Voices of Parolees Who Have Chosen a Community College Element within a Reentry Program

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand how parolees experience participating in the community college element of a reentry program. This program was located in a Midwestern county and the parolees who chose to participate in the higher education aspect of this reentry program were a small subset of those who participated in the overall reentry program. Research questions included: What influences a parolees’ decision to enroll in the community college element within a reentry program? How do such parolees describe their experiences as a student in a community college? How do such parolees describe the influence of being a community college student on their lives? One-on-one interviews with 11 parolee college students were used to gain the perspective of the parolee in relation to community college experience.

Major themes that emerged from the data include: parolees enrolled in community college like the college environment and taking college classes; they are role models for their families; and different as college students than they were prior to going into prison; most had no encouragement by parent(s) to take college classes prior to being released to the community; the main challenge of being a college student is
studying/homework; goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment; and parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by corrections/reentry program to take college classes.

The findings of this study provide higher education, corrections, and reentry programs a well rounded perspective on the parolee student experiences and allows them to make more informed decisions about their services in order to optimize students’ experiences, as well as students’ learning.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Jacob, who inspires me as he completes his middle school education, and to my parents, Bernard and Susan, who supported me and persevered with me over the years.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their sage advice and support, I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to the members of my committee, Dr. Louann Bierlein-Palmer, Dr. Sue Poppink, and Dr. Lester Wright. I wish to give special thanks and appreciation to Dr. Louann Bierlein-Palmer, who served as my committee chair, and provided good-natured guidance and patient encouragement throughout my graduate school experience at Western Michigan University. I also wish to express profound thanks to Dr. Sue Poppink, who provided professional direction and insight into phenomenological research. My thanks to Dr. Lester Wright for his expertise with this study population.

I express my heart-felt gratitude to my family for their years of interest and support during my doctoral studies.

Lastly, I wish to express my special thanks to Dr. Bruce Kocher, whose steadfast support of this project was greatly needed and deeply appreciated.

Kristi S. Potts
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Study Topic

In 2008, approximately 828,200 prisoners were released on parole to communities in the United States (Office of Justice Programs: Bureau of Justice Statistics: Probation, 2009). Prisoners face many challenges once released into the community, and a low education level seems to be a common issue for parolees (Holl & Kolovich, 2008). Unfortunately, most offenders are undereducated prior to incarceration (Tracy, 1994; Visher, Baer, & Naser, 2006), and most parolees are unsuccessful while on parole (Crayton, Mukamal, & Travis, 2009).

Indeed, approximately 50% of parolees go back to prison within three years of paroling to the community (United States, 2001; United States Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, 2007). This could be a result of parolees not obtaining a job or enrolling in school. If parolees do not obtain employment or enroll in an educational program, they are more likely to reoffend (Solomon, Waul, Ness, Travis, & Ravitz, 2004). Note, a prisoner is defined as an individual “involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution encompassing individuals sentenced to such an institution” ("Code of federal regulations," 2009, p. 11). A parolee is defined as a “criminal offender who is conditionally released from prison to serve the remaining portion of their sentence in the community” (Office of Justice Programs: Bureau of Justice Statistics: Probation, 2009, para 14).

A high return-to-prison rate might be related to our nation’s criminal justice system primary focus on punishment, rather than on rehabilitation. For many decades,
our country has had a get-tough on crime focus, often in response to drug problems. For example, in 1973, the New York legislation created “mandatory minimum sentences of 15 years to life for possession of four ounces of narcotics — about the same as a sentence for second-degree murder” (Gray, 2009, p. 1).

Following the creation of such drug laws in New York (known as the Rockefeller Drug Laws), other states created similar harsh drug-offender laws. For example, in 1987, Minnesota “passed laws that imprisoned offenders for at least four years for crack cocaine possession,” and, in 1978, Michigan passed the "650-lifer" law that “required judges to incarcerate drug offenders convicted of delivering more than 650 grams of narcotics” (Gray, 2009, p. 3). Unfortunately, as a result of the Rockefeller Drug Laws, recidivism rate increased, treatment programs decreased, and judges’ discretion was eliminated (Gray, 2009; New York Civil Liberties Union, 2009).

Given the poor statistics surrounding a strong punishment focus, Congress developed the Second Chance Act (Office of the White House Press Secretary, 2004), which attempts to shift the purpose of criminal justice from punishment to rehabilitation “...making rehabilitation a central goal of the federal justice system” (Linton, 2008, p. 65). This law authorizes federal grants for government agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide parolees educational and other services to reduce recidivism.

The renewal of the Second Chance Act occurred in 2009 providing continued funding for prison initiatives throughout the United States (Alexander, 2009), with $25 million awarded for 2009 and $100 million proposed for 2010 (Crayton et al., 2009). With such funds, reentry programs have formed throughout the United States (United States Department of Labor: Employment and Training Administration, 2006),
attempting to provide a seamless set of services for prisoners released from prison into a parolees’ designated community (MPRI, 2005).

As one example, the Triangle Residential Options for Substance Abusers (TROSA) Reentry Program, located in North Carolina, provides job training and substance abuse services to parolees. TROSA collaborates with Durham Technical Community College (DTCC) to provide evening college courses to parolees (Roman & Travis, 2004). TROSA offers a “Scholars Program” for graduates of the two-year reentry program which funds academic and housing expenses while students attend school full time at a local college or trade school as long as the students also work at TROSA (Roman & Travis, 2004).

As another example, the State of Michigan created the “Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative” (MPRI) program to increase the success rates of offenders. Specifically,

The mission of the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI) is to significantly reduce crime and enhance public safety by implementing a seamless system of services for offenders from the time of their entry to prison through their transition, community reintegration and aftercare in their communities. (MPRI, 2005, para. 1)

In Michigan, approximately 18 community colleges and a few universities participate with the MPRI Program and provide assistance for parolees interested in pursuing higher education (MPRI Coordinators, 2010). Within this context, higher education is defined as any post secondary school coursework (United States Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2010).
Despite the growth of parolees engaging in higher education courses within reentry programs, limited qualitative research exists regarding these efforts. Many quantitative studies have been done to show that higher education offered in prison, and for parolees, reduces recidivism (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2007; Ross, 2009); however, it is not clear how parolees function as a student within higher education. This was the focus of my study, to learn how parolees function as a student within higher education and to learn if common themes exist among them.

**Problem Statement**

Prisoner reentry programs are designed to decrease recidivism rates, and include many services such as mentoring, counseling, substance abuse therapy, housing, family reunification, workforce development, and education (Frazier, 2008; Ireland, 2007). The research literature on such prisoner reentry has focused primarily on recidivism and services offered in reentry programs. For example, such research has found that the recidivism rates for parolees in reentry programs are better than that of parolees not in the programs (Lynch, 2006). Recidivism rates for parolees receiving specific services of reentry programs have also been compared to those not receiving such services, with certain services found to have a positive impact (Lynch, 2006). Prisoners and parolees, within education programs, recidivate approximately 20% less than those not in education programs (Illinois Department of Corrections, 1997; Ross, 2009).

Forty percent of prisoners in the United States do not have a high school or equivalency degree, and the average parolee is 31 years old and a high-school dropout (Roman, 2006; Visher, Kachnowski, LaVigne, & Travis, 2004; Watson et al., 2004).
Most such parolees are at a disadvantage when released to communities without a basic education. Yet, 49% of parolees do have a high school diploma prior to entering prison (Visher & Farrell, 2005), and it seems parolees who choose to continue their education are at an advantage (Lynch & Sabol, 2001). Yet, most prisoners are not willing, or able, to obtain an education in prison, and this places them at a disadvantage when released into the community (Lynch & Sabol, 2001).

Although most studies looking at education issues are quantitative, some qualitative studies have been done to learn more about the background of the prisoners within education programs. Such studies have provided insight as to why prisoners take higher education classes and their experiences taking such classes. For example, Bhatti (2010) conducted qualitative analysis of correctional education teachers regarding their experiences with prisoner education, and found that prisoners had a hard time in school before going to prison due to special needs (e.g., ADHD, Asperger’s Syndrome, Autism, Dyslexia, and other special needs) (Bhatti, 2010). Other studies have found that prisoners expressed wanting a challenge and wanting to learn more in prison since they were constantly dismissed from schools due to their behaviors in schools (Bethel, 1986; Bhatti, 2010; Hall, 2003). Some prisoners have reported they take higher education classes to stay positive and be a role model for family, but they also report barriers to learning in prison include noise and lack of support (Bethel, 1986; Bhatti, 2010; Visher & Farrell, 2005).

We also know some information regarding what services are needed within reentry programs and what elements of reentry that place a parolee at an advantage in the community (Visher et al., 2004; Wilson, 2008). For example, Hall (2003) conducted an
ethnographic qualitative analysis by interviewing three parolees within a support group in Harris County, Texas. A second example, Hanrahan et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative analysis by interviewing seven youth who committed felonious offences when under the age of 18 and who was charged as adult offenders. A third example, Richards (1992) conducted a qualitative analysis by interviewing 30 male prisoners within a work release program from three prison facilities in Iowa. A final example, Richards et al. (2004) conducted a qualitative analysis by interviewing 20 prisoners, who had been returned to prison due to violating parole in Louisville, Kentucky. Themes that emerged from interviews with parolees regarding elements of reentry programs contributing to an advantage in the community included: role models in the community, college education in prison, volunteering within community programs, social connections, completing substance abuse programs, and being employed (Hall, 2003; Hanrahan, Gibbs, & Zimmerman, 2005; Richards, 1992; Richards, Austin, & Jones, 2004). From literature, we know some parolees feel that some elements of reentry programs have assisted in putting them at an advantage in the community; however we know very little why parolees take higher education classes and what they experience in higher education.

Evaluation beyond quantitative analysis was therefore needed on prisoners and parolees within higher education programs, in order to better understand the programs and the participants within the programs. Indeed, of the nearly two hundred potential resources reviewed for this research, only three studies were similar to my topic (Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey, & Byers, 2007; Hall, 2003; Heiser, 2007). Since only three similar studies could be found, I contacted the authors of the studies requesting feedback on other known qualitative research studies being done on parolees in higher
education at this time. Two individuals (Hall, Heiser) responded that they were not aware of any other qualitative analysis on parolees within higher education programs at this time, and felt there needed to be more qualitative analysis on parolees.

In addition, only one of these three published qualitative studies on parolees within higher education used a similar research strategy. Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey, and Byers (2007) conducted a qualitative analysis of four former Indiana Department of Corrections inmates, who had participated in Ball State University college courses while in prison and continued to take college courses after release into the community. The researchers found that the parolees felt they needed more support in order to succeed in the community and college (Copenhaver et al., 2007), and suggested communities provide prison transition teams to coordinate services, and offer support groups for parolees in the community. They also suggested colleges provide specialized support services for special populations such as parolees (Copenhaver et al., 2007).

The purpose of my phenomenological study, therefore, was to describe and understand how 11 parolees experience participating in the community college element of a reentry program. This reentry program was located in a Midwestern county and the community college experience includes a set of courses developed by the community college’s counseling department on a case-by-case basis. The classes ranged from general education classes, to highly specific science courses, or trade program classes.

The parolees who choose to participate in the higher education aspect of this reentry program are a small subset of those who participate in the overall reentry program. The number of those in the reentry program in the last five years has been approximately 1,600, while the number in the community college element of the program
has been approximately 60, of which 11 parolees were participating in the community college aspect of the program at the time of my study. These 11 individuals consisted of those who were following parole requirements and had not yet finished the community college aspect of the program.

The goal of my research was to learn about their experiences and possible themes for parolees in community college, within a reentry program. The research method was phenomenological reflection on parolees’ experiences while taking college courses. My research topic helps to inform higher education officials, those who administer reentry programs, and the employees of the Department of Corrections regarding the voices of parolees in higher education.

**Research Questions**

Three main research questions were the focus of this study.

1. What influences a parolees’ decision to enroll in the community college element within a reentry program?

2. How do such parolees describe their experiences as a student in a community college?

3. How do such parolees describe the influence of being a community college student on their lives?

The research questions address the issue of the lack of qualitative research conducted on parolees, and help reveal the voices of parolees within a prisoner reentry program who are enrolled in community college classes. I, as the researcher, asked about their community college experiences, their feelings toward such experiences, and how
those experiences influence their lives. In addition, I examined the expectations parolees experience when they take classes in community college.

The significance of the study is that recommendations were made to the institutions of higher education that provide college classes to parolees in the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI) Program, Michigan Department of Corrections, the MPRI Program, higher education leaders, and will add to the literature on this topic. The recommendations could be added to best practices for parolees and help to improve parolees’ experiences while on parole.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is a system of concepts that explains what I think is going on with the phenomena in my study (as extracted from a review of related literature and research) and charts the relationship among the concepts (Maxwell, 1996). The conceptual framework for this study includes six sections which were developed based on what we do know from previous research and for which I probed in this research (see Figure 1). The sections include: (a) Classes: Experience, Likes, Dislikes; (b) Family and Friends: Education level, Support; (c) Previous education: Primary, Secondary, Higher education; (d) Influence of parolees’ participation in classes: Personal, Family, Friends; (e) Challenges of taking classes: Funding, Study space, Resources, Work; and (f) Outside support for school: Parole, Funding, MPRI, Counselor.

In reference to *class experiences, likes and dislikes*, Bhatti’s (2009) research on prisoners’ experience in college classes tells us prisoners like taking college classes because they are given an opportunity to learn and are able to study in prison. The research also shows that prisoners seem to like classes because it helps them stay positive
in prison. I looked into parolees’ experiences as students taking classes at a community college by asking probing questions regarding their likes and dislikes about the classes, what they do in their classes, and challenges to being a student.

In reference to family and friends’ education level and support, previous research on prisoners and parolees’ families tells us they come from families with low levels of education (Elonheimo et al., 2007). I studied parolees’ family and friends’ education background and level of support by asking probing questions regarding previous educational experiences, support and current support.

In reference to parolees’ previous education (primary, secondary, and higher education), Visher, LaVigne and Farrell’s (2003) research on prisoners and parolees’ previous education suggests that most do not have a diploma before going to prison and after paroling into the community. Research also tells us that some prisoners felt they were not given the opportunity (or were able) to participate in education classes before going to prison and were given the opportunity (and were able) to participate in prison (Lynch & Sabol, 2001). I studied current educational level, previous educational experiences of parolees taking community college classes, by asking current educational level, and probing questions regarding previous educational experiences.

In reference to influences of parolees’ participation in classes (personal, family, and friends), Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey, and Byers’ (2007) research on parolees taking college courses at a university report that an influence on the parolees’ lives was the feeling of being “old,” and that they had to hide they are on parole, and also hide tattoos that reference drug use. Parolees also reported they felt intimidated taking courses in the college. I researched the influence, of being a student at a community college, on
parolees’ lives, and their family and friends’ lives. Probing questions used for this section revolved around family and friends’ support as well as how classes fit into their lives.

In reference to challenges of taking classes (funding, study space, resources, and work), Visher and Farrell’s (2005) research on prisoners taking college classes in prison report barriers to learning in prison involved lack of support and quiet areas to study. Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey, and Byers’ (2007) research on parolees taking college classes at a university report a barrier to learning was a lack of support within the community and college. I looked into challenges for parolees taking college classes by asking probing questions regarding where they study, if they are currently working, and who is funding their education, books and living expenses.

In reference to outside support for school (parole, funding, MPRI, and counselor), Karpowitz’s (2005) research on outside support for parolees tells us that Pell Grants have been used as financial support for college classes. I looked into outside support for parolees taking college courses by asking probing questions regarding parole office staff, MPRI Program, counselors and financial support.

As Figure 1 shows, the center of my study is the voice of parolees who have chosen a community college element within a reentry program. Surrounding that center, are six areas that previous research has hinted as impacting those voices, and for which I gathered information to help further knowledge on this important topic.
Methodology Overview

The methodology for this study was an exploratory phenomenological study. The philosophy behind phenomenology research is that there are common lived experiences among research participants, and that the essence of these experiences can be captured and described (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Tesch, 1988; Van Manen, 1990). This type of study helps to understand the essence of a shared experience of a phenomenon by several individuals (Creswell, 2007, 2009). This study focused on 11 MPRI parolees within one semester at one community college in a small Midwestern county.
Chapter One Summary

Based on literature, approximately 50% of parolees go back to prison within three years, but some reentry programs do indeed decrease recidivism rate (Frazier, 2008; Lynch, 2006; Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Roman, 2006; Schram, Koons-Witt, III, & McShane, 2006; Seiter & Kadela, 2003). We also know that reentry programs include many services such as mentoring, counseling, substance abuse therapy, housing, family reunification, and education (Case, Fasenfest, Sarri, & Phillips, 2005; Frazier, 2008; Hall, 2003; Petersilia, 2004; Schram et al., 2006). We also know that for some prisoners and parolees, taking classes while in prison or on parole decreases recidivism (Batiuk, Moke, & Rountree, 1997; Bhatti, 2010; Brazzell, 2009; Chappell, 2004; Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Fine, 2001; Gaes, 2008; Gardner, 2004; Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011; Martinez & Eisenberg, 2000; Meyer, Fredericks, Borden, & Richardson, 2010; Robinson, 1990; Ross, 2009; Ubah, 2001; Winterfield, 2009; Young, 2002).

Yet, we know very little why parolees take higher education classes and what they experience in higher education. We also know very little how parolees describe their experiences as a student in community college while in a reentry program.

Let us now turn to chapter two, “Review of the Literature,” which organizes my literature review on this topic into three main topics: (a) reentry programs and higher education; (b) educational programs offered to prisoners and parolees, as well as the recidivism rates of those in educational programs; and (c) the voices of prisoners, parolees and both groups’ voices in educational programs.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature for this dissertation is organized into three major topics and
several points of interest within the main topics with the goal of displaying previously
researched concepts related to my topic of research. The first section focuses on reentry
programs and higher education. The second section focuses on educational programs
offered to prisoners and parolees, as well as the recidivism rates of those in educational
programs. The third section focuses on the voices of prisoners, parolees and both groups’
voices in educational programs.

The literature review includes sources from 1971 to 2010. Parolee, prisoner,
education, community college, voices, recidivism, experiences, and reentry programs,
were used as keyword searches to display what concepts have already been studied in
relation to my topic of research.

Databases used for the literature search include Proquest Dissertations and Theses,
ERIC, LexisNexis, Wilson Select Plus, and Worldcat. 193 potential sources were
reviewed and 110 sources cited in this study. Of the 110 sources, 43 were articles from
peer-reviewed sources, 22 were government documents, initiatives, laws, policies or
reports, three unpublished dissertations, 13 were books, five were newspaper articles, 10
research studies, three published dissertations, one paper presented at a conference, and
one unpublished thesis.

Reentry Programs and Higher Education

This section summarizes literature related to (a) origin of reentry programs; (b)
prisoners’ expectations of reentry and reentry programs; and (c) services included in
reentry programs. This section connects the literature to my study by showing the elements of reentry programs and how higher education fits into prisoner reentry programming.

**Origin of Reentry Programs**

Quantitative analysis of studies conducted on prison rehabilitation programs in the United States, between 1945 and 1967, claimed correctional rehabilitation had no effect on prisoner reentry (Martinson, 1974). From Martinson’s (1974) concept that nothing works in regards to prisoner rehabilitation, emerged longer prison sentences, increased incarcerations, and mandatory minimum sentencing (Petersilia, 2004; Ubah, 2004). After 30 years of the punishment on crime philosophy (increasing the number of prisoners, building more prisons, and increased recidivism rates), came the *Second Chance Act*.

The *Second Chance Act* alters the focus from punishment to rehabilitation, job training, and housing assistance for parolees (Office of the White House Press Secretary, 2004). From the *Second Chance Act* of 2004 initiative, the Office of Justice Programs from the Federal Department of Justice created reentry programs as a way to reduce recidivism which include: reentry partnership initiatives (RPIs), reentry courts, Weed and Seed Programs, and increasing public safety (Byrne, Taxman, & Young, 2002; Lynch & Sabol, 2001).

Larger numbers of prisoners are being released into the community than in the past, and reentry programs help to coordinate a system of services for the parolees in the community (Byrne et al., 2002; Lynch & Sabol, 2001). Indeed, in 2006, twelve million dollars was awarded to 20 states through the United States’ Department of Justice's Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) (United States Department of Labor: Employment and
Training Administration, 2006). The reentry initiatives were to provide reentry services to prisoners, prior to being released into the community, along with individual transition plans in collaboration with local community agencies (United States Department of Labor: Employment and Training Administration, 2006).

The renewal of the Second Chance Act occurred in 2009 providing continued funding for prison initiatives throughout the United States (Alexander, 2009), with $25 million awarded for 2009, and $100 million proposed for 2010 (Crayton et al., 2009). As a result of the Second Chance Act, reentry programs have formed throughout the United States (United States Department of Labor: Employment and Training Administration, 2006). Such reentry programs are designed to provide a seamless set of services for prisoners released from prison into a parolees’ designated community (MPRI, 2005).

Although recidivism had been the golden standard for determining success of a parolee, the Second Chance Act and the focus on reentry programs changed the definition of success for individuals on parole (Lynch, 2006). Other ways to determine success now include: employment, education, parole violations, new criminal offences, social integration, and completing treatment programs (Holl & Kolovich, 2008; Lynch, 2006). Note, no national definition of recidivism exists (Klein, 2004), but in the State of Michigan, “Recidivism is measured by criminal acts that resulted in the rearrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's release” (Office of Justice Programs: Bureau of Justice Statistics: Recidivism, 2009, para 1). Thus I used the Michigan definition for my study.

The literature on the origin of reentry programs connects to my study by showing that reentry programs started after the Second Chance Act of 2004, less than ten tears ago,
and the concept of actively providing educational services for parolees is a fairly new concept.

**Prisoners’ Expectations of Reentry and Reentry Programs**

Several studies have been done on prisoners’ expectations of the reentry process and reentry programs. First, Visher, LaVigne and Farrell (2003) conducted a quantitative analysis using a survey of 400 prisoners within Illinois State Correctional Facilities, who were soon to be released from prison. Most of these prisoners showed an interest in obtaining more education after releasing into the community, with only 9% not wanting more education after releasing into the community (Visher, LaVigne, & Farrell, 2003). Most prisoners (96%) felt employment upon release was important and 86% reported a job was important in being successful on parole (Visher et al., 2003). Less than half (42%) felt health care would be important once releasing into the community. Most prisoners (72%) expected to live with their families after releasing into the community and 45% reported that the families would provide financial support for them after release (Visher et al., 2003). In regards to housing, 62% of prisoners who did not have a plan for housing felt it would be easy to find housing (Visher et al., 2003).

Second, Visher, Kachnowski, LaVigne and Travis (2004) conducted a quantitative analysis of 324 prisoners, within Baltimore, Maryland, before being released into the community, and also six months after release into the community. They found that most prisoners are optimistic about release into the community, even though they expected to have financial problems, since they felt that their families would assist them financially. Fifty percent of prisoners reported the need for mental health counseling assistance once releasing into the community and 30% reported the need for mental health treatment
(Visher et al., 2004). Approximately 33% of prisoners reported they had participated in prison vocational programs, and held a job while in prison; and 13% increased their education level while incarcerated (Visher et al., 2004). This study did not inquire into prisoner educational and employment expectations once released into the community.

A third and final study related to prisoners’ expectations of the reentry process and reentry programs, involved Roman et al. (2006) who conducted a quantitative analysis on 200 prisoners from six Philadelphia Prison System (PPS) facilities using surveys. They found that most prisoners were positive about their plans for parole (Roman, 2006). Fifty-nine percent of the prisoners planned to live with family members when they release into the community and 90% thought their families would be a support to them while on parole (Roman, 2006). Twenty percent of the prisoners felt it would be difficult to stay out of prison and 31% reported difficulty with avoiding a parole violation (Roman, 2006).

Overall, the literature on prisoners’ expectations of the reentry process and reentry programs connects to my study by showing that most prisoners are not aware of, or offered, educational programs within prison facilities, and yet most want to be involved in educational programs once released into the community.

**Services Included in Reentry Programs**

Education, social networks, family reunification, housing, mentoring, workforce development, and treatment programs are considered important elements of successful prisoner reentry programs (Case et al., 2005; Frazier, 2008; Hall, 2003; Ireland, 2007; Jucovy, 2006; Lynch, 2006; Petersilia, 2004; Roman & Travis, 2004; Roman, Wolff, Correa, & Buck, 2007; Schram et al., 2006; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Visher et al., 2004;
Wilson, 2008; Zhang, Roberts, & Callanan, 2006). Familial support is also considered an important element in reentry program success (Brooker, 2005; McBride, Visher, & La Vigne, 2005; Visher et al., 2004).

Evidence-based practices should be used when creating reentry programs in order to ensure appropriate implementation (Visher, 2006). In order to be successful, reentry programs should include: cognitive restructuring, positive reinforcements, the targeting of high-risk offenders, assessment instruments, treatment in-prison and in the community, and intensive services for at least six months (Crayton et al., 2009). Reasons for reentry programs failing include: lack of evidence-based practices, and poor implementation (Kelso, 2000; Visher, 2006). “Correctional education programs should be structured with reentry in mind, laying the groundwork for students to obtain employment and/or continue their education after release” (Brazzell, 2009, p. 36).

Some studies have been done on services included in reentry programs. First, Schram et al. (2006) conducted a quantitative analysis of 546 female parolees to determine parolee needs based on parole agent files and parolee success rate. Success was defined as “no documented new crimes or technical violations…for a period of 12 months following release” (Schram et al., 2006, p. 458). They found that approximately 65% of the female parolees failed after the first year of release and many had unmet needs at the time of failure. Unmet needs included education, employment, housing, and other assistance (Schram et al., 2006). The fact that education is considered an unmet need of parolees connects the literature to my study by showing the importance of the need for educational services for the increased number of parolees in the community.
Another study, Visher, Kachnowski, LaVigne and Travis (2004) conducted a quantitative analysis of 324 prisoners' pre-release into the community and also six months after release into the community. They found that 45% of the parolees reported enrolling in employment skills and adult education programs. 41% of parolees felt nothing had been helpful to them while on parole, 26% of parolees reported that they would have liked to be in job training while on parole, 13% reported wanting a job, 11% reported wanting to participate in educational programs, 8% wanted healthcare assistance, and 6% wanted substance abuse treatment (Visher et al., 2004). The literature connects to my study here by showing that parolees are interested in participating in educational programs.

Overall, there are many aspects to a reentry program, of which education is a key component. For example, the Central Minnesota (MN) ReEntry Project (CMNRP) provides parolees with support services which include housing, employment, education, clothing, food, and other services (Hesse, 2009). As a second example, 180 Degrees Inc. is a reentry program for 34 men located in Minneapolis. The program includes: housing, community acclimation, family reconnection, program orientation, resume building, education, and employment opportunities (Hesse, 2009). Sixty seven percent of parolees within 180 degrees Inc. Program obtain employment and housing (Hesse, 2009).

A few more examples include the Triangle Residential Options for Substance Abusers (TROSA) Reentry Program located in North Carolina, and Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI) in several counties, which collaborate with community colleges to provide courses to parolees (Gilbert, 2009; MPRI Coordinators, 2010; Roman & Travis, 2004).
The literature on the set of services within reentry programs connects to my study by showing the importance of the educational element within the set of services provided to the parolees in the community.

**Educational Programs Offered to Prisoners and Parolees**

This section provides (a) financial aid and access to higher education; (b) recidivism rates of those in educational programs; and (c) prisoners in educational programs. This section connects the literature to my study by showing educational programs available to prisoners and parolees, and ways they are able to access higher education.

**Financial Aid and Access to Higher Education**

Brown et al. (2002) note that the purpose of the “Higher Education Act of 1965” was to increase access into higher education for underrepresented groups, by providing federal aid for all individuals interested in enrolling in higher education. Yet, quantitative studies have shown that Federal Student Financial Aid (FSFA) is not available to most individuals with criminal records (Brown, Lane, & Rogers, 2002). Indeed, the FSFA “Drug-Free Student Aid Provision” denies financial aid to individuals who have been convicted of certain crimes. In 1994 incarcerated individuals were banned from receiving Pell grants for college courses (Karpowitz, 2005; Ubah, 2004). The “Drug-Free Student Aid Provision” of 1998, further denies federal financial aid to any individual who admits to having been convicted of the possession or sale of controlled substances. These policy provisions reduce the number of individuals able to obtain financial aid for higher education and restricts access to higher education.
Overall, the 1990s “war on drugs” created policies to discriminate against drug offenders (Brown et al., 2002). The intent of such provisions was to steer individuals away from drug use and trade. The specific question on the federal student aid application that affects individuals with a drug conviction history is:

Question 35: Has the student ever received a conviction for the sale or possession of drugs? A federal law suspends student aid eligibility for students convicted under federal or state law of possession or sale of drugs (not including alcohol or tobacco). If you answer “Yes” to this question, the Question 35 Worksheet will help you determine whether the law affects your eligibility for federal student aid. (United States Department of Education Federal Student Aid, 2009)

This provision affects individuals who would need financial aid in order to attend higher education and retroactively disallows parolees (who have served their prison sentence) eligibility for federal financial aid (Fan, 2002). This means that if individuals have just one possession of a drug conviction, they are ineligible for federal student financial aid for one year. If individuals have two possessions of drug convictions or one sale of a drug conviction, they are ineligible for federal student financial aid for two years. If individuals have three possessions of drugs convictions or two sales of drug convictions they are ineligible for federal student financial aid indefinitely. Individuals that complete approved drug rehabilitation programs might have financial aid eligibility reinstated; however, most rehabilitation programs are private and expensive, and most public drug rehabilitation programs are not approved for reinstating eligibility for federal student financial aid. Brown et al. (2002) claim this policy removes access to higher education for individuals trying to escape drugs and poverty. Indeed, during the 2001-
2002 academic year, “47,000 of the 10.5 million” federal financial aid applications were not eligible for aid due to past drug convictions (37,705) or they did not answer question #35 on the application (9,358) (Brown et al., 2002, p. 237).

In 2002, 80 college campuses protested this provision claiming the policy singled out a lower socio economic status minority group from accessing college aid, while other criminals convicted of murder, rape, armed robbery, extortion, drug use or drunk driving are allowed to access student aid ("Anti-drug law backfires," 2002). Brown et al. (2002) also found there was no data showing that this provision has decreased or prevented drug use.

In 2005, Congress voted to modify the Higher Education Act to allow individuals access to federal financial aid that were convicted of past drug crimes ("Congress softens drug conviction penalty for students," 2006). FAFSA question number 35 was modified to require convicted drug offenders check “yes” only if the offence took place while the student was in school (United States, 2006-2007). Despite this change, many still claim they are not able to access federal financial aid due to past criminal convictions (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2010).

The literature on financial aid and access to higher education connects to my study by showing that access to higher education has been reduced for many offenders due to new eligibility requirements for financial aid over the years.

**Recidivism Rates of Those in Educational Programs**

Many quantitative studies reveal that higher education in prison, and for parolees, reduces recidivism, but it is not clear how higher education affects parolees and reduces recidivism (Brazzell, 2009; Brewster & Sharp, 2002; California Department of
Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2007; Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Gaes, 2008; Gardner, 2004; Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011; Martinez & Eisenberg, 2000; McBride et al., 2005; Meyer et al., 2010; Robinson, 1990; Ross, 2009; United States Department of Education, 2009; Winterfield, 2009; Young, 2002). The National Institute of Justice Report to the U.S. Congress reported prison education reduces recidivism more than other prison programs (Martinez & Eisenberg, 2000).

The State of Illinois Department of Corrections (1997) found a correlation between parolees who had participated in college correctional education programs and recidivism. They found approximately 23% reduction in recidivism rate of those that had participated in college correctional education courses compared to those that had not participated in college courses (Illinois Department of Corrections, 1997). New York’s Department of Correctional Services (1991) also found approximately 22% reduction in recidivism rate of prisoners that earned a degree while incarcerated compared to those that did not earn a degree while incarcerated (Ross, 2009).

Batiuk et al. (1997) analyzed the recidivism rate of 318 individuals who had participated in college courses in a prison facility. They found higher levels of education resulted in greater employment success (on parole) and, as a result, lower recidivism rate than those that had less education (Batiuk et al., 1997). Fine (2001) and Chappell (2004) analyzed hundreds of parolees who had participated in a college program while incarcerated, and they also found approximately 21-23% reduction in recidivism rate of those that had participated in college correctional education courses compared to those that had not participated in college courses.

On the other hand, some quantitative studies have found that education does not
affect recidivism. Robinson (1990) analyzed the recidivism rate of 265 parolees who had participated in college or vocational programs while incarcerated. He found no significant relationship between recidivism and parolees who had participated in college or vocational programs (Robinson, 1990). Lewis (2006) also found that correctional education did not reduce recidivism and that correctional education varied among facilities and might be a factor when considering it as an effect on recidivism. Ward (2009) reviewed and analyzed literature with opposing views on career and technical education in prisons. He found that some prison technical education programs are correlated with reducing recidivism and some are not correlated with reducing recidivism (Ward, 2009). Ubah (2001) analyzed the recidivism rate of 960 parolees who had participated in college or vocational programs while incarcerated. He found no significant relationship between recidivism and parolees who had participated in college or vocational programs, and suggested continued research on this population since the study results are not conclusive (Ubah, 2001).

Overall, the literature on recidivism rates of those in educational programs is mixed, but connects to my study by showing that college correctional education may be one way to lower recidivism rates of parolees.

**Educational Programs within Prison**

Correctional education has been offered to prisoners in the United States since 1789. The first reported prison school in America was established at Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Jail in 1789 (Gehring & Wright, 2003; Morris & Rothman, 1995). By 1847, each New York facility employed two correctional education teachers (Reagen & Stoughton, 1976) and by 1876, New York’s Elmira Reformatory used a local college to
provide vocational education (Roberts, 1971). By 1965, Texas offered college courses in all prison facilities (Roberts, 1971) and by 1968, approximately 1% (3,000) of prisoners in the United States were participating in college courses (Adams, 1976). Adams (1976) also reported that seven prison systems in the U.S. had awarded 55 Associates’ degrees, and that one facility was looking into the possibility of offering Bachelors’ degrees programs. The purpose for offering correctional education was to improve education levels of prisoners in order to make a difference in their lives (Bell, 1979; Conrad & Cavros, 1981). By 1982, approximately 350 college prison programs were available in the United States (Frazier, 2008). In 1997, approximately eight college prison programs were available in the United States (Tewksbury, Erickson, & Taylor, 2001). By 2005, approximately 640 prison facilities offered college courses in the United States (United States Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

Let us look at a few examples of such prison programs run in conjunction with higher education institutions. Bard College, a private university, developed a program titled Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) which offered college programs within a maximum security prison in upstate New York State (Karpowitz, 2005). Bard College, has provided free college courses to prisoners within a maximum security prison in upstate New York since 1995, in part because incarcerated individuals are banned from receiving Pell grants for college courses (Karpowitz, 2005; Ubah, 2004). By February 2009, Bard had graduated 70 prisoners with Associate’s degrees and 10 prisoners with Bachelor’s degrees (Ross, 2009).
As another example, a pilot program at Wesleyan University offers college courses to prisoners within the Cheshire Correctional Institute, the largest high-security prison in Connecticut (Maternowski, 2009; Wesleyan University, 2010). This pilot program admitted 19 students in the first year of the program (2009) and planned to admit 30 students in the second year of the program, offering sociology, English, chemistry, and psychology classes (Maternowski, 2009; Wesleyan University, 2010).

