

Lawrence University

Lux

Lawrence University Honors Projects

6-14-2022

Correctional Education: A Pathway to Reducing Recidivism in Wisconsin?

Samuel George La Roi
Lawrence University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lux.lawrence.edu/luhp>

© Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Recommended Citation

La Roi, Samuel George, "Correctional Education: A Pathway to Reducing Recidivism in Wisconsin?" (2022).
Lawrence University Honors Projects. 166.
<https://lux.lawrence.edu/luhp/166>

This Honors Project is brought to you for free and open access by Lux. It has been accepted for inclusion in Lawrence University Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of Lux. For more information, please contact colette.brautigam@lawrence.edu.

Correctional Education: A Pathway to Reducing Recidivism in Wisconsin?

Samuel George La Roi

Project Advisor: Professor Arnold Shober

ABSTRACT: The United States has the highest number of incarcerated individuals per capita of any country in the world. Every single year, a large number of these individuals are released from prison and re-enter their communities. However, within three years, many of them will have recidivated and returned to prison. In Wisconsin, roughly 40% of all individuals released from prison will recidivate within three years. The financial burden of keeping such a high number of people incarcerated is monumental and rising. Identifying solutions to the problem of recidivism is critical to reducing the overall costs of incarceration for society. Correctional education programs have been shown to be one avenue in reducing the recidivism rates of individuals who participate in them while they are incarcerated. To date, Wisconsin has had very limited study of its correctional education programs and their effectiveness in reducing recidivism rates. In this descriptive piece of work, I will be examining the correctional education programs offered within the Wisconsin correctional system. Additionally, I will provide a basic analysis of the effectiveness that involvement in Wisconsin's correctional education programs has on reducing recidivism rates.

I Hereby Reaffirm the Lawrence University Honor Code

May 2nd, 2022

Acknowledgements

I would like to deeply thank Professor Arnold Shober for all of his guidance throughout the course of working on this project. From when I first started my research to helping me with the finishing touches for the project, you have been incredibly helpful and I am truly grateful.

Thank you also to Professor Jason Brozek for introducing me to the possibility of even attempting to do a project of this nature. Without your support, this project is not something that I would have thought possible. Thank you.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Tommy Thompson, the former Governor of Wisconsin, and Peter Moreno, director of UW-Madison's Odyssey Beyond Bars project, for agreeing to interview with me. Their insights into both the history and future of correctional education in Wisconsin were truly eye-opening.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my mom for all of the support you gave me throughout this project. I wouldn't have been able to complete this without your help. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Literature Review.....	7
Historical Overview.....	16
Correctional Education Programs in Wisconsin.....	19
<i>Adult Basic Education (ABE).....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Career Technical Education (CTE) / Vocational Programs.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Post-Secondary Education / College Courses.....</i>	<i>25</i>
Analysis of Correctional Education in Wisconsin	26
Enrollment in Correctional Education.....	28
<i>Race & Enrollment in Correctional Education.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Enrollment Summary</i>	<i>36</i>
Educational Attainment	37
<i>Attainment of HSEDs and GEDs</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Attainment Summary.....</i>	<i>43</i>
Analysis of Recidivism	44
<i>Rearrest.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Reconviction.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Reincarceration.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Recidivism Summary.....</i>	<i>57</i>
Overall Summary of Findings.....	63
Bibliography	73

Introduction

With over 20,000 people currently incarcerated in Wisconsin, the correctional system in the state is facing massive challenges. While just under 9,000 of Wisconsin inmates were released in 2020, Wisconsin has a reincarceration rate of roughly 40%, which means that by 2023, nearly 3,600 of the individuals released in 2020 will likely be back behind bars¹. Further, the yearly average total expenditure per inmate in Wisconsin was \$36,923 in 2018. This means those 3,600 individuals who are likely to recidivate will cost Wisconsin roughly \$133 million in a single year. The overall cost of the correctional system in Wisconsin already has a staggering price tag of over \$2.8 billion over the next three years (2021-2023) and is the seventh most expensive program in the state budget. This provides a massive incentive for the state of Wisconsin to work towards reducing recidivism rates of incarcerated individuals.

Wisconsin's prison population has not always been at such a high level. In 1980, it was just under 4,000, but has risen to over 20,000 by the end of 2021². This boom in the prison population is not unique to Wisconsin; it was observed across the United States, with the nation's prison population growing from around 315,000 in 1980 to nearly 1.4 million in 2019³. This increase in prison population can largely be attributed to the shifting political climate towards becoming "tough on crime" of the late 1980's and early 1990's, particularly with the 1994 Crime Bill enacted by the federal government.

¹ Reincarceration is one of three definitions of recidivism used by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC). The other two definitions have varying rates of recidivism; however, I chose to use reincarceration as the measure for this scenario as it implies a return to prison and thus would incur cost upon Wisconsin directly.

² The Wisconsin prison population peaked in 2018 at 23,865 and decreased over the following three years according to the Wisconsin DOC.

³ These numbers are the combined total of both state and federal prison populations in the U.S.

The 1994 Crime Bill and others from the era focused on being “tough on crime” have a significant existing body of research exploring their effects. However, the effectiveness and impact of correctional education and other programs on reducing recidivism rates have been a relatively unresearched subject until the past few decades. The prevailing sentiment prior to this period of research is that incarcerated individuals were essentially a lost cause and spending money to rehabilitate them and improve their life after release was simply a waste. However, with the surge in prison populations, states around the country have been forced to investigate programs that could alleviate the skyrocketing costs of operating correctional institutions.

Although the overall body of research is still relatively small, the general consensus is that providing correctional education programs results in lowered recidivism rates among the individuals who participate. The intricacies of how that education should be presented, how much education an individual should receive, or even what type of education should be provided are very much questions that need of further research.

The concept of providing rehabilitative programs to help incarcerated individuals is one that has been implemented across a multitude of different issues. For example, Wisconsin has programs meant to address anger management, domestic violence, substance abuse, and behavior therapy, for example. All these programs are designed to address problems potentially hampering incarcerated individuals from returning to their communities and successfully reintegrating. Correctional education is designed to serve a similar purpose.

The average educational attainment levels of the incarcerated population of Wisconsin are significantly lower than their non-incarcerated peers. About 92% of all Wisconsinites hold a high school diploma or higher, while in the correctional system that number falls to an average in the mid 70%'s. Education is often presented as the great equalizer in opportunity, regardless of your economic status or other personal hardships; if you work hard, you can achieve remarkable things. However, for many people who are incarcerated that opportunity has for various reasons been cut short and they do not possess the skills necessary to return to life outside of prison and succeed. This is the problem correctional education directly seeks to address, providing incarcerated individuals with an educational opportunity to help make a positive change in their lives.

This paper seeks to examine and describe the Wisconsin correctional system's approach to correctional education. I will provide a brief historical overview of correctional education in both Wisconsin and the United States as a whole, followed by a descriptive analysis of the different programs offered within the Wisconsin correctional system. Finally, I will present three data driven sections that analyze and address key areas to understanding the current state of and effectiveness of correctional education in Wisconsin. The first area I will examine is involvement in educational programs and how many individuals have become involved in these programs and potentially receive benefits from that involvement. The second section will focus on educational improvements observed through involvement in educational programs while incarcerated. This will specifically concentrate on individuals obtaining High School Equivalency Degree's (HSED) and General Education Degree's (GED). The third

section will explore evidence that may indicate a positive relationship between exposure to educational programming and lower recidivism rates. The purpose of these analyses is not intended to be conclusive in nature, but instead to examine the current state of correctional education in Wisconsin and provide a base upon which future research can expand.

Literature Review

Correctional education in the U.S. has existed in basic forms since the early 1800s, often taking the form of religious or moral teachings. (Gehring, 1995). However, these early forms of correctional education are vastly different from the programs available in prisons today⁴. The actual effects correctional education had on these individuals, however, have not been thoroughly explored until relatively recently. This is in large part due to the findings of sociologist Robert Martinson in the early 1970s. Martinson concluded that no correctional education or rehabilitative programs more generally worked to prevent the cycle of reincarceration. Furthermore, he contended the expenditure of additional resources on new rehabilitative programs was likely a waste of taxpayer dollars (Martinson, 1974). This belief was widely shared amongst many within the corrections and research community, and research on this topic mostly came to a halt until the late 1990s⁵.

⁴ Religious programs offered in prisons are extremely common, however educational programming is no longer inherently offered through a religious setting or group and instead is generally offered via the State correctional system.

⁵ There was still research on this topic occurring, however the projects were generally much smaller and limited in scope.

However, the rapidly growing size of the U.S. prison population would soon force both politicians and researchers to take a second look at the effectiveness of correctional education and rehabilitative programs. Incarceration rates in the U.S. remained relatively constant at 110 inmates per 100,000 people between the 1920s and the 1970s. That changed in the 1970s, with the incarceration rates soaring to 504 inmates per 100,000 people in 2008 (Sampson and Loeffler, 2010). The exact cause of this increase cannot be definitively determined but is generally attributed to the changing political opinions on crime in the United States, and a general push towards getting “tough on crime” both nationally and on the state level. Texas was one of the states that saw the most rapid increase in prison population, going from 40,000 inmates in 1988 to 160,000 in 1999 (Campbell, 2011). This parallels increasing public support for the use of punishment as well, which had been growing from the mid-1960s to the 1990s, before beginning to fall in the mid-1990s (Enns, 2014)⁶. This increasing public and political interest began during the 1960s with President Nixon’s “war on crime” which brought the issues of crime and punishment to the forefront of the political sphere in the U.S. It continued into the 1990s with the war on drugs, which saw the most rapid expansion of drug prosecution in the U.S. (Phelps and Pager, 2016). Finally, the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, commonly known as the 1994 Crime Bill, pressured states into enacting more stringent criminal punishments. Against this backdrop of political pressure, the number of prisons in the U.S. grew 43% between 1995 and 2005 (Eisen and Chettiar, 2020). Of particular note for correctional education, the 1994

⁶ This increase in the public’s support for the use of punishment may be part of why there was limited research on rehabilitative programs during this period. The public was generally less receptive to the idea of prisoner rehabilitation, and therefore funding for research on the topic diminished.

Crime Bill removed prisoner eligibility for Pell Grants, which served as the primary source of funding for college level courses in correctional institutions (Robinson and English 2017)⁷.

This rapid increase in the prison population in the U.S. during the late 1990s and early 2000s coupled with the ballooning fiscal costs of operating large numbers of prisons forced state governments to look for alternatives (Sedgley and Scott and Williams and Derrick, 2010). This search for new solutions to the problem of massive prison populations and growing fiscal costs revitalized correctional education research and led to multiple new studies on the effectiveness of education as a deterrent to crime.

Research on the groups of people who commit crimes has been fairly thoroughly explored, particularly the correlation between age and crime participation. However, the effects of education on crime participation have been less studied. The primary method of understanding the relationship between education and crime participation has been through the framework of human capital. Essentially, there are drastically different rates of property and violent crime rates across education groups. In other words, the education and training an individual has received increases the opportunity cost of participating in crimes (Lochner 2004)⁸. Lance Lochner and Enrico Moretti's 2004 study "The Effects of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self Reports" is considered foundational to the body of research that currently exists on the correlation between education and crime (Machin, Marie, and Vujić, 2011). They

⁷ Most college level programs in the U.S. are not offered by State correctional systems, but instead by outside colleges and universities which relied on funding through Pell Grants to support these programs.

⁸ Opportunity cost in this context should be understood as what an individual could potentially do if they did not participate in crime. This assumes that individuals with higher education levels have more incentives, financial or otherwise, to not participate in crime as by participating in crime those opportunities may be lost.

note that there is strong reason to suspect a causal link between education and lower crime rates, but that the empirical research on the topic is less conclusive. Through their research, they deduced that schooling increases wage rates, possibly alters individuals' risk aversion and what they prefer to do during their free time. Additionally, they found that education may affect an individual's taste for crime by affecting the psychic costs of breaking the law.

Other studies have used frameworks such as the life-cycle model to determine the effects of education on crime participation. This model is typically broken down into three specific cycles. The first is a developmental stage, where an individual is attending school and usually correlates with lower crime rates. The second cycle is when an individual starts working, after either completing their education or dropping out of high school. This is the cycle in which people most commonly either enter or leave prison and especially for high school dropouts is associated with criminal activity. The third and final cycle is retirement, either from legitimate work or crime. The study by Giulio Fella and Giovanni Gallipoli estimated that high school graduation had an effect of reducing crime participation between 4-5.6 percentage points by using their life cycle model. (Fella and Gallipoli, 2014). The common issue that is noted by all of these authors, however, is that the unobservable characteristics of individuals which may affect their decision to participate in crime are exceedingly challenging to account for (Lochner and Moretti, 2004).

The effects of correctional education on recidivism have been explored by a fairly small group of researchers. The general consensus is that the Martinson study of 1974 had two primary flaws. First, the study did not properly address the differences in

outcomes between the treatment and comparison groups. Second, it did not account for the large variability in quality between studies in their research designs (Wilson, Gallagher, and MacKenzie, 2000). These problems were addressed by future studies, however, by including significantly larger data sets with more rigorous methods of including studies in their analyses (Aos, Miller, and Drake, 2006).

