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## The College Admissions Process for Returning Citizens and Ex-Offenders at a Small, Private Midwestern College

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The College Admissions Process for Returning Citizens and Ex-Offenders at a  
Small, Private Midwestern College

by

Donna Bradley

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

The College Admissions Process for Returning Citizens and Ex-Offenders at a  
Small, Private Midwestern College

by

Donna Bradley

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

  
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: DONNA BRADLEY

Signature: Donna Bradley Date: 12/15/2022

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## **Abstract**

It is well-known that higher education faces the challenge of declining enrollment, particularly post-COVID. However, there is a population of students that higher education institutions may overlook, returning citizens and ex-offenders. Reintegration is a challenging endeavor for returning citizens and ex-offenders, without regard to the length of incarceration or the circumstances surrounding system-involvement. They face barriers and stigmatization while attempting to achieve some sense of normalization post-incarceration, including the pursuit of higher education. Using mixed methodology, specifically a qualitative case study and descriptive statistics, the extant research examined the college admission process for returning citizens and ex-offenders through the lens of three groups, admissions professionals, residential life employees, and campus safety employees, at a small Midwestern college. The research examined the understanding of the three groups about the college's admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders and their experiences with the admissions process. The research also delved into whether the experiences of the three groups in the admissions process for returning citizens or ex-offenders influenced their perspectives of returning citizens and ex-offenders. Finally, the study examined the differences and similarities between the three groups in their perceptions of returning citizens or ex-offenders admitted to the college. The researcher used NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software that facilitates organization and visualization of data, to analyze the interview data vertically and horizontally. Ten themes emerged, leading to the conclusion that admissions professionals, residence life employees, and campus safety employees had varying degrees of knowledge and experience related to the college's policies and

practices about the admission of returning citizens and ex-offenders. Without regard to the level of knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions about the policies and practices related to the admission of returning citizens and ex-offenders, the theme of second chances prevailed. The theoretical foundations of the research are university social responsibility, collaborative theory, and critical race theory.

*Keywords:* returning citizens, ex-offenders, college admission process, stigma, barriers, second chance, university social responsibility, collaborative theory, critical race theory

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Reintegration into society post-incarceration is a challenging process. The use of the term “returning citizen” indicates that words matter. Ex-offenders are individuals with past involvement in the criminal justice system, such as arrest, charges, incarceration, or probation. Though system-involved, the distinction between ex-offenders and returning citizens is the length of the period of incarceration, if any. For example, offenders may engage in conduct resulting in arrest; however, the prosecutor may not charge or may offer a plea bargain that did not result in incarceration. Reentry organizations agree that referring to the population that served prison time as ex-offenders provokes a stigma and creates barriers, while the reference to returning citizens restores dignity and provides second chances (Scott-Clayton, 2017; Thompson, 2017). The literature supports the use and definition of the term “returning citizens” to reduce stigma (Baskaran, 2019; Bowman & Ely, 2020; Cnaan & Woida, 2020; Cohen & Rosenbaum, 2019; Cossyleon & Flores, 2020; Elliott, 2019; Jones, 2016; Snodgrass, 2019; Toussaint, 2016).

Societal views towards ex-offenders and returning citizens are consistent. Because of the involvement in the criminal justice system, similar stigma and negative perceptions befall them. Ex-offenders may not have endured lengthy periods of incarceration like returning citizens. However, the stigma of involvement with the criminal justice system affects them nonetheless (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). There are obstacles and barriers to attainment of the American Dream, including higher education, particularly if decisionmakers, such as employers and higher education institutions, are aware of their status as an ex-offender.

The project explored and compared the perspectives of admissions, campus safety, and residential life personnel of higher education institutions regarding the admission of returning citizens and ex-offenders as these groups strive to achieve successful reentry into society and to overcome barriers created by imprisonment or system-involvement.

Barriers to reintegration, including the college admissions process, impede the ability of formerly incarcerated citizens, whether returning citizens or ex-offenders, to change their lives and attain educational and economic success. Understanding the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders may reveal the purpose of the collection of criminal histories for applicants, the degree of exclusion of returning citizens from the university community, and the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety officers, and residential life employees with returning citizens and ex-offenders.

The literature examines several aspects of the experiences of returning citizens' and ex-offenders' attempts to pursue higher education, including challenges faced in the admissions process, stigma, legal issues, and barriers to equal access to education (Custer, 2013, 2016; Davies, 2000; Ramaswamy, 2015; Rubenstein et al., 2019). The literature examines experiences and challenges with the college admissions process from the perspective of ex-offenders and returning citizens (Custer, 2013, 2016, 2018). However, research about the perspectives and understanding of admissions professionals and others involved in the admissions process for returning citizens about the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders is sparse. In addition, while the organizational leadership literature explores corporate social responsibility, the concept

of social responsibility in a higher education environment is comparatively recent (Ali et al., 2021; Bastos, et al., 2019; Vasilescu et al., 2010).

Scott-Clayton (2017), in her discussion about a returning citizen's challenges in pursuing a higher education, advocates for policies that look beyond the box, referring to the "Ban the Box" policy. The subject of her research began her educational journey while incarcerated. Ironically, her enrollment in college while incarcerated allowed the educational institution to bypass the criminal record inquiries. Because she was an enrolled student, she did not have to experience the process established for returning citizens and ex-offenders not previously enrolled while incarcerated.

According to Davies (2000), the practice of soliciting information about the criminal history of applicants began in the 1990's after a series of lawsuits related to college and university liability when returning citizen or ex-offender students committed crimes after admission. Davies (2000) analyzes issues about "contractual and tortious duties, rehabilitation of offenders, human rights, and data protection" (p. 143). The researcher does not draw conclusions, but provides an objective analysis on each issue. Even so, he acknowledges that education is a key factor to the reduction of recidivism.

Since then, a movement, Ban the Box, emerged (O'Neill, 2012). The Ban the Box movement advocates for removal of inquiries about criminal history from applications. Proponents of banning the box contend that research does not support the assertion that identifying those with criminal histories, such as returning citizens and ex-offenders, increases campus safety (Jung, 2015; O'Neill, 2012). To the contrary, the effect on campus safety does not offset the stigma that results when returning citizens or ex-offenders check the box acknowledging previous or perceived criminal histories, but

increases negative perceptions and attitudes towards those who experience interaction with the criminal justice system (Jung, 2015; O'Neill, 2012). The box creates yet another barrier to successful reintegration.

Halkovic and Greene (2015) conducted a participatory action research project, seeking knowledge about students with criminal records on college campuses. The researchers identify post-incarceration education of offenders as a gap in the literature. The article addresses the stigma carried by returning citizens and benefits of the inclusion of criminal offenders in the university community, recommending the creation of a hospitable campus environment. Although offenders serve prison sentences as retribution for crimes committed, the criminal conviction assigns a stigma that impedes the reintegration process. Contrary to societal views about criminal offenders, which attach stigma, the researchers identified themes characterized as gifts, such as the deconstruction of the preconceived notions, societally assigned, because of their criminal experience. According to Halkovic and Greene (2015), their research deflated campus safety concerns regarding returning citizens.

Rubenstein et al. (2019) examined stigma related to college admissions as it relates to sex offenders. The researchers indicate that the stereotypes and misinformation about the level of recidivism among sex offenders exasperates the college admissions process even more. According to this study, the ability to attain a higher education among sex offenders is a factor that lowers recidivism.

In addition to stigma, barriers also include housing, employment, food insecurity, and the pursuit of higher education (Ramaswamy, 2015; Rubenstein, et al., 2019). Ramaswamy (2015) conducted a legal analysis, which addresses the disproportionate

impact of the barriers to education on minority populations. In doing so, the researcher noted that access to higher education is critical to the success of returning citizens and ex-offenders. Removing the barriers, or at the very least, minimizing the barriers, facilitates reentry in ways that maximize a successful transition. Ramaswamy (2015) further noted that there is no educational benefit to the examination of the criminal histories of applicants.

O'Reilly (2014) conducted research demonstrating that the barriers to education and its impact on the ability of returning citizens and ex-offenders to obtain viable employment is not unique to the United States. Her research involves offenders in Ireland who seek to reintegrate into society post-incarceration, even where Irish prison policy requires the provision of education while incarcerated. The nexus between education and employment is well-settled. The inability to obtain employment because of the lack of education, leads to food and housing insecurity. When criminal histories prevent further pursuit of educational opportunities, which affects the ability to obtain jobs that pay living wages, it interferes with the growth and progress needed for successful reintegration.

While social justice advocates and policy makers made progress in addressing visible barriers, invisible barriers still exist, such as stigma and preconceived notions about previously incarcerated persons (Couloute, 2018). Higher education institutions are no exception. The Ban the Box movement initially focused on removing barriers to employment. Some cities and states now prohibit discrimination against returning citizens. However, higher education has not addressed the issue. Most colleges and universities still inquire about criminal convictions on the admissions application and



follow extended admissions process for applicants with criminal convictions. Research shows a strong correlation between education and recidivism (Baer et al., 2006; Custer, 2013; Custer, 2016; Custer, 2018). The higher the level of education, the lower the recidivism.

Despite the strong connection between education and recidivism, higher education institutions continue to collect information related to the criminal histories of its applicants. According to a report by the Center for Community Alternatives (Weismann et al., 2010), college and universities report no impact on campus safety, because of gathering criminal history data. In its report, the Center for Community Alternatives, like Ramaswamy (2015) addresses the racial disparity and discriminatory impact of the use of criminal histories in the admissions process, characterizing the issue as a civil rights problem. The organization recommends the elimination of the practice and discusses alternative solutions to address issues of campus safety.

It is also important to examine the efforts of returning citizens and ex-offenders to attain a higher education considering critical theory, a theoretical concept that focuses on social inequalities and the lack of equity for underserved and marginalized populations. According to Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), critical theory addresses societal inequalities and examines disparities caused by the development of structures and processes (p. 39). Currently, a prevailing societal issue concerns the acknowledgement and examination of systemic structures and processes that result in stigma, disparities, and inequities, primarily toward African Americans, who are grossly overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Thirty eight percent of the prison population under the purview of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) are African American, while the United States

population is 13% African American (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022). The Prison Policy Initiative reports that 30% of those under probation or parole supervision are African American and the incarceration rate for African Americans is 2,306 per 100,000, as compared to the incarceration rate of White Americans, which is 430 per 100,000 (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022). According to The Sentencing Project, incarceration in the United States increased by 500% over a 40-year period (Mendel et al, 2022).

The relevance of the statistics related to the incarceration of African Americans to the current study is the disparate impact on the African American population of the efforts to achieve a higher education where criminal justice policies, systems, and structures impede their progress systemically. African Americans systemically imposed collateral consequences stemming from slavery to slave codes, Jim Crow, and the War on Drugs, the latter which increased incarceration in the United States through ostensibly unintended consequences. Nonetheless, the consequences, whether intended or unintended, impacted communities of color disparately, as demonstrated by the findings of the 2021 Sentencing Project Report:

1. State prisons house Black Americans at nearly 5 times the rate of White Americans.
2. Nationally, one in 81 Black adults in the U.S. is serving time in state prison. Wisconsin leads the nation in Black imprisonment rates; one of every 36 Black Wisconsinites is in prison.
3. In 12 states, more than half the prison population is Black: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

4. Seven states maintain a Black/White disparity larger than 9 to 1: California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Wisconsin.
5. States incarcerate Latinx individuals at a rate that is 1.4 times the incarceration rate of Whites. Ethnic disparities are highest in Massachusetts, which reports an ethnic differential of 4.1:1, Connecticut (3.9:1), Pennsylvania (3.3:1), and New York (3.1:1). (Nellis & Fetting, 2021, p. 3)

With the racial disparities in federal and state incarceration rates, it logically follows that the stigma, barriers, and obstacles to attaining a higher education affects African Americans disparately. Therefore, the theoretical framework includes a discussion of critical theory.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the admissions process and policy for returning citizen and ex-offender applicants by conducting a case study exploring the experiences and understanding of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees at the small, private Midwestern college about the admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders. According to Goodrick (2014), case studies are effective when comparing policies or processes within and across contexts. In the study, the admission process and policies were studied across contexts by exploring the perspectives about and experiences of three groups with returning citizens and ex-offenders.

The researcher identified and described the application process and the policy for returning citizen and ex-offender applicants on all campuses. In the current study, the researcher conducted interviews with 12 admissions professionals, campus safety, and

residential life employees to learn about their experiences and understanding of the policy, the process, and to discern returning citizen and ex-offender experiences through their eyes. The college, the academic community at large, the community, returning citizens, and ex-offenders will benefit from the results of the study. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with study participants to gain knowledge about their understanding and experiences related to the admissions of returning citizens and ex-offenders. The interviews sought to gain knowledge about admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees' understanding of the admissions policy related to returning citizens and ex-offenders, if any. The researcher collected and analyzed descriptive statistics, such as available institutional data regarding admission rates, the numbers of ex-offenders admitted, and the outcome of the admissions process for the returning citizen and ex-offender applicants.

Finally, the community, returning citizens, and ex-offenders will benefit from the research, primarily because the literature reports that the higher the educational level, the lower recidivism (Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017). If colleges and universities have an effective admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders and consider "Banning the Box," communities are safer (Jung, 2017). The overall impact of the study is the important contribution of higher education institutions' social responsibility to increase public safety by adding the value of education to returning citizens' and ex-offenders' lives, especially when considering the research about the correlation between education and recidivism (Jorge & Pena, 2017).

As a result of the study, colleges and universities can examine their admissions processes and adjust, if needed, based upon the literature and the results of the study.

Doing so would demonstrate the university's desire to enhance diversity, strive for social justice, and serve traditionally marginalized populations. In addition, higher education institutions can demonstrate university social responsibility and build collaborative relationships between the college, social service agencies, the community, law enforcement, courts, and corrections.

The study used a mixed methods approach, specifically, a case study method, and the analysis of descriptive statistics to conduct an exploration of the experiences and understanding among the admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees (Merriam, 1998; Barlett & Vavrus, 2017). Case studies are an accepted methodology to accomplish the purpose of this exploration of organizational policies and processes. The case study approach is indicative of the interpretive research philosophy, which contends that researchers gain new knowledge by "understanding processes, shared place, purpose, or identity" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 39). The proposed study seeks to understand the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders. The study further endeavors to gain knowledge about the sample population's understanding of their place, purpose, and identity in the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders.

The case study is a process-oriented approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Denzin, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The research design is emergent, exploring pertinent factors, actors, features, and the historical and contemporary processes producing a sense of shared place, purpose, or identity (Barlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 19). This research seeks to explore the admissions process for returning citizens

and ex-offenders and shared experiences and perspectives of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about the process.

Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) further note that case studies focus on critical theory, addressing societal inequalities and examining disparities caused by the development of structures and processes (p. 39). The proposed case study makes horizontal, vertical, and transversal comparisons between admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees' experiences and perspectives.

To accomplish the purposes of this research, the researcher recruited a sample population of 10-12 admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life involved in all aspects of the admissions processing of applications and the integration of traditional, graduate, and non-traditional student admission to the university. At its full capacity, there were 30 admissions professionals and others involved in the admissions process for returning citizens. The President of the small, private college and the Vice President of Student Affairs approved this research. Data collection ceased once the researcher achieved saturation. Guest et al. (2020) operationalized saturation as a method of determining sample size in qualitative research. Though the researchers reimagined the methods by using a quantitative method to determine qualitative sample sizes, ultimately the determination of saturation remains unchanged, that is, at what point is no new information available.

In the current research, at maximum capacity, there were only 30 employees at the small, private Midwestern college that worked as admissions professionals, campus safety employees, and residential life employees. The sample size of 12 is almost half of the maximum employees in the relevant classifications. After interviewing the 12

employees, four in each classification, the participants provided no new information, thus reaching saturation.