Some quantitative studies have been done on prisoners in such educational programs which offer college courses to prisoners. Adams (1976) surveyed prison facilities in the United States offering college-level classes and found that more than half of the facilities offer college-level classes. Tobin (1985) analyzed data of prisoners that took college classes between 1973 and 1982, and found students under the age of 25 had lower education levels at the time of incarceration and received lower grades in the higher education classes, and "older" students with military backgrounds tend to do better in higher education classes. Fine (2001) analyzed hundreds of prisoners who had participated in a college program while incarcerated, and found an improvement in participants' self esteem, motivation to help others, and motivation to become positive role models for their families (Fine, 2001).

Several studies have also been done on the educational level of prisoners and parolees. Visher, LaVigne and Farrell (2003) surveyed Illinois State Correctional Facilities prison facilities on 400 prisoners, and found that 41% of the prisoners had a high school education or higher when entered prison. They also found that the educational level of prisoners increased to 49% having a high school education or higher, during their stay in prison (Visher & Farrell, 2005). Watson et al. (2004) analyzed the
education level of prisoners and parolees in the state of Texas, and found that the education level of prisoners is less than the general population. Roman et al. (2006) surveyed Philadelphia Prison System (PPS) facilities regarding 200 prisoners, and found that the average prisoner and parolee was 31 years old and a high-school drop out. Visher, Kachnowski, LaVigne and Travis (2004) surveyed 324 parolees to learn about their education level, and found that 42% prisoners had obtained a high school diploma before entering prison (Visher et al., 2004).

The literature on prisoners’ educational level and those in educational programs connects to my study by showing examples of educational programs offered to prisoners and having an understanding of what parolees might be offered in prison prior to release to the community as well as possible outcomes of those within the college programs.

Voices of Prisoners and Parolees

This section provides (a) voices of prisoners and voices of parolees (not related to educational programs), and (b) both groups’ voices regarding educational programs. This section connects the literature to my study by showing the voices of prisoners and parolees and their voices, specifically, within educational programs.

Voices of Prisoners and Parolees, not Related to Educational Programs

Some qualitative studies have been done on the voices of prisoners. Richards (1992) interviewed 30 male prisoners within a work release program from three prison facilities in Iowa, and found that prisoners struggled with obtaining employment and lack of resources. Richards et al. (2004) did further work in the area and interviewed 20 prisoners, who had been returned to prison due to violating parole in Louisville, Kentucky. The themes that emerged from those interviews included: (a) “the lack of
meaningful prison programs,” (b) “that prisoners leave prison with little or no money,” (c) “the problems with finding employment,” (d) “that parolees distrust parole officers,” (e) “the need for protection from petty parole violations,” (f) “the loss of credit for good time served on parole,” and (g) “the lack of economic resources” (Richards et al., 2004, p. 98).

Some qualitative studies have also been done on the voices of parolees. Hall (2003) interviewed three parolees within a support group Texas, and the themes that emerged from the interviews included: role models in the community important for success, college education in prison was the catalyst to change, giving back to community, and participating within community program essential to success, being alone would not lead to success, sticking with the substance abuse program, being a part of a community program, and being employed. Hanrahan et al. (2005) interviewed seven parolees who had committed serious criminal offences while under the age of 18 and were processed as adult offenders. Themes that emerged from this study include: need for family reunification, improving behavior to avoid prison in future, and frustration with finding employment with a felony record (Hanrahan et al., 2005). Ireland (2007) observed and interviewed approximately 300 parolees within a parolee day treatment program in California, and found that parolees were reassigned to a different parole agent frequently which seemed to cause confusion, frustration, and unhappiness for parolees (Ireland, 2007). She also found that most parolees in the program were recently released from custody and that the treatment program failed to incorporate a question regarding parolee needs in the program orientation (Ireland, 2007).
Voices of Prisoners and Parolees in Educational Programs

Some studies have also been done on the voices of prisoners in educational programs. Similar themes that emerged from seven studies on the voices of prisoners in educational programs include: (a) importance of class/study location and environment (Adams, 1976; Heiser, 2007; Malott, 1982; Winterfield, 2009; Yarborough, 1980); (b) positive feelings/attitude from taking classes ("60 minutes," 2007; Adams, 1976; Heiser, 2007; Malott, 1982; Winterfield, 2009); (c) lack of staff/peer support (Bethel, 1986; Winterfield, 2009; Yarborough, 1980) and motivation for taking classes ("60 minutes," 2007; Heiser, 2007; Winterfield, 2009).

Since such previous research is more closely connected with my study, let us review the details of such studies and then examine these themes a bit more. Adams (1976) interviewed two prisoners taking college courses at San Quentin Maximum Security Prison in California; Yarborough (1980) interviewed 189 prisoners taking college courses at Maryland Correctional Facilities; Malott (1982) surveyed 107 prisoners within higher education correctional programs in Illinois; Bob Simon, from CBS News “60 Minutes” (2007) interviewed prisoners within a maximum security prison in upstate New York State, who participated in college courses provided by Bard College; Heiser (2007) interviewed ten prisoners in a college distance-learning program at a California State maximum-security prison; and Winterfield et al. (2009) interviewed groups of prisoners at three facilities (located in Indiana, Massachusetts and New Mexico). Now, let us look more closely at the themes as extracted from such previous research.
In reference to the importance of class/study location and environment, five studies found that prisoners preferred quiet, private areas for classes and studying (Adams, 1976; Heiser, 2007; Malott, 1982; Winterfield, 2009; Yarborough, 1980). In reference to positive feelings/attitude from taking classes, four studies and one news release found that prisoners experience positive feelings from taking college courses in prison ("60 minutes," 2007; Adams, 1976; Heiser, 2007; Malott, 1982; Winterfield, 2009). In reference to lack of staff/peer support and motivation, three studies found that prisoners felt little support from correctional staff and other prisoners, and felt they would have done better in their classes with more support from staff, counselors, and other prisoners (Bethel, 1986; Winterfield, 2009; Yarborough, 1980). Two studies and one news release found that the motivation for prisoners taking classes was to be a good role model for their families, the need to feel productive, and obtain employment ("60 minutes," 2007; Heiser, 2007; Winterfield, 2009).

Different themes that emerged from seven studies on the voices of prisoners in educational programs include: (a) prisoners purchase books with own funds, feeling fortunate to be in the college program since there is a waiting list for college course participants (Adams, 1976); (b) limited number of classes in the program (Yarborough, 1980); (c) no value of education prior to incarceration, increased value of education in prison, increased maturity, sense of accomplishment (Heiser, 2007); (d) ineligible for federal financial aid, lack of high school diploma interfered with enrolling in college classes, lack of internet and computer access is a barrier (Winterfield, 2009).

As previously noted, few studies have been done on parolees in educational programs. Visher, Kachnowski, LaVigne and Travis (2004) surveyed 324 parolees to
learn about their thoughts on education and employment while on parole. They found that 45% of the parolees reported enrolling in employment skills and adult education programs and 11% reported wanting to participate in educational programs (Visher et al., 2004).

Only one study could be found that has been specifically focused on the voices of parolees in educational programs. Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey, and Byers (2007) interviewed four parolees who had participated in college courses while in prison and continued the program at the University after release into the community. They found that the parolees did not feel prepared for relationships with people on campus due to lack of personal relationships in prison and that they needed more support in order to succeed in the community and college (Copenhaver et al., 2007).

Chapter Two Summary

Overall, the literature on the voices of parolees, and prisoners, within educational programs connects to my study by showing that more literature exists for voices of prisoners, than parolees, within educational programs. The literature also shows that parolees within community college felt they needed more support while in community college and felt unprepared socially within the community college environment. Now let us turn to chapter three, which profiles the methods used in my study.
CHAPTER III

METODOLOGY

Research Design

As noted in previous chapters, it is important to understand the shared experiences of parolees, who are enrolled in higher education classes within a prisoner re-entry program, so that lessons can be learned from the phenomenon. The best way to learn about successful reentry programs is through naturally occurring research (Lynch, 2006), and the best way to learn whether an educational program has an affect on successful parole is through a natural holistic study (Lewis, 2006). Therefore, I utilized a phenomenological methodology research design for this study. The type of problem best to study in this form of research is one that is important to understand several individuals’ shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Themes were constructed from the shared lived experiences to fully describe how participants viewed the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In order to describe the participants’ experiences, in-depth interviews were the main source of data collected for the study. Analysis of the data included drawing themes from the interviews and creating new interview questions. From the data analysis, clusters of ideas and topics emerged, and recommendations made for further research.

Sampling, Subjects, Access, and Setting

I planned to select subjects through purposeful sampling; a group of 20 parolees within the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI) Program and enrolled in community college classes within a small Midwestern county. Most MPRI Program participants are pre-selected in prison by the Michigan Parole Board based on needs’ and
risk assessments, and typically the MDOC parole board selects medium-to-high risk prisoners for the MPRI Program. Such selection is based on evidence-based practices which suggest the more programming put on medium-to-high risk offenders, the lower the recidivism rate (MPRI, 2005). Studies also show that the more programming you put on a low-risk offender, the higher the recidivism rate (MPRI, 2005). The parolees who are referred or choose to participate in the higher education aspect of this reentry program are a small subset of those who participate in the overall reentry program. The number of parolees within two Midwestern counties’ MPRI reentry program during the last five years has been approximately 1,600, while the number in the community college element of this program has been approximately 60, of which about 20 parolees were participating in the community college aspect of the program at the time of my study. My proposed study group consisted of those who were following parole requirements, and had not yet finished the community college aspect of the program.

The community college receives an active list of MPRI parolees every other week. From this list, and/or parole agent referrals, the college’s Student Success center is able to identify MPRI parolees enrolled at the college. The community college has the most current comprehensive list of MPRI parolees enrolled at the college. To access the MPRI participants who were enrolled in the community college aspect of the program, I contacted the community college Vice President to obtain a list of such parolees. I obtained approval from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB), MDOC, and the community college, in order to conduct my study. I understood that parolees are considered a vulnerable population, and communicated that participation in the study should result in minimal risk, and/or a benefit, to the participant (Human
Subjects Institutional Review Board, 2010). I made an effort to protect participants' identities by using codes in place of participants' names during the interview transcription process. The codes ensured confidentiality since the names that the codes correlated to were kept in a locked file at my house separate from the locked file holding the coded transcriptions. During the interviews, participants were informed that they may stop the recording at any time during the interview. Audio and transcription files were kept in a locked file in a separate location away from the participant list of actual names. Participants were informed they may withdrawal from the study at any point. I kept the study truly voluntary. Foreseeable risks and benefits associated with this study were minimal.

Once HSIRB and MDOC approval was secured, I shared a copy of the approval letters, study consent form, and a description of the project requesting that the parolees be a part of my study for one (but not more than two), 60-90 minute interviews, with the community college Vice President. At that point, I obtained the list of MPRI parolees participating in the community college from the Vice President. I planned to recruit as many as 40 MPRI parolees participating in the community college aspect of the program, but planned to include a maximum of 20 parolees in the study. The community college provided a list of 26 names of parolees enrolled in the Spring 2011 semester at the community college and also appeared on an active MPRI list; however nine of those enrolled were no longer attending classes for an unknown reason. Six individuals on the list were currently enrolled and attending classes; however were discharged from parole supervision early within the semester changing them to inactive MPRI participants and
ineligible for the study. As a result, a total of 11 potential participants (10 male, 1 female) were available for my study.

I mailed the “Letter of Invitation for Parolee Participation” (see Appendix B) to those chosen for study recruitment. Two or three days after invitation letter distribution, I attempted to contact study participants by phone. I followed a phone script when talking to the potential study participants (see Appendix C). I set up an in-person interview time with the 11 parolees enrolled in classes within the same semester, within the MPRI Program. I obtained signed HSIRB consent forms from each parolee prior to interviewing participants (see Appendix D). All 11 potential participants participated in one 60-90 minute interview. All interviews took place in a private room within the community college.

I was able to gain access to this group since I am employed with the fiduciary of the MPRI program within the county where I planned to conduct the study; I had assisted the MPRI program for over four years, and had established a relationship with the community college that offers higher education to the parolees. In addition, I had an established relationship with the Michigan Department of Corrections and local parole office to help gain access to the subjects. The setting for each interview was within the community college to ensure a neutral, safe place to interview the subjects. The subjects each received a $10 gas station card after the interview, as gratitude for their time (see Appendix E). The gas card receipt was signed using their study pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and was stored in a locked file separate from the locked file with the names that the codes correlate to.
Data Collection Methods, Procedures, and Instrumentation

As a qualitative researcher, I am representing the participants in this study and
developing an understanding of their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I
understood that the participants have their own lives and I was not conducting this study
to change what they are doing or affect their lives in any way. I was conducting this
study to learn from their experiences.

The first phase of the study was to interview the parolees within a reentry
program and taking classes within the community college. When I went to the
community college to interview participants, I introduced myself and obtained signed
HSIRB consent forms from each participant prior to interviewing participants (see
Appendix D). I explained that this interview was a part of my project to serve as my
dissertation for the requirements of my Doctor of Philosophy degree in Higher Education
Leadership at Western Michigan University. I also explained that the consent document
explains the purpose of this research project, which is to understand and describe how
parolees experience being a student in a community college. I went over all of the time
commitments, procedures used in the study, and risks and benefits of participating in this
research project. I asked participants to ask any questions if they need more clarification.
Once the participant, and I, signed two copies of the consent form, I gave one original
form with signatures to the participant and I kept one original form with signatures.
I interviewed 11 participants, between March and April 2011; using formal, open-ended
guiding questions so they were able to speak freely about their thoughts (see Appendix
A). I asked participants what pseudonym they would like to go by for the study to ensure
anonymity.
The interview questions connected to the research questions and conceptual framework (see Table 1). During the interviews, I kept the study truly voluntary and confidential, respected the political structure of the environment, and was aware of the interplay of my own personal power, biography, and status between participants and the data. I was aware of issues of safety and real, or perceived, elements of danger or threat (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I also was aware of, and respected, cultural predispositions for both myself and for the participants. The set of guiding questions was not the same for each person and was open for changes. One prompt was provided for open-ended questions, using “what, how, or why” as a part of the prompt, and I followed the participants’ lead, making up probes that followed the participants’ lead (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Each interview was no longer than 90 minutes in length. As a qualitative research constructivist, I collaborated with the participants in the process of coconstruction (Hatch, 2002). In co construction, “multiple realities exist, the researcher portraying only one, and the researcher interpretation is at the center of the analysis procedures” (Hatch, 2002, p. 29). Therefore, I generated knowledge and the end product is my recommendation(s) and a narrative of their beliefs.

The second phase of the study was to transcribe the taped interviews and do so the same day each interview took place. Once all data was transcribed, I wrote a narrative of the parolees’ voice.

**Data Analysis Processes and Procedures**

When analyzing the data, I used the participants' language and avoided imposing my semantics and/or interpretation. I also viewed participants as holistic and autonomous human beings using no negative stereotypes.
The third phase of the study consisted of organizing and preparing the data for analysis (Creswell, 2007). I read all data several times to understand a “general sense” of the data and “overall meaning” (Creswell, 2007). After gaining a general sense of what the parolees were saying and the tone of ideas, I began a coding process (Creswell, 2007). A code represents a piece of data. Coding is the process of examining data line by line or paragraph by paragraph for significant events, experiences, feelings, that are then signified as concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In open coding and data reduction, I highlighted salient points (units of analysis) from over 10,000 lines of 12 font data, using three colors for three main categories: Educational experiences before prison, educational experiences within prison, and current educational experiences. I organized the data into “chunks” before bringing meaning to the chunks (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 171). Salient points could be assigned to more than one theme or sub theme. I labeled the chunks with a term, made a list of topics using terms, and clustered similar topics (Creswell, 2007). The topics turned into categories and new coding emerged from this process. Units of meaning and themes were identified for all interview transcriptions and cross-analyzed with one another. A complete list of salient points was assigned to each theme and/or sub-theme during open coding. Analysis continued until no new themes emerged from the data.

A final category and coding list was created and a “preliminary analysis” of the categories conducted and more recoding. All themes and sub-themes were reviewed for similarities in content and/or salient points. Similar themes and sub-themes were combined when such mergers did not reduce the essence of the represented salient points.
I created a preliminary demographic profile table (see Table 2) that includes pseudonyms in place of names, current education level, parents’ education level (if known), and other categories that emerged from the interviews. Participants’ ages ranged between 24 and 61 years old with an ethnic breakdown as follows: 6 African American, 5 Caucasian. I added subject’s criminal offence(s) and time spent in prison to the demographic profile table only after full analysis of interview data and themes completed for the study (see Table 3, Chapter 4). Criminal offence(s) and time spent in prison is available to the public in an online database Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS) within Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) website (Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) Offender Tracking Information System (OMNI), 2011).

Descriptions of the people and setting emerged from the coding process. A general description of the themes was written in narrative form and interpretation of the data captured the essence of the data. Lessons learned emerged from the themes and descriptions of the themes and shared as challenges and successes.

The Researcher

My connection to this population is through my job and how it relates to the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI). I have assisted with the administration of the MPRI grant in two Midwestern counties for five years and am extremely familiar with the legal status, needs assessments, community resources, and various issues associated with the MPRI parolees within the two counties. I am familiar with offender database systems and have tracked parolees’ behavior within those systems on a regular basis for five years.
Table 1

**Connection of Research Questions, Conceptual Framework, and Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Conceptual Framework Sections</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 What influences a parolees' decision to enroll in the community college element within a reentry program?</td>
<td>Family and Friends Education level, Support Previous education Primary, Secondary, Higher education Influence of parolees' participation in classes Personal, Family, Friends Outside support for school Parole, Funding, MPRI, Counselor</td>
<td>What is the highest grade (or years in college) you have completed? What was school like when you were younger? How did your family/friends view school? Does anyone in your family attend college or has attended? Did you take classes in prison? If so, what was that like? What did you think about college before going to prison? after going to prison? now? Were you ever encouraged to attend college? If so, by whom? Why did you decide to take community college classes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 How do such parolees describe their experiences as a student in a community college?</td>
<td>Classes Experience, Likes, Dislikes Challenges of taking classes Funding, Study space, Resources, Work</td>
<td>What were the steps you took to enroll in college classes? Who is paying for the classes? How many classes are you taking? Part time/full time? What classes? How did you choose the courses you are taking? How are you supporting yourself? What did you like about your classes when they started? Dislike? What do you like about your classes now? Dislike? How do you fit college classes into your weekly schedule? What are the challenges of taking college courses and how have you handled them? How do you feel about the level of support from MPRI for taking college courses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 How do such parolees describe the influence of being a community college student on their lives?</td>
<td>Influence of parolees' participation in classes Personal, Family, Friends</td>
<td>How is the experience of being a student at a Community College affecting your life? Family? parole experience? What are you hoping to do when you complete the classes/program? Where do you see yourself in the future? Do you think college classes will help you reach your goals? If so, how? Do you think taking college classes can help you from returning to prison?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2

**Preliminary Demographic Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Current Education Level</th>
<th>Length in College</th>
<th>Par/Full Time Student/Job</th>
<th>Family Education Level (if known)</th>
<th>First Generation College Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>HS Diploma (in prison)</td>
<td>2nd semester</td>
<td>Part time student</td>
<td>Grandmother 8th grade ed, education, parents (sisters)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>HS Diploma (in prison)</td>
<td>2nd semester</td>
<td>Full-time student</td>
<td>Brother also at Community College &amp; discharged from parole recently, 2 brothers—both graduated One with GED and other w/ diploma</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Q</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>GED (in prison)</td>
<td>3rd semester</td>
<td>Part Time student/Part Time Job</td>
<td>Mens (8th grade), Dad unknown, 4 siblings (did not complete HS)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>GED (in prison)</td>
<td>3rd semester</td>
<td>Part Time student</td>
<td>2 sisters (one in nursing program), minor HS Diploma, Dad GED, some college? (answer)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Do</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>GED (in prison)</td>
<td>4th semester</td>
<td>Part Time student/Full Time Job</td>
<td>Mens graduated high school Nephew in attending a 4 year university, parents unknown</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Reynolds</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>HS Diploma (in prison)</td>
<td>2nd semester</td>
<td>Full-time student</td>
<td>Aunt (PhD Candidate), Moms (Bachelors), Brother also at Community College &amp; discharged from parole recently, 2 brothers—both graduated One with GED and other w/ diploma</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payton</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>HS Diploma (in prison)</td>
<td>2nd semester</td>
<td>Part Time student/Part Time Job</td>
<td>Nephew from 4 yr college currently Mother of children HS diploma</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugs Bunny</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>GED (in prison)</td>
<td>4th semester</td>
<td>Part Time student/Full Time Job</td>
<td>Mens (Masters degree, Parents HS Diploma)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>HS Diploma (in prison)</td>
<td>2nd semester</td>
<td>Part Time student</td>
<td>Nephew in elementary school Dad and mom (unknown)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugs Bunny</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2 GEDs (on prison) and HS Diploma (at parole facility)</td>
<td>3rd semester</td>
<td>Full-time student</td>
<td>2 Sisters Bachelor's degree, Moms and Aunt Some college</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have also taken minutes for monthly MPRI Steering and Transition Team meetings for the past four years. Recently released parolees attend the Transition Team meetings, as well as some parolees who have been in the community more than 30 days and who are receiving employment awards. Parolees are able to ask questions of community service members at the meetings, as well as comment on their prison and MPRI experience. I have learned how parolees generally communicate, and interact with others, based on attending these meetings and also at In Reach sessions. In Reach sessions include community members going into the prison facility and conducting one-
on-one (or group), face-to-face or videoconference, meetings with MPRI prisoners 30 days prior to release into the community. Due to my background with this population, I have a heightened awareness of their communication styles and the possibility that parolees might not be completely honest with me throughout the study. I attempted to filter the information throughout the interviews and placed little weight on statements made that appeared disingenuous. Sincere statements held more weight than statements that seemed less sincere.

I have met with key staff at the community college who counseled and enrolled MPRI parolees for classes. From our meetings, I have learned the flow of services for parolees at the community college and the various ways their education is funded. Examples of funding include MPRI, Pell Grants, scholarships, donors, family and/or friends. I have a connection with the community college and was granted tentative approval by administration to conduct qualitative research on the parolees enrolled in classes prior to HSIRB and MDOC approval.

**Study Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations of this study include the sampling chosen for the study and my connection to the program. The sampling is small (11 parolees) and only includes parolees within the MPRI program that are enrolled within higher education, which limits the sample to a default group of medium-high risk parolees. This is an unintentional delimiter to the study.

Limitations of this study include constraints I built into the research design. For example, including parolees within the MPRI program and enrolled in higher education adds a constraint to the study that could limit the data obtained. As a result, the outcome
of the study cannot be generalized for all parolees. In addition, as the main tool for gathering information, I am an unintentional limit to the study. Part of my job for the MPRI program is to track approximately 1,600 parolees’ activities within the program for four years and, therefore, already have an idea of how some parolees behave and possible trends within the population. I made an effort to ignore those preconceived trends already created in my mind, in order to be an effective tool in gathering new information from the parolees within this specific population.

Now let us turn to chapter four, which describes the parolees who participated in this study and their experiences in the community college element of a reentry program. Chapter four also presents the results of the data analysis.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand how parolees experience participating in the community college element of a prisoner reentry program. From literature, we know some parolees feel that some elements of reentry programs have assisted in putting them at an advantage in the community; however we know very little why parolees take higher education classes and what they experience in higher education. Parolees in my study provided detailed responses to interview questions regarding their educational experiences before, during, and after prison. Their responses provided data to address the research questions about what influences a parolees’ decision to enroll in the community college element within a reentry program, how such parolees describe their experiences as a student in a community college, and how they describe the influence of being a community college student on their lives. Their responses also provided feedback regarding Michigan Department of Corrections’ (MDOC) and Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative’s (MPRI) educational experiences. All interviews took place in a private room within the community college (downtown or rural campus) over a period of two months.

This chapter provides a summary description of the parolees including their educational experiences. It continues with the results of more than 15 hours of interviews. This chapter also provides areas of concern, students identified, for MDOC and MPRI regarding encouragement for the college program.
Description of Study Participants

At the time of the study, the 11 study participants (10 male, one female) ranged in age from 24 to 61 years old with an ethnic breakdown as follows: six African American, five Caucasian. All, but one, participants indicated having children. All participants reported receiving financial aid (student loans or Pell Grants) for school and living expenses. Six reported being a part time student while five reported being a full time student. Four have part time jobs and two have full time jobs. Six indicated living with family, four lived alone, and one lived in a treatment facility but visited family often.

Five parolees interviewed had obtained high school diplomas prior to going into prison and two, of the five, reported they graduated from high school with honors. Three, of the five, had completed some college courses prior to incarceration and one had completed two Associates degrees prior to incarceration. Five parolees interviewed had obtained general education development (GED) certificates in prison and one parolee interviewed had obtained an adult education diploma prior to going into prison. Six participants indicated being in their second semester in college, three indicated third semester, and two indicated they were in their fourth semester of community college.

Seven participants indicated being raised by a single parent. Six reported at least one parent (or guardian) had an 8th grade education or was unsure of parent(s) education level. Five reported at least one parent completed high school with diploma while two reported one parent completed some college courses. One parent and two uncles completed Bachelor’s degrees, and one aunt was a doctoral candidate. One sibling completed a Masters degree while three siblings and a few nephews completed some college courses.
Time spent in prison ranged from four months to 40 years. Participants’ criminal offences included assaulting police officer, delivery/manufacturing narcotics, criminal sexual conduct, armed robbery, assault with intent to commit murder, unarmed robbery, operating a vehicle while intoxicated, harboring escapees, writing checks without account and sufficient funds, larceny in a building, escaping prison, breaking and entering a building, and unlawful use of a motor vehicle. Full demographic profiles are provided in Table 3.

The following sections describe the participants individually and are identified with such pseudonyms provided by each participant.

JR

At the time of the interview, JR, a 24-year-old African American male had served six years in prison. He lived with family and had one son. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his son.

I take pre elementary movement class just basically for my son... it's teaching him some movements. He's 6....When I get up for school, he get up for school. Well, he get up when I get up anyway. But when I put him on the bus, I leave and come to class. Going to college helps out a lot 'cause it keep me off the street. Six years ago if he'd seen me he'd be like “dang” and he'd thought it was okay to do the same things. But now it's just different, you have to be a role model some type of way. (JR)

His siblings completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and some college or trade program courses. One cousin also completed some college courses.
### Table 3

**Full Demographic Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Jeff</th>
<th>Kevin</th>
<th>John Q</th>
<th>Mike Lawrence</th>
<th>Lewis</th>
<th>John (No)</th>
<th>Tom Reynolds</th>
<th>Patrice</th>
<th>Baby</th>
<th>Benjamin</th>
<th>Franklin</th>
<th>Reflect Jordan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Education Level</strong></td>
<td>GED (in prison)</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>GED (in prison)</td>
<td>GED in prison</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>GED (in prison)</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>GED Diploma</td>
<td>2-3GEDs (in prison)</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>2-3GEDs (in prison)</td>
<td>Adult Ed Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length in Current College</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part Full Time Student/ Job</strong></td>
<td>Part time student</td>
<td>Part time student</td>
<td>Part time student/ Part time Job</td>
<td>Part time student/ Part time Job</td>
<td>Part Time Student/ Full Time Job</td>
<td>Part Time Student/ Full Time Job</td>
<td>Part Time student/ Full Time Job</td>
<td>Part Time Student/ Full Time Job</td>
<td>Part Time student/ Full Time Job</td>
<td>Part Time student/ Part Time Job</td>
<td>Part Time student/ Part Time Job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding for school/housing</strong></td>
<td>Pell Grant</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Student Loans</td>
<td>Pell Grant, Student Loans</td>
<td>Pell Grant, Student Loans</td>
<td>Pell Grant, Student Loans</td>
<td>Pell Grant, Student Loans</td>
<td>Pell Grant, Student Loans</td>
<td>Pell Grant, Loans, SSI</td>
<td>Pell Grant, Loans, SSI</td>
<td>Pell Grant, Loans, SSI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living with others or alone</strong></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Education Level (if known)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Generation College Student</strong></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Police Officer Assault/ Assault</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criminal History</strong></td>
<td>Controlled Substance- Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
<td>Controlled Substance—Del/Mans—Non/Civil &amp; Criminal, Sexual Conduct, 2nd Deg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Total Time in Prison**           | 12 years                | 12 years                | 12 years              | 12 years              | 12 years              | 12 years              | 12 years              | 12 years              | 12 years              | 12 years              | 12 years              | 12 years              |

| **Discharged from parole status being interviewed for study** | Y                      | Y                      | Y                    | Y                     | Y                    | Y                    | Y                    | Y                     | Y                    | Y                    | Y                    |

---

The table above provides a detailed profile of individuals, including their demographic information, education level, employment status, and family background. It also includes criminal history and details about their college education, including the programs they are enrolled in and their funding sources. The family education level is also noted, along with the status of their first-generation college students.
His grandmother raised him, and his family encouraged him to attend school K-12 and college.

Family and friends...They always encouraged me to go to school. Especially when I got kind of older towards high school because some days I might want to skip. But they always had that thing that call the house around 5:00 and say that you missed school. They would ask what I am doing...my grandma would talk to me. I stayed with my grandma most of my life. (JR)

He liked school and did well in school, and he had friends at school that did well in school.

School was fun. I actually enjoyed going to school. We did a lot of stuff in school.... Through middle school my grade point average was a 3.5...And then high school there was pretty much the same thing until I ended up going to prison sophomore year. And then I got my GED in prison. (JR)

When he first entered prison, he was aware of GED classes and he completed the GED program.

It [GED Program] didn't really take long to complete. They just kept bouncing me all over. I mean, bouncing me around to different prisons. But once I got settled then it didn't take long. It took about, maybe a month, because you had to wait and take the test. Had to take the practice test, then you had to take the real test. (JR)

He did not think college was an opportunity for him until completing his GED.

“Once I ended up going to prison, I didn't even think about going to college until after I got my GED. Then I started thinking about it. When I got closer to coming out,” he said.
Attending community college was a goal upon release from prison. “Before I had got out, I wrote down some plans and some goals of mine that I wanted to accomplish coming out and this was one of them [going to college],” said JR. He felt MDOC/MPRI did not encourage college.

I didn't even know the reentry program had anything to do with this school ‘cause I basically did everything on my own and then once I got close to starting school they have that meet and greet and that's when I found out about MPRI. (JR)

He met with college Success Center staff prior to enrolling in classes. He is a first generation part-time student, feels like he needs school in his life to be successful, and feels closer to his family as a student. He earned 3.5 grade point average (GPA) his first semester at college and was in his second semester. He was taking classes for a general studies associate’s degree. Classes he had taken or was currently taking included African American Literature, pre elementary physical education, public strategies, free weight training, and communication. He likes most of his classes because they are fun and he learns classmates’ view points on literature. He does not like homework and considers it a challenge. Another dislike is when a teacher changes the class syllabus frequently causing him confusion on homework instructions and due dates.

His family encourages him to complete more college courses. He feels school is a part of his life now and that he is different now as a college student than he was prior to going to prison. Attending college courses helps keep him out of trouble and from returning to prison.

[Attending college] Keeps me out of trouble, keeps me off the street….And it give me something to look forward to. Going to college helps out a lot 'cause it
keep me off the street. It [school] give me a better variety to open up my mind to something different... If I wasn't in school and didn't have a job I'd be back in the streets probably wanting to sell drugs or stuff like that. (JR)

His goals for the future are to own his own barbershop and to be discharged from parole. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals.

Keisha

Keisha, a 26-year-old African American female, served four months in prison, lived with her mother, and had one son. One reason she takes college courses is to be a good role model for her son.

Basically my life is just school. Like I don't have no outside life. I don't do anything. Like, I take my son to school. All of my classes are during his school time, so I just go to class and pick him up from school, go home and do homework together. (Keisha)

Her two brothers completed kindergarten through 12\textsuperscript{th} grade (K-12) school and some college courses. Her mother completed a Bachelors degree and her aunt was in the process of completing a doctoral degree. One of her brothers was also an MPRI parolee while taking community college classes and was granted early discharge from parole. She feels she is a role model for her older brother since she encouraged him to also take community college courses and, as a result, he had enrolled in college and taken some courses.

Like for him [brother], he had so much kids, he wanted to do something with his self as well and I actually talked him into going to school. I told him, “you don't have anything else to do, instead of being out in the streets and stuff, that’s just
gonna cause problems, you might end up back.” So now he’s like, on the right track. Like he’s following behind me and I’m the younger sister. (Keisha)

Her mother raised her and family encouraged her to attend K-12 school and college. “My mom, she encouraged going to school and getting an education. She has a bachelors and she wanted me and my brothers to continue our schooling,” said Keisha. My mom and my aunt are like two of the people that I look up to, and so I was very encouraged by them doing it [completing college]. I felt like I could do it or I should, I needed to do it. Those are the two people that I look up to and they would push, like they were a great backbone and support system. I went off from them. (Keisha)

She liked school and did well in school, and had friends at school that did well in school as well as friends that did poorly in school.

I had like two sets of friends. I had a set of friends that didn’t really like school and skipped class and then I had another set of friends that were like “all A” students like me and that liked school… When I was younger, I liked school. I went to school all of the time. I graduated from high school with honors. I liked it. (Keisha)

She completed two Associates degrees prior to going to prison, and felt college was an opportunity for her and as a way to improve her life.

When she first entered prison, she was aware of college classes and attending community college was a goal upon release from prison. She met with the college Vice President and Success Center staff prior to enrolling in classes. She earned 3.5 grade point average (GPA) her first semester at college and was in her second semester. She
was taking required transfer classes for a Communication and Management Bachelor’s degree program at a four-year college. Classes she had taken or was currently taking included aerobics, meditation, psychology, economics, and other prerequisites for the bachelor’s degree program.

She feels like she is busy, needs school in her life to be successful, and feels closer to her family as a student. “It’s [community college] encouraging of family relationships,” said Keisha. She likes the community college environment and all of her classes because they are small and feels there is more support from teachers.

What I like is that the classes are so small so you have like a relationship with your teacher which is more of like hands on type help.... I really like community college because it’s a lot of resources. If you don’t know how to do something there’s tutoring, there’s computer lab. I mean there’s just everything right at your fingertips. It’s all-accessible to you. (Keisha)

She considers studying and homework a challenge as well as balancing time for school and her son.

…the challenges, not spending more time with my son, like finding time to fit time in for him and time in for me. Homework and I handle it, just, I just do minimum. Like, I take care of him. What he need and if what I gotta do is just stay up later doing homework. I don’t know. (Keisha)

She felt her family encourages her to complete more college courses. She feels school is a part of her life now and that she is different than she was prior to going to prison and attending college. Attending college courses helps keep her from returning to prison.
I think that being in college will help me to not return to prison... not just college classes but yeah I think college has a lot to do with it because it gives for me, it gives me a totally different mind frame. Like I don’t have a lot of free time and just be out and do crazy stuff or and then that comes with age to and I’m just more focused, I more focused on doing and get my education and better myself too. I look at too that it will prevent me from going back [to prison]. I think that it’s a great experience. It makes me feel like, I’m doing something with myself opposed to hanging around, hoping and waiting for a job. So this is like my job, I look at school as a job because it will take care of me and it helps me with my son. (Keisha)

Her goals for the future are to be more successful by obtaining a bachelors degree and a better job. She feels attending college will help her meet her goals.

I see myself in the future as being successful one day and I think that the college classes will help. Like I said before, to give me that step ahead of any other regular just felon that’s trying to find a job or person in general that’s trying to find a job. So yeah, I think that college classes will help me. It will be a big plus. (Keisha)

Keisha was discharged from parole since the time of our interview.

