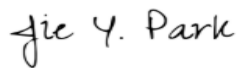


The Impact of LARC (Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens) on Staff and Participants

**Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth,
and Education Studies Major at Clark University**

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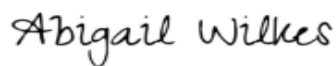
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Abstract

In the United States, it is estimated that 79 million people have a criminal record (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). Formerly incarcerated individuals may face many barriers, making it likely that two-thirds of prisoners will be rearrested within 3 years of release (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). Education directly impacts the likelihood of recidivism, with 43% odds of lowering recidivism rates (Davis et al., 2013). I created this thesis to examine the impact of a college education program on formerly incarcerated individuals and the program's staff. My findings show that the LARC program (Liberal Arts For Returning Citizens) has positively impacted its participants. However, much growth must occur because it is still a relatively new program.

Acknowledgements

As the first part of my acknowledgments, I want to thank Jie Park and Praxis for allowing me to do a passion project. It was a fantastic opportunity, and I could not be more grateful. Jie, you have been there for me during some rough times last semester, and I appreciate your understanding and support. You are someone I look up to and a role model. I appreciate you challenging me and making me a better writer and academic.

I also thank Shelly Tenenbaum for not only being a rock but also allowing me to do my research with LARC, being there for any questions I have, and supporting me in any way possible. I greatly appreciate it. You have allowed me to make this project happen and become someone I deeply admire. Not only did you help make this project happen, but you also taught me a lot about your work and inspired me in my passions.

I also want to thank the LARC program (liberal arts for Returning Citizens). I appreciate you welcoming me with open arms and being so excited about this project. This program has made a positive impact on my life.

I also want to thank Megan Mulvey, who has been there with me these entire three semesters, sitting with me in the library for countless hours, taking my phone, talking through all the issues I've had on whiteboards, and being there for me all around. I don't know what I would do without you. Thank you for being my best friend.

I would also like to thank my excellent therapist, Jennifer Pollack. I don't know what I would have done without you. You have truly been there and supported me in any way I needed, from just sitting during our sessions and doing work to answering anything I was struggling with and helping me create a plan to get it done. I'm forever grateful.

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I also want to thank my dad, who has truly inspired me. He has been there for me this entire time. He took my late-night phone calls, was there, and helped me every step of the way. I appreciate it.

I also want to thank Nadia, Liam, and Nani, who have been there for the past three weeks and a month, spending hours in the library, working together, and bouncing ideas and questions off each other. I greatly appreciate everything you guys have done and how you have supported me in completing my work.

Introduction

In today's society, people often get stuck believing that an individual can not change. There is a tendency to believe that actions taken when you are young can define a person for life or that a single mistake can diminish an individual's sense of self. In today's society, we often hear claims that "people cannot change" and that expecting people to become different is hopeless. However, I could not agree with this idea any less. I have witnessed someone transform. I watched him rebuild his entire life; I watched him conquer his mental health struggles. He became someone I detested, deeply admired, and looked up to. He put in the effort to make himself grow. He began therapy and practiced yoga and meditation. I watched him learn, grow, and become a better person to other people and a better person for himself as well. As an adult, he picked himself up again and changed. He made me believe that anything is possible and everyone deserves a second chance. He taught me to never give up on anyone because there are always two sides to every story, and you never know what someone may be going through behind closed doors. I am forever grateful to him, as he helped shape my beliefs into what they have become today.

Three semesters ago, while deciding on my research focus, I reflected on my passions and what I would want to research. I have already completed numerous projects on incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline. The topic of incarceration was something I knew I could read and talk about for months without losing any interest. I also wanted my project to impact a specific field positively. At that time, I contacted several organizations supporting incarcerated individuals and those previously incarcerated. That was when I came across LARC, or liberal arts for returning citizens. Despite being at Clark University for 4 years and being an active member of the Clark community, I had never heard of LARC before. This was when I reached

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out to one of the co-directors, Shelly Tenenbaum, with whom I had a fantastic conversation. Together, we created a project I was passionate about, and the program needed. I never knew at that point what this project would turn into and how important it would be to me.

In the United States, there are currently over 1,230,100 incarcerated individuals (*Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities, 2019—Statistical Tables, 2021*). Once released from prison, 77% (*Recidivism and Reentry | Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.*) of formerly incarcerated individuals are likely to reenter the prison system in three years. Within one year of release, 75% of formerly incarcerated individuals will remain unemployed in Massachusetts (National et al., 2016). Worcester, MA, is the second biggest city in New England and has a long history of mass incarceration and reentry issues. The history of recidivism and lack of opportunity creates a never-ending cycle of pain and prison. How do we break the cycle?

Research shows the effect of education on lower recidivism rates and impacts formerly incarcerated individuals' success (Wetzel, 2023). Having an education and a safe and affordable space to build lifelong skills and opportunities will, in turn, keep an individual out of the prison system. Although an individual can benefit from a college education, which can lead to life success, many barriers exist for formerly incarcerated individuals, such as financial aid, admission tests, past educational experiences, and limited opportunities. Higher education not only opens up employment opportunities but also affects the well-being of individuals, allowing them a sense of accomplishment and allowing them to explore their interests.

Higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals faces many barriers as it is still becoming a new resource. Few programs have been created directly for the benefit of formerly incarcerated individuals. Even with the existing programs, they still have many barriers to overcome, such as systemic issues and funding disparities. However, access to higher education

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and programs specifically for the growth of formerly incarcerated individuals can be a life changer and directly impact an individual's life. When programs are implemented successfully, they positively impact their participants, staff, and administrators. Programs created to cause positive change in the system are needed and must continue to grow, evolve, and change with the times.

The issue of formerly incarcerated individuals having limited access to resources and higher education is essential to me because I have seen the positive impact that higher education can make on someone who is in the system. It makes such a huge difference in their lives and their well-being. The criminal justice system is so broken right now that it is hard to encourage the good things happening in the world. Some people genuinely care about others and want to create a positive experience in their lives, and I hope this research project can shine a positive light and continue to create change on a dark issue.

I will conduct a program evaluation of Liberal Arts For Returning Citizens (LARC), a tuition-free program for the formerly incarcerated. While LARC is not a matriculating program, students receive a Clark transcript and can earn academic credits to be transferred to any other institution in higher education. The curriculum in the LARC program is designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of the participants. Classes offered at LARC vary every semester, but each class runs for seven weeks, meeting every week from 6-9 pm.

My evaluation will involve anyone in the Clark's Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens program. I evaluated the program by collecting data from students, peer learning assistants, teachers, and directors. My evaluation, designed to be inclusive and comprehensive, occurred during classes and outside class hours if participants chose to be interviewed independently. In essence, this evaluation is an opportunity for all stakeholders to contribute to a better

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understanding of a college program's impacts on formerly incarcerated individuals. The outcomes of this research are expected to be significant. They will provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the LARC program, identify areas for improvement, and highlight its benefits and transformative power.

After receiving the information about LARC, I created recommendations and held meetings with staff and participants. I will discuss my findings with all LARC parties that run the program and are participants. It is essential to me that I include LARC's ideas and community in my research and project, as I want this project to benefit them. To change the system, all people who are a part of it need to be included in that change. Some recommendations I will make include complete training ideas, ways to implement longer classes, and grants to which the program may apply. I also want to create an evaluation paper that can be attached to grant proposals to help the program receive more resources and money. I chose this as my action because it is sustainable and can be recreated every couple of years. Getting data from a program that has yet to receive any can also be highly beneficial. I also hope my project can continue, evolve, and change to benefit their staff and participants.

Thus far, the LARC program has yet to be evaluated as it is relatively newly developed, beginning in the fall of 2022. My praxis project is designed to assess and understand the program's current state. I used qualitative research methods, including surveys and interviews, to better understand what improvements may need to be made, their strengths and benefits, and how participants' experiences can be positive and beneficial. I also conducted a document analysis of program materials and policies. These methods will evaluate the LARC program's impact on its participants. The praxis research will explore the following questions:

- How does Clark's Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens program impact its participants?

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- What are the strengths and weaknesses of Clark's Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens?
- What improvements can be made to LARC by the current staff?
 - What improvements can be made to the program to make it more beneficial for students?
 - What improvements can be made to the program to make it more beneficial for the Staff?

Theoretical Framework

My two theoretical frameworks include the reproduction theory and the transformative learning theory. The reproduction theory aligns with LARC's theory of change, the systemic issues that LARC stands to change, and what this program aims to do. The social reproduction theory is a critical framework that examines how the impacts of our socio-cultural and economic culture create the reproduction of inequality (*Pierre Bourdieu's Social Reproduction: An Outline and Explanation*, 2024). The transformative learning theory is a theory that focuses on adult education and that learners can adjust their thinking based on new information. The transformative theory is one that LARC may use in its teachings as well. This theory specifically looks at the impact of adults' ability to look at new perspectives as things change. (*What Is The (Transformative Learning Theory*, 17). The transformative learning theory examines how college education programs can impact an individual. This theory is crucial as it aligns with LARC's pedagogy and what LARC aims to achieve as a program. Together, these two theories are helping me understand my research project.

The transformative learning theory is a theory I draw from to think about my project. The theory of transformative learning primarily drives the idea of the program to create a positive impact on individuals by using higher education to help give learners new ideas. It also allows

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learners to challenge and evolve in the way they think. This model looks at how people learn and their learning styles, specifically when education is part of the adult experience. The two main focuses of transformative learning include instrumental learning and communicative learning, in which learners will focus on communicating their needs and problem-solving skills. LARC creates opportunities for students to learn problem-solving skills and teaches how to communicate with students and teachers. There are many phases of transformative learning, which include a disorienting dilemma, in which learners find that thoughts may not be accurate; self-examination, where students will look at their understanding and beliefs; critical assessment of assumptions, in which one looks directly at assumptions and perspectives they have than planning a course of action where they can consider a new type of learning, then, in turn, learning new things, and exploring and trying new roles and perspectives, finally being self-sufficient in new roles and relationships.

The theory of transformative learning is not only for and about participants but also for staff. LARC is a program where students and staff can challenge their ideals and knowledge to create a community. Staff have biases and perspectives, which students help them learn about within the program. For a healthy practice, holding dialogue sessions where students and staff can speak together and learn to create an even stronger community and program that benefits everyone is essential. The transformative learning theory also helps people identify their questions and assumptions, allowing them to learn about a new perspective. For transformative learning theory to work, some components need to be in place to foster change. One of these components includes having a safe space for students and staff to be challenged and supported. The environment is so vital in any educational setting. The environment can foster community and conversation, both agents in this theory.

