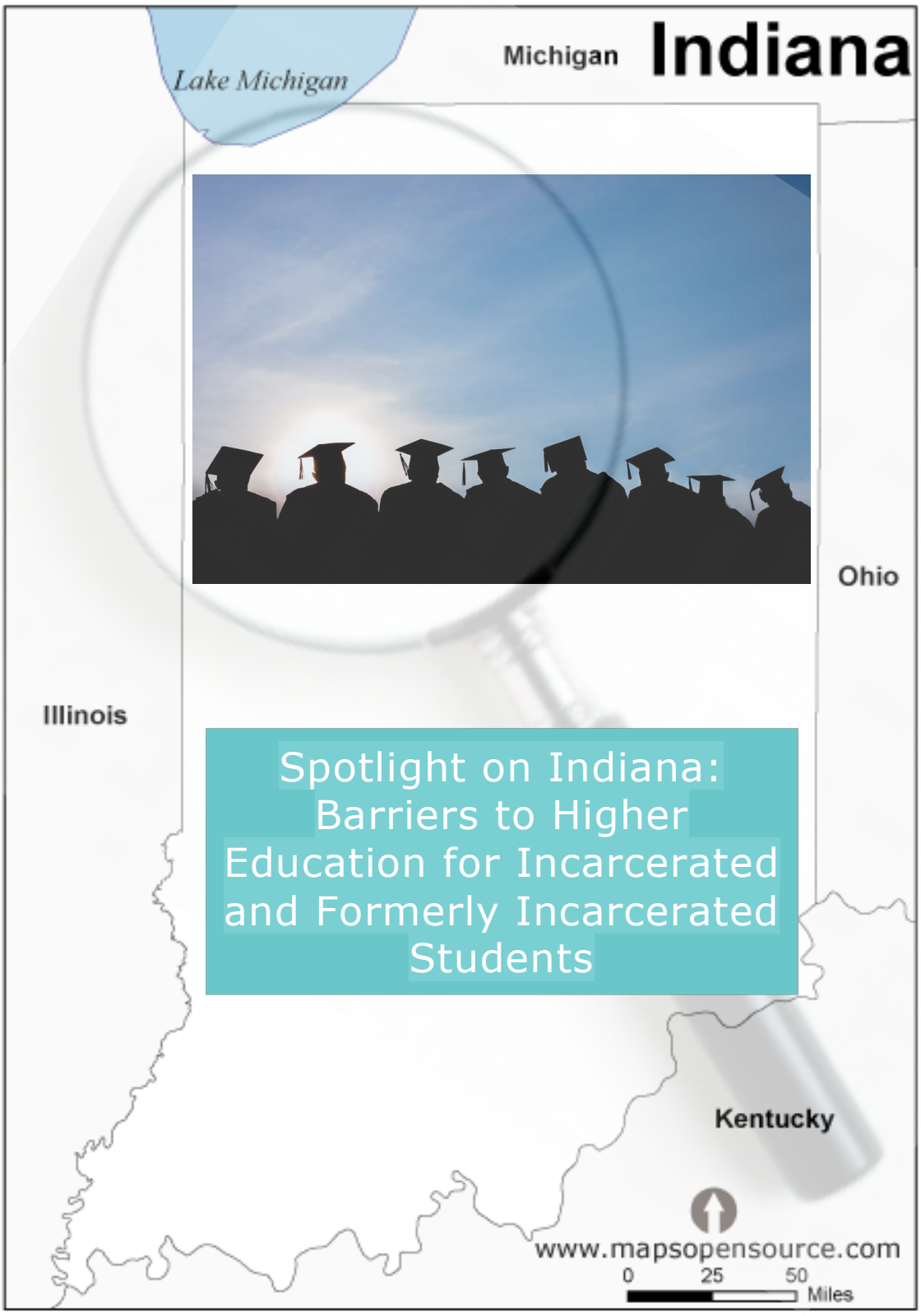

Spotlight on Indiana: Barriers to Higher Education for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Students

By the Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women of Constructing Our Future

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Preface:

The purpose of this report is to shed light on policies and practices that encourage or inhibit postsecondary attainment for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated learners from their perspectives and through their lived experiences.

Contributors to the report include nine women incarcerated in Indiana, two of whom were released during the project and continued their contributions outside; eight formerly incarcerated women in Indiana; and one formerly incarcerated man in Pennsylvania. In addition, we have drawn on the work of other post-incarcerated scholars, especially Christian Beasley, founder of the Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network, and other members of the working group for the American Studies Association White Paper on barriers to higher education, of which we were active members.

Each section of the report addresses a different barrier to post-secondary education and begins with stories from people who have encountered that barrier. We then discuss what the problem is, why it matters, and how it might be eliminated or mitigated.

Accompanying the report are a dozen podcasts created by Kristina Byers, Christina Kovats, and Anastazia Schmid. We have included lightly edited transcripts of these interviews in Appendix A.

We would like to thank the following non-incarcerated people for their invaluable help in making the podcasts: Christiane Wisehart at DePauw University and Gary Curto and Mike Scott at IUPUI. We would also like to thank Mia Beach at Kiteline, a radio program at WFHB, Bloomington, devoted to prison issues around the Midwest and beyond, that broadcast the podcasts beginning May 15, 2020, and continuing throughout the summer.

We would also like to thank Treg Hopkins, president of Ivy Tech-Greencastle, Allan Wachendorfer of the Vera Institute, and Kelsey Kauffman of Constructing Our Future for their assistance with the section on defaults.

Finally, we would like to thank Dr. Kauffman for managing the grant and helping with editing.

COVID-19

It is important to note that all of the following research was conducted prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. The challenges facing incarcerated and formerly students are only exacerbated by this pandemic. The question of in-person course instruction versus correspondence course instruction, which is an old debate, falls away under the urgency to provide incarcerated students an education. We advocate that college-in-prison programs provide high quality correspondence coursework to incarcerated students just as they would in any facility lockdown with the understanding that in-person instruction should continue as soon as a lockdown is ended and movement restored.

Acknowledgements

We offer a special thanks to the Lumina Foundation for a grant that allowed us to pay incarcerated and formerly incarcerated interviewees and essayists.

We would also like to thank Kelsey Kauffman for her leadership and direction on this project.

Barriers to Higher Education

Introduction

Access to a quality higher education in prison is fraught with many challenges. Aspiring students are up against often contrary and arbitrary Department of Correction processes and staff that impact their access to higher education. Concerns with financial aid eligibility, university bureaucracy, lack of adequate texts, computers and spaces to learn, race and gender discrimination in corrections, along with toxic prison conditions, can make pursuit of a degree like scaling a sheer cliff. These obstacles are likened unto a maze and students are required to become adept navigating every twist and turn.

The Obama Administration's Second Chance Pell initiative brought higher education in prison back to the national stage for the first time since the Clinton Administration's Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act removed all access to Pell grants for incarcerated students in 1994. This act was part of a process that started with the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, which prohibited Pell grants to those incarcerated with certain drug-related offences. Although some states continued to fund higher education in prisons, most did not. As the movement toward full restoration of Pell grants to all incarcerated students receives consideration and support, the concerns of incarcerated students are ever more critical to engage and reckon with and ultimately take meaningful action. This report offers the voices of incarcerated students and what we need to keep in the forefront of our minds as we contemplate and craft legislation, public policy, prison higher education programs, and reentry programs. The stakes are high, because the impact of mass incarceration affects us all.

KRISTINA: Can you talk a little bit about what [college classes] meant to you during your incarceration?

NICOLE: It meant everything. Everything. I don't know how else to explain it. It made me feel a sense of accomplishment, that maybe I

can move past my mistakes and continue to move forward and be a better asset to my community and to myself and to my family. Just to be able to have that higher learning and higher education in order to be a better person. Really just to be, [what] I know I can be…to be more confident with myself and to know that I do deserve a second chance and that I do deserve the opportunity to be able to present myself, in a way that can benefit not just myself, not just to benefit myself, but to benefit my community and my family as well. So, yeah, it helped a lot.

As incarcerated people seek to obtain higher education while in prison, we fight to overcome the stigma that incarcerated people are "un-deserving" of a college education. This stigma is universal and manifests itself regardless of the discourse about incarcerated people in that we are undeserving of anything decent, including the right to safety and, sometimes, life itself. In a widely quoted New York Times article amidst the SARS-CoV2 pandemic, a man held captive at a virus-infested prison in Ohio spoke of incarcerated people's experience as "undeserving."

The social category of prisoner qualifies one as undeserving of a decent civilized life. Herein lies the cause of the profound spread of the virus throughout the institution: the collective sense of the undeservingness of prisoners. A vaccination would be nice. Proper P.P.E. would help. But the real cure for our woes is an affirmation of the inalienable entitlement to life for people in prisons and jails.[1]

This stereotypical belief effectively locks incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people out of myriad opportunities and basic human rights, not least of which is education.

Stigma, systemic problems, lack of financial funding, lack of basic needs, lack of support, faulty public policy issues, zero or limited access to resources and opportunity, discriminatory laws, lack of educational programs and resources, non-transferable college credits, defaulted student loans, exorbitant carceral fines and fees, lack of wrap-around services, the COVID-19 pandemic, and PTPD—post-

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[1] *Alexander, Michelle. "Let Our People Go." The New York Times. 13 May 2020.*

traumatic prison disorder—are among the multitude of barriers incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people contend with when trying to obtain a higher education during and post incarceration. On the forefront of overcoming these challenges is humanizing people regardless of their life circumstances and allowing all people access to an equality of life.

The many barriers faced by currently and formerly incarcerated persons attempting to attain higher education is a subject that has been receiving much needed attention as of late. With data collected to prove the positive impact that higher education can have, many academic scholars, foundations and policymakers are joining in on the research needed in order to eliminate some of these barriers. Groups like the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Institute for Higher Education Policy, the United States Government Accountability Office, the Vera Institute, and New America have taken an investigative look into the benefits of postsecondary education in prisons, comparative recidivism rates, literacy gaps, and equity. Additionally, many studies have been done on the barriers themselves, such as loan defaults, Pell Grant eligibility, affordability and access to postsecondary education.

What is tragically lacking from these expository reports, however, is the perspective and experience of the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated themselves. Thus, the purpose of this report is to use first-hand accounts of currently and formerly incarcerated people in the state of Indiana in order to expound on the most common barriers we've faced while trying to obtain our postsecondary degrees. With the knowledge of personal experience, it is our intention to reveal, in depth, the kinds of barriers many of us with criminal backgrounds have encountered. There are several prime examples of loans in default, credit transferability issues, and financial constraints, along with many other challenges that are addressed in this report. This report will also spotlight the state of Indiana, its policies on postsecondary education for prisoners, and the admissions policies for some of its colleges and universities.

Background

United States

All but a handful of adults who are currently incarcerated in the US will someday return to society; more that half will do so within two years. Yet, a quarter of them have never earned a high school diploma or its equivalent—twice the rate of the general population—and only 4% have a college degree, compared to 30% of the general population.[2] This matters. Education, employment and recidivism are tightly correlated. Even before COVID, people who had been incarcerated had unemployment rates six or seven times higher than the national average.[3]

According to the National Conference of State Legislators, prisoners who acquire postsecondary education "are estimated to have a 10% better chance of higher employment and earnings when they reenter the workforce."[4] A study by the Vera Institute of Justice corroborates the NCSL findings: "inmates who receive an education while in prison are 43% to 72% less likely to return to prison."[5] As an added incentive to taxpayers to promote higher education opportunities to the currently and post incarcerated, the NCSL also reports that "an average of $5 for every $1 spent on prison education" is saved. This equates to an estimated $365 million-dollar savings for the American taxpayer when recidivism is minimized.[6] And yet, of the approximately 3,000 prisons in the US (and nearly equal number of jails), only about

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[3] *Couloute, Lucius. "Getting Back on Course" Educational exculsion and attainment among formerly incarcerated people." Prison Policy Initiative. October 2018 https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/education.html#table3*

[4] *Boggs, B. G. (2019, June). Corrections by Degrees: Postsecondary Programs in Prisons. Retrieved from National Conference of State Legislatures: https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/educ/Postsecondary-Programs-in-Prisons_v02.pdf*

[5] *Oakford, P. B. (2019, January). Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison. Retrieved from Vera Institute of Justice: https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/investing-in-futures.pdf*

[6] *Boggs.*

180 offer college programs and most of those have only done so for a few years.

Indiana

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act removed all access to Pell Grants for incarcerated students in 1994. Indiana was one of only a few states that continued to fund higher education programs in prison using state "Frank O'Bannon" grants via the State Student Assistance Commission of Indiana or SSACI. Unfortunately, that solution lasted only until 2012 when legislators stripped funding for higher education.[7] This was a particularly shocking move as the budget for higher education in prison wasn't on the chopping block and had not been debated. Instead, funding was removed by a single sentence inserted at the last minute into the 700+ page budget bill at the end of the legislative session. Most legislators in both parties did not know it was there.

While the Indiana Department of Correction website states that fourteen adult correctional facilities in the state of Indiana offer educational programming, only two prisons currently offer a college program. Holy Cross College and Marian University, both part of the Bard Prison Initiative consortium, are in place at Westville Correctional Facility for men and the Indiana Women's Prison, respectively. Holy Cross College and Bard were among sixty-seven colleges chosen to participate in the launch of the 2015 Second Chance Pell pilot program created by the Obama Administration. While the availability of college inside two Indiana prisons is a great step forward, the number of people admitted is very small—20 women at IWP and 100 men at Westville. Yet, 65% of people in the DOC have a high school diploma or GED but not a college degree. That is 16,322 men and women who have the academic credentials to enroll in higher education, with only 110 slots.

Yet, according to the DOC itself, the top two predictors of recidivism are employment and education, with a direct correlation between

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[7] Clarke, M. (2012, March 15). Indiana Cuts Prison College Courses. Retrieved from Prison Legal News: https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2012/mar/15/indiana-cuts-prison-college-courses/

education, employment, and recidivism. Those with a college education upon release have a 21% return rate, those with a high school diploma or GED have a 30% return rate, and those with less than a GED have a 37% return rate, respectively.[8]

Methodology

This is an ethnographic project, which through essays, interviews, and blogposts, allows us to take a deep dive into incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students' experiences with higher education. Here we highlight the personal and professional benefits they received as a result of going to college and the barriers encountered. Their firsthand experience allows us to identify and expound upon these barriers, and how we can solve them, while also illuminating why some students thrive while incarcerated, yet fail to do so once they are released.

We place in high relief the roadblocks and barriers they encountered that are significantly impacting their access to resources and opportunity today. Altogether, we are epistemically privileging the voice of incarcerated and formerly students in the hopes that their voices will impact public policy and spur growth and improvement in college and reentry programming until such day that decarceration and abolition remove the need for this work.

This project places a spotlight on Indiana. With one exception, interviews were conducted with women outside who had previously been incarcerated at the Indiana Women's Prison in Indianapolis and are now scattered to various parts of the state. At the time of this writing, the interviews are being aired as weekly broadcasts over public radio. Lightly edited transcripts are appended to this report. In addition, nine women assisted us from inside by writing their own personal perspectives on higher education in prison and/or researching issues (like the extend of default on education loans) with their compatriots inside. Two of the nine who participated inside are now

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[8] *Nally, J. L. (n.d.). Impact of Education and Employment on Recidivism. Retrieved from IN.gov/IDOC: https://www.in.gov/idoc/files/Impact_of_Education_and_Employment_on_Recidivism.pdf*

out; we look forward someday to the release of the others, knowing what profound contributions they could make in the freeworld.

We urge universities, as progressive workplaces and institutions dedicated to education as a civic good, to model best practices—and exhibit the courage to fashion new ones—that will diminish the intense discrimination faced by formerly incarcerated people within their communities and beyond. We urge departments of correction to view education in prison, especially higher education, as a right and not a privilege, and to have the courage to support cultural and policy shifts in institutions that eliminate barriers for incarcerated people.

Student Loan Defaults

CHEKEDA'S STORY: Chekeda has been on her own since eighth grade. She put herself through high school in Indianapolis, living where she could and braiding hair. With small, quick fingers and an artist's eye, she had many devoted clients. After graduating from high school with honors, she enrolled in Ivy Tech, courtesy of federal Pell Grants. An "A" student, she also became an excellent writer with flawless grammar.

One Saturday in mid-semester she hitched a ride for an all-day braiding appointment with a client in Terre Haute, Indiana. On the way back, they passed through rural Putnam County, where they were stopped by police. When they found drugs in the car, all the occupants were arrested. The driver and his friend quickly bailed out, but with no family to help her, Chekeda stayed in the jail for nearly three months. By the time the prosecutor dropped the charges against her, the semester was over, her Pell Grants were in default, and she owed Ivy Tech an unaffordable $700 before she could continue.

Undaunted, she enrolled in a for-profit school in downtown Indianapolis, which led her along, bled her dry with new loans, and then closed altogether. Brilliant, talented, incredibly motivated, but overburdened with debt, Chekeda gave up in despair.

A formidable, ubiquitous, but little-known barrier to higher education for formerly incarcerated students is the high number who are in default on student loans, often because of their arrest and incarceration. Indeed, in our study, student loan default was cited more often than any other as the reason for not pursuing or continuing higher education inside prison or after release. Being in default essentially eliminates the possibility of enrolling in college post-release and also may inhibit enrolling in certain programs while in prison, to say nothing of ruining credit ratings. Yet, default can be avoided, and once it happens there is a remarkably inexpensive procedure that would allow incarcerated people to rehabilitate their loans. Unfortunately, few incarcerated individuals know about this option or have the ability to navigate the paperwork required from within the prison.

Student debt is nothing new to Lumina staff or policymakers or even presidential candidates. It is a problem that bedevils this nation, exceeding even credit card debt in total amount owed. What makes it worse for those who are "justice involved" is that, as with Chekeda, arrest and incarceration are often what starts them on the road to default in the first place and then makes that status permanent, with all that implies.

> *Having a loan in default for an extended period can do serious damage to a credit score, making it extremely difficult to ever buy a car or house. The DOE also has the right to withhold tax refunds, federal benefit payments and even weekly work wages in order to repay back a defaulted loan. The most extreme consequences of a defaulted loan are the legal ramifications that could occur. The collections process could result in court costs, fines and attorney's fees (The Office of the United States Department of Education, n.d.).* ***If being sentenced to lengthy sentences results in defaulted student loans and having a defaulted loan not only bars access from furthering educations but also carries the consequences of hindering all future financial endeavors that would better lives, then getting incarcerated persons out of default should be made a priority****. [emphasis added]*[9]

The Default Problem

Pell Grants and private/public student loans affect our demographic more than almost any other because

- *Most people who end up in prison come from economically marginalized communities and couldn't afford college without grants/loans.*

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[9] Student loans and grants in the US are varied and complicated. We won't try to repeat the basics here. In April 2020, the Vera Institute published an excellent, readable toolkit geared specifically to Second Chance Pell Grant programs in prisons. We recommend it highly.

- *We tend to be first-generation college students with no one in our families who understands the implications of taking on various types of student debt. (It all sounds so enticing upfront!)*
- *We have few or no safety nets, which means when "life" happens—sick kids/parents/selves, loss of childcare, un- and underemployment—we are likely to drop out despite our best hopes and efforts.*
- *And because, by definition, we got arrested at some point and all too often it was mid-semester and it was that that triggered the default.*

How ubiquitous is this problem in prison? A student loan specialist whose full-time job for two years was to help incarcerated students in the Midwest get out of debt wrote:

> *I only have anecdotal evidence . . ., but the percentage of student applicants with previous college experience who are in default is really high. My guess would be over half. . . . The largest barrier for students with previous college experience is by far their default status. [private email, December 14, 2018]*

Friends and colleagues in other states who run, teach in, or have been students in prison college programs echoed those figures—with at least half of all applicants to these programs in default.

In Indiana, Holy Cross College began a satellite program in 2016 at the Indiana Women's Prison (IWP) in which many of us participated. The first year of the program relied on volunteer faculty and a volunteer director, so it did not matter if we were in default. It wasn't a question that even occurred to many of us. The following year, however, Holy Cross became a Second Chance Pell site. Now the faculty and director were paid, but 16 out of 20 students in the program—80%—were in default and thus not eligible for Pell Grants, the sole source of funding for the program. During the course of the year, only three additional students managed to get out of default (more on that later). By the end of the academic year, Holy Cross was in a fiscal crisis that had nothing to do with our program, but because we were draining funds rather than generating them for the college, they closed our small program.

We paid a terrible price for that. In Indiana, completing an associate's degree earns you a year off your sentence and a bachelor's degree

gives you two years off. We calculated that, collectively, we spent an additional 20 years in prison because the program closed when it did. Moreover, few of us will be able to transfer our Holy Cross credits elsewhere (see section on credit transfers), so our two years of hard work was worth nothing—indeed worse than nothing as Molly explains:

MOLLY: Not only was I unable to attain the degree I had worked so hard for or get an earlier release date along with it, but as long as I was enrolled in college, I could not participate in any other time-cut programs. In other words, I was basically punished with a longer prison sentence for attempting to further my education. The reason for this abrupt and disheartening withdrawal was because most of the women enrolled did not meet those "other" eligibility requirements for Federal Student Aid. Some of us had been convicted of drug charges, and most of us had student loans in default status.

Knowing that nearly all of the women who had been accepted into the Holy Cross program were in default does not tell us much about the percentage of women in the entire prison who are in default. We were by definition an unrepresentative group. Because we were not able to do a formal survey of the prison population as we had hoped, we asked some of our colleagues who are still in prison at IWP, Rockville, and Madison Correctional Facility to survey the people in their own housing units. They came back with figures ranging from a low of 2 out of 24 (8%) to a high of 33 out of 45 (73%), with debt ranging upwards to $45,000. (Differences in who is assigned to various housing units explain much of that variation.) At the relatively small jail (population ~90) in Putnam County, IN, we did a survey in the summer of 2019 of everyone who had completed high school/GED and was now interested in enrolling in college or college prep class. Six out of 27 (22%) said they thought they might be in default, but many weren't certain—a confusion that is part of the problem, as we will discuss below.

ANASTAZIA: When a person first becomes incarcerated there are so many stress factors on their mind that what to do about their student loan payments just isn't an immediate concern. Furthermore, given the timeline for loans to reach a default status in comparison to such staggeringly long prison terms being sentenced, loan defaults are usually inevitable.

Usually, yes. But inevitable? No.

Imagine a student with loans and a Pell Grant who is arrested six weeks into a 13-week semester. Whether you are inside prison or out, you have to keep your loans in good standing at all times. Our hypothetical student knows that she may be facing years in prison, so she seeks expert advice to avoid default. She has a scant 45 days in which she can either repay all the loans as well as the Pell Grant because she completed less than half of the semester. She quickly moves to consolidate all her loans/grants into one loan, which then makes her eligible for loan repayment plans and forgiveness programs, and (with some exceptions) also makes her immediately eligible for more Pell Grants.[10]

Now, consolidation requires making a contract, but in most states, incarcerated people are denied the right to make a contract or to incur additional debt (such as a new consolidated loan). Thus, our hyper-informed student knows consolidation must happen before sentencing.

With her loans still in good standing, she will now qualify for an income-driven repayment (IDR) plan, which sets the monthly repayment based on her income. Prison pay averages 12 cents to 25 cents an hour in Indiana, with monthly income rarely exceeding $20. The only silver lining in receiving slave wages is that means our student will owe $0 per month on her debt. If her sentence is long enough, she will have paid off her consolidate loan and be debt-free when she leaves.

Here is how one man who was incarcerated for 20 years in Washington State described the system:

1. Consolidate your loans . . .

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[10] *The process involves direct loan consolidation; thus you don't go through a bank (though you may still see a servicer attached to loans in your name). It is an online process using the National Student Loan Database System. You (or your college) request a report on your loans through NSLDS.ed.gov. That report gives an itemized breakdown of any loans/grants you have ever received and who owns them now. All the loans are connected, and you can't get additional grants if any of the loans are in default—whether to the federal government or to a federally recognized private loaner. [Our thanks to Treg Hopkins, Director of Greencastle (Indiana) Ivy Tech, for this explanation.]*

2. You are then eligible for Deferment of Forbearance; a deferment is nice since interest generally does not accrue.

3. The above deferment is usually a temporary item, and for a student with a significant amount of time to serve he/she might want to structure it under an Income-Driven Repayment Plan, Income-Based Repayment Plan (IBR Plan), or Income-Contingent Repayment Plan (ICR Plan).

4. When on the IBR or ICR, your payment is contingent on your income. As a prisoner, my reported income was $0; thus, the appropriate student loan repayment was $0 per month. I was out of default and making the required payments of $0. The downside is that interest accrues.

5. A student is also now eligible for things like Student Loan Forgiveness. . .

The upside: I was under IBR and ICR plans for over a decade before I was released. . . . My terrible credit dropped off my credit report and I accumulated a long history of making my required student loan payments on time. I [was] released with a decent credit history and FICO score of 696 (not bad!) [private communication, 7-19-2019]

Awesome! You would think the problem of student loan defaults for incarcerated students would be at an end. Alas, no. The person quoted above had more than the usual economic savvy and resources. Some of the most conscientious and brilliant members of our group each spent a full year trying to get out of default without help from anyone outside. Listen to their stories:

CHRISTINA: The attempt to address my default was an extremely frustrating circle. I wrote to an agency that was provided by the liaison between Holy Cross and the prison. I was informed that if I contacted the agency, they would establish a payment plan that would get my loan out of default if I made nine consecutive monthly payments.

I finally received a response, months later, directing me to contact a second agency. The second agency directed me to contact a third agency; and finally, the third agency told me to contact the first agency. The letters that I received were unintelligible, even to my professor and the director of the college program.

Unfortunately, I did not have family support outside of the prison to contact the agency on my behalf, and I was not able to contact them personally. . . . I witnessed that those of us who had to contact the agency directly and were only able to use mail system were just sent in circles, whereas those who had a loved one to call on their behalf were able to take advantage of this opportunity."

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MOLLY: They brought us all in the information that we needed to write the Department of Education and ask for an application for affordable repayment plan. And then they sent us back a paper that said we need proof of your income and we need it to be notarized. Well, anyone who's ever been in prison knows that the counselors that are assigned to our dorms are overworked, overstressed, and underpaid and it is very difficult to get them to help you with anything in a timely manner. . . . It sat in there on his desk for months. [T]hat was one barrier.

The Department of Education . . . was very uncooperative, ran us all around in circles without getting anything accomplished. [M]onths later I received a response letter from the DOE stating:

> This is in response to information we have received concerning your student loan account. . . . We received verification that you are incarcerated. The Department has suspended collection activity until your release. . . . However, your defaulted student loan debt is still considered to be due and payable in full. . . . If you are unable to make payments while you are incarcerated, you should contact the Department when you are released to make arrangements to repay this debt.

This was not helpful at all! I had written the address initially provided me specifically to inquire about the steps I needed to take to resolve my default status by participating in the loan rehabilitation program. Why else would they have included the "Documentation Required for Rehabilitation Financial Disclosure" form and ask me for income verification if not to help me establish a repayment plan? I already knew that I could call them upon my release and repay my debt! I wrote them again asking about establishing a loan rehabilitation repayment plan for incarcerated people, and re-sent them what I had already sent them, then waited on their response.

Two months later I received their response to that letter. It said,

> You wish to establish an affordable repayment agreement. You provided a "Financial Disclosure for Reasonable and Affordable Rehabilitation Payments" form in order to establish a reasonable and affordable repayment plan. You did not provide the required supporting income documentation. You must provide the documents indicated on the enclosed "Documentation Required for Rehabilitation Financial Disclosure" statement."

They then gave me a phone number and website I could contact if I had any further questions, even though they knew I was incarcerated with no internet access or phone! I was further dismayed to learn that during my incarceration my student loans had accrued $11,138 in interest that I am now responsible for paying back.

Without a dedicated liaison within the prison, or outside loved ones to help, this same discouraging conundrum happened to many of us.

We want to mention three other problems with Pell Grants and student loans that are usually overlooked.

***First**, Second Chance Pell programs are tempted to only admit prospective students at their prison who are not in default, thus often missing some of the most talented and motivated students.*

***Second**, being enrolled in prison college programs that are funded by Pell or federal/state student loans can put you into default even if you weren't there before. That is because the same rules apply inside as out regarding people who start but fail to complete a semester. And that happens often in prisons. An incarcerated student may be transferred to another prison, receive an earlier-than-expected discharge, get a disciplinary charge that makes her ineligible to be in the program, have their work schedule abruptly changed from nights to mornings, or their dorm (or entire prison) locked down for an extended period.*

***Third**, prison college programs may use up all of a student's "lifetime eligibility" for funding. There are two principal ways in which this happens. One is that the college provider at your prison changes (or you are moved to a prison with a different college program) and the new college requires that, in order to get their degree, you must take at least half of all your courses from their instructors. If your college*

changes more than once (as happens all too often—see the Credit Transfer section), then odds are good that you will exceed your "lifetime eligibility" and thus never get a degree. The other is that a college provides too few required courses each semester at the prison

Defaults and Formerly Incarcerated Students

Defaults keep many people in prison from enrolling in college programs, but that's not where the main problem lies. After all, most prisons in America don't have college programs and many of those that do have college programs rely on volunteer faculty and/or private funding. Moreover, many of the Second Chance Pell programs have become more adept at helping their incarcerated students navigate the tangled bureaucracy of rehabilitating loans.

The far greater problem is the barrier that defaults create once aspiring students get out of prison if they have been unable to rehabilitate their loans while inside (or, more likely, didn't know that they could rehabilitate them while inside). Now they will find themselves unable to finance their education and, worse yet, may find their tax refunds seized, their wages garnished, and their credit rating in tatters. Listen to two of our finest students who excelled inside and then found themselves unable to continue college outside.

LORI: [When] I was incarcerated, my mother helped me to get a deferment so I wouldn't go into default on my loan. She had done it multiple times, cause it's like every four or six months you have to re-file. And they told my mom that I couldn't stay in deferment forever and she told them that my circumstances hadn't changed. And yet at the same time, if my circumstances are changing, why am I being taken out a deferment and put into default? So, whenever we had a program or whenever there was a potential for us to be part of a pilot program where we would get actual financial aid that would be pooled between everybody, I wasn't able to contribute to that. Not for lack of trying on my or my family's part, but just because it's really hard to explain to people in financial aid that you can't pay because you're incarcerated, and they can't understand that your family can't pay for you. And that's not fair. That's a burden that they shouldn't have to do for your mess up.

I ended up being in default for several years when I came home. I had had a credit card before that that got wiped off cause I was incarcerated long enough that the debt was cleared. But the only thing that I had on my credit score was default from the student loan and my credit score was actually below 400. It was ridiculous. I called them when I first got out. I found out . . . that you're not able to just pay money to financial aid, you actually have to set up a payment plan. I had gotten a car in order to get to and from work and with everything else, I was not able to set up a payment plan at the time cause they would have wanted me to pay more than what I would've actually been able to pay them. To this day I haven't set one up cause I want to see where my finances are going to be.

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CHRISTINA: I enrolled in college at Ivy Tech in 2008 as a single mother with the desire to continue my education. Unfortunately, once again, life circumstances got in my way. My son was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis shortly after birth. As a young mother, I was not prepared for the road that I would travel. In an extreme situation, my son was urgently admitted to Cincinnati Children's Hospital. I was forced with choosing to be absent for my child or absent for class; not able to leave my son alone in the hospital, I was forced to drop my classes.

As noted earlier, Christina tried hard but failed to get out of default while in prison, and that made enrolling when she got out seem impossible.

CHRISTINA: My dream to get my college education was continuously being pushed further and further away. Even as I sit here today, two years after my release, I am unable to afford the payment plan that is established for loans. Education is crucial for formerly incarcerated individuals because of the many challenges they face when searching for a career or trying to advance in life.

Solutions

The conundrum of default and incarceration invites a variety of solutions, some of them novel, and some that might have unintended consequences. Here are our recommendations (with the main actors required to implement them italicized after each heading).

1. ***Prevent people entering the criminal justice system from going into default*** *(local jails, courts, community organizations/institutions): The best way to deal with default is to prevent it. Thus, we propose that positions be created and people trained to work specifically with those entering the criminal justice system before they are tried and convicted. This is not a straightforward process. It must be individualized depending on what sort of grants/loans a person has, the length of sentence they might be facing, whether they will serve time in a jail or prison, and whether they are only in jail until their case is heard. The goal for someone facing a long sentence might be to consolidate loans and get on an income-based repayment plan. For someone with less than three years to serve, it may be best to put loans into forbearance. Someone who has been arrested mid-semester and only expects to miss a few weeks of classes may need an incomplete or be advised to return to classes even if they will receive an "F" in order to not default on the loans/grant.*

   Such default prevention positions could be funded and housed in a variety of places, such as courts, jails, or community organizations, but we think in Indiana the best place might be Ivy Tech because of their statewide presence and understanding of the loan/grant maze. The benefits would be enormous. Not only would thousands be spared default and greatly improved their chances to complete their educations, but once consolidation of loans has been completed, people would then become eligible for work ready grants, work release funding, and, in Indiana, for Next Level training.

2. ***Shift funding formulas so that funding flows to colleges only after incarcerated students complete a semester or course*** *(ED, DOE): Pell Grants and federal student loans could be restructured so that funding only goes to prison/jail college programs when the student has completed at least 60% (in some states, 50%) of the course, even if the "earned" grade is an F (which counts as a completion for Pell/federal loans). This change in timing of when colleges receive funds is essential in jail programs where there is constant churn of people in and out. Indeed, Louisiana—which is the only state we know of that currently uses Pell Grants for college programs in jail—already has made that adjustment. In effect, students who are unable to complete jail or prison classes would have their enrollment erased.*

We recommend that the existing Ivy Tech-DePauw jail program in rural Putnam County become a pilot site for this approach, along with a larger jail in some other county, perhaps funded by Lumina.

3. ***For purposes of education loan forgiveness, categorize incarceration as an "inability," thus extending the same options for loan forgiveness that currently pertain to "death" or "disability"*** *(DOE): If the same language applied to those with "inabilities" as those with "disabilities," it would not only affect loans, it would also mean more resources—e.g. paper tests for courses that otherwise require computers. Every state creates its own rules on ADA, and this would be similar and we believe would not have to be approved by Congress or the federal ED.*

4. ***Develop "retroactive withdrawal policies" for justice involved students, especially those returning to college after incarceration*** *(universities, DOE): This idea comes to us courtesy of colleagues at the City University of New York who are "designing a policy that allows students to retroactively withdraw from their courses when system-involvement prevents completion of courses, as well as waiving balances within a certain threshold that would allow students to re-matriculate." [private communication, September 5, 2019] Ivy Tech has somewhat analogous policies that allow students to retroactively change from a letter grade to pass/fail. They also have flexibility to issue incompletes (as they have done widely during the pandemic), permit post-dating of withdrawal requests, etc.*

5. ***Create a pilot program for getting everyone in a prison out of default, not just current students*** *(Lumina, DOC): We propose a model program that would get everyone in a prison who has educational loans/grants in default out of default and then track whether doing so leads to positive outcomes such as increased enrollment in school during and after incarceration, higher credit ratings, and increased employment, and/or whether it has unintended negative consequences.*

   Having loans in default does not just affect schooling. It also ruins credit ratings, impacts background checks, leads to garnishing of wages (and denial of employment if wages are being garnished for more than one loan), and seizing of tax refunds. What could be the downside of getting everyone out of default? A loan can only be

rehabilitated once. If a person in prison gets her loans out of default and begins repaying at a rate of $0/month, but is then released before completing the repayments, she must promptly file the appropriate paperwork when she gets out and, if she is lucky enough to get a moderately high-paying job, begin making actual monthly payments. If she does not do all of that, her loans will go right back into default and this time will stay there until fully paid off.

6. ***Purchase incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students' debt*** *(legislatures, community organizations, churches, foundations): If your loans are older than seven years, then there is a good chance that they are being sold for pennies on the dollar to debt collectors. In theory, you or someone else could buy your debt and then cancel it. The problem is that under current law, companies that own the debt are not required to reveal whose debt they are holding.*

   Regardless of type of debt—education, medical, housing, etc.— we believe that borrowers have an inherent right to know to whom they are in debt. Thus, we propose state legislation that would give consumers the right to know who owns their debt. Loan owners wouldn't be required to locate and directly inform creditors, but the information would have to be accessible through a website. This would allow churches and civic organizations the possibility of buying bulk debt and retiring it.

   Churches around the country have begun purchasing medical debt for pennies on the dollar, a practice that has been widely praised. This bill—which would be a consumers' rights bill, not a prisoners' rights bill—would be in their interest as well. [11]

7. ***Streamline the process of getting out of default for incarcerated students*** *(DOE). There's no inherent reason why the process of getting out of default should be so difficult for people inside prisons. Moreover, it is in the interest of society as a whole that people not leave prisons saddled with impossible debt and*

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[11] We would like to thank Treg Hopkins for this idea as well. We think it is brilliant.

unable to attend school. Simplifying the process should not be hard to figure out.

Credits, Credit Transfers and Degrees

MOLLY'S STORY:

ANASTAZIA: Did Holy Cross take any of your pre-incarceration college credits towards the degree they were offering or were you having to start from scratch with them?

MOLLY: So I made them aware that I did have [about 30 credits from IU-East], and they told me that most institutions including themselves require that you still take 50% of their college credit hours. So, we hadn't really started the process of trying to apply mine to theirs. We just talked about it. I did send them my transcripts. And then nothing came to fruition because two semesters later they had pulled out of the prison. . . . It was very devastating, actually. . . . If we would have used my credits that I brought from IU-East, I would have only needed one more semester to get this associate's degree. Now the associate's degree would have also given me a year time cut off my sentence. So the fact that you cannot participate in any other time-cut programs while you were participating in that kept me from receiving any other time cuts for a year.

ANASTAZIA: So basically what you're telling me is that because this program pulled out of the prison, you were not allowed to complete your degree and essentially you would end up spending an additional year in prison because you could not acquire earned good-time credit for completing that program. And that in the time that you spent in the program, you could not enter into any other programming that would have allowed you earn good-time credit, which essentially means spending more time in prison. Is that correct?

MOLLY: That is absolutely correct.

Prison college programs do a tremendous amount of good. But in some important ways they can be a scam. A well-meaning scam, perhaps, but a scam nonetheless.

In the preceding section on default, we explored how college funding can end up being a financial trap and a barrier rather than a gateway to higher education. The primary beneficiaries are colleges that reap the money regardless of whether their students end up with credits or degrees. In this section we will examine how the issuance of credits and degrees becomes a similar trap that benefits educational institutions but not students.

In order to get a degree, students are required to accumulate a set number of credits (usually 60 for an associate's degree and 120 for a bachelor's degree). Although students outside almost always have some choice in what courses they take, they are usually required to take certain courses, often in a set sequence, in order to graduate. Moreover, nearly all colleges and universities beyond those dismissed as "diploma mills" require that a certain percentage—commonly 50%—of all the credits leading to a degree have to have been taken at their own institution. Finally, colleges and universities have sole discretion in deciding what credits they will accept from another college or university and they are typically stingy in this regard.

The vast range of colleges and universities that students outside prison can choose from mitigates these problems. To some extent, students can shop around, weighing quality, cost, and prestige of a degree versus restrictiveness of curriculum and credit transfer. Incarcerated students have no such choices. Moreover, given the frequeny with which people are transferred from one prison to another and the frequency with which degree-granting institutions themselves change at each prison, incarcerated students often find themselves accumulating vast numbers of credits—some at IWP had 150 or more—without ever receiving a degree of any sort, yet having exhausted their lifetime limits on student funding.

From 1998 - 2011 IWP had three college providers: Martin University, Ball State University, and Oakland City University. With each transition, some or all of a student's credits would be lost as non-transferable, thus causing some students to start as though they were brand new students with each new institution or at the very least be knocked back a few years.

MICHELLE: When I started college at the Indiana Women's Prison (IWP) in 1998, students worked all day and attended classes at night. College programs in the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) were funded with state dollars.[12] Students could attend Martin University or Ball State University.[13] I chose Martin University because I knew about its history of serving predominantly poor and African-American communities. Martin faculty challenged me to competently read, write and speak across their curriculum. In the classroom, I didn't feel bound. I found freedom in the world of ideas and easily jumped into English Composition with the same enthusiasm as Political Science. I'd always liked school as a child, but now with my fractured past and internal brokenness with all of the accompanying losses, college was my refuge and escape, one of the prominent paths I took to rebuild myself.

By law, incarcerated students in Indiana were given eight semesters to complete a four-year degree. I had just finished my junior year with Martin University when the Indiana Department of Correction terminated its contract with Martin, leaving Ball State as the sole provider. I had funding for only one more semester in 2001. Martin's departure and the question of transferable credits to Ball State left me wondering if I would ever graduate. Ball State ultimately took less than half of Martin's credits. I became a first-semester sophomore again when I should have been a senior. Fortunately, one Ball State faculty member's scholarship fund and some Franciscan monks provided the rest of my tuition so I could graduate in 2004. Because of their kindness, when I stood on the podium and accepted my degree, I cried grateful tears.

Most students weren't that lucky. Anastazia barely managed to graduate from Ball State when it, too, pulled out, and Oakland City

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[12] Chen, Michelle. "Prison Education Reduces Recidivism by Over 40 Percent. Why Aren't We Funding More of It." The Nation. August 17, 2015. Incarcerated people's eligibility for federal Pell grants ended in the 1990s due to complaints that federal funds were taken from non-incarcerated students, but in fact, "incarcerated students use less than 1 percent of total Pell funds . . ."

[13] Ball State University offered associate's and bachelor's degrees. Martin University offered only bachelor's degrees.

University came in. She recalled the devastation when funding was suddenly withdrawn from all prison college programs in Indiana and Oakland City abruptly left, too.

ANASTAZIA: Each time a college packed up to leave, they left devastation in their wake. . . . When that grant money that Indiana had for higher education was discontinued in 2011 . . . at that point, all of the women who were still in programs with Oakland City, everybody lost everything. I mean, they came in and literally in one day said, "Guess what? No more college ladies." They packed up the computers, the books, the labs, the everything. Just packed it up and walked straight out the door. It didn't make any difference where those women were in their education, they lost everything. . . .

It was the loss of credits. No more opportunity for a degree because unlike when Oakland came in and people had a possibility to transfer, there's no more possibility to transfer; college is just gone, period. So you're not doing anything with those credits, you're not getting a degree. And then whatever earned-time credit people might've been counting on for those degrees, that wasn't a possibility either. So the devastation of loss, and I mean really probably one of the most hardcore realities. Not only are you not getting a degree and you no longer have anything positive and productive to focus on with this prison time, guess what? You get to spend additional years in prison now because you will not earn that time to get out early.

