

Prison to College Pathways: Reentry and the Continuum of Care in the Tufts Education

Reentry Network Program, MyTERN

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Abstract:

This thesis addresses the following questions: What does a successful university-run reentry program look like? What structure and values make it successful? These questions were answered through interviews conducted with formerly incarcerated participants in the Tufts Education Reentry Network Program, MyTERN, regarding their program experience. Research findings suggest that MyTERN's function as a transition between prison and college and its prioritization of a social justice curriculum, restorative justice practices, and community building were crucial aspects of the program. By including all of these elements, MyTERN made students feel more valued, supported, capable, and even human, thereby contributing to their increased confidence, civic mindedness, hope for the future, and efficacy in accomplishing their goals. These findings indicate that in order to be successful, reentry programs must adopt clear missions and values that focus on the social, emotional, and psychological needs of participants, rather than solely focusing on tangible goals such as college matriculation and employment.

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**Evolution of Men from Prison:
Eugene Ivey**

The turning point came when
I just couldn't
Take no more,
Languishing in darkness,
Pacing the floor, eroding my core
An epiphany knocking
At my door.

On the cusp of 15 years, parole
looming in the foreground. Life or death?
I choose life.
The righteous path I tread.
In love, to these books of knowledge I wed.
DEDICATION!

No longer weak, I'm TUFT now.
They furrow their brows. How?
Got the best of me,
But this has always been
My destiny.

I found my VOICE.
I came, I suffered, I triumphed!
Myth Debunked.

Introduction

"There was a time when I didn't appreciate education. I was taught and conditioned to believe that education was something that was to be frowned upon. I chose to get my education in the streets. And I passed with flying colors. Then I was sent straight to prison instead of a college campus."--Derek

Education is one of the most fundamental pillars of personal success in U.S. society. However, the education system often perpetuates systemic racism and creates a direct pipeline to the prison system in certain populations. In K-12 schools, zero-tolerance policies are widespread, as is an increased reliance on school police officers (SROs) who enforce in-school punishment. Moreover, students of color are scrutinized and punished more heavily for rule violations than their white counterparts. The application of a policing model for discipline in school settings results in students of color being removed from school, arrested and sentenced in juvenile courts, and later returning to adult courts and prisons (Heitzeg, 2014). The funneling of a high percentage of students of color from the school yard to the jail yard is known as the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

Serving time, as well as a criminal record itself, contributes to many barriers for individuals once released from prison, including obstacles to obtaining employment, housing, healthcare, and educational opportunities. For this reason, Angela Davis emphasizes that “mass imprisonment generates profits as it devours social wealth, and thus it tends to reproduce the very conditions that lead people to prison” (Davis, 2003). The reproduction of social conditions specifically related to poverty as a result of incarceration contribute to high rates of recidivism. Therefore, once the school-to-prison-pipeline opens, the cycle of incarceration tends to continue.

There are many systemic changes that must happen on the local, state, and federal level to address inequities in the education and criminal legal system, as well as the lack of resources for returning citizens, to prevent high rates of incarceration and recidivism. However, there are also steps that colleges and universities can take to interrupt the continuity of the school-to-

prison-pipeline and instead facilitate a *prison-to-college-pipeline* that may improve the long-term outcomes of incarcerated and previously incarcerated individuals.

Many universities already offer college-in-prison programs, and in 2023, Pell Grants will be reinstated for incarcerated college students, which will vastly increase educational opportunities for incarcerated people. According to a study published by the RAND Corporation, seventy five percent of people who are released from prison return to prison within five years, but a college degree brings the return to prison rate down to between 2% and 0% (Davis et al., 2013). Therefore, these college-in-prison programs are crucial to the long-term wellbeing of system-impacted individuals. However, there is a fundamental gap in prison education: there is often no continued support for students once released from prison. Very few universities offer reentry programs on the outside or fully support a transition for students in college-in-prison-programs to matriculate at their main campuses. For a prison-to-college pipeline to truly function, educational opportunities and reentry support must continue to be provided beyond the walls of correctional institutions.

This study examines an existing university-run reentry program, the Tufts Education Reentry Network, MyTERN, to better understand how colleges and universities can best support returning citizens with the effect of reversing the school-to-prison pipeline. This study thus seeks to answer the following questions:

1. *What does a successful college reentry program look like?*
2. *What structures make it successful?*
3. *What values make it successful?*
4. *What is the definition of success when it comes to prison reentry?*
5. *What challenges do universities face when running a reentry program?*

The ultimate goal of this research is to provide pertinent information to colleges and universities that will help support the successful implementation of more university-run reentry programs in order to facilitate a continuity of care for college students who are also returning citizens.

This thesis is the culmination of the major I created through the Tufts Center for Interdisciplinary Studies (CIS), titled “Carceral Studies.” The major combines classes from the sociology, education, civic studies, and political science departments at Tufts. The specific courses were selected to enable me to study the prison industrial complex and to explore potential solutions to mass incarceration through historical, educational, societal, racial, and policy-focused lenses. Addressing prison reentry requires this multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach. After all, the current state of reentry is shaped by barriers established by the criminal legal, education, housing, workforce, and healthcare systems, as well as the more overarching realities of economic disparities and specifically those rooted in the entrenched systemic racism of the United States. Moreover, college reentry programs often take a multi-pronged approach and combine many different elements of support. The Tufts University Education Reentry Network (MyTERN), which will be the subject of my research in this thesis, combines elements of higher education, civic engagement, practical reentry support, and racial and gender justice. This multidimensional program thus requires the interdisciplinary lens that I bring to this project.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction:

Of the seven million adults in the United States under some form of criminal justice supervision, including incarceration, probation, or parole, approximately 730,000 individuals are released annually. Nearly two-thirds of the individuals released from state prison are rearrested and nearly half return to prison within three years of release, either for violations of parole conditions or for being prosecuted for new crimes (Durose et al. 2014).

Scholars and policymakers have identified many potential challenges to successful reentry that contribute to the exceptionally high recidivism rate in the United States. These challenges include barriers to employment and affordable housing due to restrictive laws for people with criminal records, the lack of a high school degree or equivalent, and the return to communities typically characterized by high rates of poverty (Travis & Petersilia 2001). Additionally, people released from prison may suffer from substance abuse and mental illness (Petersilia 2003; James and Glaze 2016), the feeling of stigma and demoralization resulting from the status of having been incarcerated, family strain, and lack of a supportive community.

There are a wide range of programs that seek to address the barriers to successful reentry and disrupt the cycle of recidivism for people returning home from prison. Some examples include job-readiness and entrepreneurship programs, college degree programs, substance abuse counseling, organizations that provide legal support, and many more. These reentry programs can be grouped into three main umbrella categories: corrections-based programs, nonprofit programs, and university-run programs. In the literature review, I will give a brief overview of the current state of corrections-based and non-profit reentry programs in the United States today. I will then transition to university-run programs, which is the main focus of this thesis. I will take

an in-depth look at the existing university-run programs, their structure and values, and how they compare to one another.

Corrections-Based Programs:

A reentry program that is run by a state's Department of Corrections or the Federal Bureau of Prisons is classified as a corrections-based program. Most state and federal prisons are required to provide reentry support for incarcerated people prior to release. The intended goal of these programs is to adequately prepare incarcerated people for life on the outside. For example, in Massachusetts, there is an Institutional Reentry Committee (IRC) at each prison. The committee is required to meet with incarcerated individuals six months before release to create an Individualized Reentry Plan (IRP), which outlines housing, employment, physical and mental health appointments, prescriptions, and other necessary services post-release (Massachusetts Department of Corrections, 2022).

However, according to interviews with incarcerated individuals, the reentry support provided by prisons is often very minimal, poorly advertised, and only for people very close to release. Furthermore, incarcerated people are regularly transferred between facilities and therefore lack consistent reentry support (Ortiz and Jackey, 2019). An audit of the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) demonstrates the lack of reentry support provided by prisons. The audit "examined the files of 60 soon-to-be-released prisoners with an eye out for their required Individual Reentry Plan (IRP). Twenty-two files – almost 37% of the total – had no evidence that IRPs were even discussed with prisoners" (Office of the State Auditor, 2020). Furthermore, Correctional Officers reported that, "some employees did not have appropriate reentry training and DOC did not provide enough job aids to properly assist them when they were not aware of reentry standards." The audit demonstrates that the DOC does not provide the

resources to adequately prepare returning citizens for the obstacles they will be presented with once released (Office of the State Auditor, 2020).

In addition to reentry programming behind the wall, the most prominent and well-funded corrections-based system focused on reentry is parole, a government program of supervision post-release. Parole grants incarcerated people an early release from prison, conditional on the individual complying with a strict set of rules, including restriction from travel, curfews, employment requirements, GPS monitoring, prohibition of alcohol, and agreement to randomized searches, home visits, and drug tests (Massachusetts Parole Board, 2022). People on parole are monitored by a parole officer, whose job is to ensure and enforce compliance with these rules and regulations (Legal Information Institute). Approximately 80% of people released from prison are released to parole; in 2019, a total of 878,900 people were under parole supervision in the United States (Oudekerk and Kaeble, 2021).

Many people on parole live in halfway houses, which are also a category of corrections-based reentry service. A halfway house provides shelter for people recently released from prison and who are on parole. They are run by private companies or organizations but are under the supervision of the Bureau of Prisons, Department of Corrections, or the Parole Board. Halfway houses, like parole, monitor the behavior and actions of people living there, and enforce rules, curfews, and employment requirements for people recently released from prison (Daniel and Sawyer, 2020).

According to the majority of state Departments of Corrections, the purpose of parole is to protect communities and maintain public safety by providing a structured and smooth transition home for people releasing from prison. For example, the Colorado Department of Corrections states that the mission of parole is to “increase public safety by evaluating an individual's

potential for successful reintegration to the community through the use of innovative evidence informed practices,” and the Texas Department of Corrections states, “The mission of the Parole Division is to promote public safety and positive offender change through effective supervision, programs, and services.”

However, according to Ortiz and Jackey (2019), despite its stated mission, parole actually more often functions as a form of obligatory surveillance and punishment rather than supportive reentry assistance. They argue that rather than providing adequate reentry support, corrections-based programs tend to restrict freedom, exacerbate barriers to reentry, and contribute to recidivism. They write, “parole and post release supervision are merely extensions of the carceral apparatus.... Consequently, supervision often hinders reentry by enforcing unrealistic expectations and conditions” (Ortiz and Jackey, 2019). Data from a 2018 PEW research report supports this conclusion by demonstrating the high recidivism rates for people on parole. The study finds that approximately one-third of people under surveillance are reincarcerated, often for violation of the conditions of parole and not new crimes (PEW Charitable Trust, 2018). For example, in 2007, 26.3% of people released on parole in New York were reincarcerated within two years for parole rule violations in comparison to only 6.8% who were reincarcerated for new crimes (New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, 2010).

Non-Profit Reentry Support:

The largest number of existing reentry programs fall under the category of nonprofit organizations. There is great diversity in the size and structure of nonprofit reentry programs for previously incarcerated individuals. A significant number of these nonprofits provide individuals with comprehensive reentry resources, including employment and housing support, mental health

counseling, and legal services. Other nonprofits choose to focus on providing a specific category of service. For example, many programs focus specifically on job readiness and finding employment, some focus on enrolling previously incarcerated individuals in colleges and universities, and others provide free community living, free legal support, or addiction and mental health treatment.

In addition to the variability in the types of services provided, there are also substantial differences in structure between reentry-focused nonprofits. Some programs function as a resource center where people can go to receive one-time support or attend a specific workshop or panel. For example, if someone needed help finding a job, they could schedule an appointment to build a resume, or if they needed legal support, they could work a couple of times with a legal professional. In contrast, other programs are more structured, continuous and longer-term, where members commit to a six or twelve-month program, with weekly meetings, classes, or workshops. Furthermore, the scope of these programs differs widely, with some programs supporting ten previously incarcerated individuals while other programs support thousands of released individuals. Some programs compensate individuals for participating in their program while others do not.

Finally, different nonprofits range in their pedagogical approaches and goals. Most programs focus on practical skills (computer proficiency, job readiness, education) and basic living needs (housing, government-issued identification, clothing, etc). However, other programs emphasize the importance of community-building, restorative justice, or incorporate trauma informed practices. Many are run by previously incarcerated individuals, and many are not. In conclusion, there is not one way to classify the wide range of nonprofits that exist.

While many of these programs are sincerely dedicated to improving outcomes of reentry, the reach and impact of these programs vary greatly. The United States government only supports non-profit reentry programs in the form of grants; however, grants are often not consistent means of funding and must be reapplied for. There is no assurance that grants will be a long-term source of funding. Therefore, nonprofits often must rely on private donations for survival or face an unreliable future that makes planning and building difficult at best. Because of the challenges to receiving funding, many nonprofit reentry programs must remain very small. Additionally, the scarcity of resources creates competition between programs for grant-funding and private donors, which may prevent programs from working together (Thompkins, 2010).

University-run Programs:

A significant amount of research demonstrates the importance of educational programs inside prison to reduce recidivism rates. A 2013 report by the RAND Corporation found that any formal education in prison reduces recidivism by at least 43%. This same report demonstrates that receiving any college education drops the recidivism rate below 10% and earning a college degree drops the rate between 0-2% (Davis et. al, 2015). In 2015, President Obama awarded 67 colleges, mostly community colleges, “Second Chance Pell Grants,” as an experiment for college-in-prison funding. Outside of community colleges, many prestigious universities have also joined the college-in-prison movement, including Cornell, Georgetown, Northwestern, Wesleyan, Yale, Villanova, Boston College, Boston University, and Tufts. Additionally, with the restoration of Pell Grants for students attending college in prison starting in 2023, many more colleges are beginning to develop programs to offer courses and degrees behind the wall (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). These in-prison programs are a vital first step to increasing opportunity and quality of life for people once they are released from prison. However, although

many colleges and universities offer college-in-prison programs, very few schools extend their program to the outside or provide support once people are released.

Only a handful of colleges and universities run reentry programs. The majority of these programs focus their efforts on providing resources for previously incarcerated students to enroll in two or four-year colleges post-release. These resources often include financial aid support, admissions counseling, mentorship, mental health services, networking, and academic coaching and advising. Four of the most prominent examples of reentry programs run by colleges and universities are Project Rebound, NJ Step, the College Initiative at John Jay, and Georgetown's Pivot Program.