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Ideas that are a part of the reproduction theory include economic inequality in how wealth and resources are disbursed and the effect of access across education, job opportunities, and social opportunities. Schools can play a critical role in creating and reproducing harmful social cycles. Schools have access to the work of knowledge and skill, which could directly affect one's socioeconomic status. This theory also draws on ideas from critical race theory and how race and gender impact reproduction theory. It also draws ideas from the Marxist theory and the feminist theory. According to the reproduction theory, individuals are believed to be shaped by their contexts, social structure, cultural norms, and institutional practices, which can impact their opportunities and life chances. The social reproduction theory draws on Marxist theory, and looks at how the different social classes impacted each other. I also use Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, which defines three types of capital: economic, symbolic, and cultural. These influence how the upper class thrives, while the lower class may often be stuck in a cycle.

About the prison system, social reproduction theory is a way many can understand the role of prisons in replicating inequalities and creating a harmful cycle. Prisons and the criminal justice system reinforce harmful disparities in our society. Individuals who are part of marginalized communities are often targeted the most. Individuals being disproportionately targeted creates a cycle of inequality as people are targeted and usually not treated equally to others. There is also a correlation between prisons and the education system, which can also be a part of the reproduction theory. Education often treats people in marginalized communities poorly as well, which affects their access to knowledge and skills, which can then impact their success outside school. Students being treated poorly in education settings may be setting students up for prison and incarceration. Schooling may then impact individuals by making them feel like they have a label on them, which can affect their future. After being in prison,

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individuals are labeled and sent back into the world. However, their past will continue to follow them, impacting their ability to get jobs and possibly have a prosperous future. Being put into these boxes may become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as many do not think they will have any other options. The school-to-prison pipeline is relevant to my work in terms of how many participants view new education systems. It all impacts the access and use of education within higher education spaces.

The social reproduction system is a prominent part of the education and justice systems. It constantly perpetuates stereotypes and puts individuals into boxes, limiting their choices and self-success. This system is so intricate and built on top of each other. The education, economics, and prison systems are so interconnected that they all contribute to and impact each other. The school-to-prison pipeline directly shows this idea as behaviors are often criminalized and harsh disciplinary measures that disproportionately affect students of marginalized communities, frequently resulting in the increased likelihood of future run-ins with the criminal justice system. This perpetuates a cycle of repeating the same things, which keeps happening, resulting in the same outcome.

Community support, holistic approaches, and equitable funding are implications for breaking the cycle. Holistic approaches to education include options for different learners and allow the education process to be individualized. As much as these issues are deeply structural, it is still possible to make positive changes in small ways. Little ideas and actions can lead to bigger changes and impacts. Policies that push for more community support, holistic approaches, and equitable funding can help break the harsh cycle of inequality. They take ideas from making sure places have access and resources to ensure the importance of equitable education and living.

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They also speak about how important support is and how having a strong community can directly impact communities.

These two theories drive my research. The reproduction theory guides how I think about the "problem" LARC is trying to impact, and the transformative learning theory drives my evaluation and recommendation actions. These two theories are incredibly beneficial for looking at the bigger picture and taking impactful action.

Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework is closely tied to the concepts outlined in my findings and theoretical framework. As one of my theoretical frameworks includes the transformative power of education, I also have it as one of my concepts, as it comes up regularly throughout this paper. This framework enables me to understand various ideas that emerged during my analysis and supports my organization and interpretation of my data. It also helps me connect the project goals and the analysis process. Many concepts and ideas came up throughout my analysis and project. However, the main ones include community, transformative education, reentry, and employment. Each idea was prominent and essential to understanding the definition throughout this research paper. Each of the three words describes the reintegration process's different aspects and the factors contributing to LARC participants' success.

Community:

Community as a concept helps me understand how the idea of a community impacts individuals, specifically those in an education program and who have been in the incarceration system. The community can affect how a program runs and the benefits it offers to its participants and staff. It can provide not only emotional support but also an opportunity for

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individuals. Specifically, for those in the system before, having a sense of community within a structure that will benefit them is extremely important to the program's outcomes. For formerly incarcerated individuals, being a part of a community can directly impact their transitions. A supportive community where they are engaged in education can positively reintegrate them into society. Community well-being is affected by participation, social support, and cultural norms. My research examines what community means to people within these structures and how it may impact them.

As a community can have multiple understandings and interpretations, I defined community for myself throughout this process. I define community as a support system that is there for each other. I also define it as a group of people with a shared interest and ideals working together to reach a specific goal. With this project and after conducting research, it was clear that people may have had different definitions of community. Regarding the community within education, I define it as a safe space that allows participants to work together to challenge and support each other in their academic achievements. The community can positively affect mental health and well-being, as well as an individual's wanting to continue educational pursuits and opportunities.

Other sources define community in many different ways; in one of the sources, I found an analysis of multiple papers defining community and analyzing the similarities and differences between all of the documents. The main similarities between all the papers include that they consist of groups of people with something in common, whether location or a shared interest. However, communities are not confined to physical locations. Many community members may reciprocally support or rely on each other (Clark, 1973). Community members helping each

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other directly relates to an environment where students may depend on each other or a teacher to create a community or shared understanding.

The transformative power of college education:

College education as a conceptual framework helps me understand higher education's impacts on individual outcomes, access to education, and curriculum. It offers a critical lens through which we can examine higher education's effects on formerly incarcerated individuals. Education programs can shape an individual's outcome and can be a means of pathways to individuality and personal success. However, although these programs are helpful, many barriers may need to be addressed to increase participation and success rates. Curriculum design and student support all contribute to the overall success of a college program for formerly incarcerated individuals. This framework ensures that all students have opportunities and success with a college education.

