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# The Prison-to-School Pipeline & the Role of Private Higher Education in California

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University of San Francisco

**The Prison-to-School Pipeline & the Role of Private Higher Education in  
California**

A Field Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Human Rights Education

by  
Kelly Mills  
Fall 2016

# **The Prison-to-School Pipeline & the Role of Private Higher Education in California**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

by

Kelly Mills

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Rosa M. Jimenez, Ph.D.

December 2016

Instructor/Chair

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## ABSTRACT

Given the realities of mass incarceration in the United States, the disproportionate effects that the criminal justice system has on already marginalized populations-particularly men of color-and our currently very high rates at which the formerly incarcerated return to prisons or jails, it is necessary to determine which programs reduce recidivism and create new opportunities for the formerly incarcerated. As the research has shown that educational opportunities for the currently and formerly incarcerated are successful at reducing recidivism rates, these types of opportunities have become more widely available. By the end of 2016, community college courses will be offered in prisons and jails across the state of California at rates higher than they have been in decades and the public postsecondary education community in the state has already created pathways for formerly incarcerated students to access four year institutions after their incarceration. This project asserts that private postsecondary institutions in California should implement programs on their campuses to increase access to higher education for formerly incarcerated students, collects and documents best practices based on the literature and existing programs, and includes a proposal for the University of San Francisco to implement a recruitment and retention strategy for formerly incarcerated students. The planned programming includes recommendations for admission and financial aid policies, support programs and other considerations of the lived experiences of students with criminal justice histories.

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

In May 2016, the University of California (UC), Berkeley held its first ever graduation ceremony for formerly incarcerated students. The 14 students celebrating their graduations from UC Berkeley were members of a student organization that advocates for current and prospective students affected by incarceration called Underground Scholars Initiative (Goldberg, 2016). At their graduation ceremony, State Senator Loni Hancock discussed state plans to ensure that community college courses and degree programs are in as many California prisons and jails as possible by the end of 2016. These plans are part of a larger movement of local, state, and national policy initiatives aimed at addressing the issues that mass incarceration has created in American society. The United States of America incarcerates more people than any other country in the world and has one of the highest rates of incarceration based on the amount of prisoners per 1000 people (Walmsley, 2016). In the 20 years between 1987 and 2007, the number of incarcerated people in the US rose by 300 percent (The Pew Charitable Trusts [Pew], 2008). The terms ‘mass incarceration’ and ‘school-to-prison pipeline’ have increasingly become a part of public discourse as activists, researchers, community members and the media have tried to understand the severity of the issues pertaining to mass incarceration (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeire, & Valentine, 2009; Riggs, 2013). The work of activists and researchers to examine the causes of mass incarceration, who is incarcerated, and the relationship between education and incarceration has led to an increase in policies that connect incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals with education opportunities.

One of the primary reasons that policies to increase access to education for those affected by the criminal justice system have been implemented is because access to education has been shown to substantially decrease recidivism rates, or the rate at which formerly incarcerated people are reincarcerated (Halkovic, 2014; Grove, 2011; Fine et al., 2001). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2014, 67.8% of released prisoners are rearrested within three years. With such high recidivism rates and overcrowding in prisons, more policy makers have looked for alternative and more effective approaches to decreasing recidivism rates. For example, in studies of college-in-prison programs in Ohio and Washington, the programs reduced recidivism rates by 62% and 63%, respectively (Burke & Vivian, 2001; Halkovic, 2014; Kelso, 2000). As Halkovic noted in a 2014 article about the benefits of higher education for formerly incarcerated students, “the effects of going to college post prison mirror those experienced by first generation college students”, particularly in relation to greater earning potential, increased opportunities for employment and positive impacts on families and children (p. 496). In a meta-analysis of decades of research on correctional education programs, the RAND Corporation found that people who participate in correctional education programs are 43 percent less likely to recidivate than people who do not (Davis, Boznick, Steele, Saunders & Miles, 2013). Policy makers, researchers and educators have noticed the success of correctional education programs in providing those released from prison with opportunities to succeed once they return to their communities.

It is important to address the fact that the U.S. criminal justice system affects communities in very different ways along lines of race, ethnicity, and gender. As Michelle Alexander (2010) has suggested, mass incarceration is a contemporary form of institutionalized racism. One out of every 11 Black people in the US is involved in the criminal justice system at



some point, while that rate for the general population is 1 out of every 31 people (Pew, 2009). Black Americans are imprisoned at a rate 8 times the rate of White Americans, and Latino/a Americans are 1.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than White Americans (Riggs, 2013). More specifically, men of color are the most likely to have experiences with the criminal justice system in the US. As many as 1 in every 3 Black males and 1 in every 6 Latino males will be incarcerated during his lifetime (Halkovic et al., 2013). It is important to note that these numbers do not include those detained in immigration detention centers. While women represent a much smaller number of the prison population in the US, their numbers are increasing at a rate that far exceeds that of men and the rates of incarceration for women of color mirror those of men of color. Between 1977 and 2007, the number of women in prison rose from 11,212 to 107,000 (Waldman & Levi, 2011). It is clear that men and women of color in the US are affected by the criminal justice system at rates higher than white men and women.

It is possible to draw parallels between the effects of institutional racism on the populations most affected by incarceration and the effects of institutional racism on educational attainment of those same populations. Post-secondary educational attainment rates are almost an exact opposite of incarceration rates. While men of color are the largest population affected by incarceration in the US today, they are the least represented population in institutions of higher education. A 2010 report compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics indicated the differences in higher education attainment for men and women of different racial groups. Of White students between the ages of 18 and 24, 43% of men and 51% of women were enrolled in college or graduate school. Of Black students in the same age range, 31% of men and 43% of women were enrolled and of Latino/a students 26% of men of those ages and 36% of women (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2012). As of the 2015 Census

and using Census designated racial categories, 54 percent of Asians 25 years or older had a bachelor's degree or higher, 36 percent of Whites of this age range had this level of education, 22 percent of Blacks had a bachelor's degree or higher and the percentage for Hispanics with this level of education was 15 percent (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

Public institutions of higher education in the state of California have acknowledged these gaps in higher education attainment and incarceration and have taken steps to actively recruit and support students affected by the criminal justice system. Programs like the Underground Scholars Initiative at UC Berkeley and Project Rebound at San Francisco State University (SFSU) are two such programs located in the San Francisco Bay Area. Project Rebound at SFSU will be leading an effort to expand the program to seven additional California State University (CSU) campuses, beginning in 2016 with the goal of enrolling students in the programs during the 2017-2018 academic year (Morales, 2016). In June of 2016, SFSU joined 14 other institutions of higher education across the country, including the UC system, as founding partners in the Fair Change Higher Education Pledge (The White House, 2016). While the only two founding partners from the state of California were public institutions, a mix of public and private institutions from across the country make up the rest of the 15 founding partners.

