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Labs, Jeff R. *The Effects of Correctional Education in Vocational Training on Employment Opportunities in Central and Northern Wisconsin for Ex-Offenders Upon Release*

Abstract

Vocational training efforts by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections have attempted to remove barriers on the path of employment for the ex-offender population. The purpose of this mixed-methods study identified if the vocational training programs offered to inmates by the Wisconsin DOC are relevant to employment opportunities across nine counties that make up central and northern Wisconsin and if employers are willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds. Participants in the study were employers in the construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services industry sectors. The study revealed that the minimum skills necessary to be qualified for employment in the skilled trades sectors are in alignment with technical college trainings taking place throughout the Wisconsin Technical College System. The study also revealed that state workforce and training agencies have not clearly communicated and included employers in the development process of ex-offender population workforce trainings that are taking place. Recommendations of the study have implications of reducing workforce shortages in the four specific industry sectors and creating an effective communication plan to increase vocational training outcomes.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The number of incarcerated individuals in the United States exceeds all other industrialized nations, with over 2.3 million inmates currently behind bars (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.b). Incarceration in the U.S. is a growing problem (Hall, 2015). Overcrowding in prisons has become an issue for the criminal justice system and our nation. Incarcerated inmates in both state and federal prisons have increased by 55% between 1995-2010 (Hall, 2015). The current incarceration level in the United States encompasses one in every 100 American adults (Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal & Solomon, 2009).

Approximately, 95% of these inmates will be released within three or less years (Hall, 2015). A significant number of these individuals are expected to relapse into criminal behavior, resulting in rearrest, reconviction, or a return to prison without a new sentence within a three-year period following an inmates release; also known as recidivism (Durose, Cooper & Snyder, 2017). According to the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics (n.d.), 56.7% of inmates released, are rearrested by the end of the first year, a total of 67.8% by the end of the third year, and 76.6% by the end of the fifth year. A study by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2014) relates the high recidivism rates with low educational attainment of incarcerated individuals. The study revealed that only 21% of prison populations have earned at least a high school education. The majority of the nearly 700,000 state prisoners released each year are not equipped with the skills, technical and social, to meet the challenges of reentering society with a successful outcome (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

As the United States continues to be the world leader in the number of citizens it incarcerates, it also is facing a great deficit of workers needed to uphold the nation's economy. Employment opportunities in the United States is expected to increase by 11.5 million between

2016 and 2026 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). The U.S. Census Bureau (2017) projects that the U.S. population is growing faster than the workforce can produce and supply the goods and services that our society is projected to consume through 2030. Another area of concern for the U.S. economy is that labor force participation continues to decline, with only 63% of the country's adult population choosing to participate in the workforce (Salzman, 2018). The population of incarcerated individuals proves to be a substantial loss in potential workforce and human resource capital for the United States.

A closer review of the current processes and systems used in corrections is needed to better prepare inmates in becoming contributing members of society again (Carver & Harrison, 2016). A great deal of criticism has been dedicated to the current state of the criminal justice system, both nationally and per individual state (Carver & Harrison, 2016). Over the past few decades, numerous studies revealed a strong relationship between higher education levels and reduced recidivism rates (Davis, Bozick, Steel & Saunders, 2013). Due to the nature of these types of studies, and the positive results, growing pressure has been placed on the administration of correctional education to provide more opportunities for inmates (Carver & Harrison, 2016).

A major challenge associated with providing correctional education is the costs of the training and the public's perception. On average, state and local spending on prisons and jails has increased at triple the rate of funding for public education in the past three decades (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The costs associated with total state spending on corrections has reached \$52 billion in the United States, making it the second fastest growing area of state budgets, only trailing Medicaid (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.b).

Although there has been widespread debate over fiscal impacts of correctional education over the past couple of decades, the notion of a safer and more well-educated population is well

supported by the general public (Duke, 2018). Correctional education includes various programs aimed at providing rehabilitation, growth, and skill development to better prepare individuals for successful engagement in employment upon release. One of the focuses in correctional education programs is vocational training. Vocational training is designed to teach inmates employment skills needed for specific jobs and industries (Davis et al., 2013). The overall goal of vocational training is to reduce the inmate's risk of recidivating through teaching them skills that can contribute to finding and persisting as contributing employees following release from prison. This study is designed to explore and validate the types of vocational training offered by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections for inmates in all minimum security Wisconsin prisons and if employers are willing to employ individuals with a criminal background in occupations related to these vocational training areas.

As of 2016, Wisconsin has 3,235 inmates in minimum security facilities across the state that are eligible to apply for vocational training offerings (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2017). After an application process is completed for the available trainings, roughly one out of every 23 inmates will get the opportunity to participate in some type of specific vocational training throughout a fiscal year. The study will address specific vocational areas that are being offered to inmates, the amount and type of training, as well as employer's feedback relative to their willingness to hire these individuals upon their release.

Statement of the Problem

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) spends \$750,000 annually for vocational training programs at correctional centers and other educational facilities (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2017). Based on this funding amount, it is projected that approximately 140 inmates have the opportunity to earn certifications each year, resulting in

increased potential for employment opportunities upon their release from incarceration (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2017). The Wisconsin DOC has provided training opportunities in 24 areas of study in vocational-related fields since the inception of correctional education programs in the state (Woodruff, 2017). Table 1 lists the 24 vocational training areas that have been offered in various locations across Wisconsin by the Department of Corrections.

Table 1

DOC Vocational Trainings Offered by Industry Sector

Industry Sector	Types of Training	
Construction	Building Maintenance	Cabinetry
	Carpentry	Drafting
	Masonry	Heavy Equipment Operator
Manufacturing	Welding	Industrial Maintenance
	Machine Tool	CNC Operator
Transportation	Auto Maintenance	Automotive Technician
	Marine and Outdoor Power	Motorcycle Repair
Hospitality Services	Barber and Cosmetology	Baking
	Culinary Arts	Institution Food Production
	Custodial Services	
Business	Computer Help Desk	Computer Literacy
	Office Assistant	Office Software Applications
	Printing	

Obtaining employment upon release of offenders is crucial to staying away from committing another criminal offense (Zoukis, 2017). Inmates with vocational training are 36

percent less likely to be re-incarcerated and 28 percent more likely to find employment opportunities (Zoukis, 2017). Employment opportunity is defined by Mohammed and Mohamed (2015) as training and educational programs offered to offenders which are relevant to jobs that exist in the location where the offender will reside upon release.

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections currently chooses to offer vocational training programs to inmates based on their research of the top in-demand occupations (Woodruff, 2017). Wisconsin DOC partners with community employment agencies to assist in finding employment opportunities for inmates getting released, but does not currently have direct conversations with employers (Wall, 2015). Employer engagement is critical when it comes to correctional education programs. Stakeholders want to know whether or not employers will actually hire someone with a criminal background, regardless of the amount of training that will be incurred (Davis et al., 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to determine if the vocational training programs offered to inmates by the Wisconsin DOC are relevant to employment opportunities across nine counties that make up central and northern Wisconsin and if employers are willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds. Table 2 lists the nine counties that make up northern and central Wisconsin included in the study.

Table 2

Counties Included in Study

County	Geographic Sector
Forest	Northern WI
Iron	Northern WI
Langlade	Central WI
Lincoln	Central WI
Marathon	Central WI
Oneida	Northern WI
Price	Central WI
Taylor	Central WI
Vilas	Northern WI

Based on the current process of selecting to offer vocational training in in-demand fields without employer input is a risky use of taxpayer dollars, and may limit employment of the skills developed through these training programs. Through examining specific vocational training programs, number of participants, and employer feedback, conclusions in determining the effectiveness of using state funding to deliver correctional education will be resolved.

Research Questions

The study examines to what extent does correctional educational training opportunities in vocational areas lead to employment opportunities upon release from prison. Specifically the study examines two important research questions:

1. To what extent do vocational training programs offered to inmates by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections align with workforce needs in central and northern Wisconsin?
2. To what extent are employers in central and northern Wisconsin willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds in those vocational areas?

Significance of the Study

The United States exceeds all other nations with the honor of holding over 2.3 million inmates behind bars (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.b). The U.S. has roughly 35% more individuals behind bars than the next closest country of China and 10 times more prisoners than the tenth highest-ranking country of Indonesia (Walmsley, 2018). Table 3 lists the top ten countries with the highest prison populations.

Table 3

World Prison Populations

Ranking	Country	Prison Population Total
1	United States	2,321,600
2	China	1,710,000
3	Brazil	773,151
4	Russian Federation	511,030
5	India	466,084
6	Thailand	375,148
7	Turkey	286,000
8	Iran	240,000
9	Philippines	215,000
10	Indonesia	210,693

Incarceration in the U.S. is a growing problem (Hall, 2015). Prior to the 1970's, the number of inmates in both state and federal prisons consistently ranged around 110 individuals per 100,000 citizens (Raphael, 2007). Since that date, the rate has increased by more than 10 times. As the number of prisoners increases, their ability to contribute to the nation's workforce needs decreases.

A major factor in the increase of incarcerations is attributed to the low attainment of educational levels of inmates. Lochner and Moretti (2004) have found that as little as a one-year increase in education level reduces state-level arrests by an average of 11 percent. The challenge becomes how to further educate inmates with skills needed to be successful for the reentry into society.

One method of developing the necessary skills for re-entering society and the workforce is by providing correctional educational programs to inmates. The Wisconsin Department of Corrections currently offers training opportunities in 24 areas of study in vocational-related fields since the inception of correctional education programs in the state (Woodruff, 2017). This research study aims to provide an analysis of the current training programs offered to inmates in central and northern Wisconsin and the relevancy of employment opportunities for inmates upon their release in this geographic area. The research and its findings relate to the fiscal responsibility of the Wisconsin DOC relative to vocational training program offerings, the skills developed by inmate participants of the training, and employer willingness to hire individuals with a criminal background based on employment sector.

Assumptions of the Study

There are several assumptions that the author believes to be true. These include:

1. Employment opportunities will be available in the areas of DOC vocational training.

2. Inmates participating in DOC training opportunities in central and northern Wisconsin will reside in these areas upon release.
3. Inmates participating in DOC training opportunities in central and northern Wisconsin want to have careers in these areas of employment.
4. Employers will hire individuals with a criminal background.
5. Specific vocational occupations are more prone to hiring individuals with a criminal background than others.

Limitations of the Study

The study consisted of having employers' complete surveys that will assist in quantifying the number of formerly incarcerated individuals that currently work in specific occupational sectors. The study included interviewing employers in these same occupational sectors identified. Participants that completed the questionnaires and interviews may have had limited experience working with incarcerated individuals. They may have been limited in their understanding of the various degrees of criminal offenses. Employers also may have been limited to the knowledge of awareness around vocational training efforts with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and the Wisconsin Technical College System.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to aid in this study:

Corrections. U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (n.d.b) The supervision of persons arrested for, convicted of, or sentenced for criminal offenses.

Correctional education. Hobler (2010) Educational training programs and/or classes within a penal facility.

Employment opportunity. Mohammed and Mohamed (2014) Training and educational programs offered to offenders that are relevant to employment opportunities that exist in the location where the offender will reside upon release.

Human resource capital. Hall (2015) The asset that an organization has in form of its employees.

Incarcerated. Hall (2015) Confinement to a penal institution while awaiting trial for an offense or as punishment for an offense.

Inmate. Hobler (2010) A person confined to a single place of residence.

Recidivism. Hobler (2010) Return to a penal institution as a result of violation of conditions of probation or parole.

Relapse. Hobler (2010) To fall back into wrongdoing or error.