Project Rebound:

Project Rebound is based out of California and is the largest university-run reentry program in the United States. The program has branches at fourteen of the twenty-three California State University (CSU) campuses, including Bakersfield, Fresno, Fullerton, Humboldt, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Northridge, Pomona, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Marcos, and Stanislaus. The goal of the program is to help previously incarcerated people successfully enroll in and complete a degree at a Cal State campus. In order to do so, Project Rebound provides previously incarcerated individuals with a wide range of services, including an introduction to the university, admissions processing, academic program advising, FAFSA assistance, meal and parking stipends, access to a learning center and SAT tutoring, professional psychological counseling, and mentorship from previously incarcerated mentors. There is no component of Project Rebound inside prisons; however, prison employees provide information on the program inside so people are aware of it when they are released (Project Rebound, 2022).

Each year, Project Rebound works with over 400 students. They receive a \$1 million ongoing annual allocation from the California state government (Vardon, 2019). In addition, in 2019, Project Rebound received an additional \$3.3 million from the state government in order to implement the program on two new Cal State campuses (Project Rebound SFSU). Furthermore, the Associated Students Inc. provides \$10,000 in annual scholarship funds for individuals completing the program (Vardon, 2019). A significant amount of this budget goes to paying staff, and the rest is allocated to supporting students. Project Rebound also has partnerships with the Prison University Project, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, and the New Way of Life Reentry Project. Because of its many partnerships with other organizations, Project Rebound connects students to other programs to provide assistance if their services do not cover everything (Project Rebound, 2022).

Central to the mission of Project Rebound is leadership provided by previously incarcerated people. Therefore, the majority of staff members and leaders in the program are system-impacted. Furthermore, in addition to their commitment to supporting education, Project Rebound defines success through civic engagement. The Project Rebound website states that it prioritizes helping students “enhance their capacity for civic engagement and community leadership” and “empower themselves, their families, and their communities,” in addition to matriculating on a Cal State campus and earning a degree. ¹

Data on Project Rebound’s success seems promising. Between 2016 and 2020, the retention rate among program participants was over 89%. Additionally, 100% of graduates secured jobs or enrolled in post-graduate programs after completing their degree. Most

¹ Besides listing it as a priority on their website, there is no mention of how the program enhances students’ capacity for civic engagement.

significantly, data collected by Project Rebound states that the recidivism rate among Project Rebound students is 0% (Project Rebound, 2022).

The New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons (NJ STEP)/

Mountainview Communities (MVC):

NJ-STEP is a reentry program run in collaboration between Rutgers University and Raritan Valley Community College. Similar to Project Rebound, the goal of NJ-STEP is to provide resources and services to help previously incarcerated individuals successfully enroll in two and four-year campuses. However, unlike Project Rebound, NJ STEP utilizes an inside-to-outside model of reentry support. Inside the New Jersey prisons, Raritan Valley offers an associate's degree in Liberal Arts and Rutgers offers a bachelor's degree in Justice Studies. Additionally, NJ-STEP counselors enter the prison and help with academic advising and prepare students for their education plans post-release.

There are a few different pathways for students within NJ-STEP once released. If someone is released prior to completing their associate's degree, they work with the transition team at NJ-STEP to enroll at a local community college. While at the community college, NJ-STEP works with students to apply to Rutgers or other four-year universities upon completion of their associate's degree. If someone completed their Raritan Valley associate's degree with a 3.0 grade point average or higher or started their Rutgers BA inside, they are automatically admitted to Rutgers to finish their degree upon release (NJ-STEP). Once on Rutgers campus, there are many resources for NJ-STEP students. NJ-STEP partners with Mountainview Communities (MVC), another Rutgers-based organization. MVC counselors support students with housing,

employment, financial management, legal issues, and campus networking. They also help facilitate peer support meetings (NJ-STEP).²

NJ-STEP has supported 1,300 students since it was founded in 2012. The BA/AA degree inside the prison is funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the Mellon Foundation (Callabro, 2018). The founding of NJ-STEP was also funded by the Vera Institute of Justice, the Ford Foundation, and the Sunshine Lady Foundation. In addition to Mountainview Communities, NJ-STEP partners with the New Jersey Department of Corrections and New Jersey State Parole Board (NJ-STEP). Mountainview Communities has existed on Rutgers campus since 2005, well before NJ-STEP offered a college degree inside NJ prisons. From 2005-2015, only 5% of the previously incarcerated individuals admitted to Rutgers and supported by MVC were reincarcerated, and 73% completed their bachelor's degree on campus (Rutgers, 2015).

College Initiative at John Jay:

John Jay College for Criminal Justice also runs an inside-to-outside reentry program. The Institute for Justice and Opportunity, formerly titled the Prisoner Reentry Institute (PRI), is the umbrella reentry organization at John Jay. Under this umbrella organization, John Jay and Hostos College run The Prison to College Pipeline (P2CP), which provides accredited but non-degree granting college courses for incarcerated people at Otisville Correctional Facility. The program is particularly focused on reentry and is geared towards individuals in the last 3-5 years of their sentence. College level general education courses are also paired with individualized Academic Reentry Planning (ARP) sessions with social workers, program wide workshops on financial literacy, housing, etc; and parole preparation sessions (Seligman, personal communication, 2022).

² There is no mention of specific pedagogical values of the program.

Once released, the students from P2CP enter into the other section of the Institute for Justice and Opportunity, The College Initiative Program. The College Initiative program was formerly a non-profit, but in 2015 joined the John Jay Institute for Justice and Opportunity. The College Initiative assists P2CP students and other returning citizens in the NYC area with applications to the City University of New York (CUNY) schools and supports other aspects of reentry, such as employment, housing, physical and mental health, and family needs. The College Initiative utilizes academic counselors that support students on campus and peer mentors that are seniors in the program and work with first years. Finally, the program organizes various bonding events with students to promote community building. The Institute for Justice and Opportunity stresses that “directly impacted people are integral to the planning and pursuit of our advocacy agenda, just as they are central to the planning and delivery of our direct services” (John Jay Institute for Justice and Opportunity).

Since its founding in 2002³, more than one thousand previously incarcerated or court-involved students have pursued higher education through the College Initiative. Nearly four hundred of these students have earned post-secondary degrees, and roughly 20% of those graduates have earned multiple degrees (John Jay Institute for Justice and Opportunity). The Prisoner Reentry Institute, in collaboration with the State University of New York, will receive approximately \$2.37 million over five years from the New York State Government (Criminal Justice Investment Initiative). The Prison to College Pipeline and the College Initiative at John Jay also partner with the Osborne Association, which provides support in housing, employment, reunification with family, health care, and other resources for returning citizens (John Jay Institute for Justice and Opportunity).

³ As stated above, the College Initiative was not housed in John Jay until 2015.

Georgetown:

Similar to John Jay and NJ-STEP, Georgetown runs both a college-degree program inside Maryland State Prisons as well as a reentry program once students are released, called the Pivot Program. The Pivot Program is a nine-month entrepreneurship and business program for approximately twenty individuals released from prison in the last two years. The program combines courses taught by Georgetown professors and TAed by Georgetown students, such as philosophy, business and entrepreneurship, and storytelling, with an internship at a local business or non-profit. Unlike the more common model of college-run reentry programs, in which universities provide resources for previously incarcerated people to enroll on their campus, the Georgetown Pivot Program is a cohort-based program and students are not enrolled on Georgetown's main campus (Pivot Program).

Students in the Pivot Program attend classes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9am-5pm, and participate in their internship on Tuesday and Thursday from 9am-5pm. The program is completely compensated, and each participant receives approximately \$17.50 an hour, for both participating in classes and the internship. Students are therefore paid for going to school and do not need to simultaneously find another job (Joshua Miller, personal communication, 2021). Unlike the other programs described so far, students receive a “*non-credit-bearing* certificate in business and entrepreneurship” at the end of the program. Furthermore, although some participants end up applying to the BA program and do coursework on Georgetown's urban campus after completing the certificate, the goal of the Pivot Program is not necessarily to further higher education or provide a pipeline to Georgetown's main campus. Rather, it is focused on teaching business and entrepreneurship and providing students with the

skills to gain full-time employment after the program is completed. After the program ends, participants are either given the resources and connections for full-time employment or are given the tools and resources to start their own business (Pivot Program).

For The Pivot Program to function, it needs a large amount of funding. In addition to a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency, the DC government's Department of Employment Services provides significant funding that covers participants' weekly program stipends. Additionally, Georgetown's college-in-prison program received \$1 million from the Mellon Foundation in 2019 (Georgetown University). Georgetown also offers a second reentry program, The *Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA)* and Georgetown's *Paralegal Program*. The paralegal program is a rigorous sixteen-month program in which participants gain technical legal skills and receive a certificate in Paralegal Studies from Georgetown (Prisons and Justice Initiative).

Name of Program	Project Rebound: California	NJ STEP: New Jersey	John Jay: NYC	Georgetown: Washington DC
Structure:				
Map of Program	- Just on outside - Help admit students to a Cal State University and support them on campus	- Inside → out - Provides support for students to enroll at a community college or Rutgers to finish their degree.	- Inside → out - Helps with planning, preparing for, applying to, and financing a college education, primarily at CUNY	- Inside → out - Non-accredited Business & Entrepreneurship certificate - Combined college course and entrepreneurship internship component
Services & Network	- Introduction to the university, admissions processing, academic program advising, FAFSA assistance, learning center/SAT tutoring, professional psychological counseling, previously incarcerated mentors - Partners: the prison university project, the anti-recidivism coalition, the new way of life reentry project	- Admissions counseling; campus networking; assistance with housing, financial management, and legal issues; peer support meetings; facilitation of employment opportunities on and off campus. - Partner: Mountainview Communities (MVC)	- Admissions support, support with college financing -partner: Osborne Association: provides support in housing, employment, reunification with family, health care, etc.	-College courses, internship provision, stipend, mentors, pro-bono legal and business services, coaching, and introductions to funding sources (if creating own business). - Partners: DC Department of Employment Services
Timeline	No specific timeframe	No specific timeframe	No specific timeframe	1 year
Incentive	-College degree - Access to resources	- College degree - Access to resources	- College degree - Access to resources	- Certificate in business and entrepreneurship - \$17.50/hr stipend - Internships at local businesses and nonprofits
Scale	Over 400 students and on 14 campuses	1,300 students since its founding six years ago	More than 1,400 students have gone through program	Up to 20 students in each cohort
Funding	- State Budget: \$1 million ongoing annual allocation - \$3.3 million in the 2019 budget for the expansion to serve two new campuses - \$10,000 in annual scholarship funds from Associated Students Inc	\$1.5 million grant from Mellon Foundation	\$2.37 million over five years from NY Gov. \$150,000 Teagle foundation grant.	- \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency - Funding from DC Department of Employment Services

Program Values:				
Class Format: Individualized vs. Cohort	Individualized/resource-based	Individualized/resource-based	Individualized/resource based	Cohort-based
Pedagogical Approach	Formerly Incarcerated Leadership; Civic Engagement; mentorship	Not mentioned	“Soliciting and centering the voices of the stakeholders involved and applying a systems-thinking lens to understanding the challenge we seek to address”	“Combination of higher education and employment – together with the social, emotional, and intellectual development that takes place in a university environment”
Definition of Success	- Successful matriculation onto a Cal State campus and completion of a college degree - "Enhance their capacity for civic engagement and community leadership, secure meaningful and gratifying employment "	Successful matriculation/completion of college	Successful matriculation/completion of college	Completion of certificate program and either starting own business or receiving full time employment
Outcomes:	- From 2016-2020, 0 percent recidivism rate for project rebound students; retention rate over 89 percent. -100% of graduates secured jobs or enrolled in post-graduate programs - no one has gone back to prison	Only 5% of students go back to prison.	Nearly 400 have earned post-secondary degrees, and roughly 20% of those graduates have earned multiple degrees.	N/A

Conclusion:

By exploring the state of reentry in the United States, and systematically looking across different types of reentry programs, as well as different individual providers, educators at Tufts University, in conjunction with partners in the reentry community, have been able to respond to some of the strengths and gaps of existing programs while creating and refining the program of the Tufts Education Reentry Network (TERN) called MyTERN.

First, the literature review demonstrates that there are major gaps in support provided by corrections-based reentry programs. Corrections-based programs tend to focus on supervision and public safety rather than care and the provision of resources for returning citizens. The reentry support that is provided is often lackluster and underfunded. This information demonstrates that the existence of a reentry program within a carceral institution whose values are largely punitive can be counterproductive and contribute to recidivism.

Additionally, the literature review demonstrates that there are numerous non-profit organizations focused on reentry that vary significantly in structure and value and range in reach and efficacy. However, there are very few reentry programs facilitated by colleges and universities. Higher-ed institutions have the academic resources to provide quality educational opportunities to returning citizens and enact a prison-to-college pipeline. Therefore, the lack of university-based reentry programs is a gap that must be addressed.

The majority of the university-run reentry programs that do exist, including Project Rebound, NJ Step, and John Jay, are resource-based programs that focus on individual support and development. Furthermore, these programs facilitate a direct jump from prison to a two or four-year college campus. There are many strengths to this program model. Primarily, these programs allow previously incarcerated students to enroll on college campuses and work towards

a degree, which is often a major institutional barrier for people with a record. Moreover, the provision of resources helps students stay enrolled and succeed on campus. However, while there are opportunities for community building at specific events, there is minimal structured interaction between participants in the program. The programs are more focused on successful *individual* integration into college campuses rather than on community building and social and emotional development.

In contrast, Georgetown's Pivot Program is a cohort-based program, in which participants stay as a group for the entirety of the program. Thus, there is substantial interaction between program participants. Additionally, Georgetown offers stipends to participants who therefore do not need to work while in the program. Georgetown also balances college-level courses with tangible employment resources and internships. However, unlike the other university-run programs, Georgetown is not accredited and focuses more on entrepreneurship than a direct pipeline to a two or four-year college campus. Accordingly, the Georgetown program focuses less on higher-ed and the prison-to-college pipeline and focuses more on a prison-to-career pipeline.