It's almost difficult to talk about without getting emotional. The psychological devastation of this was—there aren't even words to describe what I witnessed these women go through at this time. I mean, it was absolutely horrific in every sense of the word. And at that moment, it was a really hopeless, dark, devastating time. I mean, just across the board, you could feel the entire energy change inside that. I mean, it's not a great place to begin with. Let's not get that confused. But at that point in time, it was dark and oppressive and heavy and "My God, what are we all going to do now?"

The pattern repeated itself a few years later. In 2012, Martin University once again became the accrediting institution. It lasted two years, followed by a one-year hiatus with no college provider. Holy Cross started its program in 2015 but also pulled out after two years. It was another 18 months before Marian University came in. Let's listen for a moment to the stories of two women who came into prison

during that time having nearly completed their BAs and the struggles they went through to try to get a degree while incarcerated:

JENNIFER: When I got arrested, I was in my fourth year of college working on a degree in health and human sciences [at IU-Purdue-Fort Wayne]. I was arrested in November, so I didn't receive any of the credits from that semester and it put me in a really awful place when it came to my student loans because I was already like $47,000 in debt for student loans. . . . I was going through a four year program and so there was no degree in between. And so though I was close to a degree, I never actually earned a degree. . . .

[At the prison] what [Martin University] told me is that they would look into transferring some of my credits, but even if they transferred my credits, they would only be able to transfer half of the credits that I would need for a degree because I would be required to earn half of my credits through their institution in order to receive a degree from them.

ANASTAZIA: Wow. So you probably lost 30 to 40 or more credit hours from your previous institution.

JENNIFER: Yes. So it knocked me back down to the halfway point. . . . I really wanted to get my degree. When I was being sentenced, the prosecuting attorney thought that it was funny and amusing that I had a ton of student loan debt that I would probably never be able to pay off because I was going to prison. And so that sat wrong with me. And I was determined that if at all possible I was going to leave prison with a degree because I want to be able to pay my student loan debt. And I also knew, too, that based off of the way that the situation happened that I would no longer be able to get Pell Grants or would be in a status that would keep me from being able to take out any further loans. And so if I was going to get a degree, it was only going to be by the grace of God. It's the way I viewed it at the time.

ANASTAZIA: Okay. And so did you end up finishing your degree with Martin or did you have to take further steps in order to finish that degree?

JENNIFER: No, unfortunately, Martin University, three semesters into my experience with them, was put on academic probation and because they were put on academic probation they were no longer allowed to

have off-site campuses. And so they had to withdraw from having accredited classes at the prison. And so we were without a college at all for a semester or two. But [the teachers] were still coming in and we were taking classes, not for credit, just in order to be able to still be learning, and in order to have the skill set that would be needed if college were ever to come back in.

ANASTAZIA: Did college ever return?

JENNIFER: Yeah, it did. . . . Holy Cross, an institution which is a sister school to Notre Dame. . . . However, that didn't work out the way that people thought that it was going to because many of the individuals that were in the college program were actually not eligible to get the Pell Grants. . . . Two years after [Holy Cross] went into a financial crisis and because of their financial crisis they pulled out of the institution once again. And I need to mention that when they came into the institution, they, too, knocked me back down to the halfway point. They wanted half of my credits to be earned through their institution in order for them to grant me a degree. So they knocked me right back down to the halfway point when it came to my credits once again. . . .

I was pretty exasperated and very emotional about the fact that when Holy Cross pulled out, I had one semester left and I would've gotten my bachelor's degree. So I would have earned my associate's degree and then one semester later I would have earned my bachelor's degree. So like I was, my world was devastated when they pulled out, number one because the associate's degree was a year off my sentence. Number two, the bachelor's degree would have been two years off my sentence and that would have meant going home to my family no later than 2019 and also I really want my degree, like take away the time cuts, don't even look at those. Just look at the fact that I am very passionate about education and I wanted to be able to show my children that when you work hard for something and you put your mind to it, you can earn it, you can do it. So I was devastated.

JOE'S STORY:

Joe grew up in Gary, Indiana where she excelled in school. At age 18, she enrolled at Purdue University intent on a career in dietetics. Over five years, she garnered enough credits to graduate, but then discovered she needed to retake two required courses for her major in which she had received D's during one tumultuous semester.

JOE: I had been in school 5 years, financial resources used up, emotionally distraught, and mentally burned out. I had no money to retake those courses, so I went back home to Gary, despondent and feeling like a failure after all that hard work and coming so close to becoming a college graduate.

She worked hard but struggled as a single mom and eventually got caught up in events that led to her incarceration.

It was God who brought amazing positive people into my life again at worship service, semester groups, and other uplifting activities to help me to choose to forgive all the people who had harmed or hurt me and even more for me to forgive myself. I began to heal from the inside out, and the desire to live again became like a beautiful flower blossoming inside me, like in spring, once more after a deaden winter season. I decided then that I was going to do everything within my power to make the best out of the rest of the life I'd been given.

In 2011, the Indiana State Legislation took away funding for IDOC college degree programs in the men and women's prison facilities statewide. . . . Their decision to do this caused great despondency amongst the women at IWP who still desired to take college courses in the hope of earning a degree. It seemed like all hope was lost.

I had all but given up on the idea of getting a Bachelor's degree. Nevertheless, in 2012, a door of opportunity opened up at IWP. . . . Martin University [became] a satellite campus here, thereby enabling us to use their accredited curriculum program so we could again be students taking the same courses as their own on-campus students working towards earning bachelor's degrees.

The years 2013-2017 of my incarceration were life changing for me because this was when I invested my time diligently reading numerous textbooks, writing essays and research papers, studying for and taking exams for the classes I needed in accordance with the Martin University curriculum set for those who qualified to earn a degree. Along with all of these necessary educational assignments required of me to graduate, I had to endure additional adverse trials of noise pollution causing lack of sleep and an optimum study environment, coping with difficult personalities of fellow inmates and custody staff and, of course, the sporadic change in prison policies/procedures

which often affected if, when, and at what times we could attend our classes. But I stuck in there with the help and encouragement of a host of prominent professors from various prestigious institutions of higher learning who came into our prison and so generously volunteered their precious time and energy to instruct me and scores of other students. I am forever grateful for having had the privilege of being under their unparalleled tutelage, commendable leadership, and scholarly esteem for without this I would not have achieved my goal in becoming a successful college graduate.[14]

Jennifer's and Joe's stories have somewhat happy endings. Joe received her Bachelor's Degree from Martin University in May 2017. She was one of only two out of more than 100 students who enrolled in the Martin University program to receive a degree. By the time she graduated, she had accumulated ***147 credits****. The other student who received her degree from Martin University in May 2017 had by then accumulated a total of* ***152 credits*** *from IU, Martin, and Holy Cross.*

Jennifer finally got her associate's degree from Holy Cross a year after the college departed, thanks to the dogged persistence of the prison's director of educational programing, Carol Foster. Of the dozens of students who had enrolled in the Holy Cross program for two years, Jennifer was the only one to receive a degree; most of the rest had only one semester left or, at most, two. She had to wait another two-and-a-half years to receive her bachelor's degree from Marian University, which had succeeded Holy Cross at the prison. By the time

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[14] Here is what the head of the college program at the prison said of Joe at the graduation: "Joe Walls joined the program our second semester and was already an accomplished student, having studied at Purdue-Lafayette and Purdue-Calumet. She quickly distinguished herself as perhaps our hardest working student. Her professors learned that with Joe what they needed to specify with ever assignment was not the minimum amount of work required but the maximum allowed. If you asked for a few paragraphs about the passage of the Civil Rights Act or a page or two on changing dynamics in American families or—Lord help you—her thoughts on Mendelsohn's violin concerto—you were likely to receive a dissertation by the next week. It fell to me at one point to grade a Music Appreciation test for another professor. When I noticed with surprise that Joe had missed a question, I checked the source. Sure enough, Joe was right!"

*she finally received her BA, she had accumulated a breath-taking **186** college credits.*

Molly, who we quoted at the beginning of this chapter, was not as fortunate. As you may recall, she had attended Indiana University-East before going to prison; while in prison she had enrolled in Holy Cross. When she left the prison in March 2019, she was excited about finishing her degree, intent on finishing and then going straight to graduate school. Not only had she maintained a 3.8 GPA, but she had also published an article in a peer-reviewed academic journal and won a statewide award for her research. Once out, she sought to enroll at Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis, part of the same IU network as IU-East.

MOLLY: I had to meet with my student advisor to get the academic probation hold lifted in order to enroll in classes… We started going over my transcripts and what my options were. Remember that I already had 54 total college credit hours earned. My advisor informed me that practically none of them were going to count towards my degree at IUPUI. Oddly enough, not even most of my IU-East credits would count! I went into this entire situation assuming that it would only take a year or possibly a year and a half to complete my bachelor's degree. Come to find out that I am starting at the beginning of sophomore level. So basically, everything that I had done, all my hard work in Holy Cross, my student loan debt, none of it counted.

And because she had not succeeded in getting her loans out of default while in prison (see her story in the Default chapter), she was not eligible for grants going forward, at least not until she had proven herself as an IUPUI student.

MOLLY: Now here's the catch-22. In order to get my loans out of the default status I have two options. One is obviously to pay the entire $32,000; the other is to set up a loan rehabilitation repayment plan. However, to change my loan status from default through this plan I must make nine consecutive monthly payments. In other words, I must be enrolled in college to bring up my SAP [Satisfactory Academic Standing] so my federal student aid will cover later semesters. And in order to be enrolled in college I have to pay my tuition out of pocket for at least nine months (or two semesters) while my repayment plan

works on getting my loans out of default in order to even bring up my SAP in the first place.

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There are a variety of reasons why colleges and universities want to provide satellite programs in prisons. A few—mostly those already involved during the years when there was no funding—do it because it is a natural extension of their overall mission. Now that there is funding, others find the money or additional students that such programs can generate enticing. Some faculty and students appreciate prison college programs as training grounds for aspiring college professors and the opportunity it affords to do research on prisons without an IRB. Others—especially those that don't want to actually grant their college's degrees to prisoners—are starting prison programs because they are suddenly trendy. And then, of course, there are those who do it just because it is more fun and interesting to teach incarcerated students than it is to teach entitled students outside (which is true!).

Whatever the reason, colleges and universities—and the foundations that fund them—need to be sure that their programs prioritize their incarcerated students' needs and at the very least cause minimal harm to them. In regard to credits and degrees, we recommend the following.

SOLUTIONS

1. ***Require college programs operating in the same state prison system to enter into agreements on accepting credit earned in any of those programs.*** *Universities should work together. A full consortium or an agreement on credit transferability would prioritize the needs of the students over university exclusivity. The NJ-STEP program in New Jersey should become the national model, with "agreements between all two-year community colleges that every course taken at one is transferable to any other in the state and two-year degrees are transferable in their entirety to four- year public colleges and universities."*
2. ***Prioritize associate's degrees over bachelor's degrees.*** *They can obviously co-exist, but the higher degree ought not trump the lower. Not only does that make it far more likely that students will*

actually complete their degrees within the allotted time, it will also greatly increase the number of people who can be involved and diminishes the chances of people maxing out on their lifetime aid limitations.

3. ***Prohibit programs like Inside-Out that give credits to the outside students while denying them to the inside students for the exact same work.*** *Many of us have participated in—and loved—Inside Out classes while we were in prison. The idea that only free students should get credit for equivalent work might have had some merit when I-O began, but the model is exploitative and wrong. I-O can fix that, and we hope they will.*
4. ***Require all colleges and universities that accredit programs in prisons to have a plan for how they will protect their students inside were their college/university to pull out of the prison for any reason****. Whether because funding failed or interest lagged on campus or prison administrators no longer wanted them there or a pandemic ensued, they must have a pre-existing plan. This plan must include how to ensure that students who invested time and effort—as well as part of their lifetime funding eligibility—in their programs would get their degrees. We do not know any colleges or universities that have made that sort of commitment or even thought through what that would mean, so we call on Lumina and other thought-leaders in the field to begin thinking through what that would look like.*
5. ***Prohibit outside faculty and students who teach/tutor inside from publishing about us.*** *Okay, this isn't about credit; it's about epistemic justice and who owns our stories and ideas. Faculty and graduate students should prioritize assisting their incarcerated students in getting their ideas out, but not under the faculty member's or graduate student's byline.*

Admissions

Getting into college or grad school presents unique problems for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. In this section, we will briefly reprise some of the problems prospective students inside have in being admitted to college programs in their own prisons. We will then turn attention to the formidable barriers facing people inside who apply for on-campus admission after their release. Finally, we will consider problems formerly incarcerated applicants face.

Incarcerated Applicants—applying for admission into prison programs

The most obvious barrier to college admission for people wanting to study while in prison is that so few prisons have programs. As discussed in the introduction, only about 180 prisons out of more than 2,000 adult prisons in the US have any sort of higher education program. The majority of these programs are quite restrictive in whom they will take. The Second Chance Pell program imposes criteria such as barring those convicted of certain offenses and giving preference to those with between two and five years left to serve. Others, like the Bard College-affiliated programs, are highly selective academically, taking fewer than 10% of applicants.

Personal finances also play a role in who gets to participate in higher education programs inside prisons. As we discussed earlier, people in default on loans or those who have exhausted their lifetime eligibility may be excluded. At the other end of the spectrum, virtually anyone with a high school degree or equivalent can take college correspondence courses if they or, more likely, their families can pay; if not, there's no point in applying.

Finally, each prison will have its own criteria that must be satisfied, such as no disciplinary record and no simultaneous or overlapping enrollment in other programs at the prison.

Before Indiana ended state funding for incarcerated students in 2011, 10% of all men and 15% of all women in prison were enrolled in college full time. The Prison University Project at San Quentin, founded in 2003, is perhaps the best current example of a highly inclusive admissions process, one that is now being emulated

throughout California by community colleges with programs in almost every prison in the state. It is the former Indiana model and the current California model that we favor most strongly.

Incarcerated Applicants—applying for admission to colleges outside prison

Anyone wanting to continue their education upon release has to jump through many hoops with little prospect of success. For starters, nearly all colleges and universities require that applications be submitted online by the applicant themselves. (The Computer Fraud and Abuse Act makes it a felony for someone else to do it for you.)

So wedded are universities to their online portals that it is maddeningly difficult to submit supporting documents like transcripts or letters of reference off-line as well. Even finding out about an academic department and its faculty is all but impossible without access to the internet.

In 2016, Michelle Daniel, who during her 20 years in prison had established a well-deserved reputation for outstanding independent scholarship, set out to apply to some of the top graduate schools in the nation for admission in fall 2017. It was, in part, an experiment that she and the director of the college program at IWP, Dr. Kelsey Kauffman, embarked on to see whether it was even possible to gain admission from inside prison. Here is how Michelle describes the experience in a conversation with Anastazia Schmid, her former colleague at the prison:

MICHELLE: My experiences while incarcerated trying to apply for grad school were pretty difficult. First of all, I needed outside people to do research on the schools. In terms of what programs, what requirements, what eligibility. Then I needed to know what were the barriers for applying with a criminal conviction. And then there were the issues with actually filling out the application itself. Like all of those applications were online.

ANASTAZIA: And, you don't have access to that while incarcerated, do you?

MICHELLE: Absolutely not. No internet access. So I literally could not have applied to grad school. . . . If you're planning your reentry and

going to school as a part of that, you have to think a year in advance, which means you're doing it while incarcerated, overwhelmingly.

ANASTAZIA:
So how was it that you were even able to research schools?

MICHELLE: Right. So I actually asked my faculty to help me and that was a job of one person and then another person had the job of figuring out how to do these applications. Because here's the issue. When you create an online account at a university to apply, you are agreeing, when you click and you accept the conditions, that **you** are applying for this opportunity. So in order to make sure that we all didn't go down in a blaze of glory, we contacted each university to disclose my status and then say, "Hey, we're trying to apply. She gets out in a year. How can you help us do this?" And we actually had to find human beings who are at the universities who were willing to put in my application for me, and we got the applications by someone literally taking screenshots of the screen and then filling them out and then we sent them to this person. But even then I had to sign a little notification of consent that this human being at this university is approved and has the right to input my information.

ANASTAZIA: Did you hit any resistance from the universities themselves not wanting to give you even access to the application because you were an incarcerated person?

MICHELLE: Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. Some universities would send the application and then once we sent in the filled out application, they simply didn't put them online. And so part of the experiment for us was to see who would give me the opportunity, period. And so I applied to more schools than the average student would. I applied to nine schools. Well, in order to find out who would let me get to the point of access. These are the opportunities.

ANASTAZIA: About how many out of those nine schools actually took your application to the online point?

MICHELLE: I'm going to correct myself. I applied to more than nine schools because there were a few that didn't even put my applications on file. Okay. So you know, University of Maryland and Yale, no consideration at all. But there were nine that [we] actually went through the process.

ANASTAZIA: Well, it's sort of promising cause it sounds like more let you through that first barrier than not. Would that be a correct assessment?

MICHELLE: Yeah. But then the next processes of discrimination or exclusion kick in. Okay. So after you're on the list then, and you submitted this paperwork, which honestly was a challenge in and of itself because you are trying to write a personal statement and a career statement from the position of being incarcerated at the time and moving through your past and all of that in your crime and conviction, and all of that to disclose enough about yourself so that they understand who you are in order to recognize what you would do with this opportunity. And also the career statement, which is forward looking when you haven't really seen much of the world if you've been incarcerated for a significant amount of time. So it's a weird juxtaposition of like trying to talk about who you are now, but don't lock it down to the person you are now because you happen to be incarcerated and then be forward looking enough that they could see that you and your scholarship have some place to go.

So I had all these schools and it literally took a faculty member—Dr. Kaufman and myself—three weeks, every day just trying to get through the application process from this one, from that one, from this one, from that one, because they all had different requirements. Some people wanted, even after you had disclosed that you're formerly incarcerated, they wanted additional information, some schools asked for a narration of your actual crime of conviction. And so we had to figure out how to tell that narrative and then input it into the system. A lot of back and forth. Each career statement had to engage the scholars at that school. So a lot of researching of not just what you want to do but who's at that school that you're interested in working with and it simply could not have been done without a mediator, without someone in between because I simply didn't have access to the information. And the application process is arduous for anybody, but particularly for people who are lacking access to the internet, resources for those of people who don't have their CV's typed, or they don't have access to computers or printers, and then it would seem almost impossible.

ANASTAZIA: So it's almost a requirement of a full-time position for that mediator, for the outside person to stand in between and make

sure you not only have access to what you need but potentially access to even the baseline of a computer to type all this information out.

MICHELLE: Absolutely, absolutely. And then all the follow-up, because there were a lot of phone call conversations that the mediator, Dr. Kauffman, had to have with the universities to get these extra permissions for another person to input our applications and then follow up when maybe there was something else that was needed or they couldn't fill out, the person inputting couldn't check a box appropriately. It required a lot of work. I don't think a lot of universities are aware of how in getting rid of the paper applications, they create barriers for students. And let's not even begin to talk about application fees.

ANASTAZIA: Oh yeah, please.

MICHELLE: Honestly, if it hadn't been for the mediator constantly reporting the fact that I made 20 cents an hour and asking and begging for a waiver for the application fees, I would not have been able to apply to nine schools. That simply would have been financially impossible. But because it wasn't me begging and asking for an application fee waiver, I think it worked a little bit in my favor because they always have this kind of connotation that incarcerated people are looking out to manipulate to get over to pull [wool?] over one's eye. Right? But if you had a mediator speaking on your behalf, this person is vouching for you and able to make an argument for you. And it actually helped so that I didn't have to pay all those schools one application fee, but it would require also to talk to Dr. Kauffman about all the barriers that are behind that, behind the scenes that I, myself, never saw because she was doing the on-the-ground mediation.

ANASTAZIA: So our mediator then is important, not solely for access to resources you don't have otherwise, but really as a character credibility reference as well.

MICHELLE: Absolutely, they are vouching for you. You know, she's Dr. Kelsey Kauffman, graduate of Harvard and Yale, making these overtures to people that she's met at conferences and other events. Right? As opposed to me the criminalized being in prison, writing them cold saying, "Hey, I would like this opportunity. Here's a little bit about me. Whoa, here's some things on paper that are handwritten, and I would like for you to give me an opportunity."

ANASTAZIA: So really without the inclusionary status of the third party, this would be an impossibility.

MICHELLE: It would be a great impossibility. And that's what we need universities to think about. Right? Because they are limiting access to people who are thirsting and reaching for these opportunities.

After a suspenseful few weeks, Michelle was accepted into the PhD programs by the Harvard History Department, New York University American Studies, University of California-Berkeley African American Studies, University of California-Riverside Ethnic Studies, University of Kansas American Studies, and the University of Michigan American Studies.

And then something interested started to happen. One-by-one, universities began to rescind the offers. Because Michelle's application at most of the universities had necessarily by-passed the usual online portal and gone straight to each academic department, most of the graduate admissions offices had not had a chance to vet it first.[15] Once university administrators at Harvard, Kansas, and Michigan learned that an incarcerated person had been accepted and might soon appear on their campuses, they moved to block the admission. For the first time in anyone's memory, Harvard administrators overrode the decision of one of its own academic departments as to whom they could admit. Michelle had been one of approximately 300 applicants to the Harvard History PhD program and one of only five who were admitted. Historians in the department extolled the strength of her application, but to no avail. One hundred and sixty-six Harvard professors from throughout the university signed a letter decrying the administration's actions, proclaiming "We Are Educators, Not Prosecutors" in the Harvard Crimson. Michelle's admission was

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[15] Yale University was an exception. Dr. Kauffman had not succeeded in making contact with anyone in the Yale African American or American Studies Departments and instead—being an alum of the college herself—had decided to work directly with the graduate admissions office. Yale was also the only one of the nine schools for which she completed applications that demanded upfront whether the applicant had a felony conviction and, if so, required a detailed statement regarding the crime of conviction. Michelle never heard from either of the departments and we have always assumed that the graduate admissions office killed the application before it could be considered on its merits.

nevertheless blocked. With breath-taking irony, Harvard's president approved the decision to deny Michelle admission in the same week when she formally declared Harvard's regret for the role it played in centuries of slavery and discrimination against people of African dissent.

It was Harvard's loss, not Michelle's. She weighed handsome competing offers from UC-Berkeley, UC-Riverside, and NYU and eventually chose NYU, where she has flourished.

Michelle's experiment made many things clear: (1) There are people in prison who are capable of competing with the finest applicants in the world for graduate and undergraduate programs, and once there, they can thrive. (2) Most universities make applying from prison logistically impossible. (3) Assistance from outside allies is essential to keeping an application moving. (4) University administrators even at top-flight schools are willing to take extreme measures—including denying departments the hallowed right to determine who are the finest potential scholars in the nation and risking censure by faculty as a whole —in order to prevent felons from becoming part of their campuses

We have quoted at length from an interview Michelle did with Anastazia Schmid about her experiences applying to college/university while incarcerated. Anastazia had her own compelling admissions stories. Like Michelle, Anastazia had sterling academic credentials acquired during a long incarceration. Indeed, in 2016, the prestigious American Studies Association gave her their annual Gloria Anzuldua Award for best independent scholar in gender studies ***in the entire nation****.*

That same year, after more than a decade petitioning for redress in her own case, Anastazia saw her conviction overturned by a federal appeals court. With release seemingly imminent (it was not), she applied to a master's degree program at her dream school, uber-liberal Reed College in Oregon.

ANASTAZIA: I started researching schools across the country and I got my eyes and my heart and my little mind set on Reed College in Oregon, purported to be the most radical-thinking university in our country. And there's artists and there's activists [and] these great thinkers [there] and everything about the environment was so

conducive—not only to the person I am, but the work that I was doing, the work I was hoping to expand into doing. And so I applied to Reed and I mean, my God, we could go on and on about the ridiculousness of what that process looked like. I mean, first of all, no one person is ever, and I mean ever, going to be able to do this without the help of an outside assistant and liaison. So were it not for Dr. Kauffman and all these other professors I was working with that were able to obtain the applications for me, send the applications back, fight for application [fees to be waived], jump through all those hoops and do that back and forth between me and this college, it never would have happened, period. So the tremendous amount of time and human power behind the outside person and what they had to do to help me through the process is just astronomical.

So we get through all this and here's some of the irony of it. Here was the other thing. One other main reason I chose Reed—being this radical college that they claim to be—Reed at the moment was one of the colleges that did not have "the box" on the application . . . that they're wanting you to check if you're a convicted felon or not. So we thought, yes, here's a school that automatically is not even asking the question. Now, let's get here. Reed College is well aware that they have to send to me in the mail—when the entire rest of the world is doing this online—a paper application into a prison with a DOC number attached to the backside of my name. You absolutely know where you're sending this application from. So I get the application, we fill the application out, the people go through the process of scanning it, getting it back into them, doing all the things they have to do. And then Dr. Kauffman gets a call from one of the administrators at Reed College. "Yes, we've received Anastazia's application and it's amazing and this, that and the other. However she didn't answer a question and it's our fault because it's not on the paper version. The paper version's actually obsolete now, would have been in the online application. We need her to check the box on being a convicted felon."

Wow. Yeah. Wow. I mean, first of all . . . I'm yet to find somebody who's living inside a maximum-security prison who wasn't a convicted felon. I mean, now whether you're *guilty* of a felony or not is irrelevant. The point being you had to have been convicted of a felony to be living inside the prison where these people just sent me the application to. So it's almost an insult to intelligence saying, after you've already sent this to me in a prison that, oh, well I need to go

through the technicality of checking "Yes, I am a convicted felon" on their box for the application.

KRISTINA: And, and what impact that essentially, that tiny little box, have on your ability to attend Reed?

ANASTAZIA: Well, I mean tons, because now it's no longer just about my academic standing. It's no longer just about am I appropriate intellectual material for their graduate program? Now you're scrutinizing me as a person in my entire personal life and my entire history before you're going to make a determination as to whether I can go to your school or not. So all of a sudden this application process and the interview process takes on a whole new level of something that somebody without the felony, they would never have to experience or undergo.

So I go through several interview processes by phone with the administrators at Reed College and the head of the departments. We have amazing conversations. The people are great, the departments are awesome. The program seems amazing. They're highly impressed with me. They actually call me back several times for multiple interviews. I mean, this is very, very promising. And when we get down to the final state of acceptance or non-acceptance, . . . I get a letter from Reed College that in a nutshell basically states that Reed's administrators feel that it would be in my best interest to get out of prison and be out of prison for over a year before I reapply to the school because they think I need no less than a year to readjust to my life in the outside world before starting a program.

Reed College, renown for its liberalism—and also renown for open use and sale of illicit drugs (i.e., felonies) on campus by its largely white, wealthy, entitled student body—when faced with an application from a brilliant incarcerated scholar refused to even consider it until she had been out in the world for a year.

So let's turn out attention to what happens to formerly incarcerated students who do wait until they are out and then apply for admission.

Formerly Incarcerated Applicants

Hundreds of thousands of incarcerated people are released from prison each year who were not fortunate enough to have earned their

postsecondary degree while incarcerated. Many of them want to enroll in college and some formerly incarcerated individuals who were fortunate enough to earn undergraduate degrees want to enroll in post-graduate studies. Either way, this is no easy feat once you have a criminal record.

Perhaps no story reveals the height of the barriers before them—or the hypocrisy of universities who make money from college programs in prison—than that of Jarrod.

JARROD'S STORY: For 12 years, Jarrod was Ball State University's clerk inside Pendleton, a maximum-security prison northeast of Indianapolis. He had already earned his B.A., *summa cum laude*, from Ball State while incarcerated, then earned a second degree, and co-authored a scholarly article with a Ball State faculty member who taught at the prison. As the program's clerk, he did everything from curriculum planning to grant applications, class registration, tutoring, and developing a college readiness program for prospective students. Yet when he was released and applied to his alma mater for graduate school, an "Exceptional Admissions Committee" –including undergraduates who hadn't even been born when Jarrod went to prison—decided he should not be allowed to apply because of his felony conviction. For three consecutive years (during which he received his master's degree from another university), Jarrod applied to the PhD program at Ball State, and for three consecutive years, Ball State told him his application would not be considered.

This story, too, has a happy ending—at least for Jarrod who finally gave up on his alma mater and is now a PhD student at the far more academically renowned Tulane University. But it leaves us with the brutal insight that doors remain firmly closed at many, if not most, universities to even the finest applicants—including their own alumni and long-term employees—solely because of a felony conviction decades earlier.

The majority of the colleges and universities in Indiana require applicants to disclose their criminal history information. This is not a mere "check the box" method. It is a systematic and unnecessary invasion of privacy. Once an applicant has confirmed that they have a prior conduct history they are then asked to write an extremely detailed account of the event in question. IUPUI's policy on this matter can be found on their website:

Please provide details, including a complete description of the facts and circumstances that led to the charges.

You should include: Who participated, Who the victim was, What losses were suffered, When, where and how the event(s) occurred.

Explanation of criminal/disciplinary history: please explain the reason(s) for your behavior.

What positive changes have you made in your life since the event(s)?

They go on to advise that "if you do not cover enough details, we will ask you to submit this information again, via the Prior Conduct Form," which is six pages long![16]

As we and colleagues stated in 2018 in a "white paper" prepared for the American Studies Association:

> *The justification used by these universities for needing such a thorough background check is that it is their responsibility to maintain a safe campus environment. This is certainly understandable; however, there is no empirical evidence that proves those with a criminal background are more likely to commit crimes or break rules on campus than those without. Scrutinizing a person's history and passing personal judgment based on past mistakes and not intellectual aptitude does a disservice to the potential student, the university itself and society as a whole. Empirical studies show no increase in crime rates on campuses where formerly incarcerated applicants aren't screened.[17]*

As the Association of American Colleges and Universities wrote in 2018, "the evidence does not indicate that campuses are safer as a result of criminal history screening. In fact, because education has

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[16] *https://admissions.iupui.edu/apply/prior-conduct/index.html (accessed 12/2019).*

[17] *ASA White Paper, Summary 1*

been associated with lower recidivism rates, educating those with past criminal justice involvement may have broad positive effects for society."[18]

Even when admitted, applicants with felonies find the process degrading and the special restrictions imposed upon them onerous. Consider another outstanding student's experience applying, this time as an undergraduate. Like others quoted here, Molly was already an award-winning, published scholar while still in prison. After her release in spring 2019, she sought admission to Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis (IUPUI).

MOLLY'S STORY: Before my application would even be considered for admissions, I had to fill out a Prior Conduct Disclosure form and send a detailed written statement about my criminal background for a committee to review. The 6-page disclosure form required me to go online and look up every single criminal conviction (felony and misdemeanor) I've ever received. It wanted the conviction, location of offense, conviction date, disposition of case and dates of incarceration and or probation. I had to try three different websites to get my full arrest records for fear that if I left something out and they would think I was purposely not being honest with them.

Their expectations for my written statement was specified on their website. They needed details of the incident; a complete description of the facts and circumstances that led to my charges. They went on

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[18] *Lynn Pasquerella, "Expanding the American Dream: Destigmatizing Past Criminal Justice Involvement," Association of American Colleges & Universities, May 1, 2018, online at https://www.aacu.org/expanding-american-dream-destigmatizing-past-criminal-justice-involvement (Accessed 6/20/18); see also Malgorzata J. V. Olszewska, "Undergraduate admission application as a campus crime mitigation measure: Disclosure of applicants' disciplinary background information and its relation to campus crime" (Ed.D. dissertation, East Carolina University, 2007); Center for Community Alternatives,* The Use of Criminal Records in College Applications Reconsidered *(Syracuse, NY: CCA, 2010), online at http://www.communityalternatives.org/pdf/Reconsidered-criminal-hist-recs-in-collegeadmissions.pdf (Accessed 6/20/18); and the sequel, Center for Community Alternatives,* Boxed Out: Criminal History Screening and College Application Attrition *(Syracuse, NY: CCA, March 2015), online at http://communityalternatives.org/pdf/publications/BoxedOut_FullReport.pdf (Accessed 6/20/18).]*

to elaborate that those details included who participated, who the victim was, what losses were suffered and when and where these events occurred. They also wanted an explanation for the reasons for my behavior and what positive changes I have made in my life since. I poured my heart out and gave as detailed account of every aspect of my charges in a four-page written statement. I then spoke with someone from the review committee about my submissions and she told me that it would also be very beneficial for me to have letters of recommendation sent in on my behalf to go into my file. I luckily have an amazing support network and was able to get five letters written and sent in, one of which was from an IUPUI faculty member. After I submitted all these things I was then asked by the committee to edit my statement and include a few paragraphs about why I chose IUPUI, what I planned to study and why, how I would be an asset to IUPUI and what kind of supports I had in place now to help me stay on my positive path. This whole process took a month to complete, and then another month and a half to review and be accepted.

I later went to new student orientation to take a tour of the campus and get acquainted with the IUPUI environment. While I was there, I was to take care of getting two holds on my student record lifted so that I could continue with the enrollment in classes. I missed a large part of the orientation in order to go to an appointment I had with the Dean of Students. She wanted to see me, hear my explanation of my criminal background for herself, even though I had already submitted a detailed account of it in my conduct disclosure, and then pass judgment on whether I should be allowed on campus and around other students. Once she was satisfied with me, she lifted that hold. It was an embarrassing and degrading experience having all eyes on me as I left and returned from my orientation group and having to sit through a meeting I knew was solely so someone could pass judgment on my appearance and eloquence. Because I was forced to be away from my group so long during the introduction process no one spoke to me after I returned. They only spoke to each other, leaving me feeling more ostracized.

Even after enduring such an invasive and humiliating inquisition there is still no guarantee that you will be admitted. As we and other colleagues wrote in the 2018 ASA "white paper" on barriers to higher education:

> *The 2018 decision to remove the criminal history box from the Common Application for admissions signaled a broader shift in university policy and practice in this area. Yet, this welcomed shift does not prevent discrimination based on criminal history. When the box is banned, the felony background is still assessed sometimes through background checks and credit checks, but rarely is the procedure clear regarding who or what board makes the assessment, and that process is rarely shared with aspiring students. Further, aspiring students rarely, if ever, can speak for themselves beyond the limited parameters of the school application. We argue that box processes, background and credit checks should not be used to disqualify an aspiring student for a crime of conviction for which the individual has served their sentence.*[19]

We would like to share several final observations about barriers to admission that we have encountered:

(1) Many prisons that host higher education programs ban faculty who teach in those programs from writing letters of recommendation on behalf of their students—something that is routinely considered a part of the responsibilities of college faculty.

(2) Those same prisons often prevent incarcerated students from being in touch with their former professors, thus further complicating procurement of letters of recommendation and guidance in the admissions process.

(3) Some university admissions offices have processes for formerly incarcerated applicants that delay application review, thus causing applicants to fail to meet department deadlines at the same college or university.

(4) Admissions offices can also prevent a target department from considering an application, all the while cloaking the

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[19] *ASA White Paper, 2*

process to prevent applicants and their allies from discovering whether their applications were fully considered. [20]

Solutions For Barriers to Admission to Higher Education:

For Admission into Programs Inside Prison

1. *The first solution is the hardest:* ***There should be higher education programs in most prisons and many jails in the nation so that all who want to partake can do so.*** *To do that, Congress and state legislatures must either restore Pell Grants and state funding to incarcerated people or foundations must seek to develop sustainable models using volunteer faculty as we did at IWP in 20012-17 and the Prison University Project does at San Quentin (see Appendix D).*
2. ***Most of these programs should be modeled on the open access programs now in place in California with an emphasis on associate's degrees****. BA programs can be built on top of these but not at the cost of neglecting the education needs and aspirations of the majority of potential students inside.*
3. ***Open higher education programs to everyone in prison, regardless of length of sentence, crime of conviction, mental health classification, etc****. We recognize that prison administrators will continue to impose their restrictions, such as clean disciplinary records, but we encourage them, in turn, to recognize that widespread participation in college programs is one of the most effective ways to improve discipline in a prison.*

For Admission to Higher Education Programs for Applicants Who Are Still Inside Prison

4. ***Colleges and universities should make submitting applications feasible from prison either by allowing paper applications and/or allowing a designated family member, friend, or program staff member to input applications online.***

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[20] *ASA White Paper, page 3*

5. ***Colleges and universities should automatically wave application fees for incarcerated applicants and do not charge incarcerated applicants for transcripts.***
6. *Colleges and universities running programs in prisons should always* ***designate a university "re-entry representative" (preferably formerly incarcerated) to smooth the way from programs inside to college life outside.*** *Prison education programs should plan for students' transitions from the outset. Among the re-entry representative's responsibilities would be providing information on places where students might want to apply, gathering paper applications or being the designated person to input applications online, assisting students in filling out the applications, securing transcripts and letters of recommendation, minding deadlines, and acting as a go-between for applicants and universities.*
7. ***College programs inside should encourage the prisons to change regulations so that educators may continue to communicate with students upon release.***
8. ***Whether colleges and universities are involved inside prisons or not, they should all make information available to people inside:*** *Allow incarcerated applicants to request brochures & other information by mail for free; produce university handbooks and program information in paper; coordinate with professional organizations to designate a member to field questions from and advise incarcerated candidates; assign representatives to research these questions if professional organizations cannot.*
9. ***Require universities that receive government or foundation funding for higher education programs in prison to accept students in good standing to continue pursuing education on their campus after release.*** *Foundations in particular must reject the hypocrisy involved in denying access to formerly-incarcerated people while running programs with currently-incarcerated ones—particularly when such programs profit the campus either by providing a high-value experience to faculty and students who teach and study with incarcerated students, or through income from monies such as Pell Grants.*

For Admissions into On-Campus Institutions Outside by Formerly Incarcerated Applicants.

10. ***Colleges and universities should remove all questions about criminal convictions from applications.***

11. ***Colleges and universities should remove all restrictions on funding and financial aid for formerly incarcerated students.*** *And then take the next step, which is to create funding, financial aid, work-study, assistantships, etc., specifically for justice-involved applicants.*
12. ***Faculty and academic departments must not allow admissions offices to sabotage applications from incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students****. Instead, they should (a) insist on transparency around admissions office practices regarding applicants with criminal convictions; (b) in the case of graduate school applications, require admissions offices to forward those applications to the designated graduate department and to do so in a timely matter; (c) create a culture within admissions that understands the problems justice-involved people face and the barriers they have already overcome to reach the point at which they can apply.*
13. ***Colleges and universities should add "criminal justice involvement" to affirmative action or diversity statements.***
14. ***Colleges and universities should refuse the exceptionalism that endorses only the "non non nons," failing to support people with convictions for serious, violent, and sex offenses.***

Institutional, Financial and Other Barriers

LESLIE: Been watching "College Behind Bars", by Ken Burns, on PBS. I doubt most people know that, while attending college at IWP, I worked 40 hours a week as a groundskeeper. One semester short of my graduation for my bachelor's degree I was transported to Rockville. I was permitted to return to complete that semester because I was a Ball State University student and Rockville only offered Oakland City University.

When I returned for my final semester of my senior year, I had to take 4 extra classes (ten total) to complete my degree in the prescribed time. This was due to the fact only four professors were willing to teach my first year, preventing me from getting the amount of credits to complete the degree on time. I worked 40 hours a week unloading trucks and stocking the kitchen plus 30 additional hours a week at night cleaning the special needs dorm. Many people think prisoners just sit back and enjoy idle time. None of my hard work will contribute to any retirement or 401K. My degree qualifies me to be a teacher, but society says "no." No regrets just the same. People do not understand that it is an additional pursuit for those that strive to better themselves, not some easy street.

There are a plethora of institutional barriers facing incarcerated students. Outside their classrooms, they commonly

- *have to work a fulltime prison job while going to school;*
- *are bombarded by excessive noise and disruption on the housing units,*
- *too often disrupted by obtrusive correctional staff, and*
- *stymied by lack of privacy;*
- *have very limited access to technology,*
- *to say nothing of a pathetically small library;*
- *and are too often derailed by petty disciplinary infractions*

Once inside the classroom, students may either encounter a safe place to explore ideas or a space where they must become other than themselves to pass.

We won't attempt to deal with all these barriers inside, but instead will focus on how minor infractions of arcane or arbitrary rules can derail the most conscientious of students, on the lack of technology, and on the inequalities and limitations of correspondence courses, which are the only alternatives for most people in prison who want to pursue a college degree.

Infractions

What we discovered is just how precarious participation in vocational education and higher education is in a prison. Participation is woven into the fabric of the carceral logics that run prisons, which are often arbitrary and counter-logical in nature. In short, once a person begins a program, there is no guarantee of completion.

Minor infractions can bar people from enrolling in school or cause them to be removed from school, for either an extended period of time or indefinitely. For example, Kristina was sent to the disciplinary segregation housing unit (solitary confinement) for sitting on the bed of a fellow incarcerated woman. She was kicked out of school in the middle of the semester, thus losing all those classes and credits, sent to solitary and then another disciplinary unit afterwards for several months. Once released from those units she had to wait an additional six months before trying to re-enroll in school.

KRISTINA: There was an incident. I was in cosmetology school and I don't remember how close I was to taking my [state licensing] boards. But I was in that program and I was also doing college and I was written up on what we call a CAB. It was a conduct report and a friend of mine was leaving. We'd been friends for about five years, and she was leaving that facility to go to another one before she would then later be released. And so, we were sharing a talk. We were just talking about life and sharing stories and just spending time together before she was going to leave the next morning. And I gave her a hug and I happened to be in her room. And so, I was breaking the rules—I admit I was in her room, which was against the law. When you're in prison, you're not supposed to be in another person's room. And I was sitting on her bed, just like in normal life, what two friends would do and

share a hug. I'm in tears, actually many tears. And the sergeant happened to walk in, and she wrote us up and three days later I had a hearing and I was taken from that hearing in handcuffs. I was taken to lock or segregation. And so in that moment, anytime you're taken to segregation, you lose any kind of program that you're in, because of that write up. And of course, I was unable to then be connected to be able to do correspondence study because in order to do that you have to be able to have access to staff who can actually fax your coursework to a professor at the university to actually grade. So, there's no way of doing that. They consider all of those things privileges and you lose all of that when you go to lock.

ANASTAZIA: Wow. So, let me get this straight for what sounds to me like completely normal everyday human behavior, hugging a friend goodbye, you not only went to solitary confinement, but you had lost your ability to continue your education for . . . sounds to me like a substantial amount of time. How long did you have to wait before becoming re-enrolled in your classes? To complete?