The researcher used the following secondary data to inform the research: student population size, including undergraduate, graduate, and non-traditional students, university student demographics, application forms from 2004 and 2021, number of returning citizen and ex-offender applicants, number of returning citizen or ex-offender applicants admitted/denied, and past and present university admissions policy for returning citizens and ex-offenders. Data was readily accessible and publicly available regarding the student population size and demographics. Prior to conducting the research, the researcher was not aware of whether the college maintained data related to returning citizen or ex-offender applicants or whether a written policy, as opposed to a practice existed. The research revealed that the admissions office kept an Excel spreadsheet with information about returning citizen and ex-offender applicants, such as name, date of application, and the admission results. As discussed in Chapter Four, research also revealed the absence of a formal written policy. The researcher discusses the implications of the data in Chapter Five.

The interview questions are attached. Except for preliminary questions which solicited information and descriptive statistics about the participants' demographics, tenure, and experience, the inquiries are open-ended questions which allowed participants to expand upon thoughts and enabled the researcher to gain knowledge, sometimes beyond that sought. Remler and Ryzin (2015) provided guidance for conducting qualitative interviews, stating that open-ended questions seek in-depth, detailed responses using participants' words (p. 67). The interview questions are a guide rather than a script.

The researcher used probing questions to advance the conversation and to solicit further information from the participant, for example, “tell me more about that.”

### **Rationale of the Study**

Returning citizens and ex-offenders face a plethora of challenges, among which is lack of access to education (Baer et al., 2006; Custer, 2013; Custer, 2016; Custer, 2018). The study contributes to the body of literature about college admissions, returning citizens, and ex-offenders and explores the College’s admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders and their experiences through the eyes of admissions, campus safety, and residential life employees. Research shows that education lowers the risk of offender recidivism (Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017; Stewart & Uggen, 2018). For that reason, attaining a higher level of education is critical for the success of the offender and contributes to public safety of campuses and communities, because the offender is less likely to recidivate (Custer, 2018; Vacca, 2004).

There may be legal implications with the admissions of returning citizens and ex-offenders, such as contentions of negligent admissions if the returning citizen or ex-offender compromises campus safety (Custer, 2016; Pierce et al., 2014). Data protection and allegations of discrimination, considering the guidance of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regarding the exclusion of returning citizen and ex-offender employment opportunities, also present possible legal issues for higher education institutions. However, it is important to understand the experiences of professionals involved in the admissions process and the way that they use information about criminal convictions (Davies, 2000). Doing so may contribute to the diminishment of disparities created by structures, policies, and processes.



Exploration of the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders at a small, private Midwestern college may reveal any misinformation, misunderstandings, impediments, challenges, and successes, enabling the college to clarify or refine the process, if necessary. Further, the implications for practitioners in higher education admissions in a broader sense pertain to the theory of social responsibility and the contribution of institutions of higher education thereto. The effectiveness of collaboration between institutions of higher education and the community; i.e., collaborative theory, is another significant reason for this study (McGarry & Ney, 2006; Roberts & Bradley, 1991; Wood & Gray, 1991).

The university can use the results of the study to reevaluate its admissions policies and processes for returning citizens and ex-offenders. The theoretical framework, university social responsibility and collaborative theory, may motivate the university and admissions to change the perspective on returning citizens, depending upon the literature and results of the study, expand recruitment efforts, and increase collaborative relationships.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with study participants to gain knowledge about their understanding, experiences, and perspectives related to the admission of returning citizens. The interviews sought to gain knowledge from admissions, campus safety, and residential life employees about the admissions process for returning citizens and their understanding of the admissions policy related to returning citizens and provide insight to colleges and universities to enhance the experience for returning citizen applicants, create consistency in the process between campuses, and potentially increase enrollment. The results of the study may allow admissions

professionals to expand outreach and recruitment efforts beyond traditional efforts and to refine the policy and processes for admissions of the returning citizen population.

Finally, the community and returning citizens will benefit from the research, primarily because the literature reports that the higher the educational level, the lower recidivism (Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017). If colleges and universities have an effective admissions process for returning citizens, considering “Banning the Box,” the communities are safer (Jung, 2017). The overall impact of the study is the important contribution of higher education institutions’ social responsibility to increase public safety by adding the value of education to returning citizens’ lives, especially when considering the research about the correlation between education and recidivism (Jorge & Pena, 2017). As a result of the study, the university can examine the admissions process and adjust, if needed, based upon the literature and the result of the study. Using a qualitative approach, specifically, case study, the common, shared, and lived experiences among the admissions, campus safety, and residential life employees regarding their interaction with returning citizens in the admissions and campus integration process were identified (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

**Research Question 1:** What is the understanding of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about the university admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 2:** What are the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees involved with the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 3:** How do the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees influence their perspectives and attitudes towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 4:** What are the differences, similarities, or patterns between the experiences, understanding, and perspectives of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about and towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

### **Study Limitations**

The researcher identified several limitations to the study, including the tenure of study participants, the lack of knowledge about the admissions process, the lack of involvement in the admissions process, and absence of clear policy related to the admission of ex-offenders and returning citizens. In addition, the current research did not explore the reasons that study participants voiced negative concerns related to sex-related offenses as compared to other criminal offenses.

The sample population comprised admissions professionals (4), campus safety (4) employees, and residential life employees (4) at a small, private Midwestern college. The tenure of the participants, ranged from less than a year to 38 years. Of the 12 study participants, four participants worked at the college for less than one year, three participants were employed at the college for two, to two and a half years, two participants were employed for three to four years, one for 10 years, one for 23 years, and one for 38 years. The relationship between tenure of the study participant and their knowledge or lack of knowledge about the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders is discussed in Chapter Five.

The lack of involvement in the admissions process was also a notable limitation. The only classification of college employee in the sample that had direct involvement in the policies and practices related to the admission of returning citizens and ex-offenders were the admissions professionals. The only exception was the one residential life employee with the longest tenure, the Dean of Students. The lack of involvement of the other classifications of employees in the policies and practices related to the admission of returning citizens and ex-offenders resulted in a lack of the rich data that the researcher hoped to gather related to the topic of the study, also discussed in Chapter Five.

In addition, because of the high turnover in campus safety, residential life, and admissions, the lack of experience of study participants is reflected in the data. Nine of the 12 study participants worked at the college for less than five years. Of the nine, four were employed in their various capacities for less than one year. The limitation of time in the position is also discussed as a limitation of the study in Chapter Five.

Finally, a limitation and recommendation for future research involves the selection of one institution in this case study. While there is value to the case study that explores the perspectives and experiences of the three classifications of employees within one institution, a comparative case study involving more than one institution might offer deeper insight and result in a study with greater generalizability.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Admissions Process:** For purposes of this research, the admissions process includes the steps required by the university for the admission of general applicants and any additional steps required for returning citizen and ex-offender applicants.

**Admissions professionals:** Persons involved in the admissions process involving returning citizens and ex-offenders, including admissions, residential life, and campus safety representatives.

**Ban the Box:** Ban the Box refers to a campaign initiated in 2004 by All of Us or None, an advocacy group for criminal offenders. The goal of the campaign was to minimize the consequences of criminal backgrounds when seeking employment, which was the initial focus, by eliminating the question about criminal background from employment applications to create equal opportunity consideration (About Ban the Box, n.d.; O'Neill, 2012). In this study, Ban the Box refers to removal of the criminal background question for purposes of admission to a higher education institution, as a social justice issue (Custer, 2018; Jung, 2017).

**Common Application:** Also referred to as CA or Common App, it is a voluntary, nonprofit membership organization in the United States, CA, which started in 1975, provides a common admissions application that students may submit to any institution that is a member of CA. The organization helps the students reduce the time they need to spend in applying to college and enables them to spend more of their time with their schoolwork and activities in their senior year (Ehrenberg & Liu, 2009).

**Ex-offenders** are individuals with past involvement in the criminal justice system, such as arrest, charges, incarceration, or probation. Though system-involved, the distinction between ex-offenders and returning citizens is the length of the period of incarceration, if any. For example, offenders may engage in conduct resulting in arrest; however, the prosecutor may not charge or offers a plea bargain that did not result in incarceration.

**Returning citizens** are people returning from incarceration and seeking reintegration into society (Trulear, 2011).

## **Summary**

In sum, it is important to understand the challenges, barriers, and obstacles returning citizens and ex-offenders face and must overcome to obtain higher education. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the admissions process for returning citizen applicants by conducting a case study examining the experiences, perspectives, and understanding of admissions, campus safety, and residential life employees at a small, private Midwestern college about the admissions policy and process for returning citizens. A review of the literature, the methodology, analysis of the data, and report of the results follow.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

Chapter One introduced the challenges facing returning citizens and ex-offenders when seeking reentry into society, including the pursuit of a higher education. Chapter Two includes a review of the literature and identification of themes in the literature concerning issues surrounding reentry of returning citizens and ex-offenders, the impediments, barriers, and challenges that the population faces when attempting to resume their lives. The literature review also includes a summary of the research related to policy, specifically the Ban the Box movement advocating for the removal of questions related to criminal history.

The literature examines several aspects of the experiences of returning citizens' and ex-offenders' attempts to pursue higher education, the challenges faced in the admissions process, stigma, the resulting barriers to equal access to education, and legal implications (Custer, 2013; Custer, 2016; Davies, 2000; Ramaswamy, 2015; Rubenstein, et al., 2019). However, research about the perspectives and understanding of admissions, residence life, and campus safety employees about returning citizens and ex-offenders relating to the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders is sparse. In addition, while the literature explores corporate social responsibility, the concept of social responsibility in a higher education environment is comparatively recent.

### **History and Policy**

College students and the communities where the institutions are located generally considered the college campuses as relatively safe places. As the public became more aware of well-known campus-connected crimes, such as the murder of Jeanne Clery and the crimes on or near college campuses committed by the infamous Ted Bundy, there was

an outcry related to campus safety. Jacobsen (2017) conducted research to examine the influence of institutional factors on campus crime. The researcher noted that the murder of college student, Jeanne Clery, triggered concern for safety on college campuses nationwide. As a result of Clery's murder in her dorm room, her parents advocated and lobbied for the passage of the Clery Act of 1990, which requires colleges and universities to report crimes on campus annually. According to Jacobsen (2017), the fear of crime on college campuses is largely unwarranted given that campuses are safer spaces than the communities surrounding them. The Campus Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990, known as the Clery Act, focuses on altering the conduct of institutions and the way that colleges and universities respond to crime on campus. The concept is that individual exposure to crime is minimized if the university is transparent in its reporting. Interestingly, the focus of the Clery Act is not on the alleged criminal, the returning citizen, or the ex-offender but rather the focus is on the responsibility of the institution.

Azevedo et al. (2022) conducted research revealing consistency with Jacobsen (2017) about the perception of crime resulting in a "subjective insecurity" among students about campus safety. Azevedo et al. (2022) distinguishes between subjective insecurity and objective insecurity, observing that subjective insecurity is based on perceptions, while objective insecurity is based upon facts. However, Collins (2016) contends that the research is inconsistent regarding the fear of crime. Nonetheless, neither Azevedo et al. (2022) nor Collins (2016) take a position on whether criminal background checks should continue, whether in higher education or other areas of potential disparity, such as employment and housing. Their research focuses solely on the perception of crime vs. the reality of crime on college campuses. The research is of interest in light of



the literature surrounding the lack of correlation between the admission of returning citizens and ex-offenders and campus safety (Center for Community Alternatives, 2010; Ramaswamy, 2015).

In October 2000, Congress passed the Campus Sex Crimes Prevention Act (CSCPA). CSCPA, Section 170101 of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, went into effect on October 25, 2002, requiring sex offenders to notify the higher education institution if they enrolled, worked, or volunteered on a college campus. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 also contains the Wetterling Act, legislation that implemented sex offender registration for individuals convicted of a criminal offense against a minor, a sexually violent offense, or a person considered a sexual predator. It is important to note that the Wetterling Act of 1994 focused on crimes against children. Megan's Law, the first amendment to the Wetterling Act, passed in 1996. Megan's Law expanded the registration requirement mandated by the Wetterling Act to a requirement for states to develop notification systems and public access to any information about sex offenders in the community. Though the Wetterling Act and Megan's Law did not specifically relate to college campuses, Congress' passage of the legislation evolved to the requirement for sex offenders to notify campus safety and security if enrolled, working, or volunteering on campus. The focus was solely on sex offenders rather than individuals involved in the criminal justice system in general.

According to Davies (2000), the practice of soliciting information about the criminal history of applicants began in the 1990's after a series of lawsuits related to college and university liability when returning citizen or ex-offender students committed crimes after admission. Davies (2000) analyzes issues about "contractual and tortious

duties, rehabilitation of offenders, human rights, and data protection” (p. 143). The researcher does not draw conclusions but provides an objective analysis on each issue. Even so, he acknowledges that education is a key factor to the reduction of recidivism.

In 2013, the Congress amended the Clery Act in its reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which includes the Campus Sexual Assault Victims’ Bill of Rights, an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965. Colleges and universities that receive federal funding are required to gather and retain statistics and policies and procedures relating to crimes, such as sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking. The legislation also required institutions of higher learning to provide prevention training to students, faculty, and staff.

Since then, a movement, Ban the Box expanded and became well-known among policy makers (O’Neill, 2012). According to the Ban the Box Campaign (n.d.), a national civil rights movement comprised of returning citizens, ex-offenders, and their families, All of Us or None, started the movement in 2004. The catalyst for the Ban the Box movement was employment and housing discrimination experienced by returning citizens and ex-offenders, creating severe barriers to societal reintegration. The Ban the Box movement broadened its focus and now advocates for removal of inquiries about criminal history from college applications.

Proponents of banning the box contend that research does not support the assertion that identifying those with criminal histories, such as returning citizens and ex-offenders, increases campus safety. To the contrary, the effect on campus safety does not offset the stigma that results when returning citizens or ex-offenders check the box acknowledging previous or perceived criminal histories, but instead increases negative

perceptions and attitudes towards those who experience interaction with the criminal justice system. The box creates yet another barrier to successful reintegration (O'Neill, 2012).

The Ban the Box movement initially focused on removing barriers to employment and housing. Because of the movement's effective advocacy, some cities and states prohibit discrimination in employment and housing against returning citizens and ex-offenders. However, higher education has not effectively addressed the issue. Most colleges and universities continue to inquire about criminal convictions on the admissions application and follow extended admissions process for applicants with criminal convictions. Research shows a strong correlation between education and recidivism (Baer, et al., 2006; Custer, 2013, 2016, 2018). The higher the level of education, the lower the recidivism.

Custer (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of university admissions for ex-offenders in the United States and the United Kingdom. He discussed university policies that require disclosure of criminal histories and the social movement, Ban the Box, which seeks to remove the criminal history barrier for ex-offenders who want to pursue higher education. In his qualitative study, Custer (2018) identified themes. The researcher-identified themes included the criminal records law, the university admissions policies, including the logic, the history, and the language, and the admissions data. After conducting an analysis, Custer (2018) concluded that universities should modify or abandon the policies requiring disclosure of criminal history. Higher education institutions should Ban the Box requesting information about criminal history of college applicants.

Recognizing the challenges ex-offenders and returning citizens face with post-release societal integration, in 2008, under the Bush Administration, Congress passed the Second Chance Act (SCA). The SCA, whose purpose is to facilitate ex-offender and returning citizen reentry into society by helping them to reconnect with their families and build a productive life using evidence-based practices with the intended result of reducing recidivism, only covers federal offenders though most offenders in the United States are state-level offenders. Therefore, state-level offenders do not benefit from the legislation (Whetzel & McGrath, 2019). The SCA covers emergency services and services related to the transition of ex-offenders and returning citizens into society post-release. Identifying criminogenic needs, such as cognitions, social networks, alcohol/drugs, and employment/education, is an essential component of the transition. Implementation includes addressing responsivity factors, such as violence, homelessness, transportation, reading/writing limitations, handicaps, and childcare concerns.