The transformative power of higher education relates to the impact education has on creating positive change within an individual's life. For example, how a class can create more understanding of financial literacy that impacts their life success and teaching individuals critical thinking and reflection, as learning how to challenge is essential. The transformative power in higher education also fosters personal growth and self-awareness. For example, community-based learning and hands-on learning support sustainability and the creation of new ideas. I define the concept of transformative higher education as having an education that creates opportunities for individuals emotionally and intellectually and makes a lasting impact on an individual's life, both physically and mentally.

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Reentry:

Reentry refers to individuals returning to society after involvement with the criminal justice system. This conceptual framework helps us understand how factors influence an individual's return. Many elements impact reentry, including social support, employment opportunities, education, and mental health. These are all interconnected and impact whether an individual can thrive outside prison.

Reentry is a key term in my project, as my research revolves around formerly incarcerated participants. LARC was created to help the formerly incarcerated community benefit from the program's resources and opportunities. Reentry refers to all the barriers and impacts participants may face when reintegrating into society. For example, participants may face obstacles like employment, housing, and technological advancements.

Betina Szudlarek created a literature review defining and challenging the concept of reentry. This paper brought together different theories of reentry transition and concerns, specifically looking at the various ideas and definitions of reentry. One specific point the speaker spoke about is that there are different types of reentry, which are very specific to a person or situation. (Szkudlarek, 2010)

Employment

People may think that employment is straightforward, but it is anything but the case. Employment doesn't always mean "labor in exchange for wages." There is often a deeper meaning of what it means to be employed and what an employee is. Employment has many dimensions: economic status, social perspectives, legal perceptions, developmental perspectives, and what qualifies as employment. There are many kinds of employment, such as formal and informal, full-time, part-time, self-employed, stable, and short-term. These different employment

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opportunities may have different perceptions on whether they qualify to call themselves employed.

After reviewing my data, I realized how people would describe employment differently. Many thought having an internship would be described as being employed, while many others spoke about how they were unemployed because they had an internship. I define employment within this paper as having any job, internship, or self-employment. Having this definition will help this research project see if the LARC program is creating a difference in employment opportunities.

Literature Review

When writing my literature review, I looked for many ideas to find the literature I wanted to look at. I ensured that all of my sources were from recent times within the last 10-15 years. Keywords used included education, recidivism, incarceration, college education, and the labor market. I focused primarily on these words because they are prominent factors in my research. These were themes that I wanted to focus on and look at. I also concentrated a lot on finding programs similar to LARC and looking at the evaluations of those programs. This not only helped me with my literature review but also helped me formulate my research questions and understand my findings. I looked at many sites when searching for sources, including Google Scholar, Clark's online database, JSTOR, and PsycInfo. This search came up with many articles, some too broad. I narrowed the search by looking for mostly peer-reviewed and recent literature. After reading the abstract, I started with thirty topics similar to my paper's research. I then read each article in full and narrowed it down even further. After narrowing the search, I looked at literature that directly related to and answered my research questions. After completing my

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research and looking at my findings, I reviewed more of the lit review and revised my questions to make sure they made sense and aligned with my conclusions.

Education on reducing recidivism

Education plays a significant role in reducing recidivism. Education impacting recidivism means that having access to education that is for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals will directly affect an individual, causing them to be less likely to repeat or engage in more criminal activity, which could potentially cause a new conviction. It is essential to lower recidivism rates because it contributes to breaking the harsh cycle that many individuals are pushed into, "reducing recidivism is important for a whole host of reasons, among which include allowing individuals to continue to pursue personal and professional goals, as well as not forcing people to repeatedly endure the types of trauma that incarceration often causes" (Conway, 2023, p. 457). Education must create a space where all its students can flourish and contribute to their needs. When applied correctly in and out of prison, education can directly impact an individual's opportunities, reducing the need to reoffend. According to a study conducted by Ellison et al., there are "nine key factors in reoffending with education and employment being top of the list, alongside physical and mental health, family networks, housing, and drug and alcohol misuse" (Ellison et al., 2017, p. 110).

Why does education reduce recidivism? Re-entry programs' most important goal is reducing recidivism, and in-prison education programs can create a space that lowers recidivism. Individuals who participated in a prison education program had 43% lower odds of reoffending (*Justice and Education Departments Announce New Research Showing Prison Education Reduces Recidivism, Saves Money, Improves Employment*, 2013). Education can improve job

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prospects, increase self-esteem and personal growth, and develop essential life skills.

Specifically, regarding higher education programs, a study by Emory University showed that recidivism rates drop according to the type of education one receives. Individuals with an associate degree have a rate of recidivism of 13.7%, a bachelor's degree is 5.6%, and those who obtain a master's degree have a 0% chance of recidivism (Zoukis, 2017). Education programs provide an opportunity for individuals to learn new tools and have new opportunities to create a positive change.

Access to education.

Education in and outside of prisons for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals is a relatively new idea, as many of the latest programs have been developed recently or in the 2000s. One may face many barriers to being a part of an education program, such as systemic issues, lack of resources, and a need for knowledge about said programs. "In 2018, just 4% of higher education institutions offered credit courses for students in prison, and only 35% of state prisons provide access to college courses."(NCSL, 2023) Over time, there have been more programs being introduced to the world for the education of formerly incarcerated; for example, there is the Second Chance Pell Grant Program that was created in 2015 to grant incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals to attend postsecondary schools, and helping to reduce financial barriers that many may face when applying to schools.

