

PRISON EDUCATION CASE ANALYSIS: OREGON PRISON
EDUCATION PROGRAM'S STRUCTURES, MISSIONS, AND
GOALS

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This thesis aims to analyze the language and mission of four programs operating in Oregon carceral facilities to examine how their program goals, mission, and language differ from one another, and analyze what these similarities and differences can be associated with. The educational programs studied are carceral-specific branches of either four-year universities (Portland State University and University of Oregon) or community colleges (Chemeketa Community College and Blue Mountain Community College) in Oregon. By examining the organizational documents and public programming surrounding these educational opportunities in prison, the differing hallmarks of each program are studied and considered against one another, and patterns are identified. The findings suggest that there is a link between institutional type, geography, mission, and goals for reentry. Finally, an argument is made against the hyper fixation on recidivism and for a more accessible and all-encompassing program structure or program reevaluation.

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Background

School to Prison Pipeline: Who is Behind Bars?

To understand how education can be an effective tool against recidivism, we first must understand who, typically, is behind bars. How do people end up incarcerated? The full truth is much more complex than society is taught to believe. While it is easy to believe that prisoners are simply people who have been found guilty of committing crime, that explanation is a gross oversimplification of the societal upbringing, treatment, and structural pathways that encompass the journey that certain individuals are set on, oftentimes since birth. Based on demographics and location, it is clear to see that certain individuals are shaped and made to be criminals based off of societal treatment from meso-level institutions that are frequently reflected in micro-level, individual, interactions. Thus, who makes up the prison population is an important aspect to consider when discussing prison education, and any other topic relating to the prison industrial complex.

Certain populations of folks are hypercriminalized, in that they are surveilled by institutions (schools, for example) in their day-to-day lives and stopped by police more frequently, while being held to a different standard than other communities. In *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* by Victor Rios (2011), young Black and Latino boys are consistently treated as criminals by police, teachers, parole officers, and shopkeepers, whether or not they are actually acting on this criminal label or not. Being unjustifiably treated as a criminal in most situations had a negative effect on these boys that often lead them towards crime and gangs. The criminality was built into these children before they ever committed any crimes, making the main driver of their criminality the label of “criminal.” It was often easier for

these boys to lean into the narrative that everyone around them was building about them and act criminally (Rios 2011). Everyone around them assumed they were criminals, no matter how they acted. To internalize their own perceived criminality often seems to be the only option for these boys, instead of fighting the endless battle against the cemented and constant stigma against them.

Rios also emphasizes in *Punished* that while police are the most explicit extension of the carceral state and a common actor in the hypercriminalization process, teachers and the education system play a major role in the aforementioned labeling process. Teachers would often treat these boys as lost causes, incapable of working in or outside the classroom, destined for the criminal justice system. Some educational administrators would even merge the criminal justice system and the education system by calling the police and punishing students with outside intervention for classroom truancy, misbehavior, etc. So, for those who are incarcerated, there is already a strong, and negative, connection between criminality and education.

However, Rios attests that education can also be the path out of negative societal cycles between criminalization and incarceration. Rios himself was a part of a gang in Oakland, California, where he conducted his sociological ethnography on young boys and their experience. Due to help from a teacher, who broke the normative script of the hypercriminalization of Latino youth in school, Rios was able to be set on a path that got him he to college, where he eventually got a PhD. in sociology, before coming back and researching the very institutions that criminalized him (Rios 2011).

It is important to understand how education plays into the creation of the criminal label and the criminality of individuals, as the very thing that was once their pipeline to prison is now what higher education institutions are using to reverse the negative effects of their incarceration.

As will be discussed in the case study portion of this paper, one program is driven by trying to “reverse the school to prison pipeline” (Swordfisk 2019). This opposite pipeline can work, as education is a protective factor.