Vocational training. Hobler (2010) Secondary or post-secondary education that prepares individuals for skilled occupations.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this research is to determine if the vocational training programs offered to inmates by the Wisconsin DOC are relevant to employment opportunities across nine counties that make up central and northern Wisconsin and if employers are willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds. Based on the current process of selecting to offer vocational training in in-demand fields without employer input is a risky use of taxpayer dollars, and may limit employment of the skills developed through these training programs. Through examining specific vocational training programs, number of participants, and employer feedback, conclusions in determining the implementation of vocational trainings and skill development will be resolved.

The United States exceeds all other industrialized nations, with over 2.3 million inmates currently behind bars (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.b). Upon release, these ex-inmates face many obstacles reentering society such as being labeled, reconnecting with family, and employment challenges due to a criminal record (Palmer, 2012). The pressures of fitting back into society along with the obstacles these individuals encounter many times lead to breaking the law again. Research by Gorgol and Sponsler (2011) suggests that nearly 70% will recommit a crime and about half of those individuals will be placed back in jail. Studies have proven that individuals who secure employment upon release are far less likely to commit a new crime (Nally, Lockwood, Knutson & Ho, 2012).

Challenges associated with ex-inmates finding employment include the necessity of having educational credentials and the technical skills to be qualified for the job. Approximately two-fifths of individuals entering prison do not have a high school diploma or general education development (GED) diploma (Duwe, 2018). In a study by Vacca (2004), he found the majority

of released offenders were unemployed due to having insufficient education and skills to meet the job demands in a variety of industry sectors.

Giving inmates the opportunity to become better educated and develop some tangible skillsets would assist them greatly in becoming productive members of a community and workforce when they are released (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). Correctional education and technical training programs are the opportunity and pathway for individuals who are undereducated and allow inmates to strengthen their educational competency and technical job skills while incarcerated (Nally et al., 2012). It is clear that the need to educate these individuals for successful reintegration into society is at an all-time high (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.b).

Although studies have confirmed that a better educated individual has a higher chance for obtaining employment and reducing recidivism, correctional education offerings have been decreased in many states due to lack of funding (Nally et al., 2012). The general public in many states perceive correctional education as a waste of time and money and that prisoners should not be rewarded for their crimes with free education (Nally et al., 2012). However, when the costs of correctional education are compared to the costs of re-arrests, the court processes and re—incarceration, the results point to the value of correctional education and training (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). Correctional education saves taxpayers money and reduces the number of new crimes committed (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002).

The literature review focused on several areas related to correctional education and employment. It began with examining human capital theory as a basis for this study. Next, it reviewed the history of correctional education in the United States. It then focused on crime and incarceration rates, both past and present, in the United States. Next, the literature reviewed

examining recidivism along with supporting evidence of how age, race, and gender play roles in this subject area. The impact of correctional education on recidivism rates was highlighted next. It then examined the benefits related with correctional education. The review continued to examine the types of correctional education offered to inmates. Next, costs associated with incarceration and correctional education were reviewed. It then focused on employment barriers and practices that address candidates with criminal backgrounds along with the ban the box initiative. The review of literature additionally examined the employment prospects and skilled trades sectors that require technical skills training typically offered within vocational correctional education offerings. These industry sectors include construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services.

Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory is an economic approach that evaluates the overall costs and benefits relative to the investment in skills and knowledge acquired (Van Loo & Rocco, 2004). Gary Becker and Jacob Miner developed this theory in the 1960's with the recognition that the investment in humans can be analyzed in a similar manner as the investment in physical capital. The fundamental meaning or foundation of human capital theory is that increases in educational trainings are responses to an increased demand for skilled labor (Graeser, 1988).

Education is a form of human capital that has been broadly discussed through literature over the past half-century (Walters, 2004). Human capital theory is known for its ability to address areas where training can be quantified by a return on investment through efficiencies or increases in production (Van Loo & Rocco, 2004). It helps predict when organizations invest in education or training that the cost of the investment will at least equal the minimal benefit.

Human capital can be classified or described as the economic value of an employee's experience and skillsets. This includes education, training, intelligence, skills, health, loyalty, attitude, and punctuality. Employers and other entities can continuously improve human capital by investing in individuals to increase economic value for businesses and the economy as a whole. Human capital theory applies to this research study due to the vision of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections that the cost of providing inmates with vocational training and new skills acquired will lead to greater employment opportunities and lessen recidivism rates. Van Loo & Rocco (2004) describe that general training or educational opportunities lead to the acquisition of human capital that is applicable in nearly all employment sectors. The strongest support for human capital theory comes in the form of statistical evidence, which reinforces that more educated and skilled individuals usually earn more than others that are not (Walters, 2004). An educated individual is a high-level form of human capital that has been pursued by employers for decades (Van Loo & Rocco, 2004).

History of Correctional Education

From the early 19th century and beginning of the prison system in the United States, there have been attempts to use education to combat recidivism, create opportunity, and instill virtue among incarcerated individuals (Finlay, 2009). William Rogers first introduced correctional education at a jail in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1789 (Chlup, 2005). Since that first introduction of education to the incarcerated, support of these types of offerings have been inconsistent (Gehring & Rennie, 2008). Overall, the United States has shifted its beliefs in educating prison populations from rehabilitation to crime control and then back to rehabilitation (Chlup, 2005). Throughout the mid to late 1800's, the nation's belief was that punishing an

individual for a criminal offense would change that individual's behaviors, only to later find that rehabilitating these adults was a more effective method (Chlup, 2005).

In a 1965, a study by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency revealed that the majority of prisons did little to nothing for preparing offenders being released back into society. This study also found that these individuals had a poor work record and a lack of any type of vocational skills to offer employers. It was at this time in history that the President's Commission on Law Enforcement recommended that correctional facilities develop and offer educational and vocational training programs to all interested inmates with funding from the federal government (Davis et al., 2013).

The 1970's was a decade of progress in correctional education (Ryan & McCabe, 1994). Throughout this decade, correctional education and training were referred to as the pathway for successful rehabilitation and change. General education development credentials were being offered to those in need, vocational training program were a high priority, and even post-secondary education was being reviewed as an option (Ryan & McCabe, 1994).

As fast as correctional education was growing in the 1970's, it changed direction and lost support in the 1980's (Chlup, 2005). Federal funding and support was cut by nearly half and correctional institutions were forced to eliminate programs, especially in the vocational training areas (Lillis, 1994). Vocational offerings were cut to almost zero and only general education was being offered. The belief was that it was more beneficial for an inmate to know how to read and write versus acquiring a vocation.

There was not a resurgence of correctional vocational education awareness and support until about the late 1990's through the mid-2000's. The Second Chance Act was created in 2007 and focused on supporting and improving outcomes for the increased number of individuals

being released from prisons and returning to communities (Davis et al., 2013). Shortly after these efforts, the nation's support of correctional education took another turn in the opposite direction due to the start of the recession in 2008. Federal funding was directed in other areas of the country to support the nation's workforce in other ways (Davis et al., 2013).

Since the rebound of the U.S. economy, there has been more attention and a refocused effort on correctional education (Davis et al., 2013). A U.S. Department of Justice report (2018) revealed that since 2012 there has been an overall increase in both federal and state funding for correctional education programming. Unlike prison reform of the past, correctional education is evolving at a slow, but steady pace. Correctional education provides the opportunity to encourage and support individuals who have made some poor life decisions and redirect change in a positive manner (Gehring & Rennie, 2008).

Crime and Incarceration Rates

The United States held steady incarceration rates from 1920 to 1970, only to see these rates increase dramatically from 1970 to 2019 (Travis, Western & Redburn, 2014). Federal prison populations rose from about 200,000 inmates to over 1.6 million, along with over 700,000 held daily in local jails. With roughly 2.3 million adults incarcerated in 2009, the United States penal population was the largest in the world. A 2012 study revealed that 25% of the world's prisoners were held in prisons in the U.S. This rate of incarceration in the United States equated to nearly 1 in every 100 adults are in jail or prison. Incarceration rates in the U.S. were nearly 10 times higher than those of other democratic nations (Travis et al., 2014).

Since 2009, incarceration rates have been decreasing and moving in a positive direction. The total number of prisoners under state or federal jurisdiction hit 1.5 million at the end of 2017. This was a decrease of 8% compared to the prison population peak in 2009 of 1.6 million

(Bronson & Carson, 2019). In 2017, there were 440 prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents sentenced to more than one year in state or federal prison. This is the lowest rate since 1997 (Bronson & Carson, 2019).

The U.S. Bureau of Justice (2018) also examined demographic characteristics among the incarcerated population in a 2017 study. Out of the 1.5 million state and federal prisoners, nearly 1.4 million were under state jurisdiction and nearly a half million under federal jurisdiction. Out of this total population, approximately 581,000 prisoners were black, 516,000 were white, and the remaining 400,000 plus were Hispanic, Native, or Asian (Bronson & Carson, 2019). Table 4 lists the percentage of incarcerated individuals per race in 2017.

Table 4

State and Federal Incarcerated Population Percentage by Race in 2017

Race	U.S. Population	Incarcerated Population by Race	Percentage of Incarcerations by Race
White	188,670,000	516,000	.27%
Black	43,370,000	581,000	1.33%
Hispanic, Native, Asian	60,600,000	400,000	.66%

Roughly, 12% of all prisoners were age 55 and older (Bronson & Carson, 2019). In the age group of 18 to 24 year old males, 7% were white, 12% black and 11% Hispanic. The female incarcerated population in this age range was similar. Non-U.S. citizens make up 7.6% of the total adult prison population (Bronson & Carson, 2019).

Among the sentenced state prisoners in a 2017 study by the U.S. Bureau of Justice, 54% were incarcerated for violent crimes, 18% for property crimes, 17% were incarcerated for drug-related crimes, and 11% for other types of offenses. The federal sentenced prisoners had a

differing comparison when it came to crime types. There were 58% incarcerated for drug crimes, 34% for public order offenses, 7% for violent crimes, and only 1% incarcerated for property crimes (Bronson & Carson, 2019).

Along with still holding the title for the world leader in the number of individuals it incarcerates, the United States has been under scrutiny with the state of its criminal justice system even in times of an overall declining incarcerated population (Carver & Harrison, 2016). With close to a 500% total increase in incarcerations over the past 40 years, changes in sentencing law and policy, not changes in crime rates, have been identified as a main contributor of the nation's prison overcrowding (The Sentencing Project, 2017). New drug and sentencing laws, abuse of prescription drugs, income inequality, and a rise in social pressures throughout the nation have all contributed to the fast rise in incarceration rate over the decades (Carver & Harrison, 2016).

Recidivism of Incarcerated Population

The United States still far exceeds all other industrialized nations with the highest incarceration rate in the world (Hall, 2015). Harsh sentencing for non-violent drug crimes and minimal rehabilitation efforts from the country's correctional system continue to be debated across the nation by both political representatives as well as citizens (Chua, 2018). All of these concerns are highlighted by the reality that over two-thirds of released prisoners are rearrested within three years.

A U.S. Department of Justice report (2018) followed 412,731 prisoners released by 30 various states in 2005 for the purpose of tracking recidivism rates. The sample of prisoners constituted roughly 77% of the state prisoners from those same 30 states during that calendar year. Of those released, 89% were male and 11% were female, 72% were between the ages of

18-39, and 28% were 40 years old and higher. Blacks made up 40% of the released population, whites made up another 40%, and Hispanic, Native, and Asians made up the remaining 20%. Out of the entire sample population, 32% were convicted of drug-related offenses, 30% were property offenses, 26% consisted of violent criminal offenses, and 12% were public order offenses (U.S. Department of Justice, 2018).