The most notable and reputable of later correctional education studies was a meta-analysis conducted by Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles for the RAND Corporation in 2013. In this meta-analysis, they used 58 studies on correctional education programs in the U.S. and attempted to limit the effects of selection bias in the chosen studies. They focused primarily on addressing the original question raised by Robert Martinson: do correctional education programs work in reducing recidivism rates for individuals involved. Additionally, they included data on the link between correctional education participation and employment following release as well as a basic cost-benefit analysis of correctional education programs. They found that on average, participation in correctional education programs while incarcerated resulted in 43% lower odds of recidivating than individuals who did not participate. Their cost-benefit analysis further found that for correctional education to be cost-effective, the recidivism rate would have to be reduced by only 1.9 - 2.6 percentage points. They specify, however, that this only accounts for the direct costs of reincarceration for prisoners. To more comprehensively understand this, a cost-benefit analysis would have to include financial and emotional damage to victims of crimes and to the criminal justice system as a whole. Therefore, the

estimate is likely a conservative one and the actual reduction needed for correctional education to be cost-effective is even lower.

The larger challenge the researchers at RAND wanted to address was to create a stronger research design. This is because determining a causal relationship between correctional education and reducing recidivism requires eliminating selection bias from the experimental group. This is similar to the problems faced by the researchers studying the effects of education on reducing crime participation in regard to accounting for unobservable characteristics of individuals (Lochner and Moretti, 2004). Essentially, selection bias occurs when inmates who elect to participate in educational programs differ in unmeasurable ways from those who elect not to participate in these programs. RAND notes, for example, that those who choose to participate may inherently be more motivated, have a stronger internal focus, and be more proactive about planning for post-release. This means that regardless of an inmate's participation in correctional education programs and its effects, they may have inherently been less likely to recidivate.

To combat this issue, studies such as the “Three State Recidivism Study” conducted by Stephen Steurer, Linda Smith, and Alice Tracy (2001) compiled vast amounts of data on the individuals who would be participating in their study. This information included criminal history, educational background, history of drug use, mental illness, or an unstable family background. Additionally, they conducted a comprehensive individual survey meant to determine “unmeasurable” traits of each individual involved in their study. This information was then used so that during the selection of their control group (those who did not receive correctional education

programming) and the treatment group (those who participated in correctional education programming), the individuals in each group would be as similar to each other as possible to lessen the effects of selection bias.

Once the issue of selection bias has been taken into account, there are additional challenges facing research in this field. Specific education program effectiveness in reducing recidivism is extremely difficult to determine. This is because many individuals involved in educational programming participate in multiple different education programs during their incarceration (RAND Corporation, 2013). The programs that are most commonly analyzed within the scope of correctional education are Adult Basic Education (ABE), Highschool Equivalency Degree (HSED) and General Education Degree (GED) programs, vocational programs, and post-secondary or college programs. Although the RAND Corporation meta-analysis identifies some differences in the recidivism reduction regarding involvement in these programs, the exact effectiveness of a particular program is not clear.

Finally, the RAND Corporation's meta-analysis also noted that discerning the amount of time an individual is involved in correctional education programming to be able to expect a reduction in recidivism is difficult to define. The majority of correctional systems do not track the length of time an individual is involved in these programs, but rather whether they participated or not (RAND Corporation, 2013). This raises the question of how long an individual needs to be involved in these programs before it can be assumed that any positive effect has occurred in regard to reducing the odds of recidivating.

One of the underlying concerns with the existing body of research on correctional education is that although these studies focus on the relationship between recidivism and correctional education, there is minimal research on the effectiveness of correctional education in actually educating its participants. Specifically, areas such as improvement in literacy rates, basic computational skills, and other basic indicators of academic improvement have been largely unexplored to date (RAND Corporation, 2013).

Understanding what types of treatments and programs reduce recidivism is very important, but equally important is understanding the reasons causing recidivism. There is a considerable amount of research on the effectiveness of different programs in reducing recidivism, such as substance abuse treatment, mental health, anger management and correctional education. However, focusing solely on the outcome of recidivism ignores the underlying causes of why individuals recidivate in the first place (Visher and Travis, 2003).

One of the methods used to determine what areas incarcerated individuals struggle with upon release into society is by directly communicating with them through focus groups and surveys. The RAND Corporation conducted a focus group study in 2009 with a group of 39 formerly incarcerated individuals in the California state correctional system. They found that the economic challenges these individuals face were usually the largest concern, including challenges such as finding employment and a stable housing situation (Davis, M. Williams, Derosé, Steinberg, Nicosia, Overton, Miyashiro, Turner, E. Williams, 2009). This is highlighted in a 2018 study by Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf which focused on unemployment amongst formerly

incarcerated individuals. It found that these individuals had an unemployment rate of 27%, higher than any historical period in the U.S. for their non-incarcerated peers. Additionally, they found that unemployment rates were highest within the first 2 years following release, emphasizing the need for post-release employment services (Couloute and Kopf, 2018)⁹. In 2003, the U.S. Federal Government allocated \$110 million towards the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, which was designed to create programs to reduce recidivism and improve employment, health, and housing outcomes of formerly incarcerated individuals. This was made politically feasible in large part by research showing that involvement in reentry programs while incarcerated reduced recidivism by approximately 6% (Jonson and Cullen, 2015). The programs created as a result of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative were evaluated by the National Institute of Justice in 2007 through a survey of 935 individuals who were involved in those programs. The survey found that when individuals identified their own needs, 94% desired more education, 86% required general financial assistance, 83% needed a driver's license, 82% required job training, and 80% needed assistance in finding employment (Visher and Lattimore, 2007). Another important factor in successful reintegration of individuals is the support they receive from family and friends. In another study conducted by the RAND Corporation through a focus group, they found that family was one of the primary motivating factors for inspiring individuals to change their behavior and participate in rehabilitative programs (Davis,

⁹ Most prisons offer post-release services and programs that are designed to help reintegrate individuals following their release from prison. However, these programs are generally minimal in scope, and it is usually up to the individual to make the most of the program.

M. Williams, Derose, Steinberg, Nicosia, Overton, Miyashiro, Turner, E. Williams, 2009).

Historical Overview

Correctional education has existed within the U.S. essentially since prisons have existed. However, correctional education at its inception is practically unrecognizable when compared to the programs that exist in the U.S. today. The first known prison education program in the U.S. was likely formed by The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Prison around 1789 at the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia¹⁰. Although this is where correctional education in the U.S. began, it would not begin to resemble what exists today for nearly a century.

Education programs that existed in the Walnut Street Jail and other prisons until the late 1800s were generally known as Sabbath Schools. These “schools” would generally focus on teaching prisoners basic literacy skills and providing moral and religious guidance. This was usually achieved through learning to read the Bible, with most of the teaching and instruction performed by the prison Chaplain. There is some reference to very basic arithmetic schooling being offered, but the vast majority of educational programming during this period focused on teaching prisoners how to read, and in particular, to read the Bible. This theme of education through the medium of religion is critical to understanding correctional education during this time period. The core theory for many of these educational programs was to reform prisoners and make

¹⁰ There is some reference to this same group forming this program in 1776 instead of 1789, however more recent sources place it around 1789. Additionally, it is possible that other prisons had similar or other various education programs, but I was unable to find specific records supporting this.

them better people so they could more easily fit into society after their release from prison. This practice of teaching through religion still exists in prisons today, however its leading role in correctional education began to diminish in the 1870s.

Beginning in 1870 with the formation of the National Prison Association (now the American Correctional Association), which advocated for more humane treatment of inmates within prisons, correctional education programs began to evolve. Instead of being limited to basic literacy programs, prisons began to offer more broad forms of education. This included more formal education programs similar to those found in schools throughout the country as well as vocational training. One of the most impressive examples of early correctional education took place in 1876 at the Elmira Reformatory in New York. The Elmira Reformatory offered various elementary school classes as well as industrial trade schooling. This served as model for other prisons around the country, which gradually began to expand education programming over the following decades. By the end of the 20th century, prisons continued to expand their educational programming. Although not in widespread use, high school education programs began to be introduced in addition to basic elementary schooling. These were usually offered via correspondence courses, though some prisons did offer the programs inside the prison.

Currently, high school education programs and vocational programs can be found in almost every correctional institution across the United States. However, one of the fields in which correctional education had yet to be explored was post-secondary education programs. There were a few small experiments in the early 1900s with post-secondary education programs in some states across the U.S. In Wisconsin, for example,

there are records of University of Wisconsin-Madison offering face-to-face college courses briefly in 1917¹¹. Wisconsin was also possibly the first state in the U.S to offer college level correspondence courses in 1932¹². Until the mid 1900s, however, college level programs in prisons were generally very rare.

Over time, correctional education and particularly post-secondary programs began to spread throughout the country, receiving support from both states and the federal government. The U.S. Federal Government passed the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, which granted prisoners Pell Grant eligibility. Pell grants are designed to award students with significant financial need the opportunity to pursue a degree in higher education. The vast majority of college programs offered in prisons were funded directly through Pell Grants, which led to the creation of an estimated 772 college programs in 1,287 correctional institutions across the U.S. by 1994. Expansion of college level correctional education programs would come to a grinding halt with the passage of the 1994 Crime Bill. One of the provisions in this bill eliminated prisoner Pell Grant eligibility, effectively killing off the vast majority of college programs, leaving an estimated 8 college level programs operating in correctional institutions across the country. In 2015, President Obama announced the creation of the Second Chance Pell Experiment. This program reinstated prisoners' eligibility to receive Pell Grants towards post-secondary education programs. Initially, the experiment was limited to 67

¹¹ This was referenced by UW-Madison's Odyssey Beyond Bars program; I was unable to find further confirmation for this outside of that source.

¹² Wisconsin may not have been the first state to offer these types of courses, but historical records on this topic are extremely limited and what I was able to find pointed to Wisconsin being the first.

programs in state and federal prisons but has since been expanded to 134 programs with over 22,000 inmates having participated in a Second Chance Pell Program as of 2021.

Correctional education in the U.S. has evolved significantly since its inception in the late 1700s. Originally, only an exceedingly small number of prisoners had access to any form of educational programming which was extremely limited in its scope. Over time, the situation has changed. The vast majority of correctional institutions across the U.S. now offer either high school education, vocational training or even college level courses.

Correctional Education Programs in Wisconsin

When an individual is incarcerated within the Wisconsin Correctional System, one of the first events they undergo is their initial classification to determine what security level of institution they will be placed in. This classification is based upon the type and severity of the offenses they were sentenced for as well as their criminal record amongst other factors. During this process, each individual also undergoes a series of screenings and assessments that are designed to identify rehabilitative needs and to connect them to programs that will potentially benefit them during their incarceration.

The Wisconsin DOC offers numerous programs within the correctional institutions of Wisconsin. These programs are designed to address specific issues that prisoners are facing that have either led them to be incarcerated or would become an obstacle to successful reintegration into their communities after being released.

Additionally, a program may be recommended for an individual if it could enhance the safety and security of the public, staff, institutions, and other inmates.

Primary Programs are the main type of programs offered in the correctional system. An example of a Primary Program is the Anger Management Program (AM). Within the AM program, individuals are taught to manage their stress, how to deal with impulses, communication skills, and how to handle criticism and provocation. These Primary Programs treat a variety of different issues such as substance abuse, domestic violence, sex offender treatment, and cognitive behavior which assists individuals with learning how to think rationally. Educational programming is also considered a Primary Program. Within the scope of correctional education, there are three types of programs that are offered within the Wisconsin DOC. Two of these education programs, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Career Technical Education (CTE) / Vocational Programs, are offered through the Wisconsin DOC. The third program, which includes post-secondary education courses such as accredited college classes, is offered through outside institutions such as the University of Wisconsin System or the Wisconsin Technical College System.

Adult Basic Education (ABE)

The first educational programs I will examine are Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. This includes General Education Development (GED), High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED), and English as Second Language (ESL) programs. Both the GED and HSED programs are designed for individuals who have not yet completed high school or obtained an HSED. These are the most common programs within the

Wisconsin DOC and are available at most correctional institutions in the state. For all inmates who have not received a high school diploma or equivalent, involvement in ABE programs is mandatory.

An individual's academic needs are determined during the initial classification process. This process includes a screening which verifies education records and reviews academic transcripts. Once these records have been reviewed and an academic need is determined, the inmate is placed in an ABE program at the facility where they are located. If the educational program at their facility is at capacity, the inmate is placed on a waiting list.

Before an inmate is placed into a specific ABE class, they take multiple standardized tests to measure their literacy ability and other academic areas of need. Once an individual has completed the standardized testing, they are placed within classes that target specific areas of academic need that are covered on GED tests. Each facility is also able to offer classes to inmates in preparation for post-secondary preparation, as resources allow. The primary goal of these ABE programs is to prepare inmates to take the GED/HSED test, and eventually obtain a GED/HSED. One thing to note is the cost of taking tests to satisfy the requirements of GEDs or HSEDs are free to inmates.

Although these programs are mandatory for individuals who have not completed a high school diploma or equivalency degree, it is also possible for them to refuse to participate. However, refusing to participate results in them being labeled as "Voluntarily Unassigned Status". This status means they are ineligible to receive work assignments or compensation from the jobs they do while incarcerated. They are also

unable to attend recreation or library periods until 5:30 p.m. from Monday through Friday. Finally, it is recorded in their inmate education file, which can impact the placement of an individual in a particular institution.