KRISTINA: Well, to get back, gosh, to get back into any program, you had to wait six months past the date of when you were found guilty. So that's even just to get considered for reentry into your program. . . . Again, they had those restrictions in place so people couldn't finish too quickly. So, I had to end up waiting for the next semester. I may have even lost a class because I wasn't able to complete it, so its delayed things a little bit.

One of our professors recalled a time when Michelle Daniel [Jones] also received petty write-ups that disrupted a crucial semester.

> *In Sept. 2016, NPR broadcast nationally a half-hour interview with Michelle and two other students at IWP about their prison history project. Coincidentally or not, within 24 hours she received three petty "write-ups"—including one for having too many books in her cell—that landed her in solitary confinement for several days, followed by a grueling two months in "Grace" (the ironically named disciplinary segregation unit), the very months when she was supposed to be writing graduate school applications and doing final revisions of an article. When I finally managed to get into the unit to see her, she waved off my worries with a smile. "I'm doing field research!" she announced,*

and handed me a stack of notes, drafts, and revisions scribbled on every scrap of paper she could find.

A far more egregious case than Kristina's or Michelle's was that of Lisa, another outstanding student at IWP who was charged right before final exams with kissing her girlfriend while sitting on a bench in the prison yard. She knew she was innocent, and she also knew that the alleged incident took place in full view of a security camera and that the video could exonerate her. But the hearing officer refused to look at the video, so she was convicted, thrown out of college, and sentenced for sexual misconduct. She pressed the issue, first up through the chain of command, then to an ombudsman and eventually to federal court where the video finally proved she was right. But all that took 18 month during which she was banned from the classroom, lost out on many key privileges, and set back her hopes of returning home to her family, perhaps for years.

LISA'S STORY:

I lost out on a semester of college because I went to lock during the week of finals on a sexual misconduct charge of "kissing" my girlfriend on the rec yard. I was not guilty of it but due to the fact a captain wrote the conduct report I couldn't get anyone to review the cameras to prove my innocence. I went through the screening and hearing without any of my evidence being viewed, even from the officer who is supposed to view it.

I was sanctioned to 30 days in lock, then had to do the "Grace" program, which is a so-called re-entry to open population program that helps you do some inner soul searching, but it's actually an added punishment since you're locked in your room 24 hours a day and have to beg to use the restroom, no do-it-yourself laundry or microwave for the first 14-30 days. I also lost a credit class [which restricts the number of days that can be taken off your sentence for good behavior], my DOL [Department of Labor] program [on office management)], and college.

After I was released from the program I was ordered to not talk to the other girl during my work hours and I spoke to her while we were both in the library, me running an errand for my job as clerk in the rec building and her as a patron in the library, and due to that I was again fired from my job and placed back in Grace.

I couldn't get any of the staff here to direct me in how to appeal so I winged it myself. My appeals from IWP [Indiana Women's Prison] and downtown [DOC central office] were denied, but I knew I was innocent, so after more than a year of the run around, I wrote the [DOC] Internal Affairs lady and asked her to please investigate it. She had refused before I was found guilty to review the cameras because it wasn't her job, but after it was over, it then became her duty. I had requested that the footage be saved from that day and was lucky that it was because when she reviewed it she confirmed that there was no kiss.

I then wrote the federal court and asked them what to do since I couldn't get any guidance from staff and they sent me a habeas corpus to fill out with directions on how to file it. I wrote the [DOC] ombudsman and downtown again. I'm not sure in which order things happened anymore, but I'm pretty sure that the courts approved my case to be heard, then contacted the prison for their side and evidence and then the AG [Indiana Attorney General] and the attorney for IWP disputed it. It went on for about another year and I was eventually awarded another hearing, which I was then found not guilty.

It was great; however, it didn't take away the effect of the losses I had endured. I was, at that time, behind close to a year on graduating my program, which put my time-cut off that long, which caused me to graduate after my first case flipped over, so I lost the 6-month time-cut. I could have received 6 months on my first case, then another 6 months on my second, but... I lost out on a total of 7 months, state pay, and lost my preservation visits [with her children] for 6 months, which made me lose out on kids' camp and teen day as well.

Losing a semester of college trickled down to a delay in obtaining her degree, which resulted in a delayed time cut and a delay in getting home to her children, which added an additional year to her sentence.

Losing independence as a result of going to solitary confinement and later the quasi-solitary confinement GRACE unit resulted in the loss of reputation, increased surveillance by custody, and mental and emotional stress.

Losing the ability to live humanely meant being made to cease all communication with people you care about and, failing to do so, resulted in solitary confinement.

Losing the ability to be believed: The assumption that one is not ever telling the truth can be soul crushing.

Losing the small amount of state-pay, especially when it is your only income, creates great strain. One may a have a bed to sleep in, but lack the laundry detergent to wash their clothes and bedding, which requires one to use state facilities wherein clothing is routinely stolen and damaged. Countless small injustices multiply and exacerbated when losing even the slave wages state pay provides.

Most egregious of all is the loss of "family preservation" visits as a time when a person has already lost so much. Losing visits with children and special events like the annual Kid's Camp and Teen Day can have devastating mental and emotional soul crushing effects.

Technology

ANASTAZIA: Nobody, and I mean nobody, prepared me in any way for the technology that I would have to deal with coming out into the outside world. And I would have to say for me, personally, that's been one of the biggest barriers to overcome. I mean, how do I work the cell phone and the computer and all of these things that did not even exist before I went in? I joke about this all the time, but I swear to God, I'm so serious. It's like I'd been trapped on Gilligan's Island for eighteen and a half years, talking through a coconut, and now, "Here you go. Here's your cell phone and your smart phone and your Mac computer and all these great things and carry on."

Anastazia arrived at IWP in 2001. When she left for Madison Correctional Facility in 2017, more than 100 students in the higher education program were sharing 10 antiquated desktop computers, five of which operated on floppy discs.

ANASTAZIA: What a gross disservice we are doing, keeping people inside ignorant to what you must know to navigate every day. Normal life. This is not just about grad school. This is everyday life. Now, if you don't have that knowledge, you're handicapping somebody almost to the point of incapacitation. And I'm going to go out on a limb and say it is incapacitation for most people. They cannot function not knowing how these things work and how the world works now. So, this is something that we need to keep in mind above and beyond just

barriers to higher education, just education and knowledge in general. You cannot keep people isolated from the world then throw them back in the world and expect them to function normally and adequately when you have handicapped them completely to how the outside world actually works.

Lara arrived at IWP at about the same time and quickly immersed herself in college. Once having completed her degree, she became a highly effective tutor and teacher's assistant. When she had the chance to do graduate level classes and research (though not for credit), she leaped at the opportunity, but similarly lamented the lack of technology.

LARA: Technology is obsolete in prison. Recently our computers were taken for something we did, but imagine doing graduate work without a computer? It is nearly impossible. We can be put on lockdown at any time with no explanation and have no access to our work. We do not have access to out professors through email to receive help, due to the lack of technology offered.

Correspondence Courses

As we have mentioned previously, people incarcerated in Indiana can earn a year off their sentence if they earn an associate's degree and another two years off their sentence for a bachelor's degree as long as they earned most of the credit for those degrees while inside. The problem, of course, is that only two of the state's prisons for adults have college programs and they accept only a fraction of those who would like to enroll. But there is one other way of earning a degree and realizing the subsequent time-cut: correspondence courses.

Kristina, who had completed three years of college before going to prison, arrived at IWP just as funding for students was eliminated by the Indiana legislature in 2012 and the programs in all the prisons collapsed.

KRISTINA: I was crushed. I later heard of an opportunity to still earn my degree through correspondence courses. This was certainly less desirable, since I would have to do all the work without the aid of an instructor, nor internet access. But it was the only option. Then I learned of the ultimate barrier, the one that separates the haves and

have-nots. Correspondence courses cost the same as taking a college class at the university. Altogether, I would need 12 classes to finish my degree, totaling over $4,400 in tuition. This was more than I could earn in prison working full-time for over 14 year! Assuming, I made premium pay at $.25 per hour, 35 hours per week, or after taxes and withholdings, less than $25 per month. This doesn't take into account the time as a vocational student when I was earning less than $5 per month.

There was no way I could earn enough to pay for classes, and I knew my parents' funds were exhausted due to helping me pay for an attorney for my legal defense as well as a separate attorney to fight CPS [Children's Protective Services] to get my son out of foster care, where he was placed when I was charged.

When my friends heard of the situation, they banded together to raise the money to pay for my tuition, a couple classes at a time. I felt extremely blessed, and overwhelmed with gratitude. But at the same time, it didn't seem fair that I would have the opportunity to pursue my education, while so many would not.

I worked very hard over the next few years to complete my work. However, getting access to research and a computer to type my papers was difficult. Sometimes even finding the time to work on my assignments and write papers could be a challenge since college was no longer a classification. This meant that even if you chose to do correspondence courses, you must maintain a full-time job as well. I had to get creative and sometimes beg for access to a computer. I was often questioned by staff, and treated suspiciously just because I was always trying to get to the education building to work on my assignments, and track down staff to print my papers and fax them to the university to be graded. I also had to rely on prison staff to communicate with the university on my behalf, since they did not accept collect calls. This often delayed the process and created confusion. Since there were only a couple of us who were actually able to afford the courses, they didn't make many resources available. We were left to obtain research on our own, without access to internet, and a library that was lacking to say the least. I often begged staff to look up research for me and print it so I could sift through it in hopes of finding something I could use. At first, I had friends and family send some research in, but then they banned all

mail other than hand-written letters on lined paper. This of course made research even more elusive.

Finally, I completed my final class with a sense of pride and renewed hope in my future. Not only was I accomplishing my goal of earning a college degree, but this also meant I could finally go home and be reunited with my son.

Though I am still quite grateful for the people in my life that made my education possible, I am saddened that the majority of people cannot afford this opportunity. This means they are kept away from their families longer, and will one day return with fewer skills than they could have had if given an opportunity to take classes.

Some aspiring students found it difficult to even get started if they wanted to participate in correspondence coursework. Sarah had completed her BA at IWP before student funding was lost in 2012. Now at Rockville prison, she yearns to continue her education even though she cannot earn a further degree or additional time-cuts.

SARAH: First, there is no access to centralized information about available correspondence courses. There should be a packet of info available through each prison library or education department. However, when I asked the director of education for a list of available programs, she offered Oakland City University and Blackstone Paralegal Courses. She had zero other information.

I found ten addresses to write for information, and received two responses, one of those being Blackstone.

Rockville Correctional Facility does not provide any kind of assistance to students if they are not enrolled in Oakland City University courses. If a student needs to communicate with an administrator or teacher, she must treat them like any other person, and add the phone number once each three-month period, make collect calls, and otherwise communicate through paper or a finicky GTL system.

There is no access to technology. No software program access. No internet accesses. No graphing calculators or online testing. In fact, everything must be paper based. Proctoring is impossible.

Most colleges have a proctor system in place to preserve the integrity of the program. The process should be simple: a DOC employee in the

Education department should either proctor the tests or supervise online proctoring of tests. But the director of education only proctors tests for Oakland City University. The director of education does not facilitate any educational program that is not Oakland City University.

I offered several solutions:

1. Use the video-link infrastructure and protocol already in place to virtually proctor tests, either through the university or through ProctorU, which can be hired by the student without cost to the prison.

2. Clear a proctor through regular visitation procedures and allow us to use the rooms meant for attorney visits to administer tests periodically by appointment.

3. Allow a nearby university professor to complete the DOC volunteer training to be able to come in and administer tests in one of the classrooms not being used for anything else.

I was denied all of these requests and told that the courses must be 100 % paper-based with no proctoring and no technology required.[21]

Sarah's experience demonstrates how facilities are not motivated to facilitate correspondence courses for students. The fact is, the costs and effort are minimal to support self-paying students completing correspondence courses, but there is little incentive to do so.

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[21] *Rheann raises another limitation on correspondence courses. In her case, she had finished college at the prison and is now a master dog trainer in the ICAN service dog program at the prison. She wanted an advanced certification as a veterinarian technician but most prisons will not allow the necessary tests or mentorships. "Even if a person chooses to study something on their own via correspondence there are restrictions in the facility that won't allow for the full test to be taken: for example, the surgical portion of a vet-tech test although culinary students and the kitchen workers can use knives everyday with supervision. Some certifications require a person to study for a period of time under someone licensed. Such as if I wanted to study via correspondence as a legal secretary/paralegal or try to attain it through the law library...a requirement of becoming a certified paralegal is to study under a licensed lawyer. Another example is an electrician. We do not have specialists to train us."*

Formerly Incarcerated Students

For the returning citizen/student the expenses a person faces post-incarceration are often insurmountable. Many will re-enter without saving, housing, transportation, basic necessities (i.e. food, clothing, hygiene and household items, etc.), a phone, computer access or other everyday technology needed for basic functioning in today's world. Institutional barriers encountered when attending school and completing degrees outside of prison include access to scholarships, employment and housing and are inherent in the collateral consequences of criminal convictions.

Barriers erected and maintained by the criminal justice system

What many people don't realize is that the greatest barriers that recently released students face come from the criminal justice system itself—the heavy demands made by probation and parole and the exorbitant fees and fines that formerly incarcerated people are required to pay every month, often for years or decades.

Some parole and probation officers are supportive of the educational goals of those they supervise on parole and probation, but many are not. As we stated in the ASA White Paper, parole agents can put up barriers to university participation by denying transfer of residence, placing conditions on movement, imposing curfews, or issuing outright denials. Even when universities offer housing and job opportunities for formerly incarcerated college applicants and students, agents of the parole system can impede these opportunities.[22] Moreover, many are weighed down by the time demands of probation, e.g., meetings with their officer that can mean spending half a day each week in the outer office waiting to be seen, mandatory drug and therapy sessions throughout the week, random drug tests, etc. And then there are crippling fines and fees, hundreds of dollars due every month, often for years to come. Listen to Molly describe her return home after 5 years in prison:

MOLLY: I was released from prison on April 4, 2019, with 3 felonies, 2 publications, 1 statewide writing award, a 3.79 GPA, 54 total college

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[22] *ASA White Paper, 5.*

credit hours earned, and $32,235.52 in defaulted student loan debt ($11,158.57 of which is solely interest). I was to immediately start serving a year-and-a-half on house arrest at $70.00 a week plus $25.00 per random drug test. I had no possessions (not even clothes), no license, no car, no job, and no money. But clearly, I had plenty of debt!

My first order of business was to secure employment, no easy feat when you have no car or license. Surprisingly, getting a job was the easiest barrier to cross, although I was sure it would be my hardest. Next step was to get my license reinstated. . . . I bring up the license barrier because not only was it in fact a barrier of sorts that could ultimately keep me from going to school, or getting a job that would allow me to pay for school, but also because the fines and bureaucratic red tape associated with reinstating a license is . . . a prime example of systematic oppression of the poorer citizens of this country. In order to get my license reinstated after being suspended for non-proof of insurance 10 years prior, I had to first pay the fine of $526. Next I had to have proof of insurance just to have a license, which cost me another $50 per month! If my insurance were ever to lapse, my license would be automatically suspended again. After this step I had to pay $35.00 to take a BMV required online driver's safety course. Finally, after a month of fulfilling requirements I was eligible to go to the BMV and pay $17.50 to take my written and driving exam!

I could only enroll in two classes this semester, which is costing me $2,268.00 out of pocket. Just to give you an idea of my current financial situation I am having to pay monthly $435.00 for tuition, $280.00 for house arrest, $25-$50 for drug tests, $50.00 for car insurance even though I don't own a car, $5.00 for student loan repayments, and $50.00 just for basic needs, not to mention school books and clothes. That equals $845.00, but I only make $800 a month at my job! How is one who is poor enough to need federal student aid in the first place supposed to pay college tuition without financial aid or loan assistance?

On Campus Barriers

People who have been formerly incarcerated face many barriers to full participation in university and college life as students and employees.

As we have mentioned, we were part of a team that addressed on-campus barriers to formerly incarcerated students in a White Paper presented to the American Studies Association in November 2018. We are attaching the summary of that White Paper as an appendix to this report as it is not publicly available, as well as recommendations for addressing those barriers that were developed by our colleague, Chris Beasley, the founder of the Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network, that are in turn based on the Campus Pride Index. We will quickly summarize here major concerns.

Some barriers are in place even before classes begin:

- *Requirements to check the box and other biographic mediation processes weaponize stigma upon the formerly incarcerated, the most prominent being university exclusions.*
- *More abstractly, universities are incompletely or poorly accessible to formerly incarcerated people because they lack connections to campus prior to application or enrollment, familiarity and a sense of belonging, friend and community participation in campus life, and access to support and advocacy.*
- *University reputations can repel or intimidate applicants depending on public images of whom the university serves, who is on the faculty, when and how it shows up in the community, and who enrolls on campus.*
- *Universities can lack commitment to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated populations, and pathways to re-enter education can be poorly designated or lacking.*[23]

Once physically on-campus, students encounter a new set of barriers.

- *Very few previously incarcerated students have the opportunity to speak with academic advisors who can orient them to majors and other key milestones to graduation.*

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[23] *ASA White Paper, 6.*

- *Their access to peer mentors is often extremely limited, with most sources of information about the campus, majors, admissions, and enrollment available online.*[24]
- *Once on campus, students often lose credit for courses taken while incarcerated due to inadequate support in navigating the transfer process.*

Both immediate support and longer-term support for re-entering students is as a result often lacking or inadequate.[25]

Mitigating these obstacles is essential for any college or university committed to making their institution more diverse, inclusive, accessible, and equitable. Ending discrimination against formerly incarcerated people can also strengthen the university by increasing campus presence of people from underrepresented groups and admitting highly qualified and motivated students and employees who were previously barred.[26]

The Stakes

LORI: I was talking to a former coworker of mine about different papers I had done [while incarcerated] and she was unaware of my post incarcerated status. But at the same time that I'm having a conversation with her about, these great accomplishments [publications, conferences and presentations in my] college education I've had and the impact I've had on the world. She's talking about when she's trying to hire somebody from her store that she doesn't want to hire somebody from drug court because she doesn't want them stealing from her store.

CHRISTINA: Oh wow.

LORI: It's living this duality of who can I even talk to my tasks about? So it's not so much education, but just, it's funny, in general trying to

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[24] *Malgorzata J. V. Olszewska, "Undergraduate admission application as a campus crime mitigation measure: Disclosure of applicants' disciplinary background information and its relation to campus crime" (Ed.D. dissertation, East Carolina University, 2007.*

[25] *ASA White Paper, 3.*
[26] *ASA White Paper, 2.*

live this duality world and we were going to be staying in a hotel room together for a couple of nights while we were getting trained that I was having, we need to keep this huge part of myself that I had only been home for a year and a half, not even a year and a half. And my past eight and a half years I couldn't mention. So, having that mixed with, you know, emailing my friends who are still incarcerated since I was off parole and was allowed to do that, it was a huge duality.

Who Runs Higher Education Programs in Prison?

This report is about barriers facing incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people who want to access higher education. But we want to address a final problem here that has to do with people who work in prison college programs. With Second Chance Pell and sudden popularity of prison college programs among foundations, lots of jobs are being posted on listservs like that of the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison. Ads commonly state that formerly incarcerated people are encouraged to apply. Which is great! The problem is, they do not really mean it. What most of those ads in our experience really mean is "Hey, if you were in prison for a bit, but not for a very serious crime, and certainly not one that would make us squeamish, then send us your c.v. We'd love to consider you!"

How do we know this? Because one of the people featured in this report twice was offered a position at prominent, well-funded programs, one on the west coast and one in the south. Negotiations were sufficiently far advanced that in one case our friend had already given up housing here in Indiana and rented a place near the new campus. But both times, when senior administrators at those universities found out who had just been offered a job, they reversed the decision. Which says to us that their motivation for running a college prison program has very little to do with the needs and interests of the population they say they want to serve.

Solutions

1. ***Assist departments of correction in a culture and policy change wherein education is viewed as a right and not a privilege.*** *In doing so, every effort should be made to not move students mid-semester or even mid-degree and to assist students*

in completing an active semester of school even in the event they are sent to solitary confinement or have medical crises or any other interruption. Students should also be supported when returning.

2. ***Assist colleges that offer correspondence courses to incarcerated students in the creation of a plan and procedure with the department of correction for proctoring, grading student coursework, and any other special requirements that are required for certifications and degrees.*** *If a student is able to take a course via correspondence, the department of correction should facilitate that process. Again, supporting the idea that education is a right and not a privilege.*
3. ***Assist universities in improving the immediate support formerly-incarcerated students and workers encounter on campus*** *such as, designating a representative to show re-entering students around campus, assisting in person at the registrar, etc.; designating a liaison to help locate housing and employment on or near campus before release; designating an advocate to make sure every course and credit gets transferred and applied; sponsor a recognized, funded student organization for formerly incarcerated people that can welcome, orient, and mentor.*
4. ***Assist universities in connecting students to the Formerly Incarcerated College Graduate Network founded by Chris Beasley and Terrell Blount.*** *The organization offers support and a network to formerly incarcerated students. Also, Chris Beasley adapted the campus pride initiative for creating a supportive campus environment and there are other models, led by formerly incarcerated men and women that support students in college, such as College and Community Fellowship and Unlock Higher Education.*
5. ***Ask universities to consider incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people as a protected group and add them to college diversity statements.***
6. ***Assist universities in crafting a non-discrimination or protected status clause for formerly incarcerated people to weaken the use of background checks, especially in situations where universities have removed "the box" from admissions applications****. The language of "protected statutes" from "discrimination" is already present for many classifications of persons. The language of a typical EEOC policy has phrases like "prohibit discrimination" based on one's "protected status." Incarcerated people are only a protected group with*

regard to research policies established by the US Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR 46). Here and only here do we find strong language that delimits what can happen to incarcerated people, but only within the boundaries of research, specifically university research. These protections for captive people follow a long history of indiscriminate experimentation, medicalization and torture. It is odd then that only in the modern extraction processes of research, a "protected status" of sorts exists for incarcerated people. The process of extraction renders protection, but within a limited scope. Yet, the formerly incarcerated experience arbitrary exclusion in admission processes even when they don't encounter "the box" blanket elimination. A process of inclusion that renders protection from discrimination like any other marginalized and affected group is needed for thousands of formerly incarcerated people.

Post Traumatic Prison Disorder

ANASTAZIA: The traumas associated with incarceration reach far beyond and are somewhat unique to traumas identified in other trauma disorders. At its core lies extreme and prolonged deprivation; chronic dehumanization; myriad forms of violence, often experienced daily; a chronic cycle of grief and loss; among other issues. Formerly incarcerated people experiencing PTPD will face additional problems such as securing housing and employment, maintaining education, sustaining interpersonal relationships, and self-regulation, any of which may additionally trigger addiction problems or other mental illness issues. This disorder is yet to be recognized or treated. Incarcerated people are not given the tools during incarceration to handle the traumas of incarceration itself, nor are they provided treatment post-incarceration for the multitude of problems that will derive from that incarceration.

> **"Every woman in this prison is a damaged woman. Our mission is to provide a safe place for her to heal." - Dana Blank, former superintendent of the Indiana Women's Prison**

The term "Post Traumatic Prison Disorder," or PTPD, was coined by Shawanna Vaugh of Silent Cry Inc. Through it, she helped define the ways this disorder is separate and unique from other trauma disorders and is in need of a separate diagnostic category and separate forms of treatment. Through online surveys that she conducted, she discovered how PTPD negatively affects the majority of people who have experienced the carceral system, particularly people who served lengthy prison sentences. [27]

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[27] shawanna@silentcryinc.org *Ms. Vaughn is an "advocate for social justice, women's health, and children in the foster system." Silent Cry Inc. "is the product of*

We know this to be true because we have lived it and many of us still do.

In this final section of our report to Lumina, we want to address what may be the most powerful but least understood barrier to high education, stability, productivity, and happiness that we and millions of our formerly incarcerated sisters and brothers face: Post-Traumatic Prison Disorder

Lingering Childhood Trauma

Trauma is experienced in a multitude of ways with a variety of short- and long-term effects for the survivor. When trauma (particularly complex traumas) are experienced in childhood, a foundation is laid for future trauma disorders to manifest, some of which mimics childhood trauma disorder.

Myriad forms of childhood trauma can have lifelong effects, often leading into subsequent traumatic experiences. Early traumatic experiences become foundational for subsequent traumas, a baseline precursory to later life bio/psycho/social problems related to incarceration, and the ways childhood traumas are relived/ reexperienced by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, women especially, encapsulating them in cyclic patterns of trauma and its negative backlash on their lives.[28] Elizabeth Boring identifies

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the tears Ms. Vaughn has shed while overcoming the pain and hardships of incarceration and the death of her brother due to gang initiation. Her organization is designed to assist formerly incarcerated people experiencing trauma disorder as a result of being in the carceral system. It provides a voice for these experiences, works to change legislation recognizing the disorder as valid, and provides help for those who suffer from it.

[28] Boring, Elizabeth. "When the Past Resurfaces: The Lingering Effect of Childhood Trauma" Charles Warren Fairbanks Center for Medical Ethics Lecture Series. 5 Feb. 2020. Boring lists types of trauma to include: physical abuse, sexual abuse, medical trauma, intimate partner violence, early childhood trauma (ages 0-6), traumatic grief, refugee trauma, placement in foster care, institutionalization or incarceration, complex trauma (multiple exposure), separation (divorce, deployment), bullying, community violence, disasters, terrorism and violence.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) as being foundational to trauma disorders.[29]

The experience of incarceration itself inflicts a state of infantilism upon its captives. An incarcerated person is bound under the constant authority of people in positions of power, hyper-surveilled, given extremely limited choices in all regards of life, lives in an environment of deprivation on every level, is chronically subjected to relocation, subjected to routine strip searches, must be granted permission for even the most basic human functions such as using the restroom. Much like a helpless child the incarcerated woman remains in a state of dependency. Boring argues that

> *Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.*[30]

The addition of "emotionally harmful" is particularly important in relation to the experiences of incarcerated women in that myriad nuanced forms of harm occur in the carceral setting that are not physical in nature, but rather have a negative, often long-lasting, emotionally devastating effect. The perpetual loss a person experiences while incarcerated (loss of people, places, things, personhood, humanity, etc.) leaves the incarcerated person in a continuous state of traumatic grief.

Short-term effects include:

- learning or behavior problems
- difficulty with self-regulation

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[29] *Adverse Childhood Experiences includes household changes, neglect, and abuse. Incarceration of a family member or loved one falls under the category of household changes, and low socioeconomic status factors into experiences of neglect. A high percentage of incarcerated women have factors of both of these adverse childhood experiences. The third category of abuse is nearly universal, at least for incarcerated women.*

[30] *Boring.*

- physical symptoms
- nightmares
- intense emotions
- depression or anxiety symptoms
- regression
- attachment changes.

These symptoms and behavior patterns re-manifest with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women, and the trauma can have long-term effects on the body, including nervous, endocrine, and immune systems and is associated with if not causative of other adverse physical and psychological problems including lack of activity, smoking, alcoholism, drug use, missed work, sever obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, STI, heart disease, cancer, COPD, stroke and broken bones

ANASTAZIA: Absolutely. I was in a very precarious state of life prior to incarceration. I have a very extensive background of trauma in multiple areas. So coming into prison, I was not in the best shape, mentally, physically, really in any capacity at that point in time. But it was a very, very low point in my life prior to, during the process, and then originally coming into prison. So education for me at that point in time really became the catalyst of transformation for my life.

Post Traumatic Prison Disorder (PTPD)

DIVINE: As we go into these institutions, there are things that took us out to these places, traumas, adverse childhood experiences. And a lot of them are heightened once we are incarcerated. You add solitary confinement without proper treatment after being released from that jail within a jail. There's a lot of baggage that's built up and it eventually it has to manifest somewhere. And that's what happened. I was home for quite some time. I finally got one big break in life, so I thought, and I was like, "hey, I can go celebrate and have a drink," because I stopped working my program. And, I relapsed; I relapsed, and it was a hard-long road back to recovery.

ANASTAZIA: I think relapse is certainly part of addiction in any context, even for people who have not experienced incarceration. But what I hear you saying is there was a lot of untreated trauma, not only from your life prior to incarceration, but certainly, during incarceration

that went untreated, and it sounds to me like possibly that was contributing to it and causing you to have difficulty finding your way back to recovery. So how did you eventually find your way back to recovery?

DIVINE: Through a traumatic experience. Some things had to change in my life, and my current wife literally was like, "Listen, what are we going to do? It's either the alcohol or I'm out the door." And I had to decide. Like I literally had to decide the way I wanted my life to go. I mean, I was at my bottom, and so one-day-at-a time struggling, with my support system, I built myself into what I now have [which] is five-and-a-half years clean.

Divine's story illustrates how trauma of the incarcerated is not limited by gender and emphasizes the need for support across the board with any people transitioning.

Odelya Gertel Kraybill, a trauma therapist, defines developmental traumatic disorder (occurring from childhood trauma) through understanding developmental brain functioning and the subsequent aftermath of trauma occurring at a young age. She explains that

> *Development of the upper parts depends upon prior development of lower parts. In other words, the brain is meant to develop like a ladder, from the bottom up. When stress responses (typically due to consistent neglect or abuse) are repeatedly activated over an extended period in an infant or toddler, sequential development of the brain is disturbed. The ladder develops, but foundational steps are missing and many things that follow are out of kilter.*[31]

She further explains that DT manifests in a variety of ways such as sensory processing disorder, ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder, bi-polar, personality disorders (especially borderline personality

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[31] *Odelya Gertel Kraybill Ph.D.'s article in Psychology Today, "What is Developmental Trauma: a framework for Building secure attunement," Odelya Gertel Kraybill Ph.D.'s article in Psychology Today, "What is Developmental Trauma: a framework for Building secure attunement," https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/expressive-trauma-integration/201808/what-is-developmental-trauma.*

disorder), PTSD, cognitive impairment, speech delay, learning disabilities, and more.[32]

ANASTAZIA: In my own experience and findings working with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women, a substantial number of us fit the bill for DT, experiencing one or more of its sister disorders/ problems, and that many of the subsequent problems related to DT are mimetic of the problems that women with PTPD display whether or not they had a trauma diagnosis prior to incarceration. I find these issues are exacerbated in people who have experienced solitary confinement while incarcerated. [33]

As an intervention for DT, Kraybill draws from the 1992 work of Herman and van der Kolk's approach three phase trauma integration for treatment, stated thusly:

- *Establishing a sense of safety and competence. Engage with survivors in activities that do not trigger trauma responses and that give them a sense pleasure and mastery while facilitating self-regulation.*
- *Dealing with traumatic re-enactment. Survivors may replay their original trauma with other people. This can include perceiving people who try to help them, such as therapists, as perpetrators.*
- *Integration and mastery. Engaging survivors in "neutral, 'fun' tasks and physical games can provide them with knowledge of what it feels like to be relaxed and to feel a sense of physical mastery."*

While treatment methods 1 and 3 are helpful in coping with PTPD, intervention 2 of this model holds the potential to trigger and re-traumatize the survivor and can potentially lead to a setback in recovery.

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[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Keramet Reiter, PhD, JD, Joseph Ventura, PhD, David Lovell, PhD, MSW, Dallas Augustine, MA, Melissa Barragan, MA, Thomas Blair, MD, MS, Kelsie Chesnut, MA, Pasha Dashtgard, MA, EdM, Gabriela Gonzalez, MA, Natalie Pifer, PhD, JD, and Justin Strong, MA. "Psychological Distress in Solitary Confinement: Symptoms, Severity, and Prevalence in the United States, 2017–2018." AJPH OPEN-THEMED RESEARCH. Supplement 1, 2020, Vol 110, No. S1 AJPH.*

To bridge the gap in brain development due to trauma, Kraybill suggests that, "The goal is to bridge gaps in development that have been identified. For example, if assessment indicates gaps related to brainstem and midbrain functioning, therapeutic activities will include expressive arts, yoga, massage, etc. After these functions have improved, activities progress to facilitate further sequential development of the brain."

ANASTAZIA: Talk to me a little bit about, again, any stigmatization you might feel from this and particularly entering into the university again how this reflects your student life. With your new peer group, you still are on house arrest, you have all these other issues in your past, you have all these obstacles and challenges that you're facing daily. What's it emotionally like?

MOLLY: Well, it's very discouraging and disappointing that I cannot participate in any extracurricular activities offered from the college because of my house arrest. I'm a social person and so I really would like to do that. I would like to work with my fellow students on collaborative projects. But I'm, I'm too embarrassed to disclose to them that I am on house arrest. So, it's constantly in my mind, "make sure nobody sees your ankle monitor," "make sure that you don't talk about the fact that you were incarcerated."

Orientation day is a chance to take a tour, get familiar with the campus, get to know some of your fellow students, really get comfortable in your new environment. [IUPUI] is a large campus. It's scary. And instead of staying with my group, learning what I needed to learn about the school, meeting new people--because I am just recently released because I have a criminal background--I had to stop what I was doing and go meet with the Dean of Students so that she could take a look at me.

I had already been accepted. They've already read my criminal background and my story. Why this extra step? I didn't know exactly what she was looking for. And when I got back to my group--which was gone--I was lost. I had to wander around this campus trying to find them. I was alone and terrified. When I got back to the group, they were already halfway done. They'd all gotten to know each other. They were all talking to each other. And it was a great group. No one spoke to me because no one knew me. They had no chance to. And I just, I knew right then at that moment that this was going to be a

different experience for me than it is for the average college student. And that was really heartbreaking, because I'm much more than just my felonies. I'm much more than just what I did before I came here. I want to be different. But if you continuously put these obstacles in my path that remind me that I am--I am different. You constantly remind me that I did this over and over and over again, even though I'm trying to forget that and I'm trying to move on. Why would you put some, put somebody through that? Why would you do that? And it's been a painful experience.

ANASTAZIA: So, on one hand the university kind of acts as a continuing--as Michelle Jones would call it--a carceral agent to determine whether you have access or not to opportunity and to advance your education. Beyond that though, Molly, can you talk just a little bit more about how education was transformational for you?

MOLLY: Oh, yes. It was completely transformational. Education has changed my life. The work that I do. Not only did it give me confidence in myself and boost my esteem, which is something that lacks severely, especially in women who are incarcerated due to childhood trauma. Yeah, it gave me the tools to build myself up to believe in myself. And then once I started doing that and using those things, I found meaning in my work, especially as a historian--like what we focus on is speaking for women who have been subjugated or incarcerated in the past and don't have that voice. And so, all of my work is towards doing something positive for not just others in my, but myself and others. It's very powerful. And then also some of my work includes trying to break down some of the struggles and the barriers that you experience after you're released.

And so that's very meaningful and just gives me a purpose and it keeps me on track, and it keeps me away from negative influences. It keeps me away from negative places and it puts me in a circle with all positive people who are goal oriented. And that made a huge, I mean, I cannot stress this enough. It made all the difference and it's no wonder that people go right back to prison. I have a huge support system now in the circle of people that I'm in now that I would not have had otherwise. And a lot of people don't have access to it is absolutely no wonder they go right back.

Finally, Kraybill recommends practicing attunement and Expressive Trauma Integration (ETI) Secure Attunement. She defines attunement

as "a process of giving complete, non-judgmental, responsive attention to another person through eye contact, and other more or less nonverbal forms of attention and response."[34] In acknowledging the need for peer support coping with PTPD, we propose the practice of attunement in face to face support group settings amongst survivors as a way to nurture the traumatized who has been infantilized through the carceral experience and therefore mentally regressed and damaged.

As with any trauma disorder, DT, and PTPD treatment requires a complex response with multi-varied approaches to individualized holistic healing and will likely be a lifelong process.

Anastazia recalled the tumultuous days prior to her release. A federal judge had vacated her conviction, she had applied to graduate school, but had no idea when the county judge would release her or whether, indeed, he would grant the prosecutor's demand for a new trial.

ANASTAZIA: Okay, so it wouldn't be my life if there weren't 20 things happening simultaneously in the same time frame that the application for IUPUI is floating out in space. And you know, the fate of my future is hanging in the balance. The fate of my life is hanging in the balance with the court system. We finally are getting another court date. We're finally moving forth. We know absolutely that I was going to end up being an immediate release. We just were not exactly sure when that day was going to be, but we knew it was coming and we knew it was coming quickly. We knew that prison didn't necessarily know that, nor did they necessarily believe that. So nothing was done inside the prison to prepare me for my eminent release that was getting ready to happen. And right about the time that I'm finding out, yep, you've been accepted to grad school at IUPUI, I am in negotiation with my attorney, with the court system, on what we're going to do for my release. And so the wheels of justice move anything but fast. This whole process ends up dragging all the way on to the exact day that classes begin for me at IUPUI. So clerical error in court, which—that's a story in and of itself—theoretically, I should have been released on Monday the 26th and at least have had 24 hours before class started.

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[34] *Kraybill*

That didn't happen. By the time the paperwork went through, the error was fixed and amended and everything was said and done. I was released from custody at, oh, I don't know, approximately 2:15 PM on August 27th, a Tuesday afternoon. And theoretically that first class was starting at 1:30. Now, there was no way, clearly I'd already missed the first class, but I had two classes scheduled for that Monday. My second class was beginning at 6:00 PM. This is my class with Dr. Nelson. Thank God that's the way that worked out. So I left the jail at 2:15 after six days of incarceration in county jail. And if anybody knows what that looks like, that means no shower and hygiene and pretty much a horrific state of affairs, physically, mentally, emotionally. I was put into a car with a retired FBI agent and driven off grounds to the … house I'd be staying in, had a quick 45 minute to an hour crash course of welcome inside. There's a shower, jump in, you got 10 minutes, your ride's on the way to school, and less than four hours later, I was on the IUPUI campus walking into my first graduate plus.

KRISTINA: Wow. Wow. A lot of changes within that 24 hours.

ANASTAZIA: After 18 and a half years of incarceration.

KRISTINA: Wow. Wow. That is quite an adjustment. and now we're, how far in are we now? We're almost toward the end of your first semester here at IUPUI. Do you even, with all those challenges with that first day of classes and how stressful that might have been, could you imagine what life would be like if you hadn't come out and been able to go right into education, which kind of had been a safe place for you?

ANASTAZIA: I've spent the last seven years solid of my life researching and doing graduate level work and everything about my life has been molded around education in the work that I'm doing. So if they would've let me out that door and said, "Okay, well, no school, nothing you're doing, have a good life, carry on." I mean, I don't even know what I would be doing with myself right now. This was imperative to give me a decent transition into life. I mean, realistically, it's the only thing that I've had that has provided any semblance of stability.

I've had a lot more assistance than what the average person coming out would have cause I've got this impeccable network that I've been

dealing with for years now. So if it hadn't been for those people, this would have been disastrous, for real. On the other hand, when you get out and it's "start your life right this minute," that does not leave a whole lot of free time to try to figure these things out. So it's been trial and error, learning as I go, making a lot of mistakes along the way. And life has certainly happened in the midst of this. Unfortunately, I have had a lot of really crazy unforeseen circumstances in my personal life that I've had to overcome and navigate through. And that's been a mess. I mean I tell people all the time now, the irony is anything that in my mind I would have pictured to be a problem or a barrier or an obstacle or a challenge I was going to have coming back out into the free world, none of those things have been the issue. It has been all these unforeseen things that I never would have thought about. The only thing I can say that I would have anticipated being a problem and was a problem, like I said, was learning this new technology and what a gross disservice we are doing, keeping people inside ignorant to what you must know to navigate every day. Normal life. This is not just about grad school. This is everyday life. Now, if you don't have that knowledge, you're handicapping somebody almost to the point of incapacitation. And I'm going to go out on a limb and say it is incapacitation for most people. They cannot function not knowing how these things work and how the world works now. So, this is something that we need to keep in mind above and beyond just barriers to higher education, just education and knowledge in general. You cannot keep people isolated from the world then throw them back in the world and expect them to function normally and adequately when you have handicapped them completely to how the outside world actually works.

Anastazia highlighted how PTPD affects the re-entry process, noting how incapacitation is a significant part of how PTPD operates. The admissions process often exacerbates PTPD. Recall Molly's story of the humiliation she experienced in her admission to IUPUI.

ANASTAZIA: So clearly there were the financial obstacles that you've had to overcome, but I also heard you say the obstacle of trying to overcome the stigma of incarceration being a formerly incarcerated person applying to university on the outside. What I heard you saying was that there was an entire separate process in admission application where you had to devolve some pretty serious information about you and your life. And can you talk a little bit more about what that

process is like for the person how you felt through that, if that creates an additional challenge to trying to continue your education.

MOLLY: Absolutely. So, first of all, I spent five years putting my past behind me and the trauma, and the emotional turmoil, and I was forced to relive all of it by writing all that. And that was very difficult for me and very emotional for me. But I did it and I wanted to use my emotion to convey to them how changed I was now. So, the fact that we have to relive that, the fact that we have to--I found it humiliating. I found it humiliating to expose my deepest, darkest secrets, things that I would love to bury in my past, to a bunch of strangers who I knew only wanted that information so that they could judge me based on what I had done—and what I had done in no way, shape or form reflected me as a person. It reflected me as a drug addict. I'm not the same person sober as I am on drugs, nothing even close to the same person. And so, I hated to introduce them to that person because that's not who's coming to this college whatsoever. That person is long gone and will not return. But that is something that they want to know, and they want to know because they say it's for the safety of the campus. They want to know not just about incarceration, but any kind of impressions that you've ever had. Mine was personally incarceration.

So, I did do that, and I felt like I was begging, and I felt like I was groveling, and it was very degrading. So once I did that and I actually was admitted, which I believe is partially due to how many letters of recommendations I have, what my CV looked like from the work that I had done while I was in prison, I was admitted and it took months. It took months and I could've spent those months, those summer months, getting familiar with the school, the campus, meeting other students finding activities that I might want to participate in. But I was not able to do that because I was waiting on them to confirm whether I was good enough to be in the school because clearly my academics were good enough, just maybe not my personality.

With the number of women incarcerated every year rapidly increasing and their prevalence of trauma disorders (and other subsequent problems) far exceeding their male counterparts and the general population, incarcerated women experience re-victimization/re-traumatization, as well as new forms of trauma through the carceral experience which leads to subsequent PTPD. Although we can draw

upon the work of other professionals on various forms of trauma disorders and their proposed treatments, PTPD (though not yet widely recognized) is a separate, unique problem experienced by people within the carceral system. It is a valid disorder affecting countless formerly incarcerated women and is in need of intervention and complex holistic healing treatments. On the frontline of this disorder's recognition and potential treatment are those with direct, firsthand experience of incarceration, and those of us who now struggle with its debilitating aftereffects: formerly incarcerated women.