Protective Factors and Recidivism

In the sociology and criminology fields, there are certain social attributes that are marked as a protective factor. Other fields use this term to mean a lower negative likelihood of a certain outcome, but for this paper, the specific protective factors are linked with a lower incarceration rate and a lower recidivism rate. Recidivism being the re-arrest and/or re-incarceration of individuals who were formerly incarcerated and have already reentered back into mainstream society from prison. Thus, reducing recidivism is the goal of stopping individuals from reentering the criminal justice and carceral systems (Morenoff & Harding 2014). Things such as a higher socioeconomic class, employment, housing, and education are considered protective factors, meaning that if an individual has these things, their likelihood of becoming incarcerated or recidivating lowers considerably, based on situation. The education piece will be the main focus, however, as will be discussed later, many of these factors and social attributes are tightly intertwined and unable to be untangled.

The negative correlation between recidivism rates and prison education has been well documented in the sociology, criminology, and correctional fields (Hall 2015). Incarcerated individuals who partake in prison education programs recidivate less and have less violent conduct while incarcerated (Pompoco et al. 2017). The association between these two factors is not a question, but there is still hesitancy from lawmakers, correctional officers, and the general

public to encourage education for those who are currently incarcerated. Due to the negative connotation of the criminal label, incarcerated individuals are not seen as worthy of this education, despite them being some of the people who need it the most; this “principal of least eligibility” phenomenon is a part of this general stigma and subsequent lack of access and funding of carceral educational programs (Hall 2015).

Research Question and Methods

The driving question of this paper revolves around finding out the central focuses and driving principles of specific prison education programs in the state of Oregon. Additionally, I wanted to analyze the programs against each other to find any patterns or associations that relate to the program development and execution. Thus, my specific questions are:

1. What are the foundational missions and beliefs of the prison education programs available to incarcerated individuals in the state of Oregon?
2. How do these programs successfully serve incarcerated individuals?
3. In what ways do the programs differ from each other? Are there noticeable patterns in the differences?

The data collection was completed primarily through content analysis of existing program materials, mostly the specific program websites from the institutions studied. Based on the way programs presented themselves via their webpages was synthesized in the larger case analysis portion as well as the data table and program conversation section of this research.

Case Study Analysis of Programs

The four programs analyzed in this paper each serve as a case analysis on how the emphasis and structure of certain prison education programs shape the outcomes and programs themselves. Thus, each program serves as a specialized look into how an individual program's core beliefs and foundations are used to serve their student population on the inside. The programs will be discussed individually before being put in conversation with one another in the analysis portion of the paper.

Portland State University at Coffee Creek—Higher Education in Prison (HEP)

The Portland State University program, Higher Education in Prison (HEP), is the only program studied in this paper that specifically serves a women's correctional facility, Coffee Creek. This is not to say that the other programs do not serve women, as some do due to the rigid gender and sex assignments of prisons. While one's sex may not be congruent with their gender, the prison system does not often recognize that, meaning there are women in men's prison, and vice versa. The HEP program addresses gender in their mission; "The plan is to continue to develop a degree pathway for women, trans-identified and gender non-conforming adults in custody (AICs)" (Portland State University n.d.).

HEP is a unique program that mainly centers on starting an incarcerated individual on the college track before they reenter and leave prison, where they will likely finish their undergraduate degree at PSU or transfer those credits to another institution on the outside. While inside Coffee Creek, people are able to take a 15-credit seminar class, with the theme "Metamorphosis" (Portland State University n.d.). This 15-credit course is a yearlong seminar but is equal to about a full-time student's typical semester courseload (12 credits is the threshold

for “full-time student status” for undergraduates, as per PSU’s guidelines). This course is designed as a student’s first introduction to higher education, and there are similarly designed and taught courses on the PSU campus.

There are other liberal studies courses taught by PSU at Coffee Creek, such as Introduction to Business, Writing as Critical Inquiry, and Families and Society. These course offerings are less of a central PSU HEP offering than the “Metamorphosis” seminar in the sense that the credits are not specifically designed to be as easily transferrable and general education satisfying as the seminar credits. However, these credits are used to “continu[e] along a degree pathway” (Portland State University n.d.). NOTE: During the writing of this thesis, PSU HEP received a \$150,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to expand their course offerings. PSU will now offer six new humanities courses inside. These courses include African American Literature, Indigenous Nations Literature, and Chicana/Latina Literature. Part of the goal is to increase BIPOC involvement in the HEP courses at Coffee Creek (Swordfisk 2023). The impact of these classes was not studied, as the program had not begun offering these courses during the research period of this paper.