Whetzel et al (2019) examined the progress and implementation challenges of the SCA since its enactment. The researchers addressed issues with the initial implementation and noted disparities, with inconsistencies in the court system's use of SCA funding. The purpose of the article was to provide recommendations to courts for the use of SCA funding. Although the SCA identifies employment and education as a criminogenic need, the legislation does not provide funding for education. The legislation provides funding for job readiness, job training, subsidized on-the-job training, employment tools, and equipment and licensure. The only education recommended by the authors involved increasing the knowledge of staff about the SCA's potential to

improve community safety and to positively influence the lives of ex-offenders and returning citizens.

### **Criminal History: Stigma and Barriers**

While social justice advocates and policy makers made progress in addressing visible barriers, invisible barriers still exist, such as stigma and preconceived notions about previously incarcerated persons (Couloute, 2018). Higher education institutions are no exception. Returning citizens and ex-offenders face the same types of challenges in their efforts to attain college degrees as they do when trying to reintegrate into society.

Rubenstein et al. (2019) examined stigma related to college admissions as it relates to sex offenders. The researchers indicate that the stereotypes and misinformation about the level of recidivism among sex offenders exasperates the college admissions process even more. According to Rubenstein et al. (2019), like other offenders, the ability to attain a higher education among sex offenders is a factor that lowers recidivism. Societal attachment of stigma exasperates extant barriers to the pursuit of higher education for returning citizens and ex-offenders.

Halkovic and Greene (2015) conducted a participatory action research project, seeking knowledge about students with criminal records on college campuses. The researchers identify post-incarceration education of offenders as a gap in the literature. The article addresses the stigma carried by returning citizens and benefits of the inclusion of criminal offenders in the university community, recommending the creation of a hospitable campus environment. Although offenders serve prison sentences as retribution from crimes committed, the criminal conviction assigns a stigma that impedes the reintegration process (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). Contrary to societal views about

criminal offenders, which attach stigma, the researchers identified themes characterized as gifts, such as the deconstruction of the preconceived notions, societally assigned because of their criminal experience. According to Halkovic & Greene (2015), their research deflated campus safety concerns regarding returning citizens.

In addition to stigma, barriers also include housing, employment, food insecurity, and the pursuit of higher education (Ramaswamy, 2015; Rubenstein, et al., 2019). Ramaswamy (2015) conducted a legal analysis which addresses the disproportionate impact of the barriers to education on minority populations. In doing so, the researcher noted that access to higher education is critical to the success of returning citizens and ex-offenders. Removing the barriers, or at the very least, minimizing the barriers, facilitates reentry in ways that maximize a successful transition. Ramaswamy (2015) further notes that there is no educational benefit to the examination of the criminal histories of applicants.

O'Reilly (2014) conducted research demonstrating that the barriers to education and its impact on the ability of returning citizens and ex-offenders to obtain viable employment is not unique to the United States. Her research involves offenders in Ireland who seek to reintegrate into society post-incarceration, even where Irish prison policy requires the provision on education while incarcerated. The nexus between education and employment is well-settled. The inability to obtain employment because of the lack of education, lead to food and housing insecurity. When criminal histories prevent further pursuit of educational opportunities, which affects the ability to obtain jobs that pay living wages, it interferes with the growth and progress needed for successful reintegration.

Cossyleon and Flores (2020) conducted an ethnographical study, examining the involvement of returning citizens in a social movement, specifically Fighting to Overcome Records and Create Equality (FORCE). FORCE is a movement created and led by formerly incarcerated persons. They partnered with Community Renewal Society (CRS) to change law and policy. The study, unlike most in the literature, considered low income, marginalized populations involved in social movements.

The researchers found that study participants developed social capital and a sense of belonging because of their involvement in FORCE. There is extensive discussion about the social, economic, and personal consequences of incarceration, including exclusion from available opportunities and stigma. Interestingly, the researchers note that the exclusion is the result of returning citizens' involvement in formal and informal legal and social practices, i.e., the criminal justice system and post-incarceration stigmatization.

Society stigmatizes ex-offenders and returning citizens, impeding successful reintegration into society. In addition to socioeconomic stigma and the legalized consequences of incarceration, such as loss of the right to vote, denial of public assistance for food, and housing insecurity, ex-offenders and returning citizens face health disparities. Tyler and Brockmann (2017) discussed the role of public policy in stigmatizing ex-offenders and returning citizens and make policy recommendations to address the stigma related to race, mental health, drug addiction, the impact on the system-involved and their families. The researchers recommended policy reform in the treatment of mental health, sentencing, recidivism, Ban the Box legislation, and collateral consequences.

### **Legal Implications**

There may be legal implications with the admissions of returning citizens and ex-offenders, such as allegations of negligent admissions if the returning citizen or ex-offender compromises campus safety (Custer, 2016; Pierce, et al., 2014). Data protection and allegations of discrimination, considering the guidance of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2012) regarding the exclusion of returning citizen and ex-offender employment opportunities, also present possible legal issues for higher education institutions. However, it is important to understand the experiences of professionals involved in the admissions process and the way that they use information about criminal convictions (Davies, 2000). Doing so may contribute to the diminishment of disparities created by structures, policies, and processes.

Using audit methodology and a quantitative data analysis, Stewart and Uggen (2020) collected data showing that 72% of colleges and universities inquire about criminal histories during the admissions process. The researchers selected the audit study method because of its use in discrimination research, typically in studies addressing housing discrimination. Theoretically, returning citizens and ex-offenders could sue a college or university for discrimination, given the guidance of the Equal Employment Opportunity Council (EEOC). The EEOC cautions employers about potential disparate treatment or disparate impact lawsuits because of the use of arrest and conviction records. EEOC issued the guidance because of the large percentage of black males incarcerated in America's prisons (EEOC, 2012; Sugle, 2017).

Colleges and universities are legally obligated to provide a safe environment for students. The failure to do so may result in a negligence lawsuit. Such litigation typically



surrounds issues related to the institution's property, i.e., the failure to provide sufficient lighting. However, victims of campus crimes could assert that the institution is responsible for negligent admissions. For example, if the college admits a known sex-offender who rapes a student, the victim could potentially bring a civil lawsuit alleging that the institution failed to meet its standard of care and, as a result, is negligent. In that regard, Jeanne Clery's family filed and settled a civil lawsuit against Lehigh University, the institution where a student raped and murdered Clery. The Clery's lawsuit did not involve allegations of negligent admissions but rather allegations that the college failed to take necessary precautions to ensure that the dormitory was secured and that the college knew of safety issues but failed to involve the college community.

Adolf (2012) analyzed the potential legal exposure of colleges and universities related to campus safety. The researcher's findings indicate that colleges and universities should consider potential legal action related to contracts, negligence, and landlord-tenant issues in decision-making about campus safety. The researcher's recommendation that higher education institutions focus on three areas, contracts, negligence, and landlord-tenant issues is consistent with the literature that focuses primarily on institutions' legal obligations related to property. Adolf discusses negligent hiring but does not mention negligent admissions.

Other than the responsibility of colleges and universities to provide a safe physical environment, the legal cases related to negligence of higher education institutions focus primarily on negligence as it relates to the institutions' responsibilities under Title IX. In *Estate of Karlie Hall v. Millersville University, et al.* (2022) involved allegations of failure to follow Title IX policies, demonstrating deliberate indifference

toward the safety of the student. In 2015, the boyfriend of a victim of sexual harassment, who was not a student, murdered his girlfriend, a Millersville University student. The university contended that they were not responsible for the conduct of a non-student. Upon appeal, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit Court disagreed. The court's decision widened college and university responsibility under Title IX. However, the case did not address any issues related to a higher education institution's admission of a returning citizen or ex-offender that resulted in criminal activity on campus.

*Diorio v. Harry* (2022) and *K. L. v. Rutgers* (2022) are like the *Hall* case. In both cases, the issue was whether the institution displayed deliberate indifference and therefore, negligence, in addressing Title IX sexual harassment issues, resulting in harm to the student victim. *Like Hall*, there are no allegations that the institutions in *Diorio v. Harry* (2022) or *K. L. v. Rutgers* (2022) were liable for negligent admissions. Rather, the plaintiffs contended that the institutions did not fulfill its obligations under Title IX.

### **Correlation between Criminal Involvement and Education Level**

Despite the strong connection between education and recidivism, higher education institutions continue to collect information related to the criminal histories of its applicants. According to a report by the Center for Community Alternatives (2010), college and universities report no impact on campus safety because of gathering criminal history data. In its report, the Center for Community Alternatives, like Ramaswamy (2015) addresses the racial disparity and discriminatory impact of the use of criminal histories in the admissions process, characterizing the issue as a civil rights problem. The organization recommends the elimination of the practice and discusses alternative solutions to address issues of campus safety.

Halkovic and Greene (2015) review a plethora of research confirming the correlation between education level and criminal involvement, positing that the higher the educational level, the lower recidivism. Despite strong peer-reviewed support, colleges and universities continue to focus on the negative characteristics of ex-offenders rather than viewing the population as contributing positively to the higher education community.

Returning citizens and ex-offenders face a plethora of challenges, among which is lack of access to education (Baer, et al., 2006; Custer, 2013; Custer, 2016; Custer, 2018). Research shows that education lowers the risk of offender recidivism (Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017; Stewart & Uggen, 2018). For that reason, attaining a higher level of education is critical for the success of the offender and contributes to public safety of campuses and communities because the offender is less likely to recidivate (Custer, 2018; Vacca; 2004).

Halkovic and Greene (2015) also identify constructive contributions of ex-offenders, such as developing relationship and bridging the gap between institutions of higher learning and the communities, the sharing of personal, real-life experiences that give life to theories in an educational setting and eliminating the myths about stigma attached to incarceration and those previously incarcerated. Research does not support the contention that ex-offenders jeopardize campus safety.

Jung (2017) discusses the consequences and implications to ex-offenders and returning citizens when colleges and universities inquire about criminal history on admissions applications. The research supports the contention that higher levels of education reduce recidivism. Jung (2017) further discussed the minimal impact on

campus safety because of college inquiries about criminal history. Rather, inquiring about criminal history increases stigma and limits opportunities for higher education for the formerly incarcerated. The article also addressed the legal implications for colleges when applicants fail to disclose prior criminal history, providing examples of universities sued by victims for negligent admission of an ex-offender. Jung (2017) recommends a balanced approach that addresses the concerns from those that view the questions about criminal history as limiting access to higher education and those who are concerned about campus safety. The balanced approach recommended is that outlined in the Fair Access to Education Act of 2015, which would remove marijuana-related misdemeanors from the list of offenses that affect eligibility for federal loans, grants, and work study. The bill did not pass.

### **University Social Responsibility**

University Social Responsibility (USR) is a relatively recent theory, lacking substantial theoretical framework (Vallaey, 2013). The changing society, increasingly wrought with social, economic, and political issues, causes questions. Researchers define USR with a consistent focus on addressing societal issues, the significance of the participation of stakeholders, and curricular integration (Chen et al., 2015, Reiser, 2008; Vasilescu et al., 2010). Vasilescu et al. (2010) provides a conceptual framework for university social responsibility, contending that the philanthropy of corporate social responsibility does not effectually encompass the extant need for colleges and universities to address societal concerns (Vasilescu et al., 2010). Researchers note the distinction between responsibility and requirement, positing that an effective model of USR is found when the concepts are deeply engrained in the character and identity of the

institution (Chen et al., 2015). Operative and sustainable USR intrinsically requires collaboration.

Jorge and Pena (2017) conducted a literature review of articles about university social responsibility from 15 academic journals. The articles spanned a 15-year period, ranging from 2000 to 2015. The researchers analyzed the literature to ascertain the emergence of the concept of university social responsibility, to identify gaps in the literature, and to make recommendations for future research. Consistent with Chen et. al (2015), Jorge et al. (2017) recognized that the shift in the societal role of institutions of higher learning necessitates a responsibility to develop curricula that integrates principles of social responsibility in teaching, research, management, and as advocates for community engagement.

Morales et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study in the business school at a university in Mexico to determine the influence of leadership and governance in USR. The sample population included 211 students, faculty, or administrative employees in the Faculty of Administrative Sciences. The research concluded that leadership and governing bodies are impetus of USR.

Like Vasilescu et al., 2010, Bastos, et al (2019) view USR as distinct from Corporate Social Responsibility. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the researchers explore stakeholder's perceptions, using the framework established by the Carroll model, specifically economic, ethical, legal, and philanthropic dimensions (p. 28). The sample included coordinators, employees, students, and employees from a public and private university. The research showed that participants are concerned about USR, but view the four dimensions differently. For example, the participants from the public

university, believed that legal obligations and ethical conduct should merge. Public and private university participants have negative perspectives toward the philanthropic dimension of Carroll's model. While Bastos et al. (2019) discussed the importance of collaboration in defining USR, it is not a concept explored in this research because of the focus on the four dimensions of Carroll's model.

Ali, et al. (2021) conducted an analysis of literature about university social responsibility to ascertain the context in which higher education institutions applied the concept of USR and the outcomes. The researchers concluded that universities *must* participate in social responsibility initiatives, particularly from an administrative and policy perspective. Research showed that long-term, stakeholder involvement is critical for universities to address and effectively impact social issues. From a practical standpoint, Ali et al. (2021) posit that the inclusion of curricula that addresses social problems demonstrates university social responsibility. The research further reveals significant differences between corporate social responsibility and university social responsibility.

### **Collaborative Theory**

A review of the literature reveals minimal research about collaborative theory in the criminal justice and higher education environment. There is a plethora of research related to collaboration and partnerships in other disciplines, particularly healthcare. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides collaborative services to assist individuals who are criminal justice system-involved and suffer with substance abuse issues. However, collaborative relationships between the law

enforcement, courts, corrections, and social service agencies are infrequent in the literature.

Gajda (2004) examines collaborative theory in the context of program evaluation. The researcher discusses the importance of establishing collaborative relationships, also referred to as strategic alliances, to accomplish purposes that exceed the abilities of one agency. The issues related to the ability of returning citizens and ex-offenders to pursue higher education requires collaborative partnerships between law enforcement, courts, and corrections agencies. If the goal is to reduce recidivism, higher education and criminal justice agencies should work together, given the research that posits the correlation between higher education and recidivism.

Huang and Brown (2019) focused on collaboration between higher education institutions to strengthen research rather than partnerships between higher education institutions and community agencies. The researchers recognize the benefit of collaboration in higher education, although there is no discussion about the way colleges and universities can develop strategic relationships to address social concerns, as Gajda (2004) did.

Likewise, Lawrence (2017) acknowledges the significance of collaborative leadership, identifying theoretical framework, such as collaborative learning, constructivism, and transformational learning. However, while collaborative leadership is necessary for the formation of effective partnerships, the concept of working together to address a societal issue, such as successful and sustained reentry of returning citizens and ex-offenders is not found in the theoretical framework of the article.

Cropp (2017) provides insight into the effectiveness of law enforcement collaboration with community agencies within the context of the theoretical keystones of collaborative learning and collaborative problem-solving. The research contends that each agency offers a variety of perspectives, skills, resources, and services to affect the lives of the population served. Without collaboration, the agencies individually are unable to holistically address the concerns of offenders or victims. The concept advanced by Cropp (2017) would enable collaboration between higher education institutions, law enforcement, courts, corrections agencies, and communities to contribute to the educational advancement of returning citizens and ex-offenders, reducing recidivism, and producing responsible citizens.