The study revealed that 45% of the sample prisoner population was rearrested within one year of the release date, 16% rearrested within two years, 8% in the third, 11% in years four through six, and another 4% in years seven through nine. In the end, a total of 83% of the prisoner group had been rearrested at some point. Their findings are supported by another study. The U.S. Sentencing Commission (2017) showed that 64% of violent crime prisoners were rearrested within eight years and 40% of non-violent offenders during the same time span.

Recidivism can be a difficult topic for those involved to agree on a generalized definition (Hall, 2015). Currently, there is no national definition that has been agreed upon, meaning that every states could be using different methods for determining recidivism rates (Klein, Tolbert, Bugarin, Cataldi, & Tauschek, 2004). The general consensus among stakeholders identifies three measures which include re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration, but there has been much debate whether or not each measure alone can be classified as recidivism or if an individual has to reach the incarceration level to be considered recidivism (Hall, 2015). Most researchers contest that re-incarceration is the measure that most effectively identifies an act of recidivism. However, re-incarceration by itself fails to account for criminal acts that do not result in incarceration, but does indicate that a return to crime is occurring with ex-offenders (Hall, 2015).

Age and recidivism. Literature has shown that the age of offenders at time of release has an impact on recidivism (U.S. Department of Justice, 2018). Benson, Leburn, and Rasmussen

(2001), suggests that the rate of recidivism reduces with age. Better understanding the various influences of age and re-offenses by ex-offenders is useful for predicting who may recidivate at higher levels (Hall, 2015). In a study by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (2016), younger offenders consistently had higher recidivism rates than those of older offenders. Released prisoners in the 20-29 age range had a recidivism rate of roughly 43% over a three-year release period. Although it is known that age is a risk factor, it is not something that can be manipulated, only educating the younger offenders that they are at higher risks. These risks only decrease with maturation, helping to explain the effect of age on recidivism (Hall, 2015).

Race and recidivism. According to a 2015 study by the U.S. Bureau of Justice, 40% of the total prison population was black, 36% white, 22% Hispanic, and the remaining 2% other ethnicities. Table 5 compares percentage of total U.S. population by race to prison population by race.

Table 5

Incarcerated Population Percentage by Race in 2015

Race	U.S. Population	Incarcerated Population by Race	Percentage of Incarcerations by Race
White	190,380,000	828,000	.44%
Black	42,090,000	920,000	2.19%
Hispanic	56,250,000	704,000	1.25%
Other	31,980,000	46,000	.14%

This same study followed a group of prisoners released in 2011 specifically tracking ex-offenders and using a recidivism analysis tool from the Bureau of Justice Statistics department.

At the three-year mark, blacks had the highest rate of recidivism at 77.6% compared to whites, who were at 69.3% (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.a). Blacks and whites have historically always had the highest published recidivism rates due to the fact that the prison population of other races is too small to track in many instances (Hall, 2015)

Gender and recidivism. Gender is also a factor in predicting recidivism rates. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (n.d.), males have an average re-arrest rate of 51% versus females who have a re-arrest rate of 43% at the one-year release date. In a study by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (2016), male offenders recidivated at a higher rate than female offenders for every release year that has ever been tracked. The average recidivism rate for offenders released between 2000-2011 was 35.3% for males and 26.1% for females, based on a three-year follow-up period (Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 2016).

The impact of correctional education on recidivism rates. Adding together the total ex-offenders that recidivate, the inmates currently incarcerated, and the number of inmates that are expected to enter the correctional system, the United States prison system is on the verge of bursting (Mercer, 2009), The highest disadvantaged population when it comes to education in the United States resides in the nation's prison system (Klein et al., 2004). The adult incarcerated population are part of the lowed academic skill level and literacy rates within any segment of society in the U.S., most likely a contributing factor to their imprisonment (Klein et al., 2004). Upon fulfillment of sentencing, the majority of ex-offenders re-enter society no more educated or skilled when they arrived (Hall, 2015).

Inmates' lack of educational attainment and vocational skill development are major contributors for ex-offenders return to crime (Davis et al., 2014). Correctional education programs have the ability to equip inmates with both soft skills and technical skills that are

necessary for success in the workplace. Based on the belief that rehabilitation is more effective than additional time behind bars, correctional education has been directly associated with reducing recidivism rates (Klein et al., 2004). The level of education obtained during an individual's incarceration relates to the rate of recidivism (Harlow, 2003). More specifically, the importance of degree or training completion, versus only participation, further correlates in the reduction of recidivism (Hall, 2015).

According to Steurer, Linton, Nally, and Lockwood (2010), correctional education consists of three goals; provide security, safety, and rehabilitation. These three goals work toward securing the institutions where offenders are residing, keeping society protected from offenders, and developing productive members of society. Correctional education programs assisting with lowering recidivism rates also result in lower crime rates, lesser rate of splitting up families, less welfare and social services, less prison overcrowding, and much safer communities in the end (Shrum, 2004). Quality academic and vocational skill training are vital components for the overall success plan of post-release offenders (Klein et al., 2004).

Benefits of Correctional Education

Repeatedly, researchers stress that the most beneficial component of correctional education relates to a reduction in recidivism and a higher rate of employment (Nally et al., 2012). Although a reduction in recidivism rates is important, correctional education has produced evidence that it can transform offenders in many other ways. The psychological benefits of correctional education can be life-altering for inmates that successfully complete programs (Duwe, 2018). Offenders involved with post-secondary educational trainings reported a greater feeling of self-worth and confidence (Winterfield, Coggeshall, Correa & Tidd, 2009). Inmates participating in correctional education also confessed a greater ability for decision-making and

the ability to reflect on their actions. Gorgol & Sponsler (2011) shared that those who participated in education programs while incarcerated were less likely to engage in conflict and more likely to exhibit more reasonable behaviors.

Types of Correctional Education and Vocational Trainings Offered

Correctional education programs have increased over time among the various institutions and different types of program offerings (Klein et al., 2004). According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice (n.d.), as of 2000, all federal and about 90% of state prisons reported having access to educational program offerings in general education and vocational training. The majority of these offerings were in the basic education area that would lead to a general education development (GED) credential.

Although adult basic education and GED prep programs are an essential first step in attaining a higher education level, there was a recognition that the inmates were missing marketable skills in technical fields (Klein et al., 2004). Between the years of 1995 and 2000, an increased effort to provide vocational training opportunities arose. Since that time, vocational correctional training offerings have continued to rise at a rate of roughly 13% annually, especially popular in the northeast, Midwest, and western parts of the United States (Leone & Wruble, 2017).

Providing inmates with basic education or technical skills assists with the transition of ex-offenders re-entering society. Dependent upon institutional administration and staff, different criteria might be used to classify training programs, leading to skewed information across the institutions relating to specific types of educational services (Klein et al., 2004). Unfortunately, this could lead employers to believe that an inmate has successfully completed specific training and educational attainment, only to be disappointed once employment begins (National Reentry

Resource Center, 2018). According to the National Reentry Resource Center, the types of correctional education program offerings include:

- Adult Basic Education (ABE). Basic skills instruction in mathematics, reading, writing, and speaking English.
- Adult Secondary Education. Preparation for the General Education Development (GED) test or alternative certificate of high school completion.
- Vocational Education. Training to outfit individuals with the generic employability and specific job skills needed to find and hold gainful employment.
- College Coursework. Advanced instruction that enables inmates to earn college credit that may be applied toward a two-year or four-year post-secondary degree.
- Special Education. Coursework structured for inmates with learning disabilities.
- Study Release. Release of inmates to attend coursework offered in community schools.
- Life Skills. Variety of programs that focus on providing individuals with communication skills, job and financial skill development, education, interpersonal and family relationship development, as well as stress and anger management.

Costs of Incarceration and Correctional Education

Over the past four decades, the U.S. has seen a substantial increase in the use of its prison system to combat crime (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012). Overall, the United States prison population has grown more than 700% since the 1970's. The result of this dramatic increase has been a substantial financial burden to taxpayers. On average, state corrections spending across the U.S. has quadrupled over the past 20 years (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012).

In 2015 study, 45 states participated in calculating the amount of money that was spent on corrections that year. Based on the responses from these 45 states, a total of 43 billion dollars was collectively spent (Vera Institute of Justice, 2015). The size of the states and number of prison systems were all different, such that total corrections cost per state ranged from 65 million dollars in North Dakota to eight billion dollars in California (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012).

A typical way states measure the average cost per inmate is by quantifying the total dollars spent on prisons and dividing it by the average daily prison population. In the same 2015 study by Vera Institute of Justice, the 45 states share data necessary to calculate the cost per inmate on an annual basis. The lowest cost was Alabama with an average cost of \$14,780 versus the highest cost was New York with a yearly average cost of \$69,355 (Vera Institute of Justice, 2015). The total average of all 45 states was \$33,274.

In another study by Henrichson and Delaney (2012), 40 states took part in a survey representing 1.2 million inmates. They found an average per-inmate cost of \$31,166, which ranged from Kentucky's low of \$14,603 to the highest of \$60,076 in New York. These types of studies help standardize state prison costs and brings transparency to its state taxpayers on an annual basis (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012).

One attempt to lower the average cost per inmate is to educate them, hence reducing the total number of ex-offenders that might recidivate and return to prison (Hall, 2015). From an economic perspective, providing inmates with the opportunity to attain a higher level of education and technical skills can be the pathway to each released offender adding value to the U.S. economic system (Mercer, 2009). Previous research has shown that correctional education programs reduces recidivism and leads to gainful employment (Steurer et al., 2010).

There are several various types of correctional education and training opportunities offered to inmates (National Reentry Resource Center, 2018). Some programs are focused on inmates earning their high school diploma equivalency, others focused on post-secondary coursework, and a number of them offering specific technical or vocational skill development. On average, correctional education programs cost roughly \$1,400 to \$1,744 per inmate each year (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012). These types of programs, if successfully completed by inmates, can save prisons between \$8,700 to \$9,700 per inmate, the costs of re-incarceration per individual. This results in every dollar spent on funding correctional education programs reduces incarceration costs between four and five dollars during the first three years that an ex-offender has been released (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012).

Employment Barriers

Upon release from prison, ex-offenders face many challenges. One of them is the stigma of a criminal that follows them wherever and whatever they do (Thompson & Cummings, 2010). This stigma is not only apparent in the communities that these individuals reside, but from potential employers as well, which creates difficulty both obtaining employment and maintaining employment. The job search process for ex-offenders can be further complicated, as many of these individuals have driver's license that are revoked (Haney, 2002). Research by Carter (2008) revealed that the ex-offenders are fully aware of the importance of post-release employment as a means to help prevent future criminal activities.

Post-release employment is a major component towards the success of an ex-offenders's re-entry experience back into society (Nally et al., 2012). Employment barriers have haunted the incarcerated population for decades (Obatusin & Ritter-Williams, 2019). The difficulty to find work escalates the challenges of reintegrating into society by limiting ex-offenders' ability to

afford suitable housing, most end up living in poor conditions and unfavorable neighborhoods (Redcross et al., 2010). This difficulty hinders the transition from jail and settling back into communities as a free citizen (Williams & Abraldes, 2007).

Even with some vocational training while in prison, the fact is that the labor market for low-skilled workers is often very challenging (Doleac, 2016). As prisoners re-enter society and look for employment, they must persuade employers to hire them despite a criminal record and lack of recent work experience (Redcross et al., 2010). Among the working male population, less than 75 percent of who hold a high school diploma and 66 percent of those who do not hold a high school diploma are employed in the workforce (Doleac, 2016). These statistics along with a criminal background make it challenging, but the future looks hopeful (Obatusin, 2019). Gurchiek (2018), after completing numerous interviews with employers struggles to find workers, shared that given the war for human capital in the workforce, employers must think differently about jobs and the people available to fill them.