These founding partners, particularly those in California, are inspired to do this work to increase access to education. When addressing issues of access to college in California, it is important to highlight the work of the state's vast community college system and the challenges students at those institutions face. The transfer rate in the state of California is below the national average and a recent study by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University attributed part of this to capacity issues in California's public 4-year institutions (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). As more community college courses are offered in California state prisons and jails, more

formerly incarcerated men and women will become a part of the community college system affected by these low transfer-out rates. The programs at places like UC Berkeley and SFSU are important for ensuring that pathways exist for these students toward public education in California. However, California private institutions of higher education should partner with public institutions to increase access for this population. In the state of California there are currently 113 Community Colleges, 23 CSU campuses, 10 UC campuses, and 78 private accredited non-profit 4 year postsecondary institutions (Community College League of California, 2016; AICCU.org, 2016). While private institutions educate smaller numbers of students than the public system in CA, they do play an important role in the general landscape of higher education in the state. Private colleges and universities in California should create partnerships with California community colleges to support their inmate education programs and work to recruit, retain and graduate students affected by incarceration. There is an opportunity to outline best practices for creating these partnerships between public and private institutions of higher education to provide greater access to formerly incarcerated individuals.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this field project is to outline best practices for private-public partnerships to support inmate education programs and for private institutions to recruit, retain and graduate students affected by incarceration. As a staff member in the Office of Admission at the University of San Francisco (USF), I will also include in this field project a proposal for specific steps that can be taken at USF to meet these goals. I will map out the different steps that the Office of Admission, the department of Strategic Enrollment Management and the institution as a whole can take to provide access to a USF education for formerly incarcerated students. While the project will look closely at the admission process, steps will be recommended to ensure that

formerly incarcerated students are provided the support necessary to persist through graduation. Multiple members of the USF community are actively engaged in issues around incarceration and formerly incarcerated students who have graduated from USF have been highlighted in USF media campaigns. However, an intentional admission policy regarding students affected by the criminal justice system has not been clearly articulated. Additionally, the Office of Admission is currently in the process of re-evaluating its transfer student recruitment plan and initial work is being done to actively partner with local community colleges.

These circumstances at USF, coupled with the increase in attention to and funding for education opportunities for students with a criminal justice system history, have created an opportunity for this kind of project. The best practices collected will be shared with other admission and enrollment professionals across California through professional organizations, conferences and social media. The USF proposal will be presented to the Director of Admission, Associate Vice Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management and the Vice Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management with the aim of being implemented for the 2017-2018 school year. The primary audience for the project will be admission and enrollment professionals at USF and other private 4-year colleges and universities in the state of California as well as administrators at California community colleges. The secondary audience for this project will be currently and formerly incarcerated men and women pursuing higher education opportunities in California. The project will be presented to leadership at USF with the goal of implementing a recruitment plan for formerly incarcerated students during the 2017-2018 school year.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Through the theoretical frameworks of Human Rights Education (HRE) and Critical Race Theory (CRT), this project aims to make apparent the need for more educational institutions to

include formerly incarcerated students in their recruitment plans as one way that they can work toward more inclusive educational spaces. The University of San Francisco, like many other institutions of higher education-particularly Jesuit institutions- often uses the term social justice education to explain the type of educational experience its administrators hope students there have in their classrooms and in other experiences they have while students. While this is a useful term for many, this project will use the framework of HRE to explain the educational atmosphere that USF aspires to have and to describe how education for formerly incarcerated individuals can be considered a form of HRE. Additionally, this project will use CRT to illustrate the different ways that the criminal justice and higher education systems disproportionately and negatively affect people of color.

While definitions of Human Rights Education vary, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training formally defines HRE as

all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing, inter alia, to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviors, to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights. (2011)

While some other definitions are slightly different than the one above, all definitions of HRE draw from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights explanation of every person's right to education. Specifically, HRE scholars point to section 2 of Article 26 which explains, "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of fundamental freedoms" (1948). HRE, then, is the kind of education that the UDHR establishes that all people should have a right to and the kind of education that will continue to foster a culture of respect for human rights. Many HRE scholars have adapted a shorter definition of HRE to be education *about* human rights, *through* human rights and *for*

human rights (Bajaj, 2011; Claude & Tibbits). Claude & Tibbits expand on this definition clarifying that the *about* piece “ includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection”, that the *through* piece “includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners, and that the *for* piece “includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others” (p. 6). In examining the literature on HRE, Bajaj notes three different approaches to HRE identified by their intended outcomes: HRE for Global Citizenship, HRE for Coexistence, and HRE for Transformative Action (2011 p. 489). Bajaj notes that the third approach, HRE for Transformative Action, “is most akin to Paulo Freire’s process of developing a critical consciousness” (2011 p. 490, Freire 1970). HRE can be considered the most aspirational definition of what education can and should be.

When taking into account the changes in recidivism rates for formerly incarcerated men and women who participate in education programs, it is clear that education for this population is inherently transformative. The very act of incarceration takes away rights; the act of pursuing education is one way that formerly incarcerated men and women can begin to more fully realize their rights as they re-enter the society outside of prison walls. The way that USF describes its educational endeavor is that it “educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world” (USF Vision & Mission). This is similar to the goal of HRE in educating both about human rights and for human rights. This project will employ the use of HRE as an aspirational model of what education could and should be and will hold the recommendations and proposal accountable to the tenets of HRE.

Another theoretical framework that will be used in this project is Critical Race Theory. CRT is a theory that developed out of Critical Legal Studies (CLS). “CLS sought to expose and challenge the view that legal reasoning was neutral, value-free, and unaffected by social and economic relations, political forces, or cultural phenomena” (Brown & Jackson, 2013 p. 12). As scholars continued to challenge the neutrality of the law, they also developed CLS into the broader CRT, which can be used to examine the effects of racism across many different fields and experiences. CRT scholars assert “racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible part of American society” (Brown & Jackson, 2013 p. 14) and that the experiences of people of color today cannot be understood without understanding them in the context of the larger history of people of color in this country.

Some of the main tenets of CRT include centering the experiences of people of color, interest convergence, story-telling or counter narratives, and intersectionality. As CRT evolved from CLS, the major tenet of centering the experiences of people of color evolved out of the CLS principle of the victim’s perspective and the perpetrator’s perspective which asserted that racial discrimination was based on how it was experienced by the victims and not by the intentions of the perpetrator (Brown & Jackson, 2013 p. 15). Derrick Bell (1980), considered the intellectual father of CRT, explained the interest convergence principle succinctly as “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (p. 523). The use of story-telling and counter narratives by CRT scholars “reveal that racism and racial discrimination are neither aberrant nor occasional parts of the lives of people of color” and “are used to make visible the racial biases that are deeply embedded in the norms of American law and culture” (Brown & Jackson, 2013 p. 19). In much of the literature that connects CRT and education, this principle along with the first principle of centering the

experiences of people of color are often used to demonstrate the experiences of individual people of color as well as community experiences (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Kimberle Crenshaw introduced the idea of intersectionality in her 1989 work “Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” and has greatly influenced CRT scholars (Howard & Navarro, 2016). “Intersectionality is a way to conceptualize how oppressions are social constructed and affect individuals differentially across multiple group categories” (Howard & Navarro, 2016 p. 263). These tenets of CRT help to understand and critique the current system of mass incarceration and the exclusion of people of color from higher education, both of which greatly influence this project. By looking to the stories of people of color and centering their experiences in our work as educators, it becomes clear that these students are often excluded from higher education and disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. Therefore, working to expand access to higher education for this population is an opportunity to resist structural racism and begin to dismantle racist systems. By aligning the goals of this project with other goals of higher education, HRE and the specific form of social justice education at USF in the hopes of receiving institutional support for the proposal, this project demonstrates the interest convergence principle of CRT. Through the frameworks of Human Rights Education and Critical Race Theory, this project will critically analyze access to higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals as both a violation of human rights and an effect of structural racism. The project will aim to create a human rights based approach to the recruitment of these students with an institutional understanding of and commitment to battling racism and inequality.