Duffield et al. (2012), like Huang and Brown (2019) addressed collaborative relationship between higher education institutions, acknowledging the sparsity of the research. Although the researcher does not explore partnerships between higher education institutions, criminal justice agencies, and the community, in the case study research, they lay the foundation for the theoretical framework to develop collaborative theory in the context of higher education. Duffield et al. (2012) address the reasons for collaboration and identify the most internal factor as the commonality of goals. Most of the discussion involved the governance model used in building and sustaining the collaborative relationship. Lessons learned included the importance of trust, the ability to accomplish more when working collaboratively, and the creation of a model for other institutions.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood theories. Educational institutions across the country argue about the inclusion or



exclusion of books, history, and curricula because of varying interpretations of CRT. For purposes of the current study, CRT is a part of the theoretical framework because of its foundation in historical relevance supported by statistical data. It is challenging to omit race from the study of the disparate treatment of returning citizens and ex-offenders in the college admissions process when a significant percentage of the referenced population are African American males.

Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) note that comparative case studies focus on critical theory, addressing societal inequalities and examining disparities caused by the development of structures and processes (p. 39). The current study warrants a discussion of critical theory because based on federal and state incarceration statistics, African Americans are most of the population incarcerated or under the supervision of the criminal justice system in the United States. Therefore, it follows that African Americans comprise most of the population affected by the barriers to reentry, including the admission to institutions of higher education.

Warde (2012) conducted a study examining the disproportionate incarceration of black men in the United States, Canada, and England. The theoretical framework within which the research examines the disproportionality of incarceration of black men in the three countries is critical race theory. Warde (2012) notes that the issue of the disparity in the incarceration of black men is not unique to the United States. According to Warde (2012), critical race theory postulates that, from a historical perspective, racial biases are deeply imbedded, consciously and implicitly, overtly, and covertly because of systemic privilege, which resulted in one system of oppression followed by another; i.e., slavery, slave codes, Jim Crow, and even the criminal justice system as currently structured.

Warde (2012) further posits that the inequities that exist related to equal access to resources and the benefits that result is based on unequal power possessed by the now dominant population, based on race and socioeconomics. Systems established by the dominant population continue to perpetuate the inequities, including the criminal justice system. Warde (2012) contends that though the minority population, poor black men from urban communities are the majority of those affected by the historical imbalance of power in the United States, Canada, and England.

Thompson (2016) also examined the disparity in race related to incarceration in the context of critical race theory. Thompson (2016) studied the school-to-prison pipeline, considering zero tolerance policies in school discipline and the racial disparities in school discipline in the Miami-Dade School System. The researcher discussed the history of race discrimination in the United States and its impact inter-institutionally, intra-institutionally, and interpersonally, concluding that racial inequities resulted in school punishment, creating a school-to-prison pipeline, supporting the conceptualization of critical race theory.

Webb et al. (2020) researched the exoneration of youth offenders using critical race theory as the theoretical framework. To explain the racial disparity in wrongful convictions, Webb et al (2020) posited that the unfortunate history of unequal power structures in the United States based upon race resulted in systemic levels of poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and the destruction of the African American family unit. As a result, racial bias in the United States is consciously or unconsciously a part of the decision-making process that leads to mistaken identity, one of the most prevalent reasons for wrongful convictions.

## **Methodology**

The current study used mixed methods, specifically qualitative case study and descriptive statistics, to gain insight from admissions professionals, campus safety employees, and residential life employees about their perspectives and experiences with returning citizens and ex-offenders in the college admissions process. The researcher compared and contrasted the perspectives and experiences of the three groups vertically and horizontally. According to the literature, the selected methodology is appropriate (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Crowe et al., 2011; Shrestha & Bhattarai, 2021).

The exploration of the perceptions and experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety employees, and residential life employees is of cross-disciplinary interest. The study concerns a higher education institution and an exploration of its policies and practices as it relates to the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders. To discern the experience of formerly system-involved individuals in their attempts to further their education, study participants revealed glimpses of the experiences of returning citizens and ex-offenders.

According to Crowe et al. (2011), the case study is a methodology commonly used in law and policy. The current study involves law and policy. It examines the status of the law as it relates to disparate treatment and the existence of barriers, intended or unintended, for returning citizens and ex-offenders in their reintegration into society post-incarceration. The study also explores policies, such as Ban the Box, that advocate for mitigation and minimalization of the impediments to successful reintegration and policies that created some of the barriers to success.

Crowe et al. (2011) provided in-depth insight into the case study as a methodological approach, positing about the utility of case studies when studying particular phenomena or issues in the context of reality, such as policies. This study is particularly interested in the admissions policy as it relates to returning citizens and ex-offenders. The study participants provided insight from their perspectives, perceptions, and experiences that enabled the researcher to gain insight into the real-life views of those involved in the admissions process, the policy implementation, and the practices at the small, Midwestern college beyond that potentially revealed by a simple survey or questionnaire.

Shrestha and Bhattarai (2022) discussed the efficacy of the case study method in agreement with Crowe et al. (2011) about its usefulness as a research methodology. The researchers explored inclusion in education. The foci of their study were female students with visual impairments. Shrestha and Bhattarai (2022) describe inclusion in education as an issue related to access, like the current study. While the focus of the research differs, the intent is the comparable. In essence, the issues surrounding the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders concern access to higher education and the elimination of barriers preventing access. The researchers explored experiences, policy, and practices, like the current research. Thus, there is precedent for the use of case study as a methodology to research phenomena related to policies, practices, and inclusion, or conversely, exclusion.

In addition, researchers use the case study methodology to support the reshaping of policy, program development, and interventions with empirical research (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Reyes-Quilodran et al., 2017). Reyes-Quilodran et al. (2017) conducted a

case study analyzing participants' perceptions about the implementation of a victim-offender program in juvenile justice systems. The researchers contended that their research would provide insight on the process for practitioners in Chile, Sweden, England, and Italy, enabling the practitioners to reshape policies and practices. The current study provides insight to higher education institutions, criminal justice practitioners, and social justice advocates regarding policies and practices related to the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders.

### **Summary**

A review of the literature resulted in the identification of themes about issues surrounding reentry of returning citizens and ex-offenders, the impediments, barriers, and challenges that the population faces when attempting to resume their lives, particularly within the context of critical race theory. The literature review summarizes the research related to policy, specifically the Ban the Box movement advocating for the removal of questions related to criminal history. The review of the literature supports the need for collaboration between universities, the criminal justice system, and communities to meet the needs of returning citizens and ex-offenders seeking admission to colleges and universities. In addition, the framework described in the research demonstrates theoretical support for strategic partnerships in the higher education context to offer higher learning to ex-offenders and returning citizens and consequently, reduce recidivism and produce educated, socially conscious, and economically prepared citizens.

### **Chapter Three: Research Method and Design**

The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the admissions process for returning citizen applicants by conducting a case study examining the experiences, perspectives, and understanding of admissions, campus safety, and residential life employees at a small, private Midwestern college, about the admissions policy and process for returning citizens. The researcher identified and described the applications process and the policy for returning citizen applicants and ascertained whether there is consistency in the process between campuses. This researcher conducted interviews with admissions, campus safety, and residential life employees involved in the admissions process for returning citizens to learn about their experiences, perspectives, and understanding of the policy and the process. Chapter One introduced the study and Chapter Two examined relevant literature. Chapter Three expounds upon the research method and design.

#### **Research Questions**

**Research Question 1:** What is the understanding of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees involved in the admissions process for returning citizens about the university admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 2:** What are the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees involved with the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 3:** How do the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees influence their perspectives and attitudes towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 4:** What are the differences, similarities, or patterns between the experiences, understanding, and perspectives of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about and towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

Using a mixed methods approach, specifically, the case study method and the analysis of descriptive statistics, an exploration of the experiences and understanding among the admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees are explored (Barlett & Vavrus, 2017; Merriam, 1998). Comparative case studies are an accepted methodology to accomplish the purpose of this exploration of organizational policies and processes. The case study approach is indicative of the interpretive research philosophy, which contends that researchers gain new knowledge by “understanding processes, shared place, purpose, or identity” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). The study seeks to understand the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders. The study further endeavors to gain knowledge about the sample population’s understanding of their place, purpose, and identity in the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders.

The comparative case study is a process-oriented approach, without the bounds of a traditional case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Denzin, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The research design is emergent, exploring pertinent factors, actors, features, and the historical and contemporary processes producing a sense of shared

place, purpose, or identity (Barlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 19). This research seeks to explore the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders and shared experiences and perspectives of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about the process.

Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) further note that comparative case studies focus on critical theory, addressing societal inequalities and examining disparities caused by the development of structures and processes (p. 39). The case study allowed the researcher to conduct horizontal, vertical, and transversal comparisons between admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees' experiences and perspectives.

To accomplish the purposes of this research, the researcher recruited a sample population of 12 admissions, campus safety, and residential life professionals involved in all aspects of the admissions processing of applications and the integration of traditional, graduate, and non-traditional student admission to the university. There are 30 to 40 admissions professionals and others involved in the admissions process for returning citizens (Van Rjinsoever, 2017). The President of the small, private college and the Vice President of Student Affairs approved this research. Data collection ceased once the researcher achieved saturation.

The researcher used the following secondary data to inform the research: student population size, including undergraduate, graduate, and non-traditional students; university student demographics, application forms, number of returning citizen and ex-offender applicants, number of returning citizen or ex-offender applicants admitted and denied, and past and present university admissions policy for returning citizens and ex-



offenders. Data were readily accessible and publicly available regarding the student population size and demographics. The secondary data allowed the researcher to have a more precise picture of the extent of the issues related to the application process for returning citizens and ex-offender applicants at the college by examining the number of applicants with prior criminal histories and the outcomes of the admissions process.

At the onset of the research, it was unknown whether the College maintained data related to returning citizen or ex-offender applicants or whether a written policy, as opposed to a practice existed. The research revealed the existence of a practice rather than a policy. The researcher discusses the implications of the lack of formal policy in Chapter Five.

The interview questions are attached as Appendix A. Except for preliminary questions which solicited information and descriptive statistics about the participants' demographics, tenure, and experience, the inquiries are open-ended questions, which allowed participants to expand upon thoughts and enabled the researcher to gain knowledge, sometimes beyond that sought. Remler and Ryzin (2015) provided guidance for conducting qualitative interviews, stating that open-ended questions seek in-depth, detailed responses using participants' words (p. 67). The interview questions are a guide rather than a script. The researcher used probing questions to advance the conversation and to solicit further information from the participant, for example, 'tell me more about that.'

### **Sample Population**

The sample population included 12 admissions professionals, campus safety employees, and residential life employees involved in all aspects of the admissions

processing of applications and the integration of traditional, graduate, and non-traditional student admission to the university. At maximum capacity, there were 30 admissions professionals, campus safety employees, and residential life employees at the college.

The Director of Enrollment Management approved this research.

### **Study Procedure**

The researcher obtained email addresses of admissions professionals, campus safety employees, and residential life employees at the small, private Midwestern college from the college website. Potential study participants received an e-mail from the researcher describing the purpose of the study and the invitation to participate. An informed consent that also included the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, a statement of confidentiality, and a statement that participation is voluntary, and participants are free to withdraw participation at any time were included in the email. The participant had an opportunity to consent to participate or to refuse to participate in the study. The researcher requested contact information to schedule interviews once the participants consented to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained via affirmative response.

In addition, the researcher provided a phone number for participants to contact if they had questions. The researcher requested contact information for the potential participant, after consenting to participate in the study, to schedule an interview. In addition to contact information, the questionnaire after consent asked the participant to indicate whether they prefer a phone interview or a Zoom interview, as well as their availability for scheduling on the interview and whether they consented to recording. All participants consented to recording.

After scheduling interviews, all interviews were conducted by Zoom, audio-recorded, video-recorded, and transcribed. After reviewing the transcripts, the researcher used member checking by providing the participants a copy of the transcript to review for accuracy. In addition to member checking, to verify the reliability and validity of the data, the researcher used bracketing, triangulation, and reflexivity. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts to identify and highlight key terms and patterns, leading to thematic development, and to interpret the participant's understanding, perspectives, and experiences about the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders (Maxwell, 2013).

The analysis of the data includes emergent thematic coding to themes, patterns, and a descriptive narrative. The researcher analyzed the data horizontally and vertically. The results are reported in the form of a descriptive narrative, which includes the identification of the themes, anonymous excerpts from the interviews, and interpretation of the qualitative data.

The researcher also used secondary data to inform the research, such as the university's admissions practice for returning citizens and ex-offenders, the admissions applications used by the university in the admissions process, descriptive and redacted data about returning citizen and ex-offender applications, such as how many applications, how many were accepted or denied, types of crimes in general; specifically, the types of crimes committed by those accepted and the types of crimes committed by those denied, and local versus non-local applicants. The researcher requested redaction of identifying data, such as names and ID numbers, if such data existed. Data were available, reporting

the number of applicants that disclosed prior criminal histories and the disposition of those applications between 2004 and 2021.

## Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this case study is to gain insight into the admissions process and policy for returning citizen and ex-offender applicants by exploring the experiences and understanding of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees at the small, private Midwestern college about the admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders. To that end, the researcher interviewed 12 participants connected to admissions, campus safety, and residential life at the small, private college. The interview questions sought to answer four research questions, presented below.

**Research Question 1:** What is the understanding of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees involved in the admissions process for returning citizens about the university admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 2:** What are the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees involved with the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 3:** How do the experiences of admissions professionals, Campus Safety, and Residential Life employees influence their perspectives and attitudes towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 4:** What are the differences, similarities, or patterns between the experiences, understanding, and perspectives of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about and towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

Once collected, the researcher coded and analyzed the data to determine the emergent themes. This chapter presents the results of the study, descriptions of the data analysis, participant demographics, and the emergent themes. The themes are organized according to the research question answered. Following that is a discussion of the felony and misdemeanor data relevant to this study and a synthesis of the data presented.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed qualitative data by first coding each interview transcript using NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software that facilitates organization and visualization of data. The researcher drives the analysis process within the program. First, the researcher coded key words and phrases, while reading each interview line by line. In this process, the researcher analyzed interviews vertically, paying attention to the single interview transcript. Coding in the qualitative software program works by selecting, or highlighting, the passage of text that requires coding and assigning a brief descriptor, known as a code. The software stores the codes as nodes. A node contains all segments of text with identical codes, so when the researcher selects a node, all excerpts assigned that code are retrievable. After coding all transcripts, the researcher clustered the codes into larger categories, known as themes. This process is the horizontal analysis, where the researcher compared and contrasted codes across all transcripts. The themes contained codes clustered based on similarity, reflecting a concept that tied together all codes under its umbrella (Houghton et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2015; Woods et al., 2016; Zamawe, 2015).

Data analysis yielded 10 themes. The themes are as follows: Theme 1: Unclear Policy and Practices for RCEO Applicants; Theme 2: Lack of Awareness of Policy and

Practice; Theme 3: Need for Clarification of the Policy; Theme 4: Belief that a Policy Would Be Beneficial; Theme 5, Uncertainly about the Policy's Shape; Theme 6: Unofficial Practice and Procedures to Admit RCEOS; Theme 7: Subjectivity of Unofficial Admission Procedures; Theme 8: Unstated Consensus to Rescind Admission to an RCEO upon Disclosure of Criminal History; Theme 9: RCEOs Deserve a Second Chance; and Theme 10: Concern for Admitting Applicants with a History of Violent Crime.

The first five themes addressed Research Question 1. Themes 6, 7, and 8 addressed Research Question 2. Finally, Themes 9 and 10 addressed Research Question 3. Research Question 4 explores the differences and similarities within and across all three groups of study participants, admissions professionals, campus safety officers, and residential life employees. Within each theme, the discussion of the differences between categories of participants, including Admissions officials, Residential Life employees, and Campus Safety Officers, addresses Research Question 4 about the differences and similarities between the three categories of participants in their perceptions of RCEOs admitted to the college.

### **Study Site Characteristics**

The study compared the perspectives of three groups of employees at a small, private Midwestern college: admissions professionals, resident life employees, and campus safety employees. The college, a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI), is in a predominantly white rural community with a population of approximately 13,000. There are two state prisons in the community. About 50% of the college's students are African Americans from urban areas and 10% international students.