A common mistake by prison system programs is that they have focused too much on educational remedies versus job skill development in certain industry sectors (Nally et al., 2012). Lichtenberger (2006) indicated that released prisoners would improve securing employment and increase job retention if they were involved in vocational trainings that matched their technical skill development with particular industry positions. It would be practical that employers take a closer look at the types of vocational trainings offered to the incarcerated population and participating in matching the skills offered and developed with future employment needs (Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2004). There must be a dramatic shift in the ways that employers have historically thought about employing ex-offenders and a need for them to let go of the negative stereotypes (Schmitt & Warner, 2010).

Ban-the-Box Movement

As recent as 2017, there was an estimated 70 million adults in the United States with criminal records (National Employment Law Project, 2017). Many of these individual are consistently turned away from job opportunities due to checking the box on a job application. The box on a typical job application is an indicator that an individual has a history of being convicted at some point of their life. A study by Maurer (2018) indicated that a conviction record reduces the likelihood of a job callback or job offer by about 50%.

In efforts to reduce the effect that this check box has on the opportunity for skilled individuals to find employment, a ban-the-box movement was introduced in Hawaii in 1998 (National Employment Law Project, 2017). This refers to removing the conviction history check box from job applications. It took a while to increase in popularity, but ten years later, the state of Minnesota was next to adopt. Since the beginning, there have been a total of 33 states that have required employers to remove the conviction box (Maurer, 2018). Out of the 33 states participating, only 11 of them affect private employers and the rest are focused on the public job sector (National Employment Law Project, 2017). The most famous of the ban-the-box efforts occurred in 2015 when President Barack Obama removed the box for all federal government job applications (Maurer, 2018).

Although there has been widespread support by many groups across the United States, there has also been much resistance to this movement by professional business organizations (National Employment Law Project, 2017). Maurer (2018) shared that in a National Federation of Independent Business survey, 77% of the businesses agreed that ban-the-box laws hide relevant criminal record information regarding prospective employees that could affect the safety and security of their business and workforce staff. Regardless of which side of the movement

anyone is on, the continued shortage of workers throughout the U.S. has caused the Bureau of Justice Statistics (n.d.) to indicate that by limiting the number of job hiring of those with criminal records, the U.S. has a reduced output of goods and services estimated between 78 to 87 billion dollars.

Employment Prospects

Finding employment for ex-offenders continues to be a struggle (Horn, 2018). A study by the Prison Policy Initiative indicated that as of September 2018, the unemployment rate of former prisoners stands at 27%, compared to an average rate of 4% across the entire U.S. In another study by Horn (2018), ex-offenders responded that they want to work, but continuously face barriers in finding employment.

Imprisonment time can weaken a workers human capital value (Schmitt & Warner, 2010). Deteriorating soft skills, loss of on-the-job experience, and lack of social interaction in a typical day-to-day society, negatively affect the likelihood of attaining employment. Researchers continue to try to determine which employment sectors are most willing to hire offenders. In a survey conducted by Holzer (2004), 40% of employers indicated that they would probably or definitely not be willing to hire an applicant with a criminal record for a job requiring a high level of customer contact. In another survey, Raphael (2007) revealed that out of all the employment sectors, the firms most likely to hire ex-offenders were those in the skilled trades. These sectors include construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services.

Construction

Construction workers use a wide range of tools and equipment. These can be as simple as a broom or shovel, and as complex as a large piece of earth moving equipment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The construction industry consists of three different areas that include building

construction, heavy machinery and road construction, and specialty trade contractors (Torpey, 2018). Building construction jobs include carpenters, laborers, cement masons, drywallers, flooring installers, and iron workers. Workers in the heavy machinery and road construction fields include heavy equipment operators, pipelayers, power line installers, paving operators, and earth drillers. Specialty trades include electricians, plumbers, heating and air conditioning technicians, and glaziers.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), the median annual wage reached \$45,820. This industry sector has added jobs at roughly three times the rate of the U.S. economy between 2016 and 2017 in both the residential and commercial sectors (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The construction industry sector has projected an increase in employment of 1.1% between the years of 2018 and 2028.

Manufacturing

Manufacturing industries are involved in the mechanical and physical transformation of materials, components, and substances into the development of new products (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Employees these materials by hand or with the use of power-driven machines. Workers in the manufacturing professions may work in a variety of areas that include wood products, plastics and rubber, metal, metal fabrication, welding, machining, and paper industries. The manufacturing sector has the most jobs of any goods-producing industry in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). This sector alone represents 11.6% of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), the median annual wage in the manufacturing sector is \$33,467. This industry added 327,000 jobs between 2016 and 2017, the most of any 12 month span since 1994 to 1995. Manufacturing has many opportunities for

individuals with a range of backgrounds and skillsets. As the manufacturing sector has shifted from low-skilled work to higher-skilled work over the past couple of decades, potential employees with any type of additional training skills are the most sought after for filling job openings (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The manufacturing industry sector has projected an overall decrease in employment of 0.5% between the years of 2018 and 2028.

Transportation

The transportation industry sector provides transportation of cargo, storage for products and goods. The various modes of transportation include roads, rail, air, and water (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Employment opportunities in this industry may include truck drivers, railroad conductors and yard workers, material handling, bus drivers, sailors, and marine dockworkers. The majority of occupation require a valid driver's license as well as might require a more specialized licensing such as pilot's license or commercial driver's license (CDL).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), the median annual wage in the transportation sector is \$52,124. Transportation has opportunities for individuals from low levels of education in general labor positions to higher-level educational credentials such as a commercial pilot (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The transportation industry sector delivers roughly 63 tons of goods per U.S. citizen on an annual basis (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). This industry is projected to add 327,300 jobs between 2012 and 2022, slower than most industry sectors.

Hospitality Services

The hospitality industry is the second fastest growing employment sector in the U.S., only trailing health care (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Industries looking for employees include resorts, food service companies, hotel and lodging, and casinos. Hospitality jobs are

available to individuals with low to high levels of education (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Lower-level educated individuals can work as dishwashers, housekeepers, and various restaurant staff positions. Higher-level educated hospitality positions include restaurant and hotel managers, marketing and recruitment specialists, and consultants.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), the median annual wage in the hospitality sector without post-secondary credentials is \$23,730 and \$41,420 for those with a two-year or higher degree in the field. The employment outlook in hospitality depends on which area it pertains. Job growth in low-skilled areas is projected to be stagnant while positions with specialized skills and training are expected to experience the highest growth (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Overall, the hospitality industry sector has projected an increase in employment of 0.6% between the years of 2018 and 2028.

Summary

This chapter identified that the United States crime and incarceration rates are higher than any other nation in the world. Once released from prison, these ex-inmates face many obstacles reentering society such as being labeled, reconnecting with family, and employment challenges due to a criminal record. The pressures of fitting back into society along with the obstacles these individuals encounter many times lead to breaking the law again. One proven fact is that individuals who secure employment upon release are far less likely to commit a new crime (Nally, Lockwood, Knutson & Ho, 2012). Several studies have confirmed that employment opportunities align directly with levels of education and technical skills of the ex-offender. Correctional education, especially training in vocational areas, can lead to employment, reduced recidivism, as well as a greater feeling of self-worth and confidence when trying to fit back into society.

Chapter III: Method and Procedures

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures used to complete this study. The purpose of this study was to determine if the vocational training programs offered by the Wisconsin DOC to inmates are relevant to employment opportunities across nine counties that make up central and northern Wisconsin. This study aimed to determine if employers are willing to hire individuals with minimum training credentials regardless of criminal backgrounds.

This study sets out to answer the following specific research questions:

1. To what extent do vocational training programs offered to inmates by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections align with workforce needs in central and northern Wisconsin?
2. To what extent are employers in central and northern Wisconsin willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds in those vocational areas?

Research Methodology

In order to determine if the vocational trainings offered by the Wisconsin DOC lead to employment in the four different skilled trades industry sectors, this study employed a mixed methods research approach that included both quantitative and qualitative data collection. A focus on quantitative research regarding a specific phenomenon combined with qualitative research for the same phenomenon can result in much deeper insight than one method by itself (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Quantitative research uses standardized measures so that perspective or experiences shared by research participants can be placed into categories and assigned a numerical value (Patton, 2015). The advantage of quantitative research is that it is possible to reach a larger sample based on a limited number of closed-ended questions, which makes the findings much more generalizable to the phenomena. Qualitative research emphasizes

explorations and understanding from meanings that individuals or organizations place on a social or human issue (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative approach gains a perspective of issues by investigating them in their own environment and the meaning that will be drawn out from the experiences and opinions of those who participate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Even at the basic level of research, asking both open-ended and closed-ended questions is an example of where quantitative measurement and qualitative inquiry blend together to form a mixed-methods approach (Patton, 2015).

The study included a quantitative and qualitative descriptive methodology approach that contained a short questionnaire, followed by structured interviews with a random sample of industry sector employers in the construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services fields. Each of the methodology types were treated independently and the data collected was initially analyzed separately in order to gain clarity with the responses from each instrument used in the study. Once the data was analyzed from the quantitative survey and the structured interview responses, it was then used collectively to develop common themes across the study. Descriptive research is a tool to describe a specific phenomenon and its context (Nassaji, 2015). The research is focused on the what versus the how something has happened (Gall et al., 2007). During this type of research, the data is typically collected qualitatively, but can be analyzed in a quantitative fashion by using percentages, averages, frequencies, or other methods to determine relationships.

This type of research is more holistic than quantitative research and involves a robust collection of data from a breadth of sources to gain a deep understanding of individuals involved, including opinions, perspectives, and attitudes (Gall et al., 2007). This includes an inductive

approach to the data. Qualitative inductive analysis generates new concepts, explanations, results, and/or theories from the specific data of a qualitative study (Patton, 2015).

Descriptive studies typically include administering both questionnaires and face-to-face interviews by the researcher. Questionnaires and interviews are used extensively in research to collect data about phenomena that are not directly observable (Gall et al., 2007). Questionnaires are printed forms that ask the same questions of all individuals in the same sample and for which respondents record their answers in verbal form. Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2015).

The research was conducted in a two-phase approach where a questionnaire was sent to a random sample of employers and then followed up with interviews with employers in a face-to-face meeting to gain a deeper understanding. Questionnaires have a couple of advantages over interviews for collecting research data. The cost of sampling participants over a wide geographic area is lower, and the time required to collect the data is decreased. However, questionnaires cannot probe deeply into a respondent's beliefs, attitudes, and inner experience. The major advantage of interviews is the flexibility and adaptability that they bring. During interviews, researchers have the ability to build trust with respondents, resulting in a higher probability of obtaining information that the interviewee otherwise would not reveal through a typical questionnaire (Gall et al., 2007).

Subject Selection and Description

The population for this study consisted of employers in the industry sectors of construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services. These industries were selected based on vocational trainings that have been offered to the incarcerated population in Wisconsin by the Department of Corrections over the past five years. Another factor was that

based on this study's literature review, an in-depth employer study by Raphael (2008) revealed that out of all the employment sectors, the firms most likely to hire ex-offenders were those in the skilled trades. These sectors include construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services.

Employer contacts were collected through professional organizations for each industry sector. This allowed the researcher to compile a random sample size for the study. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research typically focuses on small samples, even individual cases, selected for specific purposes. Patton (2015) reinforces that random sampling, even small samples used in qualitative studies, increases the credibility of the results.