There are many other programs created for formerly incarcerated individuals. For example, Project Rebound's program supports higher education and the successful re-entry of formerly incarcerated individuals at California State University. Students who completed this program also had a 0% chance of recidivism rates between 2016 and 2020 (The California State University, n.d.). This program directly impacts individuals, specifically one of the participants

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in Chang's research, Selena, who turned her life around and graduated from university. She spoke about how this program made her feel like she belonged; it helped her obtain an internship and create a long-term change and opportunity within her life (Chang, 2023).

Other programs include the John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity, which was created to open doors and eliminate barriers for individuals who face obstacles within the criminal justice system (the Institute for Justice and Opportunity, n.d.), and the Bard Prison Initiative, which provides college education to people in prison. Over 400 incarcerated students in full-time programs can receive degrees from Bard College. It provides Liberal Arts in Prison. This prison education initiative provided a backbone in giving educational access to all individuals.

The impact education has on formerly incarcerated individuals on the Job Market.

One of the most significant barriers that formerly incarcerated individuals may face is a lack of access to the job market, making it difficult for an individual to survive outside of prison walls. There is also a stigma around employers hiring people in the criminal justice system. A 2010 report revealed that 71 percent of employers would "probably not" or "definitely not" employ a worker with a criminal record." (Cerdeira-Jara et al. 2020). Having this type of mentality in the employer market contributes to harsh stigmas and cycles with formerly incarcerated individuals. It limits their access to jobs and money, making them more likely to reoffend and end up back in the system. Not only is there a stigma around hiring formerly incarcerated individuals, but in our job market these days, you need more than a high school diploma to get a job, "70% of all jobs are projected to require some form of education beyond the high school level" (Quach et al., 2022, p.80). However, for formerly incarcerated individuals, this may be a

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barrier they need to overcome because "more than half of formerly incarcerated people only hold a high school diploma or GED" (Couloute, n.d.).

Education positively affects formerly incarcerated individuals in the job market for many reasons. It can improve job readiness and skills by helping individuals receive training and certificates that can be crucial in the job application process. This also relates directly to increasing employability and has the potential to raise wages and provide more job stability. Education also impacts life skills that go hand in hand with the job market, such as improved problem-solving, communication, and critical thinking skills.

What are the gaps in the literature?

One of the most significant gaps within the literature that I kept finding was how the specific population of formerly incarcerated individuals is not highly researched. For example, there is a lot of research about college education programs in prison, but not as much as there is about college education programs outside of prison. I also found a lot of research about the school-to-prison pipeline and theoretical changes that could be in place to create change. However, throughout my study, there was a lack of information about tangible changes that can be implemented instead of significant changes that may be hard to implement. Also, most of the literature I read was extremely negative and hopeless.

When added to the literature, my program can raise awareness among a population through a search. I also hope to shed light on how important it is to engage with formerly incarcerated individuals and allow for more growth opportunities. Another thing my research does that I didn't find much in the study is how working with specific populations can change and impact staff and their ideals and beliefs. This research also provides a basis for more programs that may want to do more and contribute more.

Context

Site description

My praxis site is Clark University, specifically looking at the Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens program that Clark offers for formerly incarcerated individuals. With the high rates of recidivism, unemployment, and homelessness for individuals entering the world outside bars, the Worcester area is no stranger to this. To create an easier transition for members of the Worcester community, Clark University created the LARC program, a free program for formerly incarcerated individuals. The LARC program was established in the fall of 2022 by Clark staff. The program is relatively small and run by Team "LARC." Two people are part of this team, including co-directors Shelly Tenenbaum and John Dobson, Jen Plante, and Sarah Barry. The LARC program allows formerly incarcerated individuals to enroll in specific courses to gain credits that students can transfer to other institutions or use on their transcripts. The only requirements that one must meet to be able to participate in this program are that an individual has been involved with the criminal justice system, has a high school diploma, GED, or equivalent, and is not a sex offender. The LARC program teaches employment skills, fundamentals, and the transformative power of ideas. This program runs courses from 6-9 pm on Clark's campus and grants students who are a part of the program a Clark ID and access to campus services, such as the athletic facility, writing center, library, etc. Each class lasts 7 weeks, usually five different modules, for the entire year. There are often at least two classes being run during each module.

There are about 10 courses offered throughout the year; the courses offered may vary based on the professor assigned to teach the course. The professors who teach the courses often

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vary because of an individual's availability to prepare for seven weeks, unpaid for the most part. Professors usually hear about this program through the directors and previous connections. A good number of the teachers had earlier connections with at least one of the program's directors, some having taught in prisons together. Other professors who have worked with this program have also been Clark professors and heard about it through their connections with faculty. The LARC program does a lot of outreach within Worcester, specifically with connections at halfway houses, the sheriff's department, and other reentry programs. A participant only needs a high school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED) to apply to the program. The participant will then be sent to a Google form in which they will be asked for their name, where they were referred, email, and phone number. After filling out the form, one of the student workers will then get in touch with the participant and help them finish registering for the program. This includes setting them up with a one-card to access campus facilities and registering for classes. It does not matter when or in most cases, why someone was in prison, even if an individual has been released from the prison system five years ago, they are still welcome to join the program. The only crime that is not allowed to be a part of this program is if an individual is a sex offender, which would exclude them from the program.