### Participant Demographics

The researcher interviewed 12 participants for this study (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Van Rjinsoever, 2017). This sample included two Residence Hall Directors, Director of Residence Life, Dean of Students, a Senior Regional Admissions Counselor, the Executive, Associate, and Assistant Directors of Admissions, and four Campus Safety Officers. Participants' jobs are in one of three campus departments: Residence Life, Campus Safety, and Admissions. Participants held their positions anywhere from under a year to 38 years. Table 1 displays the demographic data.

**Table 1**

Participant	Job Title	Department	Time in Position	Gender	Age	Race
1	Residence Hall Director	Student Affairs	2 years	F	22	B
2	Residence Hall Director	Student Affairs	< a year	F	21	W
3	Sr Regional Admissions counselor	Admissions	10 years	F	32	W
4	Dean of Students	Student Affairs	38 years	F	50	W
5	Campus Safety Officer	Campus Safety	2.5 years	M	26	W
6	Executive Director of Admissions	Admissions	2 years	M	35	W
7	Assistant Director of Admissions	Admissions	3 years	M	35	W
8	Campus Safety Officer	Campus Safety	< a year	F	21	B
9	Campus Safety Officer	Campus Safety	< a year	M	21	B
10	Campus Safety Officer	Campus Safety	< a year	F	30	W
11	Associate Director of Admissions	Admissions	23 years	F	43	W
12	Director of Residence Life	Student Affairs	4 years	M	32	B



## Results

### *Interview Data*

**Research Question 1:** What is the understanding of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees involved in the admissions process for returning citizens about the university admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Theme 1:** Unclear Policy and Practices for RCEO Applicants.

**Theme 2:** Lack of Awareness of Policy and Practice.

**Theme 3:** Need for Clarification of the Policy.

**Theme 4:** Belief that a Policy Would Be Beneficial.

**Theme 5:** Uncertainty about the Policy's Shape.

Research Question 1 sought to ascertain the understanding of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about the university admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders. Emergent from the interviews was an understanding that the campus had unclear, or nonexistent, policies and procedures for admitting RCEOs as students. Participants across all categories, including admissions professionals, campus safety, and Residential Life employees, reported the lack of an official policy for handling RCEOs. Many participants said if there was a policy, they were unaware of it. When the researcher asked participants if they were familiar with or knew of a policy for RCEO admittance to the college, participants responded that they did not know of a policy. This was true, even of admissions professionals or those responsible for admitting new students to the college. Consequently, three broad themes emerged: the unclarity/lack of a clear admissions

policy, the understanding that such a policy would be beneficial, and uncertainty as to the shape the policy would take.

Theme 1, Unclear Policy and Practices for RCEO Applicants; Theme 2, Lack of Awareness of Policy and Practice; Theme 3, Need for Clarification of the Policy; Theme 4: Belief that a Policy Would Be Beneficial; and Theme 5, Uncertainty about the Policy's Shape addressed RQ1, which asked: What is the understanding of admissions professionals, campus safety employees, and residential life employees about the university admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders? Participants across all categories, including admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees, reported the lack of an official policy for handling RCEOs. Many participants said if there was a policy, they were unaware of it. When the researcher asked participants if they were familiar with or knew of a policy for RCEO admittance to the college, participants responded that they did not know of a policy. This was true, even of admissions professionals or those responsible for admitting new students to the college.

The Senior Regional Admissions Counselor, who has a 10-year tenure in the Admissions department, said, "That's crazy, because I do not know [what the policy is]" for RCEOs. The Executive Director of Admissions said only a practice existed, not a policy, and admitted, "That is something I think the college could definitely do better at, the putting in the steps that need to be taken . . . but right it's just a practice."

Residential life employees and campus safety officers were also unaware of a policy for admissions. "No, I do not know if there's a policy," said one Residence Hall Director. The Dean of Students answered similarly, "I'm not aware of any policy," and

suggested that a policy should “come into play before the student is admitted as a student.” One Campus Safety Officer said, “In my role, I’m actually unaware [if there is a policy for RCEO admissions].”

#### **Theme 4: Belief that a Policy Would Be Beneficial**

The fourth emergent theme is the belief that a clear, codified policy for the admission of RCEOs would be beneficial. Across all three categories of participants, five believed a policy to admit RCEOs should exist. One Campus Safety Officer said a policy would help “ensure that we are operating a safe campus community” and keep all students and staff safe. Another Campus Safety Officer suggested that for certain categories of offenders, like sex offenders, “an admissions policy would help provide guidance for processing the person’s application and decisions about college admission.” The Executive Director of Admissions also believed a formal policy would help admissions officials when making admissions decisions about a RCEO applicant. This participant explained,

I'd like to see a policy. I would rather have a policy put in place, something that would go into the catalog, that if we need it, if we needed to make certain that we know we're going off the policy and not being very so subjective, because I think it's with the practice that we're currently using, it's really a subjective thought of whether or not we're allowing the student and where we could just revert back and tell them, tell the student, now we have this policy in place and this is why you are either accepted or denied.

The Dean of Students also believed a policy would benefit staff, though did not specify exactly how. The participant said, “I think that would help out tremendously. Matter of

fact, I was going to write that down to look at some pieces for that. Because I know that it would help us out over here tremendously, I believe.”

**Theme 5: Uncertainly about the Policy’s Shape.**

Exactly what a policy to admit RCEOs would look like was unclear to participants. The Assistant Director of Admissions thought a policy should include a review board with input from the applicant’s parole or probation officer. The Director of Residence Life, a Campus Safety Officer, and a Residence Hall Director agreed about the involvement of a parole or probation officer in the admissions process, as stipulated in a policy. A Residence Hall Director was also unsure what a policy might look like, saying, “Especially including, like, FERPA, and knowing how much one can really share on that information,” and wondered about the problems posed by these limitations to information sharing. It was unclear from this participant if FERPA really had an impact on the process. One Campus Safety Officer and the Associate Director of Admissions suggested interviews with a RCEO applicant. As the admissions professional said,

I wish we would have a campus committee that would actually talk to the student on the issue. . . . I would like to meet with them face to face, because this would help an admissions committee read the applicant’s face and other body language.

Further, one Campus Safety Officer suggested a “routine background check” on the applicant. Another Campus Safety Officer believed that a policy should include a background check requirement when processing RCEO applicants, then clarified that maybe a full background check is inappropriate, but “at least checking the sex offender registry and seeing if they are on that” is a good starting point. Other study participants were hesitant. One Residence Hall Director said the college should “probably, definitely”

conduct background checks, indicating some hesitation in this contradictory statement.

The Associate Director of Admissions was also hesitant, stating, “I don’t think background checks are a bad thing, but then again, I hesitate on that, too.” The reason for the hesitation was because she believed in a clean slate and second chances, but as a parent had conflicting feelings. She said,

It's nice having a clean slate, looking at a person coming in, but then I have children that I've sent off to college. So, I would want a screening process as well to know that my son or daughter, all the safety precautions have been put in place.

If a policy did exist, participants suggested the involvement of a variety of school administrators in the admissions process. Three Residential Life employees and two Campus Safety Officers suggested involvement by the Dean of Students in the admissions process. A Residence Hall Director said, “At least, probably the Dean of Students [should be included].” In addition, three Residential Life employees, four Campus Safety Officers, and the Dean of Students suggested involvement by the Director of Campus Safety in admission procedures for a RCEO. A Campus Safety Officer said, “Campus safety, definitely, because we’ll have more hands-on with individuals like this.” Two Residence Hall Directors and three Campus Safety Officers also believed that the Admissions Director should be involved in the admissions policy for admitting RCEOs. “Admissions would have to be involved because that’s their role,” said one Residence Hall Director. Two Campus Safety Officers suggested a representative of Campus Safety as a part of the admissions process. Indeed, most of these participants, including those employees from Residence Life, Admissions, and Campus Safety, believed a policy

should include a team of people across different areas of the college when making the decision to admit a RCEO.

**Research Question 2:** What are the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees involved with the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Theme 6:** Unofficial Practice and Procedures to Admit RCEOS

**Theme 7:** Subjectivity of Unofficial Admission Procedures

**Theme 8:** Unstated Consensus to Rescind Admission to an RCEO upon Disclosure of Criminal History.

Theme 6, Theme 7, and Theme 8 addressed Research Question 2: What are the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees involved with the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders? Research Question 2 sought to understand the experiences of admissions professionals and others involved in the admissions process for returning citizens or ex-offenders with the admissions process for returning citizens. Building on the findings for RQ1, the findings for RQ2 revealed unofficial practices and procedures emerging for the admittance of RCEOs.

**Theme 6: Unofficial Practice and Procedures to Admit RCEOS**

Despite the lack of an admissions policy for RCEOs applying to attend the college, admissions professionals follow a process or practice when considering applications from known RCEOs. Only those personnel in the admissions department who reviewed the application have knowledge of a RCEO seeking admission. From the interview data, other common themes emerged, such as Theme 7: subjectivity of

unofficial admission procedures and Theme 8: an unstated consensus to rescind admission to an RCEO when learning of non-disclosure of their criminal history.

Other campus staff and employees did not appear knowledgeable of this process. Two Residence Hall Directors and one Campus Safety Officer reported specifically they had no knowledge of an admissions practice for RCEOs. Campus Safety and Residential Life employees did not describe any experience with the admissions process for RCEOs. In addition, Campus Safety and Residential Life employees said no one informs them of a RCEO applicant during the admissions process. Admissions personnel would have knowledge of a RCEO seeking admission to the college if that person checked the box on their application, which asked if they had misdemeanor or felony convictions, or if that applicant had otherwise disclosed their status.

#### **Theme 7: The Subjectivity of Unofficial Admittance Procedures**

The emergent theme that also answers Research Question 2, Theme 7, was that the unofficial admittance procedures were subjective. Participants did not identify the procedures as such. Given that the college personnel would only have knowledge if someone checked the criminal history inquiry box, Admissions professionals described the process followed when reviewing the application of a RCEO into the college. If an applicant checked the box affirmatively, indicating conviction of a misdemeanor or felony, then according to the Associate Director of Admissions, a recruiter reaches out to the applicant. “When we see that on an application, we have the recruiters reach out to that applicant to see what the story is . . . what exactly happened. And there’s just so many scenarios,” said the Associate Director of Admissions. That there were “just so

many scenarios” suggested both a case-by-case basis and a subjectivity, based upon the perceptions of the specific Admissions employee handling the case.

Upon learning more about the nature of the incident, admissions personnel make decisions considering the crime and the threat that the RCEO may pose to campus safety. The Assistant Director of Admissions explained,

I can think of some recent applicants where I think a student said they got maybe pulled over for a DUI or maybe cannabis, which I wouldn't think that that would be too harmful for the student public or anything. I would say the ones that I usually research more would be more along the lines of violent crimes, or maybe a more serious drug charge, something along those lines, then I would look deeper into that part.

Decisions by admissions personnel about admittance were subjective. There was no set of guidelines dictating the decision-making process, nor requirement for evidence. As the Admissions Executive Director indicated during the interview, only more complex cases are escalated to the Vice-President of Enrollment. The Admissions Executive Director also noted that “quite a few” applications come through the system where the charge was a DUI or underage drinking. In such instances, admissions personnel would likely not follow up with that applicant. Petty crimes are most frequently reported on applications. However, there is a different practice for violent crimes. The Executive Director of Admissions elaborated:

Now, if it's a violent crime, maybe a, maybe some sort of sexual crime that could be red flag to live on campus, then we'll follow up and try to, we'll try to contact that student, get the story of maybe when it, when they were arrested for when



they were pleaded guilty or whatever it was and how you kind of get a little bit more of the backstory and what the, what they're currently doing, why they want to go to college, kind of get what they're hoping to get out of college. They're wanting to live on campus or off campus. What major they don't want to go to try to really get a good, clear picture of who they are...if I can't make a decision where I'm, I don't feel comfortable making a decision on acceptance, I'll go up one more level [VP]. But if I feel comfortable enough after meeting with them, we'll go ahead and either admit or deny them.

**Theme 8: Unofficial Policy to Rescind Admittance upon Non-Disclosure.**

Theme 8 also answers Research Question 2. Theme 8 occurred because there are occasionally instances when an applicant did not disclose their conviction on an application. When this happened and the admissions department learned of an applicant's conviction prior to RCEO enrollment in classes, admissions personnel rescinded the offer for admission. Because of the location of the school in such a small town, sometimes admissions personnel were familiar with offenders in the community and knew if applicants were omitting information on their applications. The Assistant Director of Admissions recalled an instance of this, saying, "I think we had a gentleman that applied a few years ago who was, I want to say, an ex-offender, but . . . and he did not mark that on his application, so we did rescind his admittance." The assertion by the Assistant Director of Admissions resulted in the inquiries about the number of local admissions versus non-local admissions. The chart below, which contains data between 2016 and 2021, demonstrates that there are consistently a higher percentage of non-local

applicants, rendering the Assistant Director of Admissions insights unsupported by the data.

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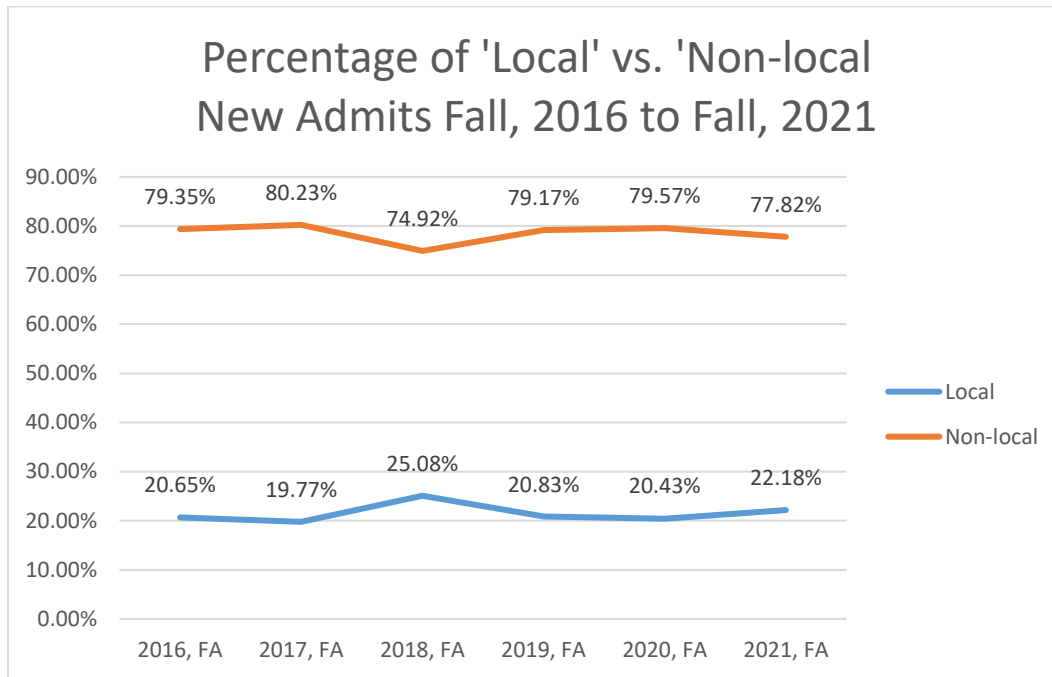
I think we had a gentleman that applied a few years ago who was, I want to say, an ex-offender, but...and he did not mark that on his application, so we did rescind his admittance.

The assertion by the Assistant Director of Admissions resulted in the inquiries about the number of local admissions versus non-local admissions. The chart in Figure 1, which contains data between 2016 and 2021, demonstrates that there are consistently a higher percentage of non-local applicants, rendering the Assistant Director of Admissions insights unsupported by the data; however, the perception that local resident college employees possess unique knowledge about local applicant RCEOs is founded. The community where the college is located has a population of 13,000. Many of the college employees, including a portion of the study participants, grew up in the community and have never left the community, which is close-knit. It is not unusual, given the characteristics of the site, for individuals to have knowledge, whether factual or based upon rumor, about other residents in the community, thus giving employees who live in

the community unique knowledge about applicants who also live in the community.