Solutions

1. *Considering the high percentage of incarcerated women who have experienced childhood trauma and other subsequent traumas and are then subjected to the innately traumatic prison environment,* ***trauma informed care within the carceral setting could provide a crucial step to healing and recovery, and perhaps lessen the possibility of PTPD post incarceration.***
2. ***Wrap-around services are a necessity, yet they are often non-existent or grossly deficient in providing the needs formerly incarcerated people have.*** *Basic needs—housing, food, transportation, employment or financial stability—are imperative, yet so are medical treatment and mental health care.*
3. ***Systemic bridge provisions must be made to assist and provide in these multiple areas of need.*** *Bridge support networks that work with individuals during incarceration and also transition with those individuals as they re-enter society assuring support in securing basic needs, housing, employment and continued education are foundational for successful re-entry as well as a catalysis for continued higher education for formerly incarcerated people. These support networks are perhaps most important assisting people overcoming the barrier carceral stigma creates effectively locking formerly incarcerated people out of opportunities and basic sustenance.*
4. ***Hire faculty and staff with justice-involved backgrounds; seek to appoint people impacted by justice system in leadership roles.***
5. ***Support social justice and diversity centers to include formerly incarcerated in their mission statements;*** *include—boast, even—of the number of formerly incarcerated individuals*

they serve along with the statistics of other "disadvantaged" populations.

6. ***Publicize the commitment to creating an accessible campus, prior to and not focused on individuals re-entering, but as a commitment to a climate and culture.***
7. ***Create PR and public messaging about university's commitment to ending the school-to-prison pipeline and creating a direct reverse pipeline from the most impacted communities to campus, and the university's commitment to embrace justice-involved people at all levels.***
8. *Include the currently incarcerated in the commitment to social* ***justice by holding college classes in prisons or holding seminars or lecture series to provide educational experiences for the incarcerated.***
9. ***Overcome funding shortfalls with pointed campaigns and grant applications to fund college programs in prison.***
10. ***Incorporate a wage incentive into college-in-prison programs to supplement salaries for officers who supervise educational programming to ensure prison staff support educational programming;*** *designate educational program coordinators whose job it is to facilitate this programming; include corrections officers and other staff in events and parties; and offer classes to correctional officers as well (separate from incarcerated students).*
11. ***Designate clear pathways for the formerly incarcerated to enter campus as workers and students; enhance access to those clearly designated pathways; hire re-entry navigators and train all pathways staff and faculty in relevant work****. Partner with other pipeline and pathways institutions; connect to broader re-entry support for housing, employment and health; create peer mentorship programs. Have re-entering students design the pathways, with all information in one place, sequenced steps, and clear, individualized support.*
12. ***Challenge the dominant narrative.*** *Support scholarship and study that asks research questions that have the potential to challenge dominant narratives. Collect, share, and discuss alternative narratives. Have libraries stock and showcase books written by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated scholars. Provide university platforms for alternate narratives to*

be shared through classroom panels, invited talks, conferences, and more. Publicize the preference for people-first language.[35]

13. ***Encourage educational programming and teach-ins on mass incarceration both on campus and in secondary schools.*** *Hold a prison-issues week to showcase famous incarcerated scholars, authors, artists, etc. Host exhibits and events such as "States of Incarceration"*[36] *or "Mass Story Lab."*[37] *Encourage universities to participate in Inside-Out or other programs in which non-incarcerated students interact with people in prison. Treat justice-involved backgrounds matter-of-factly in the classroom.*
14. ***Publicly acknowledge the importance of having formerly incarcerated people on campus as students and employees.*** *Cultivate critical mass through pointed programs of support. Organize groups and promote spaces for formerly incarcerated faculty and staff. Provide settings in which formerly incarcerated students can gather and share stories internally, enhance a positive sense of self, and narrate experiences with a broader public. Address role model pressure by supporting formerly incarcerated people who are publicly visible, offering decreased course load or course releases, supplemental financial resources, flex time work schedules, relief from service work, etc. Recognize long-term issues faced by formerly incarcerated people such as PTSD, PTPD, delayed health complaints, social network stress, etc., so as to destigmatize them and facilitate their resolution. Allow students to disclose their backgrounds as they choose; assist and facilitate classroom discussion when necessary.*

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[35] *"Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language." The Center for Nu Leadership for Urban Solutions.* https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58eb0522e6f2e1dfce591dee/t/596e13f48419c2e5a0e95d30/1500386295291/CNUS-language-letter-2016.pdf

[36] *"States of Incarceration: A National Dialogue of Local Histories."* https://statesofincarceration.org/

[37] http://www.massstorylab.com/

Conclusion

At the time of this report, we are all challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic and how this crisis affects incarcerated students. As one can imagine, the pandemic has created an additional barrier to higher education. In-person course instruction is suspended in nearly all prisons. Some college programs maintained their commitment to students by preparing correspondence coursework and working with facilities to get reading materials and instructions into students. Other programs have closed until further notice, which unfortunately results in delaying incarcerated student's degree completion opportunities and time cuts. Likewise, formerly incarcerated students, are also challenged to remain enrolled and complete coursework online. The full impact of COVID-19 upon incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students is yet to be measured.

In spite of the barriers identified in this report: Defaults, Credit Transfers, Admissions, Institutional Barriers, PTPD and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is our assessment that incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students will continue to seek out educational opportunities because of what access to a higher education offers them. Therefore, we need now more than ever to eliminate higher educational barriers and support those programs that are providing quality education to incarcerated people. We need to continue support for the full restoration of Pell Grants to incarcerated people. Such support is bi-partisan and organizations like Unlock Higher Education are working to pass this legislation. In addition, while working to eliminate the ban on Pell grants, we need to create a cultural and policy shift wherein universities cease to bar access to a higher education to incarcerated and formerly people.

ANASTAZIA: It creates a different culture, a different environment within what most of the time is very oppositional-type of living circumstance. The culture of education in the prison and being in that setting, you were surrounded by other people who were working towards the common goal, who were trying to best use the time that they had. There's that age-old adage, "Do the time, don't let the time do you." And, I mean, education is paramount in that, if you are going to do the time, this is the way to do the time. Time almost seems not to really exist while you're in the heart of education and you're working on something, so much of your energy and your mental focus

and your entire life day-to-day is structured around your classes in the work you have to do in studying for exams and preparing papers and presentations. You don't have time to be a part of all the rest of the nonsense. So yeah, there's absolutely a culture involved in it, too. And I would not have wanted to be a part of any other culture other than that.

I'm happy to say that I think Dr Kaufman's little experiment absolutely proved to be correct. I mean, she proved that women would do education solely for the purpose of education. I mean, none of us anticipated any of this amazing stuff happening later and yet we did it anyway. And, you know, part of the point we're trying to make now is that if you give people the opportunity, nine out of ten times, they will take it, they'll take it for the sake of knowledge alone. Now, that's not to say that we should let that be the only thing people can gain from this. But the point being is that people want knowledge for the sake of knowledge. They want a better life for themselves. They want to be productive; they want to make use of time. They want to do things constructively. They want to expand their minds and their own lives. And you have to give people an opportunity in order to be able to do that.

Opportunity is life. Opportunity is life for an incarcerated man or woman who, when locked behind bars, run the risks of atrophy of the mind and numbing of the spirit by the monotony and routinization of daily condemnation, the constant change of staff and rules, the mediocrity of the collective prison consciousness and the normalization of violence. As the number of universities and prisons open to allow incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students access to opportunity, the question is can we translate their interest into a proactive mindset that focuses on eliminating the barriers to students before the first class is taught. For those programs currently in existence, the question is how do we support them in meeting or exceeding quality standards of higher education programming in prisons, wherein one metric of quality is the number of barriers students must traverse in order to achieve degree completion.

Appendix A: Interview Transcripts

Beginning May 15, 2020, Kite Line Radio is broadcasting weekly podcasts by Kristina Byers, Anastazia Schmid, and Christina Kovats. The broadcasts will continue throughout the summer. This appendix contains lightly edited transcripts of the following interviews:

Kristina Byers (by Anastazia Schmid)

Michelle Daniel (by Anastazia Schmid)

Jennifer Fleming (by Anastazia Schmid)

Leslie Hauk (by Christina Kovats)

Divine Lipscomb (by Anastazia Schmid)

Nicole McCown (by Christina Kovats)

Erica Oliver (by Christina Kovats)

Lori Record (by Christina Kovats)

Anastazia Schmid (by Kristina Byers)

Molly Whitted (by Anastazia Schmid)

INTERVIEW WITH KRISTINA BYERS BY ANASTAZIA SCHMID

On the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis
January 2, 2020

Anastazia Schmid (00:19):
We're recording from the IUPUI recording sound lab. Today is Thursday, January 2nd, 2020 at 4:08 PM hello. This is Anastazia. Today we're talking to Kristina Byers. Kristina is a diversion specialist at PACE Indy, a reentry organization for people with felony convictions. She's also a founding member and former director of operations for constructing our future. She's a former community Fellow for Indiana legislation policy reform and a fellow cofounder and co-captain for the Code of America Indianapolis. Hi Kristina. Welcome. How are you today?

Kristina Byers (01:02):
Hi, I'm doing well. Thank you Ana. Good to see you.

Anastazia (01:05):
Great. You as well. So I understand, Kristina, that you had a little bit of college experience prior to going to prison. So I want to talk today to you about your history and chronology of higher education, before, during, and after incarceration. So give us a little background on what college experience looked like for you prior to incarceration?

Kristina (01:35):
Prior to incarceration, I would say had a fairly typical college experience. I knew I wanted to go to college. I didn't know what I wanted to major in, but I knew I wanted to go to school, a four year degree school, and I wanted to leave home so I wanted to live on campus. So I applied to a few schools and chose a pretty small, liberal arts college in northern Indiana called Bethel college. And I spent four years there, over a five year span. So I went for two years, went home for a year because I was out of money, saved up some money, went back for two more years.

Anastazia (02:13):
Okay, wonderful. So while you were at Bethel for about four years, did you end up earning your degree during that time frame?

Kristina (02:19):
Unfortunately, no, though later you'll hear it actually turned out to be a positive thing that I didn't get my degree at that time. But no, I switched my major several times and I was really going through a self-discovery phase. And then I ended up starting a family and going to work full time. Life happened. So I didn't end up finishing. No.

Anastazia (02:43):
All right, well obviously, we wouldn't be talking here today if we didn't end up with a little bit of some problems and issues in life, which did eventually land you in prison for awhile. And so, you arrived in the prison, was that around 2010, 2011?

Kristina (03:05):
Yes, I arrived in 2010.

Anastazia (03:07):
And so what did higher education look like in prison at that time? Was it even something you were considering going in or how did you make the determination after incarceration to decide to go back to college and get an education?

Kristina (03:23):
Sure, sure. Once I got to prison, of course, immediately I launched into what am I going to do to fill my time? And what are some ways that I can not only be productive in the use of my time here, but how can I get home sooner to my family? So I considered all of the different programs that the institution offered at that time--college was still an option. There was state funding, which I'm told that was rare across the country to have a state that offered funding for college for incarcerated students, but it was offered in Indiana. So I started working as a clerk for the college. That was one of my first jobs, which was great. And I assumed that I would enroll the next semester, once I had time to get my transcripts and all of that sent into the school. However, we found out a few months into that that college would be canceled indefinitely and that would no longer be a viable option for anyone to continue on in that capacity.

Anastazia (04:33):
Wow, that's kind of devastating. So, the prison was no longer offering an option for higher education. There was no money for higher education, but you did indeed find a way to continue your education. So can you please share with us a little bit about what that process look like and any of the issues or problems you encountered in doing so?

Kristina (04:55):
Sure. One of the options was to continue or start your higher education through correspondence study. So that meant you would still go through the application process to Oakland City University. They are the ones that had the contract with the Department of Correction in Indiana. So you could go through them and get your degree via correspondence. Now that meant that you still had to pay for your classes, which was whatever their tuition was for regular students. So it was, and forgive me, I don't know the exact amount. I don't remember, but it was probably over $400 a class, which is typical. And in order to get a bachelor's degree from that institution, you needed to complete at least your last 30 credit hours with that university.

Anastazia (05:50):
Wow. So for someone who already had four years worth of education, I mean you must have been awfully close to completing a degree before you even started this correspondence. So if you had to have 30 hours, it sounds to me like you were going to have to repeat some of those credits.

Kristina (06:08):
Yes, I did end up having to do some classes that if I had gone back to my original college, I wouldn't have had to most likely. But, I was willing to do whatever it took to finally get my degree. Something I [had] been wanting to do for a long time. I talked to my family and friends. At that point, I'd gone through most of my savings that I had lived off of for my first few years of incarceration. So at that point, it was just a matter of friends coming together. Many of my college friends actually that I went to Bethel with, came together and one-by-one took on a class. I didn't have the money all up front, and they also

had set it up so I could only take a certain number of classes at a time--that was DOC policy.

Anastazia (07:04):
Talk to us a little bit more about that. So it wasn't just the college that was expecting you to do a chunk of that degree while incarcerated and with that particular school, what other kinds of restrictions or stipulations did DOC place on this correspondence education for you?

Kristina (07:27):
So they had it set up so that even if you had the money to pay for the classes and you were ready to take on a full set of classes and be full time, you weren't able to, you could only start with two classes your first semester and then eventually go to four classes for your following semester.

Anastazia (07:46):
So they were capping you at four classes and that was after the initial semester of two classes, which means, well 30 hours or so is going to stretch out quite a bit if you're capped off at six the first semester and a maximum of 12 from there on out.

Kristina (08:03):
Yes. And again, it would be two the first semester and then you had to go in the terms that they had set up. So you could go spring semester. If you started in fall, you could do two classes in the spring, you could do four and then the following fall you could do four. So they did that intentionally. They wanted to stretch that out. They didn't want anyone going in and completing. Even if they were able to do all the classes they didn't want you to complete.

Anastazia (08:26):
And why is that?

Kristina (08:28):
I don't know the specifics, but back I believe it was in 2014 they changed Indiana Code. They changed the way that earned time credit was calculated. What happened was there was a man that had completed his degree during incarceration and I guess had a rapid finish. And he was released without serving much of his sentence and the family of his victim were outraged. I guess he was convicted of a

sex offense. The victim's family were outraged; they went to the legislature and there were changes that were made. So that impacted everyone going forward on when and how they could get their classes done.

Anastazia (09:16):
Right. So, for anyone listening who might not be aware, Indiana is indeed one of the only States that allows an earned good time credit off a person's prison sentence for completion of college education and degrees. So how much time is a four year degree worth as far as earned good time credit is concerned?

Kristina (09:39):
Well, now it's calculated based on the percentage of your courses that you completed during your incarceration. So even if you got a four-year degree, the maximum earned time credit would be two years for a four year degree and one year for a two year degree. However, that's if you completed all of that degree while you're incarcerated. So the new Indiana Code says, Hey, if you do 30% of your degree while you're incarcerated, you're only going to get 30% of that two year or one year time credit.

Anastazia (10:20):
So would that have been the stipulation during the time you completed your degree?

Kristina (10:25):
Yes.

Anastazia (10:27):
Okay. So, it seems to me though that all of these stipulations in the new policy [were] not the only difficulties or obstacles that you faced trying to do correspondence work, and be a full time student while incarcerated. What other type of barriers and problems did you encounter attempting to take on this self study full time while still living inside the prison?

Kristina (10:55):
Well, aside from, obviously the financial burden and not knowing when that money was going to come in or if friends would be able to afford it. And, there was the whole issue of communication with the admins;

you couldn't even make a phone call to the registrar. That was impossible. So there was localized staff, but it was difficult to get to them without having a classification to the education building where those people worked. In prison, you have to have a full time job. So in addition to my studies, I had to work full time or be in another full time program. There were times where I was either working at a full time job, which made it difficult to even be able to get to the computer lab if that was even available. If I was working all day, there were other times where I was in programming...

Anastazia (11:54):
Because I imagine those are limited time slots, yes?

Kristina (11:54):
Absolutely. Yeah. And it, it really was dependent on whether or not staff was willing to even let you use that. I mean, that was a privilege. We had a computer lab and it had limited usage and so it really just depended on what was happening in the lab if it was being used, and what my schedule was. It was really at the discretion of the staff member. And then there were other times where I was in other programming like cosmetology school, so I was doing college, cosmetology school during some of the time I was actually doing my degree work. So just fitting all of that in was difficult.

Anastazia (12:36):
Well, that's pretty impressive. Full time cosmetology, full time college student, jumping through all these hurdles, having to find outside support systems that were paying what upward of $4,000, maybe by the time this was all said and done?...

Kristina (12:51):
Yes. Yes. And yes.

Anastazia (12:53):
... difficulty getting to the lab. So what else? Was there anything else that stood in the way being in this environment?

Kristina (13:04):
I would say probably the biggest barrier was research. It was difficult to get hold of research when I didn't have internet access. We had very limited resources in our library. And, and even at that, it's not like

I could go make photocopies of information and then getting time to actually go to the library. There were limited movements to the actual library, so it was really dependent on the facility schedule. And then getting research would be dependent on staff coming in. There was education staff that was able to do some things, but that was also contingent on the volunteer based college program that was started there. So that was based on volunteer professors coming in and then being willing to do research for me even though I really wasn't a student of their program. I had my own program. So just a lot of variables, a lot of pleading and begging.

Anastazia (14:08):
And then I understand that you encountered some personal issues while inside that also created kind of an obstacle and a block to you finishing your education in the amount of time that you had planned to do so. Can you talk a little bit about what that looked like?

Kristina (14:26):
Sure. There was an incident. I was in cosmetology school and I don't remember how close I was to the state boards to taking my boards. But, I was in that program and I was also doing college and I was written up on what we call a CAB. It was a conduct report and a friend of mine was leaving. We'd been friends for about five years and she was leaving that facility to go to another one before she would then later be released. And so we were sharing a talk. We were just talking about life and sharing stories and just spending time together before she was going to leave the next morning. And I gave her a hug and I happened to be in her room. And so I was breaking the rules in which I admit I was in her room, which was against the law. When you're in prison, you're not supposed to be in another person's room. And I was sitting on her bed, just like in normal life, what two friends would do and share a hug. I'm in tears, actually many tears. And Sargent happened to walk in and she wrote us up and three days later I had a hearing and I was taken from that hearing in handcuffs. I was taken to lock or segregation. And, so in that moment, anytime you're taken to segregation, you lose any kind of program that you're in. because of that write up. And of course I was unable to then be connected to be able to do correspondence study because in order to do that you have to be able to have access to staff who can actually fax your coursework to a professor at the university to actually grade. So

there's no way of doing that. They consider all of those things privileges and you lose all of that when you go to lock.

Anastazia (16:18):
Wow. So let me get this straight for what sounds to me like completely normal everyday human behavior, hugging a friend goodbye. You not only went to solitary confinement, but you had lost your ability to continue your education for. ... Sounds to me like a substantial amount of time. How long did you have to wait before becoming re-enrolled in your classes? To complete?

Kristina (16:45):
Well, to get back, gosh, to get back into any program, you had to wait six months past the date of when you were found guilty. So that's even just to get considered for reentry into your program. Qnd then I had to base my re-entry you could say back into college based on the semester courses. Again, they had those restrictions in place so people couldn't finish too quickly. So I had to end up waiting for the next semester. I may have even lost a class because I wasn't able to complete it, so it delayed things a little bit.

Anastazia (17:31):
Wow. So talking to you previously too, I understand that there were some other things going on in your life that caused you to sort of delay your decision to go back into school at that time too, somewhere around 2015 were dealing with some legal proceedings. And what did that look like as far as your education and how did that factor into the grand scheme of you getting this degree?

Kristina (17:58):
Well, I would say initially I knew I wanted to go back to school. When I got to Indiana Women's Prison, I knew that, however, a few years in, a couple of years in my sentence was actually modified. So I received a sentence reduction. At that time I didn't know that I would have enough time to even complete my degree and if I maybe I could do other programming, since I had a shorter amount of time, I was actually in 2014 released early because of my sentence modification. Unfortunately, about two weeks in I received a phone call from my probation officer that said I had to go back, that they had miscalculated my sentence reduction and that I needed to serve five more years.

Anastazia (18:52):
Oh my God. What a devastation.

Kristina (18:54):
Yeah.

Anastazia (18:54):
They released you from prison early [then] tell you there's been a clerical error and you'll be returned for five more years.

Kristina (19:03):
So I had served four years. and yes, I was to return for five more.

Anastazia (19:10):
Okay. So now that you know, you're going back for five more years, a possibility of an early release from prison at that point in time is now going to be contingent upon the completion of this degree. So what happened next for you to finish this degree?

Kristina (19:31):
So that's when I decided, well, I'm definitely going to have to do this. But I don't know how. My family does not have that kind of money. And they had been supporting me already. And they were also taking care of my son, so I really couldn't ask that of them. I was very fortunate to have the support of friends and family to come see me throughout my incarceration. So I was just talking with a friend about what I would like to do, but I didn't know how I was going to do it. And they sent me some mail, probably less than a week later. They said, "Hey, we've all talked and we're going to make this happen. We're going to figure it out. We're all going to come together. We don't know how many classes we can buy for you, but we're going to at least start you out with what you said. You can start out, which is two. So how soon can you get started and let's figure out how to, how to get those paid for." So that was a huge, a huge boost and a blessing that not a lot of people probably can count on. So yeah, I was definitely blessed.

Anastazia (20:44):
Right. That's awesome. However, that is not the end of the story. Somewhere in this timeframe you were transferred to another facility

and this was after you restarted the degree, correct? Then what happened?

Kristina (21:00):
So, I was actually almost finished. It had been a very busy semester. I was getting close to the end, in the midst of working on final papers, and I was transferred to another facility to go to work release. So if this in itself had happened, yes, this would be great. Go to work release before I'm actually released. It would be a great transition. However, of course, my immediate thought and panic was how am I going to finish school? And I don't know the new facility. And so much of what you do is dependent on your connection to staff and how you can move about the facility because it is a controlled environment. You can't just go to the computer lab if you want to. You can't just go talk to a professor or talk to the administration to fax over your work if you want to. So how am I going to navigate this new system when I get there?

Anastazia (21:57):
And how did you navigate the new system? So now you're at a minimum-security prison, which actually is considered a work camp. School is not even really conducive in this facility. What did this look like? How did you manage to work your way back into education to complete this degree under those circumstances?

Kristina (22:19):
Of course, I started inside freaking out, like, how am I going to do this? But thankfully, one of the first people I was able to come into contact with, one of the other people that were living there, an incarcerated person that I had known at the Indiana Women's Prison, she had already been transferred. she was one of the people that came and talked to us during orientation at the new facility. And, immediately, I talked to her about what my concerns were and how was I going to do this because typically you're going to be classified to a job that would take you outside the facility where you would work all day, like in the city, you were at a park, or where have you. So my concern was how am I going to get my coursework done and who am I going to talk to about faxing this work and how do I find out where my grades are for my other work that had already been submitted and all of that. So, cause you really, it's, you don't think of how much contact

you lose from the institution that you're getting your degree from. I mean, I had no way to talk to them. It's not like they take collect calls at the university. So it's really dependent on the facility, the prison staff. So she was able to get me connected to the deputy warden who, thankfully was willing to, he knew I already had some education and I was willing to teach and help out others. So eventually after I finished my orientation period where you have to work-- there were 30 days where there was no way I could do anything. I had to stay all day on the dorm, clean the dorm. That was our job classification. So I had to do that. I wasn't getting out of that. So after that I was able to get a job as a GED tutor. So I would tutor students in the morning and I would go use the library to finish my papers in the afternoon and I was able to get connected to staff there to fax my papers and things. So it worked out in the end.

Anastazia (24:22):
Okay. So there was still an issue. After your last assignment is finally turned in and you think at long last you're finally going to get this degree. What issues. Did you have?

Kristina (24:40):
Yes. In addition to that, I just thought of something else. I remember I was having this feeling of it was so stressful. After I'd started being a GED tutor, I was able to get what you call re-classed to work release, which was great, but that meant I was starting a new job, still working on finishing up my degree. That was in November. So like I'm toward the end of the semester, I'm trying to start my new job, which means I'm going out and I got a job at a salon. I was a hairstylist for the first time in the free world, which was jarring itself. I hadn't been doing hair that long. Never really thought I was ever going to use my cosmetology license to do hair. I was doing all of that learning all day long, interacting with the public, which I hadn't done for so many years because I had been incarcerated and I was going in and out of the facility and spending lots of hours at work and then coming back and hoping the library would still be open at night so I could go and type on the computer to finish my papers. So I remember that was a pretty stressful, busy time. But once I got to the end of the semester, I was definitely joyful that it was all done. And then I find out that, oh, we misinterpreted your transcripts and we find we're going to need you to do one more class. So, that was somewhat devastating.

Anastazia (26:12):
Well, yeah. Cause if I understand correctly, your release from prison at this point in time was contingent upon you finishing this degree.

Kristina (26:20):
Yeah. So I had hoped that I'd be home for the holidays, but apparently that wasn't the plan. So I ended up having to do another class and then still once I had everything submitted, the university, for whatever reason, wasn't returning my grades and my degree. And then once it was ready, the communication between them and central office to calculate my earned time credit like that wasn't happening. And of course I don't have direct access to these people to speed up the process. So I'm reliant on going to another staff member and having them follow up. Eventually the deputy warden had to get involved and I believe he ended up calling the university and also calling the [DOC] central office. And, once things did go through--actually my mom ended up calling, too; I may have actually snuck in some calls to from work. I think I actually bugged him from work, too. So finally in the end, once we found out things would be processed, I had about a week to prepare for my release.

Anastazia (27:24):
Oh wow. So no reentry for you.

Kristina (27:28):
Right, right. I did end up going through some information that they give you at, at the facility, some generic information. So I did have that and I was working, which was good. But yeah, as far as living arrangements, all that had to happen on the fly.

Anastazia (27:49):
Well, okay. So finally though, at long last you earned your bachelor's degree. Congratulations. That's amazing.

Kristina (27:58):
Thank You. Thank You.

Anastazia (27:58):
And at long last you were finally released from prison and now here you are at home thriving and doing wonderful. And do you have any

future considerations for pursuing graduate study or more education now that you're out in the free world?

Kristina (28:14):
I do actually. So during my incarceration, amidst the other programs I was able to be a part of, I was honored to work with Dr. Kelsey Kauffman. She was a mentor, a friend, a hero in my eyes, for all of us.

Anastazia (28:34):
Super woman.

Kristina (28:36):
Yes. Super woman. I worked for Constructing Our Future. We were able to actually found that reentry program while our whole team was incarcerated at the time. And in doing that, we were able to work on public policy. We were able to testify before the Indiana legislature. So it really re-sparked my interest in the law. As a young girl, I was interested in becoming a lawyer, but that dream kind of died, along with reality happening. So, I've recently, because of my experience of working at the legislature and being able to be involved in the law and that scale, I'm really interested in law school. And so I'm hoping to start--well I'm not hoping, I'm going to say I'm going to start--studying for the LSAT.

Anastazia (29:32):
Great. Is there anything that could possibly prevent you from pursuing this dream?

Kristina (29:38):
Absolutely, of course. The reality is what we've just been talking about is I have a criminal conviction, a felony. And so even though I look forward to being admitted into law school one day, and even once I graduate, I still may never be able to practice law if I'm not allowed to sit for the bar. The bar association will make that determination. So there's a big "if." I'm still going to pursue it, but I may in the end not be allowed to take the bar, so I wouldn't be able to practice. But, I do look forward to law school and,

Anastazia (30:16):
Well beyond that. And, of course, we're going to wish you well and

we're going to claim that that will come through for you. But, you know, throughout the course of this discussion today, you have told us about some of the financial burdens and barriers that you've had. What might that look like for you now for a graduate school or law school? Would there be any kind of financial restriction or issue you would have to overcome?

Kristina (30:40):
Absolutely. So since I did study prior to incarceration, I incurred a lot of student debt that of course during eight years of incarceration I was unable to earn any money. Definitely not money enough to pay back my student loans. So I am currently in default. I am working now, so I'll be able to start a repayment plan. However, that default will probably be a huge barrier. And then, of course, paying for law school will be another one.

Kristina (31:11):
Well, you know, Kristina, we are going to champion behind you that now that you are indeed in front of the Indiana legislators so often and doing such a stellar job in policy reform, that you can certainly bring up these issues we're having with student loan defaults and other continuing barriers to higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. It has been a pleasure to talk to you. Congratulations on all your accomplishments and our prayers are out for you for that future in law school. Thank you so much.

Kristina (31:42):
Thank you.

INTERVIEW WITH MICHELLE DANIEL (JONES)
BY ANASTAZIA SCHMID

INDIANAPOLIS, IN
SEPTEMBER 2019

Anastazia Schmid: (00:00)
Today is September 24 2019 at 9:09 a.m. and we're speaking with Michelle Jones in her home. Michelle, we're talking today about the difficulties you've had overcoming the barriers to trying to apply to grad school while incarcerated. Can you share with us your experience on that please?

Michelle Daniel (Jones): (00:25)
Sure. My experiences while incarcerated trying to apply for grad school were pretty difficult. First of all, I needed outside people to do research on the schools. In terms of what programs, what requirements, what eligibility. Then I needed to know what were the barriers for applying with a criminal conviction. And then there were the issues with actually filling out the application itself. Like all of those applications were online.

Anastazia: (01:00)
And you don't have access to that while incarcerated, do you?

Michelle: (01:12)
Absolutely not. No internet access. So I literally could not have applied to grad school, which you do it the year before. So if you're planning your reentry and going to school as a part of that, you have to think a year in advance, which means you're doing it while incarcerated, overwhelmingly.

Anastazia: (01:24)
So how was it that you were even able to research schools?

Michelle: (01:27)
Right. So I actually asked my faculty to help me and that was a job of one person and then another person had the job of figuring out how to do these applications. Because here's the issue. When you create an online account at a university to apply, you are agreeing when you

click and you accept the conditions that you are applying for this job, applying for this opportunity? Well, people had to be me, create an email account and be me illegally in order for me to apply for apply for colleges. So in order to make sure that we all didn't go down in a blaze of glory, one of the things in which we did do, we contacted each university to find, to then disclose my status and then say, "Hey, we're trying to apply. She gets out in a year. How can you help us do this?" And we actually had to find human beings who are at the universities who were willing to put in our application, put in my application for me, and we got the applications by someone literally taking screenshots of the screen and then filling them out and then we sent them to this person. But even then I had to sign a little notification of consent that this human being at this university is approved and has the right to input my information.

Anastazia: (03:14)
Did you hit any resistance from the universities themselves not wanting to give you even access to the application because you were an incarcerated person?

Michelle: (03:23)
Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. Some universities would send the application and then once we sent in the filled out application, they simply didn't put them online. And so part of the experiment for us was to see who would give me the opportunity period. And so I applied to more schools than the average student would. I applied to nine schools, nine schools. Well in order to find out who would let me get to the point of access. These are the opportunities.

Anastazia: (03:56)
About how many out of those nine schools actually took your application to the online point?

Michelle: (04:11)
I would say so. I'm going to correct myself. I applied to more than nine schools because there were a few that didn't even put my applications on file. Okay. So you know, University of [Maryland] and Yale, no consideration at all. But there were nine that got in that [we] actually went through the process.

Anastazia: (04:46)
Well it's sort of promising cause it sounds like more lets you through that first barrier than not. Would that be a correct assessment?

Michelle: (04:54)
Yeah. But then the next processes of discrimination or exclusion kick in. Okay. So after you're on the list then, and you submitted this paperwork, which honestly was a challenge in and of itself because you are trying to write a personal statement and a career statement from the position of being incarcerated at the time and moving through your past and all of that in your crime and conviction, and all of that to disclose enough about yourself so that they understand who you are in order to recognize what you would do with this opportunity. And so you have to do that. And also this career statement, which is forward looking when you haven't really seen much of the world, if you've been incarcerated for a significant amount of time. So it's a weird juxtaposition of like trying to talk about who you are now, but don't lock it down to the person you are now just because you happen to be incarcerated and then be forward looking enough that they could see that you and your scholarship have some place to go. Cause it was an interesting process. So I had all these schools and it literally took a faculty member--Dr. Kaufman and myself--three weeks, every day just trying to get through the application process from this one, from that one, from this one, from that one because they all had different requirements. Some people wanted, even after you had disclosed that you're formerly incarcerated, they wanted additional information, some schools asked for a narration of your actual crime of conviction. And so we had to figure out how to tell that narrative and then input it into the system. A lot of back and forth. Each career statement had to engage the scholars at that school. So a lot of researching of not just what you want to do but who's at that school that you're interested in working with and it simply could not have been done without a mediator, without someone in between because I simply didn't have access to the information. And the application process is arduous for anybody, but particularly for people who are lacking access to the internet, resources for those of people who don't have their CV's typed, or they don't have access to computers or printers, and then it would seem almost impossible.

Anastazia: (07:39)

So it's almost a requirement of a full time position for that mediator, for the outside person to stand in between and make sure you not only have access to what you need but potentially access to even the baseline of a computer to type all this information out.

Michelle: (07:57)
Absolutely, absolutely. And then all the follow-up, because there was a lot of phone call conversations that the mediator, Dr. Kauffman, had to have with the universities to get these extra permissions for another person to input our applications and then follow up when maybe there was something else that was needed or they couldn't fill out, the person inputting couldn't check a box appropriately. It required a lot of work. I don't think a lot of universities are aware of how in getting rid of the paper applications, they create barriers for students. And let's not even begin to talk about application fees.

Anastazia: (08:40)
Oh yeah, please.

Michelle: (08:41)
Honestly, if it hadn't been for the mediator constantly reporting the fact that I made 20 cents an hour and asking and begging for a waiver for the application fees, I would not have been able to apply to nine schools. That simply would have been financially impossible. But because it wasn't me begging and asking for an application fee waiver, I think it worked a little bit in my favor because they always have this kind of connotation that incarcerated people are looking out to manipulate to get over to pull [wool?] over one's eye. Right? But if you had a mediator speaking on your behalf, this person is vouching for you and able to make an argument for you. And it actually helped so that I didn't have to pay all those schools one application fee, but it would require also to talk to Dr Kauffman about all the barriers that are behind that, behind the scenes that I, myself never saw because she was doing the on-on-the ground mediation.

Anastazia: (09:50)
So our mediator then is important, not solely for access to resources you don't have otherwise, but really as a character credibility reference as well.

Michelle: (10:01)
Absolutely, they are vouching for you. You know, she's Dr. Kelsey Kauffman, graduate of Harvard and Yale, making these overtures to people that she's met at conferences and other events. Right? As opposed to me the criminalized being in prison, writing them cold saying, "Hey, I would like this opportunity. Here's a little bit about me. Whoa, here's some things on paper that are handwritten, and I would like for you to give me an opportunity."

Anastazia: (10:34)
So really without the inclusionary status of the third party, this would be an impossibility.

Michelle: (10:41)
It would be a great impossibility. And that's what we need universities to think about. Right. because they are limiting access to people who are thirsting and reaching for these opportunities. I always say that if someone's willing to go through the work of an associate's degree, the work of getting a bachelor's degree and then maybe an advanced degree beyond that and then have the balls to say, "I want to go after a doctorate program", if that alone doesn't show that they have the follow through, right? For anybody, for anyone, right? Then what would, right? And so when you ascribe criminality on top of that, you're saying that I haven't demonstrated enough for this opportunity. I have demonstrated enough of this opportunity. [So when universities use these] other levels of discrimination that go beyond just the barriers of applying, when they add those on, they are saying that we do not care about the effort that you put in to get these advanced degrees. They don't weigh the same. They don't mean the same yet they would for anybody else. Right? So I applied to these schools and you cross your fingers and you pray and you wait and three months later you get some letters back. Well, I get a letter back from University of California. They're like, "Yay, we like everything about you. We want to give you this package and this fellowship, this or that amount of years for this amount and let us know by this date if you want it." So it's like, "wow, okay, great. We have one university that's really into us and into me and ready to go." And then another comes and then another comes and another. And then suddenly you're bowled over by the fact that you've got opportunity. Okay. So you weigh, you suddenly--I have options I didn't think I'd have. So now

I'm weighing options. But in the middle of that, suddenly the first university that was like, "man, we're down. We want you, we want this opportunity with you. We want to work with you." They come back and say, "We need to do a background check." You do?

Anastazia: (13:11)
Which almost seems ludicrous because obviously there was a middle party that had to do all this for you. So they clearly knew right from jump street that you were incarcerated.

Michelle: (13:25)
Well, the University of Kansas, I had met the professor of the department that I was going into via video conferencing from the Indiana Women's Prison at the American Historical Association conference. So he's looking at me inside the facility. There is no greater disclosure than giving a paper from prison. Right? So he knew; the department knew. And so I apply and my disclosure statement states it and they come back with this perfunctory, this request for a background check. And then he sent me an official form asking me to sign off to give permission for it. And the professor's great heart, wonderful person, he says "You know, I think this is just a routine. No worries." Well the department does a pause after this, not the department, the GSAS {Graduate School of Arts and Sciences} the department that runs this particular department does a pause and says, "Oh, we don't want this particular person with this criminal background history to be in here. So why don't we throw them, this is a new black box process, black box process." Because if a screening application doesn't have "check the box" that you're formerly incarcerated, this is another one way in which to discriminate. Particularly once you self disclose. So they come back, we need to do a background check and it's just very routine and they do the background check and they come back with a very official letter that says, "we are sorry that we even offered you what an opportunity because of your criminal history background, we will not be offering you, we're retracting our offer."

Anastazia: (15:29)
So this is something that really could have happened right from the very beginning. Rather than put a human being through the long arduous process, especially entailing a third party to go through all

these steps to get through the application and the disclosure, the personal statement, the career statement fees that somebody might've paid only to decline you on something that they knew right from the start.

Michelle: (15:58)
Absolutely. Absolutely. That they were going to discriminate against. Right.

Anastazia: (16:04)
So how many schools did that end up happening with? Was it just University of Kansas or was it separate?

Michelle: (16:11)
University of Michigan did the same thing. They were prepping to do the same thing. Let me be clear. So they gave me this wonderful package, beautiful, many, many thousands of dollars. I think it was worth over $105,000, and they were very, very excited to bring me on board and all of that. And they suddenly out of nowhere asked for a routine background check and out of nowhere after I'd had this offer for many months. Okay. So instead of going through what I sense was going to happen again with Kansas, that what had happened, Kansas, I went ahead and I wrote them and said, "thank you for your offer, but I'm going to withdraw my application at this time." I pulled out because I knew that this was another black box process. Right? And so what was left out of the other universities that didn't? Out of the five was left with three others. Right? But I would be remiss if I didn't say that there was the other, the two schools at Harvard that were interested in having me had sent their letters to their GSAS and said, "Send her an offer. We want her." Right? Well, the GSAS and their lawyers did did some investigation because I, again, self-disclosed and everything that they wanted to know gave them that information and they decided that they would not send an offer that both departments requested. It was History and American Studies. So technically there's seven schools that were interested in me, right? But, but discrimination and exclusionary practices happen at two schools at Harvard, then Cultural Studies at Michigan, then American studies at Kansas. So you got these four. And so I'm left with three other schools who I think on the strength of the administrators of the department, they were able to buck the GSAS above them. They had a standing as

scholars to fight against that and maybe that would have been true at Harvard, but I don't know. I don't know because both of those scholars are huge [in their own right]. They're leaders over those individual departments.

Anastazia: (19:00)
I mean, I think the irony I hear, too, are the particular schools that you're applying to on the surface level, just on the titles of those departments. And what those departments supposedly stand for. Those should have been the very places to accept you with open arms.

Michelle: (19:18)
Absolutely. Absolutely. And so ultimately I was down to University of California-Riverside, Berkeley [in the African American] department, and NYU. And I will say this about NYU, they didn't allow those black box processes to proceed in my situation. I had an amazing DGS who fought for me the whole time and made sure I had a package comparable to the other students and made sure I had guaranteed housing. I mean, they went to the next level.

Anastazia: (20:02)
And so is that what ended up being your final deciding factor on the choice of school? You would finally accept?

Michelle: (20:08)
Yeah, the school that not only had my back because U. C. Berkeley and U. C. Riverside have really great, amazing people there. But in the end, their departments didn't have safe housing to offer. You know what I'm saying? Because that was, that was critical for me. I'm coming from Indiana, I don't know New York at all. I needed to feel safe and that sounds contrary to what the so-called criminal is. The criminal is supposed to be whatever and whatever environment, but me, I needed to feel safe.

Anastazia: (20:45)
Yep. Please talk for one moment. The vulnerabilities of the incarcerated now reentering the world and your safety and security concerns.

Michelle: (20:56)

Absolutely. I mean, number one, we were required to have a roommate and for graduate housing everybody does. And we learn who the roommates are a few months in advance. So I'm still incarcerated. When I learned who my roommate is and I thought, why don't I reach out to do my department and say, "Hey, can you connect me to the roommate so that [we] can begin to foster a relationship or connection with this person prior to my release, prior to coming there so that they kind of know a little bit about me and I a little bit about them. So again, so that I feel safe walking into this new environment and I alleviate any concerns that someone might have about staying in the house with someone who has a criminal conviction. So I proceed to do this and I reach out. The woman is immediately offended and frightened or whatever, and she gets a hold of the provost and demands that I not be allowed to live with her. I don't know what particular language was used, but it was very disparaging from what I hear, from what I gather. So the response instead of criminalizing me and putting me in a bad situation, the university's response was to give me my own apartment for a year.

Anastazia: (22:44)
Well, good for you.

Michelle: (22:45)
Well, but I'm saying that's the kind of consciousness that I, what I appreciated about the university because they could have, I don't know what they could have done, but they could not, they didn't necessarily have to have that response. They could have forced us, they could have swapped at me and put me with some other person who with the rumor mill, would not have been okay. I would have been trying to reenter also in an already chaotic housing situation. So that was rare. And then again, at the end of the day I was worried about feeling safe in the place where I laid my head. And that's why the other universities were less the choice because housing was precarious and not guaranteed and not understood and not, and in one situation not affordable. So it's like how does someone get ready to live new life if they're not safe in a place where they lay their heads? It was a critical thing for me, which made NYU--above and beyond who the faculty were--the choice because I had to be safe. And I will say this, and while you also put me in contact with fifth year, six year, third year graduate students in my department and they were emailing

me back and forth talking to me about the place where I was going to live, talking to me about the school, the department, the faculty. They were, there was a team of people who were helping me feel safe about this choice. And I'll never forget that cause that was, that was key. It was key.

