dependence on Pell Grants is not Good for HEP	4
Pell Grant Process Too Cumbersome/Limiting	4
Normalization of HEP Growth and Need	5
DEI Expansion or Needs to Expand	6
Fear of Predators in with Pell Grant Growth	17
Hopeful about Pell Grant Growth	25