(Figure 1) - Institutions That Offer ABE Programming

Type of Correctional Institution	Number of Institutions that Offer ABE Programs	Number of Institutions that Do Not Offer ABE Programs
Women's Institution	3	0
Wisconsin Correctional Center	11	3
Minimum Security	3	0
Medium Security	11	0
Maximum Security	4	1
Total	32	4

Career Technical Education (CTE) / Vocational Programs

The second educational program offered by DOC is career technical education (CTE) and vocational programs. These programs are designed to educate individuals in a particular area of study that can be applied as a job skill after their release from prison. All CTE and vocational programs are in conjunction with the Wisconsin Technical College System and provide the opportunity to receive certification in a specific education area, CTE diplomas, or credit toward a 2-year associate degree. Unlike ABE programs, it is not mandatory for students to participate in these programs. This means

the option of participating in CTE or vocational programs is a personal choice for each individual. This also means that if an individual chooses not to participate, they do not face negative consequences. Similar to ABE, these programs are offered at most DOC institutions throughout Wisconsin. Although these programs are offered at most institutions, it is important to note that the number of programs available may vary greatly depending on the institution, with some institutions offering only 1 CTE/Vocational program and others offering as many as 10.

(Figure 2) - Institutions That Offer CTE/Vocational Programming

Type of Correctional Institution	Number of Institutions that Offer CTE/Vocational Programs	Number of Institutions that Do Not Offer CTE/Vocational Programs
Women's Institution	2	1
Wisconsin Correctional Center	9	5
Minimum Security	1	2
Medium Security	11	0
Maximum Security	4	1
Total	27	9

If an inmate is interested in participating in a CTE program, they go through a process similar to ABE programs. DOC provides career assessments to individuals interested in post-secondary education, and this helps determine what areas of

vocational education best suit them. Once they have completed a career assessment, they then must be accepted into a vocational program, with the following being considered for enrollment:

1. Inmates identified with a Vocational Primary need
2. Identified treatment needs including current or impending enrollment
3. Previous program terminations for fault
4. Program refusal
5. Inmates with five years or less to release may be given priority unless accredited program details require otherwise
6. Inmates who have completed a career awareness survey indicating an aptitude for the skills offered in the program
7. Inmate conduct and facility adjustment
8. Apprenticeship opportunities
9. Work release in a minimum custody status
10. Earned Release Program/Challenge Incarceration Program eligibility.

Once an inmate has been enrolled into a CTE/Vocational program, the classes they will attend are similar to those provided at traditional college campuses, with classes generally being 12-15 students and the topics covered being pertinent to the specific field they are studying. Generally, the courses offered are designed to meet current and future workforce demands identified by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. There are currently 23 different types of CTE/Vocational programs offered within the Wisconsin DOC, including topics such as auto maintenance, building maintenance and construction, welding, barbering and cosmetology, and computer literacy.

Post-Secondary Education / College Courses

The third type of educational programs offered within the Wisconsin correctional system are post-secondary programs or college courses. These are the most challenging of the three programs to examine and describe as they are managed by outside educational institutions such as UW-Madison.¹³ Additionally, these programs present a unique challenge for research as the Wisconsin DOC does not document educational records for inmates involved in these programs, rather that is handled by the universities and colleges that manage these programs.

Wisconsin is still in the beginning stages of introducing college level education courses into the correctional system. However, there are two examples of successful programs that have been implemented and are continuing to expand in the state that I will examine briefly. Trinity International University has been offering a four-year program in the Waupun Correctional Institution since 2017. In this program, inmates are able to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biblical Studies and a minor in Psychology, and in 2021 they had their first graduating class of 20 students. This type of program is reminiscent of some of the early educational programs in prisons that had a focus on education through religion. However, unlike those early forms of correctional education, this program is presented in a much more organized fashion and has the capability of awarding students with degrees which benefits them more directly after their release¹⁴.

¹³ Although these programs usually take place within the Wisconsin DOC, these outside organizations are usually responsible for providing the content and teaching for these courses.

¹⁴ Early correctional education programs focused on teaching individuals how to read. Although that is certainly beneficial to individuals, having a college degree opens up significant additional opportunities that would not have been obtainable through early correctional educational programs.

The other major college level program in Wisconsin is UW-Madison's Odyssey Beyond Bars (OBB), which is part of the UW Odyssey Project. OBB is grounded in the same basic principles of the Odyssey Project, that access to community-based education for people of color and those struggling with poverty can open doors to incredible opportunities. In 2015, OBB began by providing noncredit-bearing courses to students, before expanding in 2019 to credit-bearing courses. As of 2021, they enroll 30 students in credit-bearing courses at the Oakhill Correctional Institution and 80 students in noncredit-bearing courses at the Wisconsin Resource Center per year. Currently, the primary focus of their classes is an introductory course to the college experience.

As noted, Wisconsin is in the early stages of expanding post-secondary education programs in correctional institutions across the state. But the programs that do currently exist in Wisconsin, and the successes that they have had so far, serve as a foundation for expansion of similar programs across the state.

Analysis of Correctional Education in Wisconsin

Over the course of the following section, I will lay out my findings on three specific areas of correctional education programming in Wisconsin. First, I will examine the enrollment rates of individuals in correctional education programs in the Wisconsin correctional system. This will focus on how many individuals participated in educational programs while incarcerated in the Wisconsin correctional system. Additionally, I will examine if there are differences for enrollment in correctional education programming based on the race of the individual. Second, I will explore the educational attainment rates of individuals involved in these education programs. This will consider the number of degrees that individuals obtained through their involvement in correctional education

programs while incarcerated. Finally, I will include a basic analysis of the effectiveness of correctional education programs on reducing recidivism rates. The data I have used to conduct these analyses was all obtained through the assistance of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections.

Correctional education is a field that presents extremely complex issues to those who conduct research on this subject. As discussed in the literature review section, determining the effectiveness of correctional education is particularly challenging due to the limitations of being able to account for selection bias and the unquantifiable differences between individuals involved in correctional education programs. Additionally, untangling the individual effects of a specific program is practically impossible as individuals are usually involved in multiple educational programs during the time of their incarceration.

For all three of the subjects I have chosen to examine, there are specific limitations and constraints to consider. First, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections was unable to provide any information on the number of students who were involved in post-secondary or college education programs. This limited the extent to which I was able to analyze the effects of correctional education programming on individuals in Wisconsin, as I was only able to examine the individuals involved in ABE and vocational programs. Second, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections was unable to separate involvement in ABE and vocational programs. Third, I have opted to focus on the following years: 2010, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2021. I made this decision primarily because I wanted to focus on the current state of correctional education in Wisconsin, however I am cognizant of the fact that by focusing on a limited number of years, it is

feasible that some findings and conclusions may have been distorted or given undue weight.

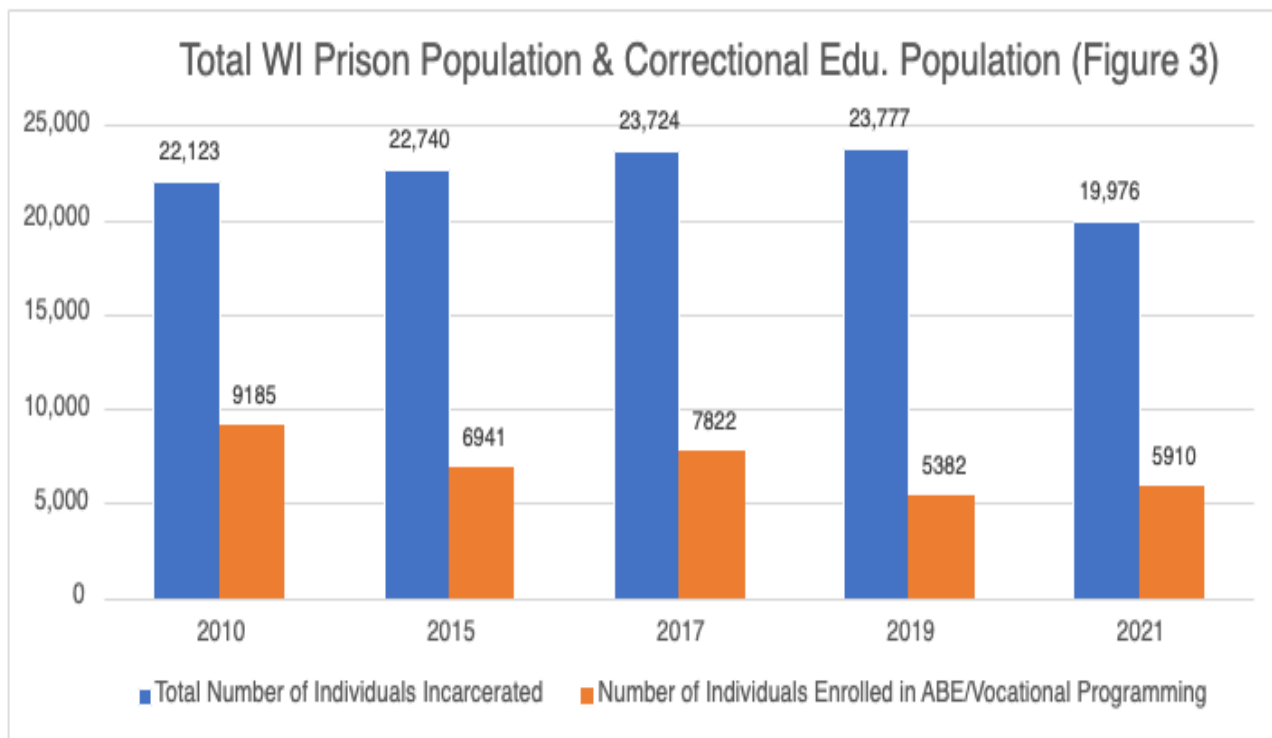
Enrollment in Correctional Education

Determining the enrollment of individuals in correctional education is critical to understanding the current state of correctional education in Wisconsin. As previously mentioned, I faced some limitations as to what I have been able to examine regarding enrollment in educational programming. The information I received from the Wisconsin DOC includes the total number of individuals enrolled in ABE and/or vocational programming, with the stipulation that I cannot differentiate between enrollment in specific programs. Therefore, it was not possible to observe whether specific types of educational programming had changes regarding involvement. Originally, I had planned to include an analysis of involvement rates in all of the specific correctional education institutions in Wisconsin. However, I was not able to receive data on the number of individuals involved in education programs at specific Wisconsin Correctional Centers and Supervised Treatment Facilities, as the number of individuals in educational programming was too small to protect individuals' anonymity or their protected information regarding health. I was, however, able to view the total number of individuals involved in educational programming at all these institutions combined. Finally, as I was not able to obtain information on enrollment in post-secondary level programs, my analysis will be focused solely on enrollment in ABE and vocational programs.

Before we examine the data provided by the WI DOC, I would like to present two hypotheses that I formulated regarding involvement in correctional education programming. First, I theorized that the years with higher total incarcerated populations would also have higher numbers of individuals involved in correctional education programming. Second, regardless of changes in the total prison population, percentages of the prison population involved in correctional education would stay relatively stable.

Hypothesis 1: Years with higher total incarcerated populations will also have higher total numbers of individuals involved in correctional education programming.

Hypothesis 2: Regardless of changes in the total prison population, percentages of the prison population involved in correctional education would stay relatively stable.

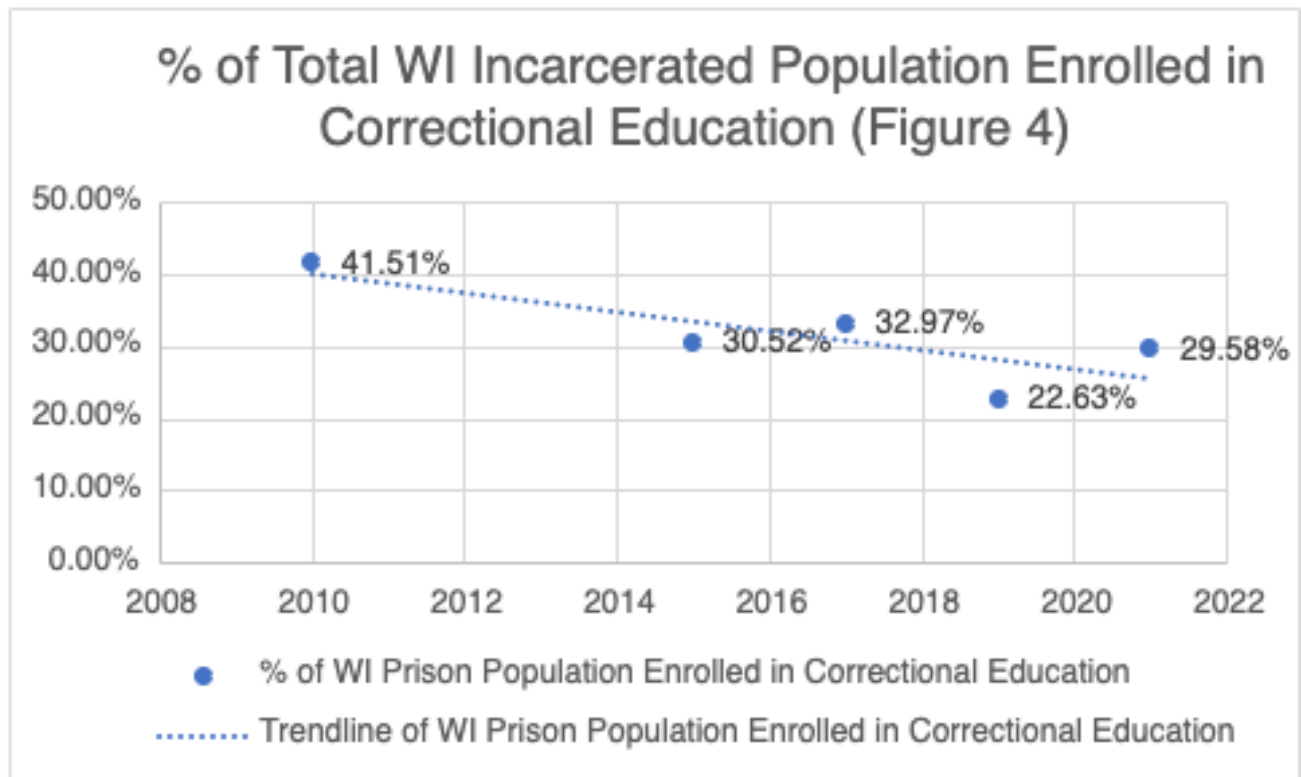


The data in *Figure 3* shows the total number of individuals who enrolled in correctional education programs compared to the total prison population of Wisconsin at the time. One important consideration to make when interpreting data from 2020 onwards is that according to the Wisconsin DOC, some correctional institutions had their correctional programming interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This may mean that specifically for the year 2021, the number of individuals enrolled in correctional education programs is reduced by COVID-19 and is not a shift in the use of correctional education¹⁵. Another piece to consider for this data is that the total incarcerated population is not fixed as individuals are leaving and entering the correctional system frequently. Therefore, although the total prison population noted in *Figure 3* is representative of what the average incarcerated population was during that specific year, there was actually a higher number of unique individuals incarcerated during that time period. We are, however, able to discern an approximate percentage of the incarcerated population that was enrolled in vocational and/or ABE programming during those years.