Figure 1 provides a comparison between the percentage of local applicants admitted vs. non-local applicants admitted from Fall 2016 to Fall 2021.

**Figure 1**



The Associate Director of Admissions provided more insight into this process:

If we know what the situation is, we'd make a decision. Right. Then, if we don't, we would call the student and say, I'm, you know, I say that I don't know how that situation actually happened. And we have two different letters for denial. One is for a felony that we are denying a student with a felony and we have one, you know what, we wouldn't call the student. We have another letter that says, "You have falsified information on your application." So, we don't ask that student in that sense. And I know the college lawyer was involved in that one. So, we took that to the vice president and said, "We know this student has also falsified

information.” So, contacted the lawyer, they came up with a letter, and we sent that letter to that student.

Although data does not substantiate the assertion of the study participant, the participant stated that sometimes an applicant failed to disclose their status on their application and the college admissions staff still admitted the applicant. This situation was not necessarily known by Residential Life employees or Campus Safety Officers, but the Dean of Students described an example. The Dean of Students recalled an incident that happened when the college admitted a RCEO without knowledge of the crime. The applicant did not mark on his application an indication of a prior conviction of a misdemeanor or felony. After enrolling in classes, this RCEO engaged in an altercation with another student, and was arrested, and permanently removed from campus. It was only after the incident that campus personnel learned about a prior incarceration on a domestic violence charge. The Dean of Students said that her fear of admitting RCEOs stemmed from the possibility that people were not honest on their applications, because there was little that even the admissions staff could do if an applicant was dishonest on their application. She said, “I think for me, a fear is that the student is not being honest on that application. Then we find out something as an incident happens on campus. I think that for me is a much larger picture.”

However, because of the small-town setting of the college, several admissions participants noted they would know an applicant and that person’s background, even if the applicant failed to disclose their conviction status on their application. Based on the data above, the admissions participant’s perception is real, though unsupported by statistics related to local versus non-local applicants admitted to the college.

**Research Question 3:** How do the experiences of Admissions professionals, Campus Safety, and Residential Life employees influence their perspectives and attitudes towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Theme 9:** RCEOs deserve a second change

**Theme 10:** Concern for Admitting Applicants with a History of Violent Crime

Theme 9, RCEOs deserve a second chance, and Theme 10, a concern for admitting applicants with a history of violent crime, addressed RQ3, which asked, “How do the experiences of Admissions professionals, Campus Safety, and Residential Life employees influence their perspectives and attitudes towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?” Most Residential Life and Campus Safety personnel reported their job responsibilities would not change if the college admitted and enrolled a RCEO. One Residence Hall Director said, “I wouldn’t change my views on my responsibilities at all with them,” and another said, “I don’t necessarily know from a professional standpoint what my responsibility goals for handling that student, but I think for me, just in general, I would treat that student like any other student.”

A Campus Safety Officer said responsibilities might change depending on the issue, and that, “I can address it to my supervisor,” but would not make anyone else aware. Another Campus Safety Officer said, “I don’t think I would have any responsibilities, really.” In addition, as one Campus Safety Officer explained, that is “none of our business” to know if the college admitted a RCEO and believed telling Campus Safety was not a good idea.

**Theme 9: Belief that RCEOs Deserve a Second Chance.**

Theme 9, Belief that RCEOs Deserve a Second Chance, emerged because of the overwhelming belief by participants that RCEOs deserved a second chance. To that end, it was not often that Admissions disclosed their histories to Campus Safety and Residential Life officials. As a result, Campus Safety Officers and Residential Life employees were unaware of any interaction they may have with RCEOs, especially in the admissions process. In addition to admissions office personnel, almost all study participants voiced their perspectives on the handling of RCEOs if admitted to the college. Most perspectives were incredibly positive. Several participants suggested RCEOs deserved a second chance in life and the opportunity for higher education. Two Residence Hall Directors spoke to this. One said, “I believe everybody is deserving of a second chance; they’re made their amends by doing, by going to jail or whatever.” Along the same lines, another said, “I feel as if we have to give everybody a chance. We really don’t know or can even understand why certain things happen.”

In addition, three Campus Safety Officers said RCEOs deserved a second chance in life. One qualified this, though, and said, “That’s also dependent on the criminal history of the individual and what charges had been filed and what they were convicted of.” Another said “it’s an awesome thing” that the college could admit RCEOs and allow them to pursue higher education through a second chance.

In the Admissions office, staff felt similarly. The Executive Director said his personal view was that RCEOs should have a second chance and “if getting a bachelor’s degree or associates or whatever, whatever degree they want, we’ll help them through that process.” Like some of the Campus Safety Officers, the Associate Director of

Admissions believed the second chance was contingent upon the nature of the crime and the specific situation. “I truly believe it depends . . . I truly, I believe in second chances,” she said. However, she has not confronted a situation like murder, so could not speak to all possibilities. “I haven’t been put to that test,” she explained.

Participants varied in their perspectives on prior drug offenses, suggesting a bit more nuance involved in possible criminal drug histories. The Admissions counselor and Dean of Students suggested they would want to know more about any drug-related convictions. As the Dean of Students explained, “I think that the drugs play a role in this as well and, what’s your activity been in the drug world.” The Assistant Director of Admissions also believed prior drug offenses are problematic, especially if they involved “one of the higher ones on that part, like manufacturing, distribution.” A Campus Safety Officer said her concern is if a RCEO student began selling drugs on campus.

Participants across all departments suggested their concern for the safety of students if a fellow student was a RCEO depended on the nature of the crime, too. Two Residence Hall Directors said if the RCEO had committed a more serious offense, concern about the safety of other students increases. Admissions officers also felt this depended on the severity of the crime. “If the person didn’t know how to control their anger, or felt it was okay to physically attack someone, I would be worried for the other population of students on campus, especially my female students,” said an Admissions counselor. A Campus Safety Officer also communicated a similar position question. “Depending on what they did, I would say only thing that would make me very cautious if they had any severe policy enforcements that were broken,” he relayed.

**Theme 10: Concern for Admitting Applicants with a History of Violent Crime.**

While perspectives regarding RCEOs on campus proved expectedly mixed, a more uniform concern emerged when discussing those with violent criminal history: concern for student safety. The concept of violent crime includes all crimes where one or more individuals are either harmed by or threatened with violence. This includes assault, murder, theft, sexual assault, and rape, crimes whose presence on college campuses evoke anxiety and concern among parents and students. Residence Hall employees, Campus Safety Officers, and Admissions officials believed overall in second chances, yet they also suggested this might depend on the crime committed. Perspectives varied on this topic. Seven participants, including Residential Life employees, Campus Safety Officers, and Admissions officials, said they are more concerned about RCEOs who committed violent crimes. One Residential Hall Director said murder was “the only big one” of concern, and that the concern stemmed from the fact that she was “in a position where I do have to care for our students,” and admitting a convicted murderer might present a challenge to her ability to assure student safety. The Director of Residence Life said murder and other violent crimes would also concern him from a safety standpoint for the RCEO and other students on campus. He would want to ensure the RCEO had resources in place if that person needed help. Campus Safety Officers believed violent crimes like aggravated assaults, battery, and attempted homicides are a cause for concern.

For one Admissions official, “something along the lines of armed robbery” is a concern. The former Director of Admissions stated similar concerns, stating,

Mainly violent crimes. Somebody who's, unlawful possession of a weapon.

Those, those would trigger for me, to not bring them on campus. I, the safety of



our students then comes in question for me, it's like, do they still have access to those weapons? What would happen if you bring them to campus? Those are some big red flags for me.

A Senior Admissions Counselor noted that a history of violent crime would be a concern, stating, "If the person didn't know how to control their anger, or felt it was okay to physically attack someone, I would be worried for the other population of students on campus, especially my female students."

Sexual offenses and sex offenders also caused concern amongst participants. One Admissions counselor said a pedophile is a problem, as did a Campus Safety Officer, who noted that there are students living on campus under 18 years old. In fact, four Campus Safety Officers specified that sex-related crimes and sexual offenses are problematic. One specified that they would be "especially" concerned if the crime were committed against "a minor or somebody under the age of 18." The Senior Regional Admissions Counsellor stated that a pedophile would be a cause for concern. A Campus Safety Officer stated that admitting RCEOs with a history of violent sexual crime was a cause for concern, as it would be a violation of the public's trust. "We're required a lot of trust from the public and with all these students on campus, to have somebody with a history of violent sex crimes just doesn't sit too easy for me." Another Campus Safety Officer admitted concern if a sex offender "applied to live on campus with other kids." As stated during this and the previous theme, campus officials believed RCEO's deserved a second chance; however, the crimes that caused the most concern were the violent crimes.

**Research Question 4:** What are the differences, similarities, or patterns between the experiences, understanding, and perspectives of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about and towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

Research Question 4 sought to compare the differences and similarities between admissions professionals and others involved in the admissions process for returning citizens in their perceptions of returning citizens or ex-offenders admitted to the college. While partially addressed in the results for RQ2 and RQ3, the position held by those involved in the admissions process proved consistent and uniform. All the individuals involved stated that their perceptions of the RCEOs were based upon the crime committed and perceptions of its impact on student safety, where violent crimes and sexual crimes were those that raised the most concern. An Associate Director of Admissions stated the general consensus succinctly by saying, “It depends on each situation. And like how long ago it's been, if it was a really violent crime.” A Senior Regional Admissions Counselor stated:

It depends on the crime, honestly. If it was. . . Because that previous schools that I've worked at, I had come across students where they had a drug related charge. That really didn't do anything to me, as much as me finding out that someone was arrested because of they had hit domestic violence, pretty much. Things like that, that's what makes me personally feel a little uneasy with some around the regular population of students, or if they did something to a child, that automatically may make me feel uneasy with them around other students.

A former Director of Admissions shared similar sentiments, stating, “Let's say it was a DUI charge and underage drinking . . . Quite probably no questions asked. . . . Now, if it's a violent crime, maybe a, maybe some sort of sexual crime that could be red flag to live on campus.” An Assistant Director of Admissions expressed their only concern would be for student safety, but their perception would depend on the crime. “And again, that's where I would look maybe more into the crime on that part to see would the overall student population be at risk, if we were to admit that student into the campus body.”

Similarly, three of the four admissions professionals interviewed expressed a belief that everyone deserved a second chance. A former Director of Admissions connected obtaining an education to success after returning to society.

My personal view is, students or students who are ex-offenders are returning since should, should be given a second chance. They should have an opportunity to continue their education or, or get back into society and, and if getting a bachelor's degree or associates or whatever.

The Assistant Director of Admissions concurred. “I would hope that they would be able to have academic success after, or a returning citizen, after the fact. I'm not opposed to giving people a second chance.” An Associate Director of Admissions said, “I believe in second chances, I really do.”

### **Similarities**

The most common similarity that both safety officers and residential life professionals had with the admissions professionals was a belief that RCEOs deserved a second chance. One male Safety Officer said, “I personally believe most people should

be eligible for a second chance, but that's also dependent on the criminal history of the individual and what charges had been filed and what they were convicted of.” A female Safety Officer concurred, “I think it's great, actually. I think everybody deserves a chance to better themselves. And I think it's an awesome thing.” A male Residence Hall Director said,

So, for me, my views towards them are they deserve a second chance. I believe everybody is deserving of a second chance. I know myself, I've been given multiple chances. I think sometimes they're just looking for somebody to have that faith in them to have their backs.

A Director of Residence Life said, “My personal opinion is that, if they have an opportunity and the ability to apply for college, why not give them that chance, that opportunity?”

Like those involved in the admissions process, both campus safety and residential life expressed concerns over RCEOs who committed violent and/or sexual crimes. One male Safety Officer said his only concerns were with RCEOs who had “violent crimes, felony convictions, so aggravated assaults, sexual assaults, attempted homicides,” adding that he would “prefer” the college to not admit any RCEO with sexual assault convictions. A female Safety Officer expressed similar views regarding concern for RCEOs with a history of sexual crime. “The only concern would be sex offenders, but they have pretty strict guidelines on what they can and cannot do, so that will not be much of a concern either.” A female Residence Hall Director stated that her primary concern was with violent crimes “such as murder. I think that's the only big one. I feel

like murder, just because we are on a college campuses.” A male counterpart concurred, saying,

I would definitely have to say murder would be a big one for me. Yeah, I do believe that they deserve a second chance, but that might put a little bit more edge when I'm dealing with that student or a person of that nature.

### **Differences**

Two differences emerged in comparing the perceptions of RCEOs held by Campus Safety and Residential Life to those held by admissions professionals. Campus Safety officers expressed a more overt concern for the safety of students, as was to be expected given their role on campus. One male Campus Safety Officer who previously stated a preference for denying those convicted of violent crimes, particularly those of a sexual nature, stated that safety was a matter of trust and that, as safety officers, they “required a lot of trust from the public and with all these students on campus, to have somebody with a history of violent sex crimes just doesn't sit too easy.” A second male Safety Officer stated he would have concerns “depending on what they did.” All Campus Safety Officers interviewed believed that Campus Safety should be informed about RCEO status and should be involved in the decision-making process of admissions.

Residential Life employees expressed a belief that an RCEO status should not require special treatment and that RCEOs admitted should be treated like any other student. A male Residence Hall Director said,

I wouldn't change my views on my responsibilities at all with them. They're just like any other student they're trying to better themselves. So, I would treat them

with the same amount of respect and the same amount of dignity that I would give any student.

A female Residence Hall Director added, “here's not always a negative term granted. Yes, you did something, but I feel like we can't always judge people on what they've been through as well, so I wouldn't feel any different.” The Director of Residence Life said, “I believe our background and our experiences, it does not define who we are and does not define what our future is.”

### **Felony and Misdemeanor Data**

The purpose of analyzing the felony and misdemeanor data was to ascertain the frequency and volume of RCEO applications. All study participants were not employed by the college during the collection period of the felony and misdemeanor data and were not expected nor asked to validate the data, which the college provided. If the numbers of RCEO applicants were insignificant or perhaps non-existent, it would indeed be a significant limitation to the study.

The college collected data from 2004 to 2021 from applications of people who affirmatively checked the box indicating conviction of a misdemeanor or felony. During this period, the college received 412 such applications. Of these, the college admitted 151 of the applicants. One hundred and ninety-nine applied with no decision made, and admissions denied 62 applications. The term “no decision” means admissions representatives could not make an admission decision on the application, because applicants did not complete the application process, usually missing transcripts. SAT/ACT test scores required before offering an acceptance or denial on their

application. Women comprised 133 of these applicants and 279 were men. Table 2 presents the acceptance rates of those with misdemeanor or felony convictions by gender.

**Table 2**

*Applications and Acceptance by Gender*

Gender	Accepted	No decision	Denied	Total
Men	98	127	54	279
Women	52	71	10	133

The researcher analyzed the data for most frequently cited misdemeanor and felony convictions by gender and whether the college admitted the applicant. Table 3, presents these data.