John Q

John Q, a 26-year-old African American male had served two years in prison. He lived alone and had two sons that did not live with him. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his sons.
I have two sons... 6 & 4.... It's like, what type of role model - I've got to set standards for them that my father wasn't able to set because he wasn't in my life. It's more important what I am going to do to set the standards for my two sons, so it's important for me to be like "Hey, I got this, and you can do it too." I'm their father. I know I'm doing something that's going to better my future in the long run, not the short run. And not only my future, my kids' and their kids', and the community overall... the world. I always tell them "go to school, because I'm going to school"... as long as they know I'm going to school. (John Q)

John Q also noted:

... because this is the difference between going into my kids' life and being negative, and it's the difference between going into their life and being positive. I want to go full positive, so I think school will help me get there. Education will help me be able to provide. (John Q)

Growing up, many times his family was homeless and his four siblings did not complete kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school. His mother raised him and family/community programs encouraged him to attend school K-12 through their actions. My mom didn't finish her education like she should. She had 5 kids, homeless... She showed me hard work, though. I didn't want her to struggle when she got older, so that's why education is needed. My mom, we have to take care of her one day. (John Q)

He liked school and did well in school, and had friends at school that did well in school as well as friends that did poorly in school.
I had a double conscience: standard on the streets, standard of education, friends who were in the educational field and we would do productive things in the community...and friends who were in the streets and we would do criminal activities... I chose at that time my wrong friends. (John Q)

He took advanced placement classes in high school and completed his high school diploma prior to going to prison; he felt college was an opportunity for him and as a way to improve his life. He was involved in school clubs, had a job, and participated in a cultural study tour to Ghana, West Africa. He also completed some college courses and certified nurse’s assistant certificate.

When he first entered prison, he was aware of college classes and attending community college was a goal upon release from prison. He noted that he might have taken college classes in prison if offered and funded.

He is a first generation full-time student, feels like he needs school in his life to be successful, and feels closer to his family as a student. “I'm the first young man in general to have some type of education out of all my family, so it's very important to me,” John Q said. He met with the college Vice President, Financial Aid staff, school counselor, and Success Center staff prior to enrolling in classes.

I met with the Vice President, he's very, very encouraging. You've gotta have people like that...this school's got it. I don't know what other schools feel, but they don't give up on you here. That's why I like it. They don't give up on you. That's some deep stuff. You go to some other places, they want to give up, but they won't give up on you here unless you give up on yourself, so they push me to do what I have to do. It's part of my flame...they're fire...it's all about refinement
and people either who went in, or have never went in prison, we all need to be refined, put through that fire, to be refined. (John Q)

He earned 3.5 grade point average (GPA) his first three semesters at college and was in his fourth (and final) semester. He was taking classes for an international studies associate’s degree. Classes he had taken or was currently taking include English, math, history, economics, African American Literature, business, independent studies, and other prerequisites for the international studies bachelors degree program at a local four-year university. He is an active member of the school drumming club and the four-year university garden club. He brought his drum to the interview indicating he had drum practice following the interview.

As a college student, he feels like he is busy, closer to his family, and more positive about his situation. He envisioned being in college when he was in prison and happy to be in college again.

I forgave myself. I still go through little guilt trips for what I did, but the things I'm doing now are ten times fuller. I'm involved in so much. I'm really busy. School keeps you busy. It keeps your mind on something your mind should be on, not necessarily something that your mind shouldn't be on. (John Q)

He also noted:

I'm sitting down with a book. I'm not behind these bars or these fences. I'm where I saw myself when I was behind the bars and fences. It's an accomplishment to make it out of there and to go from one point to the next point and say "now I'm in class.” (John Q)
He likes the community college environment and all of his classes because they are small and more personal, and he likes a challenge. “That's why I like school. It's a challenge,” said John Q.

...you're learning, you're around positive people. This community college here is better ...you've got small classes, private, more personal. It's more personal. And especially for guys getting out, it's a culture shock, just coming out...you've been gone for so long, I don't care if you did a year...things change within a year, especially in a fast-paced society like America. (John Q)

He prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to home and he does not have a vehicle. He had to take the public transportation (bus) to and from the rural campus. He considers studying/ homework, location of the rural campus, transportation, choosing and registering for classes online a challenge, as well as balancing time for school and his part time job and parole appointments. “Study, study, study. That's my challenge. When I get out of class, I don't really study like I should,” said John Q.

My biggest mistake as far as college here is I took too many classes when I first got out. Even though I did do well, I got a 3.6 for that semester, I set myself up to think the next semester would be the same...and it really wasn't, because I ended up getting a job, I didn't fit my job around my schedule, and I kind of slacked off. So schedule picking is really important, and I think I didn't do really well. If there was something I would change, I would change how I pick my schedule. (John Q)

John Q also noted:

It's [college classes] making it [parole experience] hard. Honestly, it's making it tough...she [parole agent] knows I'm very involved in school, and sometimes I'll
be really busy, I'll miss appointments here and there. With her, she understands that, but I don't think a lot of other parole officers understand that. Education is a part of my life. You should respect me and going and getting my education, and then come to see you. Basically, for me personally, even with her it's been a challenge. It's a challenge going back and forth downtown, coming here at this campus. (John Q)

Although MPRI funded one semester of his college courses; he felt MPRI/MDOC did not encourage or offer college education in prison, and indicated that they should encourage college while on parole.

I think MPRI needs to do more with helping people when they get out. When you're in prison, when MPRI goes to the prison, you get your parole, but getting those guys some proper structure...let them know, give them that vision. I don't think MPRI gives guys a vision. They go through the process. Me, I already had the vision before. I already had that when I first stepped inside prison...I was like "I'm going to do whatever it takes so I can get back and finish my school," and I did that. (John Q)

He felt his family encourages him to complete more college courses. He feels school is a positive part of his life now and that he is different than he was prior to going to prison and attending college. Attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison. "Education, that's the only thing that's saving me right now. It's opening up doors," said John Q.

...it's like places like school save you, give you something to balance off of, to challenge yourself with, and you knowing that you're doing something positive,
that you are contributing to your community in a positive way. You can give back. It's a center of networking; you meet people, people want to meet you…it's a place where you can just check yourself… Once you are around a different environment and you learn that it's a better environment, you don't want to go to that other environment again… and if I know better for myself I choose education. (John Q)

His future goals are to more successful by obtaining an associate’s degree, transferring to a four year college to complete bachelor’s degree (and possibly doctoral), and have a better job as well as doing better, being happy, and giving back to the community.

I wanted to finish my international studies degree, because I know once I get to the university it was going to be something probably in that area… I see myself in the future helping out people….Helping the community. (John Q)

John Q was discharged from parole since the time of our interview. He also graduated from college with an associate’s degree in International Studies and enrolled in a four year university program since the time of our interview.

Mike Lawrence

At the time of the interview, Mike Lawrence, a 31-year-old Caucasian male had served six years in prison. He lived with his mother and had one son who was not living with him. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his two sisters.

I’ve already encouraged my younger sister to go back to school and she did it… it’s a nursing school for nurse’s aide certificate. My other sister….she’s
terrible right now, but hopefully, later on in life, she’ll straighten up. I hope that she follows me and my younger sister. (Mike Lawrence)

Growing up, his family was dysfunctional due to alcoholic family members, and his sisters and he were victims of assault. His sisters and he did not complete kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school. His mother and grandmother raised him, and family did not encourage him to attend K-12 school. He had wished someone in the schools would have looked into the dysfunctional house he was living in at the time.

All three of us kids didn’t finish school… not because they did not like school…I believe it was some other reason. Too much other activity going on around them so…my younger sister, I think she wanted to complete school. She did hang out with the wrong crowd and it was like we drew negative people. (Mike Lawrence)

His mother completed her high school diploma, but school was challenging for her. He was unsure of his grandmother’s education level. “My grandma, I asked questions about her education, but I don’t think I ever got a good answer,” said Mike Lawrence. He did not like school, felt he did not fit in at school, and did not do well in school, and had a job. His friends also did poorly in school.

Everybody that I hung out with; they failed too. They walked the same line as I did, so… They felt that being street wise is better than being educated and they looked at people with education, very well off was like stuck up; like totally aliens to us. (Mike Lawrence)

When he first entered prison, he was aware of GED classes and he completed the GED program. He liked the GED program in prison because it was fun and he learned to read and write.
I didn't have a GED before going into prison. I never really tried to learn how to read and write, but, after I learned it, it was fun. Math and English was fun once I learned it and was aware that I needed it and it works towards the reasons why I went; being incarcerated because of I was dependent on other persons, it's not like I was; I didn't depend on myself. I had low self-esteem, low confidence, everything, so... I liked being able to do it on my own, knowing that I could do it on my own because I felt like I had to rely on people to read and to help me understand things and now I do it on my own and it is a confidence and you know, brings up my confidence. (Mike Lawrence)

Mike Lawrence also noted:

It [GED classes] was good, man! I actually had a real good teacher that, she worked with me a lot about reading and let me comprehend. She slowed me down on reading a sentence at a time because I'm just trying to go through all them words and trying to speak as fast as I can because, it’s like, I had that insecurity that I couldn’t read and I always felt stupid. But I wasn’t stupid, I just never really tried. I didn’t even know what trying was until I started. (Mike Lawrence)

He did not think college was an opportunity for him until completing his GED.

Attending community college was a goal upon release from prison.

College classes were not offered to me in prison. There was something that just happened for me and said, “Man, you need to go back” [to school]. I didn’t even know what I was going to take when I got here. But I knew that I wanted to go back to school because I felt like I missed out on so much and I think that was my
drive to go back to school because when I started learning how to read and write, it was like, and do math and stuff it was like, “Well what am I missing?” I had those goals already in prison….college courses in my goals. (Mike Lawrence)

He met with the college Vice President prior to enrolling in classes. He is a first generation part-time student, has a part-time job, feels like he needs school in his life to be successful, and feels closer to his family as a student. He was in his second semester and taking classes for a wind turbine technology certificate.

I didn’t even know at first what program to go into....but my first classes was like math and reading. The Vice President put me in math and reading to make sure I understood it. But yeah, it started out with that and then I turned around and started looking through the class registration book. And the newest thing, I wanted to do the newest thing that’s available so I went with Wind Energy and that’s how I picked my curriculum. (Mike Lawrence)

Classes he had taken or was currently taking included math, English and wind turbine energy classes. He likes all of his classes because he is learning something new. I actually liked all of them [classes], even the ones that I didn’t really, I wasn’t interested in… Like the reading class, I wasn’t really interested in it, because I had that low self-esteem in that area I believe that’s the reason why I really wasn’t interested, but I still grabbed a lot out of that class. That class was wonderful, so. It don’t matter what classes I take out here, I like it. I mean I’m at a learning state of mind, so. (Mike Lawrence)

His family encourages him to complete more college courses.
Yes. Most definitely my mom knows I am in school...she stays with me right now. She’s [mom] very proud. She’s proud that I made the change in my life to go back to school. My mom encourages me going to school now. (Mike Lawrence)

He feels that he is different now as a college student than he was prior to going to prison. Attending college courses helps keep him out of trouble and from returning to prison.

I made the change in my life to go back to school. ....And want to do things in life and be active. My life has did a totally 180, though. I don’t believe in no type of criminal activity no more. I avoid as much negative as possible. I only hang out with people that have stuff going for them and that’s it...I have things to live for. I value life now. There’s a reason why I’m out here now. I have to have a reason and it’s not really like that with; it’s different now. I don’t even want to think or go on the same streets that I was on. I live way out in the country now and so I ran away from that environment. I ran away from everything because I was seriously about, I wanted to change my life. I knew I failed so and that’s what made me want to change. Being in community college will help keep me from returning to prison. (Mike Lawrence)

His goals for the future are to be happier, doing better and have a better job.

I would like to be a lot better off; more happier than I used to be. I want to stay doing something with wind turbines, but I’m learning that the field is bigger than just wind turbines. (Mike Lawrence)
He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals. Mike Lawrence was discharged from parole since the time of our interview. He also graduated from college with a certificate in Wind Energy Technology since the time of our interview.

Lee

Lee, a 34-year-old Caucasian male had served eight years in prison. He lived alone and had three children who did not live with him. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his children.

I do have 3 children, ages 14, 12, 10; but at this time I haven't been able to spend much time with them. Me and their mother don't get along. I think they're happy I am in school. They're doing good. They're doing really good. Their mother graduated from high school, so education is a big thing for her... and it's a big thing for me, so....(Lee)

Growing up, his mother left his father, five siblings, and he. Some siblings did not complete kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school. “I have four other brothers and a sister. I was one of two twins. I think we all felt pretty good about it [school], even though we all didn't graduate, I think we all pretty much liked school,” said Lee.

His father raised him and encouraged him to attend school K-12 and college; however when his father remarried, things fell apart and he moved out of the house at 16 years old. He moved to the other side of town with another relative, but was not able to attend the school on the other side of town since he was listed under his father’s guardianship. As a result, he rode his bicycle across town to go to school; however when winter season started and the snow filled the streets, he was not able to ride his bike anymore and applied for emancipation from his father so he could attend the school
where he was living at the time, but he was not able to get emancipated and so he
dropped out of school.

School was pretty important in my house. We had to keep good grades. Most of
our time as growing up, going to school, my dad was really focused on us getting
an education, so we spent most of our time focused on keeping our grades up. I
liked the [school] social environment, mostly. (Lee)

Lee also noted:

My mother and my father separated when I was about 2 years old. My father
remarried. When he remarried, I was not able to complete school
because...differences with my father and his rules, his household rules...me and
him stopped getting along at the age of 16, so I left home. I kept trying to go to
school. I started living with a family member and they lived in a different school
district. I tried to get emancipated, it wouldn't work...I didn't know all the steps
to do it so that I could go to school wherever I was living...They [father’s
residence school district] would not let me go to school there [in the other school
district], not unless I was emancipated. I couldn't change school districts without
legal - them having legal guardianship or whatever...I spent a couple months on a
bicycle riding back and forth across town to my old school...and then once the
weather turned - once it got wintertime, I just wasn't able to do it and dropped out.
(Lee)

He liked school and did well in school, and had friends at school that did well in
school. “I didn't hang out with the ‘skip school’ crowd, I don't think my father would
allow that...everybody as far as I know liked school,” said Lee.
When he first entered prison, he was aware of GED and college classes. He completed the GED program, certificate training, and work experience in prison.

Once I got situated at a permanent facility that's when they signed me up for GED classes, and I was only in there for three days after my initial testing. They told me that I scored so high on that that I didn't even need the GED classes, that they were going to sign me up for the GED test, and within two weeks I already had completed my GED...I got some training in culinary, like cooking...I worked in the kitchen for six years, and then I did training in custodial maintenance, so I got custodial maintenance certificates and stuff like that...and paid work experience. (Lee)

He felt MPRI/MDOC did not encourage or offer college education in prison.

As far as education, no encouragement from MPRI...services were more about housing, employment.... when I came through the reentry program there was more of a push for teaching people about contacts for housing and employment. I really didn't see any real push for guys to go back to school. (Lee)

He also felt MPRI/MDOC should encourage college for parolees.

I think they should push - as far as the reentry program, I think they should push more for guys to go to school. Like I said, when I came through the reentry program there was more of a push for teaching people about contacts for housing and employment. A lot of that stuff I did on my own, and there wasn't a whole lot - I mean, I received handouts, papers with different type of information on them, but a lot of the stuff I had to get out there and experience myself. (Lee)

He noted that he might have taken college classes in prison if offered and funded.
There were a few guys that I knew that were taking correspondence courses, but that was at their own expense. There were no free programs for college education while we were locked up. If I had extra money to take the classes, I might have....

(Lee)

He is a first generation part-time student, feels like he needs school in his life to be successful, and feels closer to his family as a student. “They [family] love it that I am in school and when they see how good I'm doing it makes them really happy,” said Lee.

His nephew attends college and encouraged him to also attend college. My nephew graduated from high school and he's a real active member in our family as far as educationally, so he's been going to college for the last couple of years trying to get a business degree at the community college, and that kind of was like, you know, that kind of pushed me a little bit more towards doing it.

And then he told me how easy it was to enroll, so I was like, "Okay, well, I'll just go down, fill out the enrollment paper and speak with the counselor.” (Lee)

He met with the college Vice President, Financial Aid staff, and school counselor prior to enrolling in classes.

I enrolled there at downtown campus. I enrolled, filled out my financial aid information, spoke with the financial aid counselor and then two weeks after that I had already had an appointment with a guidance counselor downtown, so after I met with a guidance counselor downtown I came out here [rural campus] and met with the Vice President of the college. (Lee)

He earned 3.7 grade point average (GPA) his first two semesters at college and was in his third semester. He was taking classes for two associate’s degree programs:
heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) and building maintenance. He noted there is a certificate program for HVAC, but he wanted an associate’s degree.

They have a certificate for it, but I don't want the certificate. I want the associate’s degree to get a better job. I'm thinking that with the HVAC program, there are only two classes that separates that from the Building Maintenance trade, and once I finish with the Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning, just take the two classes that are different between the Building Maintenance and try to get a double degree. (Lee)

Classes he had taken or was currently taking are math, English, and classes for HVAC program requirements. He received a certificate from Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society, is honored to have the certificate, and showed the certificate to me in the interview. As a college student, he feels like he is busy and more positive about his situation.

I've gotten invitations from Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society, the different events that they've had, but a lot of times other things that I have to do kind of conflict with stuff that I would like to get more involved in, but my life is so busy. It feels pretty good to receive stuff like this….Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society certificate. It's [shows me certificate] just a new experience for me. (Lee)

He likes the community college environment and all of his classes because it is fun, the social aspect, working with other students, and the support from the teacher.

I liked the camaraderie of other students coming together and helping each other, especially in the classes that I'm taking now. When we have labs, people help
people. I liked the social aspect of school. I really liked the math teacher because he wouldn't allow the class to go any further forward if more than 1 person didn't really grasp the concept of what he was teaching, so that really helped me... I liked English. It's fun. (Lee)

He considers studying/ homework and registering for classes online a challenge as well as balancing time for school and his part time job.

I work part time...a little more than part time. If I'm not at work, I am studying...well, and sometimes at work, I'm pretty much like at lunch break, you know, I'm studying, trying to make sure that I've got everything prepared for the class that night. At home studying...Studying at the girlfriend's house, studying everywhere. (Lee)

Lee noted further challenges:

Challenges? Trying to get my classes before they get filled up online, because a lot of times the classes that I've been taking - last semester they filled up so fast and even though I was on the computer trying to get it, they filled up so fast. I waited a couple days and luckily everything opened back up again... the first week of registration is online and I have to be at work at 8:00 am, So between 6:00 and 8:00 I'm trying to get in there, get online. I think the longest I had to wait - I think the longest that I was in line was 600-700 people ahead of me. this summer registration was crazy, because at 244 people ...it stood still for about an hour. So I called work and said "Well, I'm going to be a few minutes late...I've got to get these classes." But the problem became even worse because my
computer goes into hibernation if I don't mess with it after a while -I lost signal.

...I couldn't get in. I ended up going to work. (Lee)

He felt his family encouraged him to complete more college courses. He feels school is a positive part of his life now and that he is different than he was prior to going to prison and attending college. Attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison and improved his parole experience. “I think it's [school] having a positive effect on it [parole]. My own parole officer is probably a little less worried about how I'm doing when he sees that I'm focused on work, school...,” said Lee.

I like it [college] because I know I'm working towards something better for myself. I like it because the teachers take their time...like if I don't understand something, they'll take time in between classes to help me out with whatever I don't understand... besides the education, it's giving me contacts within the field. Some of the teachers and some of the guys that go to classes with me are already in the field, so it's kind of giving me a network...it's [college] just a new experience for me. I don't feel that I have to resort to the type of lifestyle that I used to live...that I can work towards something better. Yeah, going to school will help me from returning to prison. Definitely. Because I don't feel that I have to resort to the type of lifestyle that I used to live...that I can work towards something better. I use to be just hanging out, partying, just working here and there, and just basically doing nothing, really. I think some of them [students here] are still the “hanging out” people, but I just pick my friends a little wiser now. (Lee)

His goals for the future are to be more successful by obtaining two associates
degrees, and have a better job, possibly own his own business, as well as doing better, being happy, and giving back to the community. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals.

I think these college classes are helping me reach that goal. One of the things I would like to do is try to start up some type of low-income heating program where maybe I can help teach people more about their furnace to where they don't have to call a repairman or I could go into people's houses where there's a male person that lives there, teach fathers more about furnaces to where maybe they'll save a little money...I thought with the economy the way it is and jobs being hard to find, I figured that if I had a little bit more education that it would make it easier for me to get a job. They have a certificate for HVAC, but I don't want the certificate. I want the associate’s degree to get a better job. (Lee)

Lee was discharged from parole since the time of our interview.

John Do

At the time of the interview, John Do, a 43-year-old African American male had served nine years in prison. He lived with his wife and one son. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his son.

I live with my wife and son. I got a son to raise and a wife to take care of and I can’t do that by slipping back into that old ways. My son is 10...when I come home from prison, my son was bad in school. He had like 43 school referrals. ...Because he liked to fight all of the time and people always messed with him and he put his hands on them. But since I’ve been home within this year and a half, and he’s been going to school since I'm home... no trouble. I know it’s a big
improvement since I’m home and teaching him what’s right and what’s wrong. And I feel that if he has a problem with anybody, somebody puts their hand on him, talk to the teacher, I talk to the teacher. Putting your hands on them is not going to solve anything. (John Do)

His siblings, and he, completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and received high school diplomas. “They all graduated high school,” said John Do. His mother and father raised him and family encouraged him to attend school K-12. “They [family] made me go to school, I’m saying; I really didn’t like school that much but, once I got into it, I started enjoying it more. My family loved school. They encouraged me to go to school,” said John Do.

He did not like kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school initially, but did well in school, and had friends at school that did well in school. Some of his friends went on to college. “They [friends] went to school. A lot of them graduated and went on to college,” said John Do. He thought about attending college, but did not think he could attend due to lack of financial aid.

When I was going to high school, I always thought about going to college, but I always wanted to go like to like a university, but I didn’t have the money at that time to even look into it and I didn’t know nothing about financial aid like this here now. No one told me about financial aid. (John Do)

When he first entered prison, he was aware of college classes, but had thought they were not available to him. He also completed work experience in prison.

At one time they had college courses inside prison. They stopped college courses. It wasn’t there for us to take. I mean it used to be when they had college courses,
but they don’t have it anymore. They really didn’t have any other trainings either.

I worked in the kitchen when I was locked up and I had to be up at 4:00 a.m. so I
had to be at work at 5:00 in the morning. I was a prep cook, so I had to prep
everything for breakfast, for lunch. (John Do)

Attending community college was a goal upon release from prison.

I really never thought about college when I was in there. It’s like, when it was
close to time for me to come home, I knew it was time for me to make a change,
so I decided as I was going to take college classes and see how it goes. A change
from that lifestyle that I was living, cause my lifestyle that I was living just was
really dealing drugs or using drugs. So I had to change my whole lifestyle
because it landed me in prison and making bad decisions...I had a friend in there
[prison], a homeboy that I grew up with. He was telling me about going to school
and I had thought about it and put a lot of effort in to it and we both said we were
going to do it when we got out. Well, I followed through with it, he didn’t. (John
Do)

He met with the college Vice President prior to enrolling in classes. He is a first
generation part-time student, has a full time job, and feels closer to his family as a
student. He was in his third semester at college. He was taking classes for a general
studies associate’s degree. Classes he had taken or was currently taking included
English, math, history of rock and roll, business, and prerequisites for transferring to a
four year university. His mother works at a local four-year university and so he would be
eligible to receive a discount on classes.
Really what I wanted to do was go into like Food Tech [technology], but they don’t have Food Tech here. So I was thinking maybe later on down the line, I could go into Food Tech but I have to take it at the university cause they have it and transfer cause that’s what I wanted to get a degree in. Food Tech is something that I looked into where, motels or catering and the different like and stuff like that. I checked into that and like landscaping, janitorial, I kind of scored high in those areas [in career assessment] so, right now, I’m looking at all three…if I decide to go to university, I know I can get a nice percentage knocked off because my mother works at the university. She’s been working there for like twenty something year. (John Do)

He likes the community college environment and all of his classes because the staff and people are helpful and comfortable to be around.

The people in general [in college], I like. The people, in general, that’s around you is more comfortable. They are comfortable to work with, you can talk to them. You can get the help that you need and people around here will guide you in the right direction. It [college] gave me a more better education. The professor I had, he was good. He explained it to you where you could understand everything. (John Do)

He prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to his home and job. He did not like the writing class. “I didn’t like the writing because I never really been a good writer, “ said John Do.

Challenges identified by John Do include registering for classes online, English class, morning classes, special parole conditions which restrict computer usage, and
changes in technology since going to prison as well as balancing time for school, full
time job, and parole appointments. “...that’s something I never even did was type or use
a computer so, I’m still rusty at that, I still learning,” said John Do.

I wanted to go to college and I ran it by the PO [parole officer], he said “that’s
fine and dandy, but I had to get a job first.” But it was no jobs out there so I had
registered for school and everything first anyway. I just told him that I registered
for school and I ready to go to college. He really wasn’t with it [parole officer
and college classes] unless I found a job. But my mindset was on school, so I
followed through what I wanted to do. Plus I was doing the right things and
nothing wrong. I feel that they couldn’t deny me an education because I had the
right to get an education. Well parole, it has been hard because I’m on GPS tether,
and I am only allowed to go to work, go home, go to school, go home. So I have
no other life besides that. (John Do)

John Do noted further challenges:

I work Monday through Friday from 8 to 4:30, my classes are Wednesday and
Thursday from 6 to 8:55, so I fits that [school] right in there. At the time with the
hours that I work, and when I do get ready to pick my classes on the computer at
school, there really wasn’t nothing available so, it was hard. I’m not allowed to
have one [computer] right now. I have to be able use it down here at school.
When I went to pick another class, it wouldn’t let me cause it was too late because
everything was full. They’re [students] up at five o’clock, six o’clock in the
morning getting ready to register for a class cause it’s going so fast. A lot of
times, I know when I have had started to register for class, I was like 1400
something in line, just waiting. You see I work in the morning and the best time to pick classes is in the morning. I prefer downtown location …because I live about ten minutes from it; however the classes down here [downtown campus] fill up so quick. …the rural location always has classes open. Scheduling is a challenge. It is a big challenge…Morning classes make it kind of hard because I had to get up early, but I was used to it by being locked up, I had to get up early. Cause I worked in the kitchen when I was locked up and I had to be up at 4 so I had to be at work at 5 in the morning. I was a prep cook, so I had to prep everything for breakfast, for lunch. (John Do)

He also noted:

When I first started [classes] I thought it was going to be hard to juggle it because it was like, going to school in the morning and then looking for a job. When I finally got the job, it was like, I still had both of my classes, but I had talked to my instructor and let him know I would be late coming to class, because my math class started like at four and I didn’t get off work until 4:30. I told him that I would be late so I fit it right in my schedule. (John Do)

His family supports and encourages him to complete more college courses. He is a role model for his wife and her daughter also.

They [family] like it! They love it! They like it. They like it a lot…that I am in school. I had my wife’s daughter was helping me out and showing me how to do it [math]. And then I had bought this calculator and it shows you everything on it. My wife, she’s pretty smart and she helps me with my math every now and then if I needed help when I needed the help. But she didn’t need a calculator; she can
just go out of her brain. They would tell me if I needed any help, or whatever, they would help me. I couldn't get on the computer and type myself and so... I would write it out and just have them [wife and her daughter] type it for me.... they [wife and her daughter] got to the 12th grade and didn’t finish. They was going to get they GED and they started working so, that got put off so. (John Do)

He feels school is a positive part of his life and that he is different now as a college student than he was prior to going to prison. Attending college helped him receive a promotion at his job and helps keep him out of trouble and from returning to prison.

...the math helped me a lot because now I’m promoted at my job in retail, I’m the head of department. and I price all of the stores. so I’m hired in now, full time, where I get paid time off, free eye and free dental so, everything just falls right into place. (John Do)

He also noted:

This is a change from that lifestyle that I was living, cause my lifestyle that I was living just was really dealing drugs or using drugs. So I had to change my whole lifestyle because it landed me in prison and making bad decisions. .. I enjoy going to school now, I enjoy the classes I’m taking, so it’s making me a better person every day. It’s something different. It’s something new experience. When I figure, if I had never went to college, there’s a lot of things I wouldn’t have done. So, it’s time to get out and branch out and do different things. (John Do)

His goals for the future are to obtain an associate’s degree, own his own
business, and possibly transfer to a four year college to complete bachelor’s degree. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals.

College classes keeps me out of trouble and it keeps me focused on the right things. But for me to say college will keep me out of prison, it’s all about me and what’s in me, and I know I don’t want to go back down that road, so I know what I have to do to maintain it. It’s basically change: people, places and things.

…And hang around people that’s positive that’s in my life instead of people that’s negative. So if anybody don’t have anything positive going on, I won’t deal with them. I don’t be around them. (John Do)

**Tom Reynolds**

At the time of the interview, Tom Reynolds, a 47-year-old Caucasian male had served 12 years in prison. He lived alone and had children who was not living with him.

Growing up, he felt his parents did not care what he did and did not encourage attending school kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12). He did not complete K-12 school.

There wasn't a lot of encouragement from my family for school but I felt like it was important on my own to get a high school diploma which I didn't do anyway. My parents didn't care too much about what I did. My parents never encouraged me to attend college. (Tom Reynolds)

His father and mother completed their high school diploma. His sister completed a Masters’ degree.
My sister… She's got a masters and she's a school teacher so she has to do school, I don't know, every year they require her to do more classes but she's always taking courses. So she's gotten a lot of education. (Tom Reynolds)

He did not like school, felt he did not fit in at school, did not do well in school, had a job, and had taken some community college non-certificate training. His friends also did poorly in school.

I didn't care about education before I went to prison. I felt like I didn't fit in too much in high school. My friends… We were all just crazy kids and we didn't care about school at all… I did have a course here at community college in 1983. A mechanics course. But that was without a GED or a diploma at the time. I liked the course here that I took on mechanics. I never did pursue that. (Tom Reynolds)

When he first entered prison, he was aware of GED and college classes, and he completed the GED program. He also completed a non-certified electronics class in prison.

I was three credits short for high school diploma when I went into prison, then I got my GED in prison. I took an electronics class in prison, but it wasn't really certified or anything like that so it doesn't really count for anything. (Tom Reynolds)

He noted that he might have taken college classes in prison if offered and funded.

I looked into taking college courses but didn't have the money to do it from within prison. It was like $700 or something, some course I wanted to take and I couldn't get the money. I don't know that the prisoners were even eligible for Pell
Grant and I didn't check into any kind of funding at that time while I was in prison. (Tom Reynolds)

He felt MPRI/MDOC should encourage college for parolees.

It would have been easier for me to have somebody from MPRI inside work with me directly on how to register for classes. How to get grant money. How to get loans. Everything that needed to be done to get started in school. (Tom Reynolds)

He met with the college Vice President and Success Center staff prior to enrolling in classes. He is a full-time student, feels like he needs school in his life to be successful, and feels attending college has improved his parole experience. He was in his fourth semester and taking classes for a wind turbine technology certificate.

I came out and seen Vice President of the community college. I was referred to the Vice President. I called him and he set an appointment with me and then I came out and talked to him and he sort of pointed me which way to go. The VP did a lot of the footwork initially...enrollment. The lady here at the financial office and Success Center helped me a lot. Anybody that come out here definitely should get with the Success Center. (Tom Reynolds)

Tom Reynolds also noted:

I am in Wind Turbine technology program. I took one semester and did a welding course so I could get certified in welding. So I've got something to fall back on but I don't know. I've considered other fields but haven't really made up my mind. I'm sort of in a general study group study so I got a little bit of movement where I can possibly change what my major is.... (Tom Reynolds)

He also noted:
I was forced into coming to school in a sense because I had no other way to survive. That's really what it came down to. But now that I'm here I'm glad that's the way it worked out and I enjoy learning new stuff. I am full time. I had to go to school or get a job for my parole stipulations—it's mandatory. It's either school or a job. (Tom Reynolds)

Classes he had taken or was currently taking included English, karate, political science, college writing, physics, and wind turbine energy classes. He likes all of his classes, the teachers, and the college environment.

I like all my classes. Now that I'm here I'm glad that's the way it worked out and I enjoy learning new stuff. Teachers have always been helpful. I've never had a bad teacher in here. That was helpful and that was good. I stay motivated at school since I'm proud of being able to go to college and being able to do alright at it. It's good. Yeah. This is a good thing for me. (Tom Reynolds)

Challenges identified by Tom Reynolds include studying/homework, transportation, karate class, and changes in technology since going to prison. “The Karate class is great too. I was using that as sort of a cushion but that didn't work out so well because I got so much to memorize with the moves,” said Tom Reynolds.

The challenges were much more difficult at first but I'm sort of oriented to everything now. Just the self-motivation, I guess, that's pretty tough because I can go home and put my books down and it's hard for me. So the self-motivation, I gotta keep myself motivated to do the homework. I stay motivated for:

Necessity. Survival. I got a lot of time that should be taken up by homework but I
try to do as little as possible in the homework thing. I should be doing homework. (Tom Reynolds)

Tom Reynolds noted further challenges:

The hardest thing for me to get going was not necessarily in class but it was that when I got locked up when the internet just came out. I mean if you had a cell phone it was huge. My biggest problem when I got out was I didn't know how to even use a cell phone and so then I had to come out and do all this registering on the computer. Everything had to be done on computers and I didn't have any idea. My biggest problem was trying to do everything in a modern world with computers. That was my hardest thing to do when I got out. (Tom Reynolds)

His sister encourages him to complete more college courses. He feels attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison. His goals for the future are to have a better job and possibly transfer to a four year college to complete bachelor's degree. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals.

Educated people and people with good jobs are probably statistically a lot less apt to commit crimes. Maybe they're just more well rounded or settled. Going to school will help me from returning to prison... I'm pretty simple. Buy a house. Have a nice vehicle. I don't need a lot but I think I'll be able to afford those things. I mean if I follow up on my education and end up with a good job I can have way more than what I need. College classes will help me reach my goals....through knowledge. I mean, without knowledge, that's the whole key. Sure they give you a piece of paper that says, here I'm this or that, but really in the
job it comes down to what you learn. I might get a Bachelor degree. (Tom Reynolds)

Tom Reynolds was discharged from parole since the time of our interview.

Payton

At the time of the interview, Payton, a 48-year-old African American male had served 16 years in prison. He lived with his mother and uncle.

Growing up, he was an only child and he completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and received a high school diploma. “I finished that [high school diploma] in 1980,” said Payton. His mother and aunt completed some college and two uncles completed Bachelor’s degrees. His mother raised him and family encouraged him to attend school (K-12) and college.

I was an only child, so it was like having friends, something to do - just growing up. All my uncles, my mom, her sister; everybody in the family I knew always played sports so I was basically brought up and raised around it. Just played them from little league all the way up to junior high to high school. It was basically like all my friends and everything, we were all doing sports. That was just like, the thing to do. (Payton)

He also noted:

My mom and aunt had taken some college courses. My mom never finished college and her sister never finished. She’s still taking classes off and on now. My uncles both went to four year college...and graduated. Friends and family were involved in sports...Very supportive. (Payton)

He liked school and did well in school, and had friends at school that did well in
school. He felt college was an opportunity for him and was involved in school sports.

Some of his friends went on to college. He also attended a few college courses, but did not complete the courses since he obtained employment at that time.