Random samples were established through several steps and contacts by the researcher. The construction sector was established through communication with the Headwaters Builders Association and Wausau Area Builders Association. The two associations collectively represent a diverse population of employers in the construction profession. Next, the researcher connected with the Central Wisconsin Metal Manufacturers Association (CWMMA). The organization provided a list of manufacturing employers spread throughout the nine counties that make up central and northern Wisconsin. Employers who are members of Wisconsin Automotive Truck and Education Association (WATEA) represented the transportation sector employer group for the study's geographic area. Lastly, the hospitality service sector industries in central and northern Wisconsin were represented through the Wisconsin Restaurant Association (WRA) providing the researcher with a list of member employers. The inclusive list of employers were sent an invitation to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

There were two instruments used in the data collection process. First, a hiring questionnaire (Appendix A) was sent to employers who indicated interest in the study. This instrument consisted of questions relative to the company's demographic and hiring information. This included geographic location, number of years in business, products or services offered, number of full-time employees, number of annual entry-level job openings, who is in charge of the hiring process, and history of knowingly employing ex-offenders. The use of questionnaires in this manner is intended to provide the researcher information regarding what is already known within an organization or from a single individual (Sewell, n.d.). The second instrument was developed and used to collect data through structured interviews in a face-to-face manner. Structured interviews are also referred to as formal interviews. The questions asked are prepared in a specific order where the individual who is asking the questions does not deviate from the order and does not probe the interviewee for more information than was shared (Sewell, n.d.).

The questions for the interview (Appendix B) included open-ended and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions should minimize the burden of predetermined and limited responses (Patton, 2015). Questions in an open-ended spirit should allow the respondents to answer in their own words. Respondents should be able to take any direction they choose and use whatever words they desire in order to express what they need to answer the question (Patton, 2015). Questions in a closed-ended format have a significant impact on how participants of the study interpret a question (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2014). According to Fowler (2002), closed-ended questions take on a dimension that relate responses from the most negative to the most positive, a direction that is not always welcome in research.

The questions included collecting data such as minimum educational attainment requirements, minimum technical and soft skills required for entry-level employment, gender ratio, number of ex-offenders employed, willingness to hire ex-offenders, background check policies, concerns or fears related to hiring ex-offenders, initiatives or incentives that may influence decisions to hire ex-offenders, and perceptions of the ex-offender workforce.

Data Collection Procedures

The first step in the process of data collection was to develop a list of employer contact information. Once the list was complete, an email was composed and sent to a sample of employers throughout the nine county district. Employers from the four various industry sectors were sent the email (Appendix C) with an invitation to take part in the study. The researcher allowed one week of time from the email delivery date to the time of sending a follow-up email (Appendix D). A final reminder email was sent one week later (Appendix E). All of the participants that indicated interest in taking part of the study were contacted with another email confirming their willingness to take part along with the first survey link. Participants of the study were all sent the same survey and asked to answer the same questions to ensure validity and reliability of the quantitative methodology incorporated.

The researcher once again allowed a period of one week for the employers to complete the survey. The data was collected and placed into data tables with no specific information to identify the respondent. The next step was to revise the list of study participants and condense it to the employers who completed the first survey. An email communication was then sent to those employers asking them if they would be willing to participate in a face-to-face structured interview. The employers that responded in a positive manner were then contacted and a meeting time and location was established to complete the in-person interview. The interviewees were

self-selected by the researcher based on the indication of follow-up communication and one employer from each industry sector was arranged to be interviewed at a mutual time and that it would take place virtually due to the COVID-19 situation.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were made aware of the UW-Stout International Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix F) along with an informed consent regarding participation in the study. The participant was notified that the interview would be recorded and had the opportunity to change their mind if wanted. The researcher asked the questions in the exact order that the survey was developed with opportunities for the participant to ask for clarification, ensuring the interviewees of validity and reliability for the study. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if there was any other information that they would like to share. The audio files were then submitted to Rev.com and transformed to text and a transcript was created for the researcher. All of the data collected throughout the survey and interview process was stored on a password protected hard drive.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process included the separation and compilation of data using a couple of different methods. The quantitative statistical data was input into frequency distribution tables where the data could be distributed into categories and then easily compared. Quantitative data was generated through the initial questionnaires sent to employers in an attempt to harvest the company's demographic information and general hiring practices. The data was analyzed to determine the mean, or average response, and also the mode, or most frequent response.

The qualitative data gathered from the structured interviews (Appendix G) was analyzed through the use of coding. Coding is a common statistical strategy that counts the number of times a similar response has occurred (Driscoll, Yeboah, Salib & Rupert, 2007). This analysis process

includes enumerating the frequency of themes within a sample, percentage of themes within a specific category or respondent, and the percentage of people responding to a specific theme. Once this is completed, an evaluation report of the data was generated. According to Patton (2015), an evaluation report analyzes and presents the responses from the participants question by question, or section by section, typically referred to as a cross-sectional analysis.

Limitations

The researcher recognizes the fact that there are limitations attached to this study. Such limitations include:

1. The employer sample is limited to nine counties throughout the central and northern Wisconsin region.
2. Respondents who take part in the questionnaires and interviews may have limited experience working with incarcerated individuals.
3. Respondents may be limited in their understanding of the various degrees of criminal offenses and already have a pre-conceived perception of this population.
4. Employers may be limited to the knowledge of awareness around vocational training efforts with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and the Wisconsin Technical College System.
5. There is limited prior research and literature associated with employment data related to the ex-offender population.
6. COVID-19 pandemic may limit access to resources for the study and participation rates of the sample group.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze data in the process of answering the study's research questions. A mixed methods research approach was incorporated during the process, which included one quantitative questionnaire and one qualitative structured interview with employers across nine counties in the central and northern Wisconsin region. The data was collected, analyzed, and transformed using descriptive statistical methods along with interpretational analysis through the use of coding. Once the researcher completed the transformation process, notable themes surfaced and were identified based on the responses from the study's sample population.

Chapter IV: Presentation of the Findings

This chapter presents the results and findings of the research study. The purpose of this study was to determine if the vocational training programs offered by the Wisconsin DOC to inmates are relevant to employment opportunities across nine counties that make up central and northern Wisconsin. This study aimed to determine if employers are willing to hire individuals with minimum training credentials regardless of criminal backgrounds. This study sets out to answer the following specific research questions:

1. To what extent do vocational training programs offered to inmates by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections align with workforce needs in central and northern Wisconsin?
2. To what extent are employers in central and northern Wisconsin willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds in those vocational areas?

In order to determine if vocational trainings offered by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections lead to employment opportunities in the four different skilled trades industry sectors this study employed a mixed-methods research design. The study included a two-phase approach. Phase one data collected quantitative data using an online survey tool, while phase two incorporated structured interviews with employers. The target population consisted of members of professional organizations representing the construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services industry sectors. The researcher obtained member contact lists and email addresses through the Central and Northern Wisconsin Workforce Development Board.

During the process of developing the online survey and interview questionnaire, the COVID-19 pandemic began to take hold across the state of Wisconsin and throughout the United States. The researcher deployed surveys to the random sample with much uncertainty of how the

state and nation were responding to the pandemic. This widespread virus situation had implications on the research sample email delivery confirmation notifications and overall participation rates.

On March 23, 2020, the online survey was sent to employers representing the four industry sectors across central and northern Wisconsin counties. A second email reminder was sent on March 30, 2020, encouraging those who did not complete the survey to please respond. A final reminder email was sent on April 7, 2020 to complete the survey and also thanking the respondents who participated.

The final question of the online survey asked the respondents if they would be willing to participate in a phase two which included structured interviews to engage in a more intimate discussion allowing the researcher to collect qualitative data. Once the respondents were identified that would participate, phone and/or virtual interviews were scheduled. Due to the low response rate of willing employers, the researcher arranged to interview one employer from each of the four industry sectors to ensure a high-quality and in-depth interview versus a larger sample. Each of the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

All quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics to determine central tendency or mean and variability of responses. Qualitative data was analyzed by the researcher through transcribed interviews using thematic analysis. The data was then separated by the researcher by identifying both similar and unique statements, common themes, and the compilation of major concepts.

In order to maintain anonymity of the respondent's employers, all data was grouped and reported by industry sector. This was also done to further remove any identifiers from the

research. The researcher also stored all of the data collected throughout the survey and interview process on a password protected hard drive.

Demographics

The target population for this study consisted of members of professional organizations representing the construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services industry sectors in central and northern Wisconsin. The central Wisconsin geographic sector was identified by businesses that are located south of State Highway 64 and northern Wisconsin businesses were identified by location north of State Highway 64. A total of 173 employers were sent the initial survey request email (Appendix C), a follow-up email request (Appendix D), and a final reminder email (Appendix E). A sample of 32 industry employers completed the survey. Based on the respondent's geographic location, 59.38% are located in central Wisconsin and 40.63% are located in northern Wisconsin.

Table 6 details the demographics of the employers that participated in the study. The employers are categorized by industry sector, geographic location, and number of respondents in each sector.

Table 6

Employer Demographics

Industry Sector	Geographic Location	Number of Respondents
Construction	Central WI	6
	Northern WI	4
Manufacturing	Central WI	11
	Northern WI	4
Transportation	Central WI	2
	Northern WI	1
Hospitality Services	Central WI	3
	Northern WI	1

Research Questions/Objectives

The first research question looked to identify if there was alignment between vocational training outcomes and workforce needs for entry-level employees in the skilled trades occupations.

Research question 1: To what extent do vocational training programs offered to inmates by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections align with workforce needs in central and northern Wisconsin? Research Question 1 involved the collection of quantitative data through two survey questions. Employers were first asked *What is the minimum level of education required for the majority of entry-level occupational job openings at your place of business?* The researcher asked this question to determine if inmates who do not hold a high school diploma would be qualified for employment solely with vocational training.

The highest percentage of respondents indicated that a high school diploma or HSED/GED equivalency was a minimum requirement for employment. A total of 59.4% respondents selected this as category. The next highest percentage of respondents indicated that they had no minimum level of education as a requirement. This group, 29% of the respondents, selected this category. The lowest percentage of respondents, with 12.9%, indicated that an educational credential beyond high school was a requirement for entry-level employment. Table 7 lists the responses to minimum required level of education by industry sector.

Table 7

Minimum Level of Education for Employment

Industry Sector	Minimum Level of Education	Number of Respondents
Construction	None	2
	High School / HSED / GED	7
	Post-Secondary	0
Manufacturing	None	4
	High School / HSED / GED	9
	Post-Secondary	3
Transportation	None	1
	High School / HSED / GED	2
	Post-Secondary	0
Hospitality Services	None	2
	High School / HSED / GED	1
	Post-Secondary	1

Employers were also asked *Please rate the level of importance in gaining entry-level employment at your place of business for each of the following skills*. The researcher asked this question to determine if the skill development outcomes listed by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections through vocational trainings align with the skills necessary for entry-level employment in the four industry sectors along with the level of importance.

There were a total of 30 respondents to the survey question. The highest rated skill development was split equally between safety awareness and the ability to follow directions with an extremely important percentage rating of 56.6%. The next highest percentage of respondents indicated that the ability to work with others was extremely important with a percentage rating of 50%. Other skill development areas included tool and equipment identification, use of equipment, problem solving, and the ability to complete projects on time. Table 8 lists the level of importance for each skill using a Likert scale ranging from extremely important to not at all important.