The course itself is a humanities driven course, composed of writing, group discussions, and other activities, all of which would be found in many college courses taught on the outside. Meaning that this course is a great way to introduce college to students who have maybe never taken part in any form of higher education. Not only does the seminar prepare the students for the type of knowledge they may continue to learn in college courses, but also how they will learn and the kind of pedagogical practices of this specific university. The students in the class are the same for the entire year (Portland State University n.d.). The credits consist of writing credits, science credits, and arts and letters credits: an assortment that checks off some graduation

requirements early on. This aspect of the program makes it incredibly simple to continue through the higher education process, as general education requirements are easily transferable. The introductory paragraph on the HEP website highlights the future impacts of partaking in the program (Portland State University n.d.):

The mission of Portland State University's Higher Education in Prison (HEP) program is to expand rigorous, quality higher education at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and to support justice-impacted students post-release. Because of its institutional commitment to equity and strategic urban location, Portland State University is uniquely positioned to create and strengthen educational opportunities that support incarcerated and reentering students, and to create pathways to degree completion.

PSU makes it clear that while the main intention is to get students on the educational track before reentering, their secondary goal is to get the reentered students back into college classes at PSU post release. In the program video on their website, a program coordinator even states how the goal is to "reverse the school to prison pipeline" (Portland State University n.d.).

Another unique aspect of HEP is that there are Portland State University academic counselors that are completely dedicated to advising the students in the Higher Education in Prison program and students returning to education after incarceration. These advisors are called Rebound Peer Support Specialists. Once they leave prison and reenter, if the formerly incarcerated students decide to continue their education on the PSU campus, they will continue to have access to the Rebound team, who are able to help students access a plethora of resources, such as tutoring, counseling, housing and food security, etc. (Portland State University n.d.). Housing is a particularly difficult struggle that many of the formerly incarcerated deal with (Herbert et al. 2015; Morenoff & Harding 2014). This dedication to helping combat other

struggles associated with reentry highlights, again, PSU's commitment to helping formerly and currently incarcerated students succeed in all facets of their lives enough to complete their degree.

Given the HEP resources, and the simple fact that the program exists, it is clear PSU cares about helping incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. However, there are many students who are left out of the HEP program. To take the yearlong seminar class, there is an expectation that that student will be reentering mainstream society from prison soon after the completion of the program, in order to finish their degree at PSU or continue on in higher education elsewhere. There are reasons for this, as the Metamorphosis class is designed to be a steppingstone from prison to higher education on the outside: an idea that is associated with a lower recidivism rate. Thus, the foundation of the program itself excludes those who cannot use any program or opportunity as a steppingstone to the outside—because there may not be an outside for some individuals who are currently incarcerated. The program helps students shape their reentry path to include higher education, which has the positive impact of more resource help and the perks associated with being on track to get a degree (Portland State University n.d.).

However, only some incarcerated individuals at Coffee Creek meet the release date requirements to participate in this program. This has to do with the structure of the program and the intended outcomes that PSU and the people involved in HEP have. When a program is structured around reducing recidivism, like HEP, there are going to be many people inside prison who are unable to participate. This phenomenon is a pattern seen with many of the programs studied in this research.

Chemeketa Community College – College Inside

Chemeketa offers a range of educational programs to the incarcerated individuals of multiple Willamette Valley institutions. Chemeketa offers GED programs as well as pathways to earn college certificates, degrees, career technical education and certifications while inside (Chemeketa Community College n.d.a). GED certification is important, but most of Chemeketa's educational program websites and literature focus on the colligate aspect of what they do.