Thus far, the LARC program has yet to be evaluated as it is newly developed. Since the program is new, my praxis project is designed to understand and assess its current state. I used surveys and interviews and held conversations to better understand how improvements can be made, what strengths the program has, and how the experience can benefit the students enrolled. We will conduct a longitudinal study using quantitative and qualitative research to evaluate the LARC program's impact on formerly incarcerated individuals.

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After I had collected sufficient data, I analyzed it and created recommendations and a plan for the program. I will then hold an event open to students, directors, and staff to tell them about my plan. I will discuss continuing to edit and refine my ideas and creating a sustainable plan of action for the program's implementation.

Participants

Participants include anyone over 18 enrolled in any of LARC's courses or anyone who has completed a LARC course. I will also collect data from peer learning assistants (PLAs), teaching assistants in a LARC classroom, who are usually current Clark students. I will then collect information from teachers who choose the curriculum and teach formerly incarcerated individuals. Finally, I will incorporate information from the core members of "team LARC": the co-directors, the college's associate dean, the administrative coordinator, and the student liaison. I collected data through anonymous surveys, handwritten notes, and interviews.

Positionality

As someone with experiences similar to and different from the participants I worked with, I must be aware of my position and the privileges that may come with it. As a Jewish, queer, neurodivergent individual who has struggled with schooling and discipline, I believe my identity is vital for this project in knowing my own story while also being open and empathetic to others. I will ensure that all power dynamics that may be brought up in my project are contained, as I want my participants to see me as someone who is interested in their story and what they have to say. I am listening to their journey and will do my best to ensure all my participants feel that way. The way everyone views the world is unique in itself. Each journey and conversation is inherently different from our own. How I view the world, I see how our identities may set up

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opportunities and shut them down. I see firsthand if we have control over our destiny or if it is all pre-planned and measured based on where we were born, what language we speak, and the color of our skin. When working with my participants, I will think about my theoretical framework for understanding and how I may see it in our conversations and society.

One of the most significant pieces I need to be aware of in this project is my insider-outsider positionality. Before beginning this project, I had yet to have a connection to this specific program. So, in many aspects, I am conducting my research from an outsider's perspective, which can be beneficial because I am looking at the whole picture. One thing I can grapple with throughout this project is how much I need to be an outsider and whether it impacts my research and the participants' feelings. Even though I came into the project as an outsider, I have been forming connections with staff and students and want to include them in the research. I have been speaking to all parties and asking how they would like me to engage with research and the LARC community.

Throughout this project, I have realized that I might not be as much of an outsider as I thought. The project started when the director asked me to collect data. In some ways, I have been an insider in connecting with the staff and individuals. LARC is also a part of Clark, meaning that I have been around this campus and the setting in which it takes place. Since many Clark professors also teach at LARC, I have connections with them and know many students outside LARC. So, although I am an outsider in certain aspects, I am also an insider. However, when doing my research project, I must ensure that these two positionalities are independent of the results.

As I have said before, I have experience researching multiple forms of incarceration. Not only have I done literature reviews and papers, but I have also done projects to create and

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analyze data. For example, during my junior year of college, I took a class called YPAR, or Youth Participatory Action Research, where half of the students were high schoolers and half were college students. For the class, we had to create a project in small groups; in my group, it was me, one other college student, and about eight other high schoolers. Together, we created a project that we were all passionate about, which was on the school-to-prison pipeline; we then collected data from three of the high schoolers' classes. We had about 30 responses to a survey asking about the school-to-prison pipeline, if students knew about someone who was incarcerated, and if they thought discipline in schools impacted the schools. From that research, we created a notebook on the school-to-prison pipeline and how to prevent it. We handed these notebooks out at a presentation. I have also researched prison vs. rehabilitation, morality, and well-being development, which examined and compared prison vs. rehabilitation spaces. Another one of my research studies examined how women are directly impacted within the prison system. This prior research and work within the school-to-prison pipeline directly impacted how I worked on and my position within this paper.

Another crucial impact of my positionality is my relationship with the directors. This program began because one of the directors asked me to research. Before my research, I had no connection with the director besides the fact that they were professors at the school I went to. So, I have friends who have taken classes with the director, but my first time meeting the professor was in the context of creating this project. Nevertheless, I was aware of my relationship with the director as I completed my project.

Epistemological stance

My epistemological stance refers to my beliefs and assumptions about how knowledge is created. It influences my research design, questions, and interpretation of my findings. My positionality directly impacts my stance. I will also rely on critical theory and look critically at the information before examining systemic inequalities and uncovering specific issues within a program. I will look at this program and the responses from a crucial point of view to ensure they become the best they can be.

Method

Methodology

Mixed method: I will use qualitative and quantitative research. I will distribute a survey and conduct interviews. This program evaluation will give a bird's-eye view of the program and then provide feedback and recommendations based on that evaluation.

Participants

I have received 16 paper survey responses from participants and have interviewed 11 staff members, including Administration (such as directors), Professors (past and present), and Peer Learning Assistants (who are current Clark students who work for the program as teacher assistants).