As reflected above, there is not currently a *university-accredited* reentry program that utilizes a cohort-based model and focuses specifically on community building. In the next section of the paper, I will introduce the structure and values of the Tufts Education Reentry Network (MyTERN) and describe how its model of reentry support is both similar and different from the other programs described above.

Chapter 2: Overview of MyTERN Structure and Values

Founding:

The Tufts University Prison Initiative of the Tisch College of Civic Life (TUPIT) was founded in 2016 by its director Hilary Binda, in partnership with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in the Boston-area, “to facilitate creative and collaborative responses to the problems of mass incarceration and racial injustice.” TUPIT falls under the umbrella of Tufts’ Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, a college of Tufts University committed to fostering political and civic engagement among its students. TUPIT was made possible by multiple grants, including a \$100,000 grant from the Cummings foundation, a \$150,000 National Endowment for the Humanities grant in 2020, a \$25,000 Springboard Tier II grant from the OVPR to support the development of the reentry program (MyTERN), \$20,000 to support the development of the arts journal, and most recently a \$120,000 grant to support the expansion of TUPIT in its administrative capacity to prepare for a Pell granting environment. Additionally, TUPIT is one of five founding organizations to constitute the new Boston Workforce Reentry Coalition that received a \$400,000 grant from the MA Executive Office of Economic Development which will provide \$30,000 to MyTERN this year.

There are 4 main branches of the TUPIT program:

1. A college degree program at MCI-Concord, offering an associate’s and a bachelor’s degree;
2. The MyTERN reentry program: a four-course undergraduate Civic Studies certificate program;
3. The Inside/Out program: a single credit-bearing literature course for incarcerated people and non-incarcerated Tufts students inside Massachusetts state prisons; and
4. Education on the Tufts campus through symposia with formerly incarcerated speakers, films, and other events, as well as student-activism through the Student Prison Education and Abolition Coalition (SPEAC).

For purposes of this paper, I will be focusing on the reentry aspects of the program, including the college degree program and MyTERN reentry program.

Program Structure:

Overview:

TUPIT utilizes an inside to outside model of reentry. The program offers both an associate's degree from Bunker Hill Community College and a bachelor's degree in Civic Studies from Tufts University at MCI-Concord. Students who are released from prison at all stages of both the AA and BA programs are invited to join the year-long Tufts accredited reentry program called MyTERN. However, MyTERN is not limited to people who participated in the TUPIT degree program; rather, all previously incarcerated people in the Boston-area who have earned a high school diploma or GED, are invited to apply. This model provides continued reentry support and accredited college courses to individuals from the degree program in addition to providing access to higher education to individuals who did not have the opportunity to participate in college programs inside. After completing the year-long MyTERN program, students may choose to apply to the Tufts University Medford campus through the Resumed Education for Adult Learning (REAL) program or are supported in applying to other colleges/universities or finding meaningful employment.

Degree Program:

TUPIT provides college courses toward two degrees at MCI-Concord, an associate's degree in the liberal arts from Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) and a bachelor's degree from Tufts Arts and Sciences in Civic Studies (CVS) - *at no cost to students*. The twenty-three-course associate's program, completed over the course of two and one-half years at MCI-

Concord is also part of MassTransfer, which provides guaranteed transfer to a state university to complete the BA — with no application fees or essays required. Students who successfully complete the associate’s degree inside then go through a transfer process to matriculate in the Tufts University A&S bachelor’s degree program. After two and one-half more years of coursework, these students earn their CVS bachelor’s degree from Tufts. Each semester, approximately eighteen Tufts undergraduates from the Medford campus serve as TAs, and all faculty so far have been from Tufts. Students are admitted to this dual degree program by the TUPIT Admissions committee, Tufts faculty and staff run in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Corrections.

Any student who **releases before completing the associate’s degree** will be supported in MyTERN for a year and may then apply to Tufts through the REAL program to work towards their bachelor’s degree. Any student who **releases after earning the associate’s degree** but before completing the bachelor’s degree (and transferring to Tufts) will be supported academically through MyTERN for four courses (one year and thirteen credits) and then, if there are remaining courses/credits needed for degree completion, they will be considered on a case-by-case basis for admission to Tufts. The details of this degree completion plan are still in the process of being resolved. Participation in MyTERN provides students with the opportunity to earn thirteen credits at the Boston campus, receive critical reentry support, and build a community of fellow returning citizens and Tufts undergraduates and faculty, all before stepping foot on a college campus.

MyTERN:

The Tufts Education Reentry Network (TERN) was founded in 2020 by Tufts faculty and students together with individuals directly impacted by incarceration, all of whom were

interested in creating a reentry program that was built by and for returning citizens. TERN's mission is to provide educational opportunities, reentry support, and community to returning citizens. The TERN network piloted MyTERN in 2020, a year-long accredited (thirteen semester hour units) Tufts undergraduate certificate program in Civic Studies at no cost to participants. Program participants receive their own free laptop and are reimbursed for transportation to and from class. MyTERN operates through deep partnerships with Project Place, Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation, the Boston Mayor's Office of Returning Citizens, and New Beginnings, among other reentry-focused organizations.

The program's pilot year ran from August 2020 through May 2021 and served eight previously incarcerated individuals. MyTERN currently serves twelve students in its second year, which started in August 2021 and will run until May 2022. In the Fall semester, MyTERN offers two courses: *Literatures of Justice* and *Technology for Civic Impact*. Each course meets for three hours once a week (for a total of two three-hour courses a week) during the evening. In the interdisciplinary *Literatures of Justice* course, students analyze the criminal justice system and mass incarceration through literary, historical, sociological, and philosophical frameworks. In addition to the MyTERN students, half of the class is comprised of Tufts undergraduate student co-learners. The course includes collaboration among students, weekly assigned reading and multiple written and oral assignments and reflections. In the *Technology for Civic Impact* class, students learn basic computer literacy, typing skills, and gain proficiency using email, Microsoft Word/Powerpoint, and several Google Workspace applications, including Google Sheets. Students complete multiple assignments in this class, including building and formatting a resume. Tufts undergraduates serve as teaching assistants in this technology literacy course, creating a 1:1 TA-MyTERN student ratio.

In the Spring semester, MyTERN offers a *Personal Finance and Project Development* course and one additional course that has changed each of the first two years. In *Personal Finance*, students learn how to budget and manage their finances and end the course by creating their own project. Projects range from creating a business to expanding an existing business, finding meaningful employment, or applying to an undergraduate or graduate program. Tufts undergraduates serve as TAs in this course. For the second course in the Spring semester, MyTERN offered *Financial Math & Coding* in its first year and *Introduction to Acting* in its second year. Going forward, in addition to the rotating Tufts course, MyTERN will offer a course called *Storytelling*, which will focus on writing, oral storytelling, podcast development, and public speaking, all within the context of a restorative justice curriculum. The financial planning course will be integrated into the technology course in the first semester.

The Tufts students participating in MyTERN, known as “Medford students,” referring to the location of Tufts’ main campus in Medford, MA, undergo multiple training sessions prior to participation in the program. Training materials include academic articles and writings by incarcerated and previously incarcerated authors, as well as films and documentaries. Students discuss topics including mass incarceration, positionality, community building, the higher-ed in prison movement, people centered language, and civic engagement. Many of the Tufts undergraduate co-learners and TAs also have experience tutoring incarcerated students for the high school equivalency exam through the Petey Greene Program, or have taken the Inside-Out class, and some have served as TAs for the college degree program at MCI-Concord. Most students also take part in SPEAC, the Student Prison Education and Advocacy Coalition at Tufts.

In addition to the four classes, MyTERN students also work on a podcast called MyTERN Conversations, part of the program that will become more integrated into the

coursework next year, particularly through the *Storytelling* class. Students learn about podcast development and storytelling and each student ultimately appears on at least one podcast episode. The podcast is a pertinent Civic Studies/civic impact project through MyTERN. The podcast is available through Spotify and Apple Podcasts, among other platforms. Students also take part in multiple speaking engagements and symposiums on the Tufts Medford Campus. Tufts undergraduate students help with podcast brainstorming, recording, and editing.

In addition to receiving college credit, gaining practical technology and job-readiness skills, learning to manage personal finances, and working on personal development projects, students in MyTERN receive comprehensive reentry support through MyTERN's partner organizations. MyTERN works most closely with Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation (DBECD) and Project Place, both non-profit organizations that provide job-preparedness, housing assistance, and case-management services to low-income individuals in Boston. The reentry coordinator at DBECD meets one-on-one with each student throughout the year to assess their individual needs in these areas and discuss how to meet them. Additionally, MyTERN connects students with other organizations in the Boston area which MyTERN partners with to provide the students with additional support they may need.

After MyTERN:

After completing the year long MyTERN program, all graduates are invited by the Advisory Committee to participate in a summer training program and have the opportunity to serve as (modestly compensated) mentors through structured interactions with the next year's reentry students. All graduates also remain part of the TERN network and may continue receiving support from the community as well as MyTERN's partner organizations, such as Project Place.

In addition, the credits received during MyTERN are transferable to all Massachusetts state schools through MassTransfer. During the program, students who so choose are supported in applying to community college or a four-year college. Students interested in attending Tufts as a bachelor's degree student may apply to the University through the Resumed Education for Adult Learners (REAL) program. The Tufts administration and admissions office does not automatically admit students who participated in the associate's or bachelor's degree program at MCI-Concord and who completed the MyTERN program, but MyTERN is working with the Tufts administration to streamline the process for these students to gain admission into Tufts.

MyTERN Program Values:

Although MyTERN is an education-based organization within an accredited university, and students learn many practical skills, the program prioritizes the importance of relationship building, addressing systemic injustices and trauma, and giving back to the community. The values central to the program include community-building, utilizing trauma-informed pedagogy and restorative justice practices, learning about racial and gender justice, and civic engagement. These priorities are present in every aspect of the program.

Community:

As expressed in the structure section, MyTERN students are part of the same cohort of students for the entirety of the program and participate in all courses as a group. Additionally, Tufts undergraduate students participate consistently in the program either for a semester or year. This structure is intended to facilitate intimate community building between MyTERN students, Tufts undergraduate students, and faculty. The advisory committee of MyTERN believes that strong interpersonal relationship and community support are a crucial aspect of reentry.

Therefore, the MyTERN program values community building as equally important to other aspects of reentry in the program, such as job preparedness and technology skill attainment.

Trauma-informed pedagogy:

Trauma-informed pedagogy refers to a teaching practice in which teachers recognize that students' trauma and lived experience comes with them into the classroom, and therefore shape their classroom accordingly. All MyTERN students have experienced incarceration, which comes with isolation, violence, loss of family and community, maltreatment and abuse, and inadequate medical and mental healthcare. Furthermore, many students have experienced poverty, racism, generational trauma, gang violence, and police violence prior to their incarceration. The program developers, those with and those without incarceration experience, prioritized the necessity of working intentionally with trauma and developing a focus on community as a primary means of trauma mitigation. The developers who are formerly incarcerated make up MyTERN's Advisory Committee, and continue to use their own reentry experiences to shape the curriculum and structure of the program, as well as the atmosphere and culture of the classroom. Furthermore, the professors of MyTERN are specifically trained in trauma-informed practices, through organized trainings led by a local health center that sees many returning citizens as clients.

Restorative Justice:

Restorative Justice refers not so much to the resolution of harm through victim/offender confrontation but rather to the practice of inward and group reflection and the reimagining of harm reduction through communal healing. The MyTERN program embodies a restorative justice model. For example, the classroom is set up in a large circle where everyone is facing each other. Each class begins with a grounding and breathing exercise to help each student

become “present” and connect to the shared values of the communal space. This grounding is followed by a “check-in” that invites personal reflection and sharing with the group.

Additionally, in the *Literatures of Justice* class taught the first semester, each formerly incarcerated student writes a personal narrative that draws upon the transformational moments in their life, including the events that led to their incarceration or release from prison. The facilitation of restorative justice practices in the classroom is not possible without the prioritization of community building and the collective.

Social Justice and Civic Engagement:

MyTERN is part of the Tufts University Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, whose mission is to foster civic engagement among its students. Therefore, MyTERN was founded under the principles of civic impact and social justice. The program curriculum addressed topics such as oppression, racism, the school-to-prison pipeline, generational trauma, poverty, and incarceration, through both a systems-focused and personal experience lens. Moreover, the curriculum covers resistance and reimagining a more just future. Prior to participation in the program, many MyTERN students already have taken part in or expressed interest in an array of social impact projects in their communities. The MyTERN curriculum is shaped with the goal of providing a transformative educational experience that hones in on this commitment to civic impact and provides the skills and knowledge for students to make an impact beyond the classroom. One specific civic impact project is the MyTERN conversations podcast, where students can utilize their platform in order to discuss the issues that are important to them.

Conclusion:

The MyTERN program draws from the strengths of existing programs and fills the gaps in the current reentry landscape. Like other university-run reentry programs, MyTERN includes

components both inside prison and on the outside and provides transferable college credits to participants. Uniquely, the MyTERN program additionally utilizes a cohort-based model, functions as a transition between prison and college, and prioritizes the values and practices of community, restorative justice, trauma-informed pedagogy, and civic engagement.

First, like NJ-STEP, John Jay, and Georgetown, MyTERN offers both a college-in-prison program and provides structured support for students once released. Although the number of TUPIT students being released is low, the inside-to-outside model provides a continuum of care for the students who do get out and also demonstrates a general philosophy of education rooted in sustained community and restorative justice principles. Moreover, MyTERN is an accredited program and credits are transferable to all Massachusetts state schools. However, instead of taking place within the existing landscape of a college or university like Project Rebound, NJ-STEP, and John Jay, the program functions as a transition between the prison and college. During this nine-month period, students build towards their degree in a structured environment with extra support from Tufts professors, undergraduate TAs, mentors, and fellow participants. This structure is intended to make the transition to a two or four-year college smoother and more successful. Moreover, the transitional, cohort-based model facilitates a strong focus on community building and addresses the need for relationships and peer support that is often overlooked by other programs.