The mission of College Inside is to "...create meaningful change through exposure to new concepts, experiences, and responsibilities. Through education in the correctional environment, we strive to break the cycle of incarceration and return these men to their communities better than they came in" (Chemeketa Community College n.d.a). While similar, Chemeketa's general Corrections Education "helps inmates earn their GED and college certificates and degrees to reduce their recidivism and support their productive participation in the workforce (Chemeketa Community College n.d.b). Chemeketa Community College serves three prisons, each with about 200-350 students in Chemeketa programs a year (Chemeketa Community College n.d.b). While the Chemeketa programs do not extend outside of prison as explicitly as PSU's programs do, their hopes for the impacts post-release are clear. Chemeketa's goals are laid out explicitly on their website (Chemeketa Community College n.d.a):

The College Inside program has three primary goals. First, we believe that completing a college degree program is key to achieving all our other goals, so we work very hard to ensure that all students who start our program will graduate with a degree before they release from prison. Second, we believe the process of learning, regardless of environment, can be very powerful and life-changing. We encourage our students to take value not only in the coursework they study, but also in the process of working with

others, challenging their worldview, and learning to appreciate differences in other people. We believe that students who can truly accept and seek out these experiences become better people, learn valuable skills, and ultimately are more employable and marketable. Finally, our program aims to reduce recidivism. We believe that the sense of accomplishment that comes with graduating from college, together with an enlightened view of themselves and their strengths, as well as their abilities to set goals and commit to achieving them, all contribute to a significant reduction in recidivism. Through education, we are able to help students move beyond the criminal thinking and behaviors that brought them to prison.

By not returning to prison, these college graduates contribute to significant savings to the state. They become better fathers and help to break the cycle of incarceration of their children, and are much more competitive in the job market, finding work or starting business that greatly benefit our communities.

There is also the following summarized version of their core program beliefs on a separate webpage dedicated to their correctional education efforts (Chemeketa Community College n.d.b):

We believe –

- Second chances should be given with all the tools that are necessary for success
- Rehabilitation is a choice, but once made, cannot be accomplished alone
- Marketable job skills are at the top of the list of necessary tools for reintegration in society

- A learning atmosphere that encourages growth, inspires confidence and creates a sense of community contributes to the success of our students

Chemeketa draws a direct connection between education and reducing recidivism; their numbers and website language suggest that that is likely a causal relationship. Since the College Inside's genesis in 2007, there have been 293 graduates from the College Inside program. The recidivism rate for those students who have graduated and reentered is 6%, which is a considerable reduction from the statewide rate of 25.5% (Chemeketa Community College n.d.b; Simpkins 2015, pg. 19).

Chemeketa's inclusion of career technical programs showcases the program's desire to get the people incarcerated workforce ready before they reenter. This dedication to make the students in their program employable post-release seems to be a contributing factor to the reduced recidivism rate. Part of their mission is to "...reduce their recidivism and support their productive participation in the workforce" (Chemeketa Community College n.d.b). By linking increased productivity and reduced recidivism, it is clear that their main focus is reducing recidivism by strengthening the resume and ability for employment of the formerly incarcerated. As has been proven through previous research, those who have any sort of criminal record have a much lower chance of employment (Morenoff & Harding 2014). This fact makes it more difficult for the formerly incarcerated to make enough money to successfully stay back in mainstream society. Chemeketa has created a program that narrowly focuses on a specific protective factor, employment, in order to reduce the recidivism rate. While there is a middle factor of employment, the desired outcome is the same: enroll and teach students in order to reduce recidivism.

A unique aspect of the language Chemeketa uses to justify their program is that they argue that by reducing recidivism (and thus reducing the amount of people incarcerated), their program saves the state money by not having to house and incarcerate the individuals already incarcerated. Simply put, Chemeketa's argument is that they lower recidivism, lowering the incarceration populations, which lowers taxpayer burden to pay for prisons.

Again, this emphasis differs from that of PSU, reflecting that the type of institutional structure (community/technical college vs. four-year university) sway the educational goals and execution of a protective factor providing program such as the ones mentioned in this paper. It is not better or worse to emphasize work post-release over continued education, however it is an association that may alter the post-release goals and lifestyles of those who are reentering after completing any type of educational program while inside. This difference is discussed further in the comparative analysis portion of the paper.