Anastazia: (24:30)
Well I think it's important, too, and this is part of what I'm gleaning, listening to you talk and that I think people need to understand is, a choice in grad school for anybody but particularly a person in your circumstances, that there really is a need to look at this as a reciprocal exchange. not just solely, well because you're in the situation, you are, you should be forced to just take whatever's going to be thrown at you. That there are things that you yourself need to take into consideration before making the choice.

Michelle: (25:05)
Absolutely. But a lot of people don't consider that, "take this corner--take this crust of bread, take this little piece". And you go off into the sunset and exist. Someone who is willing to acknowledge your personhood, that you have concerns, that you have values, that you have limits that you are a person as opposed to a "thingified" criminal, makes all the difference in the world about someone's success or failure coming home period. Makes all the difference in the world.

Anastazia: (25:38)
And kudos to NYU for being those people.

Michelle: (25:41)
Yeah. Yeah. It's been a good. It's been a good relationship, has been a good opportunity and it hasn't been without challenges. Absolutely not. Nothing, nothing. Nothing comes--I would say challenges are inherent in trying to do a doctoral program. I think you asked for a life of a bit of challenge. But the people have been great and I think that makes the difference. I think we can go through hell with the right people. Amen.

Anastazia: (26:19)
Amen. Thank you.

Michelle: (26:20)
Thank you.

INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER FLEMING
BY ANASTAZIA SCHMID

Indianapolis, IN
April 23, 2020

[This transcript starts at 2:20 when interview actually begins.)]

Anastazia Schmid: (02:20)
Today is April 23rd, 2020 we are doing a remote interview. This is Anastazia Schmid reporting on barriers to higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. Today we're talking to Jennifer Fleming who is a business analyst working under contract with the Department of Health. Hi Jennifer. How are you today?

Jennifer Fleming: (02:49)
Hi, I'm doing great. How are you?

Anastazia: (02:52)
Well pretty good all things considering right now. So today we're going to talk to you about your experience with higher education before, during, and after incarceration. So can you give me a brief history of what your educational endeavors look like before?

Jennifer: (03:14)
So, before prison, I dropped out of high school. I actually received my GED in the course of a previous incarceration and then, many years after that incarceration, I decided as an adult in my thirties, that I wanted to get a college education because I wanted to be able to do better for my children than I was doing. And so I started taking classes at Indiana Purdue University in Fort Wayne. And when I got arrested, I was in my fourth year of college working on a degree in health and human sciences. I was arrested in November and so I didn't receive any of the credits from that semester and it put me in a really awful place when it came to my student loans because I was already like $47,000 in debt for student loans. And somehow with the timeframe that I got arrested, it left me not only owing for the student loan for that, that timeframe, but also owing the college because a portion of my grant money wasn't given to the college. So I still owed for grant

money and I still owed the college, for that semester.

Anastazia: (04:36)
Oh, well I can see where that would be problematic. Not only at that time, but later on in your life. So prior to incarceration, did you acquire any credits towards that degree? Not counting the semester you were arrested?

Jennifer: (04:54)
I did. I was actually in my senior year. And so I was very close to receiving a bachelor's degree. However I was going through a four year program and so there was no degree in between. And so when I was arrested though, I was close to a degree. I never actually earned a degree.

Anastazia: (05:16)
So you roughly had how many semesters in not counting the one that was incomplete?

Jennifer: (05:25)
Let's see...

Anastazia: (05:27)
Would it have been six or seven?

Jennifer: (05:34)
Most definitely, yes. I actually probably had more than that. Let's see, two, four, six. I probably had about eight semesters in because I took summer semesters also.

Anastazia: (05:46)
Wow. Okay. So let's fast forward a little bit in time. So you were maybe just a semester, no more than two semester shy of earning your bachelor's degree when you got arrested and incarcerated. So after you began your prison time, at what point were you able to start taking college classes again? So just kind of give us a little bit of a synopsis of what it looked like once you got inside, and what your pursuit to complete your education looked like from the inside.

Jennifer: (06:24)

Okay. So when I first got to prison, I had heard that there was college at the prison, but it wasn't really something that was advertised. And so the assignment sheets had went out when I first got there, but I didn't know what they were. So I missed the opportunity to sign up as soon as I got there. And by the time that I realized...

Anastazia: (06:46)
Which institution were you in? Which prison?

Jennifer: (06:53)
So at the time that I was in Indiana Women's Prison and the college that happened to be present or allowing classes at the time was Martin university. So Martin University was allowing people to take classes for credit and the teachers were coming in and volunteering their time. Somebody else was supplying resources and basically the college was just allowing us to earn credits for the classes that volunteers were coming in and facilitating.

Anastazia: (07:29)
Okay. And what year was that?

Jennifer: (07:34)
It was 2013.

Anastazia: (07:37)
Okay. So you were earning credit for the classes, but you were not working for, towards a degree at this time.

Jennifer: (07:47)
Okay. In 2013 I missed the deadline. So I didn't even take classes. I had to wait until I couldn't take classes in the fall. I had to wait until the spring session came around to be able to take classes because I didn't know about the signup process when I first got there. So it was in 2014 when I started taking classes at the college. And I was told when I signed up for classes that I was working towards a degree, but that you gotta earn credits to or work towards a degree. And so what they told me is that they would look into transferring some of my credits, but even if they transferred my credits, they would only be able to transfer half of the credits that I would need for a degree because I would be required to earn half of my credits through their

institution in order to go to get it are in, receive a degree from them.

Anastazia: (08:43)
Wow. So you probably lost 30 to 40 or more credit hours from your previous institution.

Jennifer: (08:55)
Yes. So it knocked me back down to the halfway point. But the way that I viewed it at the time was I really wanted to get my degree. When I was being sentenced, the prosecuting attorney, thought that it was funny and amusing that I had a ton of student loan debt that I would probably never be able to pay off because I was going to prison. And so that sat wrong with me. And I was determined that if at all possible I was going to leave prison with a degree because I want to be able to pay my student loan debt. And I also knew too that based off of the way that the situation happened that I would no longer be able to get Pell grants or would be in a status that would keep me from being able to take out any further loans. And so if I was going to get a degree, it was only going to be by the grace of God. It's the way I viewed it at the time. Right.

Anastazia: (09:57)
Okay. So obviously you have the grace of God on our side in this, but also who was paying for the schooling inside the prison at the time? To my understanding, the Pell grants were no longer available. So how was Martin University and your college credits working towards a degree being funded at that time?

Jennifer: (10:22)
So basically, I believe that there were volunteers. The volunteers were teaching the classes for free and then there were donations that were paying for the books and paper and supplies like that. And I believe that Ms. Kelsey Kauffman basically just reached out and did a fundraising event with some of the people that she knew and they donated money and that's how the books were paid for. And then Martin University was just...acknowledging the credits. They weren't spending any money. They were just being willing to be an accrediting institution.

Anastazia: (11:16)

Okay. And so did you end up finishing your degree with Martin or did you have to take further steps in order to finish that degree?

Jennifer: (11:27)
No, unfortunately Martin university, three semesters into my experience with them, was put on academic probation and because they were put on academic probation, they were no longer allowed to have off site campuses. And so they had to withdraw from having accrediting classes at the prison. And so we were without a college at all for a semester, too. But they [teachers] were still coming in and we were taking classes not for credit, just in order to be able to still be learning, and in order to have the skill set that would be needed if college were ever to come back in. Well, eventually,

Anastazia: (12:21)
Did college ever return?

Jennifer: (12:26)
Yeah, it did. So Kelsey Kauffman was able to get Holy Cross, an institution which was a sister school to Notre Dame. She was able to get them to come into the prison also. And at this time there was a pilot program for Pell grants. And so Holy Cross had applied to be a part of the pilot program in order to have some funding for the college students. However, in the first year that they were there, Holy Cross was basically footing the bill. They had an outreach program and they thought that it fit into their mission as a part of their outreach program. Then they were hiring professors to come in, and they were paying for books and supplies. And while they were doing that, they were applying to be a part of the pilot program. They actually were approved for the pilot program. Our Institution, IWP, and one of the men's prisons were approved to have the pilot program for Pell Grants. However, that didn't work out the way that people thought that it was going to because many of the individuals that were in the college program were actually not eligible to get the Pell grants based off of how the Second Chance Grant Program was set up. And because of the way that it was set up, it still wasn't allowing the college to get funding. And then that particular institution, two years after having been there went into a financial crisis and because of their financial crisis they pulled out of the institution once again. And I need to mention that when they came into the institution, they too also

knocked me back down to the halfway point. They wanted a half of my credits to be earned through their institution in order for them to grant me a degree. So they knocked me right back down to the halfway point when it came to my credits once again. So, I did earn an associate's degree...

Anastazia: (14:41)
Yeah, that was my next question. Were you able to earn any degrees at all at this point in time? You've now had schooling on the outside, at IUPU Fort Wayne, and now you've gone to Martin and you're now in Holy Cross. So were any degrees earned with the totality of credits earned from those three institutions?

Jennifer: (15:06)
So I was able to, in the two years that Holy Cross was an institution, combining their credits with a portion of my other credits, I was able to earn an associate's degree. Unfortunately, with the way that they pulled out of the prison and the utter chaos that pursued [ensued] from that, I had to petition them and had to go through a process that lasted a year. So it took me a year to get them to grant the degree that I had earned at the time of their leaving.

Anastazia: (15:48)
Wow. So, okay. Just for the sake of our listening audience here, an associate's degree in real time in normal circumstances, would take a human being no longer than two years to earn at this point in time, starting from the time you began school in the outside world to the time that degree was finally granted. How many years are we talking about Jennifer?

Jennifer: (16:18)
Oh, about six years.

Anastazia: (16:20)
Wow. Six years.

Jennifer: (16:23)
Total, with the outside and the inside. Yes.

Anastazia: (16:25)

That's pretty amazing and tenacious of you to continue that drive despite all those obstacles. So we know you did indeed, finally receive your associate's degree. Were you ever able to attain that bachelor's degree and what did that look like?

Jennifer: (16:44)
Okay, so that looked like Bard's prison initiative, which was started in New York. They were aware of our prison and of our college program. They were aware when Holy Cross pulled out. I had actually been a part of the meeting when Jessica Neptune had come in and at that meeting I was pretty exasperated and very emotional about the fact that when Holy Cross pulled out, I had one semester left and I would've gotten my bachelor's degree. So I would have earned my associates degree and then one semester later I would have earned my bachelor's degree. So like I was, my world was devastated when they pulled out, number one because the associate's degree was a year off my sentence. Number two, the bachelor's degree would have been two years off my sentence and that would have meant going home to my family no later than 2019 and also I really want my degree, like take away the time cuts, don't even look at those. Just look at the fact that I am very passionate about education and I wanted to be able to show my children that when you work hard for something and you put your mind to it, you can earn it, you can do it. So I was devastated and Jessica Neptune was there and she heard my devastation and she worked very hard to raise the money, get the funding and find a university to come in and begin a program. They wanted to take longer to bring the program in than what they actually did. And I know that part of her drive was just the pure devastation that she saw the day they broke it to me that I would not be able to earn my degree. So they brought in Marian university.

Anastazia: (18:38)
Right. So this woman was through the Bard prison initiative project, correct?

Anastazia: (18:45)
Yes, she was. She is. Yes. So they brought in Marion University. And she personally took my credits, to the pro bars office and sat down with the Dean and the pro bar and they went over my credits and my transcripts from all three of the other institutions. And they figured out

a plan that would make their college happy and feel okay about giving me a degree because originally they wanted to knock me back down to the halfway point.

Anastazia: (19:30)
Oh my goodness.

Jennifer: (19:31)
At this point, my devastation is so complete that I'm like, are you kidding me? And so, they sat down and had a meeting and had a conversation. They did not knock me back down to the halfway point, but I did have to complete a full year at their college. So they came in in January. I went to spring classes, summer classes and fall classes. And in the fall of 2019 in December of 2019 I finally earned my bachelor's degree.

Anastazia: (20:04)
Well, congratulations. Now were they remote classes through correspondence or did you have a live interactive classes or were you doing classes via Skype?

Jennifer: (20:18)
My classes were mostly, live interactive classes. They would have college professors come into the prison and they would teach just like they would teach at any other college institution. The only difference is we had to work around some of the technological stuff because obviously you're not going to have access to the same inside of the prison as you would in a university's classroom. And so we had to learn the old-fashioned way, but yes, teachers came in and they taught. Okay. So there were some classes that I took that we did some Skype.

Anastazia: (21:04)
Okay, great. So other than the fact that there were clearly barriers in technology to your education on the inside, were there any other barriers you faced, taking college classes in a prison setting versus in the outside world? What other challenges did you face?

Jennifer: (21:27)
So aside from the technology challenge, when you don't have the

technology, doing your own research can become very difficult. So you have to find alternative ways to research. You have to know what sources you want so you can tell somebody what to go get for you. And so that, that can be very challenging to figure out how to research without having the access to the actual research. And getting access to that research. And then when you have a group projects and you're in a facility where movement is controlled and very limited, being able to get together and to have a space and a time to be able to do those group projects can be very challenging. And I'll be honest with you Anastazia, I also had the challenge of, one of the dorms that I lived on, there was the only place that I could really work on my homework was in my room. I was on the top bunk. And so I would sit on my floor to work on my homework and one of the guards that was our main guard did not like me to sit on the floor and work on my homework. So she would come by on a regular basis and give me a hard time about sitting on the floor doing my homework, about my papers or my research being setting out around me because she would want me to pick it up. So just being able to work in a way that is conducive to my work style sometimes could be a challenge.

Anastazia: (23:02)
Well, yeah, especially in the light of harassment about where you're studying and how you're studying, I can imagine that would be difficult. So you finally earn both the associate's and the bachelor's degree. What did that mean for you? Other than obviously the amazing achievement of finally accomplishing both degrees after so much time in hardship, what else did those two degrees bring for you in your life?

Jennifer: (23:34)
So they definitely brought that sense of accomplishment and they validated the time that I was away from everybody I love just a little bit it at least gave it some sort of positive meaning. And also, I did get some time cuts. For my associates, I ended up getting a year time cut. And for my bachelor's degree I ended up getting around six months worth of a time cut. So I earned my degree in December of 2019 and I was released on January 21st of 2021. Without my bachelor's degree I wouldn't have gotten out until August of 2021.

Anastazia: (24:23)

I'm sorry, you were released in January of 2020?

Jennifer: (24:30)
Yeah, it's 2020, my bad.

Anastazia: (24:32)
That's okay. I was like, wow. Wait a minute. I didn't think I was talking to you from inside the prison. Okay. So you're fairly newly released, Jennifer. With these two great degrees and accomplishments under you. Give us a brief overview of what life looks like for you now on the outside. Is there any further education in your future. Or what do these degrees do for you now that you're in the outside world?

Jennifer: (25:07)
So, while I was in, I also got some tech training and so an interesting thing that has happened for me is first off, when I first got out based off of my degrees, and my tech training, I received a phone call or a text message from the Department of Correction asking me to come in for an interview because they had my resume sitting in front of them and felt like I was qualified for a position they had open. So two weeks after incarceration, I actually began working for the Indiana state Department of Correction in their central office. So that was an interesting thing that came from my educational experiences on the inside. And then when I started working, I was working in their IT department. I was working on their databases and their different computer systems that are state operated systems. And so now I worked for the Indiana Department of Health and this is a really super thing. Cool thing because my degree...I double majored. My degree is in liberal arts, but I double majored in behavioral science and humanities and I minored in communications. And then you know, I have some tech training that doesn't have anything to do with my college education. It's through another program I went through. But in my mind I was trying to figure out how I was going to make all these different educational endeavors that I've experienced become a job, or how do you link these two things? And I'm discovering this project that I'm working on with the Department of Health is allowing me to use those behavioral science skills. Do you use those humanities? Do you use that communication? And then also bring in the technological training that I have and they're really meshing very well together and allowing me to use all of the educational skills that I received while I

was on the inside, to live a pretty decent life on the outside.

Anastazia: (27:20)
That's great. I just wanted to make mention of one...

Jennifer: (27:22)
And yes, I do plan on going on.

Anastazia: (27:26)
Okay. Well I think you're going to be able to go on because I wanted to mention one other very impressive thing. Tell us about what your GPA looked like upon graduation.

Jennifer: (27:39)
I had a 4.0 GPA, I think they call that Cum Laude or something.

Anastazia: (27:47)
Summa Cum Laude, honey.

Jennifer: (27:48)
I don't know, but yeah, it's something like that. I graduated from Marian university with a 4.0 GPA. So yeah, that, that was super awesome. And, now I do intend on going on and getting my masters. I'm struggling right now in trying to decide exactly what I want to do. There's like three different things that I toss around. Recently, this new thing has entered into my mind. And so I'm trying to figure out exactly which educational path that I want to take, but I do plan on starting to take classes for my master's this fall.

Anastazia: (28:31)
And what do you think you're going to do that in and where?

Jennifer: (28:38)
So I am thinking, I was thinking about, Purdue or IUPUI. So there was a part of me that thought, I want to go on to law school, I want to do some activist work. And then there's another part of me that, I really enjoy teaching and literature. But right now because of this new job that I'm doing, and how it's incorporating like a bunch of the things that I'm interested in, I'm considering doing, something in, informatics. I think that's how I pronounce it...which is like, something

that is in the healthcare field and combines healthcare and technology. And so the enmeshment of that is very intriguing to me. So, I don't know, that's quite across the board in many different directions.

Anastazia: (29:40)
Do you think you'll face any obstacles that will prevent you from going on to get that masters once you finally do decide what it is you'd like to do and where you'd like to go?

Jennifer: (29:55)
So funding is always a question--student loan debt already being what it is and having been in prison, they don't exactly like to defer because you're incarcerated and so there's some hoops I would have to jump through in order to get funding. So probably I will just have to pay for it out of pocket. So funding could possibly be a hurdle and...the school has a choice whether or not to accept me to their program also. I would assume that a school would accept me, but in the same aspect, I am a convicted felon and so maybe they won't accept me.

Anastazia: (30:43)
Well...from one person that comes from a similar background to another, and who is right at the tail end now of completing a graduate degree in the free world, there are people out there willing to give you a chance, so don't give up on your dreams. Jennifer, I want to thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today and share your experiences with us.

Jennifer: (31:13)
Yeah, thank you.

Anastazia: (31:15)
All right. Have a good day, Jennifer. It was great talking to you.

Jennifer: (31:19)
Bye, Anastasia.

INTERVIEW WITH LESLIE HAUK
BY CHRISTINA KOVATS

Recorded via phone at DePauw University
Greencastle, IN
March 21, 2020

Christina Kovats (00:02):
Hello, this is Christina and today I am interviewing Leslie who is going to discuss with us her experience with education during incarceration and after her incarceration. And Leslie, thank you for joining us. We really appreciate this. Give us a brief idea of what your education looked like prior to your incarceration.

Leslie Hauk (00:31):
I attended high school until the middle of my senior semester at which time I chose to leave and work and be out on my own. And then I returned and got my GED and that was the extent of my education. I did actually enroll in Ivy tech, but I didn't complete the radiology [course]. I had transportation problems because I got a DWI and so I didn't complete that.

Christina (00:57):
Okay. So when you started with your radiology at Ivy Tech, how long do you think that you were in school before you stopped?

Leslie (01:07):
Oh, I'd say I probably was in there half a semester, so something like eight weeks.

Christina (01:13):
Okay. And did you apply for any financial aid when you went?

Leslie (01:20):
Yeah, I went with financial aid and then I had to get an additional a couple of $300 books that was provided for me that I ended up having to pay back many years later after I got out before I could go back to school.

Christina (01:40):
you said you had to apply for more financial aid, so did you receive a grant and then you needed to apply for a loan

Leslie (01:54):
Yeah, I got federal funding to attend the radiology, and then I had a small little book fee that apparently was not included. They found money for me, which at the time I didn't realize that I had to pay that back. That was the only portion I had to pay back.

Christina (02:14):
How long was it from that time till your incarceration? So the time that you stopped your radiology courses at Ivy Tech until you were incarcerated? Was it a very short time or was it a few years or?

Leslie (02:34):
Well, I had actually tried before that to apply to the military, but my DWI made me an ineligible candidate. And then my radiology [course] I think was in 1992 or 93 and then I was incarcerated in 95.

Christina (02:54):
So you entered into the prison with your GED, some college, the time you had done at Ivy Tech. So what did you do education-wise while you ere incarcerated--including not just college but also vocational courses?

Leslie (03:22):
Well, I, it was three years before [I] actually reached the prison. Everybody had encouraged me all along the way to pursue college. They said that was an option and that when I would get to IWP that would be my first priority. And I got there in late '97, so in '98, I applied for FASFA in March and I was able to start classes that fall. And in the meantime as far as other educational things I didn't really pursue too many formal or vocational or specific educational things, just programming until it was time for me to start school.

Christina (04:11)
You said that you had applied for FASFA. Can you talk a little bit about that? FASFA while you were incarcerated.—How did you go about that process? What did you receive?

Leslie (04:34):
And just like anyone, we were registered for FAFSA in March and we had to list all of the information and they checked it just as if we were not incarcerated. And I think there were restrictions even at that time-

-this would be in '98--for people with certain types of cases. I was not restricted in my case. And so what it was is you get enough money for like eight semesters or the equivalent of four years of college. But you would have to take six courses each semester, or some people maybe more, in order to get your associates and your bachelor's degree in that timeframe and that amount of semesters.

Christina (05:28):
So I think that you touched on two very interesting points for me. One, six courses, that's a lot to take on and in just a semester. But also you said that when applying for FASFA some people were not able to get that because of their crime?

Leslie (05:52):
Yeah. And I cannot remember for a fact because each year we registered and I remember specifically that certain people had resentments towards other people because, for instance, if you had a violent case such as murder, you were not restricted, but if you had a drug felony, you had certain restrictions. Of course there were those people that had outstanding debts for school or different things of this nature that were also restricted.

Christina (06:20):
Wow. I wasn't aware of that. Now when you had received financial assistance, before your incarceration with Ivy Tech, you were not in default?

Leslie (06:42):
Right. And that was my biggest worry is that I was going to be ineligible until I either paid money back or I would be short the amount that I had defaulted on. But at no point did it come up. I didn't lie on anything or you know, falsify anything. But fortunately I was not restricted in any way.

Christina (07:08):
Interesting. And what was the school that you were going to during your incarceration

Leslie (07:16):
Ball State. They had two options. They had a Martin University course

curriculum and they also had a Ball State. And I chose to go to Ball State.

Christina (07:31):
Okay. So you're attending college, you're taking a minimum of six courses a semester? Correct.

Leslie (07:41):
When I first started, there were so few students and so few professors that we were taking four courses and at a later time and my personal experience, I was used to take six and more classes to make up for having the short schedule in the beginning so that I could finish and complete within my timeframe.

Christina (08:08):
And so what was your, the degree that you were pursuing at this time?

Leslie (08:14):
Well, that's kind of interesting. We were kind of in a general studies curriculum because it was basically a course curriculum created out of the willing professors from Ball State that would come and give us our class time. And so in the very beginning, the group of students that I began school with followed English and literature, but as they graduated …I think there were six other people that got a Bachelor of Science in English. And the new group had came in and, and the program expanded and it was kind of steered towards computers for a second and then it went to history. Believe it or not, that [was] the selection of the course curriculum [for] the majority of the students: the teachers that were available. So I ended up with a minor in psychology and anthropology and also a minor in literature, but I have like extra credits. So it's something like a pre-professional literature option. But I don't have a Bachelor of Science. It is in General Studies.

Christina (09:36):
So how long were you in school? Did you get your degree? And how long did it take you to get that if you did?

Leslie (09:52):
I got my Associates in 2001 and my Bachelor's in 2002 because I had to, as I described before, bolster up my class time to finish in time.

Christina (10:16):
What other education did you get or pursue during your incarceration?

Leslie (10:32):
In the very beginning, I did take some CAD [computer aided design] courses. I took Building Trades; Horticulture. After I graduated, I took Theology. Four years of Theology. And at the end, right before I got out, I was able to take Welding and that ended up putting me in a position to have a gainful employment upon release. And the Bachelor's degree not so much. I think I am qualified to probably teach school, but by the nature of my felony convictions [I'm] not permitted to do that in any way, shape or form. Not online; not adult education; nothing.

Christina (11:26):
So you meet all the qualifications and requirements to be an educator, correct?

Leslie (11:37):
So far as I know. When I was at the Madison facility and they have what they call--like a I'm not sure the name of it--but it's basically you form your resume, you research your qualifications and your skills, your interests, in trying to determine which direction you want to go forward in as far as making the best choice for career selection. And so when I did that the gal that was there trying to help, she said that I could be an adult educator, at least a GED teacher and maybe more. [It] had been a minute since I got my degree. And as I said, I didn't get a Bachelor of Science, so I'm not really sure.—But she, she went through and checked and she said it was a dead end course for me, so I didn't really pursue all the qualifications and eligibility beyond the one that they told me that I wasn't going to be able to follow through with it. Period. Dot. It wouldn't matter what the curriculum was, what the students--if they were children or teenagers or adults or whatever--it wouldn't matter because the teaching profession, I as you probably know, has had bad publicity by not having good background checks. And so in the course of all these things happening, they've made stricter rules about who can engage students in whatever form.

Leslie (13:51):
I did actually take additional college courses after I graduated. They changed the school. It was OCU [Oakland City University] and I was a

college tutor for that. And in doing that, I was able to audit many of the courses that those students were taking so that I could better help facilitate them as a tutor. And so that's, of course, not something that's in my educational credits. And then after they pretty much nixed the federal funding [for] college prison. It was about a year, I think. And then a woman named Dr. Kelsey Kauffman came in and she also coordinated with Martin University and some IU professors and maybe some from other colleges to put together a program with used books and volunteer teachers to give us an opportunity to pursue further education if we wanted to, in hopes that she could maybe get funding and get the credit at a later time. And so, yeah, I took some postgraduate courses that way.

Christina (15:11):
Okay. And did you ever receive credits for those?

Leslie (15:15):
Oh, no. We were not enrolled. It was not paid for, and so therefore the credit, you know, was not legit.

Christina (15:26):
So your degrees have not been beneficial for you [in] obtaining [a] job once you were released, but have your vocationals been beneficial for you?

Leslie (16:06):
That's right. My degrees were beneficial. Do not get me wrong as far as to have some goal to shoot for, for the learning. It was very beneficial to me to be able to accomplish that and the idea that I would be set up in a position to where I could, you know, sustain myself when I got out. The idea of that was nice to have, although it was a little disenchanting when I found out I couldn't really apply those degrees immediately upon release. But it wasn't until … I was at work release and I was within a year of release and I got the welding certification. And that actually was the most practical thing that it ended up being of all the things that I did because it put me in a position to be immediately employed at a rate of pay that was able to sustain me as an individual--pay my rent, all my bills. And so I ended up staying in the area of the work release because I had already gotten employment and it wasn't the first time that I got hired that I applied, because actually my felony conviction did keep me from

getting my first one. And that was a rough kind of awakening. And so after I didn't land the job that I have now, I decided I would stay in the area so I wouldn't have to face going through trying to get another job and everything like that because the only work release that I was able to go to within this area, which is hour and a half from all my family. And so that was basically how I determined where I would stay upon release based on the job that I got from that vocational training.

Christina (17:55):
So when you say in that area, it was originally you were at the Indiana Women's Prison and so you were transferred to Madison Correctional Facility, is that correct?

Leslie (18:10):
Right.

Christina (18:10):
And so that, is that the area that you're referring to?

Leslie (18:14):
Right when you get down [toward the end of your sentence] and your security level goes down, then you're eligible to go to minimum-security prison. Well, I was under the impression I would be going out on crews that would work around it and get a little bit of a transition. I had done it several years and I hadn't been out and exposed to society at all. And it turns out that a restriction didn't afford me the opportunity to go out on work crew or do anything like that until I got to work release. And the only work release I was eligible to go to was in Madison because adult women that have certain level of crimes and restrictions as far as security can only go to that facility. So your work release is going to have to permit you to look only in this area. And so that's how that happened that way. Most people if there isn't work release and they don't have those restrictions are first to go to the area where they committed their crime or their Community Corrections and if they don't have at least if they're on house arrest or some other kind of supervision. However, community corrections dictates that.

Christina (19:27):
Okay. So, you use that Welding certificate that you got for your current employment?

Leslie (19:40):
Right. That's how I got in the door. You're hired as a welder and I worked for eight months as a welder and then I applied with them, the same place, you can apply for different jobs; they like to hire from within. And I actually was HR for about another eight months. And then recently I went back to second shift production, just basically because it's more money. And actually I continued well after I was released trying to pursue an Automated Robotic Technician degree, but I had to drive to Madison and quite honestly I wasn't working a lot. I didn't have a good background. And a lot of mechanical thing and they were saying that the field, as far as welding, was doing more robotic. So I wanted to pursue what I had already had and build upon that. But I ended up getting passed over for a job that I thought my education would have helped me get. And now I am an Automated Technician and I do make good money, and the additional training after my welding [helped?] to secure that position for me. And don't get me wrong, they did like the fact that I had a Bachelor's degree. But as far as being able to apply it to any of the internal job postings that they have, it isn't in a technical field, so it's good to have the degree, but it's not a technical degree. That would pretty much give me any advantage over somebody that had any kind of training in that specific area.

Christina (21:14):
Right. So they liked that you've pursued the education, but it's just not really applicable to the work that they're looking for in those positions.

Leslie (21:23):
I mean, it's nice to be able to type a nice memo and spell things right. I've got a lot of English and to be a good communicator at the job. But they want people that have more vocational and technical training. That's specifically where the field is going, which is more towards robotics and data analysis, things of this nature.

Christina (21:47):
Of course. So going back to the loans that you had gotten that had never surfaced as an issue …

Leslie (22:01):
I ended up getting [an] incomplete. I tried to withdraw. I think it might've been past the deadline when I did withdraw; I'm pretty sure

it was. And then when I applied to continue my education after I was released, I wasn't able to do it until I paid back the book money that they had given me. So if that was the only portion that I had to pay back or how that came to be, I didn't question it. I was just glad they didn't, restrict me
or charge me more.

Christina (22:35):
It actually I guess turned out to be a blessing. But while you were incarcerated, the financial aid that you got, that was all strictly grant money, no loans or anything along those lines?

Leslie (22:52):
Right. We couldn't apply for any loans. You can't enter into any contracts or any kind of financial arrangement. We would be responsible to pay back when you're an incarcerated person cause you don't have that agency. And at the time, up until I think 2012, we were considered eligible candidates for the federal grant money. And I don't think that we were eligible for any state funds, so at any point, but I might add, it was nice to be able to enroll. They give the time cuts, you get a year off for an Associates and two years off for your Bachelor's. And then other different educational things are promoted with a time cut that goes with it. And so many of the people that enroll, whether or not they're actually [going] to pursue anything with that education

Leslie (23:51):
There's an incentive to do the education I'm saying. But most of the people that I see or that I know and stay in touch with that are employed consistent with the kind of education they received in prison are beauticians. The women. I think there should be more vocational opportunities. And you see, I got my degrees in 2001 and 2002, but didn't get released until 2018. If you would have an ideal system, it would gauge their talents and interests and then afford them something that would be vocational and immediately applicable in the area that they're going to be released to. And not a job that's going to restrict felons. So a lot of research would have to be done to make it a perfect plan as far as what work release, re-entry and prison education is aimed to accomplish. And I just don't think that they connected all the dots there yet. And I'm hopeful that somebody will come up with

an idea to assess: this person has this many years, this kind of talent. I've seen people specifically at my work release, there was only 10 people allowed to take the welding class and one girl was restricted because she didn't score very highly on her Accuplacer [Ivy Tech test]. Well, she was probably . . . pursuing that on her own after the fact. But things like this, there are many people, as you know being somewhat familiar with the prison system, that aren't academically inclined. And so the vocational option is the way for them to be able to have an alternative to a criminal lifestyle or having to depend on somebody, which many of the women that I've met in prison, they were side stream cases. They're not the talk like a prisoner, but their dude was dealing drugs in their house, taking care of them and their kids, they can't even go to college or get grant money. You know what I mean? And then if they're not academically inclined, then they're gonna be in another category. And there's always the factor of how much time you have and if it's going to work out for the timeframe. But I almost didn't get to do the welding. Christina, I'm going to tell you why. Because I had gotten my Bachelor's degree already and I didn't have any federal funds available.

Christina (26:33):
Really?

Leslie (26:33):
I got the idea in my head that I wanted to go to Madison and that they were going to get a welding, which they didn't have. And I didn't know how–it happened, but by fate I was talking to the right people and they seem to think that it was a good plan and they followed through with it. And then here I am, the one that was pushing it and I was not going to be able to do it. So it's some twists of fate, even through the people at Ivy Tech, people at Madison, they found funding so that I could go. And I do not know to this day how it was and I was the only one. And at the time they told me I could take both Welding and CNC training, that I wouldn't have to choose. Now I don't know which one I would've chosen because I wasn't pressed with that choice until after I did my welding. I found out, because I didn't have federal funding, I wasn't going to be given the same advantage of finding extra grant money somewhere to give me the second vocational training. So that's just kind of a big downfall of having used my federal grant money for a Bachelor's degree, [it] almost restricted me from being able to get the

education that I got. The little short, we only went for three weeks during the Christmas break at Ivy Tech when the other students weren't there; we had to be segregated. And so just the facility itself to be able to provide that training for us; it was just all a miracle for me to be able to get it. And then it turned out it was, it was a very fortunate thing for me. I'm happy with the way things have turned out as far as my job. And honestly, Christina, you and I both know teachers don't make a whole lot of money. Right. My income is probably comparable with that. I don't get long summer vacations.

Christina (28:30):
Right.

Leslie (28:30):
But, the fulfillment of the job, is a different level. But I still, I feel very grateful that they actually gave me the opportunity to get that vocational training. And that's why I wished for more pieces that they could get more appropriate training and that somebody would look ahead as far as being able to place them in their location at a real tangible job. It's not going to restrict them in the area that their education is in or their vocations in.

Christina (29:02):
Right. And I'm with you, Leslie. I feel like the, the education is great, but we, it has to be able to be used. Right. And so the, the degree that you had gotten is there, there's no field or have you explored if there's a possibility for a job in any field where that would be beneficial or was it just that you really wanted to be a teacher of some sort and you knew that you weren't able to do that?

Leslie (29:37):
Well, it started out as far as my pursuit to what fields would be consistent with my education. There are other, there are other ways to apply a Bachelor of General Studies, but nothing specific as far as something that I had considered. I thought I'll just see what's going on. But remember I told you that before I even left IWP two years before I ever got out, I made up my mind that I wanted to do the welding. Right. I knew that I could probably pursue it, achieve it and I probably wouldn't be restricted or it wouldn't be an issue as far as the people I work with or the people that hire me or the job that I do or the clients that I would interact with. There was none of that kind of

worry for me. And after the long stint incarceration, I gotta tell you, I just didn't want to have a lot of overwhelming, extra social pressure so it worked out for me to do it. It was somewhat of a choice. I'm not sure there probably are opportunities that would utilize my, my little skill set as far as what I learned in my General Studies with Anthropology, Psychology and English literature, I'm sure. But it would be something that it would probably be something more like a social worker type thing. And as I said, for me just getting out with the pressures of just learning how to use a cell phone. Relearning how to drive. Being independent and in a different, less structured world and things of this nature. Getting more familiar with my family. These were the things that I wanted get under my belt before I looked on the something, you know, more challenging I guess you could say from a person in my circumstance.

Leslie Hauk, tape 2

Leslie (09:11)
Well, I think how we got on our conversation that led to this interview was I watched the Ken Burns docu series about College Behind Bars and they showed a group of people that were basically going to college in prison. And I looked at that and I compared it to my own experience. When people look at that they say, well, yeah, if I was in prison for breaking the law and somebody gives me federal money and, taxpayer dollars to go to school and that's all I had to do, I would be able to complete it. But they have an advantage. Well, we did get federal funding and we did complete.

Leslie (10:06)
But, at the same time we were still working 40 hour a week job. I was a cook in the kitchen. I got up at three o'clock in the morning and I worked until noon every day. And then I went to school at night and I had to use my own time to do my homework and everything, just like a person in the world would have to do. And I think I would hope that people would want me to use my time in there since they're paying for me to be in prison, to do things to better myself. But I also think that they want their money to be wisely spent to where people are going to actually get out, not come back and carry their own weight, and not be criminals, and not be on welfare or get some kind of check because they can't cope with life or something to this effect.

Leslie (10:52)
And, one attitude or one stereotype about that is "I'm out here working and I'm free and I'm doing all the right things and my kids don't have the advantage to be able to go to school. And I think that's wrong." And I'm not gonna say that no one should be able to go to school if their kids can't go to school. But there's a problem with their kids can't go to school like that. And at least, and I'm going to say the same things with people on the outside [and] people on the inside. If there is an interest, a talent, and an opportunity for a skillset that somebody has and they can go and they want to get vocational training and then be employed, I think everybody should have that opportunity. And so instead of saying prisoners shouldn't get federal money to do any kind of training or schooling, it should be more along the lines of everybody should have the opportunity if they're willing and able-bodied to pursue a honest living and do something that they're good at and not have to worry.

Leslie (12:01)
So there's not necessarily a problem with the people in prison having the opportunity. It's those that don't have the opportunity outside of there that are looking at it as, "don't let them go. If I can't send my kid," you know. And so if somebody is a hardworking person and they have kids and maybe their kids don't want to do a degree, maybe that's not economical, but at least there should be a way for them to pursue the same things that I think everybody should have inside or outside of prison, which is the training, the credentials and the placement so that they can take care of yourself.

Christina: (12:41)
I totally agree with you. And when you were talking, it made me think of this thing that I had seen, like a billboard and it said, "Why do addicts get Narcan for free? And I have to pay $760 for my diabetes medication?" And then, there was another picture and they crossed out part of it and it then read, "Why do I have to pay $763 for my, my diabetes medication?" Right? So I think, I think you have a very valid point. Like it's not that there should be an opportunity that's available for everybody and not just get mad or upset that a specific population has an opportunity. But rather look at why everybody doesn't have that same opportunity.

Christina: (13:45)
And I also agree, a lot of people don't want to hear that education helps reduce the recidivism rate and they also don't want to hear that a lot of people, incarcerated come from a place where they didn't have that opportunity before. But the reality of it is, you're making the people that are using your tax dollars to be incarcerated are going to become people that are going to be paying the same tax dollars, along with you and not taking your tax money but contributing to the taxes. So…

Leslie (14:26)
you want them to be out on welfare or some kind of other funding that's still a part of the system that's still not a contributor, right? Or you want them to be a contributor and be on your team and help promote these new ideas, which are simple, which gives everybody opportunity. If they're willing to work and they want to work that they have that to get gainful employment. And I don't understand, you've seen the one where it has different pictures of meals of people that work hard and middle-class meal plate and then, well they've got a lobster sitting on the welfare plate. You know what I mean?

Christina: (15:09)
Yeah.

Leslie (15:11)
Because there are a lot of able body people collecting money

Christina: (15:15)
[inaudible] yes,

Leslie (15:16)
The prison population are also able-bodied and I think that they could be put to use where they can while they're incarcerated, be earning money and doing something. For the 24 years that I spent inside prison, I worked 40 hours a week every single week. But yet I'm just now starting to accumulate anything towards my retirement and anything towards my gaining anything for my future. And so the setbacks that I have aren't because I laid around in a cell and twiddled my thumbs for those years. I did everything that I could to be and prove myself, stayed active and worked. And you're right, everybody has to work in there and pull their weight. They're not getting paid, but we are working. So I just don't want people to get the wrong

impression of what a person's lifestyle looks like inside of the penitentiary and who they're actually helping or what the cost benefit and social benefit would be if they would change their mindsets to stop the prisoners from getting any kind of training.

Leslie (16:29)
And let's all work towards everybody who wants to work can work, gets the training. And if people aren't willing to work and are able to work, they shouldn't be getting cush-cush kind of treatment and throwing all those tax dollars away in that way. I mean I'm a tax payer now as well so I am in the same boat as the people who maybe had a different point of view, but I'm coming from a different perspective cause I've seen both sides of it. And the truth is if we could just get past those stereotypes and those narrow one-kind-of-lane vision things and work together, I think that we can make it better for everybody so that we can all have a little money in our pocket and not feel bad about somebody going to school.

Christina: (17:21)
Absolutely. Absolutely. I agree with you. Well again, thank you so much for all of your time, Leslie. I really, really appreciate it. you have great insight. You have so much knowledge and wisdom to offer in this area and so thank you so very much.

Leslie (17:39)
Well, thank you for taking the time to shine a little light on this. I'm glad, and I hope that somebody gets a different idea about what's going on and maybe we can move towards a better place and more practical arrangement so that every dollar that is spent helping somebody is beneficial and not wasted. I'm not ever down for that, but thank you very much, Christina.

Christina: (18:05)
All right. Thanks, Leslie. All right.

INTERVIEW WITH DIVINE LIBSCOMB
BY ANASTAZIA SCHMID

On the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis
January 2, 2020

Anastazia Schmid: (00:00)
Hi, this is Anastazia Schmid and we're doing this recording today from the IUPUI sound lab. It is Thursday, January 2nd, 2020 at 3:36 PM today we're talking to Divine Lipscomb. Divine is a full time undergraduate student at Penn state in rehabilitation and human services though he is an aspiring attorney hoping to eventually go to Georgetown. Divine is also an executive director for The Corrective Gentlemen and the special projects coordinator for the restorative justice initiative at Penn state. Divine is now been home from incarceration for about 16 years. He's a husband and a father and we're very happy to congratulate him for five years of sobriety. How are you today? Divine.

Divine Libscomb: (00:54
I'm doing well, Ana.

Anastazia: (00:56)
Great. So today we're going to talk to you about some of the obstacles and issues that you've encountered with higher education prior, during, and post-incarceration. So Divine, did you have any college experience prior to incarceration? If so, what or where was that and if you did not, why?

Divine: (01:18)
No, I did not have any college experience before. My first stint at incarceration, I was 14 years old, and then I went back at the age of 16 and I did a four year prison sentence.

Anastazia: (01:35)
Okay. Four years. So while you were incarcerated during those four years, and, correct me if I'm wrong, but you were inside the New York prison system, is that correct?

Divine: (01:45)

That is correct.

Anastazia: (01:46)
Okay. Did you acquire any type of education during that four years of incarceration and what did that look like for you?