### **Significance of the Project**

As previously stated, education programs for those in and recently released from prison drastically reduce recidivism rates and provide opportunities for the many men and women affected by the US criminal justice system. Additionally, incarceration disproportionately affects people of color and other marginalized groups. The frameworks of HRE and CRT implore educators to analyze how systems of education educate students in a transformative way while honoring their rights and how those systems specifically affect students of color. This project aims to identify how private colleges and universities can increase the number of formerly incarcerated students who go on to attain bachelors degrees. The public higher education community in CA is working toward this goal already and are recognized leaders in the field. Passed in 2014, Senate Bill 1391 allows community colleges to offer courses in prisons and jails and be fully reimbursed for those courses in the same way they would be if the courses were offered on the college campus (Mukamal, Silbert & Taylor, 2015). In March of 2015, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) announced a Memorandum of Understanding detailing the ways that these offices would work together to implement SB 1391 (CDCR, 2015). Now, at the end of 2016, there are in person college programs in 30 out of 35 CA prisons serving over 3000 students, a Bachelor's Degree program offered by Cal State LA at Lancaster Prison and SFSU's Project Rebound is being replicated on 8 of the 23 California State University campuses (Mukamal & Silbert, 2016). While work is being done to ensure the sustainability of these programs over time, the public higher education system in CA consistently faces capacity issues and is held to the whims of the CA state legislature.

Private postsecondary institutions in CA can work to support and replicate the programs already in existence at the public institutions to ensure that even if legislature and budget changes negatively impact the programs at public schools, pathways will exist for students exiting the prison system and hoping to pursue higher education. Even if state support for these programs continues, private institutions in the state should share in the work of making higher education accessible. Private institutions can provide programming and academic experiences that are different from programs offered at public institutions and should ensure that students leaving correctional institutions have a range of opportunities to continue their education. As a Jesuit, Catholic university in the Bay Area, USF is uniquely positioned to implement this work at this time. The Bay Area's two public 4 year institutions can provide guidance on best practices and the University can align the goals of impacting this particular population with its social justice focused Mission Statement.

### **Personal Reflections**

When pursuing my Bachelor's Degree at the University of San Francisco, I studied dance with Professor Amie Dowling of the Performing Arts & Social Justice Department (PASJ). Professor Dowling's teaching greatly influenced and expanded my own understanding of social justice and her work with currently and formerly incarcerated men introduced me to many of the issues examined in this project. While Professor Dowling works with this population in many different settings, I had the opportunity to attend two performances and watch a dance film of this kind of work that inspired me to learn more about issues surrounding incarceration. First, in 2011, I attended a performance on Alcatraz for which Professor Dowling was a contributing artist. The performance brought the audience through different spaces on Alcatraz and caused me to understand the realities of prison in a way that only art can. Next, in 2014, I was able to

experience the culminating performance of Professor Dowling's course, Performing Arts & Community Exchange (PACE). PACE is a course taught both on USF's campus and inside SF Jail #5 that covers topics of mass incarceration and the performing arts. USF PASJ majors and men inside the facility collaborate throughout the semester on performance work and end the semester by performing their work for other men inside the jail, jail staff and invited outside guests. This experience was the first time I entered a jail facility and even before witnessing the performance, I was wrestling with understanding my own privilege of never having been inside a jail and having the ability to both enter and exit the facility that day. Finally, I've also had the opportunity to watch a dance film created by Professor Dowling in collaboration with and performed by formerly incarcerated men, *Well Contested Sites*. In an interview about the film, Dowling said "The arts can and should play a role in that public discourse, because works of art can make people look at mass-incarceration through a different lens, a lens that encompasses heart and mind" (Ochoa-Gold, 2015). These pieces of art did just that for me and initiated research that has eventually led to this field project.

In the initial proposal stage of this project, I questioned what I had the ability to actually implement within the USF reality and as a staff member in the Office of Admission, I chose to focus as much as possible on the admission process. In researching education programs for formerly incarcerated individuals, one thing that I learned was about the success of these programs under the leadership of formerly incarcerated individuals. During a phone call with Steven Czifra, one of the founders of USI at UC Berkeley to learn more about that program for this project, one of the first things he asked me was 'are you formerly incarcerated?'. In that moment, I questioned whether or not my interest in working with this population was enough to bring the project successfully to fruition. After continuing research, I decided to move forward

with the project and to include plans for inviting formerly incarcerated men and women to actively participate in the creation of such a program at USF.

Since beginning this project in the summer of 2016 there have been a few developments that have shaped and fueled this work. Media attention to issues of mass incarceration and its relationship with racism has increased with the release of Ava Duvernay's documentary on Netflix, *13<sup>th</sup>*. A New Yorker article was published in the December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016 issue that details the creation of USI at UC Berkeley. Work has begun within my office to re-align our transfer admission process with diversity and access goals of the university. These developments give me hope that this project can be successfully implemented at USF and shared with other private postsecondary institutions in CA.

## CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

While research that focuses on the school-to-prison pipeline and the different ways that our current education system is set up to push students out is abundant, research on the prison-to-school pipeline is in its early stages. To develop this field project, I will look at three major areas of literature including mass incarceration and its connections to institutional racism, education and re-entry and transfer admission. Additionally I will highlight a few existing programs supporting formerly incarcerated students at postsecondary institutions. In analyzing the literature around mass incarcerations and racism a connection will be made between how racism in America shapes societal structures and the role that the criminal justice system plays in society. Existing literature on education and re-entry, or the process of leaving jail or prison and re-entering communities, has shows the potential benefits of education for current and formerly incarcerated individuals. The literature presented here on transfer admission will demonstrate a critical understanding of the abilities for transfer admission policies to expand access to higher education.

### **Mass Incarceration and Institutional Racism**

To understand how the criminal justice system affects people in the United States today, it is important to understand the somewhat recent history and phenomena of ‘mass incarceration’. “The growth in incarceration rates in the United States over the past 40 years is historically unprecedented and internationally unique” (Travis, Western & Redburn 2014, p. 2). While the US saw an increase in crime from the 1960s to 1980s, crime rates fell across the board beginning in the 1990s and that decline continued for 2 decades while rates of incarceration continued to increase (Travis, Western & Redburn 2014). The beginnings of the prison boom can

be traced to policy changes in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Travis, Western & Redburn, the use of incarceration was expanding in a number of ways: “prison time was increasingly required for lesser offenses; time served was significantly increased for violent crimes and for repeat offenders; and drug crimes, particularly street dealing in urban areas, became more severely policed and punished” (2014, p. 3).