Blue Mountain Community College – Corrections Education Program

Blue Mountain Community College's (BMCC) Correction Education Program (CEP) has less website information than both PSU and Chemeketa. Their program is presented as more of a partnership between BMCC and the Oregon Department of Corrections. No other program specifically mentions the ODOC on their main webpage, BMCC mentions them twice on their CEP homepage (Blue Mountain Community College n.d.b).

BMCC focuses mostly on getting incarcerated individuals their GED or high school diploma. While the opportunity to participate in college level courses is not the central focus of the CEP, BMCC provides additional resources to help the incarcerated folks do some of the work to get into college or continue their education. BMCC offers release classes where students learn

to create resumes and create a post-release plan, where educational opportunities are emphasized (Blue Mountain Community College n.d.a). Additionally, BMCC does college exam proctoring for students who need to take an exam to place into certain college courses, as well as proctoring career technical exams such as plumbing and electrical licensing exams. Also, there are labs available for students to use for assignments, college research, and additional college prep (Blue Mountain Community College n.d.a).

In a news blog post on BMCC's website from 2019, there is mention of a new program called "New Directions" run without state or federal funding that allows certain incarcerated individuals to take college level classes taught by BMCC staff inside. At the time of the blog posting, there were 35 students participating (Blue Mountain Community College 2019). There is no other information about the New Directions program on BMCC's website.

Additionally, BMCC does not appear to have their own mission statement for their education program. The mission statement on their website is the ODOC mission statement (Blue Mountain Community College n.d.b):

Blue Mountain Community College's Corrections Education programs works closely with the Department of Corrections to uphold their mission statement.

The mission of the Oregon Department of Corrections is to promote public safety by holding offenders accountable for their actions and reducing the risk of future criminal behavior. The Adult Basic Skills Development program receives contractual oversight from the Education and Training Unit within the Offender Management and Rehabilitation Division of the Oregon Department of Corrections.

This is an incredibly unique mission statement, as none of the other programs studied supplement their mission with the mission of another institution.

Additionally, this is the only mission that uses language about stopping further criminal activity. The reduction of recidivism is something that is a clear intention for many programs, especially the ones studied in this paper, but it is usually talked about using the word recidivism itself. BMCC seems to be taking a more individual driven approach as opposed to an individual-community interaction approach. The implication of using crime centered language to talk about reentering individuals is that their criminality is still a part of who they are and will be post-release. Putting this in opposition to using recidivism as the main term used, it is an oversimplified view of the struggles the formerly incarcerated face post-release and upon societal reentry. By aiming to simply reduce the crimes committed by those reentering, one is completely ignoring the struggles for food, shelter, employment, transportation, social status, and social connections that are a protective factor against reentering. If recidivism happened due solely to the formerly incarcerated committing crimes after release because of their desire to do so, we would not have the detrimental societal issue of recidivism that we do today. Their mission puts almost all, if not all, of the blame of recidivism onto the individual, when that is not the whole picture.

University of Oregon – Prison Education Program & Inside Out

The University of Oregon program is unique in the sense that its foundations are that in their Inside Out program, what has been colloquially called “prison exchange.” The Inside Out program began in 2007, where students from the University of Oregon (“outside students”) would travel to one of the prisons in Oregon, usually Oregon State Correctional Institution or

Oregon State Penitentiary, and take classes inside the prison with their incarcerated classmates (“inside students”) (University of Oregon n.d.).

There is great value in the difference in perspectives that the Inside Out structure provides. It is unlike any other of the programs listed, as there is an opportunity for students who are not incarcerated to learn alongside their incarcerated peers.

While their website is sparser than others in terms of mission and goal language, there was a general bulletin written by the UO Inside Out programs director stating the programs values, as of December 2021 (Cohen 2021):

Our goal as a program is to promote behavior that fosters a healthy work environment and supports individual and collective success. We respect the rights, dignity, and worth of all people, including students, staff, faculty, the community where we live and work, and the broader community both within and beyond the walls.