Furthermore, unlike other programs, MyTERN does not only - or even primarily - focus on college attainment or career-readiness. Rather, MyTERN is strongly rooted in its values of civic engagement, community building, restorative justice, and addressing systems of oppression and trauma. MyTERN's core values address the complex psychological, social, and emotional needs of returning citizens and recognize that success in reentry is more than a job or degree.

Overall, the program seeks to prepare students for continued higher education, participation in the workforce, and civic engagement by fostering an increased sense of belonging through community building. The immersion of Tufts undergraduate co-learners and TAs is another distinguishing factor of the MyTERN program. The heterogeneous class structure emphasizes the value of socialization and learning-in-community across social and cultural differences, which breaks down barriers that often hinder successful reentry and employment outcomes.

In addition to the many innovative aspects of the MyTERN program, there are also a few challenges that the program is learning from and working to overcome. Currently, TUPIT students who are released after receiving their associate's degree or starting their bachelor's degree at MCI-Concord and who then complete the MyTERN program are not granted automatic admission to Tufts main campus. Instead, students who wish to attend Tufts must complete the rigorous Tufts application through the REAL program. The University's decision to allow system-impacted individuals to pursue a Tufts BA in prison, but not automatically grant them admission to the Tufts main campus both creates a blockage in the prison-to-college pipeline and is based on assumptions that re-stigmatize formerly incarcerated persons. This dilemma reflects the institutional barriers faced by reentry programs that exist within universities that do not have the existing infrastructure to support these types of programs. The MyTERN program is working with Tufts to make the pathway from prison to enrollment at Tufts more seamless.

Additionally, while Medford students' participation in MyTERN is an innovation and strength of the program, there are also unexpected challenges associated with these students' involvement. First, despite extensive training of Medford students, their participation runs the risk of creating boundary issues. For example, one Tufts undergraduate student who participated in the MyTERN program wrote an article for a Tufts journalism course, which was later

published. The article was written about Massachusetts correctional officers' refusal to get the Covid-19 vaccine. Because the author was a Tufts student and a member of the MyTERN program, the article negatively impacted the relationship between TUPIT and the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, and therefore jeopardized both the degree program at MCI-Concord and the MyTERN program. This article demonstrates the vulnerability introduced when Medford students, who are trained, but do not always fully understand the complexities and fragility of reentry and prison politics, participate in the program.

Furthermore, the liberal arts courses in MyTERN, such as *Literatures of Justice*, in which Medford students participate as co-learners, facilitate strong community creation. However, in the Math and Finance courses, where Medford students function as TAs rather than co-learners, there is less classroom dialogue and thus less room for community building. In response to this limitation, as discussed earlier in this section, the MyTERN program is shifting its structure by combining the technology and finance course into one class taught in the first semester. This will be the only course with Medford student TAs because of the need for one-on-one technology support. The *Literatures of Justice* class in the first semester and both courses in the second semester will be humanities and social science courses that include Medford student co-learners. This shift in structure is intended to transition the program more towards a liberal arts focus and to ensure clarity of roles and sustained community building between the MyTERN and Medford students.

Chapter 3: Methods

This thesis uses qualitative methods to explore the impact of the MyTERN program's structure and values on participants' experience. Historically, the research conducted on reentry programs has been quantitative and focuses on data points such as retention in program, recidivism rates, and job attainment. There has been far less focus on the experience of participants themselves. Because the MyTERN program prioritizes its values and the complex social, psychological, and emotional needs of returning citizens, quantitative measures cannot sufficiently demonstrate what participants gain from the program. Therefore, it was decided that interviews were the most ideal research method for this study.

Samples:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students in the first (N=8) and second (N=7) MyTERN cohorts⁴. Students were interviewed before the program began, after the first semester, and at the end of the program (the second cohort is still in progress, thus the post-program interviews have not yet been collected). A year from the end date of the program, students will also complete a follow-up interview. This thesis is a preliminary review of the data collected thus far.

Several students were unable to complete all interview sessions for a variety of reasons related to their status as returning citizens. Two were reincarcerated on parole violations; two experienced a return of the symptoms of addiction and left the program; one had continuous schedule challenges that made class attendance difficult and out-of-class interview attendance impossible. Additionally, because this research relied on a narrow window to conduct interviews,

⁴ As described below, although twelve individuals started in the cohort, only seven interviews were collected because of scheduling issues and drop-outs.

one student in the second cohort could not attend their mid-semester interview due to work conflicts during the periods before class time when interviews were scheduled.

In cohort one, the ages of participants at the time of the study ranged from 35 to 53. Three participants were female and five were male. Of the female participants, all three identified as Black, including one as also Cape Verdean and one as also Haitian. Of the male participants, all 5 identified as Black, one as also Latino. Two participants were students in the Tufts Prison Initiative college-in-prison cohort at MCI-Concord, and therefore had some college experience (they had not yet received their associate's degree). Two students had no college experience. One student had completed a few trade school programs; one had completed some community college courses; and one had completed a university entrepreneurship certificate program post-incarceration. All students either completed high school or received their GED while incarcerated.

In cohort two, the ages of participants ranged from 29 to 53. Three participants identified as Black, three identified as white, and one identified as Southeast Asian. All of the people interviewed identify as male. One participant was a student in the Tufts Prison Initiative college-in-prison cohort at MCI-Concord, and is well on his way to an associate's degree. Another student took part in a different college-in-prison program when incarcerated and will have enough credits to receive his BA after completing MyTERN. One student completed college on the outside prior to their incarceration. Two additional participants have taken some college courses prior to participation in the program. The two remaining students had no college experience before enrolling in MyTERN. All students either completed high school or received their GED while incarcerated.

Instruments and Aims:

Originally, data was collected via written questionnaire response, but it was found that students interpreted this format as a program evaluation rather than a personal reflection, and therefore, responses were brief. In response, the research method was switched to semi-structured interviews, which elicited more thorough responses. All interviews took place before or after class-time and were optional to students. In this thesis, each student's name will be replaced by a pseudonym for the purpose of anonymity.

During the interviews, participants were asked questions about their program experience and the program impact. The key variables/questions that were addressed in interviews included,

Program Experience:

1. What is the most valuable part of the MyTERN program?
2. What is the impact of the social justice curriculum on program experience?
3. What is the impact of the MyTERN community on program experience?
4. What is the impact of trauma-informed pedagogy and restorative justice practices on program experience?

Program Impact:

5. Do students see themselves differently since participating in MyTERN? Have they experienced growth?
6. Did students' capacities for civic engagement change since participation in MyTERN?
7. How did MyTERN prepare students for continuing their education?
8. How do students envision their future after participation in MyTERN?

The interviews were conducted by two Tufts undergraduate student participants in MyTERN, the TUPIT student coordinator and me. This decision was made because the research team felt as though pre-established relationships between participants and interviewers were important for thoroughness and authenticity of responses. The relationship between interviewers and participants also speaks to the central goals of community building reflected in the values section above. Because of this familiarity, the interviews were casual and conversational. Moreover, although formerly incarcerated individuals are not formally considered a vulnerable population under research guidelines, the interview methods were created with careful consideration of ethical issues. At all points in the interview process, there was transparency regarding the purpose of research, how it would be used, and participants were given the opportunity to ask the interviewers questions.

Quotes from the interview transcripts were then coded in NVivo based on a combination of both predetermined codes and codes that were created to address themes that emerged in the interviews. Themes included: most valuable part of the program, program experience, program impact, role of community, civic engagement, the value of MyTERN as a transition, trauma informed pedagogy, and suggested changes to program.

Tufts Undergrad Questionnaire:

The interviews were also supplemented with both qualitative and quantitative data from a questionnaire given to Tufts Undergraduate “Medford student” participants in MyTERN. The questionnaire asked several questions regarding the impact of MyTERN on Medford students’ college experience, their academic interest, and career goals. The questionnaire was not initially created for the purpose of this research paper; however, the data will be used to demonstrate the program’s impact on Tufts undergraduates.

Chapter 4: The Impact of the MyTERN Program on Participants

In this chapter, I examine interviews with MyTERN students and use them to evaluate MyTERN's program impact. I found that MyTERN's function as a transition between prison and college, its cohort-model, and its prioritization of the values and practices of community and restorative justice contributed to students feeling supported, humanized, and socialized post-incarceration. When combined with practical reentry support and college-level courses, the unique and loving support system reflected in the interviews fostered students' personal growth and feelings of belonging, as well as their commitment to education and civic engagement. In addition, students felt that the support system prepared them socially, emotionally, and academically to successfully continue their education at a two or four-year college.

MyTERN as Transitional:

"If you would have driven me straight into a large classroom, I probably would have crashed and burned. But now it's like, I'm not as socially awkward. So I can accept that I do belong here." -- Benny

In contrast to the majority of university-run reentry programs, MyTERN occupies a transitional period in between prison and college. The nine-month cohort-based model provides a safe learning environment with the specific intention of fostering community, implementing restorative justice, promoting civic engagement, and supporting students' reentry. Many MyTERN students do want to continue their education; however, they stressed that this nine-month period was a crucial step in the-prison-to-college pipeline because it gave rise to greater self-confidence and personal growth. Therefore, the MyTERN program provided a foundation for participants to successfully matriculate onto a traditional college campus.

In the second cohort, five out of six students expressed that they would not have a successful college experience if they went straight from prison to a two or four-year campus⁵. First, many students stated that going straight to college would be “sensory overload” as a result of their social anxiety and lack of interactions with individuals on the outside. As will be described in the following section, the MyTERN program fostered a loving community between both MyTERN students and Tufts undergraduates (Medford students), which helped students adjust and acclimate socially to a college environment. For example, Benny articulated, “it’s like okay, you guys [Medford students] offset the scariness of it. So, I understand what it is to sit in the classroom with a professor with an actual student sitting by my side.” These relationships provided participants with more confidence and security that they could navigate a bustling college environment and that they “do belong here.”

Additionally, many students stressed that, because of the many obstacles they face as a result of their incarceration, having a transitional period of comprehensive reentry, as well as academic and emotional support, was crucial to their ability to matriculate on a college campus. Alex stated, “We can both agree the MyTERN program is much more supportive and nurturing than being in a formal two or four-year college.” MyTERN students are surrounded by formerly incarcerated and never-incarcerated classmates who can both motivate them to work hard and, in the case of the former, who can relate to their struggle and provide a support system. Moreover, MyTERN allows for one-on-one and small group support from professors, mentors, community partners, and Tufts undergraduate TAs and co-learners. Derek describes this non-judgemental and nurturing educational setting as providing him with “a foundation” to succeed academically.

⁵ One student did think he would have a successful transition straight to a traditional college campus from prison. This person was a participant in the Tufts/Bunker Hill college-in-prison program at MCI-Concord and was already well on his way to receiving his associate’s degree. Despite this sentiment, he still stressed that the transitional nature of the program is valuable, and that he thinks it was necessary for the majority of his classmates.

It is important to stress that previously incarcerated individuals are in fact deserving, worthy, and capable of attending and succeeding on a college campus. However, the research suggests that participants feel that they need a period of time to build confidence in themselves and their abilities, adjust socially, and receive reentry support before successful integration to a college campus. As reflected in Benny's statement at the start of the section, the program successfully engendered in students a sense of worthiness and belonging that made them feel deserving and ready for the transition (see Appendix A).

Curriculum; Social Justice:

"I think, like, the curriculum makes you more aware of the, you know, normalizing of injustice as in suppression and racism, or whatever it might be. And it's, it just makes you more aware of things that happen every day, that are not right." --Sawyer

Central to the MyTERN curriculum are the values of racial and gender justice. In the course that establishes the tone and culture of the classroom in the first semester, *The Literatures of Justice*, students learn about the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. They discuss unjust historical events, systems, and policies, such as slavery, the school-to-prison pipeline, housing and segregation, and mass incarceration. Moreover, the curriculum seeks to empower students to engage with their communities and resist and combat these injustices.

A majority of students have experience with many of the unjust systems that are discussed in class. Students reported that learning about the specific systems and structures that contributed to their incarceration through an academic lens made them more aware that these injustices are happening on a large scale, and not only in their own communities. In turn, students found that they became more aware of how change can be implemented and more motivated to take steps towards achieving justice in their communities. Benny described that the class reframed the way he thought about his community, for example the prevalence of gang

violence. Understanding the shortcomings in his community from a social justice lens “helped [him] to be able to open [his] mind and [his] mouth and say, hey, this is not cool” and motivated him to become a “community activist.” He recently took part in a clothing and toy drive for youth in the Boston-area.

The social justice lens not only prompted students who came from neighborhoods affected by injustice to want to give back to their communities, but also pushed students who came from whiter, wealthier backgrounds to engage with their communities. One of the MyTERN students, Alex, shared that he came from a very white and segregated town, where many people had racist ideologies. He stated that when he was younger, he internalized these ideas and behaviors. Alex explained that the MyTERN curriculum made him aware of the consequences of his past behaviors and prompted him to actively push back against the injustices he saw. Alex pointed to a time when recently, in his sobriety group, someone said something racially insensitive. Instead of staying silent, he decided to engage with the individual and explain why what he said was offensive. Alex stated “I got to walk out of it feeling so much better about myself. No way does that have to like, go in one ear out the other like, no, that's like a very passive thing. So I think just being more engaged.”

Learning about racial justice helped Alex reflect on and acknowledge his past behaviors and to push back against injustice in his community in order to create a more just society. At the same time, fighting for what is right provided an internal reward and heightened his own self-worth. This pattern was also seen with regard to gender. In his interview, Jackson discussed his evolution in thought regarding sex and gender, a topic he was rigid and uncomfortable with before a class discussion changed his mind. After engaging in topics about gender justice, he

became outspoken about it, and often came back to this topic in other discussions both inside and out of the classroom.

In addition to learning about topics related to racial and gender justice, there are also multiple civic engagement projects embedded into the MyTERN curriculum. Over the course of the year, students work on the MyTERN Conversations Podcast, in which they engage in conversations about life before, during, and after incarceration. Through personal storytelling, the MyTERN Conversations Podcast exposes systems and inequities that shaped students' experiences, shining light on the deep structures of racial, gender, and economic injustice. Through MyTERN Conversations, MyTERN students challenge themselves and their listeners to rethink entrenched stereotypes about people impacted by the carceral state, celebrating growth, healing, education, friendship, and the power of collective civic impact. Additionally, students speak at various roundtable discussions and symposiums on Tufts Medford campus to educate community members about incarceration, reentry, structures of racial, gender, and economic injustice, and the role of education and community-building on healing (see Appendix B).