Policies and economic changes in the 1980s and 1990s continued this trend. As inner-city communities experienced economic collapse during this time, there were further increases to the length of prison sentences through mandatory minimums and the introduction of three strikes laws (Travis, Western & Redburn 2014; Alexander 2010). Much of the increases in rates of incarceration throughout the 1980s and 1990s can be traced to the War on Drugs introduced under the Reagan Administration. By the 1980s, inner-city communities were hit hard by changes in industry in the US that brought blue-collar jobs out of cities and into suburbs, increasing incentives for inner-city residents to engage in illegal economic activity like selling drugs (Alexander 2010). As will be discussed, this War on Drugs disproportionately affected and continues to affect inner-city communities. These ‘tough on crime’ policies continued under Democratic president Clinton. As cited by Alexander (2010), the Justice Policy Institute observed that during the Clinton Administration the largest increases occurred in federal and state prison populations of any president in American history. Researchers have examined these growing rates of incarceration and determined that the policy choices of legislators to increase the use of imprisonment as a response to crime are the primary cause of the increases—not increased crime (Travis, Western & Redburn 2014). While much research has focused on issues of mass incarceration and steps are beginning to be made at the legislative level, the US incarceration rate remains at extremely high levels and political rhetoric about ‘law and order’

and ‘tough on crime’ laws has made headlines during the 2016 election. According to Prison Policy Initiative research, in 2016 there are 2.3 million people confined in the US in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 942 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails, and 79 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, and prisons in the US territories (Wagner & Rabuy 2016). That is up from an incarcerated population of 1.3 million people in 2001 (Glaze 2011; Halkovic 2014; Visser & Travis 2003).

Who are these 2.3 million people living in incarceration? The vast majority of them are black and brown men. In her 2010 work, *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander uses historical analysis to show that our criminal justice system today serves a similar, if not the same, role as the Jim Crow laws did in the South and is a consequence of racism in the US. As early as immediately following the Civil Rights era, “racial imagery” of protests and riots allowed the argument that civil rights for blacks led to increased crime to spread (Alexander, 2010, Weaver, 2007). This narrative continued to influence the conservative agenda on crime through the Reagan administration. As Alexander notes, when Reagan declared the War on Drugs in 1982, “by waging a war on drug users and dealers, Reagan made good on his promise to crack down on the racially defined ‘others’—the undeserving” (2010, p. 49). By the 1990s, Alexander considers mass incarceration at that point to have created a “new racial caste system” and attributes much of the impetus for the legislation creating this caste to politicians attempting to “win the votes of poor and working-class whites, whose economic situation was precarious, at best, and who felt threatened by racial reforms” (2010, p. 55). While the War on Drugs disproportionately affected people of color, there is no evidence that people of color engage in illegal drug activity at rates different than any other races (Alexander 2010; Travis, Western & Redburn 2014). Racially

biased policing, then, can be attributed as a cause of this disproportionality, though police adamantly deny engaging in racial profiling (Alexander 2010). When using a Critical Race Theory approach and looking at how we punish crimes in the US through a historical lens, though, it is impossible to ignore the effects of a history of racial oppression. “The unfortunate reality we must face is that racism manifests itself not only in individual attitudes and stereotypes, but also in the basic structure of society” (Alexander 2010, p. 179). Today, more African Americans are under the control of the criminal justice system—either in prison or jail or on probation or parole—than were enslaved a decade before the Civil War began (Alexander 2010). An important point to make in light of this project is that involvement with the criminal justice system systematically and negatively affects black men specifically and men of color in general even after their time is served. Black men face more discrimination—much of it legally, through a complex system of laws that denies employment, housing, education, and public benefits—when returning home from prison (Alexander 2010; Halkovic 2014).

Because of the extreme rates of incarceration in the US and the disproportionate way that the criminal justice system affects people of color, institutions purporting to do social justice work should focus their efforts on creating opportunities for the populations affected by mass incarceration to more actively participate in society. As a Jesuit, Catholic institution, USF’s mission and identity require that the university continue to re-imagine the role of higher education as a social justice tool. As the literature shows, the mass incarceration of primarily people of color in the US is symptom of institutional racism. To dismantle decades of institutional racism, work must be done to open up access to areas of society that those with incarceration histories typically do not have access to. As an institution of higher education, USF has the ability to provide access to this education and has the ability to align this work with its



mission. The university already considers the development of a diverse campus community to be a part of this mission, but has not clearly expressed this commitment to diversity including a commitment to those with diverse experiences that include involvement with the criminal justice system.

### **Education and Re-entry**

As mentioned in Chapter I, almost 70% of all prisoners released are rearrested within three years of their release (Durose, Cooper & Snyder, 2014). If we are to think about incarceration as a way to merely punish people for committing crimes, this might not seem to be a problem. However, if we are to think about incarceration as an opportunity for those who commit crimes to learn and grow and hopefully leave the criminal justice system and return as productive members of their communities, then this recidivism rate shows that our current work inside jails and prisons is failing those that we incarcerate. Because of the cycle of recidivism, there exists a ‘permanent underclass’, a number of individuals who have no way to be anything but poor (Alexander 2010; Escobar, Jordan & Lohrasbi 2013; Western 2007; Wilson 1985). These cycles of recidivism have also been described as *circuits of dispossession* (Fine & Ruglis 2009). Though using these terms—cycles, circuits, permanent—makes this rate of recidivism seem an inevitable aspect of our criminal justice system, there are programs that have been proven to reduce recidivism rates. Access to higher education within prisons has been seen to drastically affect recidivism rates as well as improve parenting relationships, save tax dollars, and have other positive outcomes for both families and communities (Fine et al., 2001; Halkovic, 2014).

Studies of the effects of education on incarcerated populations have focused primarily on college-in-prison programs. In such programs in Ohio and Washington, studies have shown that

recidivism rates were reduced by a just over 60% (Halkovic 2014). Research by Pettit & Western has shown that incarceration has a direct negative effect on lifetime earning capabilities and educational attainment (2004, 2010). Halkovic used this research to compare the effects of going to college post prison with those experienced by first generation college students—those include increased earning potential and economic opportunity, but also positive impacts on families and communities that could not necessarily be measured economically (2014). Higher education for previously incarcerated populations can yield opportunities to access better jobs with better pay, more paid days of work which can help ensure economic stability and the possibility of breaking the cycle of poverty for families (Davis et al., 2013; Halkovic 2014). Additionally, research shows that correctional education programs have the added benefit of being more cost-effective than re-incarceration (Davis et al., 2013).

This research shows that access to education for incarcerated populations has a positive affect on not only those incarcerated, but also their families and communities. By focusing on educational attainment, rather than vocational training or other anti-recidivism work, activists can have more far-reaching effects on the communities who overwhelmingly feel the burdens of mass incarceration. Though the goal of this project is not to specifically address recidivism rates, the literature shows that education programs clearly have positive impacts on the chances that a formerly incarcerated individual will find herself or himself rearrested.

### **Transfer Admission**

As stated earlier, this project will focus on the recruitment of formerly incarcerated individuals as transfer students. While this is a practical decision because of the increase in access to community college coursework within correctional facilities in the state of California, it is one piece of a larger process to more closely align the University of San Francisco's transfer

process with the University's mission and diversity goals (which are also becoming more clearly aligned with the mission of the university). In a 2008 study by Dowd, Cheslock & Melguizo, focused primarily on the admission practices of elite, highly selective institutions of higher education, the researchers identified transfer admission practices as having the capacity to further increase access to higher education for students with low socio-economic status, but that at many institutions it is not serving that purpose. For many schools, students who are deemed 'prepared' for the traditional freshman admission process must produce evidence in the form of high standardized test scores, which have come to be known as a more definitive marker of family wealth than success in college (Zumbrun, 2014). Research also shows that students of color score lower on standardized test scores than whites (Geiser, 2015). For these and other reasons, students of color comprise the majority of community college students nation-wide (Jain et al., 2011). However, these students are also the minority in successfully transferring to four-year institutions (Jain et al., 2011). Overall, research has shown that four-year colleges and universities are not meeting the needs of transfer students (Eggleston and Laanan, 2001). Researchers have looked at community colleges to ensure that they are preparing students to successfully transfer and creating a transfer culture, but others are starting to examine transfer from a four-year college's perspective—"viewing it as a two-way process of making an explicit commitment to value transfer students" (Jain et al., 2011, p. 255).