The primary observation to be drawn from *Figure 3* is that the total enrollment in correctional education programs within Wisconsin has been slowly decreasing over the past decade, although this also coincides with a moderate decrease in the total prison population of Wisconsin. Also notable is that following 2010, the total number of individuals enrolled in educational programming has been a minimum of about 1,400 individuals fewer. This is intriguing as although 2010 had a significantly larger total number of individuals enrolled in educational programming, it also had the second

¹⁵ It is unclear the extent to which COVID-19 impacted enrollment outcomes, however it is possible that during the years impacted by COVID-19 there will be some reduction of enrollment in educational programming.

lowest total population in the five years examined. Additionally, there were 5,382 total individuals enrolled in educational programming in 2019, with a total incarcerated population of 23,777, the highest of all five years examined.



Looking at the percentages of the incarcerated population enrolled in educational programming raises more troubling questions. Using the data in *Figure 4*, we can see that as the total number of individuals enrolled in educational programming has decreased since 2010, the percentage of the incarcerated population enrolled has also been decreasing. In 2010, 41.57% of the total incarcerated population was enrolled in an educational program. The next four years examined all had significantly lower percentages, with 2017 being the closest, at 32.97%. The lowest percentage of the

population enrolled in educational programming was observed in 2019, when it was a staggering 22.63%, nearly half of what that number was in 2010.

The fairly steady decreases in the total number of individuals enrolled and the percentage of the population enrolled in educational programming present a troubling outlook for correctional education in Wisconsin. However, there are some potential issues with this data that indicate a need for further examination. First, it is possible that the need for correctional education in the Wisconsin correctional system has shifted over the time period examined. I was unable to obtain information on the educational demographics of the Wisconsin incarcerated population outside of the year 2021. Therefore, it is possible that although the total number and percentage of the incarcerated population involved in this programming has decreased, this may simply reflect a demographic change in the incarcerated population¹⁶. This implies that for future research to make a stronger assessment on decreases in correctional education enrollment would require analysis on how education demographics in the Wisconsin correctional system have changed or stayed the same during the years examined.

Race & Enrollment in Correctional Education

The second area that I examined was the role of an individual's race in determining the outcome of enrollment in correctional education programs. I would like to preface this section with the disclaimer that although I have included both Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native in my analyses, the total incarcerated population of these two groups is significantly smaller than the White and

¹⁶ Essentially, if the incarcerated population has a higher level of education, it would be expected that fewer individuals would be enrolled in educational programming as they do not have need for it.

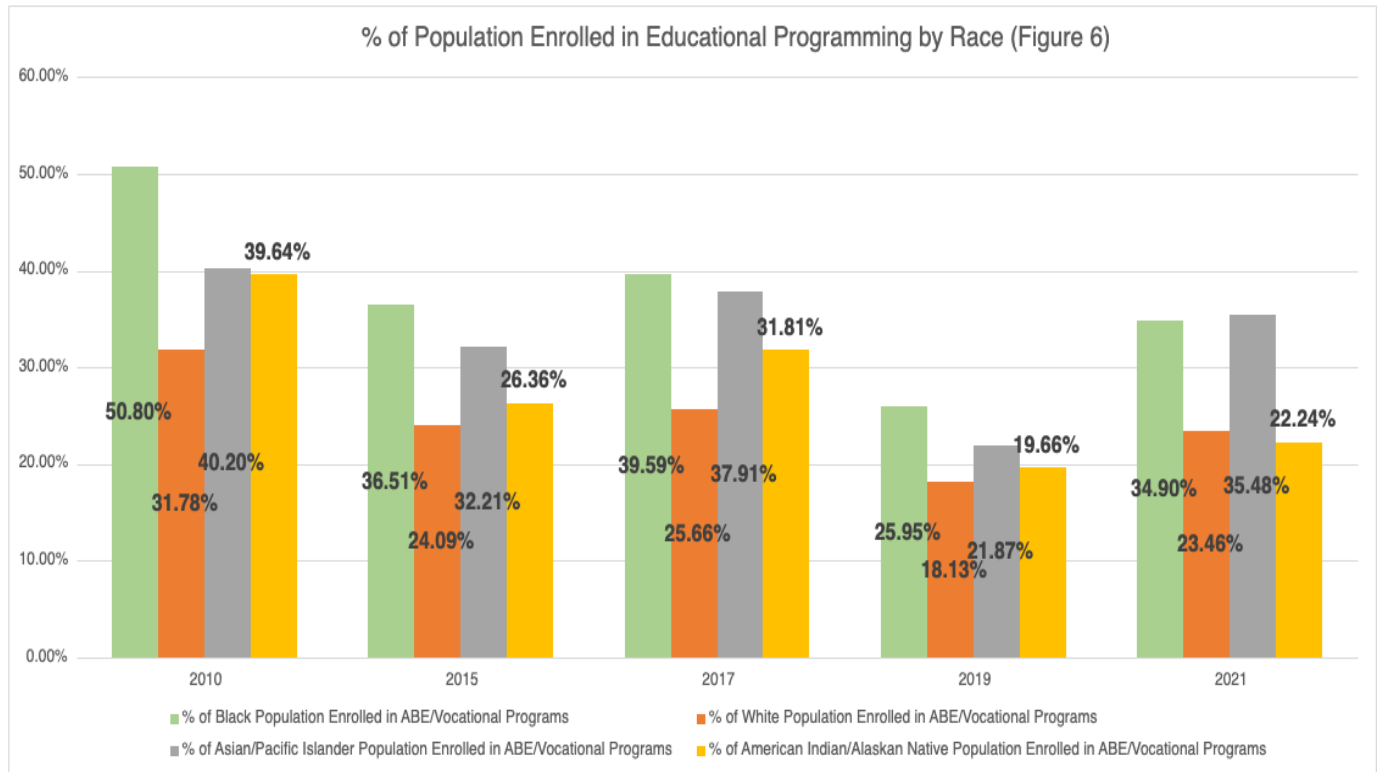
Black populations. Therefore, trends observed solely from these two groups should be treated with skepticism as they are not representative of much of the Wisconsin prison population.

(Figure 5) - 2021 Education Demographics of the WI Correctional System						
Education Level	< 9th Grade	9th – 12th Grade	HSED/G ED	Associate/Bachelor/Master/PhD	Some Vocational or Grad.	Unknown
Total WI Prison Population	3.4% / 680	20.6% / 4,965	47.9% / 9,356	7.1% / 1,174	19.6% / 3,670	1.3% / 258
White	3.5% / 405	16.0% / 1,779	49.6% / 5,111	8.4% / 836	21.4% / 2,228	1.1% / 115
Black	3.1% / 240	33.2% / 2,925	43.5% / 3,639	3.5% / 262	15.0% / 1,213	1.8% / 138
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.1% / 15	18.0% / 45	44.4% / 108	12.7% / 30	17.1% / 44	1.7% / 4
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2.0% / 18	21.7% / 215	51.8% / 490	4.9% / 44	19.6% / 182	0.1% / 1

The data in *Figure 5* illustrates the educational demographics of the Wisconsin correctional system population at the end of 2021. Although I do not have the education demographics for the other 4 years I am examining, the information from 2021 does allow us a glimpse into some stark differences between different populations in the Wisconsin correctional system. This is most notable when comparing White and Black demographics, with 19.5% of White incarcerated individuals having attained less than a

high school degree compared to 36.3% for Black individuals. This indicates that for 2021, and likely for other years being examined, educational needs between demographic groups are significantly different. This leads to my third hypothesis that because of a significantly larger portion of the Black population having attained less than a high school degree, they will have a larger percentage of their population enrolled in correctional education. The Black population would also be expected to have a larger percentage of their population enrolled in educational programming than Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native populations. However, as mentioned previously, trends for these two groups specifically are challenging to evaluate as small changes in the population's demographics would have large effects on their rate of enrollment.

Hypothesis 3: The Black incarcerated population will have a larger percentage of their population enrolled in educational programming than the White population.



This hypothesis proved to be true for 2021 as shown by the data in *Figure 6*. In 2021, 34.9% of the Black population was enrolled in educational programming, while the White population had 23.46% enrollment. Although the education demographic data for the previous four years examined was not available, we can see that specifically the Black population has a higher percentage enrollment than the White population during the other four years examined. This is evidence that depending on the educational needs of specific demographics of the population, they appear to correlate with higher or lower percentages of their population enrolled in educational programming.

Enrollment Summary

Average levels of enrollment in correctional education in the Wisconsin correctional system appears to have been slowly declining between the years of 2010

and 2021. This is evidenced by a decline in both the total number and percentage of the incarcerated population enrolled in these programs. Although this does potentially indicate that use of correctional education has been declining, it is also possible this is the result in a shift of educational need within the correctional system. It is possible that in 2010, a larger portion of the incarcerated population had not attained a high school degree, and therefore it would be expected that a larger number of individuals would be enrolled in educational programming. Therefore, it is conceivable that although enrollment in educational programming has decreased since 2010, this may not be a result of a shift in correctional policy but educational needs of the incarcerated population during this time.

When enrollment is examined on the basis of race of the incarcerated individuals, we can see that different demographics have drastically different enrollment levels. Looking purely at the data from 2021, we can see that the Black population had the highest percentage of their population enrolled in educational programming. This was hypothesized to occur, as the Black population had a larger percentage of their population having not attained a high school degree than any other racial demographic in the Wisconsin correctional system. This shows that at least in the case of 2021, the group with the highest educational need also had the highest level of enrollment in educational programming.

Educational Attainment

One of the challenges created by solely focusing on the relationship between involvement in correctional education programming and recidivism is that the intricacies of what skills people are learning and why they may recidivate less are lost.

This is one of the concerns voiced by the RAND Corporation study, as although they found a correlation between involvement in correctional education and a reduction of recidivism, they did not study the actual educational gains of individuals involved in these programs (RAND Corporation, 2013). It is conceivable that for individuals with higher educational gains than others, the probability of them recidivating would be lower as the opportunity cost of committing crimes would increase¹⁷. These factors combined create an area of research that is in need of closer examination. It is also important to consider that the underlying purpose of educational programming is to address the general academic need of incarcerated individuals, not solely to reduce recidivism.

Although I acknowledge the importance of this subject, I was constrained by the limited data available. First, I was unable to receive information on specific educational gains such as changes in literacy rates and computational improvements. I was, however, able to see the total number of individuals that received an HSED or GED. This means my analysis on attainment through correctional education will focus on attaining either an HSED or GED. It is important to understand that this metric does not allow me to accurately determine specific educational gains for these individuals. It is also possible that some individuals may have already had the academic skills necessary to attain an HSED or GED without being involved in these programs. Additionally, it is possible that individuals who did not receive an HSED or GED still had notable improvements in their academic skills. Therefore, these metrics should not

¹⁷ This infers that the skills individuals attained through correctional education open up new opportunities that they could then lose if they commit new crimes following their release.

be taken as an indicator of the number of individuals who had academic growth in these programs.

Second, regarding the number of individuals that received an HSED or GED, the Wisconsin DOC was not able to provide the number of individuals who were specifically enrolled in these programs, and instead provided the total number of individuals involved in HSED/GED programs and/or vocational programs. Therefore, it is possible that although the average number of individuals who received a degree may increase or decrease, this could simply be representing a proportionally higher involvement in HSED/GED or vocational programs.

Attainment of HSEDs and GEDs

As of 2021, nearly 25% of the Wisconsin incarcerated population did not have a high school diploma or equivalent. This translates to roughly 5,000 individuals that could potentially benefit from enrollment in ABE programs. As discussed in the previous section, the average number of individuals enrolled in these programs has been trending downwards since 2010. However, by examining the number of individuals that have attained degrees, it is possible to see if the effectiveness of these programs has declined as well. It is important to note that as the numbers I am pulling from include both ABE and vocational program enrollment, it is feasible that the Wisconsin DOC may have shifted towards offering more of either of those types of programs. These potential shifts would result in the expected number of HSED/GED degrees awarded increasing or decreasing. This warrants some skepticism in taking the findings in this section as conclusive, but rather I would recommend viewing this as preliminary and in need of confirmation.