Trauma Informed Pedagogy and Restorative Justice:

“You know, you can have all the education in life, or whatever, but everybody goes through some shit. It doesn't matter what type of degree you got. But when you have that healing aspect of it[education], that restorative justice feel to it, it allows you to heal and at the same time grow. To me, it just frees you up to become who you want to become and do what you desire to do. So this is definitely necessary.” -- Ezekial

Many individuals who have been incarcerated have experienced multiple traumas prior to their incarceration. Furthermore, the prison itself is a violent mechanism by which incarcerated individuals are dehumanized and suppressed, and therefore is inherently traumatic. The research findings suggest that the implementation of trauma-informed pedagogy and restorative justice practices in the MyTERN classroom prompted self-reflection, communal healing, and radical

love and acceptance. In turn, since participating in the program, students felt more grounded, in community, and “free” to look towards the future and actualize their goals.

There are many classroom activities that are intended to normalize and destigmatize vulnerability and prompt inward reflection. For example, students share their personal narratives through storytelling, speaking in podcasts, and daily check-ins; discuss topics such as oppression, racism, generational trauma, poverty, and incarceration in both small and larger groups; and write journals regarding their reentry and program experience on a weekly basis. Cora explained that the discussion of trauma in class pushed her to “open [her] mind” about the traumas she had been through, including those she described as embarrassing and very psychologically harmful. Moreover, the class activities allowed her to “open up” to others and share her story, which made her feel more relaxed and at ease in the classroom.

This process of addressing and sharing trauma rather than suppressing it was described as “freeing” by multiple participants. The freedom to be expressive, vulnerable, and accepting of oneself juxtaposes the machismo, suppression, and carcerality of the prison system. As reflected in Ezekial’s quote at the beginning of this section, this radical transformation towards love and acceptance allows him to begin healing and growing from his past and in turn get in touch with the person he wants to become.

The process of healing looks different for all students. Cora discussed how she has experienced abuse throughout her life and has a hard time trusting others. She explained that learning about trauma and her history from the MyTERN community helped her begin to love herself and trust people again. Moreover, she stated that identifying and working through her traumas is contributing to her process of becoming less aggressive. Derek explained that he struggles from PTSD adjustment disorder as a result of his incarceration. Learning about and

discussing trauma in class helped him “understand when [he] has triggers.” Therefore, when he feels the need to “shut down” or become “anti-social,” MyTERN gives him the opportunity to reflect and draw on the tools he has learned in class to work through his emotions. Despite the differences in life experiences between students, there is a common sentiment that trauma-informed practices and restorative justice contribute to healing and personal growth.

Moreover, in addition to facilitating activities that enable healing through restorative justice, the MyTERN classroom itself is a restorative justice circle. At all times, students sit around a circle, with no front or back of the classroom. Once seated, class begins with a grounding and breathing exercise, which helps connect students to the classroom and be in the present, creating a space that enables personal connection. The grounding is followed by a check-in, where individuals go around the circle and share what is occupying their minds and listen to their fellow classmates. This pedagogical method creates one collective community that dismantles educational hierarchies and the innocent/guilty, victim/perpetrator, and speaker/listener binaries -- thereby dismantling the carceral state at a micro level. All of the fundamental aspects of the program, the community, growth, and healing, are possible because these values of restorative justice are central (see Appendix C).

MyTERN as Community:

“The community is the best. That’s the biggest thing, right? Because we are pitted against each other in our society right? ... because of your gender or your sex and your preferences right? And coming in MyTERN and TUPIT, all this goes out the window, you know, we just do it here in a community, this is a beautiful thing.” -- Ezekiel

The importance of being part of a community to students' program experience was highlighted when individuals were asked, “What is the most valuable part of the program to you?” Of the participants asked this question, five out of seven students in cohort one and four out of six in cohort two, respectively, said that aspects of the community and relationship

building are the most impactful parts of MyTERN. As will be discussed in the following subsections, students consistently emphasized that the community-based model and pedagogy in the classroom facilitates deep, loving relationships that provide students with a sense of belonging, genuine support, and lifelong connections. In turn, the research findings demonstrate that engaging with the MyTERN community and building relationships with both MyTERN and Medford students helped students feel more humanized, socialized, and confident during and after participating in the program.

Value of Supported Relationships Among MyTERN students:

“A lot of the circles that I find myself in, there's not people who are formerly incarcerated... and then if I do find myself around formerly incarcerated people, a lot of people aren't really pushing in the same direction that I'm trying to find myself in. So like, that small cross section on the Venn diagram is like MyTERN, where everybody decided to be here on their own volition. Everybody here is formerly incarcerated, so it's finding that niche, where those two things combine, and it's really uplifting and productive and supportive.” --Alex

One theme expressed in the interviews is that, for MyTERN students, being in a space with other people who have also formerly been incarcerated allowed them to form unique relationships and support systems. Students in MyTERN feel that they understand each other's obstacles because they come from similar socio-economic if not also similar racially identified backgrounds and experiences. Jackson, because he can relate to the struggles that his classmates face, offers that whenever he has the chance, he tries to lend his peers support; seeing them succeed provides him with genuine happiness. Participants cited that this ability to lean on one another amidst shared struggles created a critical sense of family, love, and support.

In addition to sharing backgrounds that included incarceration, students also emphasized that their fellow MyTERN classmates shared similar values and commitments, such as civic engagement, higher education, and racial justice. Multiple students stated that they had been/are in community with other previously incarcerated individuals, but it is unique to be in a space with people of shared backgrounds who also want similar things for their future. For example, in

the quote at the start of this section, Alex explains that being in community with other previously incarcerated individuals who are also pursuing their education is encouraging and uplifting, and contributes to a productive classroom environment in which individuals push each other to be the best versions of themselves.

In many states where people are released to the supervision of parole and/or probation for brief or lengthy terms, previously incarcerated individuals are forbidden to communicate or be in the same space with other people who have been incarcerated, including, as is often the case, members of the same family. This is a very common stipulation of releasing to legal supervision, and the consequences for ignoring it are dire and include reincarceration in many cases. The fact that MyTERN creates a space where people with lived experience of incarceration are allowed to interact and learn together is in itself significant and what we could call an anti-carceral or even abolitionist aspect of this program. Moreover, the creation of this environment that fosters relationship building between people with incarceration histories provides participants with the opportunity to support one another, motivate each other, and ultimately facilitates growth in numerous arenas, including academic and emotional (see Appendix D1).

Value of the Central Role of Tufts Undergraduate (Medford) Students for the Benefit of the MyTERN students:

“You know, it’s just amazing to have such brilliant students behind us that really care for us. And I really do believe you all care for us. You know, I really do believe in my heart, or I would never be here, I would have been gone already.” --Cora

MyTERN students also consistently emphasized the importance of having the Tufts undergraduate students in the classroom. Despite the often substantial differences in the backgrounds of MyTERN students and Tufts undergraduate (Medford) students, specifically with respect to socio-economic status and formal education level, the interviews demonstrated that everyone was able to come together through common goals and mutual support in order to

form one loving community. In what follows, I will examine three relevant themes that MyTERN students discussed with regard to Medford students. First, MyTERN students explained the importance of having diversity of age, perspective, and personal experience in the classroom. Additionally, MyTERN students discussed themes of hope, enthusiasm, exuberance, and energy brought to the program by the Medford students. Finally, MyTERN students discussed both the love, care, and emotional support, as well as practical educational/reentry support from Tufts undergraduates.

Many participants highlighted that the classroom diversity as a result of Tufts undergraduate participation significantly impacted their program experience. Some MyTERN students explain that they have not had many interactions with individuals from different neighborhoods and backgrounds prior to their participation in the program. For example, Derek describes that throughout his life, he has only been “associated and socialized with those who live the same lifestyle I lead.” At first, some students reflected that they did not know how they could forge relationships with individuals coming from such different backgrounds, across age, race, gender, and lived experience.

However, MyTERN students quickly came to realize that building relationships with the Medford students broadened their community and contributed to personal growth. Students reflected that getting to know the Medford students facilitated a two-way transfer of knowledge in which Medford students and MyTERN students learned from each other’s cultures and backgrounds. Benny calls this shared learning experience “unbelievable”, because it introduces him to new perspectives “on how the world is on this side” that he has not previously been exposed to. Kenny reiterates this sentiment, and points to how he loves listening to the Medford students, because “whatever they [Medford students] do in life, they want to try to make a

difference.” Overall, students find that the exposure to individuals of different backgrounds broadens their outlook on life, which has been an important growth experience.

In addition to providing diversity in opinion, MyTERN students articulated that the Tufts undergraduate students, who had not experienced incarceration and still had their whole lives ahead of them, provided energy, enthusiasm, and exuberance in the classroom. This in turn provided the MyTERN students with a critical sense of hope. Multiple students commented that they are “affected by the system mentally” or are weighed down by jadedness about the system, as a result of their older age and experience of incarceration. MyTERN students contrasted this attitude with the youthful energy of Tufts undergraduate students who “bring enthusiasm and vibrancy that's needed a lot of the time.” The participation of both Medford and MyTERN students therefore facilitated an uplifting and cheerful classroom environment, in which people are excited to come to -- both Medford and MyTERN students -- even after a long day or a stressful week.

MyTERN participants articulated that this uplifting environment, only made possible by the participation of both MyTERN and Tufts undergraduates, made them feel like there could be life and hope after incarceration. For example, Aria stated, “Well I love you guys [Tufts undergraduates]. I love being around you guys. You give me energy, hope. You don't know that but you guys give me hope that it's not over.” This quote demonstrates that the enthusiasm and youthfulness of the Medford students helped motivate the MyTERN students and instilled in them a positive outlook for the future, which can be difficult to achieve for people facing so many obstacles post-incarceration.

MyTERN students also expressed that Medford students provided both love and emotional support, as well as tangible academic and reentry support. Students said they truly felt

that the Medford students cared about them and were here for them. For example, Aria described that every night after class, a couple of students would come with her to feed homeless individuals living on Boston's Massachusetts Avenue. She explained that the fact that students helped support her goals outside of class demonstrated that Medford students were genuine in their presence, and their participation is "not for a grade, it's not for credits. It's because they honestly want to be here." This unconditional love and support from the Medford students made MyTERN students feel more valued by society and helped them realize that they were not alone. Additionally, students expressed that Medford undergraduates were "instrumental in helping with assignments," and this extra hands-on academic support was crucial to their success in the program (see Appendix D2).

Value of the Central Role of Tufts Undergraduate (Medford) Students for the Benefit of the Medford Students:

"I think academia gives us a lot to work with theoretically, but oftentimes this knowledge is generalized/monolithic and lacks the human element. Through the TUPIT community, I came to understand (as much as one can) the lived realities of incarceration, racial injustice, and more, in a way that no textbook could teach."

Tufts undergraduate students' survey responses highlighted the importance of the MyTERN community to their personal growth. Tufts is a primarily white institution, and 60% of students receive no financial aid. Survey responses demonstrated that sharing personal narratives and building relationships with formerly incarcerated people facilitated an important opportunity to learn from and create community with individuals with different backgrounds and life experiences. Tufts students expressed that these experiences played a significant role in "broadening their view of society." For example, 97.8% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that participating in MyTERN taught them "things of value that pertain to knowledge about racial and economic justice that [they] have not - and do not believe [they] could have - learned in any other way while at Tufts." As reflected in the quote at the start of the section, students

pointed to the relationships they formed with the MyTERN students as the reason they “came to understand (as much as one can) the lived realities of incarceration, racial injustice, and more, in a way that no textbook could teach.”

Furthermore, by forming relationships with and learning from the MyTERN students, 88.9% of the Tufts undergraduates strongly agreed/agreed that participation in MyTERN “has given [them] a clearer sense of direction and goals for [the] future.” Although each undergraduate student reflected different passions, ranging from healthcare to psychology to criminal justice, their participation in MyTERN helped refine their interest to focus on social justice, activism, and civic engagement. Many students reflected that the MyTERN students taught them about “empathy, healing and confidence and love,” which lit a fire in them and helped them find this deeper passion to become a leader in creating a more just society (See Appendix D3).

Value of MyTERN’s Community as a Whole:

“I don't know why we even say Medford and MyTERN students, because I feel like we're just a big group of people learning. Like you guys are learning from us. We're learning from you guys.” -Aria

As demonstrated in the last two sections, and reflected by Aria’s quote above, MyTERN and Medford students came together and formed one community across fundamental differences. In this community, both MyTERN and Medford students learn from each other in different ways, and in doing so broaden their communities and world views. Furthermore, students find strength in their connections with each other, which creates the potential for social change. Therefore, the synergies that are realized by bringing these two groups together into a strong community enhanced MyTERN’s impact on its participants to an extent that could not be accomplished by either group alone.

The following example shows the power of creating this community. Hayden describes what it's like arriving at MyTERN as: “everyone comes in with a smile on their face and... everything just makes it feel like you're walking into your own living room, and just all your friends are there.” Additionally, Benny explained that, because of the obstacles he faces, some days he feels like nothing matters anymore. However, once he steps into the MyTERN classroom, “It's like the sun shines, and when you walk in, you're like, everybody's here. And like, literally, you want to just hug people. So, you're like, Oh, it's just so nice. Today was a fucked-up day. But I'm so happy to see you. And it just changes.” This collective sense of joy and community created by bringing these groups together is a significant driver of the program's success. In fact, as Benny suggests, it is only through the exuberance of “everyone” being in the classroom together, both MyTERN and Medford students, that he was able to shift his negative mindset and see purpose and light amid his personal struggles.

Moreover, the participation of both MyTERN and Medford students highlights the potential for social change when individuals from different backgrounds come together. In his interview, Hayden shared that the relationships formed between MyTERN and Medford students helps all participants understand “what it is a society can give and what we can give.” When individuals have an opportunity to receive knowledge and support from a group while simultaneously giving back to others, it enhances their feelings of self-worth and demonstrates that they can have an impact outside of themselves. This in turn provides motivation for creating change both within the group and outside of it. A Medford student built on this idea when she wrote that collaborating with previously incarcerated people “in a space that fosters such interpersonal connection” demonstrated to her that “community creation is exactly how we

create social change” because she has learned “how much stronger each of us are amidst the relationships we’ve formed.”