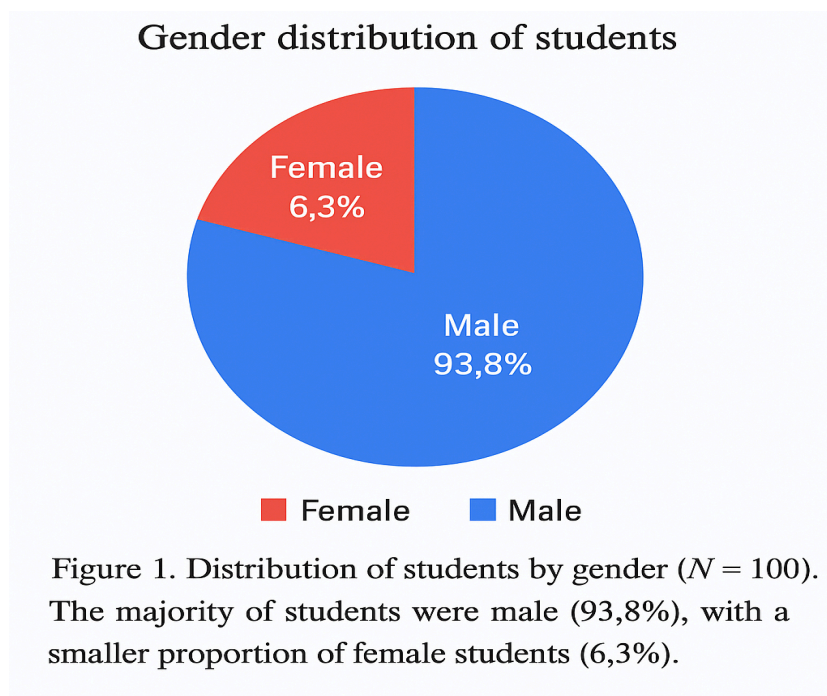
Out of the survey, the age consisted of students: One chose not to answer the age, and one recorded their age as Infiniti. The numeric range of age, however, is between 26 and 54.

Ethnicity included 18.9% Hispanic/ Latino, 12.5% White/ Native American, 31.3% Black, and 37.5% White (European/ American), as LARC takes place in Worcester at Clark University, most of the participants are local and live in Worcester, 80%. Of all the participants who responded to my survey, 43.8% said they were employed, and 18.8% said they owned a business.

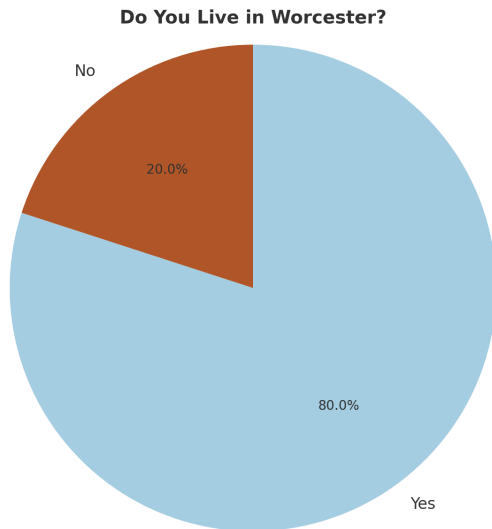
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68.8% of individuals said they had taken a college course before enrolling in LARC. Of the 16 participants, only 6.3% identified as female and 93.8% as male. A lot of the participants have taken and experienced college classes as well. To be in the program, you must have a GED or equivalent; however, about 68.8% of participant respondents have taken other college courses.

An important component to highlight about participants in LARC is the heterogeneity among all the participants. Each participant has their own story and path inside and outside LARC. Some individuals will choose to join LARC directly after they leave prison. However, it might take another individual who has been released from jail multiple times before finding this program. It is also clear within the age range, but also within the other demographic information of the LARC students, about how different their experiences may be.



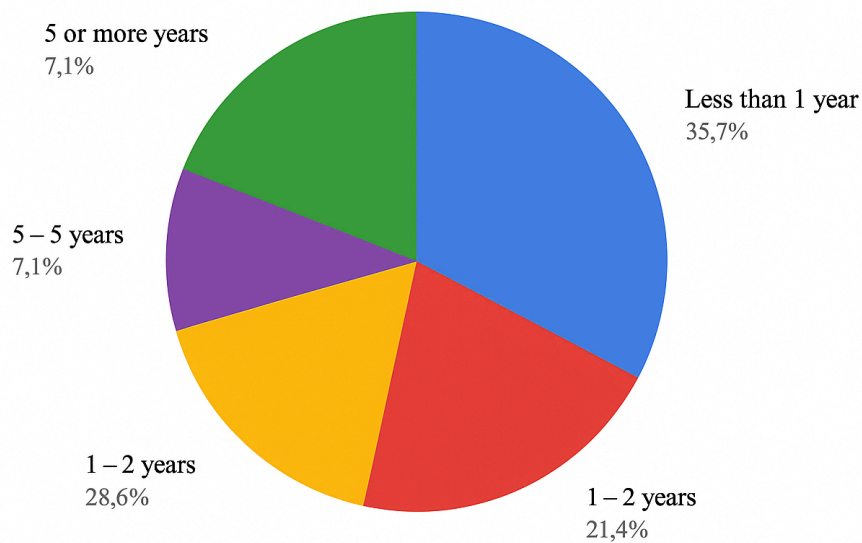
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Respondents' residency in Worcester.

This pie chart illustrates the proportion of survey participants who reported living in Worcester. The majority (80%) reside in Worcester, while 20% reported living elsewhere.