Hypothesis 1: The efficacy of these programs in awarding HSED/GED's will remain relatively stable across the years examined, regardless of lower total enrollment in correctional education programs.

(Figure 7) - Number of HSED/GED Degrees Awarded by Year

Year	Total Prison Population	White	Black	Asian / Pacific Islander	American Indian / Alaskan Native
2010	1,244	613	574	11	46
2015	472	273	173	7	19
2017	534	305	204	8	17
2019	555	268	248	3	36
2021	321	160	141	3	17
Total	3,126	1,619	1,340	32	135

Looking purely at the raw number of degrees awarded over the five years that I have examined, we can see that 2010 had a significant number of degrees awarded across all sections of the prison population. However, after 2010 we can see that those numbers drastically decreased over the next four years examined. This is consistent with the fact that the total enrollment in correctional education programs decreased over these years as well. One thing to note from *Figure 7* is that the number of individuals in the Asian/Pacific Islander or American Indian/Alaskan Native demographic is extremely small. Therefore, I will be primarily focusing on the White and Black

demographics, as they are a significantly larger portion of the population and are likely more representative of overall trends in the correctional system.

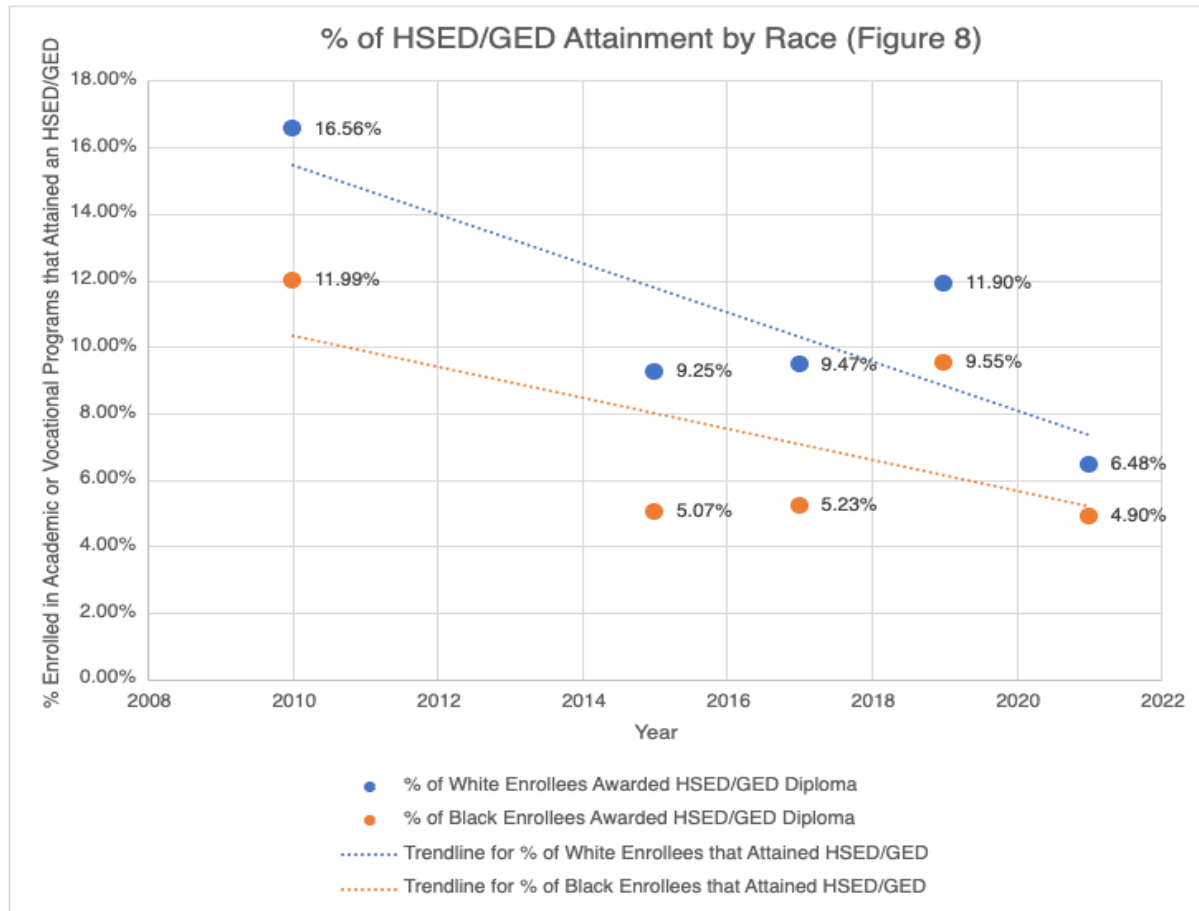


Figure 8 illustrates the percentage of White and Black individuals as well as the total Wisconsin prison population which were enrolled in academic or vocational programming and received an HSED or GED. 2010 saw the highest percentage of individuals enrolled in programming receive an HSED or GED, with 16.56% of White individuals and 11.99% of Black individuals. However, that number dropped significantly in 2015 to 9.27% for White individuals, and 5.07% for Black individuals. In 2017, the percentage of program enrollees that attained an HSED or GED had a very moderate increase but was overall very similar to the numbers in 2015. However, in

2019, there was an increase in the percentage of program participants that attained an HSED or GED, with 11.99% of White participants and 9.55% of Black participants attaining an HSED or GED, a 2.52% and 4.32% increase respectively, since 2017. This upward trend from 2015 did not continue, however, as the attainment rate dropped to 6.48% for White participants and 4.90% for Black participants, the lowest rates of any of the five years examined. One critical aspect of 2021 to consider is that according to the Wisconsin DOC, the COVID-19 pandemic affected programming during both 2020 and 2021. Therefore, it is reasonable that the significant drop in the average attainment rate during 2021 was influenced by the disruption brought by the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁸.

One intriguing outcome from this analysis is the markedly different rates of attainment of HSEDs and GEDs between White and Black individuals. It is important to understand the context of this situation as well. Over the five years examined, there were 17,564 Black individuals enrolled in academic or vocational programs, and 14,589 White individuals. Additionally, over those 5 years, 1,619 White individuals and 1,340 Black individuals attained an HSED or GED. This is intriguing because although there were 2,975 more Black individuals that participated in these programs, 279 more White individuals attained an HSED or GED. This holds true across all five years examined with on average 55.8 fewer Black individuals attaining an HSED or GED than White individuals across the years examined.

While I cannot unequivocally state the cause for this lower attainment rate, there are several possible explanations. First, it is plausible that incarcerated White

¹⁸ As I mentioned earlier, this does not appear to be something that is possible to determine based on the information that the WI DOC has available. However, it should be kept in mind when making assessments on the performances of programming during the years impacted by COVID-19.

individuals who are involved in these programs tend to have generally higher base levels of education and therefore would need less time involved in these programs to attain an HSED or GED. There is some evidence this could be the case, as in 2021 roughly 36% of all incarcerated Black individuals had less than a high school degree, whereas that number was only 19.5% for White individuals. Second, the prison experience and mental challenges faced by White and Black individuals could be significantly different which may lead to different completion outcomes of academic programming between these two groups. Although I can conclude there is a different attainment rate between White and Black individuals, the causes of this difference are significantly more challenging to discern and requires further research outside the scope of what I am able to accomplish with the data I had available to me.

Attainment Summary

Although there are certainly fluctuations in the average percentage of individuals that attain an HSED or GED, that percentage has been significantly lower than what was observed in 2010. This means that although the total number of participants and the percentage of participants have decreased, there has also been a decrease in the average percentage of attainment. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, which stated that it would be expected that the percentage of individuals attaining HSED and GED's would remain relatively stable regardless of the reduction in total program participants, is false. Although the outcome of this hypothesis is fairly clear, the reasons behind this outcome are significantly more complex to understand. There are two likely explanations for this outcome, both of which would require further research to confirm.

First, the average education level of inmates in the Wisconsin correctional system has increased, which has resulted in a lower need for ABE programming that would result in an HSED or GED. This may mean that resources for programs have shifted towards offering more vocational programs, rather than academic programs. To confirm this possibility, it would require having the data for the number of individuals that participated in only ABE programs. However, as the available data had the number of ABE and vocational program enrollees combined, it was not possible to account for a shift towards vocational programming. The second explanation, which is potentially more concerning, is that there has been an actual drop in the efficacy of these programs regarding participants attaining HSEDs and GEDs. The third explanation for this drop is that although the four years examined had lower percentages of attainment, the directly following years may have had higher rates of attainment. This would be possible since some individuals may need longer than one year of educational programming to attain an HSED or GED. Therefore, to eliminate this possibility, future research should include consecutive years in their analysis so that trends regarding attainment do not face this issue.

Analysis of Recidivism

The question of whether involvement in correctional education programming reduces recidivism rates compared to individuals that do not participate is the critical aspect of this study. Within this section I will be examining how involvement in correctional education impacts the three different measures of recidivism rates; rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration. However, before we dive into the analysis there are three limiting factors to this study that should be taken into account.

First, the content within this section will focus on any evidence that points to the possibility that involvement in correctional education programs while incarcerated reduces recidivism rates. This section is not intended to illustrate a causal relationship between correctional education and a reduction in recidivism rates. Selection bias is the most important factor to control for when attempting to prove a causal relationship between involvement in correctional education programs and recidivism rates. Selection bias occurs because it is plausible that individuals who choose to participate and take advantage of correctional education programming could be internally motivated to better themselves while incarcerated and may therefore inherently be less likely to recidivate than individuals who chose to not participate (RAND Corporation, 2013). This makes it critical that the composition of individuals in the treatment (received educational programming) and control group (did not receive educational programming) are as similar to each other as possible, so that the effect of involvement in correctional education programming can be isolated as much as possible. Because I am using aggregated data regarding recidivism outcomes, I was unable to control for selection bias. This means these results will potentially be skewed, as I will not be able to isolate the effects of participation in correctional education on recidivism outcomes.

Second, in regard to involvement in correctional education, I will use this as an umbrella term that includes involvement in both ABE and/or vocational programs. As with educational attainment, this reflects the lack of data available on the specific number of individuals who participated in these separate programs. One thing to note, however, is that although an individual is enrolled in an ABE program while incarcerated, they can also be involved in vocational programs. Therefore, even if I did

have the enrollment numbers for these specific programs, there would still be issues determining if there is any difference in recidivism rates based on involvement in different programs as individuals may participate in both programs.

Finally, I will not be able to include individuals who were enrolled in post-secondary education programs. This is due to the DOC being unable to provide any information regarding the number of individuals enrolled in these programs, or the number of individuals involved that recidivated. This is unfortunate, as these are the highest level of academic programming available to incarcerated individuals. Logically, I would expect they would be the least likely to recidivate as attainment of a college degree would theoretically open opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable and therefore, they would have the highest opportunity cost of committing a new crime and recidivating.

As stated in the beginning of this section I will be looking at how involvement in correctional education impacts affects three definitions of recidivism that the Wisconsin DOC uses. These three measures are snapshots in the timeline of an individual's return to prison. The three definitions of recidivism are rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration. It is important to distinguish between all three of these definitions of recidivism. Although an individual may be re-arrested for committing an offense, this does not guarantee that they will be reconvicted or reincarcerated. It is also important to note that the follow-up period for tracking recidivism by the DOC is three years. Therefore, it is possible that although an individual did not recidivate within three years, they may still do so after the follow-up period has passed. The three forms of recidivism are defined as follows by the Wisconsin DOC:

Rearrest: Following an episode of incarceration with the Wisconsin DOC, to be arrested in Wisconsin for a new criminal offense.

Reconviction: Following an episode of incarceration with the Wisconsin DOC, to commit a criminal offense that results in a new sentence to either prison or probation.

Reincarceration: Following an episode of incarceration with the Wisconsin DOC, to be admitted to a Wisconsin prison for either a revocation, a revocation with a new sentence, or a new sentence.

In my analysis for all three definitions, I will be comparing the rates of rearrest, reconviction and reincarceration for individuals that participated in educational programming with individuals who did not participate in these programs. I will be using 2010, 2015 and 2017 as the release years for those comparisons because of the five years I have examined, these were the only three in which the three-year follow-up period has completed. However, I will not be able to provide an analysis of the rearrest recidivism rates for 2017, as that data was not yet available at the time of writing¹⁹. I will also compare the recidivism rates for individuals that completed educational programming and individuals that participated in but did not complete educational programming.

The first hypothesis I have is based on the findings of the RAND Corporation's 2013 meta-analysis that found individuals who participated in correctional education programs had 43% lower odds of recidivating than individuals who did not participate. Therefore, I theorized individuals who participated in correctional education

¹⁹ This was rather strange as the Wisconsin DOC did have data available for reconviction and reincarceration numbers during 2017, I can only assume that this data is compiled from an outside source and therefore takes longer to obtain.

programming while incarcerated will have lower recidivism rates than individuals that did not participate. The second hypothesis I am considering is that individuals who completed educational programming will have lower recidivism rates than both individuals who participated in educational programming but did not complete it and individuals that did not participate in educational programming.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals who participated in correctional education will have lower recidivism rates than individuals who did not participate in correctional education programs.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals that completed correctional education programs will have lower recidivism rates than individuals which participated in but did not complete educational programming, and individuals who did not participate in educational programming.