School to me, it was more so fun. I was constantly in sports so I didn’t miss a lot of school, I enjoyed school, but it was more of a social thing for me. I carried like, just over a “C average.” Really didn’t take it that serious. It was more about just making sure I was eligible to do my sports. I had favorite subjects and subjects I didn’t like. I liked math… Oh, what was it? It was like a media class, for radio and stuff like that. I liked stuff like that. I could not stand English. It’s [English class] probably one of those classes I was just in there goofing off because I didn’t care about it that much, I know I’d have to write this book report so I bet you every one of my things were on sports. The classes I liked, of course, I did a lot better in than the classes I didn’t like, but it was basically with me more so making sure that I was eligible to do sports. Baseball, football, basketball, and track year round…I’ve always liked it--school. My mom use to tell me, she use to catch heck when she tried to keep me out of school when I was sick. It’s just about being in the class, being around a group of people. (Payton)

Payton also noted:

I started in college straight out of high school and was in college for two weeks and left because I got a job working at the hospital. Right out of high school I was enrolled in college. I was actually taking classes for accounting. Two weeks in, I got called – when I had taken the civil service test, I got called and I got the job at the hospital so I stopped going to school. I worked at an admitting unit, a geriatric
unit, and I think it was – I had just looked into going back to school because I was
going to try and get my LPN license and I had got in trouble, but I had worked
there like, eight years... I had an accounting one and a couple other classes [in
college], but I remember I had an accounting class. I had talked to registration
downstairs recently because I had never withdrew. I just came in and told them,
‘Hey, I got a job. I won’t be taking your class.’ So I never withdrew and I look up
and they’ve got me down for, way back then it’s still on my record, that I just got
an ‘Incomplete’. (Payton)

Payton also noted:

Everyone said that I should go [to college] because I didn’t exactly know what I
wanted to do. I didn’t know where I wanted to go to school and I said, ‘Well, I’m
going to go ahead and try and find a job and see how that works out.” I got a job
before that and then I based my schedule for classes off that job and then I came
up with the job from the hospital. But yeah, they were supportive as far as me
going to school. Yeah. My uncle, my mom, my aunt. (Payton)

When he first entered prison, he was aware of GED and college classes. He
completed certificate training and work experience in prison.

Nope. College classes were not offered to me in prison. Not where I was at. The
only classes they had that you could take – they had classes but they were more
corresponding. They were outside the facility. The only thing that they were
running basically when I was there was the GED program. ..I think there were
two people in the building, that I was in, that took a correspondence class, a
college class, but other than that, that was it. A lot of people, it seemed like, that
was there were trying to get their GED’s. That seemed to be the main focus which was at least getting them a GED while they were there. (Payton)

He also noted:

I didn’t end up doing that [college courses]. When I was in there, I ended up doing stuff like block rep. I was the block rep, so I would have to go to the warden’s for a meeting and stuff like that, but as far as classes no. No school classes...As Block Rep in prison-- you get a certificate and you can do it for up to a whole year. Then you have to have that six month break and then you can go back and do it again and I think I had like, three certificates. So I did it for a while. I was also a porter, worked inside the unit which is basically a janitor, clean up job. I got the blood spill certificate. That was ran like a class. It was a two part class. I would attend it and then did a little test and then you’d get your certificate and we had to update every year. (Payton)

He met with the college counselor and Vice President prior to enrolling in classes. He is a part-time student, has a full time job, feels he needs to take college classes to be successful, and feels closer to his family as a student. He earned 3.5 grade point average (GPA) his first semester at college and was in his second semester. He feels attending college has improved his parole experience and he is busy. He was taking classes for two associate’s degree programs: accounting and computer. Classes he had taken or was currently taking included math and English. He noted he prefers the downtown campus since it is close to home and his job.

Got locked up, got home, decided it was time to make a change. I talked to my parole officer. I contacted Vice President out at community college through the
re-entry and they told me how to go about it and I just decided, okay. That’s what I’m going to do. I came down and enrolled and have been here ever since. If you’re trying to better yourself this is the opportunity. (Payton)

Payton also noted:

When I got home [from prison] I had like, a job. My uncle had gone in for surgery and they needed someone to take care of him. I work seven to seven, Monday through Friday except for when I have class. Most of the day it’s me, most of the evening time it’s mom. Taking care of my uncle. He went and had back surgery. Went in with a walker, came out paralyzed from the waist down. I also do side jobs here and there, cutting grass, shoveling snow or something like that. (Payton)

He also noted:

When getting registered with school, that was it. I see my PO [parole officer] once every two months. That’s it. I go see her – how are you? How’s school? Yup. Yup. Any police contact? Nope? Okay. That’s basically it. I never filled out a form for food stamps, assistance. I didn’t want to go to those places. I think it [college] made it [parole experience] easier because it gave me something to do. Not as much down time and what not. Making strides in the right direction and it fills up time, keeping me busy for the most part...So I basically try and stay busy, load up on things to do that are basically around the house and stuff like that instead of get back and hang out and have the car and be jetting all over the place. My classes that I take now are basically around what has to be done for my home health aide job. (Payton)

He likes the community college environment and all of his classes because of the
social aspect and helpful college staff and teachers. “Classes I like...I like math.
anything having to do with like math I like. Anything having to do with sports and stuff
like that, stretching and those types of things, I like,” said Payton.

I liked how – the one thing that helped me out a lot was being able to talk to the
professors. Let them know where I was at, let them know what I was doing, and
being able to get access to them if I have a question or whatever. I liked that. I
think it was just the whole thing of being in the school environment. You’re
meeting new people; it’s a whole different experience. The whole thing to me
that I really liked was that at least I’m making an effort. You’re meeting new
people and finding out new stuff, you’re learning new stuff, you’re re-learning.
Just more of the stimulation of your mind to be doing something productive.
(Payton)

He does not like it when other students in class are disruptive and not serious
about learning and also does not like English and considers it a challenge.

English has just always been a problem to me and I think it’s because depending
on who is saying it and whose objection and what not, it can mean with a comma
here or a thing there, it can mean a whole different thing. There’s no set rule.
(Payton)

Payton noted further dislikes:

The only thing I didn’t like about it though, and it threw me for a while, was the
coming and going. People just get up and walk out of the class. People coming in
late to class, that just kind of threw me for a minute because I’m like... I
remember somebody saying something to one the other classmates like, “We’re
paying for it. We do what we want. We don’t have to go to school and the teacher is not going to really say anything.” Another thing that threw me was half way through – once the money came through, how small the classes were. I call it “Money Monday.” You’re guaranteed to drop seven to eight people. Every class I’ve been in, right after the financial aid is in, you lose seven to eight people.

(Payton)

He also noted:

At first I did not like the noise level [in class]. Teacher is talking here and then there are other people talking over here with different agendas and everything else so that took a while to get use to, but I figured it out. I sit in the front row of all my classes. (Payton)

Challenges identified by Payton include studying/homework, class schedule changing each semester, trying to make up for lost time [in prison], and changes in technology since going to prison.

My mom says sometimes it is good just to do nothing and it never made sense to me. Do nothing, do nothing… why would you? Took me a minute to understand what she was saying, and now I get it. But it was like I was always trying to catch up. Another thing that folks should really watch out for coming home, don’t try to catch up. It doesn’t work. It does not work. I still catch myself just trying to catch up. Just trying to catch up, moving too fast. (Payton)

Payton noted further challenges:

I remember talking to my mom and it was like, something would go on and thrown off base and she used to say, “You look so rattled,” and I told her well, I
hate to say this but it’s because I was institutionalized. I was gone so long that when you’re locked up, you know you eat at this time unless it’s an emergency count, you know you get yard at this time, and whether you really look at it or not you fall into a schedule. I get off work here, I have to go here, I work out here, I eat here, I play softball here – everything is on a schedule. That schedule in prison just … it becomes second nature. (Payton)

He also noted:

The hardest part at first was making sure I had the time to study. Sometimes there are those days where you go and put an hour in and you know you need to put some more time in, but you don’t so I kind of have to catch myself on that. Then there are those days that I just don’t feel like studying. … just trying to stay on schedule. (Payton)

Another challenge Payton noted:

I was locked up really so long, off and on, that I missed a lot of the computer things and texting and all this. And then you start doing that stuff and that’s a very good way to tear up English. Everything is short and in code. (Payton)

His family supports and encourages him to complete more college courses.

She [mom] loves that I’m in school. The funny thing is that I was so glad about the grades that I was getting and I was telling her and she looked at me and she’s like, well you’re not stupid. I was like, Ma! I carried a 4.0 through the semester! And she’s like, yeah? I’m like, well you don’t seem that happy. She says, “You aren’t stupid! It doesn’t surprise me.” You know? So if I have to get out here some time or something, just let her know. If I have to get down to the school or
what not early for some reason or something, you know, she’s pretty much just, okay cool. Family has been really – well, as much stuff as we’ve been through and that I’ve put them through, they’ve stood there and been behind me. (Payton)

He feels school is a positive part of his life and that he is different now as a college student than he was prior to going to prison. His goals for the future are to obtain an associate’s degree in computers or accounting. “Within the next two, two and a half years, I will have my Associates,” said Payton. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals and from returning to prison. “It [being in college] will help me from going back [to prison], because just keeping me busy. It's cool,” said Payton.

When I first got back, I wanted it [drivers license] and I went back and found out all this stuff I had to go through and I kind of decided, well maybe it’s a good thing I didn’t have my license right away because a lot of freedom. So I basically try and stay busy, load up on things to do that are basically around the house and stuff like that instead of get back and hang out and have the car and be jetting all over the place. So I kind of put that off for a while. (Payton)

Payton was discharged from parole since the time of our interview.

**Bugs Bunny**

Bugs Bunny, a 58-year-old African American male had served 40 years in prison. He lived in a treatment center and had a wife and two children who did not live with him, but he visits often. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his children.

I had me a couple small kids [ten and eleven years old] and then that’s another thing that made me think about going to school and bettering myself, their grades,
my children’s grades. If I could tell my child to do something or ask them to do something, right, why can’t I do it?...and so that’s what I did, I told my daughter I need for you to get a B out of math. This, this, this, this semester, and she was like, “Daddy that’s hard,!” and I asked her “If I can do it, can you do it?” She said, “Yeah!” me and her [daughter] are in math right now. So when I looked at her math score, I said, “Wow. I’ve got to hustle.” So I’ve been in that math lab every day, bringing my grades up; I’m going to have a B by the end of it, trust me. I’ve learned to! (Bugs Bunny)

Bugs Bunny also noted:

She [daughter] loves it! [that I am in school]. She loves it because I kind of reflect on it. ... I know what the square and square roots is and all of that. But see, I didn’t know none of that; we didn’t have to know that back then so. School helps to build relationship with my daughter. I have a son and he don’t like school, but I’m encouraging him. He likes the idea of it [dad in school] and when he has homework, he’ll call me up and ask me different questions and stuff so me and him sit on the phone for a minute and talk about it. I’m trying to let him know that dad is changing. (Bugs Bunny)

Growing up, his mother passed away when he was ten months old and his father raised his five siblings and him. Four siblings completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and two sisters completed many college courses. His sisters encouraged him to attend college. His nephew also completed many college courses.

His father encouraged him to attend school K-12; however things fell apart when his father remarried and his new wife moved into the house with nine or ten children of
her own and had two more children with his dad. His father drank on a regular basis and
the household had become too chaotic. Bugs Bunny moved out of the house and into his
aunt’s house, and hung out with friends that were a negative influence and ended up in
juvenile home.

Dad used to encourage school. I gotta say that my dad was more encouragement
than anybody. He told me, he looked at me one day, he said “Boy if you don’t go
to school, by the time, it get time for you to finish school, you gotta have that
education to get through school.” (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

Mom died when I was 10 months old... Dad viewed school as important... He
[dad] was my main encouragement and everything, he just drank, but that didn’t
have nothing to do with that, he was a good father. As good as a father as he
knew to be. My father raised all six of us by his self, and so when everybody was
gone but me, he chose another wife, and they had like nine or ten kids and they
moved in on me and so I really couldn’t deal with that. I am the youngest of my
five siblings [of my mother's kids]. He had two more kids with his new wife...and
then you move in all these kids younger than me. I got along with the kids pretty
good, but, at some point, I couldn’t do that no more. He moved me in with his
sister and I couldn’t do that either, and so I kind of went the wrong way. (Bugs
Bunny)

He also noted:

Everybody [five siblings on mother’s side] finished [school]. I had a brother that
didn’t, but he, I think he took on a job, and he carried his career on.... Well two of
my sisters did attend college. Actually all of my sisters did attend some college. The one that passed recently, she was still in college. She was in college and she was like 59, 60; right up to the time she died she was working and going to college. So yeah she attended college most of her life. I don’t think my sister would have never completed, she was really intelligent. She loved school. Like she got a son like that now and he goes to school still and he’s 41. He’s been going to college all his life though; he’s been there. My sister encouraged me to go to college. …The one I was telling you about that was actually in college when she died and she always said “Bugs Bunny, come on go to school.” She was going too. (Bugs Bunny)

He liked K-12 school but did not do well in school, and had friends that did poorly in school.

I got with the wrong crowd when I was about, when I was like in the eighth or ninth grade and I learned how to smoke cigarettes, but before that, before that, I and school was, school was ok. (Bugs Bunny)

When he first entered prison [juvenile home], he was aware of GED and college classes and he completed the GED program [three or four times]. He also completed work experience and certificate training. Living in a residential treatment center was a goal upon release from prison.

I have a GED and a High School Diploma. Because I’ve been in several facilities where I wasn’t nothing to do so I went back to school and I must have like two, three of them GEDs up there and I got my, I think I got my high school education in Juvenile Boys School back in 1970, ’67, something like that, ’68. That was like
my first phase of being locked up. I think I finally got too old to be there... I got so many [GEDs]... I don’t know what I have. I got a GED; I think the last one I got was in ’70. I know I got one in ’73. I think I got before that and I got another somewhere down the line. I got so many... I don’t know what I have. When you sitting in the county jail and you have nothing else to do so they got school, you go [to GED classes]. (Bugs Bunny)

Bugs Bunny noted the training completed in prison:

In prison I took up a cooking class. I completed that. I took up a machine shop class and I completed that. No, college was not offered in prison. I was working in the factory in prison and I needed to help myself at that time, but college courses that was offered; I don’t know, I just, didn’t really think about them [college courses]. There wasn’t nothing cheap. The food portions were going down like that, so, I was in a position where I had to work and so that’s what I did... I looked at them [college courses]. Don’t get me wrong, I looked at them. I actually thought about them but I had stuff to do. I had stuff to do that I know I had to do before I could get out I ended up at the end going to residential substance abuse treatment inside. So I went through that. I graduated that and once I graduated that, I was out the door. (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

This last time in prison, I took a look at myself and what I was doing and what I needed to do to get my life in order because as you see, I’m an old man now and so the first time I really came to reality about a whole lot of things. I really thought about things and I started praying and all of that... When I was locked up,
nobody even did nothing for me; not even send me a letter, “How you doing
man?” and I got sick and so I had a heart condition I didn’t even realize I had and
so they said by me drinking all my life and stuff like that and not tending to my
body, my heart was slow cooking and so they put this heart defibrillator in me…I
had been talking to this guy in charge of a community treatment center and he
told me, he said, “Man when you get out, come see me, I got a room for you.” So
when I got out, I ended up going to the hospital within like two weeks. (Bugs
Bunny)

He felt MPRI/MDOC did not encourage or offer college education in prison.

MPRI does nothing for me. I got in that treatment program I was telling you about
on my own. No, they didn’t help with my treatment. They [MPRI] did not
encourage education. I got my own treatment and so I can’t really say that MPRI
wouldn’t have helped me. They did not help with schooling, clothing,
transportation. (Bugs Bunny)

He met with the college school counselor prior to enrolling in classes. He is a
full-time student, taking classes opens opportunities for him, and improves parole
experience, and feels closer to his family as a student.

So one day I was sitting out there somewhere [in front of downtown campus
college] on a bench eating me a sandwich right, and a girl come popping in the
door, right, so I got up and followed her on in here. Found out she works here.
And I followed her on in here, right. I said, “What office you in? Well you, you in
here?” She said, “Yeah I work here.” I said, “Where is the office outside of
working here, to go here?” and she said, “Right here.” You know something told
me, I don’t know what told me that, but I came on in here and been here ever since. I guess I must have been sitting out there eating my sandwich thinking about coming in [into school]...and so I went on in there in the office. I sat down and filled that [enrollment form] out. I turned that in. Then I set up all of my appointments that I needed to set up and I was at them all. I enrolled here at downtown location and my counselor helped me choose classes. (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

Me and my counselor; we sit down, we talk about everything and for the summer, I’m older, I’m almost sixty years old, so I mean I’m not, I hadn’t been used to studying in all these years, but, as time go on, I feel better, I feel more comfortable, with studying. Right now, I got study time. I got to go to my classes, go to AA, or NA, whatever I want to go to; come back, do my study. Parole, I do what’s expected of me and beyond, because I don’t play no games with, I’m too old to play games and get locked back up, I mean it’s just a different, an altogether difference. I’m making wiser choices, I’m going different places, I’m doing different things, I’m trying to be overly nice where I would normally, my old me would have been whoo-hooing and the new me is just different and I love the new me. I don’t know how long I’ll be around to enjoy it, but I do enjoy me, I enjoy what I do now; making my own decisions as far as this, that, and the other. (Bugs Bunny)

He earned at least a 3.5 grade point average (GPA) his first semester at college and was in his second semester. He was taking classes for business associate’s degree.
Classes he had taken or was currently taking include English, math, history of rock and roll, public speaking, and independent studies.

My last grade that I got was a 3.5. That was last semester. Actually, that’s the lowest grade I got is a 3.5. I’m going for business. Associate’s in Business. [Business Program will] help me know how to spend my money instead of having somebody else spend my money and write my payments and papers and all that down when I don’t know where my money. Then I can get back and figure that out for myself. I want to know how to do that for myself, so that way, I can bypass the accountant. (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

I did public speaking for the summer. I did History of Rock and Roll for the summer…With just two classes this summer. In the fall, I took three. If it’s a challenge, I’ll live at the school. And I’ll get through. I’m gonna get through. I know that this is something that I love doing. It’s what I want to do right now. (Bugs Bunny)

As a college student, he feels like he is closer to his family and more positive about his situation. He likes the community college environment and all of his classes because they are fun and he is comfortable with the teachers.

I like the environment. It was all different. It was like; when I came in here I had one frame of mind that it was all bad because I remember how it was in school, when I was going. It wasn’t about what people were doing to me, it was about what I was doing to me and so when I came in here, I told you I was scared that day…and I came in here [college] and it was, I start having fun again; laughing,
and talking and it’s been good for me and I have nothing but good feelings about it. (Bugs Bunny)

Bugs Bunny also noted:

I love school. It’s a part of my life now. I haven’t had a problem in this school since I’ve been here. As far as classes go, I’m comfortable with my teachers. I give a lot of respect, but I kind of demand respect as being almost sixty years old, I like to be treated like I’m sixty years old. Me and my teachers get along fine; if I got something to ask them, quite naturally I got a lot of questions to ask because it’s a lot that I have missed so, if they’re good with it and I’m good with it, we just, we kind of click on something. (Bugs Bunny)

He prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to home. He considers math and English class a challenge, but feels the teachers and math lab do a good job at helping him with his struggles in math.

Math, I was struggling, probably because I didn’t have no math growing up, I couldn’t figure nothing out. But here lately, my grades have did a 360. I stay in the Math Lab. Every test I take now, I’m like an 87, 70, so I learned how to study, I mean, actually sit down and study myself and get it right but, if I got a problem with something, I go in the Math Lab. I’ll sit up in there and do the rest of my work. Then, with my tests, when I go to class and take the class, they ain’t nothing. (Bugs Bunny)

Bugs Bunny noted further challenges:

It’s not that I didn’t like the math; it’s that I was thinking that it was something that it wasn’t. ...back in the day, we didn’t have, but one class that we had to take,
we took math until the 10th grade and that was it. Now—actually I looked at one of my kid’s book and she was a 5th grader, and I said, “Wow, I’m not smarter than a 5th grader, that’s for sure!” Math has been the worst challenge, the heaviest weight on my back is math and so me and her got to a point where I had to start visiting her [teacher] regular, because the people in the math lab might not teach exactly the way she wants it. And so when I get to a point like that, well then I go and see her at one o’clock. So we talk about it and she tells me what she want and if I need more, I go into class before everybody else gets there and then I get it. (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

I got a problem in English and I know my teacher, my teacher got a gap there for an hour, for people to come in, so I go to her in her little gap then and I ask her what am I doing wrong, what do I need to do to improve, because I worry about every little thing that I do. (Bugs Bunny)

He feels his family, his parole officer, and treatment center encourage him to complete more college courses and school is a positive part of his life now, and that he is different than he was prior to going to prison and attending college. Attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison. “Definitely! Definitely! being in college will help me from going back to prison,” said Bugs Bunny.

The best thing that could have happened… so I went to the hospital, had this defibrillator put in, and during the time I had the defibrillator put in, I’m wondering, “Wow, where am I going to go, what am I going to do,” and about three days before I got out, my wife called, no she came up there and told me. She
said “You need to call the treatment center because I think he got you a room.” So I called him and he said, “Man, this room is going to be here till you get out, this is your room.” I said, “Ok.” I’m at three years clean right now. Today, I’m three years clean and the treatment center said “Man you ain’t gotta pay nothing. Long as you are staying here, all we ask is that you get out and look for employment or go to school.” So that, School, ok and so I’m just being real with you today. And so I got in that treatment program and I had to go to something practically every day; I got to include treatment with this process because it’s all together and so now after I got my time in at that place, they moved me into a house. (Bugs Bunny)

Bugs Bunny also noted:

You know I changed something. I got a place where I can go now, where I feel comfortable at least six days a week. I come here [college] and stay till it open and close and I got the right to do that. I come here with my little bag, try to have a couple dollars in my pocket so I can eat and I enjoy being around people. And there’s a lot of people in here that’s older than me or younger than me, and I enjoy it and I enjoy that because I’m doing something different. I ain’t out here with the drunks and the drugecs all of the time; I don’t even go that way. It’s serious, that’s serious! That’s what I chose...Since I’ve been out, I refuse to do things that, I refuse to go places that I know that will hurt me. I refuse to do things that I know will hurt me. I changed my life around, all the way around, 360. I’ve been on parole one year. I just put in to get off early. I live in treatment right now. I’ve been in treatment, ever since the day I got out; by my own hand. When I got out
of prison, every place I knew to, everybody I knew, and every place I went, they were drinking and doing something behind them doors and just how long do you think I actually would have lasted just living that kind of, going places where I know that’s going on. You know I didn’t have one friend. You know, because when you drink and you’re getting high. And so reality really set in now because I’m out here now in the streets. I really don’t have any place to really go that I feel comfortable laying my head down and waking up in the morning. It’s a difference in me. I choose not to go to the places where I know I’m not going to be hurt or something bad, something happen, I’m just tired of that life. (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

I’m doing different things, I’m trying to be overly nice where I would normally, my old me would have been whoo-hooing and the new me is just different and I love the new me. I don’t know how long I’ll be around to enjoy it, but I do enjoy me, I enjoy what I do now; making my own decisions as far as this, that and the other. I don’t have time to go to prison. I don’t drink. That’s different for me. That’s different for me...I don’t have time to go to prison. I don’t drink...I don’t drive and drink no more, I mean, reality sets in at these meetings. I got a sponsor, you know I got people, I got a 100, 200 people I can call around here right now, “Hey man, I’m feeling a little depressed today, you want to drink some coffee? Yeah, let’s go.” That’s different for me. That’s different for me and I got the best parole officer in the world. (Bugs Bunny)

Bugs Bunny recommended Department of Corrections to encourage school.
They [DOC] should encourage schooling more...This is different for me being in school. All over, 360 degrees difference. because, look at me. You got a 40 year felon here! You got a forty year felon here. I worked a lot of years; I got a lot of work on the books after I had them kids but, before that I’m a forty year felon. This is different for me being in school. All over, 360 degrees difference. I’m telling you. It’s something that people can do for they self; you’re helping yourself. (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

So now I’m downtown now. I’m six blocks, so everything I need to do, school, treatment center, a couple of churches; the church I go to now is right over here, and that’s basically what I do. I choose not to go to the places where I know I’m going to be hurt or something bad, something happen, I’m just tired of that life. (Bugs Bunny)

His goals for the future are to obtain an associate’s degree and own his own business. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals.

I want to open me a big girl’s [clothing] store. Actually I want to try to start a detail shop as soon as possible, that’s what I had before. (Bugs Bunny)

Bugs Bunny was discharged from parole since the time of our interview.

**Benjamin Franklin**

Benjamin Franklin, a 60-year-old Caucasian male had served 17 years in prison. He lived with his wife and had seven grown adult children who did not live with him.

Growing up, his family was dysfunctional due to alcoholic and abusive parents. His sister, brother, and he, completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school. He
completed with honors and felt college was an opportunity for him. He viewed college as a way to improve his life and get a better job. His mother and father raised them and family encouraged attending school K-12, but did not encourage college. His sister completed a bachelor’s degree and brother completed some college. He also completed some college and had a job prior to going to prison. Some of his adult children also completed college.

For me, school was basically a refuge. I grew up in a very alcoholic home and my mother was also a very abusive person and power controlling. For me, school was an outlet. I received high school diploma in 1968....I graduated with honors...I think education was more important to my mother, but there were other problems that made it next to impossible for me to ever get on her good side. I’ll simply just leave it at that. She didn’t like left handed people and I’m left handed. Dad never discouraged, but he never encouraged. In some ways, my dad resented us getting a education higher than his because he wanted to show the way...back then in the eras where men show the way. (Benjamin Franklin)

Benjamin also noted:

I went onto college for one year. I wanted to start out as an analytical physicist. I just changed to a general [program] at that time, because I really didn’t know what I wanted to do. I viewed it seriously back then, but I view it much more seriously now because it’s a means to an end to me now. Back then it was a means to further my work experience. (Benjamin Franklin)

He also noted:
I have a brother who attended college. My sister, very sadly, she obtained her bachelor’s degree as an RN and graduated May 6 in the nineties, mid-nineties...and was dead May 13. My brother attended college, but we don’t talk, but I don’t think he ever completed his degree. (Benjamin Franklin)

Benjamin shared educational experiences about his family:

My wife and I had seven children. All my children are grown because my baby is 26. Money was not always in greatest supply so I couldn’t go [to college] on the regular basis that I would’ve liked to have wanted. She [wife] ended up coming two classes short of her degree and I’m sure that if we both could’ve, we would’ve loved to have gotten our degrees. Seven children...Six of them went to college. I have one who is a CPA. I have – well, as a matter of fact of my seven... I have one who is a biotech at a hospital. Six of them went to college.. Two I know have their degrees and I believe three have their degrees. I believe my son has his degree, just not dead positive about that. (Benjamin Franklin)

He liked school and did well in school, but had friends that did poorly in school.

“I liked school. School was a refuge for me,” said Benjamin Franklin.

A lot of people I went to school with hated school, didn’t know why they were in school, and wished they could be sixteen and quit. And many of them did quit school when they turned sixteen and went into the military and went to Vietnam. When they got back, they thought their education might not be a bad idea. Some of them were very serious about it.... the majority of them thought it was a joke. (Benjamin Franklin)
When he first entered prison, he was aware of GED and college classes and was a tutor for the GED classes and completed some college courses in prison. He noted that he would have taken more college classes in prison if offered and funded past 1994 [the year the Pell grant ended in prison]. He also completed work experience in prison. “In prison I worked as a GED tutor. I taught math and I taught writing… I ended up teaching math because that’s my strong suit,” said Benjamin Franklin.

I took college classes every chance I had… So anytime, like, a college came in when I was at prison, and they offered classes and enrichment, I took every class I could. I did take community college classes back at the beginning of my incarceration because they still had it and that was before Pell grant ended in prison in 1994. When the Pell grant went out, our school went out…obviously we couldn’t pay for it so they were dependent on the Pell grants. (Benjamin Franklin)

He also noted:

I find guys who want it, maybe they were going to school when they got in trouble and their parents are willing to back them and they’re paying for their classes and they’re getting their education via the mail. I found prison inmates to be more serious about their education than regular college kids going because for us it became a job...it became our future. It was the one thing that could get rid of the stigma of ex-felon. Most guys who went to college, not all...95% percent of them, they were there for an education. I went to school with some guys that ended up with their doctorate. (Benjamin Franklin)

He noted that he feels MDOC/MPRI should encourage college for parolees.
More focus on education….I’d like to see it in prison, but it’s never going to happen. You know, I would like to see in the last two years that if somebody does prison time that you bring in people from the outside that would train you in a chosen profession and when you walked outside of prison, you would have some kind of certificate or degree, and instead of being a burden on society, by being on welfare or whatever, that you could become an asset and maybe understand the asset side instead of the detriment of it. (Benjamin Franklin)

He is a full-time student, feels like he needs school in his life to be successful and views college more seriously now. He met with the college Vice President and Financial Aid staff prior to enrolling in classes. “He [Vice President] was right there to help me and this is the gentlemen who should’ve retired, could’ve retired, 20 years ago...but he likes what he does and I’m grateful that he’s there,” said Benjamin Franklin.

I view it [college] much more seriously now because it’s a means to an end to me now. Back then it was a means to further my work experience, but right now I can’t work because I have degenerative arthritis in my back and knees and I had a kidney removal for cancer, so I draw SSI. For me it’s hopefully a way to do something, even in my retirement years. (Benjamin Franklin)

He noted attending college has improved his parole experience:

Taking college courses…it makes my parole a whole lot more simpler, because I’m busy and that’s what a parole agent wants out of you, is to know that you’re busy. My agent has to see my grades every semester to see if I really am working at what I’m doing. So it does keep you on your toes to a degree because there are expectations from them that “I’ve let you go to school and you better earn a 2.0 or
better because I don’t expect you to flunk out.” It’s been a good experience
because it gets me feel back in society. A little bit more in society and a little bit
more in as a contributor instead of a taker all the time because I understand at
sixty, my working market is gone real low. (Benjamin Franklin)

He earned 3.7 grade point average (GPA) his first two semesters at college and
was in his third semester. He was taking classes for business and accounting associate’s
degrees. Classes he had taken or was currently taking include history, political science,
sociology, and music. As a college student, he feels like he is busy, feels closer to his
wife, school is his life, and more positive about his situation. He feels school is a positive
part of his life now and that he is different than he was prior to going to prison and
attending college.

For me, it [college] has been an excellent experience and what I wouldn’t trade.
I’m glad I went back to school. I’m busy. I’m glad I was given the god given
chance to go back to school. It’s excellent for me, but it’s just part of what you
have to do. You know, it just goes with what goes on. It’s part of life and I was
bad at accepting life at life’s terms, but when you accept life on life’s terms you
flow with it a little bit easier. You may not like it anymore, and you may not like
being tired all the time, but you accept it because you chose it. In my case, I chose
it. It wasn’t handed to me on a silver platter. They [classes] can build your future,
they can make your future, but you have to want that. You have to not just want
the classes, you have to want what the classes provide you and that’s a change in
a lifestyle. I made an internal change, and you have to accept the changes that
college will bring in your life. ...And those aren’t always going to be changes that
make your life easier. This would be my job, and thus far, I make it a job now because it is imperative that I do the best I can and I’m very fortunate. I have a 3.5 from the first semester and I’m carrying 4.00’s right now. (Benjamin Franklin)

He likes the community college environment, the bookstore, and all of his classes because it is positive, staff and teachers are helpful, the social aspect, and the cost for classes is reasonable and classes are smaller.

In the community college level, I find instructors are more willing to help you at the community college. It’s more of an environmentally positive situation for somebody to get an education because everybody is there to help you. Like, I can’t use the internet because I have a parole agent who just does not let his parolees on the internet. But every instructor I’ve taken, if any computer work had to be done they’d get copies of it and give it to me. (Benjamin Franklin)

He also noted:

It’s been a good experience, because it gets me back in society. ….A little bit more in society and a little bit more in as a contributor instead of a taker. Their tuition is within a reasonable rate, I like the fact that they [bookstore] do supply you with your supplies. They have a store here where you can buy everything. I do like the smaller classrooms. The largest classroom I’ve been in, thus far, is forty. I like the support staff...Very helpful. And nobody is above helping. You can ask the dean where something is at, just as easy as you can ask other staff who works in the office, where something is at type of thing. I just like this campus. I’m hoping I can do my whole degree at this campus [downtown]. (Benjamin Franklin)
He prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to home and lack of vehicle. He walks to and from the downtown campus. He considers studying/ homework, when other students in class are disruptive and not serious about learning a challenge as well as changes in technology since going to prison. “Like the typical college student, there are nights that I don’t get a whole lot of sleep. I am doing homework at night,” said Benjamin Franklin.

I just like this campus. I’m hoping I can do my whole degree at this campus. I walk to school everyday. I like the downtown location – and maybe it’s because it’s so much smaller – each of my classes have a certain amount of older people in it too. (Benjamin Franklin)

Regarding non-serious students, he noted:

There are kids here at college...many of these kids here are here because of the local free college program. They hated school. I just listen to them talk, you know, between breaks and that….they’re just here because it’s a free ride. At first...Part of me was scared [to go to college] because it had been so many years. You know, I am sixty. I did feel kind of out of place until I got here and realized how many older people take classes. That kind of eased the tension. My challenges are dealing with the different negative personalities in class. (Benjamin Franklin)

He also considers special parole conditions which restrict computer usage a challenge:

Like, I can’t use the internet because I have a parole agent who just does not let his parolees on the internet. But every instructor I’ve taken, if any computer work had to be done they’d get copies of it and give it to me. This semester because I
can’t be on the computer, There’s just a few more courses of those I can take and
I’ll probably take some of them over the summer that don’t require computers, but
they’re basically computer oriented classes. So I have to have core elective
courses. So I took elective courses to start knocking some of them out. (Benjamin
Franklin)

Benjamin Franklin provided suggestions for the community college. He
suggested the community college have a cafeteria at the downtown campus [similar to the
one at the rural campus], longer bookstore operation hours, and more full time teachers
and tutors.

I’d like to see a cafeteria at the downtown location like they have at main campus,
where the prices would be a little bit lower. I would like to see a fuller menu,
because some people every now and then want to come to college, go to school,
grab a meal and do homework while they’re at school because they’re going to
stay at school. I wouldn’t mind seeing the [book] store open more hours because
they’re only open select hours here [downtown campus]. I would like to see
maybe more full time teachers. A lot of part time teachers here. They’re only
going to be here for so many hours where a full time instructor will be here all
day if you needed help. I think they need some morning tutors that I notice they
don’t have right now. When I’m all done with my degree, or even before I get
done with my degree, once I’m off of parole, I wouldn’t mind working as a tutor.
(Benjamin Franklin)

He felt his wife and mentoring program encourage him to complete more college
courses. Attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison.
The best thing I can use as a view point is that I go to the mentoring transformation group over at that church. She’s [wife] proud of what I’m doing. She’s glad to see that I’m working hard at it and that I am doing my best, because unfortunately I have not always used my intelligence to the best of my ability. I’ve negated my own intelligence by being a fool. (Benjamin Franklin)

He also noted:

Taking college classes will help to not return to prison if you want them to. They [classes] can build your future, they can make your future, but you have to want that. You have to not just want the classes, you have to want what the classes provide you and that’s a change in a lifestyle. It [college] can help you from returning to prison, but you have to want that. (Benjamin Franklin)

His future goals are to be more successful by obtaining two associate’s degrees, and have a better job as well giving back to the community.