**Table 3**

*Common Charges and Admittance*

Gender	Charge	Admitted	No decision	Denied
Women	Theft/burglary	8	13	0
	Forgery/fraud	4	2	0
	Drug-related or DUI	5	6	0
	Assault/battery	7	1	1
	Obstruction of justice	2	2	1
Men	Theft/burglary	12	14	8
	Forgery/fraud	1	1	1
	Drug-related or DUI	13	16	4
	Assault/battery	5	7	5
	Obstruction of justice	0	1	1

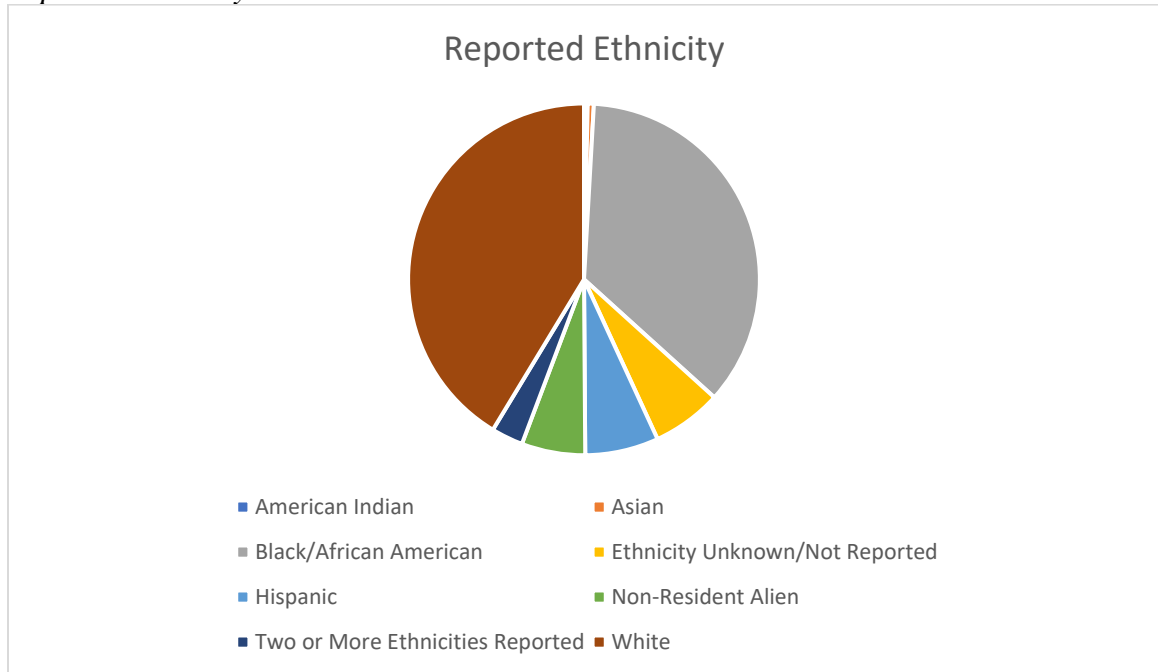
**College Demographic Data**

In Fall 2021, there were 888 students enrolled at the college. There were 456 women and 432 men. Of these, 407 were freshmen, 136 were sophomores, 143 were juniors, 172 were seniors, and 30 were graduate students. Most students (67.9%) were between the ages of 18 and 22, and the second-largest percentage (7.8%) were 42 years

old and over. Fifty-eight percent of students were campus residents, and the remainder were commuter students. The ethnic breakdown of students is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Reported Ethnicity*



*Note.* Adapted from data provided by college (2021).

In recent years, college retention rates improved from 51.91% in 2017-2018, to 54.65% in 2018-2019, and to 62.10% in 2019-2020. Data from the Fall 2014 cohort showed a success rate of 71.8%.

### **Synthesis of Data**

Interview data revealed that Campus Safety and Residential Life employees had minimal understanding or knowledge of the admissions practice to admit RCEOs. Additionally, the college has no official policy to admit RCEOs. Despite this limitation, admissions professionals implemented a practice to admit RCEOs, providing those applicants acknowledged on their application misdemeanor or felony convictions. In these instances, Admissions professionals follow up with the RCEO applicant to obtain



more information about the conviction and make an admissions decision based on that information. However, no clear standards for admission seem to exist. Of similar concern is that, despite a common concern for the safety of the students, many personnel seem to be unaware or unconcerned about the presence of RCEOs. Moreover, the statistical data do not support the concerns expressed by personnel, revealing that perceptions often differed from practice.

The point of intersection between the interview data and the data on convicted misdemeanor and felony applicants revealed that what admissions personnel described in their interviews was not what happened when someone with a conviction actually applied. Those participants also reported that very few people convicted of a misdemeanor or felony apply each year. Admissions personnel described the crimes that would concern them and prevent them from admitting applicants to the college. These crimes included drug-related charges, physical violence like assault and battery, and sex-related offenses. Data kept on these applicants showed that common convictions included for assault/battery, drug-related charges or DUIs, and theft/burglary. In the period under review, the college admitted 18 people with drug-related charges or DUIs. For 22 applicants, there was no decision, and four RCEO applicants' admission were denied. Pertaining to assault/battery charges, the college admitted 12 RCEO applicants, for eight, no decision, and for six applicants, denial of admission. For both categories, the college admitted more applicants with violent crimes and drug-related charges than denied. It is unclear why no decision was made for the others.

**Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher presented results from the study. Staff from the college's Admissions, Campus Safety, and Residential Life department provided interviews. The key findings indicated that Admissions personnel, as opposed to employees who worked for Residential Life and Campus Safety, are more aware of and experienced in handling RCEOs who sought admission to the college. Residential Life staff and Campus Safety Officers had little-to-no knowledge of any policies, procedures, or practices in place for a RCEO applicant. In fact, they reported they would only be aware of a RCEO at the college if that person disclosed the information. Admissions staff had more experience with admitting RCEOs. Though no official policy was in place for admitting RCEOs, Admissions personnel described the practices and procedures used to determine whether to admit a RCEO. Nearly all participants were clear, however, that depending on the crime, most RCEOs deserved a second chance, warranted admission to the college, and deserved the opportunity of higher education. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss these findings in greater detail in relation to the literature and make recommendations based on these findings.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of the research was to examine the admissions process for RCEOs from the perspective of three populations, admissions, campus safety, and residential life at a small, private Midwestern institution of higher learning. The research is significant, because there is a strong correlation between higher education and recidivism. Despite the strong connection between education and recidivism, higher education institutions continue to collect information related to the criminal histories of its applicants. The concern is greater than the collection of data concerning criminal history. Higher education institutions make subjective admissions decisions resulting in, at the very least, implicit bias against RCEOs. Chapter Five includes a summary of the findings and a synthesis of the findings with existing literature. In addition, the discussion includes limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

The Center for Community Alternatives communicates that college and universities report no impact on campus safety, because of the collection of criminal history data by institutions of higher education (Weissman et al., 2010). The finding is consistent with that in the current research (Rosenthal, et al., 2015). The Clery Report, the result of legislation that passed after the on-campus murder of a college student, Jean Clery, requires colleges to collect data related to crimes committed on campus. Because the Clery Report identifies the higher education institution, the citation is omitted to protect the identity of the small, private Midwestern college. However, the report contains no reports of criminal activity during the most recent report cycle, the 2020-2021 academic year.

The study contributes to the body of literature about college admissions and RCEOs and explored the small, private Midwestern college's admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders and their experiences through the eyes of admissions, campus safety employees, and residential life employees.

The research questions were:

**Research Question 1:** What is the understanding of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about the university admissions policy and process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 2:** What are the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees involved with the admissions process for returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 3:** How do the experiences of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees influence their perspectives and attitudes towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

**Research Question 4:** What are the differences, similarities, or patterns between the experiences, understanding, and perspectives of admissions professionals, campus safety, and residential life employees about and towards returning citizens and ex-offenders?

### **Summary of Findings**

Staff from the college's Admissions, Campus Safety, and Residential Life department provided interviews. The key findings indicated that Admissions professionals, as opposed to employees who worked for Residential Life and Campus Safety, were more aware of and experienced in handling RCEOs applying for admission

to the college. Residential Life staff and Campus Safety Officers had little to no knowledge of any policies, procedures, or practices in place at the college for a RCEO applicant. In fact, they reported they would only know if a RCEO was a student at the college if that person disclosed the information or if admissions professionals or campus safety officers disclosed the information post-admission.

Admissions staff had more experience with admitting RCEOs. Though no official policy was in place for admitting RCEOs, admissions personnel described the practices and procedures followed to admit a RCEO. Nearly all participants were clear, however, that depending on the crime, most RCEOs deserved a second chance, warranted admission to the college, and deserved the opportunity of higher education. The first five themes related to the lack of clarity and awareness of the policy and practices for the admission of RCEO applicants, the need for clarification, and the belief of study participants regarding the benefits of established policy and practices. Themes six through eight related to the unofficial nature of the practice of admitting RCEOs, the subjectivity involved in the process, and a mutual understanding that admissions would rescind an RCEO admission if knowledge of criminal history emerged post-admission. Finally, the themes nine and 10 revealed that most study participants agreed that RCEOs deserved a second chance, except for those who committed violent or sexual crimes.

### **Discussion**

In the current study, residential life and campus safety employees indicated little or no knowledge of any process or procedure for the admission of RCEOs to the institution. While some of the admissions employees indicated awareness of a process or

procedure, most were unclear about the details. The administrators in admissions acknowledged that there is no clear policy or procedure for the admissions of RCEOs.

The lack of clarity of the admissions process for RCEOs is inconsistent with 70% of institutions of higher learning, according to Custer (2016). In his literature review focusing on admissions policies for RCEOs, Custer (2016) discussed research showing that the pressure on college and university administrators to provide a safe environment for students resulted in the development of policies and procedures that clearly outline the steps required for admissions. The dominant model used by colleges and universities is the development of a committee structure that typically includes representatives who address student conduct issues, admissions, law enforcement or campus safety, counseling, university counsel, and a faculty representative. The committee reviews the applications and makes decisions about admission of the applicant to the college. At the research site, a small, private Midwestern college, there is no such committee or any other formal structure for the review of RCEO admission.

The unofficial practices and procedures resulted in inconsistencies and is contrary to best practices. Because of the unofficial nature of the process, there are a high percentage of “no decision” determinations (48%). No decision results when RCEO applicants do not complete the admissions process or fail to provide the documentation required for decision. It is important to note that the percentage of “no decision” applicants is consistent with the experience of other colleges and universities (Custer, 2016).

The Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) conducted a study of the admissions process for RCEOs in the State University of New York (SUNY) system. All

64 institutions that are a part of the SUNY system require that applicants disclose previous criminal histories. CCA reports that SUNY had almost 3,000 RCEO applicants; however, about two-thirds did not complete the admission process. For those applicants who completed the admissions process, the rejection rate was low, less than 10% (Weissman et al., 2010). Rosenthal, et al. (2015) conducted research confirming that colleges and universities admit most RCEOs who persist in the admissions process. In the current study, consistent with the literature, the college also admitted most of the RCEOs who completed the admissions process. There was a large percentage of ‘no decision,’ (48%), which resulted when the RCEO did not provide the requested documentation. While the percentage of ‘no decision’ results is high, the rejection rate, based on the data is low (16%). In other words, there are a high percentage of applicants that do not complete the admissions process, but a low rejection rate among those who do complete the process.

Residential life, campus safety, and admissions employees were consistent in their perspectives about sex offenders and those convicted of violent crimes, such as murder, aggravated assault, and rape. The research supports the perspective of study participants. The current study broadened the examination of the perspectives of those involved in the admissions process beyond sexual offenses.

Rubenstein et al. (2019) examined stigma related to college admissions as it relates to sex offenders. The researchers indicate that the stereotypes and misinformation about the level of recidivism among sex offenders exasperates the college admissions process even more. The current research confirms the findings of Rubenstein et al. (2019). Study participants demonstrated more hesitation about the admission of sex

offenders than any other category of offenders. For other offender types, such as drugs, theft, and other non-violent crimes, participants believed that offenders in these areas deserved a second chance. However, RCEOs were not a part of the sample, diminishing the impact of the belief that they are entitled to a second chance. Of course, RCEOs believe that they deserve a second chance and would benefit in knowing that others support their position.

In addition to stigma, barriers also include housing, employment, food insecurity, and the pursuit of higher education (Ramaswamy, 2015; Rubenstein, et al., 2019). Ramaswamy (2015) conducted a legal analysis which addresses the disproportionate impact of the barriers to education on minority populations. In doing so, the researcher noted that access to higher education is critical to the success of returning citizens and ex-offenders. Removing the barriers, or at the very least, minimizing the barriers, facilitates reentry in ways that maximize a successful transition. Ramaswamy (2015) further notes that there is no educational benefit to the examination of the criminal histories of applicants.

In this research, the researcher did not collect data related to housing insecurity, food insecurity, and other barriers, only the barriers related to criminal history. While study participants viewed criminal history as a barrier to the pursuit of a higher education, residential life, and campus safety workers were oblivious about the admissions process and screening of applicants with criminal histories. The lack of knowledge about the admissions process resulted in the lack of information about the impact of the criminal history on the admissions process, such as whether the criminal history is, in fact, a barrier to admissions to the college.



Social justice advocates and policy makers addressed the visible barriers; however, invisible barriers still exist, such as stigma and preconceived notions about previously incarcerated persons (Couloute, 2018). Although the small, private Midwestern college, like most other colleges and universities, asks applicants about criminal convictions on the admissions application and follows extended admissions process for applicants with criminal convictions, study participants were consistent in their perspectives that RCEOs deserve an opportunity to improve their lives by pursuing a higher education. Their perspectives, supported by the research shows a strong correlation between education and recidivism (Baer, et al., 2006; Custer, 2013, 2016; 2018).

The literature shows that the higher the level of education, the lower the recidivism. However, the participants were also consistent in their belief that not all offenders deserve a second chance. Consistent with the research, as stated above, they viewed sex offenders and violent offenders as less deserving of an opportunity to pursue a college degree.

Though the literature addresses possible legal implications with the admissions of returning citizens and ex-offenders, such as contentions of negligent admissions if the returning citizen or ex-offender compromises campus safety, study participants did not voice this concern (Custer, 2016; Pierce, et al., 2014). Study participants did not communicate concern for legal implications espoused in the literature, though admittedly, it is likely that they are not aware of the specific implications addressed by the literature. However, there was concern expressed about possible violations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). FERPA protects the privacy of students

over the age of 18, specifically the right to have access to education records, the right to seek to have the records amended, the right to have some control over the disclosure of personally identifiable information from the education records. However, some criminal records are publicly accessible and not subject the protection of FERPA.

Custer (2018) conducts a comparative analysis of university admissions for ex-offenders in the United States and the United Kingdom. He discussed university policies that require disclosure of criminal histories and the social movement, Ban the Box, which seek to remove the criminal history barrier for ex-offenders who want to pursue higher education. In this qualitative study, Custer (2018) identified themes. The researcher-identified themes included the criminal records law, the university admissions policies, including the logic, the history, and the language, and the admissions data. After conducting an analysis, Custer (2018) concluded that universities should modify or abandon the policies requiring disclosure of criminal history.

The perspectives of study participants about the significance and life-changing impact of an education for RCEOs is also consistent with the literature. Halkovic and Greene (2015) review a plethora of research confirming the correlation between education level and criminal involvement, positing that the higher the educational level, the lower recidivism. Despite strong peer-reviewed support, colleges and universities continue to focus on the negative characteristics of ex-offenders rather than viewing the population as contributing positively to the higher education community. Residential life, campus safety, and admissions employees embraced identical perspectives about the significance of educational opportunities to the lives and future of RCEOs.

A review of the small, private Midwestern college's annual mandatory submission of crime statistics revealed no criminal activity on campus from 2017 through 2019, the period reported by the Department of Education's Campus Safety and Security. During the same timeframe, there were RCEOs matriculating at the college. Consistent with the research, the data provided by the college demonstrates that there is no correlation between RCEO status and crime on campus.

### **University Social Responsibility**

Based upon the literature discussed in Chapter Two, the small, Midwestern college that is the site for the research should demonstrate University Social Responsibility (USR) by providing educational opportunities for RCEOs and by educating staff and faculty to eliminate or at least minimize the stigma and barriers that RCEOs face to further their education. The establishment of a consistent, formal policy, codifying the practices would demonstrate USR.