We commit to:

Treat everyone as individuals worthy of care, valuing our diverse experiences, identities, styles, backgrounds, and perspectives.

Speak respectfully and aim to be empathetic and constructive, especially in difficult conversations.

Encourage each other to share points of view, then listen respectfully to different positions or ideas.

Listen actively to understand others when they are talking.

Acknowledge others for their labor and contributions.

Present problems in a way that promotes mutual discussion and resolution.

Be mindful of boundaries and individual privacy, and to protect the dignity of all and their ownership of their own narratives.

While almost entirely pedagogical, this was the most explicit statement of mission and goals that was readily available on their webpage. The most fantastical of any program studied, there is much less emphasis on what the students will do with their knowledge post-release. Instead, the program is focused on helping incarcerated folks have access to education in their current state. This has to do with the fact that to enter the program there is no cap on how long until a student reenters, or if a student is ever able to reenter at all. This is unlike any other program researched, as recidivism and post-release was always a topic that came up in programing, goals, or mission. NOTE: While I gained much knowledge from this program by participating in it as an “outside student” in an Inside-Out class, I am unable to provide any evidence that was not published for public consumption, in order to preserve the integrity of the program.

Summary of Missions, Goals, and Program Ideology

Program:	Mission standouts:	Goals:	Summary of central program ideology:
Portland State University—Higher Education in Prison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “high-quality education” inside • Change lives through education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-release degree completion (specifically on PSU’s campus) • Support students before and after release 	Lower recidivism by helping students begin their higher education pathway in prison, so it is easier for them to complete their degree path outside, specifically at PSU.
Chemeketa Community College—College Inside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create meaningful change through higher education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three specific goals: degree completion pre-release, encourage value in learning, and reduce recidivism • Employment post-release as a protective factor 	Reducing recidivism through helping their students become employable post-release, which lessens the strain of incarceration on the state.
Blue Mountain Community College—Corrections Education Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close partnership with Oregon Department of Corrections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase safety • Reduce future crime 	By following the Oregon Department of Corrections guidelines, incarcerated individuals will be less likely to commit crime again once reentered.
University of Oregon—Prison Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance educational opportunities for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat all students, incarcerated or otherwise, as equal individuals 	To give all incarcerated individuals the opportunity to experience higher education with their incarcerated peers, as

Program & Inside Out	incarcerated individuals <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social justice is a foundational pillar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster the creation of a welcoming educational space	well as their “outside” student counterparts.
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Comparative Analysis

Each program differs from another in some way in terms of structure, mission, people served, educational emphasis, and/or outcomes. These differences can be attributed to factors such as geography, institutional type, and program goals:

Much like PSU's college education program, there is the option for students to transfer their credits to an outside institution once they are released and reentering. Unlike PSU, however, the emphasis on continued education is much less pervasive in the Chemeketa information and mission. This could possibly be associated with the fact that PSU is a four-year university, whereas Chemeketa is a community college that does not offer bachelor's degrees, meaning their program philosophies are different in structure due to the nature of the educational institution and what they provide.

PSU has an incredibly streamlined program, whereas Chemeketa has more variety in the types of programming and educational focus. This too could be associated with the type of institution that is running these programs, as stated before, PSU is a four-year university, meaning their outside educational structure is going to be more focused on a four-year degree completion, as is the norm of PSU. Whereas community colleges serve more nontraditional students who are not seeking four-year degrees at that institution, meaning their basis of knowledge and typical programming plan is open to more variety and career-technical education and focus as compared to a university.

Many ideas surrounding recidivism and protective factors are at the heart of each of the programs analyzed. However, they are executed in different ways. PSU's HEP program keeps women from recidivating by setting them up on an incredibly clear path to a bachelor's degree, with resource help to combat the financial and housing struggles associated with recent reentry.