The method I will be using to compare the outcomes of individuals who participated in academic or vocational programming and those who did not participate is a basic comparison of the percentages of individuals that did not recidivate and those that did. This will focus on determining whether a larger or smaller percentage of the population that participated in educational programming recidivated than those who did not participate. I opted not to include an analysis that focused on the likelihood or odds of an individual who participated in educational programming not recidivating, as this could be misinterpreted as showing involvement in educational programming may cause individuals to have lower rates of recidivism²⁰. However, the data I am using is

²⁰ As mentioned previously, without being able to control for selection bias the results I would find are likely to be inherently biased towards showing involvement in educational programming reduces recidivism outcomes.

unable to account for selection bias, and therefore cannot establish any correlation between involvement in educational programming and recidivism rates.

Rearrest

The first definition of recidivism that I will be examining is rearrest, as it is the beginning of the process of recidivating. Before an individual can be either reconvicted or reincarcerated they must be rearrested for a new criminal offense. This category will therefore be examining the largest number of individuals, as not every rearrest will result in reconviction or reincarceration. As mentioned previously, the primary limiting factor in this category is that the rearrest numbers for 2017 were not available, so therefore my analysis will be based solely off data from 2010 and 2015.

(Figure 9) Number + Percentage of Individuals That Were Rearrested Within 3 yrs. of Release				
Involvement Level in Educational Programming	Release Year			
	2010 (8,386 total # released)		2015 (7,330 total # released)	
	Rearrested	Not Rearrested	Rearrested	Not Rearrested
Involved in Educational Programming	1,332 – 49.89%	1,328 – 50.11%	1,136 – 48.39%	1,212 – 51.61%
Not Involved in Educational Programming	2,944 – 51.33%	2,792 – 48.67%	2,549 – 51.17%	2,433 – 48.83%
Completed Educational Programming	660 – 47.05%	743 – 52.95%	660 – 45.90%	712 – 54.10%
Did Not Complete Educational Programming	662 – 53.09%	585 – 46.91%	532 – 51.65%	500 – 48.44%

Figure 9 includes data from 2010 and 2015 on the number and percentage of individuals released from the Wisconsin correctional system who were either rearrested or were not rearrested. These numbers are broken down into four categories. Those who

were involved in correctional education serves as an umbrella term for both those that completed educational programming, and those that did not complete educational programming. Therefore, the completed educational programming category and did not complete educational programming category make up the composition of those that were involved in educational programming. The final group that was not involved in educational programming had no participation in educational programming prior to their release.

There are three interesting trends that can be viewed from this data. First, there does appear to be a slight difference between the rearrest rates for individuals who were involved in correctional education and those who were not. Individuals that were involved in educational programming had an average 2.11 percentage point lower portion of their population rearrested within the three-year follow-up period compared to those who were not involved. Although this is not a massive difference, it does suggest there may be some difference in the rates of rearrest between these two groups.

Second, for individuals who completed educational programming, there does appear to be a significant difference in outcome regarding rearrest compared to those that were not involved. Comparing these two groups shows that individuals who completed educational programming had an average 4.78 percentage point lower portion of their population rearrested compared to those who were not involved in programming. This observation in particular may be influenced by selection bias as individuals with inherent qualities that make them less likely to recidivate may also be more likely to complete educational programming.

The most intriguing of these three observations, however, is regarding the group of individuals that participated in but did not complete educational programming. This group had a higher average portion of their population rearrested than both individuals that completed educational programming and individuals that did not participate in programming. Individuals that participated in but did not complete educational programming had an average 1.08 percentage point higher portion of their population rearrested than those who did not participate. This difference is even more significant when compared to individuals who completed educational programming. With individuals who didn't complete educational programming having an average 5.85 percentage point higher portion of their population rearrested than those that completed programming.

This was slightly unexpected as, I had assumed that if an individual had participated in educational programming regardless of whether they completed it or not, they would at worst have approximately the same rate of rearrest as individuals that were not involved in educational programming. One possible explanation for this is that the individuals who participate in educational programming may have lower average education levels than those that do not participate as they may not have an educational need. Therefore, using the theory that individuals with higher education levels are less likely to commit crimes due to increased opportunity costs (Lochner and Moretti, 2004) it is feasible that as these individuals who did not complete educational programming would have lower education levels, and would therefore be more likely to be rearrested for a new crime.

Reconviction

The second definition of recidivism is reconviction. Reconviction is the step that occurs following an individual's rearrest, in which they are sentenced to either a new prison sentence or probation. Prior to 2021, the Wisconsin DOC only used reconviction when they would report recidivism rates. The majority of people that are reconvicted will eventually be reincarcerated, barring being placed on probation. Therefore, the following section on reincarceration will likely have very similar outcomes. One of the advantages for this section and the following section on reincarceration is that the Wisconsin DOC was able to provide data for 2017, which it was unable to provide for rearrests.

(Figure 10) Number + Percentage of Individuals That Were Reconvicted Within 3 Yrs. Of Release						
Involvement Level in Educational Programming	Release Year					
	2010 (8,402 total # released)		2015 (7,331 total # released)		2017 (5,796 total # released)	
	Reconvicted	Not Reconvicted	Reconvicted	Not Reconvicted	Reconvicted	Not Reconvicted
Involved in Educational Programming	793 – 29.81%	1867 – 70.19%	703 – 29.94%	1645 – 70.06%	551 – 30.49%	1256 – 69.51%
Not Involved in Educational Programming	1932 – 33.65%	3810 – 66.35%	1745 – 35.02%	3238 – 64.98%	1359 – 34.07%	2630 – 65.93%
Completed Educational Programming	386 – 29.33%	1022 – 70.67%	365 – 27.74%	951 – 72.26%	239 – 27.28%	637 – 72.72%
Did Not Complete Educational Programming	407 – 32.51%	845 – 67.49%	338 – 32.75%	694 – 67.25%	312 – 33.51%	619 – 66.49%

Figure 10 includes data from 2010, 2015 and 2017 on the number and percentage of individuals that were released from the WI correctional system in those years that were either reconvicted or not reconvicted in the three-year follow-up period. They also use the same categories based on involvement used in the section on rearrest. This data on reconviction outcomes points strongly to the hypothesis that individuals who are involved in educational programming tend to have lower rates of recidivism than those who are not involved.

There is a significant difference between the percentage of individuals that were reconvicted who were involved in educational programming and those that were not. For individuals that were involved in educational programming there was an average 4.17 percentage point lower portion of their population reconvicted within the three-year follow-up period than those that were not involved in educational programming. This is almost double the difference found regarding rearrest rates between these two groups, which was a 2.11 percentage point difference. Consistent with what was found regarding rearrest is that the difference between the percentage of individuals reconvicted who completed educational programming and those who were not involved in programming is fairly large. Individuals that completed educational programming had an average 6.13 percentage point lower portion of their population reconvicted within three-years than those who were not involved in educational programming.

However, unlike what was found in regard to rearrests, there does appear to be a positive effect for individuals that were involved in but did not complete educational programming in reducing reconviction rates. For individuals who were involved in but did not complete educational programs, there was an average 1.33 percentage point

lower portion of the population reconvicted compared to individuals that were not involved in programming. It is to be expected the individuals who were involved in but did not complete educational programming would have outcomes more similar to those that were not involved in programming. This is because it is unlikely that an individual who was involved in, but did not complete educational programming would receive the full potential benefits

Reincarceration

The final definition of recidivism I will be examining is reincarceration. The definitions of reincarceration and reconviction are very similar, however some individuals that have been reconvicted will not be reincarcerated and return to prison, and instead will be placed on probation. One other difference between reincarceration and rearrest or reconviction is that the Wisconsin DOC uses the date when an individual has returned to prison for the purposes of reporting recidivism information, whereas for rearrest and reconviction, the date of the original offense is used. Therefore, although an individual may have been reconvicted and will be returning to prison, they may appear as someone who was not reincarcerated in the data I am using as they did not physically return to prison within the three-year follow-up period²¹.

²¹ This would likely affect an extremely small number of individuals but is important to keep in mind as a possible situation.

(Figure 11) Number + Percentage of Individuals That Were Reincarcerated Within 3 Yrs. Of Release						
Involvement Level in Educational Programming	Release Year					
	2010 (8,402 total # released)		2015 (7,331 total # released)		2017 (7,668 total # released)	
	Reconvicted	Not Reconvicted	Reconvicted	Not Reconvicted	Reconvicted	Not Reconvicted
Involved in Educational Programming	929 – 34.92%	1731 – 65.08%	876 – 37.31%	1472 – 62.69%	904 – 38.26%	1459 – 61.74%
Not Involved in Educational Programming	2159 – 37.60%	3593 – 62.40%	1881 – 37.75%	3102 – 62.25%	2098 – 39.55%	3207 – 60.45%
Completed Educational Programming	472 – 33.52%	936 – 66.48%	448 – 34.04%	868 – 65.96%	379 – 33.10%	766 – 66.90%
Did Not Complete Educational Programming	457 – 36.50%	795 – 63.50%	428 – 41.47%	604 – 58.53%	525 – 43.10%	693 – 56.90%

Figure 11 includes data from 2010, 2015, and 2017 on the number and percentage of individuals that were released the Wisconsin correctional system during those years that were either reincarcerated or not within the three-year follow-up period. One thing to note is, as mentioned earlier, the reporting method for reincarceration is different than rearrest or reconviction, which may mean the number of individuals who were not reincarcerated could be very slightly inflated.

The observations that can be made from *Figure 11* are intriguing for multiple reasons. Generally, the data on reincarcerations continue most of the trends found for both rearrests and reconvictions. Of specific interest, however, is the reincarceration trend for individuals who were involved in but did not complete educational

programming. For these individuals, there was an average 2.06 percentage point higher portion of that population reincarcerated than the population of those that were not involved in programming. This is similar to the recidivism trends between these two groups found in the rearrest section, however, it is the opposite of what was found in the reconviction data. This is also confusing because if it is necessary for an individual to be reconvicted before they can be reincarcerated, the percentage of the population that would be reincarcerated would be equal to or less than the percentage that was reconvicted. This leads me to believe that certain individuals that are rearrested are automatically reincarcerated without having to be reconvicted. This is likely caused by individuals that break rules of their parole or other stipulations of their release that cause them to be reincarcerated without needing to be reconvicted of a new crime.

For individuals who were involved in educational programming, there was an average 1.47 percentage points smaller portion of the population that were not reincarcerated compared to individuals who were not involved. This is the smallest difference between these two groups out of all three definitions of recidivism. This is in large part the result of the group that was involved in but did not complete educational programming having a significantly higher percentage of their population reincarcerated than those that completed the programming. For the group that did complete educational programming, there was an average 4.75 percentage point smaller portion of their population reincarcerated compared to those that were not involved in any educational programming. This is very similar to what was found regarding both rearrests and reconviction between these two groups.

Recidivism Summary

All three definitions of recidivism provide different views on the effects of involvement in educational programming. The consistent finding throughout these definitions, however, is that for the group of individuals who completed educational programming, a smaller percentage of that population recidivated compared to the group that was not involved in any educational programming. The somewhat strange finding from these sections was regarding the group that was involved in but did not complete the programming. This group had a higher percentage of their population rearrested and reincarcerated, but a lower percentage of their population reconvicted than the population who had no involvement in educational programming.

(Figure 12) Percentage Point Difference in Rearrest Outcomes Between Involved Groups & No Involvement Group (+ = higher percentage had negative outcome, - = lower percentage had negative outcome)			
Involvement Level in Educational Programming	Release Year		
	2010	2015	2017
Total Involved in Educational Programming	-1.44	-2.78	N/A
Completed Educational Programming	-4.28	-5.27	N/A

Did Not Complete			
Educational Programming	+1.76	+0.48	N/A

(Figure 13) Percentage Point Difference in Reconviction Outcomes Between Involved Groups & No Involvement Group (+ = higher percentage had negative outcome, - = lower percentage had negative outcome)

Involvement Level in Educational Programming	Release Year		
	2010	2015	2017
Total Involved in Educational Programming	-3.84	-5.08	-3.58
Completed Educational Programming	-4.32	-7.28	-6.79
Did Not Complete Educational Programming	-1.14	-2.27	-0.56

(Figure 14) Percentage Point Difference in Reincarceration Outcomes Between Involved Groups & No Involvement Group (+ = higher percentage had negative outcome, - = lower percentage had negative outcome)			
Involvement Level in Educational Programming	Release Year		
	2010	2015	2017
Total Involved in Educational Programming	-2.68	-0.44	-1.29
Completed Educational Programming	-4.08	-3.71	-6.45
Did Not Complete Educational Programming	-1.10	+3.72	+3.55

Figures 12, 13 and 14 show the percentage point difference between the three different involvement groups compared with the group that was not involved in educational programming regarding experiencing a negative recidivism outcome. A negative outcome is considered either being rearrested, reconvicted, or reincarcerated. For years with “+”, this indicates that there was an X percentage point larger portion of the involvement group that was rearrested, reconvicted, or reincarcerated. Years with “-

” indicate that there was an X percentage point smaller portion of the involvement group that was rearrested, reconvicted, or reincarcerated.