Divine: (01:54)
I was able to obtain my GED, at Clinton correctional facility, after I finished spending about 14-and-a-half months in solitary confinement. So the majority of my four year sentence I was either being transferred from facility to facility or I was inside on a solitary confinement.

Anastazia: (02:17)
Well, that definitely makes it difficult to obtain any type of education, I would assume. But congratulations on receiving your GED. Did you have opportunities to go further than a GED after you completed your high school equivalency on the inside?

Divine: (02:33)
I did not. When I was incarcerated back in the early two thousands, higher education wasn't an option, at least not one that was readily available to individuals, in the facilities where I was.

Anastazia: (02:49)
Okay. So eventually you're released, and then post-incarceration, what made you decide that you wanted to go to college and did you have any problems being able to do so?

Divine: (03:03)
While I was incarcerated, I got my GED, I scored pretty high or on an exam. And so that made me feel like I was capable of going to college afterwards, so I pursued it immediately after release. But there were some difficulties because financial aid is not awarded to certain individuals with criminal convictions.

Anastazia: (03:35)
Now this is still in New York, correct?

Divine: (03:39)
This is still in New York, yes.

Anastazia: (03:39)
And which offenses were barred from financial assistance?

Divine: (03:45)
Drug offenses, drug offenders are not allowed to access financial aid up to two years after incarceration.

Anastazia: (03:53)
And so was that one of the problems for you?

Divine: (03:57)
Well, I had on my record a drug offense and so the school could not readily determine whether or not that would play a part in me receiving financial aid. However, the offense that I spent my four years for was a violent offense. So they found a way around financially in order to get me accepted.

Anastazia: (04:21)
Okay. And so where did you originally start education once you were released then? Once the financial obstacle was overcome?

Divine: (04:30)
The first school I attended was Telebusiness Institute in Manhattan. They eventually closed about a year into me pursuing my degree.

Anastazia: (04:40)
And what, what were you trying to get a degree in there?

Divine: (04:42)
Business.

Anastazia: (04:43)
Okay. And was this an associate's degree?

Divine: (04:46)
Yes.

Anastazia: (04:47)
So essentially a two year degree, but the school closed down after your first year. So I'm assuming you did not end up earning that degree then?

Divine: (04:57)
No, I did not. And in the process of the school going through its difficulties, I also found out that I was going to be a father and I also ended up getting married, so I was building a family as well, so I needed to work.

Anastazia: (05:15)
All right. And so what did you end up doing at that point in time?

Divine: (05:20)
I knew the school was going through some things and I knew they were eventually [going to] close. I dropped out cause I was also struggling with addiction. I dropped out, I went to work for Dunkin Donuts and I tried to take care of my family the best I could-- minimum wage at that time, I think [in the] 2000's I we were still at $7.25 for minimum wage. And again, it's New York city, like you can't live off of that.

Anastazia: (05:52)
Right. So, I'm assuming, one, having the felony conviction was an obstacle not only for education prior to that, but now for employment issues.

Divine: (06:04)
Correct.

Anastazia: (06:06)
And then it sounds to me like you really were not provided a lot of assistance or treatment for your addiction, is that correct?

Divine: (06:14)
That's correct.

Anastazia: (06:16)
Okay. So, difficulties finding employment and especially a livable wage and difficulties with treatment for your addiction. Was there any point in time though that things sort of started to even out for you in your life and that you decided to go back to school to finish your degree and if that is the case, approximately when did that happen and where did you decide to go and were there any difficulties getting back into school?

Divine: (06:43)
So yes, actually, 2006, I ended up with a DUI., and my parole officer sent me to a 28-day program. After I was released from the 28-day treatment program I found work, and once I started working my program, I think I had almost a year clean, I decided I was ready to go back to school. I opened up a tee shirt company and I didn't know how to deal with my taxes. And so that was the most ideal opportunity for me to enroll in school. Definitely. I decided I was going to go to Monroe College and I had no issues once I already had a solid foundation with Taylor and I had some credits that I can transfer in, Monroe was willing to accept a bulk of those transfer credits and I took those credits and moved them to an associate's degree, which I completed in 2008, Summa Cum Laude. So, I'm proud of that.

Anastazia: (07:52)
Awesome. You should be. That's great. So I'm assuming that when you went back to college, you didn't have difficulty with financial aid then as well, or were you a self-pay at that point in time or how were you able to finance to finish the rest of your degree?

Divine: (08:07)
Oh, it was fine. Actually, like most Americans, I live below the poverty line, so financial aid was definitely needed and it's easier to access now once you start to understand the different challenges of higher education and navigating certain systems.....but you have to go through it.

Anastazia: (08:34)
...What a shame that we have to go through these struggles in order to figure out how to overcome them. But that is indeed part of the reason why we're doing this podcast now is to try to educate other people on these problems. So, congratulations on the Summa Cum Laude Business degree from Monroe College in 2008. Now we're quite a bit further down the line in time. What happened from 2008 to you becoming enrolled at Penn state?

Divine: (09:10)
A lot happened; life showed up. As we go into these institutions, there are things that took us out to these places, traumas, adverse childhood experiences. And a lot of them are heightened once we are

incarcerated. You add solitary confinement without proper treatment after being released from that jail within a jail. There's a lot of baggage that's built up and it eventually it has to manifest somewhere. And that's what happened. I was home for quite some time. I finally got one big break in life, so I thought, and I was like, Hey, I can go celebrate and have a drink cause I stopped working my program. And, I relapsed; I relapsed and it was a hard long road back to recovery.

Anastazia: (10:16)
I think relapse is certainly part of addiction in any context, even for people who have not experienced incarceration. But what I hear you saying is there was a lot of untreated trauma, not only from your life prior to incarceration, but certainly, during incarceration that went untreated, and it sounds to me like possibly that was contributing to it and causing you to have difficulty finding your way back to recovery. So how did you eventually find your way back to recovery?

Divine: (10:51)
Through a traumatic experience. Some things had to change in my life, and my current wife literally was like, "Listen, what are we going to do? It's either the alcohol or I'm out the door." And I had to decide. Like I literally had to decide the way I wanted my life to go. I mean, I was at my bottom, and so one-day-at-a time struggling, with my support system, I built myself into what I now have is five-and-a-half years clean.

Anastazia: (11:32)
That is amazing. So happy to know you made the choice that you made. That's wonderful. So I understand that you moved to Pennsylvania somewhere around 2009. Was this with your wife's assistance and how, from your move to Pennsylvania, did this eventually lead you to Penn State?

Divine: (11:56)
I love to tell a story about how my wife actually rescued me from New York. When I relapsed, I found my way into the projects, which I'm not from the projects. I had no business running around in the projects. But that's where I found myself, with an Associates degree. I still had a business, but I resorted back to the things that I knew. My kids' mom and I had split and I just didn't know how to deal with life.

So my wife, her brother's my best friend, and after his passing, she would randomly check in on me. And she happened to check in on me as I was going through that struggle. And she was like, "I think you need to leave New York for a little bit." And I was reluctant. I did not want to move to Pennsylvania. I really didn't. And she was like, "I'm coming to get you." And I blew her off. Like, whatever. She showed up, she literally, showed up and asked me was I ready? You know, I totally, yeah. I came downstairs and we haven't looked back. We're 10 years strong now, six years married, ten years together. So, in that process though, I still had things that I deal with. And to be honest, without my wife, I wouldn't have made it through most of those--those custody issues, those divorce issues, how to stand and actually be a father. And in the process of recovery, doing recovery, how to be a husband, you know, because we are taught--men in this society in particular are taught-- there's certain characteristics that you have to live by in order to be a man. Those societal norms that I still struggle with while I was still on my trauma.

Anastazia: (14:02)
Sure, sure. I mean, I think there's much to be said for the fact that your incarceration fell at such a young age and during formative years. It's a long road to try to recover from that. And how do you learn adult life and adult living from there? So, I think the key point you're making here, that I think we can't stress enough to our audience is the importance of support across the board with any people transitioning. So this wonderful wife and finally coming to recovery and new life in Pennsylvania gets us to about 2016 and you decide to enroll in Penn State. And so can you please share with us now what happened with that further obstacles to getting back into school to start a bachelor's degree?

Divine: (14:56)
Of course, first things first, they wanted to know about my conviction because there's a box on almost every slip anywhere you go. It's changing these days, but know, have you ever been convicted of a felony? Yes. You have to click that box, check that box. And so my initial application at Penn State, I had to do an in-person interview, I had to write in depth essay, to get in. Once they determined that I was not a threat to the campus at large. They gave me my decision about a week before class started, but with that decision came the stipulation that our business school doesn't accept any outside

business credits. And so because I also did not take the SATs, I didn't have the required math class to get accepted. So I was accepted but I wasn't accepted. They told me I needed to go to the liberal arts program and, you know, dealing with a university... So Monroe College is pretty small compared to Penn State and so I'm not used to the red tape. It's like, who do I call or I contact. No one is answering the phone at that point. I did not understand how busy a university is during move in week.
No one answered and I fell by the wayside. I applied again shortly after that. This time it came with added fees that weren't there the first time when I applied. So that was a barrier. You know, I have kids and I have a family. You're telling me to just pull a dollar out of there and [that] just wasn't going to happen. And so finally, the third time I applied, I anticipated that they were going to give me fees. I knew what degree program I was eligible to get accepted and so I went for it and they accepted me.

Anastazia: (17:13)
Wonderful. They say third time's the charm. I guess you gotta be persistent. Wonderful. Okay. So I mean that was 2016 then here we are now 2020. So does that make you a senior this year?

Divine: (17:27)
Yes. Well, they actually accepted me at 2018 because I had the credits, coming as a junior transfer to Penn State. But I am a senior now. I have about a year. I have this whole entire year and then I have an internship and then I'm done.

Anastazia: (17:47)
Okay. Awesome. So I'm, we're super proud of you and your accomplishments. You've told me you're aspiring to be an attorney. So before we close that one, [could you] share with us a little bit about your future plans for a higher education, what's next for you, Divine?

Divine: (18:04)
So I know individuals who've been incarcerated to practice law--Pennsylvania and a few other states--and so I want to go forward and get a law degree and use it inside of my program, Corrective Gentlemen.

Anastazia: (18:23)
Tell me about that a little bit., you know, for those of us that are

totally ignorant, to me, Corrective Gentlemen sounds a little bit like, maybe a prep school for post incarcerated men. What is that exactly?

Divine: (18:36)
Well, Corrective Gentlemen is just a holistic approach to looking at post-incarceration. Eventually I will want to move into intervention programming as well. Right now I see a lot of individuals who are coming home and who have barriers that they don't know how to get around. Entrepreneurship was, for me, the first time I experienced self-sufficiency. My current degree, Rehabilitation and Human Services, has a great emphasis on counseling components. So that's going to be incorporated into Corrective Gentlemen: counseling, trauma, and then legal. Once you're home from incarceration, you still will come across legal issues--whether it's a parole violation, custody issues, housing, landlord--there are a slew of issues that people feel like because you are formerly incarcerated, you do not deserve a shot in some of these spaces if you don't have these redeemable qualities per se, so Corrective Gentlemen will be an advocacy center site that fights from every aspect.

Anastazia: (19:51)
Wonderful. Do you happen to have a link or a website or something you can share with our audience for any of those fine young men who are out there who might need assistance in your area?

Divine: (20:04)
So we're on Facebook at Corrective Gentlemen. We're also on Twitter. I don't use the Twitter feed that much, but you can find us on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, all at Corrective Gentlemen.

Anastazia: (20:19)
Wonderful. Am I correct that there's a possibility of Georgetown in your future?

Divine: (20:27)
Georgetown is my number one. I would love to stay at Penn State, but I also want to move around; to get into Georgetown would be ideal. That's where policies are made right there in Washington. And if I can get in the heart of it, I can make some real change.

Anastazia: (20:48)
That's right. So, if anyone out there from Georgetown is listening, I

hope you will certainly remember, this fine gentleman, Divine Lipscomb and his aspirations and what a complete asset he would be to any university and whatever future endeavors he has. Divine, it has been such a pleasure talking to you. I congratulate you on all your accomplishments and we absolutely wish you the best in your future for you and your family. Thank you so much for talking. Have a great day.

INTERVIEW WITH NICOLE MCGOWN BY CHRISTINA

By phone from DePauw University, Greencastle, IN
March 22, 2020

Christina Kovats (01:07):
Okay, Nicole, so we're just interested in getting your story on your education journey and if you want to go ahead and share that a little bit and from prior to incarceration and through your incarceration.

Nicole McGown (01:27):
Okay. So in 2011,I applied for Indiana Tech and 2012 I ended up having family issues and having to drop out. So I had an outstanding amount of student loans.

Christina (01:52):
So was Indiana Tech a university?

Nicole (02:03):
I believe it's a two year college.

Christina (02:05):
So you are working to get your associate's degree?

Nicole (02:09):
Yes.

Christina (02:09):
And what is it that you wanted to get your degree in?

Nicole (02:13):
I had started out doing business administration.

Christina (02:17):
And so did you receive grants or did you apply for loans?

Nicole (02:25):
I got a certain amount I believe of grants, but it didn't cover everything. So then I had to do loans as well.

Christina (02:35):
How long were you in school before the extenuating circumstances that made you have to,

Nicole (02:57):
Maybe two and a half semesters roughly. I mean, it wasn't very long.

Christina (03:08):
And so then you're, you ran into some problems at home and that had forced you to drop out.

Nicole (03:17):
Correct.

Christina (03:17):
And so did you pursue your education and any manner of magnitude after that?

Nicole (03:23):
Only when I had became incarcerated did I apply for the Pell grant program that was offered at Indiana Women's Prison back in 2016. That was the only other time that I had pursued my education.

Christina (03:47):
Did you do any other college or vocational prior to the college in 2016 during your incarceration?

Nicole (03:57):
Besides being at Indiana Tech? No, I did not.

Christina (04:00):
Okay. And what was the school in 2016 that you got involved in?

Nicole (04:06):
Holy Cross.

Christina (04:08):
You mentioned the Pell Grant program. What, what was that to your understanding?

Nicole (04:18):
I believe it was a program based for 25 students who were incarcerated to pursue their higher education.

Christina (04:32):
Okay. And so-were your previous loans from before your incarceration, an issue during this time?

Nicole (04:44):
Yes and no. It was a weird situation for me. I tried to get it taken care of, but they never continued to contact me, it was quite irritating. I mean, I was allowed to pursue higher education, but at the same time they defaulted my loan, but then I tried to make the payments that they were trying to offer us for the nine months.

Christina (05:16):
Okay. So when you say they, who are you referring to?

Nicole (05:20):
I'm sorry, the [Indiana] education department.

Christina (05:36):
So you had had contact with them during your incarceration?

Nicole (05:40):
Correct. They defaulted my loans. I was trying to get the income-based payment arrangements for the nine months that they had offered us, but they never contacted me, so I didn't have any way to pursue it more.

Christina (06:04):
So did you establish a payment plan with them during your incarceration?

Nicole (06:09):
Not during my incarceration, no, but I have one now.

Christina (06:13):
Okay. but during your incarceration, you said that they had offered this. What did that look like? If you weren't able to be in contact with them, why weren't you able to be in contact? What efforts did you

make to contact them? You said you were not able to set up the payment plans, correct?

Nicole (06:38):
Correct. Only because they did not continuously to contact me. The administrator that was over the program [at the Indiana Women's Prison] had given us contact information for the Department of Education for the income-based nine months payment arrangements. So I wrote them and contacted the Department of Education. They sent me back the information that they needed to continue. So then I sent that information to prove that I was incarcerated and then they never contacted me after that.

Christina (07:52):
Okay. And so you tried to, you contacted the state in regards to your loans and their response to you was to send further information?

Nicole (08:06):
Correct.

Christina (08:06):
And you had sent that information in and you had never heard from them again afterwards?

Nicole (08:14):
Right.

Christina (08:15):
How long were you in doing college courses during your incarceration?

Nicole (08:25):
That was two semesters and then the PELL grant program [through Holy Cross] shut down.

Christina (08:57):
They were trying to apply the Pell grants to your tuition for Holy Cross, right?

Nicole (09:09):
Yeah.

Christina (09:09):
Okay. So you're attending Holy Cross, you try to get in contact about your student loans to take advantage of the deferment program. They ask you to send more information, you do that and you never hear from them again. You continue your education with Holy Cross. Up until they were no longer present at the prison. And so what did you do after that?

Nicole (09:37):
Nothing until I got out.

Christina (09:40):
Okay.

Nicole (09:43):
I moved prisons and ended up just getting modified out on house arrest under recovery program. So I didn't continue my education nor did I pursue anything until I got out. And then it took me a while to get back in contact with them.

Christina (10:05):
With who? Who is them?

Nicole (10:06):
The Department of Education. Then out of idle curiosity, I went up, cause I live in Huntington, Indiana, so we have Huntington University. So I went up there probably about six or seven months ago and just talked to the financial aid office up there

Christina (10:30):
At Huntington University?

Nicole (10:32):
They could at least help me and direct me in the right direction to get the proper contact information for the Department of Education. So I went up there and the lady was really sweet and she helped me and she emailed me all the information that I needed to get in contact with the Department of Education in order to set up payment arrangements, income-based. So I can continue my education because that's something that I've always wanted to do. So I finally got in contact with the department of education and I got income based

payment arrangements set up for the nine months and then it'll drop. So right now, currently I'm paying $5 a month for nine months in order to get my student loans taken care of so I can start college again.

Christina (11:43):
Okay. So at Huntington, the woman and the financial department helped you get in contact with them. So now you are doing the payment arrangements.

Nicole (11:54):
Yes Ma'am.

Christina (11:54):
You had written a story about [your] education, and in it you had mentioned that there were threats that they were going to take your tax return?

Nicole (12:12):
They did take my tax return, my first tax return when I got out back in '18.

Nicole (12:44):
I got released in March of 2018; I'm on house arrest and a recovery program; so I wasn't allowed to work for the first month or two. So bear with me here. So then I started work in September of that year, September of 2018, and I think I was making like $7 or $8 an hour. Minimum wage… So then when I went and filed, I had not received any information from the Department of Education. Nothing. I've not received anything stating that I owe anything. They've not contacted me about how much I owe, do I want to make payments, nothing. I've not received anything from them. So then until I filed for my taxes, I didn't get my taxes and then I received information stating that they had taken my tax check for my past loans. So then that's when I started pursuing the Department of Education in order to get everything taken care of.

Christina (14:38):
Okay. And so how much was your loan initially?

Nicole (14:44):
It was like $15 or $16,000.

Christina (15:24):
Okay. And so how much was your tax return that they had taken?

Nicole (15:29):
It was only like $300 or $400 cause I only been working a few months.

Christina (15:33):
You have set up a payment plan with them where you're, you're now making a $5 a month payments?

Nicole (15:46):
Yes ma'am.

Christina (15:55):
You'll continue to have to make payments on that even after your loans [are] out of default, you'll just be able to access financial aid at that point. What is it that you want to pursue?

Nicole (16:12):
That's a good question. I know I want to get some form of higher education. I'm still leaning more towards maybe business administration, but I've been thinking and I don't know if my felony will allow me to do some form of possible counseling or something. But that's an interest of mine as well.

Christina (16:45):
That's fantastic. I think you'd be good at it, too. And so have you had any kind of issues pertaining to transcripts or obtaining them, transferring them, just any issues surrounding that?

Nicole (17:04):
I haven't even tried to be honest with you for seeing now I have my transcripts from Holy Cross, the last ones that we had received because I keep stuff like that. So I have the ones through Holy cross. I do not have mine through Indiana Tech, but I know that Tex credits really aren't transferable to a lot of places. So I hadn't even really bothered to pursue that just because I know that they're not, I mean,

they're not going to be transferable if I decide to do night classes at Huntington University.

Christina (17:55):
While you were incarcerated, did you have any other challenges or barriers that you had faced pertaining to your education at all?

Nicole (18:14):
I don't think so.

Christina (18:15):
Okay. And so since you've been out you want to continue to pursue your education, not quite sure exactly the direction that you want to go in, which is okay because you know, a lot of, a lot of people feel that way. I currently feel that way, so that's okay. But you are making payments to try to get out of default so that you can continue your education. So evidently education means something to you. Can you talk a little bit about what that meant to you, during your incarceration?

Nicole (19:00):
What it meant for me to be able to have the opportunity to pursue my education?

Christina (19:05):
Absolutely. Yes.

Nicole (19:06):
It meant everything. Everything. I don't know how else to explain it. It just, it made me feel a sense of accomplishment that maybe my mistakes weren't--that maybe I can move past my mistakes and continue to move forward and be a better asset to my community and to myself and to my family. Just to be able to have that higher learning and higher education in order to be a better person. Really just to be, well, I know I can be.

Christina (20:22):
Having the opportunity to pursue your education while you were incarcerated? Did that do anything to your level of confidence to kind of boost you in the direction to want to continue it out here?

Nicole (20:32):
Yeah.–Made me feel super smart. Yeah. But no, from a real note. Yeah, it did. It helped me tremendously just to be more confident with myself and to know that I do deserve a second chance and that I do deserve the opportunity to be able to present myself, in a way that can benefit not just myself, not just to benefit myself, but to benefit my community and my family as well. So, yeah, it helped a lot.

Christina (21:20):
That's fantastic. Okay, Nicole, is there anything else that you'd like to share about your thoughts on, on offering education in the prison or the incarcerated setting at all?

Nicole (21:35):
Just that it's a wonderful idea and I think everybody should be given the opportunity to be able to learn how to present themselves to society in a positive manner because some people aren't taught and don't live in a environment that enables them to learn to be the best that they can be. And when you put them in a position to where they can feel accomplished and not downgraded, then that helps them to become a better person, which in return helps them in society become a better person outside of their incarceration as well.

Christina (22:28):
Absolutely. I agree with you. Well thank you so much Nicole, for sharing with us. Your story is very much appreciated and, and your story matters and I appreciate you. Exposing the different barriers and challenges that incarcerated individuals face with pursuing their education both within the criminal justice system but also once they leave. And not only that, but the impact that it had on your life. So thank you so much for your time. Greatly, greatly appreciate you.

INTERVIEW WITH ERICA OLIVER
BY CHRISTINA KOVATS

Recorded via phone at DePauw University
Greencastle, IN
March 21, 2020

Christina Kovats: (00:05)
Good morning. This is Christina. And today I'm interviewing Erica in regards to what her educational experience was like prior to and during her incarceration at the Indiana women's prison. So Erica, if you could just walk through for us what education looked like from high school, whether you graduated high school, dropped out, and then what you did up until your incarceration as far as your education goes.

Erica Oliver: (00:42)
Okay. Well before incarceration, during high school or whatever, school was a little difficult for me. So like although I wanted to attend, but I didn't really take school serious. But they passed me along though, cause Indiana got that no child left behind law. So they kinda like passed me along.

Christina: (01:24)
So you struggled in high school?

Erica
Yeah.

Christina:
Was that your typical high school mentality, you just didn't want to go to school, or do you think that you had issues beyond what normal everyday high school kids have?

Eric: (01:44)
I kinda had issues like from the normal high school students or whatever, like mental health, educational barriers.

Christina: (02:00)
While you were in high school you're dealing with mental health issues. Had these ever been addressed in your life at all?

Erica : (02:13)
No.

Christina: (02:15)
So you had never gone and seen a doctor, a therapist, a counselor? What about the counselors at the school? You'd never talked to anybody about it? You just had these issues that you kept to yourself?

Erica : (02:30)
I talked to the counselor. I had a counselor, I had a therapist, mental health doctor and stuff like that or whatever, but education was never really, like in my plan or whatever. Like, I had an IEP, but my IEP was just like, okay, as long as you show up to class, we going to pass her along. It wasn't about if I was long about the learning and trying to increase my education level or nothing like that. It was just like, you show up to class, we're going to pass you.

Christina: (02:56)
Okay. And what is IEP?

Erica : (02:59)
Individual Education plan.

Christina: (03:02)
So with your classes, you showed up and you were just physically present. Were you engaged or learning? Or

Erica : (03:20)
No. I mean if I wanted to, if I felt like it, then yeah. But like some of the stuff was too easy. So I'm like, what am I in this class? Learning all this easy stuff where I want to be challenged and stuff like that or whatever. But I never voiced that to nobody. And so since I didn't really voice it and didn't really participate in my, partake in my own education plan, like what I needed and what I needed to do and stuff like that or whatever. Like everybody made it for me, so, okay. I didn't really make my own decisions. Everybody else made them for me.

Christina: (03:52)
Gotcha. So did you graduate high school?

Erica : (03:56)
I graduated with a certificate of completion. A certificate of completion was just me showing up to class, it wasn't me graduated. So I'm

[inaudible] what with that certificate of completion, they let me go to the university of Phoenix and Bryan and Stratton College. But as bad as I wanted to do something, like while I was in school, I started getting like my fears because I know like, okay, I'm going to college, I'm accumulating this financial aid debt. How I'm going to pay it off cause ain't nobody get no jobs and no fields. Like when I was going to college in 2010, 2011, when nobody really getting no jobs in that field at the schools I was going to. So I got a little discouraged about that and ended up quitting. So I had moved to Indiana from Milwaukee and ended up going to school to take my CNA class. I was two weeks into my CNA course before I had caught my charge. So I was like, I'm about to plan on doing my, I'm paying on my financial aid loans. But it didn't work like that.

Christina: (05:25)
So you lived in Milwaukee up until, what point? Did you, after high school and after you had started some of that college or was it, were you still in high school when you were in Indiana?

Erica : (05:38)
I was still in high school when I was in Indiana. I went to college in Wisconsin. Okay.

Christina: (05:42)
Oh, okay. So you lived in Indiana, went to Wisconsin and started doing these college courses that you really didn't think were going to be beneficial to you. And then you ended up getting into your, the CNA, which is a certified nurse assistant, and you transferred back to Indiana. Couple of weeks later, you ended up catching your case. Yeah. All right. So then you go to the prison and now what?

Erica : (06:15)
Let's see. I knew, cause when I was outside of prison, I knew I was going to get some time. So my auntie was like when you get in there, get your GED and stuff like that or whatever. Like I knew my certificate of completion still would involve me to get my GED, like it wasn't counted. So when I got to the prison, the counselor was like "you graduated in 2007 from Memorial. You can't get a GED class. You gotta do this and you gotta do that." I was like, no. And what does do this and do that? I couldn't be in a GED class. She wanted me to just get a job. So I had to fight for about a month to get into GED classes and write the teachers and write…who was it?

Erica : (07:11)
Ms. Stevens, I think it was of the education program. I had to write her and I said I got a certificate of completion. It's not a GED. I'm still eligible for GED. I wanted that GED cause I wanted that time cut. But at the same time, like I had to go from scratch because I was in a special education and stuff. So I had to--I was real determined to get my GED. And I started from the lower levels, like the elementary school levels. My math, my science, my reading, and I was just doing all that on up. And it took me three months to get my GED. I had to put in that work to get, it was tiring though, but I was, I wanted to get it. So yes, I got my GED went to PLUS.

Christina: (08:04)
So when you went into the GED classes, they originally give you like a placement test, is that correct?

Christina: (08:18)
How do you decide where you need to start working?

Erica : (08:23)
They give you a placement test after you in there for a little bit. They test everybody at once. So when you first go in there, you're not getting your GED test, you just going in like where you think you need to be at or whatever. So then when the tests come back around then you find out where you at and take it and then you study it from where you at and learning what you're doing or whatever, you don't know where you at. When you first go into GED, you got to wait to that test come around and then it's like basically a self study. Like, you in class, you still studying, you work in the workbooks by yourself. You're not getting no lessons or nothing like that or whatever.

Christina: (09:20)
So I imagine that that would be kind of challenging teaching yourself, especially if you had issues and in the past. So did, do you get any help from the instructor or is it like the teacher or did you find any kind of help there?

Erica : (09:42)
They had a one-on-one tutoring. I had a couple of tutors. I had Christina for my tutor and Kelsey

Christina: (09:56)
So you had them tutoring in that and you ended up taking your GED test in the prison, correct?

Erica : (10:04) mm hmm [Inaudible] That was before the hard test. So I'm happy I had [inaudible].

Christina: (10:08)
That's good. Before they changed the test over. Yeah. So after your GED then, what did you do? Did you pursue your education and a vocational or a I'm sorry, vocational or any kind of college courses or

Erica : (10:28)
I did that, I went for the Martin university course. I was taking pre college courses though because I ain't got no credits or nothing towards my other courses. I already took pre-college courses but I guess I ain't get accredited for it. So yeah, I was taking the pre-college courses and I did just one semester at pre-college courses there.

Christina: (10:56)
And when you said that you had taken pre-college courses, where had you taken those?

Erica : (11:01)
Before? At Bryan and Stratton.

Christina: (11:05)
So before your incarceration at the college that you went to in Milwaukee. Okay. So you had taken those there. Did you have any kind of transcripts or anything from the college stating that you had attended or what you had done? Did you try to get in touch with them?

Erica : (11:28)
No, I thought maybe they'll just transfer over, but I guess it didn't. I thought they would. Martin would have did that.

Christina: (11:38)
So you thought that the university would, that it was their responsibility to get the credits? Okay. And

Erica : (11:47)
I mean it wasn't really too much I could do [since] I'm in prison. Right. I couldn't call them or nothing.

Christina: (11:55)
And did you tell Martin university that you had attended that college?

Erica : (11:59)
That college? Yeah. I told him I put it down on that paper that had us filled out.

Christina:
Okay. And you just never heard anything after that?

Erica:
Well, I got a letter from the department of education telling me I was in [deferment?] and then when I had wrote them and told them I was incarcerated and … then write me back.

Christina: (12:22)
How long did you attend Martin University at the prison?

Erica : (12:35)
I did one semester. I did one semester there.

Christina: (12:39)
Did you complete that semester or you just started a semester?

Erica : (12:44)
I just started that semester. I completed one to a couple of your two classes, Ms Ruth Guion class. And her class was like English. She had like an English reading class. I completed that class. [inaudible]

Christina: (13:04)
Okay.

Christina: (13:07)
Now since you said that you started them or you completed them.

Erica: (13:14)
All I completed Ms Ruth Guion. Okay. I started and completed that class. Okay.

Christina: (13:18)
And did you get credit for that class?

Erica : (13:22)
No, we weren't getting credit cause it didn't get awarded cause they was trying to do that satellite thing so it wasn't really awarded it. But sure was a barrier getting up every morning, going to a class. Cause, I mean, I ain't going to get into that or whatever, but I don't know out here in the real world, like you'll get penalized if you don't go to class, if you don't go to your college courses. You could mess up y'all financial aid, you can do all that. So in prison it was kind of like the same way you don't go to class, you getting rolled up, you get a CAB. It's basically, where are you getting penalize. And like, I didn't want to go through it. So I went through it with one semester and then I was like, nah, I don't want to, I don't want to commit to something. Like, I wasn't really trying to commit to it.

Christina: (14:12)
So you get wrote up on a CAB. What is a CAB?

Erica : (14:16)
Conduct a conduct report, like and disciplinary [inaudible].

Christina: (14:21)
So if you don't feel like going to class one day, then you're getting wrote up for your conduct.

Erica : (14:30)
Yeah, you're getting wrote up for that.

Christina: (14:35)
And what does a conduct report do to you?

Erica : (14:39)
It could make you stay in prison longer. Could mess up your time. It can send you to GRACE. They couldn't do a lot of stuff. Just get penalized. No rec; no Jay pay [prison form of email].

Christina:
Which I'm sure that means quite a bit to you when you're, when you're behind those walls.

Erica : (15:10)
But nevertheless, the instructors and the people, the volunteers that came in for the university, like they was all for it. Like they was all for coming and giving us the education, teaching us what we need to

know. And I applaud them for that. And I mean to be in school and to like go to college, you gotta have that determination and you gotta have that drive and you gotta want to do that, you need that these days in order to like make it to where you need to be at in life. Because if you ain't got no education, you really ain't got nothing. Sorry.

Christina: (15:53)
Absolutely. Right. So did you have any, when you were in Milwaukee and you were attending college courses, you received financial aid and you had said that when you applied for Martin university that you had gotten a letter saying that you were in default and you wrote them back, never heard anything, and now you're out. You were released. How long ago were you released?

Erica : (16:22)
I was released October, 2016.

Christina: (16:26)
And have you heard anything from the department of education about your [inaudible] loans?

Erica : (16:32)
Yeah, I mean, actually I called them, and they steady sending me bills and stuff when they find out my address. But no, I called them trying to get back at school. I see what I need to do to fix it. And they, they had my loans are steady [growing?]. I ain't know they put all that interests on your loans. They said they don't ever stop working. Accumulate. Just kidding. Sign going up, huh? Yeah. Well but I want to, like this absolutely didn't.

Christina: (17:11)
Do you want to pursue your education any further?

Erica : (17:14)
I want to pursue my education. Yeah. But I wanna pursue it. Like, if I do go back to school, it's just gotta be something I want to be passionate about. Maybe [ready hosting]

I don't know if it like, television broadcast. They don't offer them trades no more. You gotta, it's rarely that they offer that type of stuff now. Like they done took away a lot of stuff out the education thing and you gotta find certain schools that do that type of stuff and be

accepted in certain schools. I mean, I'm 31 years old, I ain't no kid anymore and I'm all so sick looking.

Christina: (17:45)
So your looking for something that you are interested in and be something that's available to you. Have you really like dove deep into the research of what you would want to do in order to continue your education?

Erica : (18:14)
Kinda, I mean, I'm a what is that called? I'm a codependent person, so the education that I want to do is really like something that I could do, like vocational, so I really don't have to go accumulate, no, student loans. And then there's grant writing and stuff, but that is a lot of work to do, but I'm not, I'm like, I'm codependent. So what I would want to do, I can't do anymore. Like I would want to go back to school to go get my CNA license and like take care of the elderly people, and help out. Because like some people don't need to be treating those people. Right? And I mean, since I got incarcerated and since I caught my case, I'm not able to do the things that I wanted to do no more. So now I got to think of a whole different, something that I don't even really want to do that I need to do in order to survive out here.

Christina: (19:15)
Yeah. I totally agree with you. And in the codependency, like wanting to take care of somebody, that's really hard that you're not able to do something that you are so very passionate about. And as far as anything else goes, is that the only reason that you haven't gone back to school is because of not deciding what you want to go for?

Erica : (19:39)
Yeah. And because I'm not passionate about some things, and I know some jobs, like by me being a felon, some jobs, I won't even make it past the background screen. So I don't know.

Christina: (20:00)
So if you knew what you wanted to further your education with and you knew what you wanted to do as a career, there's nothing else standing in your way of going back to school.

Erica : (20:12)
No. And it's not what I want to do, it's what I could do because of what I wanna do, I can't do. Right. Does that make sense?

Christina: (20:20)
It absolutely makes sense. I think that's one of the elements, like a lot of people start going that area, getting degrees and, and areas that are not applicable to your future because you're restricted by your crime or your criminal history of the past if you, if you've been justice-involved.

Christina: (21:04)
Well thank you Erica for coming today. And is there anything else that you want to share about education? Well when you were in prison, did you do any kind of vocationals or anything or was it, was GED the only thing that you had done and a little bit of the, the college courses?

Erica : (21:24)
I did Business Tech. Vocational.

Christina: (21:28)
Okay. And has that been beneficial to you at all? Since you've been out.

Erica : (21:34)
It's been beneficial, but like I said, you gotta find the right person that's gonna accept it. And that's going to accept your criminal case. Cause I learned, I did the whole, like the Microsoft office, Excel, Outlook. So I'm like that right there. Like I want to do secretarial work with that, but I can't get into that because it just all depends on who want to accept you working at they place, a business, with a felony. So it really ain't been beneficial. But I mean, nevertheless, I learned, I got the experience and then what I want to share with people is that, I don't know, the education is a very good thing. And if you don't know, if you don't use what you learned, you'll lose it.

Erica : (22:35)
And I'm like, I got to sit in our Leslie interview and she made a lot of sense. You got to work for what you need. But those people who do got like mental health issues and educational issues and learning issues. Like we gotta want it, too, and work for it. If we really want to do it, we gotta get a support system and be real and be honest and

stuff about your treatment and stuff and just go out there and go do it.

Christina: (23:14)
Erica, I really appreciate that element to it because I don't think that that's really talked about too much as the mental health of students and, and incarcerated people. You know, the people that have mental health diseases that are trying to work towards getting their GED or work their way up out of prison presents a whole other level of challenges, right? So you have all these rules and stipulations that you have to abide while you're incarcerated. And untreated mental health is very real in an incarcerated setting because the prisons that I've been to, that I've seen, don't have a very good mental health approach. And so when you have an issue like that, that is untreated, and trying to conduct yourself and live your everyday life as if it's not there I mean it, wouldn't it be great if we could just ignore it, but that's not reality. And so having to face that while you're trying to get your education is really commendable and really I think that that sheds a light that a lot of people aren't thinking about very often. And so I really do appreciate that.

Erica : (24:48)
Thank you.

INTERVIEW WITH LORI RECORD
BY CHRISTINA KOVATS

Recorded via phone at DePauw University
Greencastle, IN
March 22, 2020

Christina Kovats (00:02):
Good morning, Lori. I really appreciate you doing this with us today. We just want to get what your story is pertaining to education and if you could start by talking us through what your educational journey has looked like. Starting from when you first began. First of all, did you graduate high school?

Lori Record (00:41):
Yeah.

Christina (00:41):
Okay. So you have your high school diploma?

Lori (00:44):
Yes, I graduated from high school. I actually had a 21st century scholarship [an Indiana state scholarship], went on to a local college down in Evansville, USI [University of Southern Indiana], but I really was not prepared or ready for college and I ended up dropping out halfway through my first semester….Classes started in August and I dropped out middle of October, end of October. Not long at all.

Christina (01:35):
During your time there, did you receive like grants or loans? What kind of financial aid did you get?

Lori (01:52):
I did have the Pell Grant and I also had 21st Century Scholar, [which] paid for all of my classes themselves and then my program paid for all of my textbooks and stuff. And then I had a little bit leftover for gas cause it was on the other side of town. So I did have all that. I didn't have any loans out, so I was lucky about that.

In order to stay on my mom's insurance after I dropped out of college, I ended up going to beauty school and then once again, I still was not ready to be an adult, and I'm in a bad relationship. I ended up

dropping out of beauty school. We re-enrolled. It wasn't very well run in the first place and that beauty school closed down. I enrolled in another beauty school and then got pregnant.

Christina (02:50):
So for the beauty schools that you had attended, was this loans or grants or how was that funded?

Lori (03:03):
Some mild amount of grants, but the majority of it was student loans that now about $7,000.

Christina (03:10):
Okay. So how much was it when you initially had received the loan? What was the amount of that?

Lori (03:18):
It was supposed to be $10,000 divided between two. Once you finish your first half of your school, the school take out the other $10,000. My first school got in trouble and they actually had to pay back a lot of loans. That's part of the reason why they got shut down cause they were taking out the full $10,000 when you were in your beginning classes. So that's how I ended up with only $7,000 worth of loans instead of the full 10,000 for starting school twice.

Christina (03:57):
But the loan that you applied for was 10,000, am I correct?

Lori (04:06):
It was two $5,000 loans.

Christina (04:08):
Yeah. It looks like that they were probably in some financial trouble, to put it mildly,

Lori (04:22):
The people who owned the school were trying to pass it down to their daughter and then their daughter basically bankrupted the school. And they were banking on people graduating. Well, people weren't graduating. And then when people had more loans out than they were

supposed to, that's when they ended up just finding out and filing a class action lawsuit. Fast forward five years and I'm in prison, so,

Christina (04:59):
So you got pregnant and it was about five years later that you had gotten incarcerated. If you could talk about what education you received while you were [there].

Lori (05:25):
So the first semester I was still in the PLUS Program, I believe. It was the second semester that the school was actually enrolling people. I wasn't able to enroll the first semester, but the second semester when I enrolled we did the writing. We had a writing prompt that we had to do to evaluate what classes we would need. Well, some basic math tests and stuff like that. Dr Kauffman actually pulled me aside because my math was great. And my essay, I actually took it a different direction than the other students had and she liked the way that I was able to interpret things differently than other people on the prompt itself. And that's when I joined the history project.

Christina (06:26):
What was the history project about?

Lori (06:31):
It was a research of the Indiana Women's Prison and she figured that the best people to write about the history of something were the people who were directly involved in it. So since we were incarcerated at the Indiana Women's Prison, we made the most sense to be the scholars for the Indiana Women's Prison. So for that to be the first prison for women [in the US], it was something that was close to us, but all of us would take a different take on it than most people in the general public would.

Christina (07:00):
Absolutely. I'm sorry, Lori, did you mention that this was originally Martin University?

Lori (07:07):
I did not, but that was who Dr. Kaufman has partnered with whenever it came to who was going to accredit our classes.

Christina (07:18):
So you're attending Martin University and you're involved in the history program. How long were you taking courses with Martin University? Do you know about how many credits you received?

Lori (07:33):
It was about 12 credits, maybe 15. I took a total of eight classes or nine classes between Martin University and then when Holy Cross took over. Yeah. I'm a terrible college student who has no idea how many credit hours I actually have!

Christina (08:14):
Well, considering the circumstances surrounding it while we were incarcerated, it was hard to keep up with knowing what was for credit and what wasn't. So you said that you did start doing another college. Can you tell me what that college was and about how many credits or classes that you had done during that time?

Lori (08:38):
Martin University ended up having to pull out of the prison, so we ended up with Holy Cross College out of South Bend, Indiana. I attended about another six classes with them, that I took credit for. So I had another 18 credit hours. It was pretty awesome. One of the things that I really appreciated was even though our professors weren't from the school that we were getting our credits for, we had teachers who were from all kinds of schools. Everything from Indiana University to DePauw. We even had a professor who was from Butler and it was pretty incredible to get all these different teachers who when you go through a traditional college, you get to pick everything out. But we were having ours hand selected for us. Plus they were willing to put in the extra hours for us. They weren't getting paid for this; a lot of times they were not only having to spend their own gas money to come see us, they were buying supplies for us too, making sure that we had what we needed. And so many people put so much extra effort into it that; we knew what this meant. We also knew that college wasn't just offered from the state and it was something that we were really having to work for and fight for. It's pretty incredible. A lot of our professors even told us they go to their normal schools and you have a lot of late teenage, early 20 year olds and they were basically the kids that I was whenever I dropped out of school; they

come unprepared, they don't care. They are just sitting there to get their credits and move on with the next subject. But we wanted to learn, we wanted to figure out how does this apply to our life, how do we fit into this?