Chemeketa and BMCC give their students skills and career education in order for the recently incarcerated individuals to be employable, which also can partially combat the financial and housing worries of reentering citizens. This is a notable method of preventing recidivism. As discussed, Chemeketa used future employment as a central pillar to their program and operations. This emphasis on employability is not seen just at Chemeketa, but at other programs nationwide and globally, as well. Mertanen & Brunila (2018) discuss how an emphasis on employability works within some European countries and the subliminal messaging that is being marketed when there is an emphasis on employment. Mertanen & Brunila highlight how this job market focus tried to shape incarcerated individuals into proper citizens by indirectly teaching the traits of a good laborer; traits such as resiliency, self-sufficiency, etc. By emphasizing work as a way to avoid prison again, these incarcerated individuals are learning the cultural script for success post-release (Mertanen & Brunila 2018). Understanding specific social scripts, or the expectation of individuals in certain roles in certain situations, shapes how these individuals will move through the world post-release and makes it easier for them to avoid reentering the carceral system. This is a foundational method to how Chemeketa works in explicitly and formal educational ways as well as implicit social ways.

While Chemeketa and BMCC are both community colleges as opposed to the four-year university model of PSU and UO, their similarities are not as plentiful as expected. There are a couple reasons that this might be true, one being geographic location. Chemeketa serves the Willamette Valley, along the I-5 corridor. Being located along a major interstate means higher accessibility, especially when it comes to visitors. Additionally, the surrounding institutions and general population are different in more sparsely populated counties compared to their city counterparts. It is easy to identify how a program based in the Willamette Valley (PSU,

Chemeketa, UO) is run would differ from the implementation of a more rural program (BMCC). This geographic difference may be associated with some difference in overall program structure and execution.

However, the nature of a community college program is different in many ways than that of a four-year university. As Gaskew notes, community colleges have many advantages when it comes to offering up opportunities for prison education based on three key factors: proximity to correctional facilities, lower cost of education, and a critical cultural advantage (2015, pg. 67-69). While the first two factors are standard, the cultural advantage highlights the typical audience and student base of a community college. There are what four-year universities refer to as “nontraditional student” or students who did not come to college right away, post high school, but community colleges are made up of “nontraditional” students. By being versed in many age groups, backgrounds, and other factors, community colleges are better equipped to build a program and education to individuals who are not aged between 18-24 and have just completed high school. Not that PSU and UO are unable to provide high quality and proper education to incarcerated folks, I am simply noting that it comes easier and strays away from their educational norms for community colleges to teach incarcerated individuals.

Conclusion: Reevaluating Recidivism as Key Justification of Program

Reducing recidivism is a compelling and noble goal—keeping people from returning to prison is beneficial to the individual, community, and society. However, as seen with many of the programs studied here, building prison education programs around the concept of reduced recidivism is too narrow of a central pillar to reach the full impact these programs could have. There are many incarcerated individuals who are not going to reenter soon, maybe never. There are people inside who are never going to have the opportunity to be a part of the reduced recidivism statistic. The question becomes, should these people be allowed to participate in these programs if the goal is to reduce recidivism? This question not so subtly suggests that certain prisoners are less worthy than others, which goes against the very nature of many of these programs. Supporters and creators of prison education programs are fighting to do their work in order to make the lives of the formerly incarcerated better post-release, but sometimes will not focus on the fact that there are people inside who will not be able to come out. While the foundation and belief of many of these educational opportunities is that people on the inside are worthy of education, by excluding certain groups of people they are further solidifying the claim that people are more worthy when they are on the outside by treating folks as either pre-reentered or not.

It is for this reason that I implore programs like some studied in this paper to evaluate how their programs can unintentionally exclude a myriad of different incarcerated individuals, and to analyze what that means, ethos wise, to their program and the people it serves. Again, reducing recidivism is not a bad or evil goal, it is a genuinely helpful aspiration and I do applaud these programs for doing what they can to lower the prison population. Breaking the cycle of

incarceration at every point is important to do and strive for. However, it is also important to think about how these programs that are built to help combat the negative societal effects of incarceration inadvertently perpetrate the exclusion and further division of incarcerated individuals.

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