Jain et al. propose creating a transfer receptive culture at four-year colleges and universities to partner with community colleges that have already started the work of creating a 'transfer culture' (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). Jain et al. define this transfer receptive culture as "an institutional commitment by a four-year college or university to provide the support needed for students to transfer successfully" (2011, p. 257). The authors use 'transferring successfully'

to mean navigating the community college, taking the appropriate coursework to be eligible for admission, applying, enrolling and successfully earning a baccalaureate degree in a timely manner (Jain et al., 2011). To make the transfer admission process a social justice tool, scholars like Delgado Bernal propose using an asset based approach when considering the diverse experiences that transfer students bring to four-year campuses (2001). Other scholars who view higher education within the role that it plays in shaping future political and business leaders explain that increasing transfer admission and therefore increasing the numbers of poor, working-class, and racial minority students on college campuses increases the probability that these students will enter positions of power in society and also increases the likelihood that other graduates of these institutions will interact with a diverse set of peers while in school (Dowd et al., 2008).

To build a transfer receptive culture at four-year colleges and universities, Jain et al. (2011), propose five elements of this culture and divides them into pre and post transfer:

**Pre-transfer:**

1. Establish the transfer of students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and graduation.
2. Provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students while complimenting the community college mission of transfer.

**Post-transfer:**

3. Offer financial and academic support through distinct opportunities for nontraditional=reentry transfer students where they are stimulated to achieve at high academic levels.
4. Acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family.
5. Create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer receptive programs and initiatives that can lead to further scholarship on transfer students. (p. 258)

These five elements can help four-year institutions to reimagine transfer admission as a social justice tool. By approaching the creation or re-creation of a transfer admission process at a four-

year institution through both a Critical Race Theory and social justice education lens, enrollment management professionals can better realize the potential of the transfer admission process to continue to increase access to education for communities historically underserved by higher education. Currently, the USF Office of Undergraduate Admission is completing an internal review of our transfer admission policies to re-align them with institutional goals, including the university's commitment to a diverse student body. While previous sections and chapters have illuminated the role that transfer admission can play in increasing ethnic and racial diversity on campus, using CRT, HRE and USF's social justice framework, the diversity of experiences that transfer students bring to the institution they transfer to is a more asset-based approach to that recruitment strategy. Currently, much of the work being done to create a more transfer receptive culture on our campus involves creating academic structures and policies that allow for a smooth and transparent admission process that includes clear information about a student's future academic plans at USF.

### **Program Models**

Education programs for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals exist in a number of capacities. Much of the research previously mentioned about the positive results of education for people with criminal justice system involvement has focused on correctional education offered within prisons and jails. Less comprehensive research exists on programs designed specifically for formerly incarcerated students studying on college campuses, though such programs do exist. Two programs for formerly incarcerated students at Bay Area postsecondary have served as inspiration and models for this project, Project Rebound (PR) at SFSU and Underground Scholars Initiative (USI) at UC Berkeley. Both programs were created and are led by formerly incarcerated individuals.

Project Rebound was founded at SFSU in 1967 by Professor John Irwin and remains a program of Associated Students Inc., the student governing body of the university that funds the program along with private foundations ([asi.sfsu.edu](http://asi.sfsu.edu); Mukamal et al., 2015). Formerly incarcerated individuals staff the program and Project Rebound has an advisory board made up of tenured faculty and staff from across the university (Mukamal et al., 2015). Project Rebound supports about 150 SFSU students each semester, along with many more prospective students and their families through correspondence throughout the year and works with City College San Francisco (CCSF)'s Second Chance Program (Mukamal et al., 2015). The services and support that Project Rebound provide include admissions processing, academic advising, financial aid assistance, tutoring, counseling, mentoring and financial support for things like textbooks and transportation ([asi.sfsu.edu](http://asi.sfsu.edu); Mukamal et al., 2015).

As mentioned in Chapter I, UC Berkeley's Underground Scholars Initiative (USI) hosted its first ever graduation ceremony during its May 2016 commencement events. Newer than Project Rebound, USI grew out of a desire for a space for formerly incarcerated students to meet and eventually took on the work of recruiting more formerly incarcerated students to UC Berkeley (MacFarquhar, 2016). According to USI, its purpose is "to demystify the university experience and create space for the formerly incarcerated". USI works with the Admission office to support prospective transfer students through the admission process. Once on campus, USI offers formerly incarcerated students a variety of support services including a course called "Navigating Berkeley", a physical center on campus that provides things like study space and printing, advising on CalWORKS/CalFRESH, tutoring and mentoring. In addition to these more formal support structures, USI continues to host regular organization meetings ([undergroundscholars.org](http://undergroundscholars.org)).

### **Summary**

In analyzing literature pertinent to the idea of a prison-to-school pipeline, a few things become clear. First, the over-representation of people of color within the criminal justice system is a symptom of a racist society and, therefore, any programs for the formerly incarcerated must be created with this awareness. The research that exists on the effects that education opportunities have for those affected by the criminal justice system shows that these programs positively impact one's chances for future success outside of prison or jail and decrease a person's chances of returning to a correctional institution. The literature around transfer admission processes and their potential for increasing access to higher education is also promising. Taken together, the literature shows that a program designed for formerly incarcerated students at the University of San Francisco can achieve a number of goals. This type of a program, first and foremost, can and should provide additional opportunities for people affected by the criminal justice system to access higher education. Next, this type of a program should be included in an overall transfer admission plan that aims to provide opportunities for communities and students who are not served by the freshman admission process and timeline. Learning from programs like those at SFSU and UC Berkeley will also serve any future programming at USF well.

## CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

### **Positionality**

For many aspects of the development of this project, I have drawn on my own knowledge of the undergraduate admission field, the Office of Admission at USF and general trends in higher education. For the past four years, I have worked in the Office of Undergraduate Admission at USF, served on various university committees, and made a conscious effort to stay up to date on issues of access within higher education. When I was an undergraduate student at USF, I also participated in the Performing Arts & Social Justice program. Through that program, I was introduced to the work of faculty members at USF like Amie Dowling, whose teaching and research deal with issues of mass incarceration. As a staff member, I participated in an educational seminar offered through Human Resources on Restorative Justice practices facilitated by a formerly incarcerated alum of USF and his wife-a fellow staff member. These experiences have led to the development of this project.

### **Description of the Project**

This field project will consist of a written proposal for the Office of Undergraduate Admission at USF to consider taking steps to actively recruit formerly incarcerated students as well as a collection of general best practices for institutions of higher education to implement their own programs for recruiting this population. The proposal will be presented to the leadership of the Office of Admission and Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM), and then to other university stakeholders as determined by SEM leadership. The proposal will include different steps that the university can make to become more accessible to people with incarceration histories, with particular focus on strategies and goals that are within the scope of the work of the Office of Admission.