Christina (10:36):
Absolutely. Can you tell me how--being as though you had experience with college prior to your incarceration and then I know it was just a little bit of experience, but still nonetheless--can you briefly talk about how it differentiated from being a student incarcerated versus non incarcerated?

Lori (11:15):
It sounds like a stereotype, but it was really a close-knit community. You would see people who would go to rec and they would be studying. Sometimes depending on where we were going to rec out, we weren't allowed to bring our books with us or anything. So we were trying to memorize as much as possible to relay what we learned to the next person or trying to meet up with them at lunchtime or something like that, just so we could try to get along the message of how to solve a particular problem or what we interpreted from a certain class. Then later on we ended up having study nights and everything else and you'd see people who weren't even in the same classes trying to figure out, okay, well I think I want to take that class next time because I really like this aspect of how it's being taught and what people are getting from it. Whereas when I was in college on the outside, there were maybe four or five of us who had talked in between classes and stuff, but we didn't really know each other. We didn't really care. Matter of fact, I have some girls who work for me now, and they're both college students and each one of them made one friend, maybe two or three. You don't really get that connection to other people the same way you see all the movies about-- over amplify a lot of aspects of stuff. But one of them, she said, "I thought college would be an opportunity for me to meet new people," and she goes, "I made one friend" and she's the one who got her the job with me. So it's really funny to me that for us it was the way of us interacting with other people both on the inside and the outside that normally we wouldn't cross paths with. But on the outside it's not like that at all. You know, it's kind of role reversal of everything that we're taught when we're in high school of what college is going to be like.

For me, prison actually opened my doors to pretty amazing people. Oh, when I went to college the first time, I don't know if that's because I didn't live on campus or what, but you don't really meet a lot of new people.

Christina (13:25):
Right. Very disconnected. So I want to go back to this History Project that you had mentioned. Can you talk to me a little bit about what your experience was with that and the different opportunities that it had opened up for you and experiences that you had with presenting?

Lori (13:47):
You know, it's funny, I had been a part of the classes and stuff where we had people come in from the outside and we had to explain our story and talk to people we didn't know and have them get a large grasp of things that they had never understood or never heard of before. But being part of the History Project it, evolved into us presenting in front of a lot of academic scholars who this is their life and we were coming from it. Some of us were new students in general, new to the subject matter at hand, but at the same time we were becoming experts in our field because nobody knew about this stuff. We weren't able to do our own research. So the research we did get, we hungrily went over it. And every time they brought in new papers for us, there was this mild amount of groaning. But it was so amazing because, you know, we really did thirst for knowledge. When you're on the outside, we think everything's just one click away on the computer or your phone or whatever. You take it for granted. And then it evolves to us writing papers and myself and another student co-authored a paper that I can now say I'm a published author and I won an award. And that's something I still feel funny saying it because that's nothing I ever would have thought would have happened in my life. Especially not either where I was going before, who thinks that that's what happens when you go to prison?

Christina (15:20):
That's awesome. And congratulations. What was the award that you had won?

Lori (15:33):
It was for the paper Michelle Jones and I wrote, "Magdalene Laundries: The First Prisons for Women in the United States." It was [published

in] the Journal of Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences. They're just a surreal thing that I can say these things, but they still don't seem real even though it's been many years now.

Christina (16:12):

So you did Holy Cross and when you were doing Holy Cross did you face any issues with transferring of credits or issues with your previous financial loans?

Lori (16:35):
[When] I was incarcerated, my mother helped for me to get a deferment so I wouldn't go into default on my loan. She had done it multiple times, cause it's like every four or six months you have to re-file. And they told my mom that I couldn't stay in deferment forever and she told them that my circumstances hadn't changed. And yet at the same time, if my circumstances are changing, why am I being taken out a deferment and put into default? So whenever we had a program or whenever there was a potential for us to be part of a pilot program where we would get actual financial aid that would be pooled between everybody, I wasn't able to contribute to that. Not for lack of trying on my or my family's part, but just because it's really hard to explain to people in financial aid that you can't pay because you're incarcerated and they can't understand that your family can't pay for you. And that's not fair. That's a burden that they shouldn't have to do for your mess up.

Christina (17:45):
I totally agree. So was your mom able to take care of your loans, or did you set up like a payment plan? What came of that?

Lori (18:05):
I ended up being in default for several years when I came home. I had had a credit card before that that got wiped off cause I was incarcerated long enough that the debt was cleared. But the only thing that I had on my credit score was default from the student loan and my credit score was actually in below 400 It was ridiculous. I called them when I first got out. Find out … that you're not able to just pay money to financial aid, you actually have to set up a payment plan. I had gotten a car in order to get to and from work and with everything else, I was not able to set up a payment plan at the time cause they

would have wanted me to pay more than what I would've actually been able to pay them. To this day I haven't set one up cause I want to see where my finances are going to be. But once I do set it up, then it'll be pretty interesting.

Christina (19:17):
Then they think that, like, they're the only bill you have to pay and it's very frustrating. So you had said that you had been involved with Martin University prior to your involvement with Holy Cross. Did your transcripts transfer? What had taken place with your credits from Martin?

Lori (19:46):
Not all of my credits were going to transfer, some of that just because most college programs don't have things that Martin University was offering to us, like the History Project. So it's always a crapshoot as far as what's going to transfer, what's not. At this time I'm looking to go back to school, but at first I have to get out of default first or just not all schools leave unless you just pay a flat rate to just take one class at a time. So I'm juggling between do I want to file for financial aid and then, or not financial aid, but do I want to try to get out to default and see if I can still pay for classes cause I don't want to go further into debt. I was lucky enough while I was incarcerated to be able to finish my cosmetology degree and that's helped me immensely. But there's still parts of my college that I would like to finish.

Christina (20:44):
Oh, thank you for touching on that. Cause that's what I was going to ask you as well. As far as like the vocational training, you said that you got your cosmetology license. Did you do any other vocational training?

Lori (20:57):
I did not. I was in this weird Goldilocks, like I was just outside the Goldilocks time period when you're incarcerated. Getting into vocational classes is based on your outdate. My outdate, when I was first incarcerated was pretty far out and I figured out a math formula to figure out how long the vocational take what your out date will be. And I realized that in order for me to take something like substance abuse, the PLUS Program, and cosmetology, that wasn't really going to leave any other time for me to do anything else. Luckily I was able to

take the college classes while I waited for my vocationals to go through.

Christina (22:00):
So you do want to continue your education?

Lori (22:17):
Yes. First of all, I want to figure out exactly what it is that I want to do. Right now I'm a store manager of a pretty small retail store part of a much larger corporation. But I realized that that's not going to be what I want to do for the rest of my life. So

Christina (22:41):
What is it that you do want to do with the rest of your life? Do you, have you figured that out? Like what if you were to go back to school, what would you be pursuing?

Lori (22:54):
I think I'd either pursue small business or accounting or something like that because no matter what happened and why I ended up going, those are always good things to have under the belt.

Christina (23:04):
Absolutely. And so the barriers that you'd face in order for you to go back to school are the loan in default. And do you have any other barriers that you're aware of or is it just that one?

Lori (23:22):
Most schools it wouldn't be an issue. But whenever it comes to trying to figure out exactly which avenue I want to go with, what I want to do with my life, having any felony is horrible. Mine according to the state of Indiana, it's not a violent felony, but like I said, I wasn't able to join school for the first semester because that was considered a violent felony while I was incarcerated. There are some felonies that have this weird in-between states. So figuring out what I want to do later on in life and making sure that whatever career path I choose isn't going to be hindered by what my felony is, is also a huge one. Also for some people, I know that they've had issues which I'm not quite to that stage yet, but getting into grad school with felony is not necessarily an easy thing either. Luckily I have met champions who would stand behind me, write me letters of recommendation, and

those do weigh really nicely with the admission boards, but at the same time, not everybody has that.

Christina (24:29):
That's absolutely true too. So Lori, can you talk about what education meant to you while you were incarcerated?

Lori (24:45):
There are these moments where even when I was in jail, I was so starved for anything that would challenge me, that me and another girl, I had a high school diploma, she had a GED and …I had ordered off the commissary for like $20 or $30 a GED book just to go through it just because I was so bored out of my mind.

Christina (25:07):
Not because you needed your GED but because you wanted to continue to exercise your mind on some level?

Lori (25:16):
Yeah. Anything to make me feel like I wasn't making my brain shrink. Everyday playing cards is fun, but you feel like you're losing parts of yourself, parts of yourself that you had worked hard when you were in high school, whether you actually worked hard or not to gain those skills, and those thoughts and to be able to fill that; it's hard to describe, but you can literally feel yourself losing parts of yourself. So when I went to college and we had the opportunity to do things, and then later on we took a Public Policy class and even though we weren't able to present directly, in the beginning anyway, to public figures. Later on, we were, and we saw changes happen. I know it sounds like such a small, ridiculous thing, but we [the Public Policy class] got tampons [for everyone] in prison for free. I feel I come home and I see homeless people on the street and I think they don't have those basic necessities that we were able to get for people who are incarcerated. It's just pretty incredible to me that we were able to affect change on a much larger scale and in things that would affect actual policies, not just in our direct vicinity, but statewide. And that's something. Whatever size your world is, that's how you feel your ripple effect is. But we don't realize this a lot bigger than that. So going to college made me realize that I had a much larger impact on the world. I was lucky enough to be a part of other projects that were on a global scale. So I realized that it didn't matter what situation you were in,

you can affect something much bigger than yourself anyway. So having that was pretty incredible.

Christina (27:19):
Is there anything else that you feel is important to know? Any other barriers that you face during your incarceration that you feel should A) be addressed or B) that the people are completely oblivious to that it would shock them to know or or anything else that you want to share surrounding education?

Lori (27:52):
You know, it's funny, I was talking to a former coworker of mine about different papers I had done and she was unaware of my post incarcerated status. But at the same time that I'm having a conversation with her about, these great accomplishments I've had and the impact I've had on the world. She's talking about when she's trying to hire somebody from her store that she doesn't want to hire somebody from drug court because she doesn't want them stealing from her store.

Christina (28:23):
Oh wow.

Lori (28:25):
It's living this duality of who can I even talk to my tasks about? So it's not so much education, but just, it's funny, in general trying to live this duality world and we were going to be staying in a hotel room together for a couple of nights while we were getting trained that I was having, we need to keep this huge part of myself that I had only been home for a year and a half, not even a year and a half. And my past eight and a half years I couldn't mention. So having that mixed with, you know, emailing my friends who are still incarcerated since I was off parole and was allowed to do that, it was a huge duality. Whereas now I have people who work around me who my entire store knows that I'm post incarcerated. They love it. They accepted. If they have questions they ask, and most of them, it allows them to have conversations with me that they wouldn't normally. And with the girls who were in college. It's funny because I tell them about my college experience. And it's not so much a barrier, but they're almost envious of the community that we were to create for ourselves. And one that everybody strives really hard for us to be able to have. So it's funny

that on the one hand we're still being judged for something that may have happened multiple years ago and we've totally changed into new people. And then on the other hand, we have people who accept us, love us, and are really in awe of the things that we were able to create for ourselves.

Christina (30:09):
Something just dawned on me when you were talking that you're talking about people being envious of community that we had. And then, out here, people strive for that. But yet in there how, they [the prison] do everything that they can to absolutely prevent the community from taking place. And I think it's interesting and the reason for the Facebook group [of formerly incarcerated women], like to have that connection, because we all do have that tie that runs through each and every one of us. And we don't all have the same stories, but we do share that similar camaraderie and have that level of understanding of each other facing certain circumstances.

Lori (31:02):
It's funny, I had a customer come in the other day and she was a late 80 year old woman and we're from the same hometown and I was just giving her updates from before I moved out of there--different things in the town that had changed. And she, you could see her hungrily listening to me for information about seeing something grow and evolve. And we do that with each other when we're posting incarcerated. I don't even have to know you. We didn't even have to serve at the same time. But knowing that somebody understands where we've been and what we're trying to do. I don't have to know you. I don't have to know your story or anything else, but I know a piece of it and it's an understanding that nobody else will ever get.

Christina (31:51):
Absolutely. Well, Lori, thank you so much for your time. Is there anything else that you wanted to share? I appreciate all that extra feedback that you had given.

Lori (32:02):
I can't think of anything off the top of my head.

Christina (32:06):
Well, thank you so much and we really appreciate you sharing your story with us and Good luck to you.

Lori (32:15):
Thank you, anytime.

INTERVIEW WITH ANASTAZIA SCHMID BY KRISTINA BYERS

On the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis
2020

Kristina Byers (00:00:19):
My name is Kristina Byers. I'm your host today. I'm here with Anastazia. She's a grad student in the medical humanities department at IUPUI. Which is short for Indiana University, Purdue University of Indianapolis. I'm so happy to be with her today. Welcome Ana. Hi Ana. There's so much I can say about you to introduce you and I will say a few things briefly, but I'll want you to talk about each of these. You are a founding member of the history project that started out of the Indiana Women's Prison here in Indianapolis. You're also a recipient of the 2016 Gloria Anzaldua Award. And, you can correct me later, I'm sure I mispronounced that. But that's an award that stems from the American studies association for your work in gender and sexuality.

You've also received several other awards I hope we have time for today. If we don't, then perhaps we can go into them later on. And then you're also about ready to publish a book. What next year? I believe it is…

Anastazia Schmid (01:41):
Well, hopefully next year. 2022 is our hoped for projected publication date with The New Press.

Kristina (01:49):
Okay. But you're, you definitely have a contract and you're working on that now.

Anastazia:
Yes, yes.

Kristina:
Wonderful. So basically we're doing these interviews to talk about barriers that people have experienced while pursuing higher education within prison and also upon release and what those experiences were like for people. And one day how we can work to make things better. So if you don't mind, Ana, if we can just start from the beginning. You

had some education prior to going into prison. Did that work to your advantage or would you say was that a factor at all in your studies?

Anastazia (02:33)
Yeah, I went to college probably on five different occasions prior to my incarceration. I was an adult by the time I went to prison. So that's a little different of an experience. I had had a lot of life experience, adult living in the outside world, and a lot of it education under my belt before going in. I never did end up obtaining a degree in any one area though. So when I got inside and I found out that college programming was available, I figured what better way to spend my time than to finally go back and finish a degree in something? Now, the irony of that would be out of five different occasions of me going to college, you would've thought I'd have a substantial number of credits that would have transferred in. However, that ended up not being the case of all my collective college experience combined, I believe only about a semester's worth of credits transferred roughly 15 to 18 credit hours.

So, like I said, they did not give me credit for more than about one semesters worth of classes. So I was essentially beginning my degrees on the inside from ground zero.

Kristina (03:52):
Wow. And was that because of the degree that you chose to pursue with Ball State [University], and also were you limited on your choices for degree options?

Anastazia (04:05):
Yeah, so because I went to school so many different times prior. I did a lot of traveling in my life and moved around the country quite a bit before I became incarcerated. So I think part of the reason was that my credits came from so many different schools across the country, so some of it simply was not going to transfer in because they were out-of-state schools. Some of my credits had come from Ivy Tech State College, so they weren't going to transfer in Ivy Tech credits.

So there were various reasons why some of those credits weren't transferring. The other was, at the time, Ball State in the prison was only offering a general education diploma, just general arts. So in a way it's kind of ironic that if you're offering a degree, basically just a Gen Ed degree, why more of the credits didn't transfer because

theoretically that was going to involve kind of a foundational across the board education. But for whatever reason, if you were a decent student at Ball State and you had a good rapport with your professors and with the administrators, they were pretty open to bringing us the classes that we wanted. What we wanted to see. So within my first year at Ball State, I expressed an interest in wanting to pursue a degree for psychology and my professors and the, they were very willing to bring in what was needed to make that happen.

I apparently was not the only student who expressed that interest at the time. So it became beneficial to just offer kind of a plethora of classes in psychology. And so as time went on, that's exactly what I majored in and ended up actually doing a triple minor in psychology through Ball State through the course of my education with them.

Kristina:
So it sounds like you had a pretty good experience studying taking courses through Ball State.

Anastazia:
Yeah, for the most part, I really have no complaints at all whatsoever. Our classes were intimate, they were interactive, they were critical in analysis and theory. I cannot complain at all about the actual education I received from Ball State on the inside. The teachers were very, very vested in their students and very much willing to work with us, not only collectively but individually.

So yeah, it was, it was a good experience for me.

Kristina (06:47):
So obviously you were learning, you're taking the courses just as if you were on the outside taking courses. So we know education has an impact on our daily lives. Can you talk about the impact it had on you while you were incarcerated? How that changed your life on the inside?

Anastazia (07:07):
Absolutely. I was in a very precarious state of life prior to incarceration. I have a very extensive background of trauma in multiple areas. So coming into prison, I was not in the best shape, mentally, physically, really in any capacity at that point in time. But it was a very, very low point in my life prior to, during the process, and

then originally coming into prison. So education for me at that point in time really became the catalyst of transformation for my life.

How was I going to take these extremely horrific circumstances that had happened and try to funnel that into something worthwhile with purpose that would give me the ability to remain positive and productive. But I think first and foremost for me, my education on the inside was really transformative for me. What was I going to do to figure out the issues and the problems that I had within myself in my own life? How was I going to find the answers in the solutions to that and give some type of livability to my life under the circumstances and be okay as a human being and especially being okay in such horrific circumstances. It gave me drive, purpose, motivation, hope. I mean, I was facing an extremely long sentence and I think it's [never?] easy for any individual when they're facing a lot of time.

Like, I was to become very hopeless and to want to just completely give up. I think one of the common fallacies when we talk about reform with prison and we just talk about prison in general, people want to use terms like "rehabilitation." They want to talk about all this programming and the outside world is under this erroneous assumption that that's just a given that you come in and they're automatically educating you and giving you therapy and doing all these wonderful things. And that is not at all the reality. For those of us who were a part of education, most of us had to fight tooth and nail to get it, even though it was being offered. It was a long uphill battle to even be able to get admittance into the college and to be able to do that.

So you know, it's a constant struggle in the system itself to be able to attain and become a part of what theoretically is an option for you to do. It may be there, but it doesn't mean it's easy for you to get into, it also doesn't mean that this is the choice that the majority of people inside are making. There are a substantial number of people that they choose not to. So you know, it's very possible to go into prison for a few years or many, many years or even many decades and not do anything at all the whole time. It's a choice to, and like I said, a choice that most of the time you have to fight in order to obtain. And that was certainly the case with me. They were not readily offering me this. I was not going to be one of the people that they were pushing to get in originally.

Kristina (10:32):
You mentioned it was difficult to get in, to get accepted. You had to fight for that opportunity. Can you talk about why you had to fight for that opportunity?

Anastazia (10:45):
Sure. Like I said, unfortunately I have a background pretty steeped in trauma. Trauma leads to some mental and emotional problems. I do have chronic PTSD and so originally going into prison with psychiatric diagnoses we are the most forgotten and the forgotten. Nobody really wants to take the time to figure out what the problem is or why you have it or if it's an actual problem or if you are capable or able to function in even an everyday capacity, let alone higher intellectual functioning. And I think one of the biggest barriers I originally faced inside the prison was trying to get people to understand that having some type of a mental illness label does not equate a person being mentally deficient.

So there was this false assumption that any and all people inside who had any type of psychiatric diagnoses were also mentally incompetent and mentally deficient and incapable of doing higher levels of learning. It took several months of me fighting and arguing with counselors, trying to, even so much as convince these people that I was in college before I came to prison. I was a straight A student on the street. There was no reason for me not to be able to get in. And I mean, it was very much an uphill battle. I finally had to just appeal to one particular staff member who worked on the psychiatric unit inside the prison who was like, yeah, you know what? I hear you and you're right and it's wrong that they're trying to lock you out. And she went to bat for me and she got me in.

And so that was kind of the beginning of it. But, you know, going into higher education, especially under those circumstances and with the stigmatizing label at that point in time, then I'm having to work twice as hard as the average student would. I had to prove myself above and beyond what most of the other incarcerated students were doing. So I think there's barriers within barriers and there's labels upon labels and there's issues and circumstances and intersections within these dialogues that aren't necessarily getting addressed. And my particular case is one of those things.

Kristina (13:40):
It sounds kind of like you having the opportunity to further your studies actually kind of saved you and brought you out of that. Like you mentioned, it gave you purpose. So things are going well while you're a Ball State, your classes are progressing, you're progressing as far as your career track your degree. And then tell me about what happens.

Anastazia (00:14:18):
At this point in time I had fully completed two semesters. I obtained my associates degree with Ball State and was certainly going on to complete a bachelor's degree at that point in time. So it would have been halfway through the first semester of my third year with Ball State that all of a sudden we are all told that Ball State has lost the contract to the state and Oakland city university is about to come in and take over. So at the end of that calendar year, Ball State was going to be completely out of the prison. So like I said, I'm in the first semester of my third year at this point in time. And you know, like I said at the beginning I had about a semester's worth of classes that originally transferred in. So for me, I'm three semesters away from being able to graduate with a bachelor's degree.

The problem is that Ball State is only going to be in the prison for two. The one I'm currently in and the next consecutive spring semester after that, they're gone. Any student who was enrolled at the time who had not yet finished degree was going to be forced to have to transfer credits to Oakland City. Now here in lies the problem at this point in time. My amazing professors [and] Ball State administrators had just moved mountains to bring me every single class I would have needed to earn a psychology degree. So the bulk of my credits were all psychology and psychology degree related and geared towards that track. If I would have had to transfer over to Oakland City, I was going to lose almost every single credit I had earned. And at that point in time, what was almost two and a half years in with only three semesters left to go.

Kristina (16:05):
And why is that? Is that because Oakland city University was not offering a psych degree or anything similar?

Anastazia: (16:29)
No, they were offering solely different types of business degrees and management degrees and the kind of things that quote unquote, they had told people that prisoners are going to need to succeed in the outside world. So unfortunately that was not factoring into my life or my plans for my life and was about to be a huge devastation. So at this point in time I began speaking with the Ball State administrators. What in the world can I do to finish my degree with Ball State that I worked so hard to attain, not lose all those credits and actually get my degree in psychology that I had worked so hard to, to do. So at this point in time, now I'm looking at, there is one final semester left that Ball State will be inside the prison and I still need 27 credit hours in order to be able to complete that degree with Ball State.

Kristina: (17:26)
So at this point it seems, I mean, did devastation set in, did it seem like there's no way, or did you instantly go into, okay, how are we going to fix this?

Anastazia: (17:38)
Well, sure. I mean, I think the initial reaction is, Oh my God, this is insurmountable. I mean, how am I ever going to do this? I need 27 hours. There's one semester left. The grant money that was available in the state of Indiana at the time would not pay for more than 18 hours in a semester. So I need 27; they're only going to pay for 18 in the next semester. If I had to let that remaining 11 credits rollover, I would've been screwed. I'm losing my degree with Ball State. I'm losing all those credits to Oakland. It would have been starting from ground zero. And then at that point in time, I had used up so much of my financial aid, I never would've been able to finish a degree with Oakland city anyway. So again, I go back, I talked to the administrators because at this point in time there was no way I was going to lose everything. I had just worked so hard to saying I didn't care what it took. I was going to complete that degree at the end of the next semester, graduate with Ball State, and carry on with my life degreed person.

Kristina: (18:48)
Which sounds great. How did that actually work? Tell me about what you had to do to actually realize that dream.

Anastazia: (18:57)
Okay. So here would be one time that I can actually say I am an anomaly and that, in this one particular context, I was an exception and maybe exceptional in this point that at that point in time I was indeed a straight A student with Ball State. My GPA was impeccable. My rapport with my professors was impeccable. My ability to work above and beyond was superseding. Most of my fellow students and the administrators at Ball State said, Anastazia, if you had been any other person walking in here talking this craziness that you want 27 credit hours in one semester, we would have laughed you right out the door. However, given your track record, given your GPA, given your standings with this university, we will allow you to do it. If now here we come, here we go again. This big goal if is once again one area where if I were not in the position that I was in, this would not have happened for probably 99% of other people.

Kristina: (20:08)
And talking about the position that you were in, first of all, you mentioned your grades which [were] a lot of, in part I'd say, because of your abilities as a student. Some of that though was support you received from the professors just being really engaged in your education. but then the other piece that like you mentioned being an anomaly not everyone would have the opportunity you did to get all of those classes and get all of those credits because, as you mentioned, there's a gap between what state funds were going to provide for you to finish your degree and that gap between what you need it. And I think you needed 27 credits, the state would pay 18. That leaves nine credits is my math. Right? So nine credits somewhere in there. And so that nine credits had to be paid for by someone. Who was that someone? Okay. Was that something you were able to earn? Were you able to pay that with, with money you were making within the prison?

Anastazia: (21:09)
Absolutely not. Okay. A prison funding, if you are really, really lucky, you're making $20 a month if you're really lucky. And that $20 a month has to sustain you, you must pay for all of your internal needs with that amount of money. So is that going to pay for nine credit hours at a major university? Absolutely not. I mean, it wouldn't have

even touched it. So at the time, I want to say that the tuition was roughly somewhere between [$300] and $500 credit. I mean, it was up there. I was going to have to come up with a few thousand dollars out of pocket to be able to pay for those additional classes. And who paid for that will—certainly not me being an incarcerated person. I had zero money. I was indigent once I was inside prison. I had lost everything through this happening, despite the fact that I was a business owner previously, incarceration will devastate a person's life in ways, far beyond what most people realize. So for myself, I had no more money. And certainly I couldn't rely on the wages that the prison was paying me at the time. So fortunately I have a family that is very supportive and when they listened to the plight that I was in and just how detrimental the loss was going to be if I did not pay for that nine credit hours my family opted to pay that remaining money for me to complete that tuition so that I'd be able to finish those 27 hours in that semester.

Kristina: (23:01)
So again, if, if you didn't have, if your family did not have the means to support you, you would not have been able to complete your degree, then?

Anastazia: (23:10)
No, I wouldn't have been able to complete my degree. None of my credits would have been transferable into the college that was coming in. And what other people may not realize is that college, at least in this state, can earn a person what's known as "good time" credit, which essentially equates a reduction and a prison sentence. So in this context, the bachelor's degree was worth two years of good time credit. So that would've been me also spending an additional two years in prison by not [getting] that degree.

Kristina: (23:46)
Wow. Wow. that would be a lot of loss.

Anastazia: (23:49)
Yeah, that's a lot of loss. I mean, so essentially it's kind of like weighing out, geez, no degree at all, losing all these credits plus spending two more years in prison. Or, on the other hand, figuring out who can pay this few thousand dollars so I can finish the degree, not

lose everything I earned plus earn two years off of my sentence.

Kristina (24:13):
And it's great. I'm so happy your family was able to step up for you. Unfortunately, many of the women that were there with you would you say that that was the norm, that many of them would have had that same access to funds that their families wouldn't have been able to, would have been able to support them even if they wanted to?

Anastazia (24:32):
Absolutely not. I watched and witnessed firsthand the devastation of countless women around me who lost their degrees, who lost their funding, even for the ones that went on to transfer to Oakland city. So many of them could never finish because the grant money ran out before they were able to earn those degrees. And for some other women, Oakland city would eventually pull out before they finished their degrees. So I was one of a handful of women that were lucky enough to be able to complete the degree and finish what I was doing and use the money that was available through the state at the time, plus have that supplemental money provided by outside people.

Kristina: (25:22)
That's great. And amazing story that you did have that support and that you were able to maximize that. While so many people fell to the mercy of the Department of Corrections and negotiations on contracts and who was to provide education cause you didn't have access to whatever education you wanted, it was actually whatever was being offered was what you were able to take advantage of. Can you tell me a little bit about what that final semester was like doing 27 credit hours? I mean, I can't fathom doing 27 credit hours, even in a perfect, I guess, situation where I'm only doing my classes and no one is bothering me and I'm just in the zone. So tell me in the environment that you were in what that was like and then what other things, I think you had some other things that were major going on at the same time. So I'll let you talk about that.

Anastazia: (26:18)
Yeah, absolutely. So although this was a day and age inside the prison where we were allowed multiple classifications (which as time went on, they would not allow you to go to school and work; it was one or the

other). Back in this time period, we're circa 2006 right now, it was pretty much whatever you could handle doing, they were going to let you do. So I was working a full-time job in the prison 40 hours a week. I was working in the cosmetology department and yeah, in that very final semester I was also studying for my state board exams to obtain my cosmetology license. So, wow. I've got state board exams going on for cosmetology, which was indeed my full-time day job. And then I was going to college all night long. So when I tell you that I didn't sleep for about three months, I'm not joking. I was working around the clock either working at actual physical work on site, being in class or studying. It was nonstop. And I mean we joke about it now for people who are familiar with what goes on in prison, you have what's known as count time several times a day that they're making sure nobody's gotten out and they're making sure all the people are there that are supposed to be there. And those counts last anywhere from 10 minutes to 45 minutes depending. I cannot tell you how many college papers I wrote during a count time because I did not have any other time to write them. So I'm writing papers during count. I'm cramming for tests during count. You know, I'm trying to read through 50 and a hundred-page chapters in my book. All in these little itty-bitty windows of time in between work and formal classes in school.

Kristina: (28:16)
And, really, count time. Does that prove to be the only time where you actually got time you could focus on your work? Really, cause it's actually quiet or supposed to in theory be quiet depending on what facility you're at, how they enforce those rules. But typically a count time would be the only time you would experience near silence or at least quiet within a prison, would you agree?

Anastazia: (28:38)
Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. So I think it's funny because in the norm[al] prison life, people dread count, "Like, Oh God, the disruption of life; we have to be on our bunks and it's count time." And I can remember praying, "Please God, do not let them get the count right today. So I have extra time to study and get my work done in quiet and just some peace." So the environment is very chaotic. It's very much non-conducive to studying or trying to advance herself in any kind of way. A staff is very oppositional to people is especially people who are choosing to utilize their time in education and other

productive pursuits. So, I mean you're, you're really fighting an uphill battle to get a degree in that environment.

Kristina: (29:32)
Would you say that the education department, as they call it, this space where you're able to pursue your education that is often separate from the custody way of handling things. So would you say that having access to an education building where you were able to study did help some, even though there were limited time periods where you could use that space?

Anastazia: (29:58)
Yeah, absolutely. It creates a different culture, a different environment within what most of the time is very oppositional-type of living circumstance. The culture of education in the prison and being in that setting, you were surrounded by other people who were working towards the common goal, who were trying to best use the time that they had. There's that age-old adage, "Do the time, don't let the time do you." And, I mean, education is paramount in that, if you are going to do the time, this is the way to do the time. Time almost seems not to really exist while you're in the heart of education and you're working on something so much of your energy and your mental focus and your entire life day-to-day is structured around your classes in the work you have to do in studying for exams and preparing papers and presentations. You don't have time to be a part of all the rest of the nonsense. So yeah, there's absolutely a culture involved in it, too. And I would not have wanted to be a part of any other culture other than that.

Kristina: (31:15)
Wow. Well said. Let's go back to this semester. So after this whirlwind of a semester, you completed, you got your bachelor's degree and your cosmetology license. Let's mention that. And then what happens? That's in 2006, then OCU as we call it, Oakland City University came in and some students were able to transfer or start over there. But your education or access to it kind of ended fairly abruptly with that semester. Can you talk about when and how it was reintroduced into your life?

Anastazia: (31:58)

Yes. So yeah, I mean here's this amazing accomplishment. Against all odds, I graduate a four-year degree in three years. I graduated Summa Cum Laude. I had some of the most amazing professors in the world that I was working with. People that talk to me about doing research projects with me and extending my scholarship and, God, I could taste grad school at that point. And no, not an option. There's no more opportunity for higher education. And there you are sitting in prison at that point—[I] was still facing about a decade and a half on my sentence. So what in the heck are you supposed to do with your time now? So I carried on with other random vocational programs that might've been available, just something trying to stay focused, trying to stay productive. But yeah, there was no more opportunity for higher education. And I believe it was somewhere around 2011, 2012 when that grant money that Indiana had for higher education completely was discontinued. So at that point, all of the women who were still in programs with Oakland City, everybody lost everything. I mean, they came in one day and literally in one day said, "Guess what? No more college ladies." They packed up the computers, the books, the labs, the everything. Just packed it up and walked straight out the door. It didn't make any difference where those women were in their education, they lost everything. So as I previously mentioned, it was the loss of credits. No more opportunity for a degree because unlike when Oakland came in and people had a possibility to transfer, there's no more possibility to transfer college is just gone, period. So you're not doing anything with those credits, you're not getting a degree. And then whatever earned time credit people might've been counting on for those degrees. That wasn't a possibility either. So the devastation of loss, and I mean really probably one of the most hardcore realities. Not only are you not getting a degree and you no longer have anything positive and productive to focus on with this prison time, guess what? You get to spend additional years in prison now because you will not earn that time to get out early.

Kristina: (34:30)
And you mentioned something about it, it sounds kind of like it was a thing that everyone felt. So everyone's, a lot of people that weren't in enrolled in college, were really working towards something and perhaps towards something they never thought they would have been able to accomplish before. So you've got people, women who before prison perhaps didn't even think that they would ever see themselves

inside of a classroom at a university. And now here they are excelling and they're dreaming of possibilities that they never would have imagined for themselves or for their families. So in an instant, that's all lost.

Anastazia: (35:21)
It's almost difficult to talk about without getting emotional. The psychological devastation of this was--there aren't even words to describe what I witnessed these women go through at this time. I mean, it was absolutely horrific in every sense of the word. And at that moment, it was a really hopeless, dark, devastating time. I mean, just across the board, you could feel the entire energy change inside that. I mean, it's not a great place to begin with. Let's not get that confused. But I mean, at that point in time, it was dark and oppressive and heavy and my God, what are we all going to do now. So no other opportunity comes in until somewhere in the midst of 2012, after this devastation has happened, Dr Kelsey Kaufman comes into the prison with this notion that she believed that people in prison were hungry for education and that people would go after that education. Even if there wasn't a time cut, even if there wasn't a degree, they would do it for the sake of education alone. And because she had good rapport with the administration at the facility and because she had the connection, she managed to start a higher education program once again inside IWP with zero funding, no backing from the state other than saying, "sure, you can come in the prison and have the time and space." No books, no materials, no computers, no degree sitting out there, no possibility of time cut for these women. Nothing. Just here you go off for whatever classes you want and, you know, they can take them if they want to, but that's all they're getting. And we're not giving you any help at all whatsoever. You better figure out how you're getting books, materials, and computers because we shan't be providing them for you. So for anyone who doesn't know, somebody needs to give Dr. Kaufman a cape cause she's absolutely super woman. She did that. She found professors at several different universities willing to volunteer their time, willing to donate their resources. And we started a higher education program inside the prison. For myself and Michelle Jones and several other women who were graduate students already, who had basically been sitting on idle time at that point in time, we were all pulled into help as kind of teaching assistants and tutors to

the undergrads and in the midst of this, Dr. Kaufman decides she wants to start the history project.

Kristina: (38:16)
Okay. Let's, and, and I'm glad you brought the history project up because that really led to doors being opened for you. Not just in exposing this important history that people need to know about, we all need to know about, but it opened doors for you, too, to continue your education. Can you talk a little bit about how the history project was born, what it actually was and what it's become?

Anastazia: (38:47)
Yeah. Okay. So we started out in what was theoretically going to be a one-semester class predominantly for undergraduate students to learn about history and learning about historical research. And Dr. Kaufman had this lofty idea that because we had the records from the very institution we were in for its first roughly 15 years of existence, that we were going to use those documents as our primary sources to learn about history, learn about researching history and, guess what, we were going to write a book in one semester because the history is that IWP is the very first women's prison in the country and that these two amazing Quaker feminist reformers started this prison for women and it was wonderful. They were saving women's lives, great things were happening and, yes, we're going to read these documents and we're going to expand this feel-good history about the Indiana women's prison and, you know, as I said, myself and Michelle, Leslie, Kim, several other women who already had our degrees and really didn't have anything else to do at that time, we came in as assistants to the undergrads and joined the history project. I mean really for something to do, something positive, something productive to do. And very, very, very early on we realized that that history was not at all what anybody had been led to believe. And it changed the course of everything.

Kristina: (40:26)
Wow. Wow. And I'm sure you could go on and on about what you actually uncovered and we're definitely going to have to do another edition at some point about that. But can you talk about how working in that project and in that space, the people that gave you access to what you were able to participate in that led to you pursuing higher education? Okay. beyond your bachelor's degree, of course.

Anastazia: (40:54)
Right. So there we were with all these documents, all these primary resources. Then we had professors willing to bring us in all sorts of secondary resources. We were contextualizing Indiana in the 19th century and particularly institutionalization, total institutions, the medicalization of women's bodies, all of these very important issues with primary and secondary sourcing. And it turned out that the theories of myself and several of my academic colleagues, while they seem to be very farfetched at the [beginning] by our professors and outside help, all ended up proving to be true. And we realized we had uncovered a trove of information that nobody, including the historians, were aware of. And once again Dr. Kaufman puts her cape on and she gets us to start presenting our research and the findings that we had at academic conferences. And so from the prison via teleconferencing, myself and several other women were able to start giving presentations on our historical research and our findings to different conferences across the country.

Kristina: (42:17)
So forgive me if we could go back. Here you are, let's remind our audience, that you're at this point still an incarcerated woman participating in this research project. You're presenting at conferences. Can you talk a little bit about how were you presented at conferences? You're in prison?

Anastazia: (42:42)
Yeah, we're teleconferencing. So we're sitting in front of a camera hooked to the computer and they had a bridge link actually that was linking us inside the prison to the universities or the lecture halls or the hotels or the conference centers or wherever these conferences were at. And we're being Skyped in. So we're live feed via video conferencing into these conferences. Now, there were a few, over time, (and ironically not always the prison shooting it down; occasionally it was the conference venue themselves and said, "No, we're not gonna do that."). So there were a few conferences that we actually pr-recorded our session and then our taped sessions of our presentations would be presented.

Kristina: (43:36)
And, Dr. Kaufman was really the one with her cape on that was able to get the Department of Corrections to agree to either it'd be a live feed or a taped recording for you to present. I mean, that's huge. Would you say that that's typically what's happening?

Anastazia: (43:55)
No, absolutely not. Absolutely. Absolutely not. I mean, the lady moved mountains clearly, but we were under good administration at the time, the culture at IWP and IWP's administration was very pro-education. They were very pro what we were doing. So let me just give a little shout out right now to Mr. Steven McCauley, who was our warden at the time. And he was on board for what we were doing. He believed in the work, he supported the work and he was letting us do what we needed to do.

Kristina: (44:31)
And I'm so glad. Thank you for for bringing that up. Mr. McCauley was paramount in allowing all of this to be going on and not just to help you or the women that are involved, but it also was helping the country, helping everyone abroad to really understand the history about what was going on and hear from such amazingly talented scholarly women who just happened to be in a prison.

Anastazia: (45:03)
Yeah. And I think this is one of the points we're trying to make now with the work is -- it's a little thing that Miranda Fricker and several other scholars have coined as "epistemic privilege". And what epistemic privilege essentially means, at least in this context, is that we give validity to knowledge that comes from first-hand lived experience. So we are incarcerated people researching, writing about, theorizing about, and critiquing the carceral state in the experience of incarceration from the inside out. And the reason we were able to uncover the things we've uncovered in our research is because of that lived experience, we were able to look at those documents and see things in the documents that the outsiders have chronically overlooked and missed because they don't have that experience. And so it was actually our epistemic privilege in that standpoint of knowledge that really added the fuel to the work. I mean, this was the meat and the substance underneath what we were doing and how we were able to

do it.

Kristina: (46:20)
So if you hadn't been given that opportunity to study and to do this research, if the women working on this project like yourself hadn't been given that opportunity, it may never have been uncovered because it took your lived experience to shape your research and your ability to interpret the information you agree?

Anastazia: (46:45)
Absolutely! Absolutely. And I'm so pleased to tell you that our project has now begun to inspire other projects across the country. There are other women in prison up on the East coast. There are men down in Florida. There are several other places across the country now that are trying to emulate the history project and what it is we've done really giving that validity to the person, living with the actual experience to be able to rewrite their own histories. So I mean, it's really monumental what's happening.

Kristina: (47:24)
In going back to the opportunity part, cause again, it's not a given in this setting, right? You're in prison, so you're at the mercy of whatever staff wants to make available to you. So fortunately during this time period,. . . the warden of the prison was allowed to, was really given the authority to make those kinds of decisions on what projects were allowed to be pursued, what programs were available to each person that was incarcerated. So it brings up an interesting point. For you, it didn't prove to be a barrier. It actually proved to be beneficial. The person that was in that role going forward though, that wasn't the case as we know, during your incarceration, even that administration changed as it often does throughout someone's time at a facility or sometimes multiple facilities. So you're really at the mercy of whoever's in charge of the facility.

Anastazia: (48:38)
Absolutely. I mean, at any given point in time the plug could have been pulled on what we were doing. I mean, and you know this, you function and you operate and you carry on with your research, with your studies, with what you're doing, knowing that at any given point in time, at any moment, the entire thing can be pulled. I can't speak

for everyone, but for me personally, it caused me to try to work at my maximum potential at all times because you never know when it's going to be taken and when it's going to be gone. And I'm happy to say that I think Dr. Kaufman's little experiment absolutely proved to be correct. I mean, she proved that women would do education solely for the purpose of education. I mean, none of us anticipated any of this amazing stuff happening later and yet we did it anyway. And, you know, part of the point we're trying to make now is that if you give people the opportunity, nine out of 10 times, they will take it, they'll take it for the sake of knowledge alone. Now, that's not to say that we should let that be the only thing people can gain from this. But the point being is that people want knowledge for the sake of knowledge. They want a better life for themselves. They want to be be productive, they want to make use of time. They want to do things constructively. They want to expand their minds and their own lives. And you have to give people an opportunity in order to be able to do that. You know? So for me, there was no more opportunity inside the prison for anything else for me to do. I had maxed out on every program, and every educational opportunity that the prison was offering. If it had not been for this, I would have spent years sitting on idle time with nothing to do. So being in the history project, starting to present my research and my findings across the country on these academic presentations, it gave some semblance of a decent livability to live in. What is otherwise a very destitute and oppressive circumstance. And then that is what opened the door for me to eventually go a step further

Kristina: (51:05)
There were doors that were open because of this research. Of course you didn't foresee this going in. But through these presentations and the people that you encountered in there were classes that you were able to participate actually that gave you eventually, you won a little bit of credit in a graduate program. Can you talk about some of those experiences and, and how that came about. That was it through a conference? Was it through, I know you had experience with Dr Micol Siegel at IU Bloomington, you're meeting all these amazing people, but can you talk about how that manifested into grad school and you becoming a grad student now?