In each of the testimonials above, students highlight the value of the MyTERN program bringing the community of MyTERN and Medford students together as a whole. The community formed provided an uplifting environment in which students felt supported and therefore were able to support each other. This interpersonal connection and community creation created a foundation for increased social change. All of this was made possible by the cohort-based format of the MyTERN program (see Appendix D4).

MyTERN Program Impact:

“When I look back at my past, and I see the things I’ve been through, my trials and tribulations. And then as I sit in Tufts University, with my sweatshirt on and Tufts mask at times, and my laptop in front of me, it just gives me a huge, huge degree of confidence, because it allows me to understand that as long as I continue to persevere, and have discipline, I can triumph over anything. That’s what MyTERN gives me. It feeds my soul.” --Derek

This chapter has demonstrated that the loving community, the utilization of trauma informed and restorative justice practices, the focus on social justice and civic engagement, and the provision of college-level courses are all necessary components of the MyTERN program. Together, these elements facilitate a classroom environment in which participants feel humanized, socialized and supported. When students felt all three of these things, they noted an increased level of self-worth, confidence, and a greater sense of hope for the future.

Participants discussed that the MyTERN program made them feel more humanized. Multiple students explained that the carceral system is very dehumanizing, as it paints incarcerated people as criminals and monsters that deserve to be locked in a cell. Moreover, once released, society continues to dehumanize returning citizens through restrictive laws and generally negative perceptions and attitudes. One element of the program that made students feel more human was its civic studies orientation. Through the podcast, public speaking events, and

personal civic impact projects students took part in, participants saw themselves as contributing members of society who can make a positive impact on the world. Additionally, the restorative justice and trauma-informed practices, such as reflecting on personal histories in the context of sociological analyses; learning about the social-historical determinants of health widely defined; and working through trauma helped students reframe their perceptions of themselves. Students highlighted how this helped them free themselves from the label of criminal and feel deserving of a successful future. Furthermore, the program's focus on relationship building and creating a community of care helped students feel more valued by society and that they were a part of something greater than themselves. Together, these elements helped students gain a greater sense of their own humanity and the capacity to care for others. Benny shared,

I look at myself as I am a regular person because of this class. I am a normal citizen and I deserve to be here and I deserve to have everything that everyone else has. And I deserve to be treated as a person as well. And this class allowed me to recognize that so I understand I am a person and not just a monster.

As reflected in Benny's quote, the program helped him see himself as a "normal citizen" rather than a "monster," and he now feels more deserving of equal treatment and capable of making a positive impact on society.

Additionally, after participating in the program, students felt more socialized to life on the outside. Students expressed that incarceration can be very isolating and there are many unspoken rules in prison that aren't conducive to the way society functions on the outside. Students who have experienced long periods of incarceration voice that they initially had a hard time adjusting to the new form of socialization. However, MyTERN provided a safe place for students to have social interactions with individuals who value them. Students stated that the

relationships they formed in MyTERN helped them adjust to “what normal life is,” and contributed to increased confidence in social settings. Being in a college classroom with professors and college students also helped students adjust to an academic environment. After participating in the program, students felt more ready and able to matriculate and succeed on a traditional college campus.

Finally, students felt more supported after participation in the MyTERN program. As described in the literature review, there are many barriers to reentry that make day-to-day life very challenging for returning citizens. Students emphasized that the support and love that they receive helps keep them grounded and gives them the strength to overcome the obstacles in their way. For example, as described in the community section, Benny expressed that some days he feels like nothing matters anymore as a result of the obstacles he faces. However, he stated that he always finds a way to get to class, because, once there, the community provides him with happiness and a positive mindset. When individuals face hardships, they need community and love and support to remind them that they are valued and part of something greater than themselves. MyTERN provides just that, and Benny demonstrates how spending time with the people who care about you can completely transform one’s outlook on life.

Feeling humanized, socialized, and supported instilled in MyTERN students higher levels of confidence and a greater sense of self-worth. As reflected in Derek’s quote at the beginning of this section, being part of the MyTERN program “gives me a huge, huge degree of confidence.” In turn, achieving greater confidence and self-worth helped MyTERN students gain clarity and hope for what their futures will hold. Derek stated that prior to MyTERN, he did not have a vision for what his life was going to look like. However, through participating in the program and being part of the community, he stated that his “goals and directions got more clear.” He

specifically pointed to the Medford students, who “gave me some direction, gave me some insight and some wisdom in how to proceed which was very helpful.” With Medford student support, Derek built a civic-impact project that continues almost a full year later, a non-profit program that mentors inner-city youth.

Like Derek, after participation in the program, many participants’ visions for the future focused on civic engagement. Ezekiel stated that he wanted to dedicate his future to give back to the men that are still incarcerated and make sure their voices do not go unheard. He stated that the education he received through MyTERN, such as the financial literacy class, technology training, and college-level courses provided him with the tools to successfully pursue this vision. Similarly, Jackson stated that his definition of a successful future is giving back to his community. The fact that the MyTERN students want to commit their future to investing in their communities demonstrates that they have started to see themselves as part of that community, not as isolated and hunted by the police. The community can provide a sense of identity that replaces the street identity that had been the only one available - even for many leaving prison without having had interaction with restorative justice and community-based educational programs like TUPIT-MyTERN. The community, social justice, and restorative justice aspect of the MyTERN program helped students cultivate their identity as a community member able to make a difference and provided them with the tools and support to put their ideas into action.

In addition to civic engagement, students also envisioned their future differently with regard to education. The majority of students in both cohorts stated that prior to their participation in MyTERN, they never envisioned themselves going to college. However, after being part of the MyTERN community, their perceptions of education changed. Cora stated that,

“I used to have the feeling that my life was over, I was worthless, that I wasn't going to have no education, that I wasn't going to be nobody, because that was what was instilled in me. That's what they tell you in prison, that you're nobody, you're nothing.” However, after having been in the MyTERN program for almost a year, she exclaimed, “I know that none of that's true. I know that I am somebody, I know that I have big dreams that I can accomplish if I put my mind to it. I got so far here in this program, so I know what I'm capable of. I know that next year, I want to be sitting in the classroom somewhere in some college.” Cora's statement demonstrates that the MyTERN program's focus on education in conjunction with community building and reentry support enables students' confidence, self-empowerment, and agency. For Cora, this made her feel capable and worthy of pursuing an education.

For many students, their goals for the future translated into concrete action steps. For example, Alex stated that he had hoped to get a bachelor's degree and a master's in social work; however, he thought that these dreams were unrealistic. Since participating in MyTERN, he stated, “I think my hopes have become more realistic. And it's actually started to form into a plan.” Alex has now enrolled in Bunker Hill Community College for a Fall 2022 start date, and has a concrete action plan to apply to four-year universities, including Tufts, after receiving his associate's degree. Both Alex and Cora's testimonials highlight how different students come into the program at different life stages and with different perceptions of education. The MyTERN program was able to meet students where they were at entering the program, and regardless of each student's individual needs and goals, the program helped them gain hope and a plan for the future.

As Derek stated in the quote at the start of this section, the MyTERN program helped him see that “as long as [he] continue[s] to persevere, and have discipline, [he] can triumph over

anything. That's what MyTERN gives [him]. It feeds [his] soul.” The program’s focus on community, restorative justice, civic engagement, and higher education instilled in students this sense of worth and confidence that translated into agency over their lives and futures (see Appendix E).

Conclusion:

The traditional view that reentry programs should reduce recidivism, improve public safety, and save money is far too simplified, broad, and ultimately fails to address the factors most important to individual and community-based success. This study’s findings demonstrate that MyTERN’s prioritization of community building, restorative justice, trauma informed pedagogy, and social justice provides benefits unlike any other life experience its students have had - unconditional love, support, and a new sense of home, specifically one that is built through and across cultural, socioeconomic, and racial barriers. The MyTERN community thus made students feel more valued, supported, capable, and even human, thereby contributing to their increased confidence, civic mindedness, hope for the future, and efficacy in accomplishing their goals. These findings indicate that MyTERN’s success is derived in large part from prioritizing its mission and values, rather than merely addressing employment and public safety.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

“Men and women need MyTERN, really bad. We need it as a man needs breath. Because if we don't have more programs and education opportunities, like MyTERN, there are many men and women that are gonna continue to recidivate and that is a huge problem because we need education. I'm not going to give up. I'm staying strong. I love education. Let's come together. And let's give everybody hope. Peace.” --Derek

There is a major lack of support for individuals returning home from prison. One of the significant gaps in reentry support is the shortage of colleges and universities providing a continuum of care for incarcerated people once released from prison⁶. As reflected in Derek's words above, individuals impacted by incarceration need programs and educational opportunities once released. He calls upon individuals in the community to come together and enact change, in order to provide returning citizens with a sense of hope for the future. Colleges and universities, public and private, open enrollment and selective enrollment, have a responsibility to join this fight and increase access to higher education for individuals who have been incarcerated. This is one substantial way that these institutions can become more equitable, impacting some of the most entrenched problems with elite higher education, specifically its exclusivity.

The research conducted on the MyTERN program provides insight into one successful model of university-based reentry support. In the introduction of this thesis, I asked, *What does a successful college reentry program look like? What structures make it successful? What values make it successful?* The interviews with MyTERN students demonstrate that a cohort-based and values-based program that functions as a transition between prison and college has many benefits for participants. MyTERN's role as a transition between prison and college helped participants build confidence in academic and social settings and therefore made students feel more capable and worthy of matriculating at a two or four-year campus. Furthermore, the civic impact focus of

⁶ Two more universities in Massachusetts, Harvard and Clark University, have reached out to MyTERN for support starting up reentry programs.

MyTERN and the incorporation of material related to racial and socio-economic justice into the curriculum helped students realize their goals of giving back to their communities. Moreover, the program's central focus on restorative justice and community building across cultural, socioeconomic, and racial barriers provided students with support, a sense of home, and a space for communal healing. The MyTERN community in turn made students feel more valued, supported, capable, and even human, thereby contributing to their increased confidence, civic mindedness, hope for the future, and efficacy in accomplishing their goals.

Therefore, for colleges and universities looking to implement reentry programs on their campuses, the research findings on the MyTERN program suggest that it is crucial for a reentry program to adopt core values that focus on the social, emotional, and psychological wellbeing and growth of its participants, rather than solely focusing on tangible goals such as college matriculation and employment. Over the last two years, individuals in the program have found that by far the most influential aspect of the entire program was the relationships that made them feel human and valued and worthy. This research demonstrates the immense power of community support when it comes to reentry, and how being part of a positive network, one that makes people feel part of something greater than themselves, is necessary for individuals who have experienced the trauma and isolation of the prison system.

However, although interviews with participants demonstrated the many benefits of participation in the MyTERN program, there are also significant challenges that any reentry program will face. In the introduction I asked, *What are these challenges that universities face when running a reentry program?* One major challenge the MyTERN program has faced is the reality that many of the obstacles to successful reentry are institutionalized. For example, systemic forces that contribute to recidivism include racial and economic injustice, barriers to

employment and affordable housing due to restrictive laws for people with criminal records, the return to communities typically characterized by high rates of poverty, the lack of adequate mental health services, and the presence of restrictive and unrealistic parole stipulations. While MyTERN attempts to combat these systems by providing returning citizens with a sense of home, support, community, practical reentry support, and access to higher education, these positive forces are not always able to overcome the systemic injustices entrenched in the foundational institutions of the United States. As a result of these obstacles, two students in cohort one were reincarcerated for violations of parole, one during the program and one six months after completing MyTERN. Furthermore, a student in cohort one and a student in cohort two experienced a return of the symptoms of addiction and left the program.

Although two students in the program did return to prison, MyTERN also played an active role in preventing other students' reincarceration. Two students in the second cohort, for instance, were involved in pre-trial proceedings upon entering the program and faced a sentencing trial during the course of the school year. Both students voiced that their enrollment in MyTERN along with letters of support from Tufts faculty significantly improved the outcomes of their cases. According to sentencing guidelines, one student faced reincarceration but had completed two programs that the judge cited in deciding against more time inside. This MyTERN student was given a sentence of six months on house arrest with the privilege of being able to attend work and the MyTERN program. The student explained that the judge cited MyTERN as a reason why she did not want him to go back behind the wall, saying "Why would I send him back when he is in the middle of a Tufts University reentry program?" The student stated, "If I didn't take this class, I probably would've been sentenced to jail." Another student, according to sentencing guidelines, was looking at a sentence of twelve years. Again, the judge

cited the same two programs in which this student had participated as the basis for a substantially reduced sentence. This student had completed a program run by federal probation that alone reduced the sentence in half to six years. After that, the judge further reduced the sentence to one year and a day, citing his participation in MyTERN as the primary reason for this reduction. Based on time already served, this student will only be reincarcerated for 3-4 months and the judge set the start date for after his graduation from MyTERN.

This returns us to the final question this study posed: *What is the definition of success when it comes to prison reentry programs?* Previous research conducted on reentry programs has primarily focused on recidivism as a marker of a success or failure. However, while the MyTERN program does not disagree that preventing recidivism is an important goal of any reentry program, and it is surely devastating that members of the MyTERN community have been reincarcerated, it also recognizes that recidivism is not necessarily a mark of program failure. Many students enter reentry programs with open cases or simply under supervision and thus remain vulnerable to guidelines, structures, and consequences that are outside of the control and responsibility of the reentry program. Equally significant, oftentimes recidivism is outside of the reasoned control of the individual due to the psychological-emotional effects of any of the many factors that lead to court involvement, such as addiction, previous incarceration, experience of violence, and poverty.

Despite reentry programs' limited ability to completely triumph over powerful systems of inequality, they can still play a crucial role in supporting returning citizens⁷. This research on the

⁷ In order to truly combat mass incarceration and recidivism, there is the need for the radical restructuring of many institutions in the United States. Abolition is the collective struggle to improve the underlying causes of crime and create a society that does not need to rely on prisons and jails. Abolitionists advocate for the investment in communities and an increased access to resources, such as free health and mental health care for all, available and affordable housing, adequately funded and demilitarized schools, more healthy food options, clean water, community centers, accessible addiction treatment, and much more (Davis, 2003).