Table 8

Level of Importance for Skill Development

Skill Development	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
Safety Awareness	56.67%	20%	16.67%	6.67%	0%
Equipment Identification	23.33%	40%	30%	3.33%	3.33%
Equipment Use	26.67%	43.33%	20%	6.67%	3.33%
Follow Directions	56.67%	40%	3.33%	0%	0%
Work with Teammates	50%	46.67%	3.33%	0%	0%
Problem Solving	36.67%	33.33%	30%	0%	0%
Complete Projects Timely	36.67%	53.33%	10%	0%	0%

Research question 2: To what extent are employers in central and northern Wisconsin willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds in those vocational areas?

Research Question 2 involved the collection of quantitative data through survey questions and qualitative data through structured interviews. In order for the researcher to establish a foundation of the size and scope of the employers involved in the study, respondents were asked to quantify the number of full-time employees at their place of business. A second question related to this topic was to determine the average number of entry-level job openings on an annual basis.

The highest percentage of respondents indicated that they employed more than 25 full-time individuals. Over half (54.84%) of the respondents selected this category. The next highest percentage of respondents indicated that they employed 10 or less full-time individuals. This group, 35.8% of the respondents, selected this category. Table 9 lists the responses by industry sector related to number of full-time employees.

Table 9

Number of Full-Time Employees

Industry Sector	Full-Time Employees	Number of Respondents
Construction	1-10	2
	11-25	7
	More than 25	0
Manufacturing	1-10	4
	11-25	9
	More than 25	3
Transportation	1-10	1
	11-25	2
	More than 25	0
Hospitality Services	1-10	2
	11-25	1
	More than 25	1

Table 10 represents the number of full-time annual entry-level job openings by industry sector. Over half (51.61%) of the employers indicated that they typically have 6-20 job openings annually for entry-level employment. Roughly, 12% of the employers responded that their company posts more than 20 job openings each year.

Table 10

Number of Full-Time Annual Entry-Level Job Openings

Industry Sector	Full-Time Employees	Number of Respondents
Construction	0-5	2
	6-20	7
	More than 20	0
Manufacturing	0-5	4
	6-20	9
	More than 20	3
Transportation	0-5	1
	6-20	2
	More than 20	0
Hospitality Services	0-5	2
	6-20	1
	More than 20	1

The survey also collected quantitative data to examine the recruiting and hiring processes of the various industry sectors. Respondents were asked *Which of the following recruitment methods does your place of business use to fill job openings?* Respondents were able to select among various mediums including television and radio, social media, online job postings, referrals, working with state agencies, and a category of other. All of the medium choices were selected as a means of recruitment with online job postings rating the highest at 30%. The next highest selection was using referrals with a percentage of 23.33%. The use of social media was tied for the third highest method with a percentage rating of 16.67%. The “other” category was

the other category with a 16.67% rating. The respondents indicated that some additional recruitment categories include posting job openings within professional organization literature and using third party professional recruiters such as temporary employment agencies. Only 10% of the respondents indicated that they work with state agencies in recruitment efforts. The least used method of recruitment was television, newspaper, and radio with a 3.33% rating.

A second question that was asked related to how the hiring process takes place at the various industry sectors. The researcher asked *How is the full-time employee hiring process done at your place of business?* Respondents had selection options that included Human Resources Manager, a hiring committee, owner of the company, and other. A total of 31 respondents participated and it was a near equal split with 48.9% indicating that the owner of the company leads the process and 48.9% using a hiring committee for the employment hiring process. One respondent (3.23%) indicated that a Human Resources Manager is the main hiring process. There were no responses for the other category. The researcher examined the number of full-time employees related to the type of hiring process that is incorporated. Table 11 identifies the results.

Table 11

Employer Hiring Process

Number of Employees	Hiring Process	Number of Respondents
Less than 20	Human Resources Manager	0
	Hiring Committee	3
	Owner of Company	12
More than 20	Human Resources Manager	1
	Hiring Committee	12
	Owner of Company	3

The last section of the survey focused on potential employees associated with a criminal background. A question was asked *Does your place of business run criminal background checks on applicants?* The respondents were given three options to choose from, there was an equal split of 37.93% in the categories labeled “always” and “never”. The four industry sectors also indicated that they “sometimes” complete criminal background checks about 24% of the time. Table 12 breaks down the practice of criminal background checks by industry sector.

Table 12

Criminal Background Check by Industry Sector

Industry Sector	Criminal Background Check	Number of Respondents
Construction	Always	2
	Sometimes	7
	Never	0
Manufacturing	Always	4
	Sometimes	9
	Never	3
Transportation	Always	1
	Sometimes	2
	Never	0
Hospitality Services	Always	2
	Sometimes	1
	Never	1

The final question of the survey related to criminal backgrounds directly asked the respondents *Does your place of business hire persons with criminal backgrounds?* The

respondents indicated that a little over one-fourth, about 28%, would not be hesitant to hire an ex-offender. Roughly, 60% indicated that they would not hire an ex-offender, and 12% of the respondents indicated that it would “depend on the level of offense”. Table 13 shows the breakdown of responses by industry sector.

Table 13

Hiring of Persons With a Criminal Background

Industry Sector	Will They Hire with a Criminal Background	Number of Respondents
Construction	Yes	2
	No	7
	Depends on Level of Offense	0
Manufacturing	Yes	4
	No	9
	Depends on Level of Offense	3
Transportation	Yes	1
	No	2
	Depends on Level of Offense	0
Hospitality Services	Yes	2
	No	1
	Depends on Level of Offense	1

In order for the researcher to gain a deeper and more clear understanding of employers willingness to hire individuals with a criminal background, a structured interview was set up to gather information and qualitative data. The final question of the survey sent to employers asked

Would you be willing to take part in a face-to-face interview to learn more about your thoughts related to employing the ex-offender population to fill workforce needs? Out of the 32 respondents, 13 of them (41%) were willing to take part in an interview due to uncertainty of their availability during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher determined that interviews with companies that have a large number of employees and those with a small number would be a good mix and representation of today's workforce needs. Due to the focus on quality over quantity, the researcher selected four employers to interview, one employer from each industry sector.

The interviews were completed virtually using Skype. The interviews comprised of two participants from the central Wisconsin geographic area and two from the northern Wisconsin geographic area. The interviews ranged in time to complete from 19 minutes to 28 minutes. There were 12 questions asked during the interviews. The researcher used clarifying questions if there was a lack of understanding by the respondent. The questions were clustered into 5 categories and then broken down into resulting themes. The categories included company policy, employer perception, workforce impact, training efforts, and increased hiring practices.

Company policy. The interview included six questions related to this category. The first question asked: *Does your place of business hire persons with criminal backgrounds?* All of the respondents indicated that they sometimes would hire this population. The second question in the interview was the following: *To what extent would you consider recruiting individuals who are ex-offenders if they have the minimum qualifications for the job posting?* Respondents indicated that overall, they would at least consider recruiting the ex-offender population. The main theme that resulted was having the necessary qualifications and demonstrating that the applicant could demonstrate those skills. One of the respondents indicated that the consideration would depend

on the applicant's behavioral record since his or her original conviction. Question number three asked: *What is your company's policy on hiring this population?* All four of the respondents indicated that their companies did not have a specific policy that addressed hiring the ex-offender population. The fourth question in the interview was the following: *Please explain why you would hire this population?* The responses by the four industry sectors are listed in Table 14.

Table 14

Reasons Employer Would Hire the Ex-Offender Population

Employer Responses

- A high number of entry-level jobs that include repetitive work duties
 - If they can be timely and ready to work, we have jobs for them
 - Open to hire any population on a case by case basis
-

The next question in the interview was opposite of the previous question: *Please explain why you not would hire this population?* The responses by the industry sectors are listed in Table 15.

Table 15

Reasons Employer Would Not Hire the Ex-Offender Population

Employer Responses

- Public perception and this population may be viewed as a liability
 - If their criminal offense is controversial, they may not fit into the company culture
 - Distrust and customer perception
 - High level of customer interaction
-

The final interview question in the area of company policy asked the following: What level or types of crime would be an influence in the decision-making/hiring process? The common theme that arose from this question was that any type of violent or sexual-related conviction would cause the employer to not hire an ex-offender. Several of the respondents also indicated that a conviction of theft would be high on the list of not employing this population due to the products or services they provide.

Perception. The interview included two questions related to this category. The first question asked *What is the perception at your place of work about individuals that have had a criminal conviction?* The responses by the four industry sectors are listed in Table 16.

Table 16

Perception of Individuals That Have Had a Criminal Conviction

Employer Responses

- Generally, not a problem
 - Pretty low, it would depend on the type of crime and conviction
 - Fairly open-minded
 - Open to giving people second chances
-

The second question asked the following *What might be some general fears of hiring an ex-offender?* The respondents' largest fear was related to the safety of both staff and customers. The majority of these employers provide face-to-face services and the employees interface with customers on a daily basis. Another common response was whether they could fully trust this population. Related to this response was also a concern of ex-offenders going back to their old ways of criminal activity.

Workforce solution. The interview included one question that directly addressed how the ex-offender population could address the four industry sectors workforce shortage. The question asked *Describe how this population may be a potential solution to reducing the workforce shortage in your industry sector?* The responses by the four industry sectors are listed in Table 17.

Table 17

Ex-Offenders Reducing Workforce Shortages

Employer Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding a pipeline of qualified entry-level workers would be a huge win • Need a lot of entry-level workers. We will continue to invest in training if they have potential. • Looking for many trained workers willing to work varied shifts and schedules • Looking for good work ethic and attitude. We want people ready to “earn” their place here.

Correctional and vocational training efforts. The next two interview questions were focused on the transparency of training efforts being made by Wisconsin agencies and the knowledge of employer related to these trainings. The first question asked *To what extent are you aware of the efforts being made by the Wisconsin Technical College System and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide vocational training to incarcerated individuals in fields related to your place of business?* All of the respondents indicated that they were not aware of any efforts by the technical colleges or DOC throughout the state of Wisconsin. The second question in the interview was the following *Have you or any other*

business that you know of in your industry sector ever been contacted by DOC or another agency to discuss what skills would be necessary for ex-offenders to be qualified for job openings?

Three out of the four respondents indicated that they had zero contact by any state agency to discuss the skills required to obtain entry-level employment. One respondent indicated they had been contacted by the Central Wisconsin Workforce Development office. The office shared that they had grant money to spend on training that would be focused on high-demand job skills. This same respondent indicated that after a brief conversation with the workforce development office, they did not have any further contact and left them wondering if any training ever took place.

The final question asked during the structured interviews focused on potential strategies that may influence employers to examine hiring the ex-offender population more consistently.

The following question asked *What might be some types of incentives that would influence your company to hire ex-offender or more of them if you already have some on your workforce team?*

All of the respondents were open to working closer with state agencies and this population. The responses by the four industry sectors are listed in Table 18.

Table 18

Incentives to Influence Employers to Hire the Ex-Offender Population

Employer Responses

- Financial incentive. Provide employer with assurances or guarantees that we are not “stuck” with the individual if things do not work out
 - Financial support. A commitment from DOC that they stay connected, maybe a liaison.
 - Mentor program. Company tax breaks/incentives. Wage sharing program.
 - Split wages during a probationary period. Tax incentives for employer.
-

Throughout the structured interviews, there were several common themes that surfaced from the responses of the interviewees. These themes included *tentativeness and unease*, *workforce partnerships*, and *second chances*. The tentativeness and unease to pursue a special population theme results from the lack of education and professional development related to the employment laws and/or policies in the state of Wisconsin. Interviewees shared frustrations due to the lack of awareness that state agencies have provided to employers and initiatives related to specific industry sectors. All of the interviewees in each industry sector responded in the belief of second chances for human beings and the investment in human capital provides a return on investment for business in economic measures as well as an improved sense of belonging and value for the individual taking part in training or further education opportunities.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

The purpose of this study was to determine if the vocational training programs offered by the Wisconsin DOC to inmates are relevant to employment opportunities across nine counties that make up central and northern Wisconsin. This study aimed to determine if employers are willing to hire individuals with minimum training credentials regardless of criminal backgrounds. The study was designed to answer the following specific research questions:

- (1) *To what extent do vocational training programs offered to inmates by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections align with workforce needs in central and northern Wisconsin?*
- (2) *To what extent are employers in central and northern Wisconsin willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds in those vocational areas?*

This chapter contains three sections. The first sections provides a summary of the study. The second one provides the conclusions from literature, data collection, and analyzation. The third section includes recommendations for future research.