Anastazia: (51:48)

Yes. Okay. So I'm going to try to recount this story as best I can because some of what apparently happened in this story happened outside my presence and the presence of some of the other students. So some of this information I am receiving second hand by the outside people who were there in privy for these conversations. So as I was still there, we were presenting our research at conferences and there were so many people just blown away by the work and the research. And yes, it's amazing work and it's great and it's wonderful. And on the one hand, we're receiving really high accolades, and recognition and awards are starting to come in for us as a whole, as well as for several of us individually. We start getting articles published in different places, so major strides were being made forward. However, there will be a skeptic no matter where you are in life. And we certainly were no exception. So at one of the particular conferences, I'm not even a hundred percent sure which one it was, but there were our professors who had been coming inside, working with us for a substantial period of time at this point, actually at the conference physically that we were presenting at via Skype. And so here's these outside academics and scholars and researchers and all these people that had been a part of this conference and sat in the audience and listened to our presentation. And so apparently some happens amongst the two groups of people. And while there was many people saying the work is great, there were that few skeptics in there. Well, sure yeah, it's nice. Those were decent papers. But these people are not graduate level material to which Dr Kauffman and several of the others that had been working inside with us adamantly disagreed. No, we think you're completely wrong. We think they're every bit as good as any college student in the outside world, maybe better. And so I minor argument ensued for a while over whether incarcerated people had the same level of mental capacity or not. And somewhere in the midst of all of this, Dr. Micol Siegal, who is from IU, Bloomington said, "No, I think they absolutely are capable and I'm absolutely going to let them into one of my graduate classes and we're going to see what happens. But I think you people are going to be proven wrong. And so, let's see." So the fight then began with the administration on how were they going to get some of us into this graduate class while we were still in prison. And what ended up happening was that Michelle Jones and I were the two that ended up being selected for the opportunity. Lots of factors came into this. One was both of our previous grades in college. Two, was the tremendous amount of work

we had done at that point in time with the history project. Three was just our conduct inside the prison and our standing with prison staff and administrators. I mean, many, many, many factors went into this. So Michelle and I were chosen to essentially be the guinea pigs to experiment in, can incarcerated people handle graduate level work? And so then they go through the process of how are we going to tele-conference in to these classes?

Kristina: (55:32)
And, and before we get into the technical side of that, can you talk about how that went? Were people, and I'll let you tell it, but I'm imagining that just from my experience of knowing you and Michelle that they were surprised, to say the least, at your ability and your level of engagement. So of course you can't speak from their point of view, but can you talk a little bit about what that experience was like?

Anastazia: (56:04)
Well, yeah, because let's get here. We're up against all odds by the time--the prison administration and all these parties and entities that have to become a part and onboard and on the same page in order to make this happen--by the time all of that was solidified, the semester was five weeks underway. Micol's class was a three-hour long class, so they're five weeks into the semester once we finally get approval to do this. So it was literally on a Friday, Dr. Kaufman comes to the prison with a enormous box of books that she hands to Michelle and I and she says, "Good news, the prison and everybody finally approved this. You'll be starting class next week. However, they're already five weeks in. So here's all the material that they've already read in this five weeks. You need to be caught all the way up to speed. Plus here's your work for that night. So you'll be prepared for discussion in class. Sorry to say they would only allow you to be on Skype for an hour and a half of the three hours of the class because of count times. So you will be coming in for the second half of the class." Which means the students were already engaged in the discussion at hand when the screen would pop on and Michelle and I would be present. So we begin grad school having to get five weeks' worth of work under our belt in less than a week's time to start class--with no computers, no outside resource materials. We even had to jump through hoops sometimes to try to find a dictionary compatible enough to have half the words that were in our readings even in there for definitions. So to say that this

was monumental is an understatement, but nonetheless. And then there's the trepidation that you know--Michelle and I graduated with our bachelor's in 2006. What was this? I think we were all the way in 2015 now; at this point in time we had not been in a formal classroom as such in all of those years. I mean damn near a decade of time we had not been in formal education and now here we are in grad school with PhD students in the outside world and no light topic either. Dr. Micol's class was genocide, dispossession, and debt for God's sakes. I mean, there were books that she assigned for reading that a single book for a single week was in excess of 400 pages and I'm not joking. So if there were ever a class that would have put a human being to the test of can they handle it or not, that was it. Wow! And we did it and we held our own. And at the end of the semester, it was a Dr Micol's words to all the students. "You were excellent students, not excellent incarcerated students, just excellent students." And our very last class session that semester, the prison granted permission for that entire IU class to actually come inside the prison and have a face-to-face class session with Michelle and I for the final day of the semester. And I mean the learning experience on both sides of that equation, we don't have enough time or words to describe that. But that was the beginning. So that was our first class. And, "uh hey, when can we do it again?" …How do we get to do this again next semester? And so we did end up taking a second class through IU. And so let's say for all the greatness and all the amazingness that this afforded the two of us and all parties involved. Now let's get to the one obstacle and the one downfall that we have as incarcerated people. Even though Michelle and I did every single bit of the work that those outside students did, every bit of the same amount of work in the same amount of time, the same papers, the same exams, the same in-class participation, the same everything; out of two classes, IU was only willing to actually grant us a single credit for all of that work that we had done.

Kristina: (01:00:56)
Can you compare that to the credit that would have been received then for students who were not incarcerated?

Anastazia: (01:01:03)
Well, sure. I mean those classes were worth three to four credits a piece. So on the maximum end the spectrum, that should have been eight credit hours; I mean, two full-load graduate study courses. And

we received one [credit].

Kristina: (01:01:25)
So you did receive one, and this was the beginning of this really. You'd probably thought about grad school, but at this point now, now you've had a taste.

Anastazia: (01:01:36)
Yeah. Now we've got a taste and we want to keep going. So…

Kristina: (01:01:39)
So how did that happen? You've got the ball rolling now. How do you go from there?

Anastazia: (01:01:47)
Right. So we take the two classes with IU, then we go on to take a class at University of California-Riverside with Dr. Andrea Smith, and that was an amazing opportunity. So now we're Skyping to California and we're in grad school in California. And I mean that was beyond words. Amazing. We ended up taking classes and doing symposiums and having an entire semester-long graduate level project with the DePauw students. So we're doing classes with students at DePauw. And at this point in time, DePauw is actually presenting our research and our published articles to their students. So between the conferences and the presentations and now the graduate experience we have, it's not just us saying we want to go to grad school, it's grad school saying, "Hey, who are these two women and how do we get them?" And so it's at this point in time that Dr. Kauffman and some others start talking to Michelle and I about, "Hey, we think it's time you guys need to start applying to schools."

Kristina: (01:02:57)
Wow. So you actually started applying while you were still, you still had some time left on your sentence. How did you get from that point, the initial application process, to where you are now in this chair, in this studio on campus, that Indiana University, Purdue University, Indianapolis? Can you talk a little bit about that.

Anastazia: (01:03:26)
Okay. So you know, the story gets a little more interesting before it

gets smooth sailing. For me, yes, there was still a substantial chunk of time left on the sentence, right about this time. As fate would have it though, I ended up winning my case in the US Court of Appeals. It was the first major victory I had had legally after years and years and years of fighting a wrongful conviction. Finally, the court unanimously sided with me. Now again at this point in time here was all of our ignorance inside and outside people like thinking, "Yay, you just won, surely you're going to be released any moment now." Yes, absolutely apply to grad schools right now because everyone assumed that I would be out of prison within that year. And so that sort of expedites the process of saying, let's apply and let's apply right now. So for me, I started researching schools across the country and I got my eyes and my heart and my little mind set on Reed College in Oregon, purported to be the most radical thinking university in our country. And you know, there's artists and there's activists [and] these great thinkers and everything about the environment was so conducive—not only to the person I am, but the work that I was doing, in the work I was hoping to expand into doing. And so I applied to Reed and I mean, my God, we could go on and on about the ridiculousness of what that process looked like. I mean, first of all, no one person is ever, and I mean ever, going to be able to do this without the help of an outside assistant and liaison. So were it not for Dr. Kaufman and all these other professors I was working with that were able to obtain the applications for me, send the applications back, fight for application [fees to be waived], jump through all those hoops and do that back and forth between me and this college. It never would have happened, period. So the tremendous amount of time and human power behind the outside person and what they had to do to help me through the process is just astronomical. So we get through all this and here's some of the irony of it. Here was the other thing. One other main reason I chose Reed, being this radical college that they claim to be, Reed at the moment was one of the colleges that did not have the box on the application.

Kristina: (01:06:15)
Sorry to interrupt, by box, the box means what?

Anastazia: (01:06:17)
That they're wanting you to check it if you're a convicted felon or not. So we thought, yes, here's a school that automatically is not even

asking the question. Now, let's get here. Reed College is well aware that they have to send to me in the mail--when the entire rest of the world is doing this online--a paper application into a prison with a DOC number attached to the backside of my name. Okay, so let's get there. You absolutely know where you're sending this application from. So I get the application, we fill the application out, the people go through the process of scanning it, getting it back into them, doing all the things they have to do. And then Dr. Kaufman gets a call from one of the administrators at Reed College. "Yes, we've received Anastazia's application and it's amazing and this, that and the other. However she didn't answer a question and it's our fault because it's not on the paper version. The paper version's actually obsolete now, would have been in the online application. We need her to check the box on being a convicted felon." Wow. Yeah. Wow. I mean, first of all, I don't know about you Kristina, but I'm yet to find somebody who's living inside a maximum-security prison who wasn't a convicted felon. I mean, now whether you're guilty of a felony or not is irrelevant. The point being you had to have been convicted of a felony to be living inside the prison where these people just sent me the application to. So it's almost an insult to intelligence saying, after you've already sent this to me in a prison that, oh, well I need to go through the technicality of checking "Yes, I am a convicted felon" on their box for the application.

Kristina: (01:08:05)
And, and what impact that essentially, that tiny little box, have on your ability to attend Reed?

Anastazia: (01:08:12)
Well, I mean tons, because now it's no longer just about my academic standing. It's no longer just about am I appropriate intellectual material for their graduate program? Now you're scrutinizing me as a person in my entire personal life and my entire history before you're going to make a determination as to whether I can go to your school or not. So all of a sudden this application process and the interview process takes on a whole new level of something that somebody without the felony, they would never have to experience or undergo. So I go through several interview processes by phone with the administrators at Reed College and the head of the departments. We have amazing conversations. The people are great, the departments

are awesome. The program seems amazing. They're highly impressed with me. They actually call me back several times for multiple interviews. I mean, this is very, very promising. And when we get down to the final state of acceptance or non-acceptance, it's, I get a lovely letter and my God, I wish I had it with me right now so I could just read it to you verbatim. I get a letter from Reed College that in a nutshell basically states that Reed's administrators feel that it would be in my best interest to get out of prison and be out of prison for over a year before I reapply to the school because they think I need no less than a year to readjust to my life in the outside world before starting a program.

Kristina: (01:10:09)
Okay. I need a second to take that in. So they've decided that for your best interest, not for theirs, that it's better for you to be outside a year. Did they give you any kind of recommendation of what they felt you needed to do to prepare to attend?

Anastazia: (01:10:26)
Absolutely not. I mean, it's just this--very much a paternalistic view. I like to call it "father knows best" that [?] daddy said because you're just not ready.

Kristina: (01:10:39)
So do you know of any situations with other grad students where they're told that after a move or after quitting a job or career change, that they have to wait a year or any time period before applying for school? Is this a standard practice or do you feel that it was just unique to the fact that you were incarcerated?

Anastazia: (01:11:04)
Absolutely. I have never in my life heard about any other student applying to any kind of college or grad school being told, "no, we want you to go live life in the outside world to make sure you're adjusted before you go to school here." Which is almost ironic because let's think about the average college student in an undergrad program. They're teenagers right out of high school. Now, are any of these universities telling the teenager fresh out of high school who went straight into college who's now thinking about grad school? No. "We think you need to go live your life in the world for a year and make

sure you're adjusted to life in the world before you embark upon grad school. I mean, that's ludicrous. Nobody is telling a kid that. Right. However, that's what I was told. And that's what many incarcerated people are told if they're even given the opportunity.

Kristina: (01:11:59)
So I'm sure that was discouraging, especially after all the time invested. And in all of these interviews where I'm sure you had to talk about some things that felt somewhat invasive and maybe things that you were not forced to, but that you felt compelled to talk about in order to be deemed admissible. Can you talk a little bit about how you turned that frustration and disappointment into where you're at now?

Anastazia: (01:12:36)
Okay. Well, for one I have one hell of a tenacious spirit. I'm not ever giving up on anything that I have my heart and my mind set on. And so I was going to school, hell or high water. I'm going to school somewhere. This will happen. I mean, I was a bit disheartened at the time to think what the most radical college in the country, this is what's just happened. My God, what's this gonna look like now? You know? So I started looking at other schools. Clearly things were moving at a snail's pace with the court system that did not go down nearly as quickly as we would have thought [and] time was dragging on. I continued to pursue my research. I continued to write and push for my work to be published in various different sources. Throughout this time I ended up transferring facilities. I ended up at a different facility there. That's a whole separate story of not only the transition to the new facility but having to basically prove who I am and the work that I was doing to once again gain access to resources, to people on the outside coming in, to be able to Skype from that prison then into conferences and continue my work. So it's in the process of continuing the work I was already doing. Now in another facility that I start working with Dr. Elizabeth Nelson. So Dr. Nelson, who a professor here at IUPUI in medical humanities, ends up becoming an assistant to me in my research and the work I'm doing with the history project. And my work had expanded at that point in time from IWP onto the Madison State Hospital and correctional facility, which is where I was then spending time. And so Dr. Nelson starts coming in, she's working with me one-on-one very intensively. I'm continuing with the writing and the research and at some point in time she tells me, "Hey, here's

another educational opportunity for you for grad school and I think the work you're doing and the person you are and what you're doing, you're a perfect fit for the program that I happened to be a professor in at IUPUI and I think you should apply." And so it's at that time that she begins navigating the application process with me for medical humanities graduate study program here at IUPUI.

Kristina: (01:15:10)
And how how did you get connected to professor Nelson?

Anastazia: (01:15:17)
Through Dr. Kaufman somewhere through the network. She ended up knowing her and she started volunteering time and resources to the history project. She took a particular interest in my work because her own work is in 17th century French asylums. And so she was very much interested in the work I was doing and invested in assisting me in the process of what I was doing.

Kristina: (01:15:41)
So here again, if it were not for the intervention by Dr. Kaufman to connect you to people who could help you in pursuing your higher education and your goals, and she not only got you connected to those people, but she actually made conversations possible that even back to the Reed interviews, those interviews wouldn't have just happened on their own if you didn't have a separate space, which I'm sure required other staff to intervene as well in order to give you a space where you could have those conversations. Because let's face it, most colleges are not going to accept collect calls from us to just cold call people.

Anastazia: (01:16:24)
No, but let me get here with Reed in that interview process, I actually did have to prepay on my own account to make the phone calls to Reed from the prison telephone system because that was one thing the administration was not agreeing to. They said, "Oh, sure. All that's great, but if you want to interview with these people, you're going to do it on your time and your dime. And so I paid out of my pocket for phone calls that are no less than $6 for 15 minutes, multiple calls to Reed college on interviews.

Kristina: (01:16:59)
So potentially a month or two salary for you.

Anastazia: (01:17:03)
So I mean once again, the average person, he would have ended right there. They wouldn't have even been able to interview with the college because if they couldn't have paid for it on their own, "No, well it's not happening." And then let's get here. You're constantly interrupted on a prison phone. The phone is automatically going to cut you off at 15 minutes, but there's a high probability it'll cut you off for any reason or no reason at all. Right in the middle, which did happen with me several times. I would have to repeatedly call back in order to complete the interviews. So I was making no less than three phone calls for every interview I had with them. And it was multiple interviews.

Kristina: (01:17:42)
And let's not forget the constant reminder throughout the call that they are speaking to someone in a [inaudible] facility on a recorded line, which does feel like it could bias their opinion of the information you're presenting. Forgive me if I'm wrong.

Anastazia: (01:18:01)
No, absolutely correct. So anyway, we digress for a minute. Let's go back to present now. So yeah, so absolutely. I've got this tremendous network of people on the outside that are backing me, supporting me in, my God, hours upon hours upon hours of work they're doing on their own in order to assist me in this process to make this happen. And so now, I mean, I honestly have to say that I think the major difference between what happens with Reed and what happens with IUPUI is that I was already working for years with a faculty member at this institution that could go in to the board, to the Dean of Students, to the head of whoever she needed to talk to, the committees and the people and the thousand-and-one different avenues somebody has to go through in order to gain admittance into grad school, to be able to speak on my behalf and vouch for me to be able to bring my writing and my applications and all the things I was doing on the inside to be that bridge, to bring them to the outside to get me admitted into this school. And so through that support and that networking through the tremendous amount of work I had done through my academic record, through my CV, through all of these things I was indeed accepted to

IUPUI And I began grad school on August 27.

Kristina: (01:19:35)
Congratulations. I, for a lot of people, that's where the story would end. Just your acceptance. But I do want you to talk a little bit about going from, knowing you've been accepted, not knowing exactly when you're going to be able to start school, what that must've felt like. And then the day you actually did show up for class. What was that like?

Anastazia: (01:20:01)
Okay, so it wouldn't be my life if there weren't 20 things happening simultaneously in the same time frame that the application for IUPUI is floating out in space. And you know, the fate of my future is hanging in the balance. The fate of my life is hanging in the balance with the court system. We finally are getting another court date. We're finally moving forth. We know absolutely that I was going to end up being an immediate release. We just were not exactly sure when that day was going to be, but we knew it was coming and we knew it was coming quickly. We knew that prison didn't necessarily know that, nor did they necessarily believe that. So nothing was done inside the prison to prepare me for my eminent release that was getting ready to happen. And right about the time that I'm finding out, yep, you've been accepted to grad school at IUPUI, I am in negotiation with my attorney, with the court system on what we're going to do for my release. And so the wheels of justice move anything but fast. This whole process ends up dragging all the way on to the exact day that classes begin for me at IUPUI. So clerical error in court, which that's a story in and of itself. Theoretically, I should have been released on Monday the 26th and at least have had 24 hours before class started. That didn't happen. By the time the paperwork went through, the error was fixed and amended and everything was said and done. I was released from custody at, oh, I don't know, approximately 2:15 PM on August 27th, a Tuesday afternoon. And theoretically that first class was starting at 1:30. Now, there was no way, clearly I'd already missed the first class, but I had two classes scheduled for that Monday. My second class was beginning at 6:00 PM. This is my class with Dr. Nelson. Thank God that's the way that worked out. So I left the jail at 2:15 after six days of incarceration in county jail. And if anybody knows what that looks like, that means no shower and hygiene and pretty much a horrific state of affairs, physically,

mentally, emotionally. I was put into a car with a retired FBI agent and driven off grounds to the … house. I'd be staying in, had a quick 45 minute to an hour crash course of welcome inside. There's a shower, jump in, you got 10 minutes, your rides on the way to school, and less than four hours later, I was on the IUPUI campus walking into my first graduate plus.

Kristina: (01:22:57)
Wow. Wow. A lot of changes within that 24 hours.

Anastazia: (01:23:02)
After 18 and a half years of incarceration.

Kristina: (01:23:05)
Wow. Wow. That is quite an adjustment. and now we're, how far in are we now? We're almost toward the end of your first semester here at IUPUI. Do you even, with all those challenges with that first day of classes and how stressful that might have been, could you imagine what life would be like if you hadn't come out and been able to go right into education, which kind of had been a safe place for you?

Anastazia: (01:23:43)
I've spent the last seven years solid of my life researching and doing graduate level work and everything about my life has been molded around education in the work that I'm doing. So if they would've let me out that door and said, "Okay, well, no school, nothing you're doing, have a good life, carry on." I mean, I don't even know what I would be doing with myself right now. This was imperative to give me a decent transition into life. I mean, realistically, it's the only thing that I've had that has provided any semblance of stability. The state in no way, shape, or form had provided … the assistance that they swore up and down I was going to have post-release. Nobody, and I mean, nobody prepared me in any way for the technology that I would have to deal with coming out into the outside world. And I would have to say for me, personally, that's been one of the biggest barriers to overcome. I mean, how do I work the cell phone and the computer and all of these things that did not even exist before I went in? I joke about this all the time, but I swear to God, I'm so serious. It's like I'd been trapped on Gilligan's Island for 18 and a half years, talking through a coconut, and now, "Here you go. Here's your cell phone and

your smart phone and your Mac computer and all these great things and carry on."

Kristina: (01:25:20)
Simple things that most people take for granted, even how to turn on and make a phone call on this fancy device. Let alone being introduced to your laptop for the first time and, "Oh, by the way, you have a paper due tomorrow." Yeah. I'm trying to figure that out. So that had to add a ton of stress to your life. But did you have some people in place to kind of help you through that?

Anastazia: (01:25:45)
Yes and no. I mean yeah, I've had a lot more assistance than what the average person coming out would have, cause I've got this impeccable network that I've been dealing with for years now. So if it hadn't been for those people, this would have been disastrous, for real. On the other hand, when you get out and it's "start your life right this minute," that does not leave a whole lot of free time to try to figure these things out. So it's been trial and error, learning as I go, making a lot of mistakes along the way. And life has certainly happened in the midst of this. Unfortunately, I have had a lot of really crazy unforeseen circumstances in my personal life that I've had to overcome and navigate through. And that's been a mess. I mean I tell people all the time now the irony is anything that in my mind I would have pictured to be a problem or a barrier or an obstacle or a challenge I was going to have coming back out into the free world, none of those things have been the issue. It has been all these unforeseen things that I never would have thought about. The only thing I can say that I would have anticipated being a problem and was a problem, like I said, was learning this new technology and what a gross disservice we are doing, keeping people inside ignorant to what you must know to navigate every day. Normal life. This is not just about grad school. This is everyday life. Now, if you don't have that knowledge, you're handicapping somebody almost to the point of incapacitation. And I'm going to go out on a limb and say it is incapacitation for most people. They cannot function not knowing how these things work and how the world works now. So, this is something that we need to keep in mind above and beyond just barriers to higher education, just education and knowledge in general. You cannot keep people isolated from the world then throw them back in the world and expect them to function

normally and adequately when you have handicapped them completely to how the outside world actually works.

Kristina: (01:28:04)
Wow. Technology really is no longer the privilege that it used to be. It's now a necessity. It's just, it's a way of life. And, yeah, I'm glad you bring that up.

Anastazia: (01:28:18)
I want to just make one final comment on this whole thing and because it has, it was the argument of Reed College. It's been the argument of multiple universities and educators across this country when it comes to formerly incarcerated people. The stigma still exists that somehow or another we're supposedly mentally deficient compared to non-felons, which of course is completely ludicrous. But the challenges that the formerly incarcerated have getting back into school post-incarceration is not academic or intellectual. These are not the barriers that we face. We are not mentally deficient or somehow less than any other students in this environment. The challenges we face are absolutely external, everyday living. Where are we going to live? Where's the transportation coming from? Are we going to have a job? Is anybody even going to hire us? Where are we getting food to put on our table? Where's our clothing coming from? Where are your hygiene items coming from? How are you paying for insurance? How are you getting place to place? What are you doing to repair family bonds and restore yourself in the community at large? These are the problems we face. Not can we get into class and handle class with everybody else. Matter of fact, most of us are superseding some of our fellow students as far as the intellectual capacity is concerned. Not everybody spends such a concentrated amount of time doing nothing but reading books like we did so the problem isn't intellectual, the problem adjusting to the outside world is not can we function as students? And this is something educators and legislators need to keep in mind at all times. It's a systemic issue and it's an issue of lack of support and it's an issue of lack of education and knowledge with common everyday things.

Kristina: (01:30:32)
Wow. Well, thank you Ana so much. I hope that everyone listening is able to understand a little bit better about what it's like to try and just

pursue your education, but also what it's like to not have the access that you need. Any other final remarks as, as we wrap this up? I know I've kept you for quite awhile and I appreciate your time.

Anastazia: (01:30:57)
Invest in human beings and in their potential and in their future, no matter where they are or what their life circumstances entail, it's always going to prove to be worth it.

Kristina: (01:31:11)
Well, I appreciate that. I don't think there's anything I can add to that. Thank you again for your time and best of luck. Best wishes as you finish up your first semester here in grad school.

INTERVIEW WITH MOLLY WHITTED
BY ANASTAZIA SCHMID

On the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis
November 21, 2019

Anastazia Schmid: (00:00)
We're in the IUPUI sound lab on November 21st, 2019 at 10:32 AM okay.

Anastazia: (00:11)
Hi, my name is Anastazia Schmid. I'm a graduate student in the medical humanities department at IUPUI. Today we'll be talking to Molly Whitted. She's an undergrad in the history department at IUPI and an award-winning published scholar for her work on the Indiana reformatory for women and girls. Molly, we're talking today about issues and challenges and obstacles that you've encountered with education and how your education transferred from the outside world to the inside world of prison. And back again to the outside world. Could you give us a brief history on your pre incarceration education and the challenges you face trying to continue your education once you became incarcerated?

Molly Whitted: (00:57)
Sure. In 2006, I started college, at IU-East, which is a part of the IUPUI family. I took about roughly three years before I dropped out due to I started doing drugs. So I kind of messed up some things for me. I got arrested. I was incarcerated; after about three years of incarceration. Holy Cross College, a sister college of Notre Dame [University] came under the Second Chance Pell and offered college classes to the women of IWP.

Anastazia: (01:39)
So, you spent three years in prison with no educational opportunity before Holy Cross came in?

Molly: (01:46)
That's right because I already had my high school diploma and there's nothing else really offered in prison or in jail. IWP wasn't actually the

only institution that I was at because I spent some time in Rockville and at Madison correctional unit, in two county jails, all in a matter of five years. None of those offered anything for me.

Anastazia: (02:10)
Okay. So Holy Cross came into the prison and started offering college. What year was that and what did the process look like for you to become enrolled with Holy Cross?

Molly: (02:18
So the year was 2016 and when they posted the opportunity on the dorm, I was very excited. I'm ready to get my degree and further my education in any way that I can. Also, the mental wellbeing that comes with learning for me is extremely important. So, all that they asked for admission to this was to go up to the education building. They gave you three questions, you opted for one, answered it in an essay form. They, they looked over it and then, let you know whether you were in or not.

Anastazia: (02:56)
Did Holy Cross take any of your pre-incarceration college credits towards the degree they were offering or were you having to start from scratch with them?

Molly: (3:07)
Okay. So I made them aware that I did have so many, and they told me that most institutions including themselves require that you still take 50% of their college credit hours. So, we hadn't really started the process of trying to apply mine to theirs. We just talked about it. I did send them my transcripts. And then nothing came to fruition because two semesters later they had pulled out of the prison.

Anastazia: (03:44)
And what happened with that? Can you expand upon why Holy Cross left the prison or what that did for your educational and degree status?

Molly: (3:52)
Sure. Yeah. It was very devastating, actually. A lot of terrible things happen there.

Anastazia (4:00)
How far along were you in the degree process when this happened?

Two years in. So you had completed approximately how many hours when this happened?

Molly (4:09):
So it was, it was only two semesters that they came, but if we would have used my credits that I brought from IU East, I would have only needed one more semester to get this associates degree. Now the associate's degree, would have also given me a year time cut off my sentence. So the fact that you cannot participate in any other time cut programs while you were participating in that, kept me from receiving any other time cuts for a year.

Anastazia (4:39)
So basically what you're telling me is that because this program pulled out of the prison, you were not allowed to complete your degree and essentially you would end up spending an additional year in prison because you could not acquire earned good time credit for completing that program. And that in the time that you spent in the program, you could not enter into any other programming that would have allowed you earn good time credit, which essentially means spending more time in prison. Is that correct?

Molly (5:10)
That is absolutely correct. Yeah. So in addition to that, it really emotionally devastated me because I've been trying to obtain this degree since 2006, and I thought that this was finally my second chance. It was very discouraging. But there was a ray of hope and so joining a Holy Cross college, it got me the recognition from some of the volunteers, namely Dr. Kelsey Kauffman, who offered me a spot in the Indiana Women's Prison history project. And that led to me writing several pieces of historical research and getting published. So there was a silver lining in that cloud and it ended up working out all right. But at the time it was really, really devastating. I believe that they pulled out because of financial trouble. So I know that they were chosen as recipients of the Second Chance Pell. And when they already are set up in Westville, which has a men's prison here, but Westville has, I think, a couple hundred students in their program there. We only had approximately 30 to 35 women that signed up and, of those, the majority of them had student loans that were in default, including myself.

Anastazia (6:34):
Oh yes. Can you please talk to us a little bit about what that student loan default meant as far as attempting to gain admission into college on the inside and how that affected the overall programming inside and what eventually happened with the college pulling out?

Molly (6:54):
Yes, cause that made a huge impact on my present and my future. So they brought us all in the information that we needed to write the department of education and ask for an application for affordable repayment plan. And a lot of us women did that. And then they sent us back a paper that said we need proof of your income and we need it to be notarized. Well, anyone who's ever been in prison knows that the counselors that are assigned to our dorms are overworked, overstressed, and underpaid and it is very difficult to get them to help you with anything on in a timely manner, you know. So, I did have difficulty getting that. It sat in there on his desk for months. So while I'm trying to get my student loans out of default and I'm constantly telling him how important it is that we do this in a timely manner--that was one barrier. The Department of Education themselves, not just with me but with, I know, other women, would not accept the paper that I sent to them and they sent me back something requiring more and they did this about three times. So they finally tell me call this number or get on our website while I'm in prison and I don't have access to those things. And I believe that I made that very clear in my very first letter that I am incarcerated and I would like to take care of these student loan defaults. That way when I get out, I will be ready to start college immediately. I will be ready to sign up for some financial aid. But it was not to be. They were very uncooperative, ran us all around in circles without getting anything accomplished.

Anastazia (8:42):
Let's talk for a moment also about what income level actually looks like for an incarcerated person. So how much money were you actually making while in prison to be able to attempt to make a quote unquote affordable loan repayment?

Molly (9:02):
Sure. So about $20 a month. Their initial correspondence said that our repayments would most likely be $0. But I know that on the outside if you have low income, it is usually around five. That is to be

determined by them, but they promise $0 repayment and that it would count towards getting our loans out of default.

Anastazia (9:29):
And did that happen?

Molly (09:30)
No, not at all.

Anastazia (9:36):
So you leave Holy Cross with approximately how many more credits at this point in time?

Molly (09:43):
Okay. So I left there. I began with roughly 30 something credit hours from IUE East and I left there with 24 from Holy Cross. I also during my two semesters received academic honors, straight A's, just a couple of Bs, but got my GPA all the way up to a 3.8 and was doing very well. I was very excited about what that meant for my future education.

Anastazia (10:18):
So you were very close theoretically to having accrued enough hours to actually obtain your AA, but then you continued on with the only option you had at the time then on the inside and that was with the higher education program at IUPUI and joined the history project. So I could you expand just a little bit more on what your research entailed and your publications entailed for that because that did indeed create kind of a bridge for you then to further education later on. Is that correct?

Molly (10:54):
That is absolutely correct. The volunteers--I mentioned Dr. Kelsey Kauffman earlier--recognize that in order to get out and further education is very important for us to kinda beef up our CV, if you will. So, she would bring in--because we fully rely on what people bring into us--the information all the way around. So she would bring in writing contests or other opportunities to us, ask us if we wanted to participate in those. So she brought in a writing competition, open to all Indiana undergraduates, about Indiana history. The only premise was that you use primary sources. So in prison without access to any kind of information, the only primary sources that we had available

were the annual reports of the prison itself, which worked out beautifully because that is the first all-women's prison in the country. So what better subject to study? So we wrote about the the girls in the reformatory side for the first 10 years for that contest specifically. We won second place in that contest with Ms. Christina Kovats winning first place.

Anastazia (12:17)
Great. And what award was that?

Molly (12:19)
That was the Peggy Seigal undergraduate writing competition that was out of Manchester university.

Anastazia (12:28)
Great. Congratulations.

Molly:
Thank you.

Anastazia
Okay. So eventually you are released from prison and you attempted then to transfer to where you're currently in school now at IUP Y. So could you talk a little bit more about what that process looked like and, what an admission was like trying to get back into university but now post-incarceration status?

Molly (12:59):
Sure. This has been one of the most challenging processes of my entire life, but I'm very determined so we've been pushing through it. Initially, we still had the student loan default to take care of and in order to get out of default you have to pay nine consecutive monthly payments. So, I'm wanting to apply to IUPUI. I'm needing FASFA, some kind of financial aid, because post incarceration you're flat broke. Basically. I get out of prison; I'm on house arrest. That is $140 every two weeks for me. I have to immediately acquire a job, anything that will take me as a felon, so that process was very difficult. I have no car, I have no license, so I have to rely on someone to drive me around. I have to walk, do a lot of walking, but I was lucky enough to get a job near by my house. I'm on the house arrest, I pay a thousand dollars to get my license back, which in and of itself was full [of] a lot of hoop jumping. So then I'm applying, I'm starting the admission

process for IUPUI and so what they require that you do is write a roughly four or five page account of your criminal background and they want to know everything they want and they'll tell you right there on their admissions website full details. So in the meantime I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to pay for this and I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to show them how serious I am about getting into this college and participating in giving everything that I have to offer to them. So what we did was, I got into I got into contact with some people in the admissions committee review office that helped me, kind of coached me on exactly what all I would need. I got together some letters of recommendation and all of my awards and my publication at the journal.

Anastazia (15:32):
Did you, did you also have assistance from some of the professors and the people you worked with while you were on the inside in this process or were you completely on your own just having to rely on university staff to help you?

Molly (15:46)
Not while I was on the inside, no. There was an IUPUI professor that helped us with the history project and she did suggest IUPUI and she has been very supportive since my release on helping me get in, and encouraging me to take this process. Also I was given a few opportunities as a research assistant through her paying opportunities that would help me with my tuition. Had it not been for that I would not be able to pay for my schooling at all. That would have been a complete impossibility as a released released woman with very little resources.

Anastazia (16:31):
So clearly there were the financial obstacles that you've had to overcome, but I also heard you say the obstacle of trying to overcome the stigma of incarceration being a formerly incarcerated person applying to university on the outside. What I heard you saying was that there was an entire separate process in admission application where you had to devolve some pretty serious information about you and your life. And can you talk a little bit more about what that process is like for the person how you felt through that, if that creates an additional challenge to trying to continue your education.

Molly (17:15):
Absolutely. So first of all, I spent five years putting my past behind me and the trauma, and the emotional turmoil, and I was forced to relive all of it by writing all that. And that was very difficult for me and very emotional for me. But I did it and I wanted to use my emotion to convey to them how changed I was now. So, the fact that we have to relive that, the fact that we have to--I found it humiliating. I found it humiliating to expose my deepest, darkest secrets, things that I would love to bury in my past to a bunch of strangers who I knew only wanted that information so that they could judge me based on what I had done--and what I had done in no way, shape or form reflected me as a person. It reflected me as a drug addict. I'm not the same person sober as I am on drugs, nothing even close to the same person. And so I hated to introduce them to that person because that's not who's coming to this college whatsoever. That person is long gone and will not return. But that is something that they want to know and they want to know because they say it's for the safety of the campus. They want to know not just about incarceration, but any kind of impressions that you've ever had. Mine was personally incarceration. So I did do that and I felt like I was begging and I felt like I was groveling and it was very degrading. So once I did that and I actually was admitted, which I believe is partially due to how many letters of recommendations I have, what my CV looked like from the work that I had done while I was in prison, I was admitted and it took months. It took months and I could've spent those months, those summer months, getting familiar with the school, the campus, meeting other students finding activities that I might want to participate in. But I was not able to do that because I was waiting on them to confirm whether I was good enough to be in the school because clearly my academics were good enough, just maybe not my personality.

Anastazia (19:41)
So, on one hand the university kind of acts as a continuing--as Michelle Jones would call it--a carceral agent to determine whether you have access or not to opportunity and to advance your education. Beyond that though, Molly, can you talk just a little bit more about how education was transformational for you?

Molly (20:07):
Oh, yes. It was completely transformational. Education has changed my life. The work that I do. Not only did it give me confidence in

myself and boost my esteem, which is something that lacks severely, especially in women who are incarcerated due to childhood trauma. Yeah, it gave me the tools to build myself up to believe in myself. And then once I started doing that and using those things, I found meaning in my work, especially as a historian--like what we focus on is speaking for women who have been subjugated or incarcerated in the past and don't have that voice. And so all of my work is towards doing something positive for not just others in my, but myself and others. It's very powerful. And then also some of my work includes trying to break down some of the struggles and the barriers that you experience after you're released.
And so that's very meaningful and just gives me a purpose and it keeps me on track and it keeps me away from negative influences. It keeps me away from negative places and it puts me in a circle with all positive people who are goal oriented. And that made a huge, I mean, I cannot stress this enough. It made all the difference and it's no wonder that people go right back to prison. I have a huge support system now in the circle of people that I'm in now that I would not have had otherwise. And a lot of people don't have access to it is absolutely no wonder they go right back.

Anastazia (21:53)
Okay. So you yourself have had to overcome numerous obstacles and challenges in order to get to this point and finally become a student at IUPUI. Why you're now in the history program here. Can you talk a little bit though more about any challenges you might have faced with credit transferring? As you were previously telling us, between IU East and Holy Cross, you had accrued almost 60 hours towards a degree. So what did that look like as far as transferability is concerned once you finally got into IUPUIs undergrad program?

Molly (22:33):
Oh yes. This has been so many struggles. So I'm now currently paying on my default and I need the FASFA. However, FASFA has a rule that if your student academic progress has dropped to a certain degree or your GPA, you cannot receive [?] until you bring those back up. So you're not going to help me pay my tuition until I bring those up. So basically I'm having to pay out of my pocket no matter what I do so that it is my own fault. During my time IU East, I should not have let that happen. However, during my time at Holy Cross, I did raise my GPA. I did complete 100% of my course load. So when I come to this

college and I go to the advisor and I go to sign up for my classes and I tell them this, they start me out as the beginning sophomore, which means that I have lost somehow pretty much two years worth of my college work that I have put my blood, sweat, tears into.

They will not accept any of Holy Cross credits. I have asked repeatedly, why not? They are a very accredited school. I did very well. That would make all the difference in my receiving FASFA. Why won't you? No one will give me an answer. There is no answer. In addition to that, they will not even accept a majority of my IU East credits from when I was doing semi-well before my incident, and again, I asked why wouldn't you do this? That should be automatic, I would think. Whether it be an Indiana university and, again, I am treated like I don't have the right to know that information and no one will tell me. I definitely intend to work towards fighting for those credit hours because I did not waste that time. I worked very hard. But as of yet, I am still stuck in that rut.
And in addition to that, I'm on house arrest as part of my sentence.

Anastazia (24:58):
So can you please talk a little bit more about the complications you've had to deal with being on house arrest and trying to complete your education now. What does average daily life look like with that additional complication added into the mix of everything you've already told us?

Molly (25:18):
Oh yeah. So like I said, I have to have this job specifically to pay that bill. I have to go there once a week and fill out a schedule, which means I have to know exactly where I'm going to be at, what time I'm going to be there, ahead of time and ask permission. So we do that. Now, this particular community corrections is very lenient and supportive of me and my education. Luckily. Bigger cities are not that way. This is very small. It's an hour and a half away from this campus. And so I have to get special permission to be able to come over here. In addition I'm the research assistant and an employee of IUPUI now, so I do have to commute over here several times a week and I did not have a vehicle. Luckily, I have supportive grandparents that provided me one very recently, but before that I drove a very unsafe, very old vehicle over here, borrowed twice a week. So in addition to trying to jump through all the bureaucratic hoops of admission to this

institution, I'm also having to work three jobs just to be able to maintain, some sort of financial stability and pay the tuition and pay the house arrest. When I got out, I got out to nothing, no clothes, no house, no car, no nothing. So I'm starting completely from the ground up. That is quite a struggle and I don't have time. I don't have the financial ability to continue to pay for my college for three more years. I needed this to be a one-year deal, but it's not. So that's an additional struggle.

Anastazia (27:15)
Talk to me a little bit about, again, any stigmatization you might feel from this and particularly entering into the university again how this reflects your student life. With your new peer group, you still are on house arrest, you have all these other issues in your past, you have all these obstacles and challenges that you're facing daily. What's it emotionally like?

Molly (27:46)
Well, it's very discouraging and disappointing that I cannot participate in any extracurricular activities offered from the college because of my house arrest. I'm a social person and so I really would like to do that. I would like to work with my fellow students on collaborative projects. But I'm too embarrassed to disclose to them that I am on house arrest. So it's constantly in my mind, make sure nobody sees your ankle monitor, make sure that you don't talk about the fact that you were incarcerated. Don't let that slip up in front of anybody.

I have a particular story that would just illustrate how I feel about this. Orientation day is a chance to take a tour, get familiar with the campus, get to know some of your fellow students, really get comfortable in your new environment. [IUPUI] is a large campus. It's scary. And instead of staying with my group, learning what I needed to learn about the school, meeting new people--because I am just recently released because I have a criminal background--I had to stop what I was doing and go meet with the Dean of Students so that she could take a look at me.
I had already been accepted. They've already read my criminal background and my story. Why this extra step? You want to see me with your eyes to decide whether I look like I would be a good student or not? Whether I look like I would be trouble? I didn't know exactly what she was looking for. But again, humiliation; I felt degraded. I

felt, like I needed to prove myself further, more than just my academic words. And when I got back to my group--which was gone--I was lost. I had to wander around this campus trying to find them. I was alone and terrified. When I got back to the group, they were already halfway done. They'd all gotten to know each other. They were all talking to each other. And it was a great group. No one spoke to me because no one knew me. They had no chance to. And I just, I knew right then at that moment that this was going to be a different experience for me than it is for the average college student. And that was really heartbreaking, because I'm much more than just my felonies. I'm much more than just what I did before I came here. I want to be different. But if you continuously put these obstacles in my path that remind me that I am--I am different. You constantly remind me that I did this over and over and over again, even though I'm trying to forget that and I'm trying to move on. Why would you put some, put somebody through that? Why would you do that? And it's been a painful experience.

Anastazia (31:00):
But on the bright note, you are here, you're doing it. Your scholarship in your work has been absolutely amazing and completely inspiring and encouraging. So I just want to really thank you for taking this time to talk to us and share your experience with us and I wish you the best in your future endeavors in your journey. Keep doing what you do. Thank you, Molly.

Molly (31:23)
Thank you.

Appendix B

Appendix C

Appendix D