## **Development of the Project**

The initial idea for this project started to form as I sat in a session at the Western Association of College Admission Counseling Annual Conference in June 2016. Members of the admission team at UC Berkeley facilitated the session and the topic was the school's Underground Scholars Initiative (USI). The admission staff members framed the conversation then video called members of USI to share their stories from their incarceration histories to their academic journey at UC Berkeley. With the knowledge that members of the faculty and staff at USF had research and personal interests in topics like mass incarceration and restorative justice, I began to think about recreating a program like USI within the context of USF. After initial research on these types of programs and general research on the topics involved, I began to reach out to people involved in USI and Project Rebound at SFSU as well as members of the USF community for their input. Utilizing these interviews and the initial research, I then developed the project.

## **The Project**

### **Best Practices**

These best practices have been designed based on the research previously mentioned. In addition, much of this work is based on recommendations made in the reports *Degrees of Freedom: Expanding College Opportunities for Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Californians* prepared by Mukamal et al. for the Stanford Criminal Justice Center at Stanford Law School and the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy at UC Berkeley School of Law and *Beyond the Box: Increasing Access to Higher Education for Justice-Involved Individuals* prepared by the U.S. Department of Education. . While the first report makes recommendations specifically for public institutions of education and corrections,

the best practices listed below attempt to interpret those recommendations onto the context of private higher education in CA.

### **Financial Support & Counseling**

One of the primary barriers to accessing private higher education within CA for all students is the high cost of these institutions. Formerly incarcerated students face additional barriers to employment because of their conviction histories, which compounds their inability to access these educational institutions. Students with incarceration histories do have access to federal and state aid opportunities, but may not know this. Limitations to accessing federal aid do exist for some students with specific convictions, and students might not understand what their eligibility is (US Department of Education). “Programs can improve college accessibility by providing financial support through assistance in applying for financial aid, counseling to improve students’ financial management skills, and direct grants for books, meals, or other costs” (Mukamal et al., 2015, p.27). Many of the existing programs at public institutions in the Bay Area for formerly incarcerated students include some time of financial assistance that is in addition to the school’s traditional financial aid programming. In the creation of a program for formerly incarcerated students, private institutions should create programs to financially support these students. These programs should include financial aid counseling and financial aid counselors specifically trained to work with this population of students.

### **Community Spaces**

The Underground Scholars Initiative at UC Berkeley started out as a student run organization for formerly incarcerated students to meet. While the program has since grown, its primary role on campus is to provide a space for formerly incarcerated students to cultivate community. “Staff of existing support programs also emphasize the importance of creating

spaces and cultivating communities in which individuals with criminal histories can feel comfortable sharing their past experiences and expressing the fears and anxieties that naturally arise as they pursue their degrees” (Mukamal et al., 2015, p. 28). Additionally, “it is important to think about the needs of students, and to create safe spaces for those students who need the supportive environment of a college to make the transition from prison” (Halkovic 2014). In creating programs for formerly incarcerated students at private institutions, staff should examine the landscape of student groups and spaces on their campus and plan to create spaces specifically for this population of students. The need for these types of community organizations and physical spaces should be taken into account when designing recruitment and retention programs.

### **Advisory Board**

At many private colleges and universities in CA, faculty may already be engaging in scholarship that relates to mass incarceration, criminal justice policy, access to higher education and other related topics. Additionally, these institutions may have staff in offices that work on outreach, diversity initiatives, student support and other areas who may be interested in working with this population of students. Outside community members, alumni and donors may be interested in these institutions opening up to formerly incarcerated students. Engaging these broad constituencies can be important for these types of programs to begin and for their long-term sustainability. The development of “an advisory board of tenured faculty, high-level administrators and community leaders” can “lend support and legitimacy to the program” (Mukamal et al., 2015, p. 28). Those who are creating programs for formerly incarcerated students should look across and outside of their institutions to create a sustainable advisory board within the structures that exist on their campus. People to consider for this advisory board

include faculty, administrators, community leaders, alumni and donors. Care should be taken in choosing members of the board to ensure that participants have prior knowledge of the experience of formerly incarcerated people.

### **Peer Mentoring**

Many college campuses utilize peer mentoring to support student success. In examining research done on these programs, Budge indicates that the following may all be benefits of peer mentoring: increased retention and graduation rates, the development or advancement of interpersonal and communication skills, expanded patience and compassion, increases in a student's self esteem, self-efficacy and satisfaction with their academic program, positive influence on career choices, and perseverance in following educational goals (2006). In the *Degrees of Freedom* report, the authors indicate "incorporating peer mentorship into campus programs can help formerly incarcerated students transition into the college community with the support of others who have encountered similar challenges" (Mukamal et al., 2015, p. 28). While it is clear that these authors are recommending peer mentors who are themselves formerly incarcerated, it may be difficult to create an initial program in this way if campuses do not already have many formerly incarcerated students on campus.

### **Staffing Needs**

For programs to succeed long-term, a staff member (or members) should be responsible for administration. The staff member(s) should coordinate with the advisory board, student groups and offices throughout campus to ensure that formerly incarcerated students have access to the support necessary for them to succeed. "Both in- and out-of-custody college programs for criminal justice-involved students need dedicated program coordinators to oversee day-to-day implementation and build sustainability so the program survives turnover in leadership"

(Mukamal et al., 2015 p. 63). While it may be difficult for a new program to have a full-time dedicated staff member, the responsibility of administering a program for formerly incarcerated students might live in an office on campus that already exists to serve underserved student populations, like the EOPS office at CCSF which administers the Second Chance program there.

Additionally, staff members tasked with working with formerly incarcerated students should receive training on the specific needs of this population of students. “Program staff should work to understand and respond to the experiences of formerly incarcerated students without judgment” (Mukamal et al., 2015, p. 63). This type of training should be made available across the university so that all campus staff members that a formerly incarcerated student may interact with will be sensitive to their experiences. Advisers specifically trained to work with formerly incarcerated students and assigned to them specifically could help ease formerly incarcerated students’ transition to a new campus community as well as the effects of stigmatization they may experience (Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey & Byers 2007).

### **Outreach & Admission Policies**

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 66% of postsecondary institutions collect criminal justice information from all of their applicants and 5% request criminal justice information from students applying to “programs that appeared to be closed to individuals with criminal records” (2016, p. 10). The U.S. Department of Education recommends that postsecondary institutions determine whether or not criminal justice information is necessary in the admission process, delay the request for or consideration of this information until after a preliminary admission decision has been made, transparently and clearly inform students about the need for criminal justice history early in the admission process and ensure that questions about criminal history are specific and narrowly focused (2016). Many private postsecondary

institutions in CA use the Common Application as their admission application and this application requires “students to indicate if they have been ‘adjudicated guilty or convicted of a misdemeanor, felony or other crime’” (U.S. Department of Education 2016, p. 10). Schools using the Common App should decide on their policy of reviewing this information and clearly indicate that policy on their website and in outreach materials so that formerly incarcerated students know how their disclosure will affect their application.

Once an admission policy for formerly incarcerated students has been established, schools should create and disseminate outreach materials in the community. Institutions that plan on making a commitment to educating formerly incarcerated students should plan for how to counsel students who are not eligible for admission. Programs like the SFSU’s of recommending that students enroll in CCSF’s Second Chance program are potential models of this type of counseling. Colleges and universities should perform “outreach to prospective students at probation and parole meetings, in local jails, and at state prisons through informational fliers and newsletters (Mukamal et al., 2015, p. 67). Schools should also become aware of programs that might already exist in their communities within correctional institutions and at community colleges. If a local community college already offers a program for formerly incarcerated students, private colleges and universities in the area should partner with that program so that the advisors in the program clearly understand what would be required to transfer to that private institution. Private colleges and universities should also analyze their transfer admission policies to ensure that they are serving the needs of all transfer students with particular focus on the needs of formerly incarcerated students.