Regarding **Hypothesis 1**²², we can see this was true. For all three definitions of recidivism, the group that was involved in educational programming had a smaller percentage of their population result in a negative outcome. However, the size of that percentage which had a negative outcome was not consistent across all three definitions of recidivism. Reincarceration rates appear to be the least impacted by involvement in educational programming as an average 1.47 percentage point smaller portion of the population reincarcerated compared to the group that was not involved in programming. Rearrest rates were in the middle with an average 2.11 percentage point smaller portion of the population being rearrested than the population that was not involved in programming. Reconviction rates appear to be the most impacted by involvement in educational programming, with an average 4.17 percentage point smaller portion of the population that was involved in educational programming being reconvicted than the group that was not involved in programming. This indicates that although there may be positive effects for involvement in educational programming, the type of recidivism being examined will impact the degree to which it is effective.

²² Hypothesis 1: Individuals who participated in correctional education will have lower recidivism rates than individuals who did not participate in correctional education programs.

Hypothesis 2²³ was also found to be true. The group that completed educational programming had a lower percentage of their population experience a negative outcome regarding recidivism when compared to the group that was not involved in programming, and the group that was involved in but did not complete the programming. Similar to what was found for **Hypothesis 1**, although there was a lower percentage of the population that had a negative outcome across all three definitions of recidivism, that percentage was varied depending on the definition. The differences between rearrest and reincarceration rates were minimal, while completion of educational programming appears to have a larger effect in reducing reconvictions. For the population that completed educational programming, there was an average 4.78 percentage point and 4.75 percentage point smaller portion of the population that was rearrested and reincarcerated respectively, when compared to the population that was not involved in educational programming. Reconviction rates had the largest difference between the population that completed programming and the group that was not involved with an average 6.13 percentage point smaller portion of the population being reconvicted.

The most interesting and frankly unexpected observation from this data was regarding the group of individuals that was involved in but did not complete educational programming. For both years examined based on rearrests, this group had a larger

²³ Hypothesis 2: Individuals who completed correctional education programs will have lower recidivism rates than individuals which participated in but did not complete educational programming, and individuals who did not participate in educational programming.

percentage of their population rearrested than the group that was not involved in educational programming. Additionally, this group also had a larger percentage of their population reincarcerated than the group that was not involved in programming for two of the three years examined. This indicates there is likely some difference between the individuals who completed educational programming and those who were involved but did not complete it. This may simply be that the skills an individual received while completing their educational programming assisted them in not recidivating. However, it is also plausible that this is displaying selection bias. The individuals that completed these programs may simply be more motivated to make a positive impact on their lives by completing these programs and are therefore, inherently less likely to recidivate than the group that did not complete this programming.

These findings present us with evidence that suggests involvement in educational programming may lower recidivism rates. However, especially when considering the mixed outcomes for individuals who were involved in but did not complete educational programming compared to those that completed educational programming, it is clear that without controlling for selection bias it is not possible to establish a causal relationship between involvement in programming and lower recidivism rates.

Overall Summary of Findings

As Wisconsin and the United States continues to grapple with an exceedingly large incarcerated population and high recidivism rates, identifying treatments and tools that are effective in combating of issues is a critical issue for states across the country to

address. These issues informed the purpose of this paper, as I have sought to examine the correctional education programs offered in Wisconsin and provide an analysis on the potential benefits for involvement in educational programming. To achieve this, I focused on three areas that I believe are critical to understanding the recent state of correctional education in Wisconsin. This included examinations on how enrollment in educational programming has shifted, the educational attainment rates for HSEDs and GEDs, and finally a basic analysis of how involvement in educational programming may reduce the likelihood of individuals recidivating.

Much of my research was based upon the findings of previous studies, particularly the 2013 RAND Corporation meta-analysis which found that individuals who were involved in correctional education had 43% lower odds of recidivating than individuals who did not participate in educational programming. Unlike these studies, however, I did not attempt to establish a causal relationship between involvement in correctional education and lower recidivism rates. In the following sections I will be reviewing the findings of my research as well as explaining the areas which are in need of further research.

Summary of Correctional Education Enrollment

The focus of the section regarding enrollment in correctional education was to observe how the number of individuals who have been able to potentially benefit from educational programming has changed from 2010 to 2021. Gaining an understanding of how enrollment numbers have shifted over time allows us to evaluate the degree to which correctional education is being used as a treatment method in Wisconsin.

Over the five years examined between 2010 and 2021, I observed that both the total number and percentage of the incarcerated population enrolled in educational programming has been declining since 2010. This is most clearly demonstrated by comparing enrollment rates in 2010 to the following four years examined. In 2010, 41.57% of the total incarcerated population was enrolled in educational programs, however out of all other years examined the next highest level of enrollment was 32.97% of the population in 2017. In 2019, the percentage of the incarcerated population enrolled in programming had been nearly halved since 2010, at 22.63%. This indicates that correctional education has potentially been used less as a treatment method in the Wisconsin correctional system from 2010 to 2021. To be able to state this conclusively, however, requires additional research in two specific areas.

First, I was unable to account for changes in the educational demographics of the incarcerated population across all five years examined. This potentially means that in 2010, a larger portion of the incarcerated population had an educational need that could be addressed by enrollment in ABE or vocational programming. By including educational demographic data for the years examined, it would be possible to determine if shifts in enrollment are the result of a change in educational need of the incarcerated population. Second, I did not include every year between 2010 and 2021 and therefore it is plausible that during the years not examined, enrollment in programming had reached the levels observed in 2010.

The other subject I examined regarding enrollment was the difference in enrollment between racial demographics. As noted earlier, I only had the educational demographics available for 2021. However, what I was able to discern from that

information is that at least during 2021, racial demographics with higher educational needs had a larger percentage of their population enrolled in educational programming. In 2021, the Black demographic had 34.9% of their total population enrolled in educational programming compared to 23.46% of the White population. This was in line with my hypothesis that groups with lower education levels would have higher enrollment in educational programming as in 2021 36.3% of the Black population had not attained an HSED or GED, whereas that number was substantially lower for the White population at 19.5%. The primary improvement that can be made on this topic in future research would be by including additional years of educational demographic data. Although I observed that there were significant differences between racial demographics regarding enrollment in educational programming, I cannot conclusively say that for the years examined outside of 2021 that this was caused by differing educational needs for these groups.

These observations point towards a general theme of a smaller percentage and number of individuals being enrolled in educational programming in the Wisconsin correctional system. Although there are potential explanations for why this has occurred that do not mean the Wisconsin correctional system is using educational programming less, this nonetheless presents a troubling outlook for correctional education. I would strongly encourage further research on this topic in the areas I have outlined to determine the cause of this reduction in educational enrollment.

Summary of Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is an important factor to consider when evaluating correctional education's impact. This is one of the areas that previous correctional

education research has left relatively unexplored, with most studies focusing primarily on the correlation between involvement and recidivism outcomes. My analysis on attainment proved to be quite challenging, primarily due to the limitations on the data that was available. However, I have focused on examining the trends for attainment of HSEDs and GEDs between 2010 and 2021. This is not an in-depth analysis of educational attainment as it does not account for specific increases in educational skills. It can be assumed, however, that attainment of an HSED or GED is indicative of some increase in academic ability. Similar to what was found regarding educational enrollment, the number and percentage of individuals awarded an HSED or GED has been decreasing since 2010.

In 2010, the total number of HSEDs and GEDs awarded to the Wisconsin prison population was 1,244. This was more than double the amount awarded in every other year that I examined. Not only did the total number of degrees awarded drop sharply, the average percentage of enrollees in educational programs that achieved these degrees dropped starkly over the remaining years. In 2010, 13.56% of the enrollees in ABE and vocational programs attained an HSED or GED. In 2015, 2017 and 2021 that percentage was under 7%. 2019 was the only of the other four years examined that had a higher percentage of enrollees attain an HSED or GED at 10.31%.

These trends become even more troubling when attainment is broken down by racial demographics of the individuals attaining HSEDs and GEDs. This was particularly noticeable when comparing attainment rates for the White and Black demographics, where there was consistently an attainment gap between these two groups. In 2010, 16.56% of White enrollees attained an HSED or GED whereas for the Black population

that number dropped to 11.99% of enrollees. This finding does not, however, indicate that correctional education programs offered are more successful for White individuals than Black individuals. There are multiple possible explanations. What I find to be most likely is that on average the Black incarcerated population needs more education before they would be eligible to receive an HSED or GED than White individuals.

Unfortunately, I was unable to determine this from the educational demographic data that the Wisconsin DOC has available, but this would be an area that would benefit from further research²⁴.

The largest factor that limited what I was able to conclude regarding attainment trends for both the incarcerated population as a whole and racial demographics was that the data I had available combined enrollment numbers for ABE and vocational programming. To improve confidence in the results, I would recommend future research place an emphasis on using data composed of only the group of individuals that were eligible to attain an HSED or GED. Regardless of the areas that I believe need improvement for future, the trends I observed regarding reduced attainment rates for both the total incarcerated population and specific racial demographics are concerning and need additional research individually.

Summary of Educational Programming & Recidivism

Determining the effects and impact of involvement in correctional education on recidivism outcomes is the core theme of the vast majority of research on correctional education. As I was not able to account for selection bias in the available data, I chose to

²⁴ The Wisconsin DOC educational demographic data in this situation categorizes individuals as "< 9th Grade" and "9th through 12th grade – No HSED". This means that if an individual has a 9th grade level of education, they are equivalent to an individual with an 11th grade education in the data offered by the WI DOC.

focus on identifying evidence that would indicate involvement in educational programming results in lower recidivism rates. This was unfortunate in a sense because it limited my ability to evaluate the overall effectiveness of correctional education programming in Wisconsin. However, the basic analysis I performed did allow me to draw potential conclusions on the effectiveness of correctional education in Wisconsin. Additionally, I wanted to focus on determining if involvement in educational programming had varying levels of effectiveness on reducing negative recidivism outcomes depending on the definition of recidivism used.

Overall, I found that across all three definitions of recidivism, the population that was involved in educational programming had a smaller percentage of their population recidivate when compared to the population that had no educational involvement. This effect appears to be even more significant for the group that completed educational programming which had an even smaller percentage of their population recidivate. This is to be expected, as findings from thorough analyses such as the 2013 RAND Corporation's meta-analysis found that for individuals who received educational programming, they had significantly lower odds of recidivating when compared to individuals that did not receive programming.

These findings served as confirmation for **Hypothesis 1**, which stated that individuals who participated in correctional education would have lower recidivism rates than individuals who did not participate in correctional education programs. This means that although I cannot confirm the exact effects involvement has on reducing the likelihood of recidivism, it does appear that involvement in programming has a positive effect on reducing recidivism outcomes. **Hypothesis 2** also proved to be true, as the

individuals that completed educational programming recidivated at lower rates than the group that was involved in but did not complete programming as well as the group that had no involvement in programming. All of these findings suggest that involvement in educational programming has an effect of making an individual less likely to recidivate. Additionally, for individuals that complete educational programming, they may be even less likely to recidivate than an individual that was only involved.

One of the more interesting findings from my research was that depending on the type of recidivism being examined, the apparent effects of involvement in educational programming are varied. Reconviction rates appear to be the type of recidivism most impacted by involvement in educational programming with there being an average 4.17 percentage point smaller portion of the population that was involved in educational programming reconvicted compared to the group that received no programming²⁵. While involvement in educational programming still appears to have an effect on reducing rearrest and reincarceration rates, the difference between the involved group and the non-involved group is somewhat smaller than it was for reconvictions. For the group that was involved in educational programming, there was an average 1.47 percentage point and 2.11 percentage point smaller portion of their population reincarcerated and rearrested respectively, when compared to the group that had no involvement in programming. These findings indicate that although involvement in educational programming appears to have a positive effect in reducing recidivism outcomes, those effects are varied across rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration.

²⁵ This is an average percentage of the population not reconvicted from the years 2010, 2015 and 2017.

The group that presented the strangest findings across all types of recidivism, however, was the group of individuals that was involved in but did not complete educational programming. These individuals appear to have been both rearrested and reincarcerated at a higher rate than the group that was not involved in educational programming. I found this to be a particularly interesting outcome, as well as one that I was not expecting. This observation also highlighted the limitations of my research, as I could not isolate the effects of involvement in correctional education and was therefore unable to determine what effect these individuals' involvement had on the outcome of recidivating. Although the group that did not complete educational programming was rearrested and reincarcerated at a higher rate than the group that was not involved, it is possible that they would have been rearrested and reincarcerated at an even higher rate if not for their involvement in educational programming.

Conclusion

Wisconsin is faced with large challenges regarding its correctional system. The rising costs of keeping people locked up is financially burdensome for the state, and the moral question of whether these individuals deserve a second chance is challenging to answer. Reducing recidivism rates of individuals, however, presents a possible solution to both of these issues. As I have outlined, there are outstanding issues with my research that must be addressed before being able to state the extent to which correctional education is beneficial in reducing recidivism. However, based on the existing evidence, data suggests that involvement in educational programming may result in lower recidivism rates. The possibility that correctional education may be a solution to both

the financial and moral dilemmas associated with incarceration in itself warrants the need for further research on the topic.

The massive price tag of \$2.8 billion over the next three years (2021-2023) that corrections will impose upon Wisconsin is a burden that can be alleviated. Even if involvement in correctional education may reduce the number of individuals who are incarcerated in Wisconsin by only 250 individuals, this would cut the state's corrections costs by nearly \$28 million over the next three years²⁶. Although this clearly does not wholly resolve the challenges that Wisconsin faces regarding the size of its correctional population, the potential benefits that might be derived from providing correctional education seem to far outweigh the cost of inaction.