Summary

Incarceration in the U.S. is a growing problem (Hall, 2015). The current incarceration level in the United States encompasses one in every 100 American adults (Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal & Solomon, 2009). As the United States continues to be the world leader in the number of citizens it incarcerates, it also is facing a great deficit of workers needed to uphold the nation's economy. The population of incarcerated individuals proves to be a substantial loss in potential workforce and human resource capital but the majority of the nearly 700,000 state prisoners released each year are not equipped with the skills, technical and social, to meet the challenges of reentering society with a successful outcome (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Giving inmates the opportunity to become better educated and develop some tangible skillsets through correctional education offerings would greatly assist them in becoming productive members of a community and workforce when they are released (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). One of focuses in correctional education programs is vocational training. Vocational training is designed to teach inmates employment skills needed for specific jobs and industries (Davis et al., 2013). The overall goal of vocational training is to reduce inmates risk of recidivating by teaching them skills that can contribute to finding and persisting as contributing employees following release from prison.

In order to determine if the vocational trainings offered by the Wisconsin DOC lead to the implementation of the skills needed for entry-level employment, this study employed a mixed methods research approach. The study included a quantitative and qualitative descriptive methodology that contained a short questionnaire, followed by structured interviews with a random sample of industry sector employers in the construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services fields. There were two-phases of research conducted during the study.

Phase one of the study included the distribution of an online survey questionnaire where the researcher was able to collect quantitative data through a descriptive analysis of industry sector responses. Quantitative research uses standardized measures so that perspective or experiences shared by research participants can be placed into categories and assigned a numerical value (Patton, 2015). The advantage of quantitative research is that it is possible to reach a larger sample based on a limited number of closed-ended questions, which makes the findings much more generalizable to the phenomena. The final analysis included employer demographics, skill requirements for entry-level employment, and employer hiring methods.

Phase two of the study involved the collection of qualitative data through structured interviews with employers in the four industry sectors. Structured interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of the employer's view of the ex-offender population as a workforce solution. This type of research is more holistic than quantitative research and involves a robust collection of data from a breadth of sources to gain a deep understanding of individuals involved, including opinions, perspectives, and attitudes (Gall et al., 2007). The major advantage of interviews is the flexibility and adaptability that they bring. During interviews, researchers have the ability to build trust with respondents, resulting in a higher probability of obtaining information that the interviewee otherwise would not reveal through a typical questionnaire (Gall et al., 2007).

Thirty-two responses were analyzed through quantitative data collection and four structured interviews were conducted with employers representing each of the four industry sectors. Quantitative data was analyzed through the use of descriptive statistics. Both central tendency and variability measures were determined with this method. Qualitative data was analyzed by the researcher through the transcribed interviews using thematic analysis. The data was then separated by the researcher by identifying both similar and unique statements, common themes, and the compilation of major concepts.

The quantitative data revealed that the majority of entry-level job opportunities in the four industry sectors required a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalent credential. The data also revealed that the most important skillsets for job seekers included safety awareness, the ability to follow directions, and being able to work with teammates. The second highest rankings in skillsets included the ability to use equipment and completing projects or tasks in a timely manner.

The quantitative data revealed that the majority of businesses that responded have between 6 and 20 entry-level job openings on an annual basis. Company owners in businesses with less than 20 total employees primarily complete the hiring of these job applicants and by a hiring committee for businesses with more than 20 employees. The data also revealed that the majority of employers “sometimes” will conduct criminal background checks, but would be hesitant to hire individuals if they know that the job applicant has a criminal conviction.

The qualitative data revealed that the companies did not have a specific hiring policy addressing the ex-offender population or any other special population. Respondents were open-minded about the prospects of this potential workforce and all sectors were in need of high numbers of entry-level workers. The data revealed that current workers in the respective industry sectors did not have any reluctance towards employing this population and having them as part of the team. The largest deterrent of employing ex-offenders was if their criminal offense was violent or sex-related.

The qualitative data revealed that employers were mostly unaware of vocational training by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections or any other state agency’s efforts in development of ex-offenders’ skillsets in the four industry sectors of the study. Respondents shared that training was an essential first step in securing employment for this population and that they would like to see continued efforts being made, but with the employers being part of the development process.

Conclusions

The study revealed that there is a divide among employers regarding the likelihood of employing ex-offenders depending on company demographics, industry sector, and size of the organization. It also revealed that smaller employers hiring practices are completed solely by the

owner of the company, which is influenced by his or her philosophy and perspective of ex-offenders. Larger employers tend to rely on hiring committees, which can bring a more diverse perspective to the hiring process and the job candidates. Findings also revealed that the level of criminal offense plays a large part in the consideration of hiring an individual with a conviction.

Research question 1: To what extent do vocational training programs offered to inmates by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections align with workforce needs in central and northern Wisconsin? Research Question 1 was comprised of two parts: minimum level of education for entry-level employment and the level of importance for specific skillsets. Specific skills included in the study were aligned with common ones listed in Skills for America's Future (Aspen Institute, n.d.) relative to each of the four industry sectors. The list of skills included both technical and social development levels.

The majority of employers, nearly 60%, indicated that a high school diploma or equivalent credential is the minimum requirement for employment. The data also revealed that the manufacturing sector was most prone to requiring a post-secondary credential. The construction and hospitality services sectors were the most open to employing an individual without any educational credentials.

There were seven common skills for entry-level employment included in the research study to determine the level of importance. These skills included safety awareness, equipment identification, equipment use, follow directions, work with teammates, problem solving, and completing projects in a timely manner. The data revealed that safety and following directions were the top-ranked skills. These skills were followed in level of importance by working with a team, problem-solving, knowledge of equipment, and completing projects on time.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the majority of employers believe that a high school credential is sufficient for entry-level employment, but when aligning the desired skillsets upon starting the job this would require additional education and training beyond secondary education. Furthermore, the employers ranked all seven skills as “extremely important” or “very important” revealing that they are in support of education or training programs that could develop these skills prior to employment.

Research question 2: To what extent are employers in central and northern Wisconsin willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds in those vocational areas?

Research Question 2 was comprised of four parts: entry-level job openings, policy and hiring processes, perception of ex-offenders, and awareness of training efforts. Based on the quantitative survey and structured interviews, the data revealed that, overall, employers are not comfortable talking about their hiring processes related to specific populations. It was also found that certain industry sectors have more experience and history working with the ex-offender population.

Based on the findings of the study, over half of the employers (56%) post 6 to 20 entry-level job openings annually. The data also revealed that roughly 13% of the businesses post more than 20 job openings on an annual basis. Respondents indicated that their most effective means for recruiting applicants was through some type of internet or online services.

The data revealed that hiring processes are consistent with size of employers. Larger companies incorporate the use of a hiring committee, while the company owner solely completes the hiring process for smaller businesses. Other findings related to hiring processes revealed that criminal background checks are not consistent regardless of company size. The data also revealed conflicting responses between the survey and interviews. Findings in the survey

revealed that most employers would lean towards not hiring an ex-offender if they knew that the job applicant had a previous conviction versus the respondents in the interview all were open to hiring an ex-offender with a criminal record. The only deterrent was if the conviction was violent or sex-related.

The respondents included in the interviews revealed that they were not aware of any types of vocational training efforts by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections that would support the development and qualifications of individuals for their respective industry sector. One of the four respondents indicated that they were contacted one time by a state agency regarding workforce training without any other follow-up communication.

It can be concluded that the four industry sectors have a large number of job openings that remain unfilled due to a lack of individuals without the minimum qualifications and skillsets. It can also be concluded that there are inconsistent company policies related to hiring special populations, especially the ex-offender population. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the lack of communication between the Wisconsin DOC and district employers has created obstacles in connecting the ex-offender population with job opportunities.

Recommendations

The research has shown that there are roughly between 280 to 348 entry-level annual job opportunities connected with the vocational training efforts of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and employment in the construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services sector. Based on this research it is recommended that the DOC work closely with a large group of employers to determine the necessary skills and minimum requirements necessary to earn employment prior to any type of vocational trainings that are scheduled. It is also recommended that the DOC or any other state agencies organize an advisory committee of

employers, in conjunction with the Wisconsin Technical College System, to develop and verify the curriculum that will be used during the training sessions. The data also revealed that employers would be more inclined to hire ex-offenders if there was financial incentives such as wage share and tax incentives along with mentorship or a liaison type of support system to work collaboratively with employers and assist with monitor the work performance of each individual.

The research also revealed that the topic of hiring the ex-offender population is not a comfortable subject to discuss for the majority of employers. All of the respondents in this research study belong to a professional organization in their industry sector. Therefore, it is recommended that each professional organization provide professional development opportunities to educate hiring managers and staff about the legal issues and obligations related to employing this population.

Lastly, this research study provides a background and suggestions for future improvements between the DOC, industry sector employers, and the ex-offender population. Based on the research study and findings, it is recommended that future trainings include clear goals and learning outcomes to support the investment of human capital and produce well-qualified individuals to fill workforce needs in all industry sectors.

Areas for Further Study

In addition to recommendations for communications and a better understanding of vocational trainings offered to the ex-offender population, the following research is recommended:

- Replicate the study by expanding the geographic area of employers and increasing the sample size throughout Wisconsin counties.
- Replicate the study by expanding additional industry sectors.

- Perform a qualitative study with a sample of ex-offenders that have successfully completed vocational training through the DOC and their employment journey.
- A study of recidivism for ex-offenders that completed a vocational training program versus those who did not participate.

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Appendix A: Employer Hiring Survey

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
STOUT

WISCONSIN'S POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

This research is being conducted by a UW-Stout student

Employer Hiring Survey

I would like to thank you for participating in this study related to your company's hiring practices and more specifically, your thoughts and perceptions related to a workforce that consists of individuals that have had criminal convictions and a history of incarceration. Please take a few minutes to read through the following "Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research" prior to starting the survey. I greatly appreciate your time and willingness to be part of this research study.

Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research

Project Title:

The effects of correctional education in vocational training on employment opportunities in central and northern Wisconsin for ex-offenders upon release

Description:

The research study will examine if the workforce needs of employers in the construction, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality services industry sectors in central and northern Wisconsin align with the vocational skills training being offered by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) to its incarcerated population. You will take a short survey or will be asked to answer questions on the minimum skills required for being considered qualified for entry-level employment and hiring practices related to the ex-offender population. Please feel free to contact the researcher with any questions.

Risks:

You may experience questions that are uncomfortable to answer based on your company's hiring practices related to the ex-offender population. You do not need to answer them and may choose to not continue participating in the survey.

Benefits:

The research study will benefit future trainings offered by the DOC by identifying the technical skills that are required to earn entry-level employment along with identifying employer perceptions that may be causing hesitation to hire the ex-offender population.

Confidentiality:

There will be no identifying information released during this study. All information collected during the study will be stored on the researcher's computer and will be remain on a password protected hard drive until no longer needed. At this point, the information will be permanently deleted.