## **A Proposal for Developing a Prison-to-School Pipeline at the University of San Francisco (USF)**

The remainder of this section of the project is a proposal specifically for the Office of Undergraduate Admission, Strategic Enrollment Management of the University of San Francisco. Based on my research and experience, this proposal will address a few key areas of necessary programming for this project to be successful. These areas will include examining and updating outreach and admission processes, stating the need for an advisory board, exploring staffing needs, detailing necessary financial aid counseling and support, suggesting a peer mentoring model, and explaining the need for community spaces. The first section will attempt to align the needs and goals of a program for formerly incarcerated students with the mission and values of USF.

### ***The Need & Alignment with USF Mission***

The United States incarcerates more people than any other nation in the world and incarceration affects people of color disproportionately. In USF's mission statement, the university establishes its hope that it will "distinguish itself as a diverse, socially responsible learning community of high quality scholarship and academic rigor sustained by a faith that does justice". Additionally, the university identifies a number of Core Values as integral to the identity of the institution. These include "a belief in and a commitment to advancing diversity of perspectives, experiences and traditions as essential components of equality education in our global context". As staff members of the University, we have a responsibility to ensure that the projects under our responsibility continue to support and further this mission.

Currently, the Office of Undergraduate Admission employs certain strategies to recruit an increasingly diverse pool of academically qualified students. However, the majority of these

strategies are reserved for the freshman admission process. As a team, we are currently engaged in a process of evaluating our transfer admission strategies to increase the number of transfer students we enroll each semester and to re-align the transfer admission strategy to USF's mission. Including formerly incarcerated students in the transfer admission process will first and foremost increase access to higher education for this population of students. Additionally, as a recruitment strategy, the program can help increase the racial and socio-economic diversity of transfer applicants. While not currently an explicit recruitment goal of the Undergraduate Admission team, this project will also help to diversify the collective experiences of USF students. As the university continues to reconstruct what it means to be a diverse institution while working toward increasing diversity, programs like this will help the university achieve those goals.

The following are steps that the University, Strategic Enrollment Management and the Office of Undergraduate Admission should take to actively recruit, retain and graduate formerly incarcerated students.

### **1) Outreach & Admission Policies**

#### **A. Clarify Transfer Admission Process for all Transfer Applicants.**

- i. Continue to work to make the transfer admission process transparent and work to serve applicants by increasing the number and type of classes that will be articulated at the time of admission.
- ii. Ensure that information regarding admission requirements and process is clear and transparent across all forms of communication, including the admission letter and information regarding a student's Degree Evaluation.

#### **B. Create clear policy for reviewing Criminal Justice History.**



- i. Establish plan to go “beyond the box” when reviewing applications. Create an admission process that initially eliminates the question about an applicant’s incarceration history from a student’s application during the initial review process. During a second read, determine whether or not the criminal justice history should alter the initial admission decision.
- ii. NYU, a private postsecondary education institution that also uses the Common App. could serve as a model:

Last year, NYU decided to change its application review procedures and initially review all undergraduate applications without knowledge of whether the applicant has affirmatively answered the question of whether he or she has been convicted of a crime. Once the initial assessment of admission is made, the applications of individuals who checked the criminal conviction box are reviewed by a special committee made up of a team of admissions professionals who have been specially trained to perform an assessment of the information based on a multi-factor analysis to determine whether a past criminal offense justifies denial of admission” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 19)

- C. Publicly Announce the University’ commitment to students with incarceration histories.
- D. Create admission materials that clearly explain the University’s commitment to this population of students, the application process and how the admission committee will review criminal justice history.

## **2) Advisory Board**

- A. Invite faculty with scholarly interests in criminal justice, mass incarceration, access to education and other related ideas to a meeting to discuss the program. Ask for their feedback and input on program goals.
- B. Identify and invite formerly incarcerated current students and alumni and request their feedback and input on program goals and processes.
- C. Create Advisory Board for Program

- i. Include Faculty, Staff, Alumni and students on an advisory board with the responsibility of administering the project.
- ii. Invite formerly incarcerated alumni and students as primary stakeholders on the advisory board.

### **3) Staffing Needs**

- A. The long-term ideal goal of the program would include a full-time staff member to administer all programmatic elements. Priority for this type of position should be given to formerly incarcerated people.
- B. If a full-time staff member is not possible at this time, create a University committee with members from the Office of Undergraduate Admission, Diversity and Community Engagement (DECO), Student Life, the Center for Academic and Student Achievement (CASA) and Career Services Center (CSC). This committee would be tasked with ensuring appropriate programming in each division exists for formerly incarcerated students, collecting and reporting data on the program to leadership and monitoring student success.

### **4) Financial Support & Counseling**

- A. A long-term goal of the program should be to raise funds specifically for a scholarship available only to formerly incarcerated students. If that scholarship is possible, clear guidelines for who is eligible and how students can apply for that scholarship should be made available in outreach materials.
- B. Robust Financial Aid counseling should be made available to formerly incarcerated students. While Financial Aid counselors with specific knowledge of how a criminal justice history should be assigned to working with this population of students, all

employees in Financial Aid and Student Enrollment Services should be trained on the specific financial aid considerations necessary for formerly incarcerated students. This program of Financial Aid counseling could serve as a pilot program for expanding this type of counseling to all USF students receiving financial aid.

- C. Clearly explain financial aid policies in outreach materials for formerly incarcerated students.

### **5) Peer Mentoring**

- A. Peer Mentoring possibilities for formerly incarcerated students could grow out of a variety of existing programs on campus.
- B. Expand scope of current Transfer Nation club. This club currently exists to provide social opportunities for transfer students to meet other students who have transferred to USF. As the transfer admission process continues to be refined, this club could include a peer mentorship component that helps incoming transfer students understand their degree evaluations, connect these students with faculty and staff, and welcome them to the community.
- C. Expand Muscat Scholars Program (MSP) to transfer students. Currently, MSP serves as a summer bridge program for incoming first-generation freshman students. The program includes both peer and staff mentorship opportunities. To re-align our transfer admission process with diversity and access goals of the University, a version of MSP should be available to incoming transfer students, including those with incarceration histories.
- D. The long-term goal of the program should be to create a peer mentorship program that pairs formerly incarcerated students as both mentors and mentees. If peer mentoring component initially does not include formerly incarcerated students as mentors, the

students serving as mentors need to receive training on issues of mass incarceration, the specific needs of formerly incarcerated students and cultural competency training.

## **6) Community Spaces**

- A. The Cultural Centers at USF, made up of the Intercultural Center and the Gender & Sexuality, serve as both physical spaces on campus where students build community, and as outlets for student run programs that explore social issues and identity. One of the signature programs of the Cultural Centers is their Collective Series that invites students who share particular identities to build community and engage in dialogue. A formerly incarcerated student Collective could serve as a community space for students with incarceration histories. Conversation between formerly incarcerated students and the Cultural Centers should determine the shape that a community space for this population takes.