Jorge and Pena (2017) conducted a literature review of articles about university social responsibility from 15 academic journals. The articles spanned a 15-year period, ranging from 2000 to 2015. The researchers analyzed the literature to ascertain the emergence of the concept of university social responsibility, to identify gaps in the literature, and to make recommendations for future research. The shift in the societal role of institutions of higher learning revealed a responsibility to develop curricula that integrates principles of social responsibility in teaching, research, and management and advocates for community engagement.

Jung (2017) discusses the consequences and implications to ex-offenders and returning citizens when colleges and universities inquire about criminal history on

admissions applications. The research supports the contention that higher levels of education reduce recidivism. Jung (2017) further discussed the minimal impact on campus safety, because of college inquiries about criminal history. Rather, inquiring about criminal history increases stigma and limits opportunities for higher education for the formerly incarcerated. The article also addressed the legal implications for colleges when applicants fail to disclose prior criminal history, providing examples of universities sued by victims for negligent admission of an ex-offender. Jung (2017) recommends a balanced approach that addresses the concerns from those that view the questions about criminal history as limiting access to higher education and those who are concerned about campus safety.

The balanced approach recommended is that outlined in the Fair Access to Education Act of 2015, which would remove marijuana-related misdemeanors from the list of offenses that affect eligibility for federal loans, grants, and work study. The bill did not pass. The researchers designed the study to address 1) whether and to what extent four-year colleges discriminate based on criminal records; 2) whether such discrimination varies by race and institutional context, including the local crime rate; and 3) how a strategy to remove criminal records questions from college application forms might affect admissions and racial inequality (pp. 163-164). A quantitative analysis of the data indicated statistical significance in the level of discrimination and rejection rate between tester applicants with criminal records and those without.

Higher education institutions, including the college that is the subject of this study, should take practical steps specifically designed to address potential discrimination against RCEOs and to increase the admission rate. From a pragmatic standpoint, to do so

increases the enrollment at higher education institutions at a time when enrollment is declining nationwide, resulting in closure of colleges and universities. The RCEO population of learners is either overlooked by college recruiters or discouraged from applying because of the onerous nature of the process. Elimination of the barriers and proactive recruitment of the RCEO population demonstrates USR.

Tyler and Brockmann (2017) discussed the role of public policy in stigmatizing ex-offenders and returning citizens and make policy recommendations to address the stigma related to race, mental health, drug addiction, the impact on the system-involved and their families. The researchers recommend policy reform in the treatment of mental health, sentencing, recidivism, Ban the Box legislation, and collateral consequences. The elimination of the questions related to criminal history during the admissions process provides opportunities for RCEOs to further their education, thus reducing the likelihood of recidivism. As a result, RCEOs become responsible citizens. The extant study demonstrates that increasingly, individual concern of others criminal background is diminishing, except for violent and sexual crimes. It is time for the creation of policies that are consistent with societal viewpoints.

### **Implications**

There are societal, policy, and process-related implications of the research. Given the support provided by the literature, the perspectives of study participants towards RCEOs, the establishment of a policy, including a committee comprised of administration, faculty, campus safety, residential life, the conduct officer, a law enforcement representative, and admissions would provide a consistent admissions experience for RCEOs. In addition, since the study participants have no demonstrative

bias against RCEOs, except sex offenders and violent offenders, there is a potential pool of applicants that recruiters may have overlooked. RCEOs can make valuable contributions on college and university campuses and communities (Bowman & Ely, 2020).

Cossyleon and Flores (2020) conducted an ethnographical study, examining the involvement of returning citizens in a social movement, specifically Fighting to Overcome Records and Create Equality (FORCE). FORCE is a movement created and led by formerly incarcerated persons. They partnered with Community Renewal Society (CRS) to change law and policy. The study, unlike most in the literature, considered low income, marginalized populations involved in social movements.

The researchers found that study participants developed social capital and a sense of belonging because of their involvement in FORCE. There is extensive discussion about the social, economic, and personal consequences of incarceration, including exclusion from available opportunities and stigma. Interestingly, the researchers note that the exclusion is the result of returning citizens' involvement in formal and informal legal and social practices, i.e., the criminal justice system and post-incarceration stigmatization.

In the current study, study participants expressed a perspective that RCEOs criminal history should remain private and that they should have the opportunity to become an integral part of the campus community. Again, except for sex offenders and violent offenders, there was no hesitation on the part of study participants to include those with prior criminal convictions in the campus community.

There are 2.3 million Americans incarcerated in state and federal prisons, many for drug-related crimes that occurred before the societal shift towards cannabis, now legalized in 19 states. On October 6, 2022, United States President, Joe Biden, pardoned thousands of prisoners incarcerated in federal prisons for simple possession of marijuana, indicating the evolution of societal and political views toward drug offenders.

Unfortunately, the states have not yet followed suit by pardoning offenders incarcerated in state prisons for simple possession of marijuana. However, given the views of study participants towards RCEOs and their belief that they deserve a second chance, there is the potential for policy change that may eliminate existing barriers to college admission.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The current research did not explore the reasons that study participants voiced negatives concerns related to sex-related offenses as compared to other criminal offenses. Other limitations included the limited tenure of the participants, the lack of knowledge about the presence of returning citizens or ex-offenders on campus, and the lack of awareness of the existence of a policy or practice related to the admissions of returning citizens and ex-offenders.

The study participants' tenure with the college ranged from less than a year to 38 years. This limited the knowledge of the less senior participants related to the process of admitting RCEO applicants. Though the senior staff was more aware of a practice, they had relatively little or no knowledge about the presence of RCEOs on campus.

Admissions did not communicate with other departments when an RCEO applied or was admitted to the college, limiting the involvement of residential life and campus safety employees in the process.

Other than the Director of Admissions, only one other study participant, a 23-year admissions professional, acknowledged awareness of a policy or practice. The lack of awareness of the existence of a policy or practice was a limitation because of the inability of the researcher to gather rich data on the subject matter. The Director of Admissions was the most knowledgeable. Even the long-term admissions professional's knowledge was limited.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future researchers should specify as a requirement of participation in the study, some knowledge of the process, policy, or practice. It does not help to advance the research if study participants have no knowledge. If possible, it would help if the researcher could ascertain in advance of the research whether there is an existing policy or practice, since such was the subject matter of the research. In addition, future researchers could specify a required number of years of experience though in this study, the institutional size would have limited the number of available participants.

Future researchers should also conduct quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method research where the sample population are offenders who experienced the college admissions process. Speaking directly to offenders will provide more accurate insight into their experience in navigating the college admissions process. Conducting focus groups or individual interviews with offenders will allow the researcher to draw conclusions rather than inferences about whether their criminal history affected their ability to pursue a higher education. It will also reveal whether the stigma described in the research impeded admission or successful matriculation to an institution of higher learning.



In addition, future research should compare the policies, processes, and admissions outcomes for RCEOs of multiple colleges and universities. A comparative case study involving multiple colleges and universities of comparable size would enable the researchers to examine whether there are consistencies or inconsistencies in the admissions process and the factors that cause the variances in the process.

Future researchers may also examine whether there is a disparate impact in admissions of RCEOs based upon race, since most incarcerated persons are minorities. Along those same lines, future researchers could focus on those offenses that concerned the study participants in this study, sex offenses and violent offenses, by examining how other colleges and universities process their applications and the specifics of their policies related to these categories of offenders. An examination of the types of sex offenses and violent crimes is warranted. There are some offenses classified as sex offenses that may not be as onerous upon inspection, i.e., Romeo and Juliet cases, or indecent exposure. Criminal justice policy continues to require offenders to enroll on sex offender registries, resulting in a stigma that impedes many areas of progress in their lives, including admission to institutions of higher learning.

### **Conclusion**

The study is significant, and the results are impactful for colleges and universities, especially small private colleges. Before the COVID pandemic, institutions of higher learning struggled with recruitment and enrollment. The pandemic exasperated recruitment and enrollment efforts, domestically and internationally. The current study reveals that there is a population of potential students often overlooked by colleges and universities because of the stigma attached to RCEOs and because, at one time, the

federal government eliminated funding for certain classifications of offenders. In addition, the federal government also eliminated funding for higher education courses in correctional institutions.

However, the Second Chance Act now provides funding for pilot programs in prisons. The views and perspectives of the study participants are generalizable, opening the possibilities for colleges and universities to educate RCEOs. According to the literature, the higher the educational levels, the lower recidivism. As RCEOs obtain higher education degrees, they become responsible citizens and contribute to society. Likewise, providing educational opportunities to RCEOs enables colleges and universities to practice university social responsibility. The development of collaborative relationships with probation and parole agencies, corrections facilities, and community organizations demonstrates the effectiveness of collaborative theory. Consistent with Collaborative Theory, organizations can work together to educate and support RCEOs resulting in safer campuses and communities.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **General Information**

1. What is the title of your current position at the university?
2. How long have you worked in the position?
3. What are the responsibilities of your job as \_\_\_\_\_?
4. Did you have previous experience in a similar role? If so, describe that experience?

#### **Views towards Ex-Offender Applicants**

5. What is your view towards ex-offender applicants?
6. Understanding of Admissions Policy for Ex-Offender Applicants
7. Do you know if there is a policy related to the admissions of ex-offenders?
8. Can you describe how and where to locate the policy?
9. Describe your understanding of the policy.

#### **Experience Processing Ex-Offender Applications**

10. Describe your experience processing the admissions applications of ex-offenders, if any?
11. What types of crimes have the ex-offenders seeking admissions completed?
12. What types of applications were approved for admissions?
13. What types of applications were denied?
14. What are the bases of the admission or denial of admission?

#### **Recommendations related to Policy re Ex-Offenders**

15. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations related to the admissions policy related to ex-offenders? If so, what?

16. Do you have suggestions related to the implementation of the admissions policy related to ex-offenders? If so, what?

## Vitae

**Donna Osborne Bradley, PhD, JD**  
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Innovative and visionary educational and legal professional with 13+ years of administration, leadership, teaching, and service experience at different institutional types, including private and public 4-year and 2-year institutions. Proven record of successfully managing and directing the overall functions of the academic division, including directors, faculty, staff, and students. Accomplished at relationship building, public speaking, curricula development, academic coaching, critical thinking, budget oversight, and budget management. Value and committed to academic excellence, faculty, staff and student success, community, service, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### EDUCATION

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- JD** Howard University School of Law  
**PhD** Capella University, Public Safety and Criminal Justice Graduated with Distinction (4.0)  
 Dissertation: *"Comparing Police Performance at Union and Non-Union Municipal Departments"*  
**EdD** Lindenwood University  
 Dissertation: *"A Case Study: The College Admissions Process for Returning Citizens and Ex-Offenders"* (In progress)  
**MS** Columbia College, Criminal Justice Administration Graduated with Distinction (4.0)  
 Thesis: *"The Impact of Monitored Judicial Discretion on Racial Disparity in Sentencing"*  
**BS** Brown University, Political Science Minor: Sociology

### EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

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Special Assistant to the President  
 Strategic and DEI Initiatives  
 Eureka College, Eureka, IL 2022-Present

Provides leadership and oversight of the College's strategic initiatives, including grant management, student success, inclusive excellence and other sustained growth efforts as directed by the president and in collaboration with the senior leadership team.

- Serve as grant manager and liaison of the College's IT Workforce Accelerator Good Jobs grant sub-award.
- Promote and help to sustain the culture necessary for the College to execute and accomplish its strategic objectives.
- Work in collaboration with the College's leadership team to identify and implement student success, institutional sustainability, and sustained growth initiatives.



- Collaborate with the College's Inclusive Excellence Director to develop and oversee programs, services, and initiatives designed to enhance the recruitment and successful retention of students, faculty, and staff from diverse and under-represented groups, to create a welcoming and inclusive campus community, and to maintain regulatory compliance
- Promote a culture of continuous improvement and assessment in key areas that foster sustained growth.
- Serve as a resource to strengthen the College's wraparound support for students.
- Serve as a member of the President's Cabinet.
- Serve as a liaison for the President to various associations and professional organizations as needed.
- Represent the College by speaking at select events.
- May opt to teach one course per semester in area(s) of expertise.
- Other duties and responsibilities to advance the mission and vision of the College.

### Provost and Academic Vice President

Lead Faculty, Criminal Justice

Lincoln College, Lincoln, IL

2019-2022

- Supervises 200+ employees.
- Ensures fiscal accountability for the academic department.
- Manages a multi-million-dollar budget.
- Manages projects and grants, including retention projects, Title III grant, and PBI grant.
- Directs, monitors, and evaluates the activities of the academic department directors and staff.
- Ensures compliance with institutional, departmental, and division policies and guidelines.
- Supervises the daily operation of the academic department, including the setting of individual, departmental, and division goals.
- Established systems of accountability to ensure the progress and attainment of individual, departmental, and division goals.
- Promotes collaboration between departments and divisions.
- Approves division budgets, payroll and other financial transactions, and timesheets.
- Addresses faculty, staff, parent, community, and student complaints pursuant to established policies in a professional, sensitive, and caring manner.
- Maintains accurate records related to complaints, including logs, timelines, response time, and other relevant data, referring to the appropriate department if unresolved and requiring additional investigation.
- Received, reviewed, and resolved student complaints related to alleged incidents of discrimination, disparity, mistreatment, or unfairness.
- Supervises the Office of Disability Services, ensuring that any complaints are investigated and resolved.
- Created the Accessibility, Belonging, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (ABIDE) committee to provide education and inclusion of students that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming,
- Supervises and oversees the Information Technology department to ensure the availability of current resources, technical assistance, and support to the campus community, including faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community.

- Stays abreast of current legislation that affects the institution and the academic department.
- Establishes and oversees dual-credit programs with high schools.
- Negotiates and provides oversight of articulation agreements with community colleges, professional schools, such as chiropractic, law, and nursing programs.
- Exercises judgment and discretion effectively.
- Adept at time management, including the management of timelines.
- Communicates efficaciously orally and in writing.

**Program Director, Graduate Criminal Justice** 2016-2019  
**Lindenwood University, St. Charles, MO**

- Provided oversight of the graduate criminal justice program.
- Developed and implemented new curricula.
- Conducted program and course assessments.
- Hired, trained, evaluated, and observed full-time and adjunct faculty.
- Prepared course schedules and assignments.
- Advised undergraduate and graduate criminal justice students
- Taught undergraduate and graduate criminal justice courses
- Provided detailed feedback to students on content, writing mechanics, and APA formatting.
- Participated in university activities, including graduation, recruitment events, and community outreach, among others.
- Created and maintained Canvas shells for courses, student, and faculty communities
- Organized and developed training and professional development opportunities for students and adjunct faculty
- Served on university academic committees.

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**OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Adjunct Teaching** 2012-Present  
 St. Charles Community College  
 Maryville University  
 Lindenwood University  
 Webster University  
 Columbia College

**Executive Assistant/Program Director** 1997-2013  
 Jubilee Community Church/Jubilee Christian Development Corporation

**Attorney/Legal Investigation and Litigation** 1981-1996  
 Defense Logistics Agency  
 Peete, Higgs, and Armstrong  
 National Labor Relations Board

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**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

- Alpha Chi Honor Society
- Research Gate
- National Association of Professional Women

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**COMMUNITY SERVICE**

**The Links, Incorporated**

Recording Secretary

**Delta Sigma Theta, Incorporated**

Fundraising Chair

**Westside Community Church**

Leader and Volunteer

First Step Team, Online Worship Greeter, Small Group Leader

**St. Charles Juvenile Justice Center**

Assessment Team Member

**St. Louis Juvenile Justice Center**

Assessment Team Member

**St. Martin's Childcare Center**

Board Member

**Bridge of Hope Ministries**

Board Member

**Community Liaison**

Organized and conducted community forums to improve the relationship between Lincoln College and the community, including the police department, local businesses, local government, and citizens.

**HONORS AND AWARDS**

Excellence in Teaching and Outstanding Service Award

NSLS Leadership Award

Columbia College Professional Achievement Award

Donna Osborne Bradley Diversity & Inclusion Scholarship

St. Mary's Alumnae of the Year

Unsung Heroine Award