I view it much more seriously now because it’s a means to an end to me now. Back then it was a means to further my work experience, but right now I can’t work because I have degenerative arthritis in my back and knees and I had a kidney removal for cancer, so I draw SSI which is not enough. For me it’s hopefully a way to do something, even in my retirement years. I finally wanted to finish my degree. That was very much in my mind. And I got shut down from job hunting because of the degenerative arthritis so that was my opportunity to step up and say to me agent, “can I go to school?” And he said, “yeah.” I can go do something like income taxes when I’m done with school. (Benjamin Franklin)

Benjamin also noted:
I will keep my time busy. I would like to help other people coming out of prison and help them see that if you can get yourself into a positive attitude and stay there, that there is no reason that you can’t stay positive and help other people. See that some of us feel that we owe it to society to do good. I would like to mentor eventually. When I’m all done with my degree, or even before I get done with my degree, once I’m off of parole, I wouldn’t mind working as a tutor.

(Benjamin Franklin)

**Robert Jordan**

Robert Jordan, a 61-year-old Caucasian male had served five years in prison. He lived alone and had two grown adult children who did not live with him. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his children.

It’s just me. I don't have anybody to worry about but me. I thought I was alone. My son finally called me. He's [son] 38 years old but they still live together [with his mother]. I have a 42-year-old [daughter] that's being diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, and she's [ex wife] put up with it for a long time...and that is my biggest regret. Now we're keeping in track - in touch. They're struggling. So every once in a while I send him [son] some money. (Robert Jordan)

He also noted:

And I want to go down and see him [son] after I get off parole, but it's like I told him, I'm coming back here because I'm going to finish school. I'm going to finish school. That's too important to me. Hopefully by then I can have my associate's degree. I keep sending him copies of certificates from work from a retail sales training program. I took it, didn't get paid, but I took it anyhow, for the
knowledge and the experience. I kept thinking, "This is going to open up doors that I would not otherwise knock on, because in my life I've never done retail sales. I successfully completed it. I have a certificate for a professional sales associate. The work that I've done in the past I'm knocking on doors but they're not opening. I can't get nowhere." Now, through this, it's going to open up a whole new set of doors that I otherwise would not even try. So this gives me a different avenue to go look for work...and that's one of the reasons my current employer hired me, because of that certificate. I sent him [son] a copy of my training certificates. I sent him a copy of everything, every certificate. I got one for CPR and I have a certificate for an academic honor society Phi Theta Kappa...because of a 3.75 GPA. (Robert Jordan)

Growing up, his family was dysfunctional due to an alcoholic father. His five siblings completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and he did not complete K-12 school. His mother and father raised him and family did not encourage attending school K-12.

Our family was not with money. We had six kids. My dad was the only one working. He drank, wasn't home all that much. Most of my family was pretty good in school. I've got a couple of sisters and a brother just shy of being genius. I mean, as far as I'm concerned, they were smart in school, and they were good in school. I was good in school, but I just didn't care. I just had an attitude I didn't care. No one encouraged me to go to school or college...nobody to encourage me. (Robert Jordan)
He did well in school, but did not like school, felt he did not fit in at school, and had friends that did poorly in school.

I didn't like school...but I passed most everything but English with decent grades. I had a high school principal call me in the office one time, and because I had missed three-quarters of a sixth period and passed every grade with a C...he said if I really tried I could be a “straight A” student. And I looked right at him and I told him I didn't care. And now, man, I'm beating myself up for it. I regret it. I was good in school, but I just didn't care. I just had an attitude I didn't care. I did like to read. I had the attitude I just didn't care. English back in school was not my forte, When I was in school there was no such thing as a calculator. (Robert Jordan)

He also noted:

Kids in school, the richer kids, looked at me with holey jeans and...I was poor. Then I wind out beating them up. I even had a teacher make a comment one time about my attire. At 12, I stood up in class and told him, "Look, you want to go buy my clothes? I'll be glad to wear them. Until then, don't ever talk to me about my clothes." (Robert Jordan)

Regarding friends, he noted:

They [friends] did not care about school. ..First day in town, I go for a walk, run into five guys, thinking "hey, hi, how's it going?" Next thing you know, we're in a fistfight. My first day in this town. And for two months this went on. Every time I'd see them there would be a fight. They couldn't beat me, so they finally asked me to join them. There I was, 10 years old, in a gang. ...then after about
three or four years I didn’t like their ways. I never really did like their ways, but…there I was. They decided to pick on a kid that was a friend of mine in school and I wouldn’t let them, and I just started changing. From then on I always stuck up for the underdog, the little guy, even took a couple under my wing and taught them how to fight. I switched. I just stopped hanging with them. I had taught myself how to box and Jiu-Jitsu through books. (Robert Jordan)

Robert Jordan had a job, and completed his adult education diploma prior to going to prison.

After I went through two marriages, raised two families and without a diploma, and always had a job, always had a roof over my kids’ head. After 33 years of marriage, I went back to school. At 50 years old, I just felt I needed to do it. Job wise…things were getting harder to get a decent job, a job in general without a high school diploma, and I just - I had worked all my life. Ever since I’ve been 10 years old, I’ve been working…farming. 2003 went into adult education and graduated---although I was in prison in 2004 during graduation. (Robert Jordan)

When he first entered prison, he was aware of college classes and noted that he might have taken college classes in prison if offered and funded. He also had work experience while in prison.

By the time I got to prison, they had taken all that out, or I would have [taken college courses]. For some reason they had just taken it right out. They used to do college courses quite a bit from what people would tell me, but they didn't offer it anymore. They just stopped doing it. They had janitorial classes if you wanted to be a janitor. Oh yeah, they had classes for that. I never did participate
in training. I wished I would have, but I didn't because I worked a yard crew
garden. I loved to garden, it was outdoors, and I'd be out there at 59 years old,
shoveling snow in the middle of winter. I'm doing all right. I'd be shoveling and
throwing that snow. (Robert Jordan)

He also noted:

Never even thought about it [college courses] inside. I heard about the college
courses. If they would have still been offering it [college courses], I probably
would have started college then, but since they didn't offer it, I just didn't even
think about it. My concern - getting back out, was a job. That's what every man
thinks about, is a job. What am I going to do? How is society going to accept
me, a felon, with work. When I was in prison I read a lot of books. Thousands of
books. It preoccupied my time. (Robert Jordan)

He is a first generation part-time student, feels like he needs school in his life to
be successful, and feels closer to his family as a student. He was encouraged to go to
school by another parolee staying at the transitional housing program they lived at the
time he started school.

There was a guy at the housing program that had been going [to college], and I
had talked to him and he directed me...as a matter of fact, he brought me a
[schedule/registration] book. I sat down and started looking through it and so
then I started making out a little schedule. It was a guy that was already there,
that was already in [school], but now he's messed up. (Robert Jordan)

Regarding motivation for attending college, he noted:
I had more freedom in prison than I did at the [transitional] housing program and I didn't like it. But...nothing I could do about it, unless I got out, so at the time I didn't have the job yet. I'm thinking I'm still out looking for work every day...well, all but the weekends, and getting nowhere. I was knocking on the door, but nothing was opening...so I'm talking to some other guys that are going to college, and I'm thinking, well, there are no jobs. I might as well go do this. Get some knowledge, training, and see if I can better myself. So that's when college came into play so I can get out of the housing program. The fastest way I could see out of that program was through college. (Robert Jordan)

He met with a college counselor and the college Success Center staff prior to enrolling in classes.

I met with a counselor in Success Center first. The two greatest people [at the college] that helped me the most are at Success Center...and then another counselor. If I've got any questions, any one of them I can call, and go see and they'll talk to me, show me what I've got to do, how I've got to do it. (Robert Jordan)

He earned 3.75 grade point average (GPA) his first semester at college and was in his second semester. He was taking classes for an electrical technology associate’s degree. Classes he had taken or was currently taking include English, math, history, and computers. He received a certificate from Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society and is honored to have the certificate. He was also working at a part-time job. As a college student, he feels like he is closer to his family, busy and more positive about his situation.
I was out almost a year, close to 11 months, before I got a job. ... And two days before classes started, this employer called and wanted to know if I wanted to go to work. This woman gave me a job. When I went in for the interview, and on my application I put down part time, because I also put I will be going to school...and so she's worked around my schedule. She's worked with me. She's been really a great help. I'm staying there. She took a chance and gave me a job, and I won't let her down. I'm so happy just to have a job, I don't care what I do, as long as I'm working. I am so tickled to have a job. If she wanted me to scrub floors or - well, one day she asked me, "Would you mind going out and scraping ice off the sidewalk at the handicapped area?" Whatever you need done. Whatever, I don't care, I'll do it. (Robert Jordan)

He noted being a college student has improved his parole experience.

Being in college and on parole....Actually, it's helped me. ... It keeps my mind preoccupied, it keeps me preoccupied, and between it and work there's no time to do anything else. Keeps me busy. I'm at six [credit hours]. I had six credit hours scheduled and I added it up...my first semester I went full time, 12 credit hours...and I was working. (Robert Jordan)

He likes the community college environment and all of his classes because staff is helpful and the social aspect of school.

I love it [school]. A good environment. The classmates, no matter how old, I get along with all of them. Just the people. I enjoy the people, and everybody - they're friendly. I have yet to run into anybody that was snotty or not helpful. My classes out at rural campus I liked really well, because of the people... and a
couple of them said, "Hey, why don't you be my tutor in math?" And I just don't have the time...but it made me feel good. (Robert Jordan)

He prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to home and lack of vehicle. He had to take public transportation [bus] to and from the rural campus. He rides his bicycle to and from his job. He considers studying/homework, location of the rural campus, and transportation a challenge, as well as balancing time for school and his part time job and parole appointments.

I was riding my bike to and from work. I was on a bus to go to school. A coworker picking me up for work in the winter, because I was going in at 4:00 in the morning, which meant I got up at 2:00 a.m., was on the bike at 3:00 a.m. and got there about 10 minutes to 4:00. I worked until 3:00 p.m. and pedaled home. Classes were in between days working. Mondays and Wednesdays. (Robert Jordan)

Robert Jordan noted further challenges:

My major challenge is finding the proper study time. I'm having trouble maintaining it [studying]. I get it in...if I don't use it, it's like it's gone. Then I have to go back and I have to retrace my steps and reread it. That's why I'm thinking about getting a digital recorder so that while I'm in class and everything that's said then I can go back, listen to it. I study at home, time wise. I have my own room...it's just I have this trouble with turning off TV and sitting down and just doing it. And the other day I was reading a history book, and I'm reading...the next thing I know I wake up going "oh..." I'd catch myself nodding
off quite often in the history book. This is the last history course I have to take.

(Robert Jordan)

He also considers special parole conditions which restrict computer usage a challenge:

It's the only access I have to a computer...at school....I cannot, can't have one at home until off parole. I can use a computer at certain public places and here downtown campus, or the community college rural campus. I'm limited to time also on computers. (Robert Jordan)

Robert noted changes in technology since going to prison as a challenge for him:

When I was in school, there was no such thing as a calculator. I'm doing computers. It's just driving me crazy so far. I'm scared to death of it, and for the longest time I was afraid I was going to push the wrong button and I'd mess it up,

And I'm getting past that, but I've still got a lot to learn. So one of my classes this semester is keyboarding and my biggest fear with the keyboarding, 25 words a minute. (Robert Jordan)

He felt his family encourages him to complete more college courses. He felt school is a positive part of his life and that he is different than he was prior to going to prison and attending college. Attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison. “Attending community college will help from returning to prison. Oh yeah. Anybody that doesn't feel that way, there's something wrong with them,” said Robert Jordan.

His goals for the future are to obtain an associate’s degree and to be discharged
from parole. “Getting off parole is the major and main goal and also associates in
electrical technology,” said Robert Jordan. Robert Jordan was discharged from parole
since the time of our interview.

**Chapter Four Summary**

This concludes the individual descriptions and narratives of the participants. Now let us turn to chapter five which discusses analysis of themes and sub-themes identified from the interview transcriptions, and suggestions for the community college identified by one participant.
CHAPTER V
EMERGENT THEMES

Units of meaning and themes were identified for all interview transcriptions and cross analyzed with one another.

Initially, 36 themes were identified under three main categories: Educational experiences before prison, educational experiences within prison, and current educational experiences. After data reduction, seven themes (and some sub-themes) from interview transcriptions were identified. Themes and sub-themes are defined as those categories with five or more interviewees expressing similar experiences. All themes and sub-themes were reviewed for similarities in content and/or salient points. After further data reduction, major themes and sub-themes were identified.

Major themes from the data include: (1.0) parolees enrolled in community college like the college environment, taking college classes & the social aspect; (2.0) parolees enrolled in community college are role models for their families; (3.0) parolees enrolled in community college are different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, learning something, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences); (4.0) parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by parent(s) to take college classes prior to being released to the community; (5.0) for parolees enrolled in community college, the main challenge of being a college student is studying/homework; (6.0) for parolees enrolled in community college, goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment, and (7.0) parolees enrolled in community college had no
encouragement by MDOC/MPRI to take college classes prior to being released to the community. These main themes and various sub-themes are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Top Findings of the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.0</th>
<th>Parolees enrolled in community college like the college environment, taking college classes &amp; the social aspect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Attending college has improved parole experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>All community college staff and teachers are helpful and positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>They met and worked directly with college Vice President prior to enrolling in college and he is very encouraging/supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Prefer downtown campus due to closer proximity to home and some have transportation issues to travel to rural campus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.0</th>
<th>Parolees enrolled in community college are role models for their families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Families encourage/support them taking college classes now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Most are first generation college students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.0</th>
<th>Parolees enrolled in community college are different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, learning something, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Taking college classes keeps them busy and will help them from returning to prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>School is their life &amp;/or need school in their lives to be successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Most earned at least a 3.5 GPA in college and are in an Associate's or Bachelor's degree program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.0</th>
<th>Parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by parent(s) to take college classes prior to being released to the community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Encouraged by extended family (Uncles, Aunts, Nephews) to attend college and extended family had attended (or currently attended) college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Growing up, most lived in dysfunctional homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Most had a difficult childhood, but K-12 school was encouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.a</td>
<td>Most raised by single parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.b</td>
<td>Most siblings completed high school diploma and some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.c</td>
<td>Most liked K-12 school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.d</td>
<td>Most did well in K-12 school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.e</td>
<td>Most had a job prior to going to prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.f</td>
<td>Most had a group of friends that did well in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.g</td>
<td>Most also had a group of friends that did poorly in school (street/gang friends)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 5.0 | For parolees enrolled in community college, the main challenge of being a college student is studying/homework. |

| 6.0 | For parolees enrolled in community college, goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.0</th>
<th>Parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by MDOC/MPRI to take college classes prior to being released to the community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Most parolees feel MDOC/MPRI should encourage college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Aware of education available in prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.a</td>
<td>Some completed some education in prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.b</td>
<td>Most completed work experience in prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>For some, attending college was a goal upon release from prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Some might have taken college courses in prison (if funded and encouraged).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 now provides these major themes and sub-themes identified from the eleven interview transcriptions, as connected to each participant in the study.

Table 5

**Major Themes and Sub-themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JR  Keisha John Q Mike Lawrence Lee John Do Tom Reynolds Payton Bugs Bunny Benjamin Franklin Robert Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Like College Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Improved Parole Exp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>College Staff are Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Worked with College VP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Prefer downtown campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Role Models for Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Families Encourage College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>First Generation Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Different as College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Busy / College helps from returning to prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>School is their life/ Need school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Earned at least 3.5 GPA/ Associates/Bach Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/ Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 Growing up, Parent did not encourage college</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Extended family attends &amp; encourages college and attends</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 Growing Up, Dysfunctional home</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 Parent(s) Encouraged K 12 School</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43a Raised by Single Parent</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43b Siblings completed school</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43c Liked K 12 school</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43d Did well at K 12 school</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43e Had a job prior to prison</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43f Friends did well in school</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43g Friends did poorly in school</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Sub-Themes</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>71</th>
<th>72</th>
<th>72a</th>
<th>72b</th>
<th>73</th>
<th>74</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Challenge of College is Studying</strong></td>
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Major Theme Narratives

The following sections describe the major themes and sub-themes identified from the eleven interview transcriptions.

Theme 1: Parolees enrolled in community college like the college environment, taking college classes and the social aspect.

All 11 parolees indicated they like the community college environment and the classes, and had positive feelings and attitudes from taking college classes. Some also indicated positive feelings from the social aspect of school. Mostly all parolees indicated no dislikes about attending the community college.

For example, JR liked most of his classes because they are fun and he learns classmates’ view points on literature. Keisha liked the small class sizes, personal relationship with teachers, and the school resources.

What I like is that the classes are so small so you have like a relationship with your teacher which is more of like hands on type help.... I really like community college because it’s a lot of resources. If you don’t know how to do something there’s tutoring, there’s computer lab. I mean there’s just everything right at your fingertips. It’s all-accessible to you. (Keisha)

As a college student, John Do feels like he is more positive about his situation.

I’m sitting down with a book. I’m not behind these bars or these fences. I’m where I saw myself when I was behind the bars and fences. It's an accomplishment to make it out of there and to go from one point to the next point and say "now I'm in class.” (John Q)
He likes the community college environment and all of his classes because they are small and more personal, and he likes a challenge. “That’s why I like school. It’s a challenge,” said John Q.

...you're learning, you're around positive people. This community college here is better ...you've got small classes, private, more personal. It’s more personal. And especially for guys getting out, it's a culture shock, just coming out...you've been gone for so long, I don't care if you did a year...things change within a year, especially in a fast-paced society like America. (John Q)

John Do liked the community college environment and all of his classes because the staff and people are helpful and comfortable to be around.

The people in general [in college], I like. The people, in general, that’s around you is more comfortable. They are comfortable to work with, you can talk to them. You can get the help that you need and people around here will guide you in the right direction. It [college] gave me a more better education. The professor I had, he was good. He explained it to you where you could understand everything. (John Do)

Mike Lawrence liked all of his classes.

I actually liked all of them [classes], even the ones that I didn’t really, I wasn’t interested in... Like the reading class, I wasn’t really interested in it, because I had that low self-esteem in that area I believe that’s the reason why I really wasn’t interested, but I still grabbed a lot out of that class. That class was wonderful, so. It don’t matter what classes I take out here, I like it. I mean I’m at a learning state of mind, so. (Mike Lawrence)
Lee liked going to college because he felt going to college was doing something to better himself, building a social network for future employment opportunities, and the teaching staff was supportive.

I like it [college] because I know I'm working towards something better for myself. I like it because the teachers take their time...like if I don't understand something, they'll take time in between classes to help me out with whatever I don't understand... besides the education, it's giving me contacts within the field. Some of the teachers and some of the guys that go to classes with me are already in the field, so it's kind of giving me a network...it's [college] just a new experience for me. I don't feel that I have to resort to the type of lifestyle that I used to live...that I can work towards something better. Yeah, going to school will help me from returning to prison. Definitely. (Lee)

As a college student, Lee feels like he is busy and more positive about his situation.

I've gotten invitations from Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society, the different events that they've had, but a lot of times other things that I have to do kind of conflict with stuff that I would like to get more involved in, but my life is so busy. It feels pretty good to receive stuff like this....Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society certificate. It's [shows me certificate] just a new experience for me. (Lee)

He likes the community college environment and all of his classes because it is fun, the social aspect, working with other students, and the support from the teacher.

I liked the camaraderie of other students coming together and helping each other, especially in the classes that I'm taking now. When we have labs, people help
people. I liked the social aspect of school. I really liked the math teacher because he wouldn't allow the class to go any further forward if more than 1 person didn't really grasp the concept of what he was teaching, so that really helped me... I liked English. It's fun. (Lee)

Tom Reynolds liked all of his classes, the teachers, and the college environment.

I like all my classes. Now that I'm here I'm glad that's the way it worked out and I enjoy learning new stuff. Teachers have always been helpful. I've never had a bad teacher in here. That was helpful and that was good. I stay motivated at school since I'm proud of being able to go to college and being able to do alright at it. It's good. Yeah. This is a good thing for me. (Tom Reynolds)

Payton likes the community college environment and all of his classes because of the social aspect and helpful college staff and teachers. “Classes I like....I like math. anything having to do with like math I like. Anything having to do with sports and stuff like that, stretching and those types of things, I like,” said Payton.

I liked how – the one thing that helped me out a lot was being able to talk to the professors. Let them know where I was at, let them know what I was doing, and being able to get access to them if I have a question or whatever. I liked that. I think it was just the whole thing of being in the school environment. You’re meeting new people; it’s a whole different experience. the whole thing to me that I really liked was that at least I’m making an effort. You’re meeting new people and finding out new stuff, you’re learning new stuff, you’re re-learning. Just more of the stimulation of your mind to be doing something productive. (Payton)
As a college student, Bugs Bunny feels more positive about his situation. He likes the community college environment and all of his classes because they are fun and he is comfortable with the teachers.

I like the environment. It was all different. It was like; when I came in here I had one frame of mind that it was all bad because I remember how it was in school, when I was going. It wasn’t about what people were doing to me, it was about what I was doing to me and so when I came in here, I told you I was scared that day… and I came in here [college] and it was, I start having fun again; laughing, and talking and it’s been good for me and I have nothing but good feelings about it. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin feels school is a positive part of his life.

For me, it has been an excellent experience and what I wouldn’t trade. I’m glad I went back to school. I’m busy. I’m glad I was given the god given chance to go back to school. It’s excellent for me, but it’s just part of what you have to do. You know, it just goes with what goes on. It’s part of life and I was bad at accepting life at life’s terms, but when you accept life on life’s terms you flow with it a little bit easier. You may not like it anymore, and you may not like being tired all the time, but you accept it because you chose it. In my case, I chose it. It wasn’t handed to me on a silver platter. They [classes] can build your future, they can make your future, but you have to want that. You have to not just want the classes, you have to want what the classes provide you and that’s a change in a lifestyle. I made an internal change, and you have to accept the changes that college will bring in your life. ...And those aren’t always going to be changes that
make your life easier. This would be my job, and thus far, I make it a job now because it is imperative that I do the best I can and I’m very fortunate. I have a 3.5 from the first semester and I’m carrying 4.00’s right now. (Benjamin Franklin) He likes the community college environment, the bookstore, and all of his classes because it is positive, staff and teachers are helpful, the social aspect, and the cost for classes is reasonable and classes are smaller.

In the community college level, I find instructors are more willing to help you at the community college. It’s more of an environmentally positive situation for somebody to get an education because everybody is there to help you. Like, I can’t use the internet because I have a parole agent who just does not let his parolees on the internet. But every instructor I’ve taken, if any computer work had to be done they’d get copies of it and give it to me. (Benjamin Franklin)

He also noted:

It’s been a good experience, because it gets me back in society. ....A little bit more in society and a little bit more in as a contributor instead of a taker. Their tuition is within a reasonable rate, I like the fact that they [bookstore] do supply you with your supplies. They have a store here where you can buy everything. I do like the smaller classrooms. The largest classroom I’ve been in, thus far, is forty. I like the support staff...Very helpful. And nobody is above helping. You can ask the dean where something is at, just as easy as you can ask other staff who works in the office, where something is at type of thing. I just like this campus. I’m hoping I can do my whole degree at this campus [downtown]. (Benjamin Franklin)
Robert Jordan likes the community college environment and all of his classes because staff is helpful and the social aspect of school.

I love it [school]. A good environment. The classmates, no matter how old, I get along with all of them. Just the people. I enjoy the people, and everybody - they're friendly. I have yet to run into anybody that was snotty or not helpful. My classes out at rural campus I liked really well, because of the people. and a couple of them said, "Hey, why don't you be my tutor in math?" And I just don't have the time... but it made me feel good. (Robert Jordan)

A few sub-themes were found within the theme of liking college and classes: (a) attending college has improved parole experience (b) all community college staff and teachers are helpful and positive, (c) they met and worked directly with the college Vice President prior to enrolling in college and felt he was encouraging and supportive to them, and (d) parolees prefer downtown campus due to closer proximity to home and some have transportation issues to travel to rural campus.

**Sub-theme 1.1: Attending college has improved parole experience.** Six parolees indicated attending college has improved their parole experience. Attending college classes has improved Lee's parole experience. "I think it's [school] having a positive effect on it [parole]. My own parole officer is probably a little less worried about how I'm doing when he sees that I'm focused on work, school...," said Lee. Payton feels attending college has improved his parole experience and he is busy.

I think it [college] made it [parole experience] easier because it gave me something to do. Not as much down time and what not. Making strides in the right direction and it fills up time, keeping me busy for the most part... So I
basically try and stay busy, load up on things to do that are basically around the
house and stuff like that instead of get back and hang out and have the car and be
jetting all over the place. My classes that I take now are basically around what has
to be done for my home health aide job. (Payton)

Robert Jordan noted being a college student has improved his parole experience.

Being in college and on parole….Actually, it's helped me. ... It keeps my mind
preoccupied, it keeps me preoccupied, and between it and work there's no time to
do anything else. Keeps me busy. I'm at six [credit hours]. I had six credit hours
scheduled and I added it up…my first semester I went full time, 12 credit
hours…and I was working. (Robert Jordan)

Attending college has improved Bugs Bunny’s parole experience.

Parole, I do what’s expected of me and beyond, because I don’t play no games
with, I’m too old to play games and get locked back up, I mean it’s just a
different, an altogether difference. I’m making wiser choices, I’m going different
places, I’m doing different things, I’m trying to be overly nice where I would
normally, my old me would have been whoo-hooing and the new me is just
different and I love the new me. I don’t know how long I’ll be around to enjoy it,
but I do enjoy me, I enjoy what I do now; making my own decisions as far as this,
that, and the other. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin also noted attending college has improved his parole experience:

Taking college courses…it makes my parole a whole lot more simpler, because
I’m busy and that’s what a parole agent wants out of you, is to know that you’re
busy. My agent has to see my grades every semester to see if I really am working
at what I’m doing. So it does keep you on your toes to a degree because there are expectations from them that “I’ve let you go to school and you better earn a 2.0 or better because I don’t expect you to flunk out.” It’s been a good experience because it gets me feel back in society. A little bit more in society and a little bit more in as a contributor instead of a taker all the time because I understand at sixty, my working market is gone real low. (Benjamin Franklin)

Sub-theme 1.2: All community college staff and teachers are helpful and positive. All 11 parolees indicated community college staff and teachers are helpful and positive. Bugs Bunny met with the college school counselor prior to enrolling in classes.

So one day I was sitting out there somewhere [in front of downtown campus college] on a bench eating me a sandwich right, and a girl come popping in the door, right, so I got up and followed her on in here. Found out she works here. And I followed her on in here, right. I said, “What office you in? Well you, you in here?” She said, “Yeah I work here.” I said, “Where is the office outside of working here, to go here?” and she said, “Right here.” You know something told me, I don’t know what told me that, but I came on in here and been here ever since. I guess I must have been sitting out there eating my sandwich thinking about coming in [into school]...and so I went on in there in the office. I sat down and filled that [enrollment form] out. I turned that in. Then I set up all of my appointments that I needed to set up and I was at them all. I enrolled here at downtown location and my counselor helped me choose classes. (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:
Me and my counselor; we sit down, we talk about everything and for the summer, I’m older, I’m almost sixty years old, so I mean I’m not, I hadn’t been used to studying in all these years, but, as time go on, I feel better, I feel more comfortable, with studying. Right now, I got study time. I got to go to my classes, go to AA, or NA, whatever I want to go to; come back, do my study. 

(Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin noted:

I like the support staff...Very helpful. And nobody is above helping. You can ask the dean where something is at, just as easy as you can ask other staff who works in the office, where something is at type of thing. I just like this campus. I’m hoping I can do my whole degree at this campus [downtown].... In the community college level, I find instructors are more willing to help you at the community college. It’s more of an environmentally positive situation for somebody to get an education because everybody is there to help you. Like, I can’t use the internet because I have a parole agent who just does not let his parolees on the internet. But every instructor I’ve taken, if any computer work had to be done they’d get copies of it and give it to me. (Benjamin Franklin)

Robert Jordan met with a college counselor and the college Success Center staff prior to enrolling in classes.

I met with a counselor in Success Center first. The two greatest people [at the college] that helped me the most are at Success Center...and then another counselor. If I’ve got any questions, any one of them I can call, and go see and
they'll talk to me, show me what I've got to do, how I've got to do it. (Robert Jordan)

**Sub-theme 1.3: They met and worked directly with college Vice President**

*prior to enrolling in college and he is very encouraging/supportive.* Eight parolees met with the college Vice President prior to enrolling in college and felt he was encouraging and supportive. Keisha and John Do met with the Vice President prior to enrolling in college. John Q met with the college Vice President, Financial Aid staff, school counselor, and Success Center staff prior to enrolling in classes.

I met with the Vice President, he's very, very encouraging. You've gotta have people like that...this school's got it. I don't know what other schools feel, but they don't give up on you here. That's why I like it. They don't give up on you. That's some deep stuff. You go to some other places, they want to give up, but they won't give up on you here unless you give up on yourself, so they push me to do what I have to do. It's part of my flame...they're fire...it's all about refinement and people either who went in, or have never went in prison, we all need to be refined, put through that fire, to be refined. (John Q)

Mike Lawrence met with the college Vice President prior to enrolling in classes.

I didn’t even know at first what program to go into....but my first classes was like math and reading. The Vice President put me in math and reading to make sure I understood it. But yeah, it started out with that and then I turned around and started looking through the class registration book. And the newest thing, I wanted to do the newest thing that’s available so I went with Wind Energy and that’s how I picked my curriculum. (Mike Lawrence)
Lee met with the college Vice President, Financial Aid staff, and school counselor prior to enrolling in classes.

I enrolled there at downtown campus. I enrolled, filled out my financial aid information, spoke with the financial aid counselor and then two weeks after that I had already had an appointment with a guidance counselor downtown, so after I met with a guidance counselor downtown I came out here [rural campus] and met with the Vice President of the college. (Lee)

Tom Reynolds met with the college Vice President and Success Center staff prior to enrolling in classes.

I came out and seen Vice President of the community college. I was referred to the Vice President. I called him and he set an appointment with me and then I came out and talked to him and he sort of pointed me which way to go. The VP did a lot of the footwork initially...enrollment. The lady here at the financial office and Success Center helped me a lot. Anybody that come out here definitely should get with the Success Center. (Tom Reynolds)

Payton met with the college counselor and Vice President prior to enrolling in classes.

Got locked up, got home, decided it was time to make a change. I talked to my parole officer. I contacted Vice President out at community college through the re-entry and they told me how to go about it and I just decided, okay. That’s what I’m going to do. I came down and enrolled and have been here ever since. If you’re trying to better yourself this is the opportunity. (Payton)
Benjamin Franklin also met with the college Vice President and Financial Aid staff prior to enrolling in classes. “He [Vice President] was right there to help me and this is the gentlemen who should’ve retired, could’ve retired, 20 years ago...but he likes what he does and I’m grateful that he’s there,” said Benjamin Franklin.

Sub-theme 1.4: They prefer downtown campus due to closer proximity to home and some have transportation issues to travel to rural campus. Six parolees indicated preferring the downtown campus since it was closer to their home and job, and some did not have a vehicle to travel to rural campus. John Do prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to his home and job. John Q also prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to home and he does not have a vehicle. He had to take the public transportation (bus) to and from the rural campus. He considers location of the rural campus and transportation a challenge. Bugs Bunny prefers the downtown campus.

So now I’m downtown now. I’m six blocks, so everything I need to do, school, treatment center, a couple of churches; the church I go to now is right over here, and that’s basically what I do. I choose not to go to the places where I know I’m going to be hurt or something bad, something happen, I’m just tired of that life. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to home and lack of vehicle. He walks to and from the downtown campus.

I just like this campus. I’m hoping I can do my whole degree at this campus. I walk to school everyday. I like the downtown location – and maybe it’s because it’s so much smaller – each of my classes have a certain amount of older people in it too. (Benjamin Franklin)
Robert Jordan considers the location of the rural campus, and transportation, a challenge. He prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to home and lack of vehicle. He had to take public transportation [bus] to and from the rural campus. He rides his bicycle to and from his job.

I was riding my bike to and from work. I was on a bus to go to school, a coworker picking me up for work in the winter, because I was going in at 4:00 in the morning, which meant I got up at 2:00 a.m., was on the bike at 3:00 a.m. and got there about 10 minutes to 4:00. I worked until 3:00 p.m. and pedaled home.

Classes were in between days working. Mondays and Wednesdays. (Robert Jordan)

**Theme 2: Parolees enrolled in community college are role models for their families.**

As the second major theme, eight parolees indicated they are role models for their families (children, siblings, and/or significant other) by taking college classes. All, but one, indicated having children and most were not living with their children at the time of the study. “My wife and I had seven children. All my children are grown because my baby is 26,” said Benjamin Franklin. JR lived with family and had one son. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his son.

I take pre elementary movement class just basically for my son... it's teaching him some movements. He's 6....When I get up for school, he get up for school. Well, he get up when I get up anyway. But when I put him on the bus, I leave and come to class. Going to college helps out a lot 'cause it keep me off the street. Six years ago if he'd seen me he'd be like “dang” and he'd thought it was okay to do
the same things. But now it's just different, you have to be a role model some type of way. (JR)

Keisha lived with her mother, and had one son. One reason she takes college courses is to be a good role model for her son.

Basically my life is just school. Like I don’t have no outside life. I don’t do anything. Like, I take my son to school. All of my classes are during his school time, so I just go to class and pick him up from school, go home and do homework together. (Keisha)

She feels she is a role model for her older brother since she encouraged him to also take community college courses and, as a result, he had enrolled in college and taken some courses.

Like for him [brother], he had so much kids, he wanted to do something with his self as well and I actually talked him into going to school. I told him, “you don’t have anything else to do, instead of being out in the streets and stuff, that’s just gonna cause problems, you might end up back.” So now he’s like, on the right track. Like he’s following behind me and I’m the younger sister. (Keisha)

John Q lived alone and had two sons that did not live with him. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his sons.

I have two sons...6 & 4....It's like, what type of role model - I've got to set standards for them that my father wasn't able to set because he wasn't in my life. It's more important what I am going to do to set the standards for my two sons, so it's important for me to be like "Hey, I got this, and you can do it too." I'm their father. I know I'm doing something that's going to better my future in the long
run, not the short run. And not only my future, my kids' and their kids', and the community overall...the world. I always tell them "go to school, because I'm going to school"...as long as they know I'm going to school. (John Q)

John Q also noted:

...because this is the difference between going into my kids' life and being negative, and it's the difference between going into their life and being positive. I want to go full positive, so I think school will help me get there. Education will help me be able to provide. (John Q)

Mike Lawrence lived with his mother and had one son who was not living with him. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his two sisters.

I've already encouraged my younger sister to go back to school and she did it...it's a nursing school for nurse's aide certificate. My other sister....she's terrible right now, but hopefully, later on in life, she'll straighten up. I hope that she follows me and my younger sister. (Mike Lawrence)

Lee lived alone and had three children who did not live with him. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his children.

I do have 3 children, ages 14,12,10; but at this time I haven't been able to spend much time with them. Me and their mother don't get along. I think they're happy I am in school. They're doing good. They're doing really good. Their mother graduated from high school, so education is a big thing for her...and it's a big thing for me, so....(Lee)

John Do lived with his wife and one son. One reason he takes college courses is
to be a good role model for his son. He is also a role model for his wife and step daughter. “They [wife and her daughter] got to the 12th grade and didn’t finish. They was going to get they GED and they started working so, that got put off so,” said John Do.