MyTERN program has demonstrated that success in a reentry program can be defined by much more than preventing recidivism. Success should also be judged based on the degree to which students feel accepted, supported, in community, and even loved. Success might be best measured by the extent to which students feel like human beings deserving and capable of success.

The necessity of a community that can provide these things amidst the systemic challenges associated with reentry is clearly articulated by Hayden, a student in the first cohort. A few weeks before the MyTERN graduation, Hayden was reincarcerated for nine months on a parole violation. He was released from prison mid-way through the next year's MyTERN program and rejoined the program. Hayden reflects on how the MyTERN community played a powerful role during his incarceration and once released. First, Hayden recalled that when he was locked up, he received many letters from fellow students in the program. Hayden explained,

It made me happy, you know, to see that people that I just met, so recently care so much. Like, they hardly know half the things I've done in life, but it's just like, they don't care. They just care for the person that they see and the person that they know. I can honestly say, like, not a lot of people get that support.

Moreover, Hayden shared that, the day after he was released from prison was the day he came back to class rejoining the new cohort. We asked Hayden, you just got out, and out of all the things you could have done, why do you think the first thing you did after being released was to come to class?

Because for nine months and three days, all I kept thinking about was, how's it gonna feel to come back in the class and see everybody's face? I feel like no disrespect to my family, but I looked forward to that more. I feel like I was

looking forward to that more than anything else. And it's just because of the support I got from everybody. Like y'all didn't have to go to my court or anything. You guys got school classes, all types of things. I'm pretty sure y'all caseload for school is crazy. But all of you were waiting for me at court and hoping the judge released me back. And then when I didn't, a lot of people say 'out of sight out of mind', but it wasn't like that, you know?

As reflected by Hayden's story, while the MyTERN program was not able to prevent his parole violation and reincarceration, the real value of a program like MyTERN is making people feel human in a system that relies on dehumanization. The creation of community, loving relationships, and a sense of home makes participants feel valued, worthy, supported, and hopeful, which is transformational for individuals who have experienced such a violent system. By investing in each MyTERN student and facilitating a community focused on healing, radical love and acceptance, and civic engagement, MyTERN itself is supporting an abolitionist project.

Direction for Future Research:

There are multiple directions for future research that could expand the scope of this project. Because of the thesis deadline, this paper was written before follow-up interviews were conducted one year after students in both cohorts completed the MyTERN program. Including the one-year follow up interviews would be an important addition to this research because it will demonstrate if the benefits of participating in MyTERN are sustained after students have continued their education or entered the workforce, and no longer come to class twice a week. It is important to ask previous participants,

- *If you matriculated at a college/university, what happened? Has it been successful?*

- *What successes and failures have you experienced in the last year?*
- *What did the MyTERN program prepare you for with respect to college/the workforce and what did it not prepare you for?*
- *What do you wish MyTERN had provided that it did not?*
- *How do you reflect on the most meaningful part of the MyTERN program for you?*
- *Do you still feel the effects/support of the MyTERN community's support after a year – and if so how or if not why is that?*

These questions are necessary for understanding the long-term impact of the program and students' outcomes.

Additionally, although I included some survey responses from Tufts Medford undergraduate students, because of time constraints, thorough interviews were not conducted with this population. Because the MyTERN program creates a reciprocal environment in which both MyTERN and Medford students gain tremendous value from participation, it is important to more thoroughly explore the program's impact on Tufts undergraduates. This data would provide important information to Tufts University regarding the importance of the MyTERN program to not only previously incarcerated participants, but also the University's undergraduates. Moreover, this data would further demonstrate to other universities creating reentry programs the positive impact of undergraduate participation.

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Appendix:

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed various themes and ideas from interviews with the MyTERN students. This appendix includes the raw interview data that I summarize and refer to in my writing. The purpose of including this data is to showcase the voices and perspectives of the MyTERN students in their original form. Each sub-section of the appendix lists quotes that correlate with the analysis of a section in Chapter 3: Research Findings.

Appendix A: Value of MyTERN as a Transition

“I think it would have been a lot [going straight to a 2 or 4 year college]. Like, honestly, I don't think for myself personally, I don't think it would have been an academic thing, I think it would have been like sensory overload. Because one thing I struggled with, in sobriety and post incarceration is social anxiety. So yeah, it would have been too much. And also, I do think I needed the support that MyTERN offers because again, my expectations and my experiences in life is like, if I had fallen behind a little bit, I would have freaked out and stopped without the added support of MyTERN. Not that I've fallen behind but I think we can both agree the MyTERN program is much more supportive and like nurturing than being in a formal two or four year college campus aspect where it's like you work or don't like you're more or less an adult, like, you know, sink or swim aspect to it. So, yeah, I think kind of dealing with that social anxiety, it's easier here and also that added level of support.”

“if I enrolled [in a 2 or 4 year college] before the program, I wouldn't have made it, it would have just been way too much. Socially, it would have been too much, it would have been drawing me into a pit. Now with MyTERN, it's like okay, you guys offset the scariness of it. So I understand what it is to sit in the classroom with a professor with an actual dude sitting by my side. And we're interacting with each other, and we're just guys, we're making it happen. And then, it was so, so much better to be in MyTERN and experience the college atmosphere from here, at the nutrition center, then to Medford and actually walk on the campus, it was a better fit for me, I have to say, for myself, it was better for me just to get the feeling of that, because if you would have drove me straight into a large classroom, I probably would have crashed and burned. But now it's like, I'm not as socially awkward. So I can I can accept that I do belong here. So yeah,”

“Yeah. It's a reentry too, as well. Yeah. That's why it makes a difference. It's not just college. It's reentry too. And that's what makes it important”

“it does a good job of like, like reintegrating you into society, but also not forgetting where you were from”

“So I would have to say, without my turn, I know for a fact, I can only speak for myself, it would have been a lot harder adjusting to society without the support of MyTERN.”

I probably would've dropped off [going straight to a 2 or 4 year campus]. The workload, having to go everyday being a father of 2 children and going to school everyday and work."

Appendix B: Curriculum; Social Justice

"I think, like, the curriculum makes you more aware of the, you know, normalizing of injustice as in the suppression of racism, or whatever, you know, whatever it might be. And it's, it just makes you more aware of things that happen every day, that are not right."

"My role? My role is, is, you know, to give back, right, I'm being taught. So it's incumbent upon me to be able to give back to where I come from, just in general. My motto is each one teach me. So I can't be successful in life and just forget where I came from."

"So far, since I've been in MyTERN, I literally became a community activist, taking donations for Christmas, doing lecture roundtables, walking the campus speaking to, like actual professional people that I would never have spoken to before. Because of, you know, just my, my settings in my atmosphere would not have brought me to be able to speak to people, like from here. I consider myself an activist now. So I see the change, and myself through that. And I see myself being able to speak up for the people that can't speak at the moment, or the people that can't speak but won't speak. Because they're afraid to do that. This class helped me to be able to open my mind and my mouth and say, Hey, this is not cool. Or, Hey, this is cool. And we need to really push this a little bit more."

"My passion is helping others You know, to try to give back to knowing, like I said guys behind the wall because that's, you know, that's my main passion is to not let those voices go unheard. to let somebody kids and even adults voices out hear that are not being heard be heard."

"Before this class, the most I thought about was, not that I was gang banging, but I worried about the gang members in my neighborhood, but not on a social level, like worried about them, like is the neighborhood good. Now when I think about it, it's like, no, you're no longer involved in that. So socially, you have to be active in order to change the mindset of other people and change the atmosphere. And that's what MyTERN has done."

Appendix C: Trauma Informed Pedagogy and Restorative Justice

"We actually talk about trauma every day that we come to class two times a week. And that kind of pushed me to open my mind up a little bit more about all the trauma that I've been through. And allowed me to open up about some of the, I don't want to say embarrassing trauma, but some of the physical trauma that like really screwed me up mentally. Then, you know, the class helped me to be able to share this trauma and my story with the class with strangers that are going through the same exact thing, not the same exact thing, but almost on the same level that I've been on. And yeah, that just makes you know, it's so much easier to be able to, to relax in the classroom and to talk and yeah, so it just opened up the whole thing that I'm super confident with speaking with people now than I was before."

“I think that trauma-informed training is something that's necessary and needed, especially to individuals that were formerly incarcerated. Because I think that a majority of individuals that were incarcerated already went through some trauma, and then you get re-traumatized by being incarcerated. So I think that is definitely important. I definitely see it in the program. Yeah, definitely do. I love that, and just check ins, I think it moves smoother when you do that, too. I think soon as you get people to open up a little bit, even when people open people when it comes to the reading and stuff, they talk about a lot of things. So that's part of that, too. You know, and I think like soon as one person does, the next person is going to do it”

“I think [trauma-informed pedagogy] is good. When everyone else speaks about their past or current traumas it helps you because you may think you are alone in this but you are not and there are other people that went through either the same thing or something similar to what you were going through. So you have support.”

“You know, you can have all the education in life, or whatever, but everybody goes through some shit. It Doesn't matter what type of degree you got, you know, but, you know, when you have that, that healing aspect of it, right, that restore justice feel to it, you know, it allows you to heal at the same time grow, you know. You can grow intellectually, but not grow wisdom, right? You can be in prison and you can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you're in prison, that doesn't matter. Right? You gotta be able to free that up in heaven, that aspect. It just brings it all together, you know, to me, it just frees it up for you to become who you want to become and do what you desire to do. So this is definitely necessary.”

“I do. I do see [trauma-informed pedagogy and restorative justice] implemented, certainly. And I think it's extremely important. Like luckily, I think most of the people in here, most of the MyTERN students at least have experience with restorative justice. And a lot of that, again, it's like a trauma informed. Indigenous, like, peace circle is the root of it.”

“Coming here, you know MyTERN Mondays and Thursdays is like a little reprieve. You know, you get that restorative justice feel, coming here. And it's just like, wow, you know, that spark keeps me grounded. You know, let me know how to be just be appreciative for everything I have in my life.”

“I would have to say, the training in trauma is really effective, especially for individuals, men and women who are newly released from incarceration. Most of us understand that mental health is a real thing. I myself know that I suffer from a slight case of PTSD adjustment disorder, because of my long stretch in prison. So what we go through in class is a beautiful, beautiful tool for me, that helps me understand what I have triggers. When I want to, you know, shut down or when I want to be anti-social, MyTERN gives me the opportunity to go back and reflect on the tools that I learned within those trainings.”

“[Trauma-informed pedagogy in the class] is a very healthy role, because we all experience some of the same symptoms as it relates to incarceration. Also, even the Medford students, because they face so much pressure on striving to accomplish and finish and graduate college, they also have certain issues with mental health, it can be depression, it can be anything. So it helps we speak openly in these classroom discussions about our, say, mental health issues.”

Appendix D1: Community, MyTERN

“A lot of the circles that I find myself in, there's not people who are formerly incarcerated that I can relate to in those aspects, you know, and then if I do find myself around formerly incarcerated people, a lot of people aren't really pushing in the same direction that I'm trying to find myself in. So like, that small cross section on the Venn diagram is like MyTERN, where everybody decided to be here on their own volition. Everybody here is formerly incarcerated, you know, so it's that kind of finding that niche, like, where those two things combined, and it's really uplifting and productive and supportive.”

“I feel compelled, because of our own backgrounds, to try to be as much support to each one of the MyTERN students... I know that we all struggle with what we have in our past, you know, and if we can try to lend as much, or least myself, if I can lend it my support, despite my own personal struggles, you know, if I can see someone else become successful, then I'll be happy that I was in support of them in any which way”

“We're all on the same wavelength. And we're all trying to help each other. We're all trying to understand each other on each and every different level. So that, that kind of like, made everything like, well, that made everything like everything, just mesh and molded together. And it just made, it just made MyTERN, like, I love coming in.”

“You know, I feel like I have a different relationship with everybody in the program. We text each other. We talk. We had a rough class on Monday. So I texted Hayden and Jackson, just to make sure they were good. We text back and forth back and forth. I called him and we talked for like a half hour like you. I mean, like we, we talk outside of this class. It's not something where we just come to this class, we do what we're doing, and we leave it here. We have a relationship I feel outside of this classroom, and we're friends. That's what I think I am. I'm friends with them. You know eight, seven new friends.”

“I would have to say for the past few months that I've been a part of the mytern committee, my relationship with the other students. It's amazing. It's beautiful. It gives me strength. It gives me hope.”

Appendix D2: Community, Medford Impact

Diversity:

“Well, I learn things from anybody. Doesn't matter what is young? old, middle of the road. I'm just a sponge. So everybody teaches me something.”

“But [the Medford student participation] also allowed me to just open up and be able to talk to people who have not been incarcerated, because I've been programmed to, to only talk to people that are incarcerated, because I always felt like they were the only ones that understood what was going on. And now, because of MyTERN, I understand now that that's not the case that there's

people out here that understand what you went through and want to help and commit to helping you out as well.”

“I got to meet, you know, students from different states, different backgrounds. Unfortunately, that wasn't always my reality. Growing up, I ... associated and socialized with those who live the same lifestyle I lead. So coming to this class, that was like, the biggest, biggest thing for me is meeting people and understanding their background and culture.”

“It's a shared learning experience that is unbelievable. Like, it's really unbelievable, because if you sit down and talk to people, you find out even though they're young, they have so much knowledge, and you know, like, I've never really traveled like that. But now I'm talking to people that's from, like, Ohio, and Nevada or wherever, you know, and it's just, you know, it's nice to hear everybody else's perspective on how the world is on this side.”

Hope, exuberance, positivity:

“Because also like, I think, just with us being older, or maybe it's the incarceration, like, there's this certain like jadedness and like, like, time smooths this, like, smooths all stones, you know, and I think that the Medford students also bring like a great, like enthusiasm and vibrancy that that's needed a lot of the time, you know.”

“I don't have kids of my own. But I just enjoy, like, the youthful, exuberance, like it keeps me young, but it lets me know that you know coming out here at this point in my life, there is still life, you know, it is still, as they say. So, it's lovely to be able to speak with people who aren't necessarily jaded or too affected by the system mentally, you know, they are not indoctrinated, like y'all to walk in their shoes. It's just, it's exciting, beautiful to see.”