Future Use:

Any information collected for this research study will be stripped of identifiers and will not be used in any future research.

Time Commitment:

The average time to complete the online survey is 5-10 minutes.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. You have the right to stop the survey at any time. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been turned into the investigator. If you are participating in an anonymous online survey, once you submit your response, the data cannot be linked to you and cannot be withdrawn.

IRB Approval:

In accordance with Federal Regulations, your project, "*The effects of correctional education in vocational training on employment opportunities in central and northern Wisconsin for ex-offenders upon release*" was reviewed on **March 6, 2020** by a member of the Institutional Review Board and was approved under Expedited Review through **March 5, 2021**.

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator: Jeff R. Labs

IRB Administrator
Elizabeth Buchanan
Buchanane@uwstout.edu
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
101 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg.
UW-Stout Menomonie, WI 54751

Advisor: Dr. Matthew Simoneau

Statement of Consent:

By completing the following survey or structured face-to-face interview, you agree to participate in the research study entitled, "The effects of correctional education in vocational training on employment opportunities in central and northern Wisconsin for ex-offenders upon release"

- Yes I Consent
- No I do not Consent

Section 1: Geography and Demographics

Please indicate the response that best aligns with your place of business and industry sector:

What geographic sector of Wisconsin does your place of business reside in?

- Central Wisconsin (South of State Highway 64)
- Northern Wisconsin (North of State Highway 64)
-

What industry sector most closely represents your place of business?

- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Transportation
- Hospitality Services
-

What is the number of full-time employees at your place of business?

- 1-10
 - 11-25
 - More than 25
-

What is the average number of annual full-time job openings at your place of business?

- 0-5
 - 6-10
 - 11-20
 - More than 20
-

What is the minimum level of education required for the majority of entry-level occupational job openings at your place of business?

- None
- High School Diploma or HSED/GED
- Educational credential beyond High School

Section 2: Skill requirements

Please rate the level of importance in gaining entry-level employment at your place of business for each of the following skills:

	Extremely important (1)	Very important (2)	Moderately important (3)	Slightly important (4)	Not at all important (5)
Safety awareness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tools/equipment identification	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tools/equipment use and operation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to follow directions/processes/procedure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to communicate/work with teammates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to problem solve	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Complete projects/tasks on time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 3: Hiring methods

How is the full-time employee hiring process done at your place of business?

- Human Resources Manager
 - Hiring committee (more than one person)
 - Owner of company
 - Other _____
-

Which of the following recruitment methods does your place of business use to fill job openings?
Please check all that apply.

- Television/radio/newspaper
 - Social media
 - Online job posting website
 - Referrals from past or current employees
 - Working with state agencies
 - Other _____
-

Does your place of business run criminal background checks on job applicants?

- Always
 - Sometimes
 - Never
-

Does your place of business hire persons with criminal backgrounds?

- Yes
- No
- Depends on the level of offense

Section 4: Follow-up interview

Would you be willing to take part in a face-to-face interview to learn more about your thoughts related to employing the ex-offender population to fill workforce needs?

- Yes
- No

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Face-to-face structured interview questions

Jeff Labs

Research study: *The effects of correctional education in vocational training on employment opportunities in central and northern Wisconsin for ex-offenders upon release*

Opening statement:

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study related to your company's hiring practices and more specifically, your thoughts and perceptions related to a workforce that consists of individuals that have had criminal convictions and a history of incarceration.

Questions:

1. Does your place of business hire persons with criminal backgrounds?
 - Always
 - Sometimes
 - Never

2. To what extent would you consider recruiting individuals who are ex-offenders if they have the minimum qualifications for the job posting?

3. What is your company's policy on hiring this population?

4. Please explain why you would hire this population?

5. Please explain why you would not hire this population?

6. What level or types of crime would be an influence in the decision-making/hiring process?

7. What is the perception at your place of work about individuals that have had a criminal conviction?

8. What might be some general fears of hiring an ex-offender?

9. Describe how this population may be a potential solution to reducing the workforce shortage in your industry sector?

10. To what extent are you aware of the efforts being made by the Wisconsin Technical College System and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide vocational training to incarcerated individuals in fields related to your place of business?

11. Have you or any other business that you know of in your industry sector ever been contacted by DOC or another agency to discuss what skills would be necessary for ex-offenders to be considered qualified for job openings?

12. What might be some types of incentives that would influence your company to hire ex-offenders or more of them if you already have some on your workforce team?

Appendix C: Initial Email to Employers

Employer Survey Email sent 03/23/2020 at 5:06 pm

Hello,

My name is Jeff Labs and I am a doctoral candidate at UW-Stout in the Ed.D.in Career & Technical Education degree program. My research is focused on the incarcerated population and the relevancy of vocational trainings offered to these individuals by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC).

While there has been numerous research studies on education levels influencing a decrease in recidivism rates, there has been little research on employer involvement and input on the types of vocational trainings offered to increase levels of education and the development of technical skills to help gain entry-level employment for this population. There has also been minimal research regarding employer perceptions of this population and the willingness of employers to recruit ex-offenders into their industry. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated and would help steer taxpayer dollars being used for future correctional education and vocational trainings in a more effective manner.

Your feedback will be incorporated in developing recommendations to the Wisconsin DOC for technical skill trainings in each of your respective industries. All responses will remain anonymous and secure. The survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes of your valuable time.

Below is a link to the survey. Please read and acknowledge the consent to participate in the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures that are in place to ensure you anonymity.

https://uwstout.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b7a8y03Av2nxwah

Sincerely,

Jeff Labs
Doctoral Candidate at University of Wisconsin – Stout
labsje@my.uwstout.edu
715-437-0987 (cell)

Appendix D: Follow-up Email to Employers

Reminder Employer Survey Email sent 03/30/2020 at 12:06 pm

Hello,

My name is Jeff Labs and I am a doctoral candidate at UW-Stout in the Ed.D.in Career & Technical Education degree program. I sent you a survey link on March 23, 2020. I want to sincerely thank those of you who participated. If you did not complete the survey, I am asking you to please take roughly 5 minutes and complete it to assist with my research goals.

As mentioned in my previous email, your feedback will be incorporated in developing recommendations to the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) for technical skill trainings in each of your respective industries. All responses will remain anonymous and secure.

Below is a link to the survey. Please read and acknowledge the consent to participate in the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures that are in place to ensure you anonymity.

https://uwstout.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b7a8y03Av2nxwah

Sincerely,

Jeff Labs
Doctoral Candidate at University of Wisconsin – Stout
labsje@my.uwstout.edu
715-437-0987 (cell)

Appendix E: Final Email to Employers

Final Employer Survey Email sent 04/07/2020 at 2:45 pm

Hello,

This will be my last email reminder....I promise! I want to sincerely thank all of you that have already participated in my research study. I understand that everyone is very busy with the what is happening in the world today and we all our trying to adjust our lives to accommodate a new normal. Once again, my name is Jeff Labs and I am a doctoral candidate at UW-Stout in the Ed.D.in Career & Technical Education degree program.

As mentioned in my previous emails, I am interested in your past experiences and perspectives related to the ex-offender population in the workforce. Your participation and feedback is very important and will be incorporated in developing recommendations to the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) for technical skill trainings in each of your respective industries. All responses will remain anonymous and secure. The survey will take 5 minutes or less.

Below is a link to the survey. Please read and acknowledge the consent to participate in the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures that are in place to ensure you anonymity.

https://uwstout.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b7a8y03Av2nxwah

Sincerely,

Jeff Labs
Doctoral Candidate at University of Wisconsin – Stout
labsje@my.uwstout.edu
715-437-0987 (cell)

Appendix F: IRB Approval Letter



Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
 152 Vocational Rehabilitation
 University of Wisconsin-Stout
 P.O. Box 790
 Menomonie, WI 54751-0790
 Phone: 715-232-1126

March 6, 2020

Jeff Labs
 Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
 University of Wisconsin-Stout

RE: The effects of correctional education in vocational training on employment opportunities in central and northern Wisconsin for ex-offenders upon release

Dear Jeff,

In accordance with Federal Regulations, your project, "*The effects of correctional education in vocational training on employment opportunities in central and northern Wisconsin for ex-offenders upon release*" was reviewed on **March 6, 2020** by a member of the Institutional Review Board and was approved under Expedited Review through **March 5, 2021**. If a renewal is needed, it is to be submitted at least 10 working days prior to the approvals end date.

If you are conducting an **online** survey/interview, please copy and paste the following message to the top of the form: **"This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46."**

Responsibilities for Principal Investigators of IRB-approved research:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date. (Principal Investigators and Sponsors are responsible for initiating Continuing Review proceedings.)
2. All unanticipated or serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB.
3. All protocol modifications must be IRB approved prior to implementation, unless they are intended to reduce risk.
4. All protocol deviations must be reported to the IRB.
5. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
6. Federal regulations require IRB review of ongoing projects on an annual basis.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and best wishes with your project.

Should you have any questions regarding this letter or need further assistance, please contact the IRB office at 715-232-2691 or email buchanane@uwstout.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Buchanan".

Elizabeth Buchanan
 Interim Director, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs; Human Subjects Protections Administrator,
 UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB)
 CC: Simoneau

Appendix G: Interview Responses

Interview Questions	Responses			
Does your place of business hire persons with criminal backgrounds?	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes
To what extent would you consider recruiting individuals who are ex-offenders if they have the minimum qualifications for the job posting?	Show qualifications, references – including a person from the jail or prison	Demonstrate that they have the necessary skills to be a productive worker	Review the training that took place and look deeper into it	Depends on behavior since their conviction
What is your company's policy on hiring this population?	No specific policy on any certain population	No specific policy	None, up to each manager	Open to hiring any population, case by case
Please explain why you would hire this population?	If they have the qualifications, we need employees	A lot of entry-level jobs and highly repetitive duties	If they can be timely and ready to work	Probably will be motivated to work
Please explain why you would not hire this population?	Public perception, they may be viewed as a liability	If conviction is controversial, they may be hard to fit in company culture	Distrust, customer perception	High rate of customer interaction
What level or types of crime would be an influence in the decision-making/hiring process?	Repeat violent offenders and/or sexual-related	Sex-related and/or theft	Violence and/or sexual assault	Sex-related and/or theft
What is the perception at your place of work about individuals that have had a criminal conviction?	Generally not a problem	Pretty low, depends on conviction	Fairly open-minded	Open to giving people second chances
What might be some general fears of hiring an ex-offender?	Safety of other employees	Trust, safety in workplace	Go back to their old ways of criminal actions	Not trustworthy, customer safety

Describe how this population may be a potential solution to reducing the workforce shortage in your industry sector?	Finding qualified workers would be a huge win	Need a lot of entry-level workers, will continue training if they have potential	Looking for good work ethic, someone to “earn” their place here	Hard to find people that want to work hospitality shifts/schedule
To what extent are you aware of the efforts being made by the Wisconsin Technical College System and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide vocational training to incarcerated individuals in fields related to your place of business?	Not at all	No	No	None
Have you or any other business that you know of in your industry sector ever been contacted by DOC or another agency to discuss what skills would be necessary for ex-offenders to be considered qualified for job openings?	Never	Have been contacted by Central WI Workforce Development	No	No
What might be some types of incentives that would influence your company to hire ex-offenders or more of them if you already have some on your workforce team?	Financial incentives, provide employer with assurances or guarantees that we are not “stuck” if things don’t work out	Financial support commitment in some manner, DOC guarantees to stay connected with employer on job performance	DOC includes a liaison from the state to monitor work performance	Split wages during a probationary period, tax incentives for company