I live with my wife and son. I got a son to raise and a wife to take care of and I can’t do that by slipping back into that old ways. My son is 10…when I come home from prison, my son was bad in school. He had like 43 school referrals. ...Because he liked to fight all of the time and people always messed with him and he put his hands on them. But since I’ve been home within this year and a half, and he’s been going to school since I’m home... no trouble. I know it’s a big improvement since I’m home and teaching him what’s right and what’s wrong. And I feel that if he has a problem with anybody, somebody puts their hand on him, talk to the teacher, I talk to the teacher. Putting your hands on them is not going to solve anything. (John Do)

Bugs Bunny lived in a treatment center and had a wife and two children who did not live with him, but he visits often. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his children.

I had me a couple small kids [ten and eleven years old] and then that’s another thing that made me think about going to school and bettering myself, their grades, my children’s grades. If I could tell my child to do something or ask them to do something, right, why can’t I do it?...and so that’s what I did, I told my daughter I need for you to get a B out of math. This, this, this, this semester, and she was like, “Daddy that’s hard,!” and I asked her “If I can do it, can you do it?” She
said, “Yeah!” me and her [daughter] are in math right now. So when I looked at her math score, I said, “Wow. I’ve got to hustle.” So I’ve been in that math lab every day, bringing my grades up; I’m going to have a B by the end of it, trust me. I’ve learned to! (Bugs Bunny)

Bugs Bunny also noted:

She [daughter] loves it! [that I am in school]. She loves it because I kind of reflect on it. ... I know what the square and square roots is and all of that. But see, I didn’t know none of that; we didn’t have to know that back then so. School helps to build relationship with my daughter. I have a son and he don’t like school, but I’m encouraging him. He likes the idea of it [dad in school] and when he has homework, he’ll call me up and ask me different questions and stuff so me and him sit on the phone for a minute and talk about it. I’m trying to let him know that dad is changing. (Bugs Bunny)

Robert Jordan lived alone and had two grown adult children who did not live with him. One reason he takes college courses is to be a good role model for his children. It’s just me. I don't have anybody to worry about but me. I thought I was alone.

My son finally called me. He's [son] 38 years old but they still live together [with his mother]. I have a 42-year-old [daughter] that's being diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, and she's [ex wife] put up with it for a long time...and that is my biggest regret. Now we're keeping in track - in touch. They're struggling. So every once in a while I send him [son] some money. (Robert Jordan)

He also noted:
And I want to go down and see him after I get off parole, but it's like I told him, I'm coming back here because I'm going to finish school. That's too important to me. Hopefully by then I can have my associate's degree. I keep sending him copies of certificates from work from a retail sales training program. I took it, didn't get paid, but I took it anyhow, for the knowledge and the experience. I kept thinking, "This is going to open up doors that I would not otherwise knock on, because in my life I've never done retail sales. I successfully completed it. I have a certificate for a professional sales associate. The work that I've done in the past I'm knocking on doors but they're not opening. I can't get nowhere." Now, through this, it's going to open up a whole new set of doors that I otherwise would not even try. So this gives me a different avenue to go look for work...and that's one of the reasons my current employer hired me, because of that certificate. I sent him [son] a copy of my training certificates. I sent him a copy of everything, every certificate. I got one for CPR and I have a certificate for an academic honor society Phi Theta Kappa....because of a 3.75 GPA. (Robert Jordan)

A few sub-themes were found within the theme of family role model: (a) families encourage/support them to take more college classes (after being released into the community from prison), and (b) most are first generation college students.

Sub-theme 2.1: Families encourage/support them taking college classes now.

All 11 parolees indicated that their families encouraged and/or supported them taking college classes after being released from prison. Keisha’s mother and aunt encouraged her to attend college classes. “My mom, she encouraged going to school and getting an
education. She has a bachelors and she wanted me and my brothers to continue our schooling,” said Keisha.

My mom and my aunt are like two of the people that I look up to, and so I was very encouraged by them doing it [completing college]. I felt like I could do it or I should, I needed to do it. Those are the two people that I look up to and they would push, like they were a great backbone and support system. I went off from them. (Keisha)

Keisha feels like she is busy and feels closer to her family as a student. “It’s [community college] encouraging of family relationships,” said Keisha. Lee feels closer to his family as a student. “They [family] love it that I am in school and when they see how good I’m doing it makes them really happy,” said Lee. Mike Lawrence’s family encourages him to complete more college courses.

Yes. Most definitely my mom knows I am in school…she stays with me right now. She’s [mom] very proud. She’s proud that I made the change in my life to go back to school. My mom encourages me going to school now. (Mike Lawrence)

John Do’s family supports and encourages him to complete more college courses.

They [family] like it! They love it! They like it. They like it a lot…that I am in school. I had my wife’s daughter was helping me out and showing me how to do it [math]. And then I had bought this calculator and it shows you everything on it. My wife, she’s pretty smart and she helps me with my math every now and then if I needed help when I needed the help. But she didn’t need a calculator; she can just go out of her brain. They would tell me if I needed any help, or whatever,
they would help me. I couldn't get on the computer and type myself and so...I would write it out and just have them [wife and her daughter] type it for me.... they [wife and her daughter] got to the 12th grade and didn’t finish. They was going to get they GED and they started working so, that got put off so. (John Do)

Payton’s family supports and encourages him to complete more college courses.

She [mom] loves that I’m in school. The funny thing is that I was so glad about the grades that I was getting and I was telling her and she looked at me and she’s like, well you’re not stupid. I was like, Ma! I carried a 4.0 through the semester! And she’s like, yeah? I’m like, well you don’t seem that happy. She says, “You aren’t stupid! It doesn’t surprise me.” You know? So if I have to get out here some time or something, just let her know. If I have to get down to the school or what not early for some reason or something, you know, she’s pretty much just, okay cool. Family has been really – well, as much stuff as we’ve been through and that I’ve put them through, they’ve stood there and been behind me. (Payton)

Benjamin Franklin lived with his wife and had seven grown adult children who did not live with him. He felt his wife and mentoring program encourage him to complete more college courses.

The best thing I can use as a viewpoint is that I go to the [mentoring] transformation group over at that church. She’s [wife] proud of what I’m doing. She’s glad to see that I’m working hard at it and that I am doing my best, because unfortunately I have not always used my intelligence to the best of my ability. I’ve negated my own intelligence by being a fool. (Benjamin Franklin)
Sub-theme 2.2: Many parolees are first generation college students. Six parolees indicated they are first generation college students. JR, Lee, and Mike Lawrence are first generation college students. John Q is also a first generation student and feels closer to his family as a student. “I'm the first young man in general to have some type of education out of all my family, so it's very important to me,” John Q said. Mike Lawrence’s mother completed her high school diploma, but school was challenging for her. He was unsure of his grandmother’s education level. “My grandma, I asked questions about her education, but I don’t think I ever got a good answer,” said Mike Lawrence. John Do’s siblings, and he, completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and received high school diplomas. “They all graduated high school,” said John Do. Robert Jordan is a first generation college student. “First generation college student...all the way around,” said Robert Jordan.

Theme 3: Parolees enrolled in community college are different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, learning something, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences).

As the third major theme, ten parolees indicated they feel they are different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences), and more serious about school. All 11 parolees indicated they are learning something new by taking classes in college and that college opens their mind to new opportunities and ideas. When talking about being a role model for his son, JR indicated he was different as a college student than he was prior to going into prison.

Going to college helps out a lot 'cause it keep me off the street. Six years ago if he’d [son] seen me he’d be like “dang” and he’d thought it was okay to do the
same things. But now it's just different, you have to be a role model some type of way. (JR)

John Q feels school is a positive part of his life now and that he is different than he was prior to going to prison and attending college.

…it's like places like school save you, give you something to balance off of, to challenge yourself with, and you knowing that you're doing something positive, that you are contributing to your community in a positive way. You can give back. It's a center of networking; you meet people, people want to meet you…it's a place where you can just check yourself… Once you are around a different environment and you learn that it's a better environment, you don't want to go to that other environment again… and if I know better for myself I choose education. (John Q)

Mike Lawrence feels that he is different now as a college student than he was prior to going to prison.

I made the change in my life to go back to school. ….And want to do things in life and be active. My life has did a totally 180, though. I don’t believe in no type of criminal activity no more. I avoid as much negative as possible. I only hang out with people that have stuff going for them and that’s it…I have things to live for. I value life now. There’s a reason why I’m out here now. I have to have a reason and it’s not really like that with; it’s different now. I don’t even want to think or go on the same streets that I was on. I live way out in the country now and so I ran away from that environment. I ran away from everything because I was seriously about, I wanted to change my life. I knew I failed so and that’s what made me
want to change. Being in community college will help keep me from returning to prison. (Mike Lawrence)

Lee feels school is a positive part of his life now and that he is different than he was prior to going to prison and attending college.

I like it [college] because I know I'm working towards something better for myself. I like it because the teachers take their time...like if I don't understand something, they'll take time in between classes to help me out with whatever I don't understand... besides the education, it's giving me contacts within the field. Some of the teachers and some of the guys that go to classes with me are already in the field, so it's kind of giving me a network...it's [college] just a new experience for me. I don't feel that I have to resort to the type of lifestyle that I used to live...that I can work towards something better. (Lee)

John Do feels school is a positive part of his life and that he is different now as a college student than he was prior to going to prison. Attending college helped him receive a promotion at his job.

...the math helped me a lot because now I’m promoted at my job in retail, I’m the head of department .and I price all of the stores. so I’m hired in now, full time, where I get paid time off, free eye and free dental so, everything just falls right into place. (John Do)

He also noted:

This is a change from that lifestyle that I was living, cause my lifestyle that I was living just was really dealing drugs or using drugs. So I had to change my whole lifestyle because it landed me in prison and making bad decisions. .. I enjoy going
to school now, I enjoy the classes I’m taking, so it’s making me a better person every day. It’s something different. It’s something new experience. When I figure, if I had never went to college, there’s a lot of things I wouldn’t have done. So, it’s time to get out and branch out and do different things. (John Do)

Bugs Bunny feels that he is different than he was prior to going to prison and attending college.

You know I changed something. I got a place where I can go now, where I feel comfortable at least six days a week. I come here [college] and stay till it open and close and I got the right to do that. I come here with my little bag, try to have a couple dollars in my pocket so I can eat and I enjoy being around people. And there’s a lot of people in here that’s older than me or younger than me, and I enjoy it and I enjoy that because I’m doing something different. I ain’t out here with the drunks and the drugees all of the time; I don’t even go that way. It’s serious, that’s serious! That’s what I chose...Since I’ve been out, I refuse to do things that, I refuse to go places that I know that will hurt me. I refuse to do things that I know will hurt me. I changed my life around, all the way around, 360. I’ve been on parole one year. I just put in to get off early. I live in treatment right now. I’ve been in treatment, ever since the day I got out; by my own hand. When I got out of prison, every place I knew to, everybody I knew, and every place I went, they were drinking and doing something behind them doors and just how long do you think I actually would have lasted just living that kind of, going places where I know that’s going on. You know I didn’t have one friend. You know, because when you drink and you’re getting high. And so reality really set in now because
I’m out here now in the streets. I really don’t have any place to really go that I feel comfortable laying my head down and waking up in the morning. It’s a difference in me. I choose not to go to the places where I know I’m not going to be hurt or something bad, something happen, I’m just tired of that life. (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

I’m doing different things, I’m trying to be overly nice where I would normally, my old me would have been whoo-hooing and the new me is just different and I love the new me. I don’t know how long I’ll be around to enjoy it, but I do enjoy me, I enjoy what I do now; making my own decisions as far as this, that and the other. I don’t have time to go to prison. I don’t drink. That’s different for me. That’s different for me... I don’t have time to go to prison. I don’t drink... I don’t drive and drink no more, I mean, reality sets in at these meetings. I got a sponsor, you know I got people, I got a 100, 200 people I can call around here right now, “Hey man, I’m feeling a little depressed today, you want to drink some coffee? Yeah, let’s go.” That’s different for me. That’s different for me and I got the best parole officer in the world. (Bugs Bunny)

A few sub-themes were found within the theme of feeling different as students: (a) taking college classes keeps them busy and will help them from returning to prison (keep off the streets and out of trouble), (b) school is their life (or a part of their life) & feel they need school in their lives to be successful, and (c) most parolees earned at least a 3.5 GPA in college and are in an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree program.
Sub-theme 3.1: Taking college classes keeps them busy and will help them from returning to prison. All 11 parolees indicated taking college classes will help them from returning to prison (keep off the streets and out of trouble). Mostly all indicated taking college classes keeps them busy. “Being in community college will help keep me from returning to prison,” said Mike Lawrence. JR feels school is a part of his life now and that he is different now as a college student than he was prior to going to prison. Attending college courses helps keep him out of trouble and from returning to prison.

[Attending college] Keeps me out of trouble, keeps me off the street....And it give me something to look forward to. Going to college helps out a lot 'cause it keep me off the street. It [school] give me a better variety to open up my mind to something different... If I wasn't in school and didn't have a job I'd be back in the streets probably wanting to sell drugs or stuff like that. (JR)

she is different than she was prior to going to prison and attending college.

Keisha feels attending college courses helps keep her from returning to prison.

I think that being in college will help me to not return to prison... not just college classes but yeah I think college has a lot to do with it because it gives for me, it gives me a totally different mind frame. Like I don’t have a lot of free time and just be out and do crazy stuff or and then that comes with age to and I’m just more focused, I more focused on doing and get my education and better myself too. I look at too that it will prevent me from going back [to prison]. I think that it’s a great experience. It makes me feel like, I’m doing something with myself opposed to hanging around, hoping and waiting for a job. So this is like my job, I
look at school as a job because it will take care of me and it helps me with my son. (Keisha)

John Q feels like he is busy and more positive about his situation as a college student. Attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison.

Education, that's the only thing that's saving me right now. It's opening up doors….I forgave myself. I still go through little guilt trips for what I did, but the things I'm doing now are ten times fuller. I'm involved in so much. I'm really busy. School keeps you busy. It keeps your mind on something your mind should be on, not necessarily something that your mind shouldn't be on. (John Q)

Lee feels that attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison.

Yeah, going to school will help me from returning to prison. Definitely. Because I don't feel that I have to resort to the type of lifestyle that I used to live…that I can work towards something better. I use to be just hanging out, partying, just working here and there, and just basically doing nothing, really. I think some of them [students here] are still the “hanging out” people, but I just pick my friends a little wiser now. (Lee)

John Do feels that attending college helps keep him from returning to prison.

College classes keeps me out of trouble and it keeps me focused on the right things. But for me to say college will keep me out of prison, it’s all about me and what’s in me, and I know I don’t want to go back down that road, so I know what I have to do to maintain it. It’s basically change: people, places and things. …And hang around people that’s positive that’s in my life instead of people that’s
negative. So if anybody don’t have anything positive going on, I won’t deal with them. I don’t be around them. (John Do)  

Tom Reynolds feels that attending college helps keep him from returning to prison. Educated people and people with good jobs are probably statistically a lot less apt to commit crimes. Maybe they're just more well rounded or settled. Going to school will help me from returning to prison… I'm pretty simple. Buy a house. Have a nice vehicle. I don't need a lot but I think I'll be able to afford those things. I mean if I follow up on my education and end up with a good job I can have way more than what I need. College classes will help me reach my goals...through knowledge. I mean, without knowledge, that's the whole key. Sure they give you a piece of paper that says, here I'm this or that, but really in the job it comes down to what you learn. I might get a Bachelor degree. (Tom Reynolds)  

Payton feels school is a positive part of his life and that he is different now as a college student than he was prior to going to prison. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals and from returning to prison. When I first got back, I wanted it [drivers license] and I went back and found out all this stuff I had to go through and I kind of decided, well maybe it’s a good thing I didn’t have my license right away because a lot of freedom. So I basically try and stay busy, load up on things to do that are basically around the house and stuff like that instead of get back and hang out and have the car and be jetting all over the place. So I kind of put that off for a while….It [being in college] will
help me from going back [to prison], because just keeping me busy. It's cool.

(Payton)

Bugs Bunny indicated school is a positive part of his life now and attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison. “Definitely! Definitely! being in college will help me from going back to prison,” said Bugs Bunny. Benjamin Franklin indicated that attending college courses will help him from returning to prison.

Taking college classes will help to not return to prison if you want them to. They [classes] can build your future, they can make your future, but you have to want that. You have to not just want the classes, you have to want what the classes provide you and that’s a change in a lifestyle. It [college] can help you from returning to prison, but you have to want that. (Benjamin Franklin)

Benjamin also noted:

I will keep my time busy. I would like to help other people coming out of prison and help them see that if you can get yourself into a positive attitude and stay there, that there is no reason that you can’t stay positive and help other people. See that some of us feel that we owe it to society to do good. I would like to mentor eventually. When I’m all done with my degree, or even before I get done with my degree, once I’m off of parole, I wouldn’t mind working as a tutor.

(Benjamin Franklin)

Robert Jordan indicated that attending college courses helps keep him from returning to prison. “Attending community college will help from returning to prison. Oh yeah. Anybody that doesn't feel that way, there's something wrong with them,” said Robert Jordan.
Sub-theme 3.2: School is their life and/or need school in their lives to be successful. All 11 parolees indicated that school is their life (or a part of their life) now, and feel they need college in their lives to be successful. “Education is a part of my life,” said John Q. Bugs Bunny talked about his plans for college classes in the summer and noted if too much of a challenge, he will plan to spend more time at school to work on his classes.

I did public speaking for the summer. I did History of Rock and Roll for the summer…With just two classes this summer. In the fall, I took three. If it’s a challenge, I’ll live at the school. And I’ll get through. I’m gonna get through. I know that this is something that I love doing. It’s what I want to do right now. (Bugs Bunny)

He noted that school is a part of his life now.

I love school. It’s a part of my life now. I haven’t had a problem in this school since I’ve been here. As far as classes go, I’m comfortable with my teachers. I give a lot of respect, but I kind of demand respect as being almost sixty years old, I like to be treated like I’m sixty years old. Me and my teachers get along fine; if I got something to ask them, quite naturally I got a lot of questions to ask because it’s a lot that I have missed so, if they’re good with it and I’m good with it, we just, we kind of click on something. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin feels he needs to school now in order to be successful and obtain employment.

I view it much more seriously now because it’s a means to an end to me now. Back then it was a means to further my work experience, but right now I can’t
work because I have degenerative arthritis in my back and knees and I had a kidney removal for cancer, so I draw SSI. For me it’s hopefully a way to do something, even in my retirement years. (Benjamin Franklin)

**Sub-theme 3.3: Most parolees earned at least a 3.5 GPA in college and are in an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree program.** Nine parolees indicated earning at least a 3.5 grade point average (GPA) in college and are enrolled in an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree program. John Q, JR, Keisha, and Payton earned a 3.5 GPA average for classes completed at the community college. Benjamin Franklin earned a 3.7 GPA average and was taking classes for business and accounting associate’s degrees. Robert Jordan earned 3.75 GPA his first semester at college and was in his second semester. He was taking classes for an electrical technology associate’s degree. He received a certificate from Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society and is honored to have the certificate.

Lee earned a 3.7 GPA his first two semesters at college and was in his third semester. He noted there is a certificate program for HVAC, but he wanted an associate’s degree.

They have a certificate for it, but I don't want the certificate. I want the associate’s degree to get a better job. I'm thinking that with the HVAC program, there are only two classes that separates that from the Building Maintenance trade, and once I finish with the Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning, just take the two classes that are different between the Building Maintenance and try to get a double degree. (Lee)
Lee received a certificate from Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society, is honored to have the certificate, and showed the certificate to me in the interview. As a college student, he feels like he is busy and more positive about his situation.

I've gotten invitations from Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society, the different events that they've had, but a lot of times other things that I have to do kind of conflict with stuff that I would like to get more involved in, but my life is so busy. It feels pretty good to receive stuff like this….Phi Theta Kappa-academic honor society certificate. It's [shows me certificate] just a new experience for me. 

(Lee)

Bugs Bunny earned at least a 3.5 GPA his first semester at college and was in his second semester. He was taking classes for business associate’s degree.

My last grade that I got was a 3.5. That was last semester. Actually, that’s the lowest grade I got is a 3.5. I’m going for business. Associate’s in Business. [Business Program will] help me know how to spend my money instead of having somebody else spend my money and write my payments and papers and all that down when I don’t know where my money. Then I can get back and figure that out for myself. I want to know how to do that for myself, so that way, I can bypass the accountant. (Bugs Bunny)

**Theme 4: Parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by parent(s) to take college classes prior to being released to the community.**

As the fourth major theme, eight parolees indicated their parent(s) did not encourage or support them taking college courses. Robert Jordan’s mother and father raised him and family did not encourage attending college when he was in high school.
Our family was not with money. We had six kids. My dad was the only one working. He drank, wasn't home all that much. Most of my family was pretty good in school. I've got a couple of sisters and a brother just shy of being genius. I mean, as far as I'm concerned, they were smart in school, and they were good in school. I was good in school, but I just didn't care. I just had an attitude I didn't care. No one encouraged me to go to school or college...nobody to encourage me. (Robert Jordan)

Benjamin Franklin’s mother and father raised them and family encouraged attending school K-12, but did not encourage college.

For me, school was basically a refuge. I grew up in a very alcoholic home and my mother was also a very abusive person and power controlling. For me, school was an outlet. I received high school diploma in 1968...I graduated with honors...I think education was more important to my mother, but there were other problems that made it next to impossible for me to ever get on her good side. I’ll simply just leave it at that. She didn’t like left handed people and I’m left handed. Dad never discouraged, but he never encouraged. In some ways, my dad resented us getting a education higher than his because he wanted to show the way...back then in the eras where men show the way. (Benjamin Franklin)

Several sub-themes were found within the theme of lack of encouragement for college from parents while they were in high school: (a) many, however, were encouraged by extended (or other) family (Uncles, Aunts, Nephews) to attend college and extended family had attended (or currently attended) college, (b) growing up, most lived in dysfunctional homes, (c) most had a difficult childhood, but K-12 school was
encouraged, (d) most were raised by single parents, (e) most had siblings that completed high school diploma and some college, (f) most parolees liked K-12 school, (g) most did well in school, (h) had a job prior to going to prison, (i) most had a group of friends that did well in school, (j) and most also had a group of friends that did poorly in school (street/gang friends).

**Sub-theme 4.1: Most (or many) were encouraged by extended family (uncles, aunts, nephews) to attend college and extended family had attended (or currently attended) college.** Seven parolees were encouraged to attend college by extended family members (uncles, aunts, nephews) and most had extended family that had attended (or currently attended) college. JR’s cousin completed some college courses. Keisha’s aunt was in the process of completing a doctoral degree.

> My mom and my aunt are like two of the people that I look up to, and so I was very encouraged by them doing it [completing college]. I felt like I could do it or I should, I needed to do it. Those are the two people that I look up to and they would push, like they were a great backbone and support system. I went off from them. (Keisha)

Lee’s nephew attends college and encouraged him to also attend college.

> My nephew graduated from high school and he's a real active member in our family as far as educationally, so he's been going to college for the last couple of years trying to get a business degree at the community college, and that kind of was like, you know, that kind of pushed me a little bit more towards doing it. And then he told me how easy it was to enroll, so I was like, "Okay, well, I'll just go down, fill out the enrollment paper and speak with the counselor.” (Lee)
Payton’s aunt, uncle, and mom encouraged him to attend college.  

Everyone said that I should go [to college] because I didn’t exactly know what I wanted to do. I didn’t know where I wanted to go to school and I said, ‘Well, I’m going to go ahead and try and find a job and see how that works out.” I got a job before that and then I based my schedule for classes off that job and then I came up with the job from the hospital. But yeah, they were supportive as far as me going to school. Yeah. My uncle, my mom, my aunt. (Payton)  

Bugs Bunny’s sister and nephew completed many college courses.  

Actually all of my sisters did attend some college. The one that passed recently, she was still in college. She was in college and she was like 59, 60; right up to the time she died she was working and going to college. So yeah she attended college most of her life. I don’t think my sister would have never completed, she was really intelligent. She loved school. Like she got a son like that now and he goes to school still and he’s 41. He’s been going to college all his life though; he’s been there. My sister encouraged me to go to college…. (Bugs Bunny)  

**Sub-Theme 4.2: Growing up, most lived in dysfunctional homes.** Growing up, six parolees lived in dysfunctional homes. Growing up, many times John Q’s family was homeless. His mother raised him and family/community programs encouraged him to attend school K-12 through their actions.  

My mom didn't finish her education like she should. She had 5 kids, homeless... She showed me hard work, though. I didn't want her to struggle when she got older, so that's why education is needed. My mom, we have to take care of her one day. (John Q)
Growing up, Mike Lawrence’s family was dysfunctional due to alcoholic family members, and his sisters and he were victims of assault. His mother and grandmother raised him, and family did not encourage him to attend K-12 school. He had wished someone in the schools would have looked into the dysfunctional house he was living in at the time.

All three of us kids didn’t finish school… not because they did not like school…I believe it was some other reason. Too much other activity going on around them so…my younger sister, I think she wanted to complete school. She did hang out with the wrong crowd and it was like we drew negative people. (Mike Lawrence)

His mother completed her high school diploma, but school was challenging for her. He was unsure of his grandmother’s education level. “My grandma, I asked questions about her education, but I don’t think I ever got a good answer,” said Mike Lawrence.

Growing up, Lee’s mother left his father, five siblings, and he. Lee’s father raised him and encouraged him to attend school K-12 and college; however when his father remarried, things fell apart and he moved out of the house at 16 years old. He moved to the other side of town with another relative, but was not able to attend the school on the other side of town since he was listed under his father’s guardianship. As a result, he rode his bicycle across town to go to school; however when winter season started and the snow filled the streets, he was not able to ride his bike anymore and applied for emancipation from his father so he could attend the school where he was living at the time, but he was not able to get emancipated and so he dropped out of school.
School was pretty important in my house. We had to keep good grades. Most of our time as growing up, going to school, my dad was really focused on us getting an education, so we spent most of our time focused on keeping our grades up. I liked the [school] social environment, mostly. (Lee)

Lee also noted:

My mother and my father separated when I was about 2 years old. My father remarried. When he remarried, I was not able to complete school because...differences with my father and his rules, his household rules...me and him stopped getting along at the age of 16, so I left home. I kept trying to go to school. I started living with a family member and they lived in a different school district. I tried to get emancipated, it wouldn't work...I didn't know all the steps to do it so that I could go to school wherever I was living...They [father’s residence school district] would not let me go to school there [in the other school district], not unless I was emancipated. I couldn't change school districts without legal - them having legal guardianship or whatever...I spent a couple months on a bicycle riding back and forth across town to my old school...and then once the weather turned - once it got wintertime, I just wasn't able to do it and dropped out. (Lee)

John Do’s mother and father raised him and family encouraged him to attend school K-12. “They [family] made me go to school, I’m saying; I really didn’t like school that much but, once I got into it, I started enjoying it more. My family loved school. They encouraged me to go to school,” said John Do. Tom Reynold’s father and
mother completed their high school diploma. Payton’s family encouraged him to attend school (K-12) and college.

I was an only child, so it was like having friends, something to do - just growing up. All my uncles, my mom, her sister; everybody in the family I knew always played sports so I was basically brought up and raised around it. Just played them from little league all the way up to junior high to high school. It was basically like all my friends and everything, we were all doing sports. That was just like, the thing to do. (Payton)

Payton’s mother completed some college courses.

My mom and aunt had taken some college courses. My mom never finished college and her sister never finished. She’s still taking classes off and on now. My uncles both went to four year college...and graduated. Friends and family were involved in sports...Very supportive. (Payton)

Payton also noted:

Everyone said that I should go [to college] because I didn’t exactly know what I wanted to do. I didn’t know where I wanted to go to school and I said, ‘Well, I’m going to go ahead and try and find a job and see how that works out.” I got a job before that and then I based my schedule for classes off that job and then I came up with the job from the hospital. But yeah, they were supportive as far as me going to school. Yeah. My uncle, my mom, my aunt. (Payton)

Growing up, Bugs Bunny’s mother passed away when he was ten months old and his father raised his five siblings and him. His father encouraged him to attend school K-12; however things fell apart when his father remarried and his new wife moved into the
house with nine or ten children of her own and had two more children with his dad. His father drank on a regular basis and the household had become too chaotic. Bugs Bunny moved out of the house and into his aunt’s house, and hung out with friends that were a negative influence and ended up in juvenile home.

Dad used to encourage school. I gotta say that my dad was more encouragement than anybody. He told me, he looked at me one day, he said “Boy if you don’t go to school, by the time, it get time for you to finish school, you gotta have that education to get through school.” (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

Mom died when I was 10 months old… Dad viewed school as important… He [dad] was my main encouragement and everything, he just drank, but that didn’t have nothing to do with that, he was a good father. As good as a father as he knew to be. My father raised all six of us by his self, and so when everybody was gone but me, he chose another wife, and they had like nine or ten kids and they moved in on me and so I really couldn’t deal with that. I am the youngest of my five siblings [of my mother's kids]. He had two more kids with his new wife…and then you move in all these kids younger than me. I got along with the kids pretty good, but, at some point, I couldn’t do that no more. He moved me in with his sister and I couldn’t do that either, and so I kind of went the wrong way. (Bugs Bunny)

Growing up, Benjamin Franklin’s family was dysfunctional due to alcoholic and abusive parents. His mother and father raised them and family encouraged attending school K-12, but did not encourage college.
For me, school was basically a refuge. I grew up in a very alcoholic home and my mother was also a very abusive person and power controlling. For me, school was an outlet. I received high school diploma in 1968… I graduated with honors…I think education was more important to my mother, but there were other problems that made it next to impossible for me to ever get on her good side. I’ll simply just leave it at that. She didn’t like left handed people and I’m left handed. Dad never discouraged, but he never encouraged. In some ways, my dad resented us getting a education higher than his because he wanted to show the way…back then in the eras where men show the way. (Benjamin Franklin)

Growing up, Robert Jordan’s family was dysfunctional due to an alcoholic father. His mother and father raised him and family did not encourage attending school K-12.

Our family was not with money. We had six kids. My dad was the only one working. He drank, wasn’t home all that much. Most of my family was pretty good in school. I’ve got a couple of sisters and a brother just shy of being genius. I mean, as far as I’m concerned, they were smart in school, and they were good in school. I was good in school, but I just didn’t care. I just had an attitude I didn’t care. No one encouraged me to go to school or college…nobody to encourage me.

(Robert Jordan)

Sub-theme 4.3: Most had a difficult childhood, but K-12 school was encouraged. Eight parolees indicated their parent(s) encouraged K-12 school.

Sub-theme 4.3.a: Most were raised by single parent. Seven parolees indicated being raised by a single parent. JR’s grandmother raised him, and his family encouraged him to attend school K-12 and college.
Family and friends...They always encouraged me to go to school. Especially when I got kind of older towards high school because some days I might want to skip. But they always had that thing that call the house around 5:00 and say that you missed school. They would ask what I am doing...my grandma would talk to me. I stayed with my grandma most of my life. (JR)

Keisha’s mother completed a Bachelors degree and her aunt was in the process of completing a doctoral degree. Her mother raised her and family encouraged her to attend K-12 school and college. “My mom, she encouraged going to school and getting an education. She has a bachelors and she wanted me and my brothers to continue our schooling,” said Keisha. Lee’s father raised him and encouraged him to attend school K-12 and college; however when his father remarried, things fell apart and he moved out of the house at 16 years old. Mike Lawrence’s mother and grandmother raised him. Payton’s family encouraged K-12 school.

Everyone said that I should go [to college] because I didn’t exactly know what I wanted to do. I didn’t know where I wanted to go to school and I said, ‘Well, I’m going to go ahead and try and find a job and see how that works out.” I got a job before that and then I based my schedule for classes off that job and then I came up with the job from the hospital. But yeah, they were supportive as far as me going to school. Yeah. My uncle, my mom, my aunt. (Payton)

Growing up, Bugs Bunny’s father raised his five siblings and him. His father encouraged him to attend school K-12.

Dad used to encourage school. I gotta say that my dad was more encouragement than anybody. He told me, he looked at me one day, he said “Boy if you don’t go
to school, by the time, it get time for you to finish school, you gotta have that education to get through school.” (Bugs Bunny)

He also noted:

Mom died when I was 10 months old… Dad viewed school as important… He [dad] was my main encouragement and everything, he just drank, but that didn’t have nothing to do with that, he was a good father. As good as a father as he knew to be. My father raised all six of us by his self, and so when everybody was gone but me, he chose another wife, and they had like nine or ten kids and they moved in on me and so I really couldn’t deal with that. I am the youngest of my five siblings [of my mother's kids]. He had two more kids with his new wife… and then you move in all these kids younger than me. I got along with the kids pretty good, but, at some point, I couldn’t do that no more. He moved me in with his sister and I couldn’t do that either, and so I kind of went the wrong way. (Bugs Bunny)

**Sub-theme 4.3. b: Most siblings completed high school diploma and some college.** Eight parolees had siblings that completed high school diploma and some college. JR’s siblings completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and some college or trade program courses. Keisha’s two brothers completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and some college courses. One of her brothers was also an MPRI parolee while taking community college classes and was granted early discharge from parole. John Q’s four siblings did not complete kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school. John Do’s siblings completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12)
school and received high school diplomas. “They all graduated high school,” said John Do. Tom Reynolds’ sister completed a Masters’ degree.

My sister… She's got a masters and she's a school teacher so she has to do school, I don't know, every year they require her to do more classes but she's always taking courses. So she's gotten a lot of education. (Tom Reynolds)

Bugs Bunny’s four siblings completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and two sisters completed many college courses. His sisters encouraged him to attend college.

Everybody [five siblings on mother’s side] finished [school]. I had a brother that didn’t, but he, I think he took on a job, and he carried his career on…. Well two of my sisters did attend college. Actually all of my sisters did attend some college. The one that passed recently, she was still in college. She was in college and she was like 59, 60; right up to the time she died she was working and going to college. So yeah she attended college most of her life. I don’t think my sister would have never completed, she was really intelligent. She loved school. Like she got a son like that now and he goes to school still and he’s 41. He’s been going to college all his life though; he’s been there. My sister encouraged me to go to college. …The one I was telling you about that was actually in college when she died and she always said “Bugs Bunny, come on go to school.” She was going too. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin’s sister and brother completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school. His sister completed a bachelor’s degree and brother completed some college.
I have a brother who attended college. My sister, very sadly, she obtained her bachelor’s degree as an RN and graduated May 6 in the nineties, mid-nineties...and was dead May 13. My brother attended college, but we don’t talk, but I don’t think he ever completed his degree. (Benjamin Franklin)

Robert Jordan’s five siblings completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school.

**Sub-theme 4.3.c: Most parolees liked K-12 school.** Seven parolees liked K-12 school. Bugs Bunny liked school. JR also liked school. “School was fun. I actually enjoyed going to school. We did a lot of stuff in school,” said JR. Lee and his siblings liked school. “I have four other brothers and a sister. I was one of two twins. I think we all felt pretty good about it [school], even though we all didn't graduate, I think we all pretty much liked school,” said Lee. Benjamin Franklin liked school “I liked school. School was a refuge for me,” said Benjamin Franklin. Payton liked school and was involved in school sports.