²⁶ This is the estimated cost of 250 incarcerated individuals in Wisconsin over a three-year time period. This was calculated using the 2018 average per year cost of housing an individual in the Wisconsin correctional system, which was \$36,923.

Bibliography

- Angle, Terry. 1982. "The Development of Educational Programs in American Adult Prisons and Juvenile Reformatories During the Nineteenth Century." *Journal of Correctional Education* 33 (3): 4-7.
- Austin, James. 2016. "Regulating California's Prison Population: The Use of Sticks and Carrots." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 664 (March): 84-107.
- Blumstein, Alfred. 1988. "Prison Population: A System Out of Control?." *Crime and Justice* 10 (1988): 231-266.
- Campbell, Michael C. 2011. "Politics, Prisons, and Law Enforcement: An Examination of the Emergence of "Law and Order" Politics in Texas." *Law & Society Review* 45 (September): 631-665.
- Caplow, Theodore, and Jonathan Simon. 1999. "Understanding Prison Policy and Population Trends." *Crime and Justice* 26 (1): 63-120.
- Colorado College History Department. 2016. "Elmira Reformatory." *Past, Present, Prison*. http://sites.coloradocollege.edu/hip/elmira-reformatory/#_ftnref3 (April 18, 2022).
- Colvin, Richard. 1987. "Studying the Effects of Reform." *Educational Researcher* 16 (6): 7-9.
- Couloute, Lucius, and Daniel Kopf. 2018. "Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment Among Formerly Incarcerated People." *Prison Policy Initiative*. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html> (April 28, 2022).
- Davis, Lois. 2019. "Higher Education Programs in Prison: What We Know Now and What We Should Focus on Going Forward." *RAND Corporation*. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE342.html> (April 30, 2022)
- Davis, Lois M, Malcom V. Williams, Kathryn Pitkin Derose, Paul Steinberg, Nancy Nicosia, Adrian Overton, Lisa Miyashiro, Susan Turner, Terry Fain, and Eugene Williams. "Understanding the Public Health Implications of Prisoner Reentry in California." *RAND Corporation*. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1165.html> (April 30, 2022).
- Delaney, Ruth, Fred Patrick, and Alex Boldin. 2019. "Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education." <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/unlocking-potential-prison-to-postsecondary-education-report.pdf> (April 29, 2022).

- Dillon, Pat. 2020. "Writing a New Future." *Isthmus*, February 20. <https://isthmus.com/news/cover-story/odyssey-beyond-bars/> (April 18, 2022).
- Eisen, Lauren-Brooke, and Inimai Chettiar. 2019. "Undoing the 1994 Crime Bill." *Brennan Center For Justice*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep28415.27> (April 30, 2022).
- Enns, Peter K. "The Public's Increasing Punitiveness and Its Influence on Mass Incarceration in the United States." *American Journal of Political Science* 58 (October): 857-872.
- Fella, Giulio, and Giovanni Gallipoli. 2014. "Education and Crime Over the Life Cycle." *The Review of Economic Studies* 81 (October): 1484-1517.
- Ghering, Thom. 1995. "Characteristics of Correctional Education, 1789-1875." *Journal of Correctional Education* 46 (2): 52-59.
- Ghering, Thom. 1997. "Post-Secondary Education for Inmates: An Historical Inquiry." *Journal of Correctional Education* 48 (June): 46-55.
- Grace, Julie. 2020. "Violent: A Matter of Definition." *The Badger Institute*. <https://www.badgerinstitute.org/Diggings/Fall-2020/Violent-A-Matter-of-Definition.htm> (April 28, 2022).
- Guetzkow, Joshua, and Eric Schoon. 2015. "If You Build It, They Will Fill It: Consequences of Prison Overcrowding Litigation." *Law & Society Review* 49 (June): 401-432.
- Haynes, David D. 2018. "Throw the Books At Them: How More Training for Wisconsin's Prisoners Could Help Companies." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 26. <https://www.jsonline.com/story/opinion/columnists/davidhaynes/2018/07/26/why-training-wisconsin-prisoners-makes-economic-sense/780105002/> (April 29, 2022).
- Huynh, Kayla. 2021. "UW System Receives Funding for Bachelor's Degree Program in State Prisons." *The Cap Times*, December 1. https://captimes.com/news/education/uw-system-receives-funding-for-bachelors-degree-program-in-state-prisons/article_5dae1339-3d28-54e8-b340-a809a160c002.html (April 30, 2022).
- Jonson, Cheryl Lero, and Francis T. Cullen. 2015. "Prisoner Reentry Programs." *Crime and Justice* 44 (September): 517-575.
- Inmate Classification, Sentence, and Release Provisions. 2018. *Wisconsin Department of Corrections Administrative Code Chapter DOC 302*. https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/doc/302/i/04 (April 30, 2022).

- Koo, Angela. 2015. "Correctional Education Can Make a Greater Impact on Recidivism by Supporting Adult Inmates with Learning Disabilities." *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 105 (1): 233-269.
- Langan, Patrick A. 1991. "America's Soaring Prison Population." *Science* 251 (March): 1568-1573.
- Lagemann, Ellen C. 2015. "2015 AERA Distinguished Lecture: College in Prison: A Cause in Need of Advocacy and Research." *Educational Researcher* 44 (November): 415-420.
- Lochner, Lance. 2004. "Education, Work, and Crime: A Human Capital Approach." *International Economic Review* 45 (August): 811-843.
- Lochner, Lance, and Enrico Moretti. 2004. "The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports." *The American Economic Review* 94 (March): 155-189.
- Loury, Glenn C, and Bruce Western. 2010. "The Challenge of Mass Incarceration in America." *Daedalus* 139 (3): 5-7.
- Manchin, Stephen, Olivier Marie, and Sunčica Vujić. 2011. "The Crime Reducing Effect of Education." *The Economic Journal* 121 (May): 463-484.
- Martinson, Robert. 1974. "What Works? Questions and Answers About Prison Reform." *The Public Interest* 35: 22-54.
- Moreno, Peter S. 2022. Interview by Samuel G. LaRoi. January 15. Tape Recording.
- Nevzer, Stacey. 1998. "Social Benefits of Education." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 559 (September): 54-63.
- Phelps, Michelle S. 2011. "Rehabilitation in the Punitive Era: The Gap Between Rhetoric and Reality in U.S. Prison Programs." *Law & Society Review* 45 (March): 33-68.
- Phelps, Michelle S, and Devah Pager. 2016. "Inequality and Punishment: A Turning Point for Mass Incarceration?." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 663 (January): 185-203.
- Prison Fellowship. 2019. "Higher Education in Prison." <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/advocacy/conditions/higher-education-in-prison/#> (April 30, 2022).
- Prosser, Mary M, and Shannon Toole. 2018. "How Did We Get Here? Wisconsin's Mass & Disparate Incarceration." *State Bar of Wisconsin*. <https://www.wisbar.org/news/publications/wisconsinlawyer/pages/article.aspx?Volume=91&Issue=4&ArticleID=26275> (April 21, 2022).

- Resources For Inmates. 2020. *Wisconsin Department of Corrections Administrative Code Chapter DOC 309*. https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/doc/309 (April 30, 2022).
- Robinson, Gerard, and Elizabeth English. 2017. "The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program: A Historical Overview." *American Enterprise Institute*. <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-Second-Chance-Pell-Pilot-Program.pdf> (April 30, 2022).
- Ross, Catherine E, and Marieke Van Willigen. 1997. "Education and the Subjective Quality of Life." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 38 (September): 275-297.
- Sakala, Leah. 2014. "Breaking Down Mass Incarceration in the Census: State-by-State Incarceration Rates by Race/Ethnicity." *Prison Policy Initiative*. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/rates.html> (April 28, 2022).
- Sampson, Robert J, and Charles Loeffler. 2010. "Punishment's Place: The Local Concentration." *Daedalus* 139 (3): 20-31.
- Sedgley, Norman H., Charles E. Scott, Nancy A. Williams, and Frederick W. Derrick. 2010. "Prison's Dilemma: Do Education and Jobs Programmes Affect Recidivism?." *Economica*. 77: 497-517.
- Shields, John M. 1923. "Education and Crime." *The High School Journal* 6 (October): 160-163.
- State of Wisconsin. Legislative Fiscal Bureau. 2021. *2021-2023 Wisconsin State Budget Summary of Provisions 2021 Act 58*. https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/budget/2021_23_biennial_budget/101_summary_of_provisions_2021_act_58_august_2021.pdf (March 23, 2022).
- State of Wisconsin. Legislative Audit Bureau. 2019. *Adult Corrections Expenditures*. <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/lab/media/2845/19-4full.pdf> (April 30, 2022).
- The Sentencing Project. 2020. "State-by-State Data." <https://www.sentencingproject.org/the-facts/#rankings?dataset-option=BWR> (January 16, 2022).
- Thompson, Tommy. 2021. Interview by Samuel G. LaRoi. December 21. University of Wisconsin System, Madison. Tape Recording.
- Tonry, Michael. 2015. "Federal Sentencing "Reform" Since 1984: The Awful as Enemy of the Good." *Crime and Justice* 44 (September): 99-164.
- Trinity International University. 2021. "Building a Culture of Second Chances." <https://www.tiu.edu/news/archive/building-a-culture-of-second-chances/> (April 30, 2022).

- Trinity International University. 2021. "Trinity Celebrates First Graduating Class from Waupun Prison." <https://www.tiu.edu/news/archive/trinity-celebrates-the-first-graduating-class-from-waupun-prison/> (April 30, 2022).
- University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2021. "UW Odyssey Beyond Bars Program Receives Grant to Teach College Courses in Wisconsin Prisons." <https://continuingstudies.wisc.edu/blog/uw-odyssey-beyond-bars-program-receives-grant-to-teach-college-courses-in-wisconsin-prisons/> (April 30, 2022).
- U.S. Department of Education. Office of Federal Student Aid. 2013. *Federal Pell Grants*. <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/pell> (April 30, 2022).
- U.S. Department of Education. 2021. "U.S. Department of Education Announces It Will Expand the Second Chance Pell Experiment for the 2022-2023 Award Year." <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-announces-it-will-expand-second-chance-pell-experiment-2022-2023-award-year#:~:text=The%20Obama-Biden%20Administration%20launched,67%20additional%20programs%20to%20participate> (April 30, 2022).
- U.S. Department of Education. 2021. "Correctional Education." <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/correctional-education.html> (April 17, 2022).
- Visher, Christy A, and Pamela K. Lattimore. 2007. "Major Study Examines Prisoners and Their Reentry Needs." <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/major-study-examines-prisoners-and-their-reentry-needs> (April 30, 2022).
- Visher, Christy A, and Jeremy Travis. 2003. "Transitions from Prison to Community: Understanding Individual Pathways." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 89-113.
- Wagner, Peter, and Daniel Kopf. "The Racial Geography of Mass Incarceration." *Prison Policy Initiative*. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/racialgeography/report.html> (April 30, 2022).
- Westervelt, Eric, and Lois Davis. 2015. "Measuring The Power of a Prison Education." *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/07/31/427741914/measuring-the-power-of-a-prison-education> (April 29, 2022).
- Whissemore, Tabitha. 2021. "Expanding Educational Access to People in Prison." *Community College Daily*, March 3. <https://www.ccdaily.com/2021/03/expanding-educational-access-to-people-in-prison/> (April 30, 2022).
- Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Division of Adult Institutions. 2009. *DAI Policy #309.55.03, Adult Basic Education*. <https://doc.wi.gov/GuidanceDocumentsV2/DAI/DAI%20309.55.03%20WCCS%20Adult%20Basic%20Education%2009-14-20.pdf> (April 30, 2022)
- Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Division of Adult Institutions. 2009. *DAI Policy #309.55.04, Mandatory Education*. <https://doc.wi.gov/GuidanceDocumentsV>

[2/DAI/certDAI%20309.55.04%20RGCI%20Mandatory%20Education%2003-25-19,%2006-22-20.pdf](#) (April 30, 2022).

Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Division of Adult Institutions 2009. *DAI Policy #309.55.05, Postsecondary Education Opportunities for Inmates*. <https://doc.wi.gov/DepartmentPoliciesDAI/3095505.pdf> (April 30, 2022).

Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Division of Adult Institutions Office of Program Services. *Opportunities and Options Resource Guide*. <https://doc.wi.gov/Documents/AboutDOC/AdultInstitutions/OpportunitiesOptionsResourceGuideEnglish.pdf>. (April 19, 2022)

Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Office of the Secretary Research and Policy Unit. 2020. *2019 Profile of Persons in Our Care*. <https://doc.wi.gov/DataResearch/DataAndReports/2019%20PIOC%20Profile.pdf> (April 28, 2022).

Wisconsin Department of Corrections. 2021. *Month-End Prison Population Dashboards*. <https://doc.wi.gov/Pages/DataResearch/DAIMonthEndDB.aspx> (January 17, 2022).

Wisconsin Department of Administration. Division of Executive Budget and Finance. 2019. *State of Wisconsin Executive Budget*. <https://doa.wi.gov/budget/SBO/2019-21%20Executive%20Budget%20Complete%20Document.pdf> (April 29, 2022).

Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Division of Adult Institutions. 2017. *Education Services*. <https://doc.wi.gov/Pages/AboutDOC/AdultInstitutions/EducationServices.aspx> (April 29, 2022).