“They are like, seeing I'm almost 50, they are like my little kids. My smarter little kids that are way smarter than I am. So our relationship is... well I love you guys. I love being around you guys. You give me energy, hope you don't know that but you guys give me speaking for myself. You guys give me hope on like that it's not over.”

“I really appreciate the medford students, you know, they're very helpful. And I love listening to them speak and talk, because, you know, they have such a different view of the world, you know, seems like, you know, whatever they do in life, they want to try to make a difference. And that's really important.”

“I really do appreciate what [Medford Students] bring to the course. You know, they are very bright kids. And I don't think the course would be the same without them there. You know, because they just bring a lot to the table.”

Support:

“I think I have a good relationship with the Medford students. I, I'm kind of, like in awe a little bit because it really is. There's so much care, and like, compassion, and a desire to really, I wouldn't even say help- Yes, but like, more like support, it really is, and not to be like a crutch, but really to like be like a motivation. And it's, it's really humbling to see people who have no personal connection to incarceration, have such a strong commitment and feelings towards changing the carceral system, and also being supportive to us.”

“The Medford student [component] has worked great. Very instrumental in helping me with my assignments ... they weren't like arrogant people that you would think that, you know, I'm in this college, I have this knowledge, you know, sometimes people could be arrogant about that. They were down to earth people”

“[Medford Students] help me know that no matter what I've been through in life, no matter what I've done, no matter what my past looks like, I am not my past. And they give me that hope, that push, I need to propel myself forward to get to that next level of life, which is peace, love and happiness.

“It's been the Medford students who have helped me you know, to learn new tech, new stuff on the computer and stuff.”

“I'd say it's the relationships that I've built with people like Alex going to Mass Ave to feed the homeless people, you know what I mean? Like, and seeing that you guys are here, because you want to be here. You know what I mean? Like, I don't think you guys are doing for a grade, like, I genuinely feel like you's all want to be here. You guys try to help us the best we can.”
“You know, it's just amazing to have such brilliant students behind us that really care for us. And I really do believe you all care for us. You know, I really do believe in my heart, or I would never be here, I would have been gone already.”

Appendix D3: Medford words

“MyTERN and TUPIT students have taught me about empathy healing and confidence and love, and that we really have no other option than to fight for justice together. Working with formerly incarcerated and incarcerated people in a space that fosters such interpersonal connection, has taught me how much stronger each of us are amidst the relationships we've formed. Combining these voices and perspectives, allows those who don't know about incarceration to be better educated and transformed by the injustice of it. Those who experience and are impacted by incarceration are cared about and for, and are provided a space to share first-hand their needs and desires. This community creation is exactly how we create social change.”

“I expanded my field of study from simply the natural sciences to an interdisciplinary exploration of holistic health – specifically considering oppressive structural and systemic factors that create health inequities. This program has single handedly transformed my academic interests and experiences at Tufts”

“I think academia gives us a lot to work with theoretically, but oftentimes this knowledge is generalized/monolithic and lacks the human element. Through the TUPIT community, I came to

understand (as much as one can) the lived realities of incarceration, racial injustice, and more, in a way that no textbook could teach.”

“TUPIT has been the most important and transformative experience I've had at Tufts.”

“I just recently met a fellow Tufts student, and in getting to know each other, she asked me what my 'thing' was. I could have said my major of Human Factors Engineering. I could have said my love of basketball, or playing the drums, or reading books. But, of all the things that define who I am, without hesitation, I said my work in TUPIT and MyTERN. That little exchange demonstrates how significant an impact these programs have had on me. When I look back on my experience at Tufts, I know that TUPIT and MyTERN will define my time here, and will define what I do in the future. I am so grateful and appreciative that Tufts has given me this experience, as it has taught me more than any other class I have taken.”

Appendix D4: Community as a Whole

“My relationship with the other students. It's amazing. It's beautiful. It gives me strength. It gives me hope.”

“Because I feel like when you put us both together, it gives two different, you know, like, two different mindsets, because I feel like if it was just all my turn, it would just be a bunch of stories about everybody being in jail. But it's like when we got you all, we get that college experience. And we give you all the incarceration experience, and when you put it together, it makes us all understand, you know, the, what's the word I'm looking for? It helps us all understand what it is a society can give and what we can give.”

“The network in general through MyTERN, being there and being this like positive force. You know, this is a unity based organization. I've found myself a part of this and others. And it's like that realization just kind of allowed me to, like breathe and be like, You know what, like, the things I'm doing, I am doing for me selfishly, but also like, in a way to build a community based and like love based life where before it was very, like selfish and fear based and addiction based. So yeah, that was kind of like the biggest takeaway for me.”

“I would have to say, it's a real harmonious dynamic. Initially, I thought it would be awkward and weird, because how can I relate to a student who was chasing education when my whole life I spent chasing a lot of illusion, which was a criminal lifestyle, what do we have in common? But I realized that once I changed my vision, and I changed my attitude, I changed my outlook on life, I began to see that we can have many things in common because we're both chasing one thing and what is that? That is love, peace, and happiness on Earth. So it just makes so much sense that we come together and build and motivate each other.”

“the community just like the sense of caring and love that there is for everybody? Kind of from all directions in all directions? Yeah, I'd say that's the most important.”

“Oh, relationships and networking relationships. The community is the best. That's the biggest thing, right? Because we saw pitted against each other in our society right? Like the other other

because of your color or because your gender or your sex and your preferences right? And coming in my turn and TUPIT, all this out the window, you know, we just do it here in a community, this is a beautiful thing.”

“I've received text messages from everybody in the classroom. Like, just hold on, stay strong, you know, and you don't get that from other communities. It's just like, well, you fucked up

“Yeah, I think I in general [the community] is super positive, it's definitely uplifting, like, when there is something going on, like I, I know, for myself, and for others, we tend to support each other, you know, if somebody is doing something in the community, I know for a fact people will make a big effort to get out there and support them, which is huge.

“There's been days where I'm just like, I don't give a fuck about anything anymore. But okay, let's go to class. Because once you get in there, you know, it's like the sun shines, and then walk in, you're like, everybody's here. And like, literally, you want to just hug people. So you're like, Oh, it's just so nice. Today was a fucked up day. But I'm so happy to see you. And it just changes.”

Appendix E: Program Impact

Humanization/Socialization:

“In the first semester, I found out who Calvena was. I'm not afraid to be alone anymore. You know what I mean. It's just like, it's such a good feeling inside. You know what I mean? I'm not a victim anymore. You know what I mean? I was a victim, when I came into MyTERN, you know what I mean? I was going through abuse, and it doesn't have to be that way anymore. Through my writing, I found myself and I learned all that through my turn.’

“Since 17 years old, I didn't know interactions with regular people. I knew hurt regular people. Now I look at myself as I am a regular person, because of this class. I am a normal citizen, and I deserve to be here and I deserve to have everything that everybody else has. And I deserve to be treated as a person as well. And this class allowed me to recognize that so I understand that I am a person and not just a monster.”

“So it's helped me, it's helped me a great deal all around the board, like just learning what normal life is sort of kind of just, I'm not all the way adjusted to it yet. But I'm getting there. Being able to express myself in front of people without being upset all the time. And just being able to interact with just people.”

“Well, once again, my turn gives me a foundation. So not only am I working, and maintaining a job, but I also have the opportunity to educate myself and not only educate myself, but educate

myself with the luxury of being within a classroom setting, having access to my professor and to my mentors, and my classmates, individuals who can relate to my struggle and what it takes me to go through my turn, I'm taking public transportation to get here, it's a struggle, but MyTERN allows me to have the strength, it allows me to have the motivation, the determination to keep myself motivated”

So it's helped me, it's helped me a great deal all around the board, like just learning what normal life is sort of kind of just, I'm not all the way adjusted to it yet. But I'm getting there. Being able to express myself in front of people without being upset all the time. And just being able to interact with just people.

“Because if you would have driven me straight into a large classroom, I probably would have crashed and burned. But now it's like, I'm not as socially awkward. So I can accept that I do belong here.”

“MyTERN gave me like, it gives me like a sense of normalizing.”

“So I feel the effects of like, incarceration, post incarceration, often. like, it's, you know, it's not easy to feel normal. So this actually, like what Mike was saying, the other day, whenever I come to this class, like, you know, you're legally allowed to be around like, felons, basically. Yeah. And like, regular people, too. So it does a good job of like, like reintegrating you into society, but also not forgetting where you were from.”

Confidence:

“When I look back at my past, and I see the things I've been through, my trials and tribulations. And then as I sit in Tufts University, with my sweatshirt on and Tufts mask at times, and my laptop in front of me, it just gives me a huge, huge degree of confidence, because it allows me to understand that as long as I continue to persevere, and have discipline, I can triumph over anything. That's what myern gives me. It feeds my soul.”

“So I'm walking with a backpack and my back is straight up in the air, my tufts bottles on the side, I'm on the train, I'm going through my reader, I'm doing homework on the, on the train on the bus. And not that I pay attention to the crowd. But I see the people like, okay, there's kids trying to do something with themselves. And that kind of makes you feel, you know, it makes you feel good. And on top of that, it just drew me into the community and now became a social activist.”

“Chasing education has given me more confidence knowing that, you know, I go to school, Monday and Wednesday. I'm going to go to school and I want to learn something. So it gives me more confidence.”

“Like, I got my superpowers. I think that's the only way to explain it, like my superpowers came in. And it's amazing. It's amazing.”

Hope/Visions for future:

“I didn't really have a vision for where my life was gonna go. I know what I wanted to do. I just didn't know how to get there. I wasn't taking proper steps. Once I became a member of MyTERN, my goals and directions got more clear. The Medford students gave me some direction, gave me some insight and some wisdom on how to proceed while in class and after class was very helpful.”

“It's helped me give myself the best opportunity to succeed in life, right? MyTERN is one of those, TUPIT is one of those. You know, you have to give yourself a fighting chance, you know, be able to take advantage of the services provided. And MyTERN is a great program for that. And so I envision myself doing great things in life. What that may be, I can't tell you, but I can tell you my passion is helping others. You know, to try to give back to knowing, like I said guys behind the wall because that's, you know, that's my main passion is to not let those voices go unheard.”

“MyTERN has just given me so much hope and inspiration. And that I just hope that you know, my life and my dreams come true, you know, and it all began here. And I will take what I learned here, and I will take it with me. And I hope that you know, I prosper from it.”

Education:

“Now it's like, when I come to class, it's like, you know, this is just the Hangout anymore. You know, this isn't, you know, we're not socially gathering for nothing. We are socially gathering, because we all have a purpose to gain more, not necessarily monetary value wise, but like education, we need to gain more we need to understand. And that's what, that's what this class has done. It's helped me to understand that education isn't just about learning. Education is about everything that is around this, you have to understand everything in order to make it work. And that's what MyTERN definitely has done. It has given us a chance to understand that education is just as important is just as important as everything else”

“Yeah, I definitely, like after, after my turn, I want to matriculate to, you know, getting my associates to a bachelor's. And ideally, I want to get my masters in social work. you asked about, like a plan for education, post incarceration. And I didn't have one, I had like, the hope, right, like, Oh, I'd like to do that. And I think one of the big things with the mentors here, it's like, alright, you see somebody who's been through this before, like, somebody has followed this path that you're hoping to follow, like, gone down this path you're hoping to follow? And so to

actually see that as like a reality where it's like, oh, shit, like, I guess? I guess, like I had expected there to be like, I don't know, in a way, like, almost I expected my goal to be impossible to reach. And so yeah, I think my hopes have become more realistic. And it's actually started to form into a plan. Yeah.”

“Yes, I found myself thinking about MyTERN every day, somewhere, whether it's at work, whether I'm just with somebody, that's how passionate I am about MyTERN, and it's, it's um, man. Just the comfort it gives me to know that after 20 years in prison, I can really, really apply myself and chase education.”

Civic Impact:

“My role? My role is, is, you know, to give back, right, I'm being taught. So it's incumbent upon me to be able to give back to where I come from, just in general. My motto is each one teach me. So I can't be successful in life and just forget where I came from.”

“So far, since I've been in MyTERN, I literally became a community activist, taking donations for Christmas, doing lecture roundtables, walking the campus speaking to, like actual professional people that I would never have spoken to before. Because of, you know, just my, my settings in my atmosphere would not have brought me to be able to speak to people, like from here. I consider myself an activist now. So I see the change, and myself through that. And I see myself being able to speak up for the people that can't speak at the moment, or the people that can't speak but won't speak. Because they're afraid to do that. This class helped me to be able to open my mind and my mouth and say, Hey, this is not cool. Or, Hey, this is cool. And we need to really push this a little bit more.”

“My passion is helping others You know, to try to give back to knowing, like I said guys behind the wall because that's, you know, that's my main passion is to not let those voices go unheard. To let somebody kids and even adults voices out hear that are not being heard be heard.”

“Before this class, the most I thought about was, not that I was gang banging, but I worried about the gang members in my neighborhood, but not on a social level, like worried about them, like is the neighborhood good. Now when I think about it, it's like, no, you're no longer involved in that. So socially, you have to be active in order to change the mindset of other people and change the atmosphere. And that's what MyTERN has done.”

General:

“I would describe [MyTERN] in a way as that is something edifying. Something that can help them get from one place in their life to another place in their life, I will explain to them that, that, you know, there can be unfortunate situations that a person can be raised in, but then MyTERN can offer them a different situation where you get actually, become connected with a whole

different range of people that can help to produce and develop their minds in a different way that will make you more of an asset to yourself and to other people in society.”

“the MyTERN program, I know it's always gonna be there, you know, at least for me, because its an integral part of my future, you know, just the constant re-entry process. And I'm always going to be a part of it in the sense that I'm going to be supportive to others that are going to go through what I'm going through.”

“I've never in a million years thought that, like, I would get all the stuff I've gotten from the program.”

“I just feel empowered to be here like, you know, I mean, I feel like my confidence has gone up a little bit. I'm a student. I'm 40.”

“I just, this is my dream come true. MyTERN has shifted my whole atmosphere, has shifted my whole life.”