School to me, it was more so fun. I was constantly in sports so I didn’t miss a lot of school, I enjoyed school, but it was more of a social thing for me. I carried like, just over a “C average.” Really didn’t take it that serious. It was more about just making sure I was eligible to do my sports. I had favorite subjects and subjects I didn’t like. I liked math... Oh, what was it? It was like a media class, for radio and stuff like that. I liked stuff like that. I could not stand English. It’s [English class] probably one of those classes I was just in there goofing off because I didn’t care about it that much, I know I’d have to write this book report so I bet you every one of my things were on sports. The classes I liked, of course, I did a
lot better in than the classes I didn’t like, but it was basically with me more so making sure that I was eligible to do sports. Baseball, football, basketball, and track year round...I’ve always liked it—school. My mom use to tell me, she use to catch heck when she tried to keep me out of school when I was sick. It’s just about being in the class, being around a group of people. (Payton)

**Sub-theme 4.3.d: Most parolees did well in school.** Eight parolees did well in K-12 school. John Q did well in school, and had a job prior to going into prison. He took advanced placement classes in high school and completed his high school diploma prior to going to prison. He was involved in school clubs, had a job, and participated in a cultural study tour to Ghana, West Africa. He also completed some college courses and certified nurse’s assistant certificate. JR also did well in school. “Through middle school, my grade point average was a 3.5. And then high school, there was pretty much the same thing until I ended up going to prison sophomore year,” said JR. Keisha also did well in school. She completed two Associates degrees prior to going to prison. John Do also did well in school. He completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and received a high school diploma. Payton also did well in school. He completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school and received a high school diploma. “I finished that [high school diploma] in 1980,” said Payton. Benjamin Franklin also did well in school. He completed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school with honors. He went to college prior to going to prison.

I went onto college for one year. I wanted to start out as an analytical physicist. I just changed to a general [program] at that time, because I really didn’t know what I wanted to do. I viewed it seriously back then, but I view it much more
seriously now because it’s a means to an end to me now. Back then it was a means to further my work experience. (Benjamin Franklin)

Robert Jordan did well in school.

I didn't like school…but I passed most everything but English with decent grades. I had a high school principal call me in the office one time, and because I had missed three-quarters of a sixth period and passed every grade with a C...he said if I really tried I could be a “straight A” student. And I looked right at him and I told him I didn't care. And now, man, I'm beating myself up for it. I regret it. I was good in school, but I just didn't care. I just had an attitude I didn't care. I did like to read. I had the attitude I just didn't care. English back in school was not my forte, When I was in school there was no such thing as a calculator. (Robert Jordan)

*Sub-theme 4.3.e: Most had a job prior to going to prison.* Six parolees indicated having a job prior to going to prison. Benjamin Franklin, John Q, Mike Lawrence and Tom Reynolds had a job prior to going into prison. Payton had a job prior to going to prison.

I started in college straight out of high school and was in college for two weeks and left because I got a job working at the hospital. Right out of high school I was enrolled in college. I was actually taking classes for accounting. Two weeks in, I got called – when I had taken the civil service test, I got called and I got the job at the hospital so I stopped going to school. I worked at an admitting unit, a geriatric unit, and I think it was – I had just looked into going back to school because I was going to try and get my LPN license and I had got in trouble, but I had worked
there like, eight years… I had an accounting one and a couple other classes [in college], but I remember I had an accounting class. I had talked to registration downstairs recently because I had never withdrew. I just came in and told them, ‘Hey, I got a job. I won’t be taking your class.’ So I never withdrew and I look up and they’ve got me down for, way back then it’s still on my record, that I just got an ‘Incomplete’. (Payton)

Robert Jordan had a job, and completed his adult education diploma prior to going to prison.

After I went through two marriages, raised two families and without a diploma, and always had a job, always had a roof over my kids’ head. After 33 years of marriage, I went back to school. At 50 years old, I just felt I needed to do it. Job wise… things were getting harder to get a decent job, a job in general without a high school diploma, and I just - I had worked all my life. Ever since I’ve been 10 years old, I’ve been working… farming. 2003 went into adult education and graduated---although I was in prison in 2004 during graduation. (Robert Jordan)

*Sub-theme 4.3.f: Most had a group of friends that did well in school.* Six parolees had a group of friends that did well in school. Keisha had friends at school that did well in school as well as friends that did poorly in school.

I had like two sets of friends. I had a set of friends that didn’t really like school and skipped class and then I had another set of friends that were like “all A” students like me and that liked school… When I was younger, I liked school. I went to school all of the time. I graduated from high school with honors. I liked it. (Keisha)
John Q had friends at school that did well in school as well as friends that did poorly in school.

I had a double conscience: standard on the streets, standard of education, friends who were in the educational field and we would do productive things in the community...and friends who were in the streets and we would do criminal activities... I chose at that time my wrong friends. (John Q)

Lee had friends at school that did well in school. “I didn't hang out with the ‘skip school’ crowd, I don't think my father would allow that...everybody as far as I know liked school,” said Lee. John Do had friends at school that did well in school. Some of his friends went on to college. “They [friends] went to school. A lot of them graduated and went on to college,” said John Do. Payton had friends at school that did well in school and some of his friends went on to college.

I was an only child, so it was like having friends, something to do - just growing up. All my uncles, my mom, her sister; everybody in the family I knew always played sports so I was basically brought up and raised around it. Just played them from little league all the way up to junior high to high school. It was basically like all my friends and everything, we were all doing sports. That was just like, the thing to do. (Payton)

Sub theme 4.3.g: Most also had a group of friends did poorly in school (street/gang friends). Seven parolees had a group of friends that did poorly in school (street/gang friends). Mike Lawrence’s friend did poorly in school.

Everybody that I hung out with; they failed too. They walked the same line as I did, so... They felt that being street wise is better than being educated and they
looked at people with education, very well off was like stuck up; like totally aliens to us. (Mike Lawrence)

Tom Reynolds’ friends also did poorly in school.

I didn't care about education before I went to prison. I felt like I didn't fit in too much in high school. My friends... We were all just crazy kids and we didn't care about school at all... I did have a course here at community college in 1983. A mechanics course. But that was without a GED or a diploma at the time. I liked the course here that I took on mechanics. I never did pursue that. (Tom Reynolds)

Bugs Bunny had friends that did poorly in school.

I got with the wrong crowd when I was about, when I was like in the eighth or ninth grade and I learned how to smoke cigarettes, but before that, before that, I and school was, school was ok. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin had friends that did poorly in school.

A lot of people I went to school with hated school, didn’t know why they were in school, and wished they could be sixteen and quit. And many of them did quit school when they turned sixteen and went into the military and went to Vietnam. When they got back, they thought their education might not be a bad idea. Some of them were very serious about it.... the majority of them thought it was a joke. (Benjamin Franklin)

Robert Jordan had friends that did poorly in school.

They [friends] did not care about school. ..First day in town, I go for a walk, run into five guys, thinking "hey, hi, how's it going?" Next thing you know, we're in a fistfight. My first day in this town. And for two months this went on. Every
time I'd see them there would be a fight. They couldn't beat me, so they finally asked me to join them. There I was, 10 years old, in a gang. ...then after about three or four years I didn't like their ways. I never really did like their ways, but...there I was. They decided to pick on a kid that was a friend of mine in school and I wouldn't let them, and I just started changing. From then on I always stuck up for the underdog, the little guy, even took a couple under my wing and taught them how to fight. I switched. I just stopped hanging with them. I had taught myself how to box and Jiu-Jitsu through books. (Robert Jordan)

**Theme 5: For parolees enrolled in community college, the main challenge of being a college student is studying/homework.**

As the fifth major theme, eight parolees indicated the main challenge of being a college student was the task of studying and completing homework for college classes. Keisha considers studying and homework a challenge as well as balancing time for school and her son.

...the challenges, not spending more time with my son, like finding time to fit time in for him and time in for me. Homework and I handle it, just, I just do minimum. Like, I take care of him. What he need and if what I gotta do is just stay up later doing homework. I don’t know. (Keisha)

John Q considers studying/homework a challenge, as well as balancing time for school and his part time job and parole appointments. “Study, study, study. That's my challenge. When I get out of class, I don't really study like I should,” said John Q.

Lee considers studying/homework a challenge as well as balancing time for school and his part time job.
I work part time...a little more than part time. If I'm not at work, I am studying...well, and sometimes at work, I'm pretty much like at lunch break, you know, I'm studying, trying to make sure that I've got everything prepared for the class that night. At home studying...Studying at the girlfriend's house, studying everywhere. (Lee)

Tom Reynolds also considers studying/homework a challenge.

The challenges were much more difficult at first but I'm sort of oriented to everything now. Just the self-motivation, I guess, that's pretty tough because I can go home and put my books down and it's hard for me. So the self-motivation, I gotta keep myself motivated to do the homework. I stay motivated for: Necessity. Survival. I got a lot of time that should be taken up by homework but I try to do as little as possible in the homework thing. I should be doing homework. (Tom Reynolds)

Payton also considers studying/homework a challenge.

The hardest part at first was making sure I had the time to study. Sometimes there are those days where you go and put an hour in and you know you need to put some more time in, but you don’t so I kind of have to catch myself on that. Then there are those days that I just don’t feel like studying. ... just trying to stay on schedule. (Payton)

Benjamin Franklin considers studying/homework a challenge. “Like the typical college student, there are nights that I don’t get a whole lot of sleep. I am doing homework at night,” said Benjamin Franklin.
Robert Jordan considers studying/homework, as well as balancing time for school and his part time job and parole appointments.

My major challenge is finding the proper study time. I'm having trouble maintaining it [studying]. I get it in...if I don't use it, it's like it's gone. Then I have to go back and I have to retrace my steps and reread it. That's why I'm thinking about getting a digital recorder so that while I'm in class and everything that's said then I can go back, listen to it. I study at home, time wise. I have my own room...it's just I have this trouble with turning off TV and sitting down and just doing it. And the other day I was reading a history book, and I'm reading...the next thing I know I wake up going "oh..." I'd catch myself nodding off quite often in the history book. This is the last history course I have to take.

(Robert Jordan)

**Theme 6: For parolees enrolled in community college, goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment.**

As the sixth major theme, all 11 parolees indicated goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment in the future.

Keisha’s goals for the future are to be more successful by obtaining a bachelor’s degree and a better job. She feels attending college will help her meet her goals.

I see myself in the future as being successful one day and I think that the college classes will help. Like I said before, to give me that step ahead of any other regular just felon that’s trying to find a job or person in general that’s trying to find a job. So yeah, I think that college classes will help me. It will be a big plus.

(Keisha)

John Q’s future goals are to more successful by obtaining an associate’s degree,
transferring to a four year college to complete bachelor’s degree (and possibly doctoral), and have a better job as well as doing better, being happy, and giving back to the community.

I wanted to finish my international studies degree, because I know once I get to the university it was going to be something probably in that area... I see myself in the future helping out people....Helping the community. (John Q)

Mike Lawrence’s goals for the future are to be happier, doing better and have a better job.

I would like to be a lot better off; more happier than I used to be. I want to stay doing something with wind turbines, but I’m learning that the field is bigger than just wind turbines. (Mike Lawrence)

Lee’s goals for the future are to be more successful by obtaining two associates degrees, and have a better job, possibly own his own business, as well as doing better, being happy, and giving back to the community. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals.

I think these college classes are helping me reach that goal. One of the things I would like to do is try to start up some type of low-income heating program where maybe I can help teach people more about their furnace to where they don't have to call a repairman or I could go into people's houses where there's a male person that lives there, teach fathers more about furnaces to where maybe they'll save a little money...I thought with the economy the way it is and jobs being hard to find, I figured that if I had a little bit more education that it would make it easier for me to get a job. They have a certificate for HVAC, but I don't want the certificate. I want the associate’s degree to get a better job. (Lee)
John Do’s goals for the future are to obtain an associate’s degree, own his own business, and possibly transfer to a four year college to complete bachelor’s degree. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals. He noted that his mother works at a local four-year university and so he would be eligible to receive a discount on classes.

Really what I wanted to do was go into like Food Tech [technology], but they don’t have Food Tech here. So I was thinking maybe later on down the line, I could go into Food Tech but I have to take it at the university cause they have it and transfer cause that’s what I wanted to get a degree in. Food Tech is something that I looked into where, motels or catering and the different like and stuff like that. I checked into that and like landscaping, janitorial, I kind of scored high in those areas [in career assessment] so, right now, I’m looking at all three…if I decide to go to university, I know I can get a nice percentage knocked off because my mother works at the university. She’s been working there for like twenty something year. (John Do)

Payton’s goals for the future are to obtain an associate’s degree in computers or accounting. “Within the next two, two and a half years, I will have my Associates,” said Payton. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals.

Bugs Bunny’s goals for the future are to obtain an associate’s degree and own his own business. He feels attending college will help him achieve those goals.

I want to open me a big girl’s [clothing] store. Actually I want to try to start a detail shop as soon as possible, that’s what I had before. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin’s future goals are to be more successful by obtaining two
associate’s degrees, and have a better job as well giving back to the community.

I view it much more seriously now because it’s a means to an end to me now.

Back then it was a means to further my work experience, but right now I can’t work because I have degenerative arthritis in my back and knees and I had a kidney removal for cancer, so I draw SSI which is not enough. For me it’s hopefully a way to do something, even in my retirement years. I finally wanted to finish my degree. That was very much in my mind. And I got shut down from job hunting because of the degenerative arthritis so that was my opportunity to step up and say to me agent, “can I go to school?” And he said, “yeah.” I can go do something like income taxes when I’m done with school. (Benjamin Franklin)

Benjamin also noted:

I will keep my time busy. I would like to help other people coming out of prison and help them see that if you can get yourself into a positive attitude and stay there, that there is no reason that you can’t stay positive and help other people. See that some of us feel that we owe it to society to do good. I would like to mentor eventually. When I’m all done with my degree, or even before I get done with my degree, once I’m off of parole, I wouldn’t mind working as a tutor.

(Benjamin Franklin)

Robert Jordan’s goals for the future are to obtain an associate’s degree and to be Discharged from parole. “Getting off parole is the major and main goal and also associates in electrical technology,” said Robert Jordan.
Theme 7: Parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by MDOC/MPRI to take college classes prior to being released to the community.

As the seventh, and last, major theme, all 11 parolees indicated MDOC/MPRI did not encourage or support them taking college courses. JR felt MDOC/MPRI did not encourage college.

I didn't even know the reentry program had anything to do with this school 'cause I basically did everything on my own and then once I got close to starting school they have that meet and greet and that's when I found out about MPRI. (JR)

Although MPRI funded one semester of John Q’s college courses; he felt MPRI/MDOC did not encourage or offer college education in prison.

Lee felt MPRI/MDOC did not encourage or offer college education in prison.

As far as education, no encouragement from MPRI…services were more about housing, employment…. when I came through the reentry program there was more of a push for teaching people about contacts for housing and employment. I really didn't see any real push for guys to go back to school. (Lee)

Bugs Bunny felt MPRI/MDOC did not encourage or offer college education in prison.

MPRI does nothing for me. I got in that treatment program I was telling you about on my own. No, they didn’t help with my treatment. They [MPRI] did not encourage education. I got my own treatment and so I can’t really say that MPRI wouldn’t have helped me. They did not help with schooling, clothing, transportation. (Bugs Bunny)

Several sub-themes were found within the theme of lack of encouragement for college from MDOC/MPRI: (a) most parolees feel MDOC/MPRI should encourage
college, (b) aware of education available in prison, (c) some completed education in prison, (d) most completed work experience in prison, (e) for some, attending college was a goal upon release from prison, and (f) some might have taken college courses in prison (if funded and encouraged).

Sub-theme 7.1: Most parolees feel MDOC/MPRI should encourage college. Six parolees felt MDOC/MPRI should encourage college for prisoners and parolees. John Q felt that they should encourage college while on parole.

I think MPRI needs to do more with helping people when they get out. When you're in prison, when MPRI goes to the prison, you get your parole, but getting those guys some proper structure...let them know, give them that vision. I don't think MPRI gives guys a vision. They go through the process. Me, I already had the vision before. I already had that when I first stepped inside prison...I was like "I'm going to do whatever it takes so I can get back and finish my school," and I did that. (John Q)

Tom Reynolds felt MPRI/MDOC should encourage college for parolees.

It would have been easier for me to have somebody from MPRI inside work with me directly on how to register for classes. How to get grant money. How to get loans. Everything that needed to be done to get started in school. (Tom Reynolds)

Lee also felt MPRI/MDOC should encourage college for parolees.

I think they should push - as far as the reentry program, I think they should push more for guys to go to school. Like I said, when I came through the reentry program there was more of a push for teaching people about contacts for housing and employment. A lot of that stuff I did on my own, and there wasn't a whole lot
- I mean, I received handouts, papers with different type of information on them, but a lot of the stuff I had to get out there and experience myself. (Lee)

Bugs Bunny recommended Department of Corrections to encourage school. They [DOC] should encourage schooling more...This is different for me being in school. All over, 360 degrees difference. because, look at me. You got a 40 year felon here! You got a forty year felon here. I worked a lot of years; I got a lot of work on the books after I had them kids but, before that I’m a forty year felon. This is different for me being in school. All over, 360 degrees difference. I’m telling you. It’s something that people can do for they self; you’re helping yourself. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin noted that he feels MDOC/MPRI should encourage college for parolees.

More focus on education....I’d like to see it in prison, but it’s never going to happen. You know, I would like to see in the last two years that if somebody does prison time that you bring in people from the outside that would train you in a chosen profession and when you walked outside of prison, you would have some kind of certificate or degree, and instead of being a burden on society, by being on welfare or whatever, that you could become an asset and maybe understand the asset side instead of the detriment of it. (Benjamin Franklin)

**Sub-theme 7.2: Aware of education available in prison.** All 11 parolees indicated they were aware of GED and college classes in prison. John Q and Keisha were aware of college courses in prison. When they first entered prison, JR, Mike Lawrence, Tom Reynolds, Bugs Bunny, and Lee were aware of GED classes.
When he first entered prison, John Do was aware of college classes, but had thought they were not available to him.

At one time they had college courses inside prison. They stopped college courses. It wasn’t there for us to take. I mean it used to be when they had college courses, but they don’t have it anymore. They really didn’t have any other trainings either.

(John Do)

When he first entered prison, Payton was aware of GED and college classes.

Nope. College classes were not offered to me in prison. Not where I was at. The only classes they had that you could take – they had classes but they were more corresponding. They were outside the facility. The only thing that they were running basically when I was there was the GED program. ..I think there were two people in the building, that I was in, that took a correspondence class, a college class, but other than that, that was it. A lot of people, it seemed like, that was there were trying to get their GED’s. That seemed to be the main focus which was at least getting them a GED while they were there. (Payton)

When Benjamin Franklin first entered prison, he was aware of GED and college classes and was a tutor for the GED classes. When he first entered prison, Robert Jordan was aware of college classes.

Never even thought about it [college courses] inside. I heard about the college courses. If they would have still been offering it [college courses], I probably would have started college then, but since they didn't offer it, I just didn't even think about it. My concern - getting back out, was a job. That's what every man thinks about, is a job. What am I going to do? How is society going to accept
me, a felon, with work. When I was in prison I read a lot of books. Thousands of books. It preoccupied my time. (Robert Jordan)

Two sub-themes were found within the theme of prison education awareness and experiences: For some, attending college was a goal upon release from prison and might have taken college courses in prison if funded and encouraged.

**Sub-theme 7.2.a: Some completed some education in prison.** Six parolees completed the GED program in prison, and one parolee completed some college classes in prison. JR completed the GED in prison.

It [GED Program] didn't really take long to complete. They just kept bouncing me all over. I mean, bouncing me around to different prisons. But once I got settled then it didn't take long. It took about, maybe a month, because you had to wait and take the test. Had to take the practice test, then you had to take the real test. (JR)

Mike Lawrence also completed the GED program in prison. He liked the GED program because it was fun and he learned to read and write.

I didn't have a GED before going into prison. I never really tried to learn how to read and write, but, after I learned it, it was fun. Math and English was fun once I learned it and was aware that I needed it and it works towards the reasons why I went; being incarcerated because of I was dependent on other persons, it’s not like I was; I didn’t depend on myself. I had low self-esteem, low confidence, everything, so... I liked being able to do it on my own, knowing that I could do it on my own because I felt like I had to rely on people to read and to help me
understand things and now I do it on my own and it is a confidence and you
know, brings up my confidence. (Mike Lawrence)

Mike Lawrence also noted:

It [GED classes] was good, man! I actually had a real good teacher that, she
worked with me a lot about reading and let me comprehend. She slowed me
down on reading a sentence at a time because I’m just trying to go through all
them words and trying to speak as fast as I can because, it’s like, I had that
insecurity that I couldn’t read and I always felt stupid. But I wasn’t stupid, I just
never really tried. I didn’t even know what trying was until I started. (Mike
Lawrence)

Lee completed the GED program and certificate training in prison

Once I got situated at a permanent facility that's when they signed me up for GED
classes, and I was only in there for three days after my initial testing. They told
me that I scored so high on that that I didn't even need the GED classes, that they
were going to sign me up for the GED test, and within two weeks I already had
completed my GED…. (Lee)

Tom Reynolds also completed the GED program in prison. He also completed a
non-certified electronics class in prison.

I was three credits short for high school diploma when I went into prison, then I
got my GED in prison. I took an electronics class in prison, but it wasn't really
certified or anything like that so it doesn't really count for anything. (Tom
Reynolds)

Bugs Bunny completed the GED program [three or four times] in prison.
I have a GED and a High School Diploma. Because I’ve been in several facilities where I wasn’t nothing to do so I went back to school and I must have like two, three of them GEDs up there and I got my, I think I got my high school education in Juvenile Boys School back in 1970, ’67, something like that, ’68. That was like my first phase of being locked up. I think I finally got too old to be there... I got so many [GEDs]... I don’t know what I have. I got a GED; I think the last one I got was in ’70. I know I got one in ’73. I think I got before that and I got another somewhere down the line. I got so many... I don’t know what I have. When you sitting in the county jail and you have nothing else to do so they got school, you go [to GED classes]. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin completed some college courses in prison. He noted that he would have taken more college classes in prison if offered and funded past 1994 [the year the Pell grant ended in prison].

I took college classes every chance I had... So anytime, like, a college came in when I was at prison, and they offered classes and enrichment, I took every class I could. I did take community college classes back at the beginning of my incarceration because they still had it and that was before Pell grant ended in prison in 1994. When the Pell grant went out, our school went out... obviously we couldn’t pay for it so they were dependent on the Pell grants. (Benjamin Franklin)

**Sub-theme 7.2.b: Most completed work experience in prison.** Six parolees completed work experience in prison. Lee completed certificate training and work experience in prison.
I got some training in culinary, like cooking... I worked in the kitchen for six years, and then I did training in custodial maintenance, so I got custodial maintenance certificates and stuff like that... and paid work experience. (Lee)

Payton also completed certificate training and work experience in prison.

When I was in there, I ended up doing stuff like block rep. I was the block rep, so I would have to go to the warden’s for a meeting and stuff like that, but as far as classes no. No school classes... As Block Rep in prison— you get a certificate and you can do it for up to a whole year. Then you have to have that six month break and then you can go back and do it again and I think I had like, three certificates. So I did it for a while. I was also a porter, worked inside the unit which is basically a janitor, clean up job. I got the blood spill certificate. That was ran like a class. It was a two part class. I would attend it and then did a little test and then you’d get your certificate and we had to update every year. (Payton)

John Do also completed work experience in prison.

I worked in the kitchen when I was locked up and I had to be up at 4:00 a.m. so I had to be at work at 5:00 in the morning. I was a prep cook, so I had to prep everything for breakfast, for lunch. (John Do)

Bugs Bunny also completed work experience and certificate training in prison.

In prison I took up a cooking class. I completed that. I took up a machine shop class and I completed that. No, college was not offered in prison. I was working in the factory in prison and I needed to help myself at that time, but college courses that was offered; I don’t know, I just, didn’t really think about them [college courses]. There wasn’t nothing cheap. The food portions were going
down like that, so, I was in a position where I had to work and so that’s what I did… I looked at them [college courses]. Don’t get me wrong, I looked at them. I actually thought about them but I had stuff to do. I had stuff to do that I know I had to do before I could get out I ended up at the end going to residential substance abuse treatment inside. So I went through that. I graduated that and once I graduated that, I was out the door. (Bugs Bunny)

Benjamin Franklin also completed work experience in prison. “In prison I worked as a GED tutor. I taught math and I taught writing… I ended up teaching math because that’s my strong suit,” said Benjamin Franklin. Robert Jordan also had work experience while in prison.

By the time I got to prison, they had taken all that out, or I would have [taken college courses]. For some reason they had just taken it right out. They used to do college courses quite a bit from what people would tell me, but they didn't offer it anymore. They just stopped doing it. They had janitorial classes if you wanted to be a janitor. Oh yeah, they had classes for that. I never did participate in training. I wished I would have, but I didn't because I worked a yard crew garden. I loved to garden, it was outdoors, and I'd be out there at 59 years old, shoveling snow in the middle of winter. I'm doing all right. I'd be shoveling and throwing that snow. (Robert Jordan)

He also noted:

Never even thought about it [college courses] inside. I heard about the college courses. If they would have still been offering it [college courses], I probably would have started college then, but since they didn't offer it, I just didn't even
think about it. My concern - getting back out, was a job. That's what every man thinks about, is a job. What am I going to do? How is society going to accept me, a felon, with work. When I was in prison I read a lot of books. Thousands of books. It preoccupied my time. (Robert Jordan)

**Sub-theme 7.3: For some, attending college was a goal upon release from prison.** Nine parolees indicated that attending college was goal upon release from prison. John Q, Keisha, and JR indicated that attending community college was a goal upon release from prison. “Before I had got out, I wrote down some plans and some goals of mine that I wanted to accomplish coming out and this was one of them [going to college],” said JR. John Q envisioned being in college when he was in prison and happy to be in college again.

Me, I already had the vision before. I already had that when I first stepped inside prison...I was like "I'm going to do whatever it takes so I can get back and finish my school," and I did that....I'm sitting down with a book. I'm not behind these bars or these fences. I'm where I saw myself when I was behind the bars and fences. It's an accomplishment to make it out of there and to go from one point to the next point and say "now I'm in class.” (John Q)

Mike Lawrence indicted that attending community college was a goal upon release from prison.

College classes were not offered to me in prison. There was something that just happened for me and said, “Man, you need to go back” [to school]. I didn’t even know what I was going to take when I got here. But I knew that I wanted to go back to school because I felt like I missed out on so much and I think that was my
drive to go back to school because when I started learning how to read and write, it was like, and do math and stuff it was like, “Well what am I missing?” I had those goals already in prison….college courses in my goals. (Mike Lawrence)

John Do indicated that attending community college was a goal upon release from prison. I really never thought about college when I was in there. It’s like, when it was close to time for me to come home, I knew it was time for me to make a change, so I decided as I was going to take college classes and see how it goes. A change from that lifestyle that I was living, cause my lifestyle that I was living just was really dealing drugs or using drugs. So I had to change my whole lifestyle because it landed me in prison and making bad decisions… I had a friend in there [prison], a homeboy that I grew up with. He was telling me about going to school and I had thought about it and put a lot of effort in to it and we both said we were going to do it when we got out. Well, I followed through with it, he didn’t. (John Do)

**Sub-theme 7.4: Some might have taken college courses in prison (if funded and encouraged).** Five parolees indicated they might have taken college courses in prison if funded and encouraged. John Q noted that he might have taken college courses in prison if offered and funded. Lee noted that he might have taken college classes in prison if offered and funded.

There were a few guys that I knew that were taking correspondence courses, but that was at their own expense. There were no free programs for college education while we were locked up. If I had extra money to take the classes, I might have…. (Lee)
Tom Reynolds also noted that he might have taken college classes in prison if encouraged and funded.

I looked into taking college courses but didn't have the money to do it from within prison. It was like $700 or something, some course I wanted to take and I couldn't get the money. I don't know that the prisoners were even eligible for Pell Grant and I didn't check into any kind of funding at that time while I was in prison. (Tom Reynolds)

Robert Jordan might have taken college classes in prison if offered and funded.

Never even thought about it [college courses] inside. I heard about the college courses. If they would have still been offering it [college courses], I probably would have started college then, but since they didn't offer it, I just didn't even think about it. My concern - getting back out, was a job. That's what every man thinks about, is a job. What am I going to do? How is society going to accept me, a felon, with work. When I was in prison I read a lot of books. Thousands of books. It preoccupied my time. (Robert Jordan)

Chapter Five Narrative Theme Summary

Analysis continued until no new themes emerged from the data. Overall, all participants liked taking classes at the community college and liked the college environment. They liked the social aspect as well as the positive, helpful support of staff, teachers, and their peers. Mostly all struggled to identify any dislikes of the college experience. For some, attending college has improved their parole experience. Mostly all are earning at least a 3.5 grade point average (GPA) in college and in an associate’s or
bachelor’s degree program. Goals for the future are to complete the college program and obtain employment.

Participants are role models for their families and indicated some family support and encouragement for them to continue to take college classes. All, but one, indicated having children. They are closer with their families, as college students, than they were prior to going into prison.

Growing up, most participants were encouraged to attend K-12 school, most did well in school, liked school, and had siblings that completed K-12 school. Most participants were not encouraged by their parent(s) to take college classes prior to going to prison. Most are first generation college students and all indicated receiving Pell grants and/or student loans for school and living expenses. Some also have part time or full time jobs and live with family.

As college students, participants feel like they are different than they were prior to going to prison. They avoid negative influences and people, and criminal activity. They choose positive and supportive people to be in their social network and feel they are learning something as a student. They feel taking college classes keeps them busy and, as a result, will help keep them from reverting to criminal activity and returning to prison. They feel they need college in their life to be successful and consider college their life (or a part of their life). The main challenge of being a college student is the task of studying and completing homework for college classes; however participants seemed to handle it well, by seeking out school resources and organizing their lives with studying/homework as a priority in their daily agendas. Most prefer the downtown campus since it closer to their home and jobs, and some had transportation issues to the rural campus.
Participants were aware of GED and college classes in prison, and some completed the GED program and liked it. Some might have taken college classes in prison, but were not able to do so because they lacked the funding and encouragement to do so in prison. Some also completed work experience in prison. For many, attending college was a goal upon release from prison. All participants felt that the reentry program (MPRI) and MDOC did not encourage taking college classes (in prison and also as a parolee). Most participants did not use any services within the MPRI reentry program and felt the program and MDOC should encourage college more for prisoners and parolees since it has helped them to be successful while on parole.

Now let us turn to chapter six which discusses findings of this study concerning voices of parolees who have chosen the community college element of a reentry program and presents suggestions for application within higher education institutions and department of corrections reentry programs. Chapter six also offers recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND RESEARCHER’S REFLECTIONS

Based on literature, approximately 50% of parolees go back to prison within three years, but some reentry programs do indeed decrease recidivism rate (United States, 2001; United States Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, 2007). We also know that for some prisoners and parolees, taking education classes while in prison or on parole decreases recidivism (Batiuk et al., 1997; Bhatti, 2010; Brazzell, 2009; Chappell, 2004; Erisman & Contardo, 2005; Fine, 2001; Gaes, 2008; Gardner, 2004; Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011; Martinez & Eisenberg, 2000; Meyer et al., 2010; Robinson, 1990; Ross, 2009; Ubah, 2001; Winterfield, 2009; Young, 2002).

Yet, we know very little why parolees take higher education classes and what they experience in higher education. We also know very little how parolees describe their experiences as a student in community college while in a reentry program. Evaluation beyond quantitative analysis was therefore needed on prisoners and parolees within higher education programs, in order to better understand the programs and the participants within the programs. Indeed, of the nearly two hundred potential resources reviewed for this research, only three studies were similar to my topic (Copenhaver et al., 2007; Hall, 2003; Heiser, 2007). In addition, only one of these three published qualitative studies on parolees within higher education used a similar research strategy (Copenhaver et al., 2007; Hall, 2003; Heiser, 2007). Within this context my research was conducted.
Results Summary

The conceptual framework for my study includes six sections which were developed based on what we do know from previous research and for which I probed in this research (see Figure 1). The sections include: (a) Classes: Experience, Likes, Dislikes; (b) Family and Friends: Education Level, Support; (c) Previous Education: Primary, Secondary, Higher Education; (d) Influence of Parolees’ Participation in Classes: Personal, Family, Friends; (e) Challenges of Taking Classes: Funding, Study Space, Resources, Work; and (f) Outside Support for School: Parole, Funding, MPRI, Counselor. As Figure 1 shows, the center of my study is the voice of parolees who have chosen a community college element within a reentry program. Surrounding that center, are six areas that previous research has hinted as impacting those voices, and for which I gathered information to help further knowledge on this important topic.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.
The purpose of my phenomenological study was to describe and understand how 11 parolees experience participating in the community college element of a reentry program. The goal of my research was to learn about their experiences and possible themes for parolees in community college, within a reentry program.

Major themes from the data include: (1.0) parolees enrolled in community college like the college environment, taking college classes & the social aspect; (2.0) parolees enrolled in community college are role models for their families; (3.0) parolees enrolled in community college are different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, learning something, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences); (4.0) parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by parent(s) to take college classes prior to being released to the community; (5.0) for parolees enrolled in community college, the main challenge of being a college student is studying/homework; (6.0) for parolees enrolled in community college, goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment, and (7.0) parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by MDOC/MPRI to take college classes prior to being released to the community.

Table 6 provides an overview of my research questions as connected to my conceptual framework and the themes identified from the study. Please note that the themes are numbered in the order they arose from my analysis. Following this multi-page table, my findings, as broken down by research questions, will be revealed.
Table 6

Connection of Research Questions, Conceptual Framework and Themes

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<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Conceptual Framework Sections</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What influences a parolees’ decision to enroll in the community college element within a reentry program?</td>
<td>(b) Family and Friends: Education level, Support (c) Previous education: Primary, Secondary, Higher education (d) Influence of parolees’ participation in classes: Personal, Family, Friends (f) Outside support for school: Parole, Funding, MPRI, Counselor</td>
<td>2.0 Parolees enrolled in community college are role models for their families</td>
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<td>2.1 Families encourage/support them taking college classes now</td>
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<td>2.2 Most are first generation college students</td>
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<td>4.0 Parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by parent(s) to take college classes prior to being released to the community</td>
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<td>4.1 Encouraged by extended family (Uncles, Aunts, Nephews) to attend college and extended family had attended (or currently attended) college</td>
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<td>4.2 Growing up, most lived in dysfunctional homes</td>
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<td>4.3 Most had a difficult childhood, but K-12 school was encouraged</td>
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<td>4.3.a Most raised by single parent</td>
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<td>4.3.b Most siblings completed high school diploma and some college</td>
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<td>4.3.c Most liked K-12 school</td>
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<td>4.3.d Most did well in K-12 school</td>
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<td>4.3.e Most had a job prior to going to prison</td>
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<td>4.3.f Most had a group of friends that did well in school</td>
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<td>4.3.g Most also had a group of friends that did poorly in school (street/gang friends)</td>
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<td>7.0 Parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by MDOC/MPRI to take college classes prior to being released to the community</td>
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<td>7.1 Most parolees feel MDOC/MPRI should encourage college</td>
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<td>7.2 Aware of education available in prison</td>
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<td>7.2.a Some completed some education in prison</td>
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<td>7.2.b Most completed work experience in prison.</td>
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<td>7.3 For some, attending college was a goal upon release from prison</td>
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<td>7.4 Some might have taken college courses in prison (if funded and encouraged).</td>
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<td>2. How do such parolees describe their experiences as a student in a community college?</td>
<td>(a) Classes: Experience, Likes, Dislikes</td>
<td>1.0  <em>Parolees enrolled in community college like the college environment, taking college classes &amp; the social aspect</em></td>
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<td>(e) Challenges of taking classes: Funding, Study space, Resources, Work</td>
<td>1.1  Attending college has improved parole experience 1.2  All community college staff and teachers are helpful and positive 1.3  They met and worked directly with college Vice President prior to enrolling in college and he is very encouraging/supportive 1.4  Prefer downtown campus due to closer proximity to home and some have transportation issues to travel to rural campus.</td>
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<td>3.0  <em>Parolees enrolled in community college are different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, learning something, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences)</em></td>
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<td>3.1  Taking college classes keeps them busy and will help them from returning to prison 3.2  School is their life &amp;/or need school in their lives to be successful 3.3  Most earned at least a 3.5 GPA in college and are in an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree program.</td>
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<td>5.0  <em>For parolees enrolled in community college, the main challenge of being a college student is studying/homework.</em></td>
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<td>6.0  <em>For parolees enrolled in community college, goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment.</em></td>
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<td>3 How do such parolees describe the influence of being a community college student on their lives?</td>
<td>d) Influence of parolees' participation in classes Personal, Family, Friends</td>
<td>1 0 Parolees enrolled in community college like the college environment, taking college classes &amp; the social aspect</td>
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<td>3 3 Most earned at least a 3.5 GPA in college and are in an Associate's or Bachelor's degree program</td>
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<td>6 0 For parolees enrolled in community college, goals for the future include Completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment</td>
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Review of the Research Questions

Research Question 1: What influences a parolees’ decision to enroll in the community college element within a reentry program?