## **Proposed First Steps**

The above proposal includes both short and long term goals for a program at USF that aims to recruit, retain and graduate formerly incarcerated students based on the previously described best practices. Understanding the constraints of working within existing structures at the University and without any current funding for this type of program, I propose that the Office of Admission attempt to initiate the following steps to create a pilot program for this purpose.

1. Host a symposium on the intersections of education and incarceration. Possible presenters to invite include USF faculty and students engaged in work relating to these topics to present their work, representatives from Project Rebound at SFSU, Underground Scholars Initiative at UC Berkeley and the Second Chance Program at CCSF to present on their programs, the researchers who published the Degrees of Freedom report.

2. Engage with University leadership to declare USF's commitment to formerly incarcerated students.
3. Identify and engage formerly incarcerated current USF students and alumni. Their experiences and input should guide all aspects of implementation of the program.
4. Create admission policies and goals for the recruitment of formerly incarcerated students. Publicly announce these policies and clearly describe them on our website.
5. Engage campus community in conversations about supporting formerly incarcerated students across the student experience with goal of creating advisory board and/or University committee tasked with overseeing program.
6. Identify staff in campus offices that students interact with (CASA, CSC, Cultural Centers, Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Student Disability Services (SDS), Learning and Writing Center (LWC), Library, etc.) who can receive training on working with formerly incarcerated students and serve as primary points of contact for this group of students.
7. Partner with CCSF's Second Chance Program as a pilot program for recruiting formerly incarcerated students.

## CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Conclusions**

In examining the existing literature on topics related to the prison-to-school pipeline and assessing the current climate of our systems of criminal justice and higher education, the opportunity for a program of this kind becomes clear. As a society, we incarcerate at an alarming rate and the people most commonly affected by the criminal justice system are the same people who are excluded from postsecondary opportunities. If we are to understand the transformational power of education, and specifically education guided by the principles of Human Rights Education and social justice, then opportunities to expand access to this type of education must be explored. Through analysis of the history of our criminal justice system with a CRT lens, it is possible to understand the entire system as a manifestation of a racist society that continues to punish people of color at rates exceeding those of white people. If we understand the entire system of incarceration in this country to be a manifestation and example of institutional racism, then programs designed for formerly incarcerated students must take seriously the experiences of people of color.

Research of the effects of education opportunities on outcomes for incarcerated men and women is promising. Not only do correctional education programs decrease a person's chances of recidivating back to prison, they are also a cost-effective measure for the correctional system. Currently in the state of California, a number of events and movements are providing opportunities for an increase in education programs offered for the currently and formerly incarcerated. Legislative support for education within prisons and jails is currently at one of the highest levels it has been at within the state and more people will have access to community college coursework within the state's correctional institutions by the end of 2016 than in the

many years prior. As these people re-enter their communities with college coursework, programs already exist at public institutions to continue that education. These programs include those of Bay Area institutions. As a private, post-secondary institution, USF serves to provide the community with a type of education that is different from the public system and rooted in Jesuit, Catholic values. This identity as a Jesuit, Catholic institution means that USF must continue to work toward creating a more just society. As the research has shown, injustice exists both in the system of incarceration we find our society in as well as the system of higher education that USF finds itself in. Therefore, the university must commit to expanding access to education for communities historical excluded from this system. One of the ways that USF can do this is by re-imagining its transfer admission process as a tool for social justice and by including formerly incarcerated students in that transfer admission recruitment plan. In order to serve the needs of this population fully, efforts must be taken across the university to ensure that the support structures necessary are in place. USF can learn from the Bay Area's existing successful programs, support those programs and connect with them to ensure that the region as a whole is attending to the needs of this population of students.

While the main focus of this project has been on the creation of a recruitment strategy for formerly incarcerated students to USF, the research also indicated how this type of program might best serve these students. A transparent and welcoming admission and outreach process is the first step that a program like this should take to bring students with incarceration histories to apply to the university. Next, the transfer admission process should clearly demonstrate how a student's previous credit would be applied to a degree at USF. As is the case at other institutions, an advisory board should be created to guide the program and ensure its legitimacy and long term success. While the advisory board would play a key role in the program, staff must be

available for the day-to-day administrative tasks of the program. Staff across the university in the various offices, centers and departments that formerly incarcerated students would interact with should be trained on the specific needs of this population and identified as supporters of these students. The financial aid process should be clear and robust and special consideration should be given to providing access to books and supplies as well as transportation needs. Networks of peer mentors, community gatherings and physical spaces must also be an integral part of a retention strategy for formerly incarcerated students. As mentioned previously, any program designed for formerly incarcerated students should be grounded in the experiences of this population but should also be guided by the direct input of people who have this lived experience. In an ideal program, leadership and administration of the program would themselves have incarceration histories.

Understanding that we are living in a moment in U.S. history where we are grappling with the effects of years of incarcerating incredibly large groups of people, and particularly incarcerating people of color, attention must be paid to the experiences of those who are leaving correctional facilities and attempting to re-integrate into communities that they have been excluded from. The research is clear that educational opportunities are some of the best tools for reducing recidivism. As a University with a mission that includes a commitment to social justice and diversity, USF should include formerly incarcerated students in its recruitment plans and recognize the assets that they can contribute to the campus community. USF should follow the models set by its fellow Bay Area postsecondary institutions like SFSU, UC Berkeley and CCSF who are already engaging in the work of providing access for this population of students.

One of the main limitations of USF doing this work at the moment is the cost of education at USF relative to other Bay Area higher education options. If the university is to take



its mission seriously and continue to create spaces for students with a diversity of experiences on campus, work must continue to make financial aid programming robust, transparent and accessible. The cost of implementing a program like this is one of the barriers to implementation that I anticipate. Another barrier that I anticipate is questions about having formerly incarcerated students on campus and what that might mean for the safety of our student body. However, evidence shows that the majority of people who commit crimes on college campuses are first time offenders (Drysdale, Modzelski, & Simons 2010; Runyan, Pierce, Shankar, & Bangdiwala, 2013).

### **Recommendations**

As someone who does not have an incarceration history, I am also limited in my ability to lead a program like this. The literature and leaders in the community are clear in the need for leadership by formerly incarcerated individuals. It will be important for any progress moving forward on this project to include formerly incarcerated individuals whenever possible and the long-term goal should be to create a professional staff position at USF to administer this program and for that staff person to have an incarceration history. Seeking input from community leaders as well as formerly incarcerated current USF students and alumni should be one of the first pieces of this project implemented. While I do not have an incarceration history, I am committed to using my own experiences, voice, and position to advocate for those who have been affected by the criminal justice system and to advance this work.

A major assumption that this project includes is that students of color and students with incarceration histories can thrive at USF. In light of recent student organizing on campus, including a list of demands delivered to the University President by the Black Student Union, I would recommend that the University implement a campus climate survey to understand what it

is like for students with different identities to navigate USF. The experiences of students of color, non-traditional aged students, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds should inform how this program and other initiatives that aim to increase diversity on campus are implemented.

A final recommendation is that the Bay Area community of higher education should work together to ensure that clear pathways exist for formerly incarcerated students at every postsecondary institution in the area. Public institutions have clearly been leaders in this work and wisdom and experience on this prison to school pipeline exists. Public and private institutions should work together to share resources and encourage more schools to create programs for formerly incarcerated students. This work will be important to continue opening up more spaces and opportunities for people with incarceration histories and to change the perception of people with criminal justice histories.

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