For eight parolees, being role models for their families was a major influence for their decision to enroll in the community college (theme 2.0). They felt their children, siblings, and/or other significant others would benefit from them obtaining a college education. For example, JR specifically took a pre elementary physical education class so he would be able to teach his elementary-aged son how to be physically fit. He encouraged completing schoolwork by doing homework together; he would do his college homework while his son would complete elementary school homework.

Although his two sons did not live with him, John Q would make an effort to call them on a regular basis to encourage them attending elementary school and would report his college success to them. He wanted to be a positive role model for his sons since he did not have a male role model growing up that encouraged college for him. He also felt if he had a college degree he would have a better chance of being a part of their lives with a college education. Keisha had two strong female role models growing up that had college degrees and encouraged education. She wanted to also be a positive role model for her son that encouraged him to attend college. She would do her college homework with her son, while he would complete elementary school homework. When John Do was in prison, his son had many behavior issues in elementary school. By attending college, John Do wanted to be a role model for his son and encourage school. His son improved his school behavior and performance at school significantly since John Do was released from prison and started attending college. His wife and her daughter never completed their GED’s; however were involved with assisting John Do with his
schoolwork. He was also a role model for them to continue their education. Bugs Bunny had a son and daughter in elementary school and felt he needed to attend college to be a positive role model for them to improve academically. He felt he needed to earn good grades in college if he expected his children to improve their grades in school. His daughter improved her math grade and so he was also working hard to improve his math grade in college. His son did not like school, but he was constantly encouraging him since he was in college.

Although he had not seen his adult son in many years, Robert Jordan rekindled a relationship with him by attending college. He would talk on the phone with him about his college classes and grades, and mail copies of training certificates of completion and college transcripts to his son. He planned to see his son after he has obtained his college degree.

As a sub-theme, for 11 parolees, family encouragement and/or support for them taking college classes after being released from prison was another influence for their decision to enroll in the community college (sub-theme 2.1). Families were involved in the parolees’ lives and, for most, families encouraged college education more for them as parolees than they did prior to them going to prison. This encouragement and support seemed important for most parolees.

As another aspect of influence to enroll in college, six parolees were first generation college students (sub-theme 2.2). JR, Lee, Mike Lawrence, John Do, John Q, and Robert Jordan were first generation college students. John Q noted: “I'm the first young man in general to have some type of education out of all my family, so it's very
important to me.” As a result of being first generation students, they seemed proud, passionate, and determined to enroll in college and complete their college education.

For eight parolees, their parent(s) did not encourage or support them taking college courses prior to them going to prison and six parolees lived in dysfunctional homes (theme 4.0, 4.2). The lack of encouragement by parent(s) to attend college [prior to going to prison] and dysfunctional home life were not influences on them enrolling in college as parolees, since all had family encouragement and/or support as parolees to attend college. Seven parolees were raised by single parents (sub-theme 4.3.a). Those raised by single parents mentioned the single parent that raised them many times in the interviews and seemed to want to make them proud as a college student.

As more aspects of influence to enroll in college, eight parolees’ had a difficult childhood, but encouraged K-12 school (sub-theme 4.3); seven liked K-12 school; and eight did well in K-12 school (sub-theme 4.3.c, 4.3.d). The parental encouragement received for K-12 school, and that they liked and did well in K-12 school seemed to stick with most participants throughout their lives to the point that they would enroll in college as parolees (and some enroll in college prior to prison). As one example, JR liked school: “School was fun. I actually enjoyed going to school. We did a lot of stuff in school.” Seven parolees were encouraged by extended family (Uncles, Aunts, Nephews) to attend college and extended family had attended (or currently attended) college (sub-theme 4.1).

Eight parolees had siblings that completed high school diploma and some college (sub-theme 4.3.b). Sibling education success and encouragement seemed to influence college enrollment also. Lee and his siblings liked school. “I have four other brothers and a sister. I was one of two twins. I think we all felt pretty good about it [school], even
though we all didn't graduate, I think we all pretty much liked school,” said Lee. Six parolees had jobs prior to going to prison (sub-theme 4.3.e). John Q did well in school, and had a job prior to going into prison. He took advanced placement classes in high school and completed his high school diploma prior to going to prison. He was involved in school clubs, had a job, and participated in a cultural study tour to Ghana, West Africa. He also completed some college courses and certified nurse’s assistant certificate. Six parolees had a job prior to going to prison. Benjamin Franklin, John Q, Mike Lawrence, and Tom Reynolds had a job prior to going into prison. They were aware of the job market prior to going to prison and at the time of the study, and felt a college education was important for them to obtain a job after being released from prison.

As another aspect of influence to enroll in college, six parolees had a group of friends that did well in K-12 school and seven parolees had a group of friends that did poorly in school (street/gang friends) (sub-theme 4.3.f, 4.3.g). Many had friends in both groups and felt it was a mistake to hang out with friends that did poorly in school as it probably affected their future in criminal activity. Those that had friends that did well in K-12 school felt they should have chose to spend time with that group of friends in place of the friends that did poorly in school. They felt they should have spent more time with friends that did well in school.

As another major theme, for 11 parolees, MDOC/MPRI did not encourage or support them taking college courses (theme 7.0) and six felt MDOC/MPRI should encourage college for prisoners and parolees (sub-theme 7.1). The lack of encouragement by MDOC/MPRI to attend college [in prison and parole] was not an influence on them enrolling in college as parolees, since all had family encouragement and/or support as
parolees to attend college. Most felt MDOC/MPRI should encourage college for prisoners and parolees since it has helped them to be successful as parolees.

As other aspects of influence to enroll in college, 11 parolees were aware of GED and college classes in prison (sub-theme 7.2); six parolees completed the GED program in prison, six completed work experience in prison, and one parolee completed some college classes in prison (sub-theme 7.2.a, 7.2.b). The awareness of educational opportunities in prison carried with them into the community, as they were also aware of educational opportunities in the community as parolees. For nine parolees, attending college was a goal upon release from prison (sub-theme 7.3) and so attending college was one measure of success for them as parolees. “Before I had got out, I wrote down some plans and some goals of mine that I wanted to accomplish coming out and this was one of them [going to college],” said JR. John Q envisioned being in college when he was in prison and happy to be in college again. Five parolees might have taken college courses in prison if funded and encouraged (sub-theme 7.4) and taking college courses as parolees was fulfilling that desire to take college classes in prison.

Research Question 2: How do such parolees describe their experiences as a student in a community college?

As one major aspect of community college experiences, 11 parolees liked the community college environment and the classes, and had positive feelings and attitudes from taking college classes (theme 1.0). Some also had positive feelings from the social aspect of school. Mostly all parolees had no dislikes about attending the community college. As a sub-theme, six parolees noted attending college had improved their parole experience, including Lee’s parole experience (sub-theme 1.1). As he noted: “I think it’s [school] having a positive effect on it [parole]. My own parole officer is probably a little
less worried about how I'm doing when he sees that I'm focused on work, school…”

Eleven parolees felt community college staff and teachers were helpful and positive.

Mostly all parolees noted the time spent meeting with college staff inside (and outside) class time and felt all staff (teachers, support staff, and executive level) were very positive and supportive of their educational experience (sub-theme 1.2). Eight parolees met with the college Vice President prior to enrolling in college and felt he was encouraging and supportive (sub-theme 1.3). Six parolees preferred the downtown campus since it was closer to their home and job, and some did not have a vehicle to travel to rural campus (sub-theme 1.4). John Do prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to his home and job. John Q also prefers the downtown campus since it is closer to home and he does not have a vehicle. He had to take the public transportation (bus) to and from the rural campus. He considers location of the rural campus and transportation a challenge.

As another major theme within college student experiences, ten parolees felt different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences), and more serious about school (theme 3.0). Bugs Bunny and John Do no longer hang out with friends that were negative influences in the past. Both have new sets of social networks and avoid negative influences. 11 parolees felt they were learning something new by taking classes in college and that college opens their mind to new opportunities and ideas. JR enjoyed learning classmates’ perspectives on literature while Mike Lawrence continued to improve his reading performance. When talking about being a role model for his son, JR felt he was different as a college student than he was prior to going into prison. Eleven
parolees felt being a college student and taking college classes would help them from returning to prison (keep off the streets and out of trouble) (sub-theme 3.1). As one example, Mike Lawrence noted: “Being in community college will help keep me from returning to prison.” Mostly all noted taking college classes keeps them busy (sub-theme 3.1). As a sub-theme, for 11 parolees, school was their life (or a part of their life), and felt they need college in their lives to be successful (sub-theme 3.2). “Education is a part of my life,” said John Q. Nine parolees earned at least a 3.5 grade point average (GPA) in college and were enrolled in an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree program (sub-theme 3.3). John Q, JR, Keisha, and Payton earned a 3.5 GPA average for classes completed at the community college. Benjamin Franklin earned a 3.7 GPA average and was taking classes for business and accounting associate’s degrees.

As another major theme within college student experiences, eight parolees noted the main challenge of being a college student was the task of studying and completing homework for college classes (theme 5.0). John Q considered studying/homework a challenge, as well as balancing time for school and his part time job and parole appointments. “Study, study, study. That’s my challenge. When I get out of class, I don't really study like I should,” said John Q. Lee considered studying/homework a challenge as well as balancing time for school and his part time job.

I work part time...a little more than part time. If I'm not at work, I am studying...well, and sometimes at work, I'm pretty much like at lunch break, you know, I'm studying, trying to make sure that I've got everything prepared for the class that night. At home studying...Studying at the girlfriend's house, studying everywhere. (Lee)
As another major theme, 11 parolees noted goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment in the future (theme 6.0). Payton’s goals for the future were to obtain an associate’s degree in computers or accounting. “Within the next two, two and a half years, I will have my Associates,” said Payton. He felt attending college will help him achieve those goals.

**Research Question 3: How do such parolees describe the influence of being a community college student on their lives?**

For 11 parolees, being a college student was a major influence on their lives since it became something they liked to do (theme 1.0). They liked going to the college and being in that environment and in the classes. They were able to fit in socially and academically. They felt good about themselves and seemed proud to be doing something positive. They felt the college staff was helpful and positive also (sub-theme 1.2). Some also had positive feelings from the social aspect of school (theme 1.0). John Q was in a drum club and garden club in college and enjoyed collaborating with others in the clubs. Mostly all parolees had no dislikes about attending the community college. As a sub-theme, for six parolees, attending college had improved their parole experience (sub-theme 1.1). Eight parolees met with the college Vice President prior to enrolling in college and felt he was encouraging and supportive (sub-theme 1.3). They felt honored and special to have worked with the college Vice President prior to enrolling in college. For six parolees, they preferred the downtown campus since it was closer to their home and job (sub-theme 1.4). Some did not have a vehicle to travel to rural campus. Robert Jordan rode his bicycle to and from his job and took public transportation to the downtown campus. Payton took public transportation to and from the downtown campus as he felt it helped keep him away from possibility of negative influences. He felt if he
had a vehicle, it would increase the chances of going to places that might get him into trouble.

As a major theme, for 8 parolees, being role models for their families influenced their lives as college students (theme 2.0). Robert Jordan had rejuvenated a relationship with his adult son by being a college student. He called him regularly, talked about college classes, and mailed copies of college transcripts to him. He planned to see his son after he obtained a college degree. John Q felt he had a greater chance of being a part of his son’s lives if he obtained a college education. Bugs Bunny felt he needed to obtain good grades in college since he expected it out of his daughter. John Do’s son had significantly improved school performance since John Do was released from prison and a college student.

As another aspect of influence on their lives, 11 parolees’ families encouraged and/or supported them taking college classes after being released from prison (sub-theme 2.1). They felt closer to their families as parolees in college. Their families were excited they were taking college classes and encouraged it. Six parolees were first generation college students and seemed passionate about completing their college education (sub-theme 2.2).

As another major theme, for ten parolees, a major influence of being a college student on their lives was they that they were different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences), and more serious about school (theme 3.0). For 11 parolees, they were learning something new by taking classes in college and that college opens their mind to new opportunities and ideas, and school was their life (or a part of their life), and feel
they need college in their lives to be successful (sub-theme 3.2). Benjamin Franklin and Bugs Bunny spent most of their daily lives on campus and felt school was a major part of their lives. As another sub-theme, nine parolees obtained at least a 3.5 GPA in college and also planned to complete an Associate’s and/or Bachelor’s degree (sub-theme 3.3).

As another major theme and aspect of influence of being a college student, 11 parolees’ goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment in the future (theme 6.0). John Q planned to complete his associate’s degree and continue on to a local four-year college to complete his bachelor’s degrees. Since the time of the interview, John Q completed his Associate’s degree and enrolled in the local four-year college.

Discussion, Connections to Previous Research, and Conclusions

The purpose of my study was to understand and describe how parolees experience being a student in a Midwest community college. This was a phenomenological study researching the lived experiences of parolees in college and the outcome of the study cannot be generalized for all parolees. Despite this limitation, my study provides future researchers, the department of corrections, and higher education leaders, information that can be used to better understand prisoner reentry and how higher education can play a major role. The sample for this research study represented a wide range of ages, race, education, home life, criminal backgrounds, and plans for the future. Regardless of their age and background, these participants had similar influences and experiences as college students. Three of the themes found in my study were supported by previous quantitative and qualitative research. Several themes from my study were not found in previous
research and, therefore, additions to the body of knowledge for parolees in higher education. See Table 7 for a summary, followed by a narrative.

Table 7

Comparison of Potts Research with Previous Research Involving Parolees and Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potts Research (2011)</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> Parolees enrolled in community college are role models for their families.</td>
<td>Confirms Fine (2001), Heiser (2007), and Winterfields’ et al. (2009) findings that prisoners taking college classes were motivated to become positive role models for their families. Their studies assessed prisoners, while my study is on parolees.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> Parolees enrolled in community college like taking college classes and have positive feelings and attitudes from taking college classes.</td>
<td>Confirms Bhatti’s (2009), Heiser (2007), Malott (1982), and Winterfields’ et al. (2009) research on prisoners’ experience in college classes which tells us prisoners like taking college classes in prison because it helps them stay positive in prison. Their studies assessed prisoners, while my study is on parolees.</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong> Parolees enrolled in community college consider studying/homework a challenge.</td>
<td>Confirms previous research where five studies found that prisoners considered studying a challenge and, therefore, preferred quiet, private areas for classes and studying (Adams, 1976; Heiser, 2007; Malott, 1982; Winterfield, 2009; Yarborough, 1980). Their studies assessed prisoners, while my study is on parolees.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>Parolees enrolled in community college like the college environment &amp; the social aspect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Attending college has improved parole experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- All community college staff and teachers are helpful and positive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- They met and worked directly with college Vice President prior to enrolling in college and he is very encouraging/supportive</td>
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<td>- Prefer downtown campus due to closer proximity to home and some have transportation issues to travel to rural campus.</td>
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<th>5</th>
<th>Parolees enrolled in community college are different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, learning something, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>- Taking college classes keeps them busy and will help them from returning to prison</td>
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<td>- Most earned at least a 3.5 GPA in college and are in an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree program.</td>
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<th>6</th>
<th>For parolees enrolled in community college, goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.</td>
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Previous Research
No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.
Table 7 (continued)

<table>
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<th>Potts Research (2011)</th>
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<tr>
<td>7 <strong>Parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by MDOC/MPRI to take college classes prior to being released to the community</strong></td>
<td>No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Most parolees feel MDOC/MPRI should encourage college</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Aware of education available in prison</td>
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<td>-Some completed some education in prison</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Most completed work experience in prison</td>
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<td>-For some, attending college was a goal upon release from prison</td>
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<td>-Some might have taken college courses in prison (if funded and encouraged)</td>
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<td><strong>Families encourage/support them taking college classes now</strong></td>
<td>No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.</td>
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<td>-Most are first generation college students</td>
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<td><strong>Parolees enrolled in community college had no encouragement by parent(s) to take college classes prior to being released to the community</strong></td>
<td>No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Encouraged by extended family (Uncles, Aunts, Nephews) to attend college and extended family had attended (or currently attended) college</td>
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<td>-Growing up, most lived in dysfunctional homes</td>
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<td>-Most had a difficult childhood, but K-12 schooling was encouraged</td>
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<td>-Most siblings completed high school diploma and some college</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Most liked K-12 school</td>
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<td>-Most did well in K-12 school</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Most had a job prior to going to prison</td>
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<td>-Most had a group of friends that did well in school</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Most also had a group of friends that did poorly in school (street/gang friends)</td>
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The analysis of the parolee interviews suggests several conclusions. One of the major findings from my study is that parolees in college are role models for their families. They wanted their families to be proud of them and wanted to show that education was important by attending college. This is consistent with Fine (2001), Heiser (2007), and Winterfields' et al. (2009) findings that prisoners taking college classes were
motivated to become positive role models for their families. Those studies had assessed prisoners (those still involuntary confined to penal institutions), while my study is on parolees (those conditionally released from prison to serve the remaining portion of their sentence in the community). Although previous research on this topic focused on prisoners, my findings regarding parolees are consistent.

A second major finding is that parolees liked taking college classes and had positive feelings and attitudes from taking college classes. They felt more positive about their situations as college students. This is consistent with Bhatti’s (2009), Heiser (2007), Malott (1982), and Winterfields’ et al. (2009) research on prisoners’ experience in college classes which tells us prisoners like taking college classes in prison because it helps them stay positive in prison. Their study assessed prisoners, while my study assessed parolees, but the findings are consistent.

A third major finding is that parolees considered studying/homework a challenge; however, they were handling the challenge well by making studying a priority in their weekly schedules and also by utilizing school additional support resources (i.e., math lab, tutors, teachers) when possible. This is consistent with previous research where five studies found that prisoners considered studying a challenge and, therefore, preferred quiet, private areas for classes and studying (Adams, 1976; Heiser, 2007; Malott, 1982; Winterfield, 2009; Yarborough, 1980).

A fourth major finding is that parolees enrolled in community college like the college environment and the social aspect of college. They consider the Midwestern community college a positive encouraging, helpful, learning environment. They feel that attending college has improved parole experience, and that all community college staff
and teachers are helpful and positive. Most met and worked directly with college Vice President prior to enrolling in college and indicated he is a supportive, encouraging individual that continues to encourage them in college. Some also met with the college Success Center counselors, and financial aid staff. Mostly all prefer downtown campus due to closer proximity to home and some have transportation issues to travel to rural campus. No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.

A fifth major finding is that parolees enrolled in community college are different as college students than they were prior to going into prison (socially different, learning something, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences). They feel that taking college classes keeps them busy, motivated to stay away from negative social influences, and will help them from returning to prison; school is their life and/or they need school in their lives to be successful; most earned at least a 3.5 GPA in college courses and are in an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree program. No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.

A sixth major finding is that for parolees enrolled in community college, goals for the future include completing the college program and obtaining (better) employment. No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.

A seventh major finding, as drawn from my research, involves the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI) and Department of Corrections (MDOC). All participants indicated that the reentry program and MDOC did not encourage college classes for them. Since I have assisted with the administration of the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI) grant in two Midwestern counties for five years and am extremely familiar with the MPRI model, I was surprised to hear that these parolees felt
that the MPRI program and MDOC were not encouraging college education for participants in the program.

Most parolees feel MDOC/MPRI should encourage college for parolees and prisoners; they were aware of education available in prison; and some completed some education in prison. Most completed work experience in prison. For some, attending college was a goal upon release from prison and might have taken college courses in prison (if funded and encouraged). No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.

An eighth major finding is that for parolees enrolled in community college, although most of their parent(s) might not have encouraged college education prior to them going to prison, they encouraged them, as parolees, to continue to complete college courses. They seemed closer to their families, as parolees in college, than they were prior to going to prison. Most are also first generation college students. No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.

A ninth, and final, major finding is that mostly all parolees enrolled in community college, growing up, had no encouragement by their parent(s) to take college classes prior to being released to the community; however, most were encouraged by extended family (Uncles, Aunts, Nephews) to attend college and extended family had attended (or currently attended) college. Growing up, most lived in dysfunctional homes at some point, parent(s) encouraged K-12 school, and were raised by single parent. Most siblings completed high school diploma and some college. Most parolees liked and did well in K-12 school, had a job prior to going to prison, and had two sets of friends (a group that did
well in school and a group that did poorly in school). No previous research found on parolees, thus Potts (2011) is a new finding.

Leadership and Research Recommendations

Recommendations for application of the qualitative research findings provide suggestions for future researchers, state department of corrections reentry program, and the Midwestern community college.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

When comparing the findings from my study to previous research on prisoners or parolees in higher education, three studies provided the same findings, thus six are new findings. Continued research that explores the voices of parolees within reentry programs and higher education will provide higher education, department of corrections, and reentry programs, a well rounded perspective on the experiences and allows them to make more informed decisions about their services in order to optimize students’ experiences, as well as students’ learning. I also recommend further study of individuals that have been discharged from parole, but still in college and/or completed degrees, to show further results of their experiences as an ex-offender choosing to participate in college or successfully completed college.

Participants indicated they had family support for them to continue to complete college courses. Continued qualitative research that explores the voices of the families of parolees in higher education would provide a family perspective on how to support parolees in college. Participants noted the main challenge of being a college student was studying and homework. Continued qualitative research that explores how parolees study
and complete homework in college would provide higher education on how to better support parolees’ special needs as college students.

Participants indicated they liked the community college environment and social aspect of school. They also noted all staff was helpful and positive to them. Continued qualitative research that explores what aspects of the community college environment parolees like would provide higher education on how to better support parolees’ special needs as college students.

Participants indicated goals for the future were to complete an Associate’s and/or Bachelor’s degree and obtain (better) employment. They also noted that attending college will help them from returning to prison. Quantitative analysis assessing recidivism rates of parolees that take college classes; college retention and employment of parolees, would provide higher education, department of corrections, reentry programs, and the community, information on the types of degrees completed and jobs obtained by parolees, and quantitative measures of success for living in the community.

**Higher Education and State Department of Corrections Reentry Program Recommendations**

The participants for this study were all highly enthusiastic and positive about the Midwest community college at which they were taking classes, and seemed satisfied with the experience. Only one participant provided specific suggestions for the community college, noting that the community college downtown campus should have a cafeteria (similar to the one at the rural campus), longer bookstore operation hours, and more full time teachers and tutors.

Participants indicated community college classes played a positive role in their life and might have an effect on them not going back to prison, as well as reenergizing a
relationship with family. Therefore it is important for continued collaboration between the Midwestern community college and department of corrections, which in turn provides prisoners and parolees additional opportunities to participate in higher education. Such collaboration should include the state department of corrections reentry’s continual encouragement of community college Success Center staff attending prison reentry In Reach visits and pre-parole orientations, and prison reentry participant and executive meetings.

Participants indicated they received Pell Grants to fund their college education. Continued support for prisoners and parolees’ college education funding opportunities will provide the funding needed for them participate in higher education.

Recidivism has been the golden standard for determining success of a parolee. I recommend higher education collect long-term data on recidivism rates of parolees that have completed college classes/programs.

Overall, it would appear beneficial for the state department of corrections reentry program to consider the expansion, or replication of, the Midwestern community college identified in this study for future prisoner reentry plans.

**Researcher’s Reflections**

As I conclude my research involving parolees enrolled in community college, the voice of these individuals still ring in my head regarding how this experience is affecting them.

You know, I changed something. I come here [college] and stay till it open and close...I come here with my little bag, try to have a couple dollars in my pocket so I can eat and I enjoy being around people. And there’s a lot of people in here
that’s older than me or younger than me, and I enjoy it and I enjoy that because I’m doing something different. I ain’t out here with the drunks and the druggees all of the time; I don’t even go that way. It’s serious…That’s what I chose…Since I’ve been out, I refuse to go places that I know that will hurt me…I changed my life around, all the way around, 360…because, look at me. You got a 40-year felon here! When I got out of prison, every place I knew…they were drinking and doing something behind them doors and just how long do you think I actually would have lasted just living that kind of [life], going places where I know that’s going on. You know I didn’t have one friend…reality really set in now because I’m out here now in the streets. I really don’t have any place to really go that I feel comfortable laying my head down and waking up in the morning. It’s a difference in me. I choose not to go to the places where I know I’m not going to be hurt or something bad happen, I’m just tired of that life. (Bugs Bunny)

Bugs Bunny’s reflection on his community college experience and feeling different than he was prior to going to prison matches other participant’s reflections. It also happens to match my own assessment of my personal growth and development throughout this study, community college experiences, and in life.

I was surprised by how much I identified with participants throughout the study. It seemed all of them had major struggles at some point in their life, but had made the decision at this juncture to be different than they were prior to going to prison, and to attend community college. Most considered attending community college a major difference in their life, not an easy choice, and not the easy way out. No matter the age, gender, or race, it seemed that participants were at a point in their life where they must
choose to participate in more positive elements of society or else the potential to fall back into old habits would be great. Community college was one of the positive elements they chose to participate in at that time.

Unlike most of the participants, I was raised in a house with two parents who provided a solid, peaceful, caring, stable home-life, which led to many opportunities for me to be successful in life. Despite those positive aspects, I experienced many major life struggles. Like the participants, I found myself in situations where I must choose to participate in more positive elements of society or else reap the consequences of additional poor choices.

At one of the major low-points in my own life, I went back to school at the community college, raised my GPA to honor status, and eventually attended a four-year college to complete my Bachelor’s degree and then also Master’s degree. I also held many jobs while attending community college and all throughout the Bachelor’s and Master’s degree programs. Many times I had to use public transportation for work and school. It was a constant struggle for me to coordinate my work, school, and bus route schedules. At one point, as a young single mother, I could identify with participants struggling with parenting and balancing quality time spent with children, working at a job, and college classes. Keisha, JR, John Q, John Do, Lee, Bugs Bunny, and Robert Jordan expressed wanting to be role models for their children as college students. I also identify with wanting to be a positive role model for my child as a college student.

Identifying with participants was helpful for gathering and analyzing data; however, forced me to constantly bracket out any areas of preconceived notions or ideas to ensure high integrity of the data. Meeting with participants in the community college
environment worked well and seemed natural for the participants since it seemed to capture the essence of their community college experience.

One challenge in the study was that a few of the interview questions did not receive quality responses, and so I had to rephrase the interview question at times, and change a few interview questions for future interviews. I learned that every interview question built on the next question, and the interview session felt like a dance where the interviewee was leading the way to the next question every time in order to arrive at the true essence of the participants.

There were surprises to me throughout the study. In the interviews, when asking about educational experiences growing up, and in prison, participants seemed neutral or negative, but when they talked about their current college student experiences, their faces lit up and they seemed positive and upbeat. Another surprise was, despite the wide difference in age range and ethnicity, participants were all singing the same song. They all felt different (socially different, staying away from criminal activity/negative influences) than they did prior to going into prison, they are role models, and they have reengaged a relationship with their families. Growing up, most seemed to have had the potential to have done well in college, but something got in the way, and now they are rediscovering the joy of learning. All participants seemed to have had the predisposition for education, the desire to be a role model, and the need for social connections. These are the collective “voices” of parolees-involved in a community college experience.

Overall, the entire research process has been a learning experience and changed me into a person that is more careful about life choices, and also more aware of the voices of parolees who have chosen the community college element of a reentry program.
My future research plans include conducting qualitative research on other challenged populations and cultures in society.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions
Interview Questions

Warm-Up
1. How are you doing today?
2. What is the highest grade (or years in college) you have completed?
3. What is your age?

Background
4. What was school like when you were younger? How did your family/friends view school?
5. Does anyone in your family attend college? or has attended?
6. Did you take classes in prison? If so, what was that like?
7. What did you think about college: before going to prison? after going into prison? now?
8. Were you ever encouraged to attend college? If so, by whom?
9. Why did you decide to take community college classes?
10. What were the steps you took to enroll in college classes? Who did you first meet with/talk to at the college? Who is paying for the classes?
11. How many classes are you taking? part time/full time? What classes?
12. How did you choose the courses you are taking?
13. How are you supporting yourself?

Experience
14. What did you like about your classes when they started? Dislike?
15. What do you like about your classes now? Dislike?
16. How do you fit college classes into your weekly schedule?
17. What are the challenges of taking college courses and how have you handled them?
18. How do you feel about the level of support from MPRI for taking college courses?
19. How is the experience of being a student at a Community College affecting: your life? family? parole experience?
20. What are you hoping to do when you complete the classes/program?
21. Where do you see yourself in the future? Do you think college classes will help you reach your goals? If so, how?
22. Do you think taking college classes can help you from returning to prison?
23. What haven’t we talked about that you would like to add?
Appendix B

Letter of Invitation for Parolee Participation
Dear ______________,

I am writing to you in hopes that you will participate in my dissertation research study of parolees taking classes in community college. This study has been approved by the community college, the Michigan Department of Corrections, and WMU. Your name was included in a list of names of MPRI parolees taking classes at KVCC and that is how I am able to contact you for this study. I have worked with the MPRI Program for over four years and am now finishing my Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership at Western Michigan University (WMU). My study is titled “Voices of Parolees who have Chosen a Community College Element within a Reentry Program" and is not a part of the MPRI Program. My dissertation advisor is Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer.

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how parolees experience being a student in a community college.

One benefit you may gain from participation in the study is a better understanding of your experiences as a student in community college. Another benefit from this study is by providing the researchers with information that can be used to improve prisoner reentry. In addition, you will receive a $10 gas station card after the interview, as gratitude for your time.
If you agree to participate, I would interview you for about 60-90 minutes during one visit. The interview would be scheduled at the community college campus at a time that is convenient for you. You will be asked about your experiences as a student in a community college. All information collected from you will be completely confidential. Only the researcher will know whether you are interested in learning more. If I were not able to complete the interview, I would stop the interview and reschedule to complete it at another time for no more than 60 minutes.

As an advocate of the MPRI Program and the community college element of the program, I would be grateful if you would consider this invitation to participate. I look forward to learning about your experience as a parolee participating in the community college element of a reentry program. Within a few days after you have received this letter, I will call you to inquire about your participation. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me. Thank you,

Kristi Potts, Researcher:

Kristi Potts, M.A.

Administrative Assistant MPRI Program

Kristi.potts@wmich.edu

Advisor: Louann Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D.

Western Michigan University

1903 West Michigan Avenue

Kalamazoo, MI 49008

Email: L.bierleinpalmer@wmich.edu
Appendix C

Follow-up Phone/ Email Script for Participation
Follow-up Phone/ Email Script for Participation

Hello, my name is Kristi Potts. I have been support to the MPRI Program for over four years. I contacted you a few days ago by email and/or mail hoping you will participate in my dissertation study of parolees in community college. This study is in partial fulfillment of my Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership at Western Michigan University.

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how parolees experience being a student in a community college.

As a parolee from the MPRI Program, taking classes in a community college, your valuable insights would benefit others who are considering the community college element of the MPRI Program.

One benefit you may gain from participation in the study is a better understanding your experiences as a student in community college. Another benefit from this study is by providing the researchers with information that can be used to improve prisoner reentry. In addition, you will receive a $10 gas station card after the interview, as gratitude for your time.

If you agree to participate, I would interview you for about 60-90 minutes during one visit. The interview would be scheduled at the community college campus at a time that is convenient for you. You will be asked about your experiences as a student in a community college.
If you are interested, I would like to meet with you to review details about the research and go over a consent document. If after this you agree to participate, we can proceed with the interview at that time. If you are not interested, opting out of the study will not impact your parole status. All information collected from you will be completely confidential. Only the researcher will know of your participation.

If you have any questions about the study, I would be happy to answer them at this time. I would like to schedule a visit to explain the consent form and discuss your community college experience. May I schedule a visit to explain the consent form and continue our conversation about your community college experience?

Thank you and I look forward to meeting you. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me with any questions that you may have about the study. You can contact me by email at: Kristi.potts@wmich.edu.

OR

Thank you for speaking with me. I understand that are not able to participate in this study. I appreciate the time that you spent as you considered participation.
Appendix D

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approved Consent Form
You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Voices of Parolees who have Chosen a Community College Element within a Reentry Program." This project will serve as Kristi Potts' dissertation for the requirements of my Doctor of Philosophy degree in Higher Education Leadership at Western Michigan University. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how parolees experience being a student in a community college.

Who can participate in this study?
I plan to study a group of 20 parolees, within the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Program (MPRI), enrolled in community college classes.

Where will this study take place?
All interviews will take place within a private room within the community college.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
You will be asked to participate in one (but not more than two) 60-90 minute interviews to be scheduled at the community college campus at a time that is convenient for you.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
You will be asked about your experiences as a student in a community college.
What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
The foreseeable risks associated with this study are minimal. By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing for the interview to be audio taped. There is a small possibility that answering some of the questions may evoke some feelings of anxiety. Should you experience any feelings of anxiety, there are counseling services available to you at Student Services at the community college.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
One benefit you may gain from participation in the study is a better understanding of your experiences as a student in community college. Another benefit from this study is by providing the researchers with information that can be used to improve prisoner reentry.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
All information collected from you will be completely confidential. Your identity will be known only to me as the student investigator. To ensure accuracy of your responses, the interview will be recorded using an audio recorder and later downloaded to a computer for transcription, storage, and protection. Your name will not appear on any documents on which information is recorded. The participants will be coded, and the researchers will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other documents will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the principal investigator’s office.

There are some limits to confidentiality. If there is a reason to suspect harm to oneself (e.g., suicide) or others (e.g., homicide), child abuse or child neglect, or violation of parole, Ms. Potts is ethically and legally obligated to report the concern to the appropriate authorities. If you have any questions regarding what this entails, please feel free to ask Ms. Potts.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You may refuse to answer a question or to participate, and may quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. You will experience no consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. You may also stop
the audio recording at any time during the interview. I may also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent. Your participation in this study will not impact parole status.

If you have any questions prior to or during the study, you may contact the Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer at (269) 387-3596 or Kristi Potts at Kristi.potts@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at (269) 387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant's signature  Date
Appendix E

Gas Station Card Receipt
Voices of Parolees who have Chosen a Community College
Element within a Reentry Program
Research Study

By signing this form, you are confirming that:

- You participated in one (but not more than two) 60-90 minute interview
- You have received a $10 gas station card from the Student Investigator, Kristi Potts, as gratitude for your time.

Parolee pseudonym:__________________________ Date:____________

Student Investigator:________________________ Date:____________
Appendix F

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter
Date: September 23, 2010

To: Louann Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
Kristi Potts, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 10-08-20

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Voices of Parolees who have Chosen a Community College Element within a Reentry Program” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 23, 2011