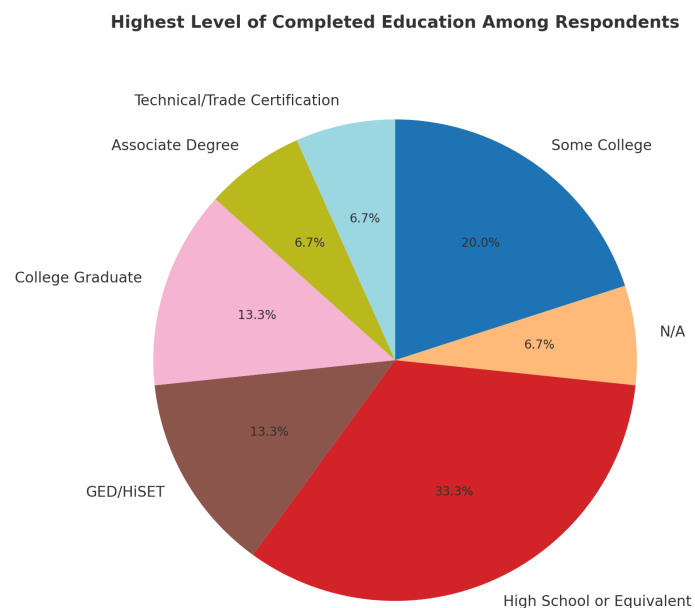
How long were you incarcerated for?



Duration of incarceration reported by respondents.

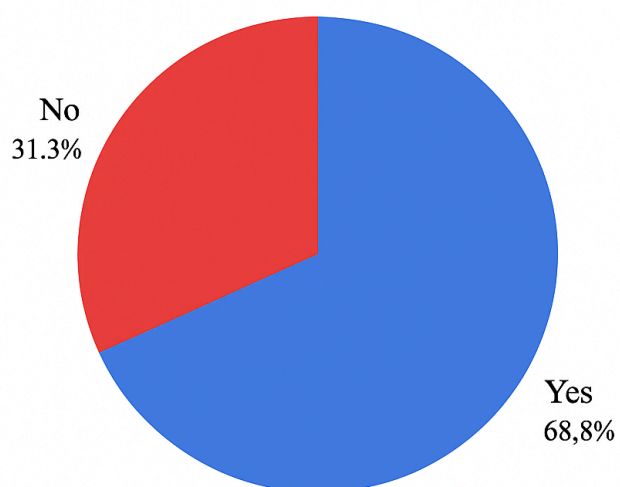
This pie chart illustrates the self-reported length of incarceration among participants. The majority reported serving less than one year (35.7%), followed by 1–2 years (28.6%), and 1–2 years again (21.4%, likely a labeling error). Smaller proportions reported being incarcerated for 5 years (7.1%) and five or more years (7.1%).

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The self-reported highest level of completed education among respondents is. This pie chart represents various educational attainment levels, categorized into college degrees and trade certifications. Responses indicate a diverse range of educational experiences.

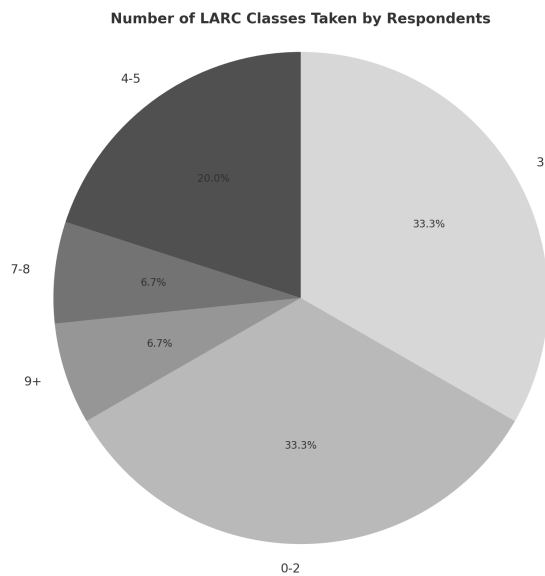
Have you taken a college course before enrolling in LARC?



Prior college course experience among LARC enrollees.

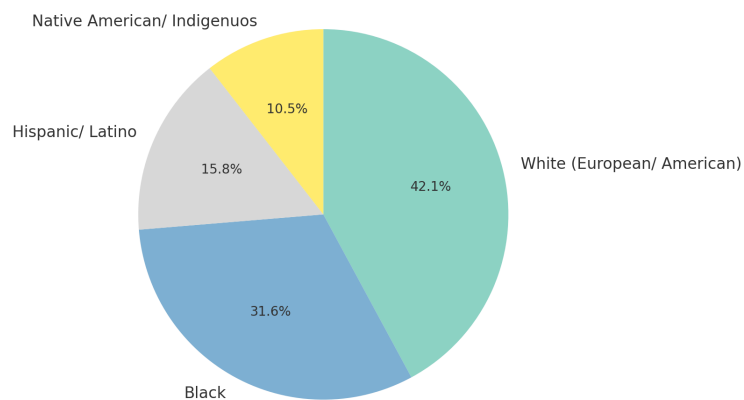
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This pie chart shows the percentage of respondents who had taken a college course before entering the LARC program. A majority (68.8%) indicated they had taken a college course before, while 31.3% reported no prior college coursework.



This pie chart illustrates the distribution of the number of LARC (Learning and Academic Resource Center) classes participants reported taking in their current enrollment. Responses were grouped into ranges for clarity (e.g., "0-2," "3," "4-5," etc.).

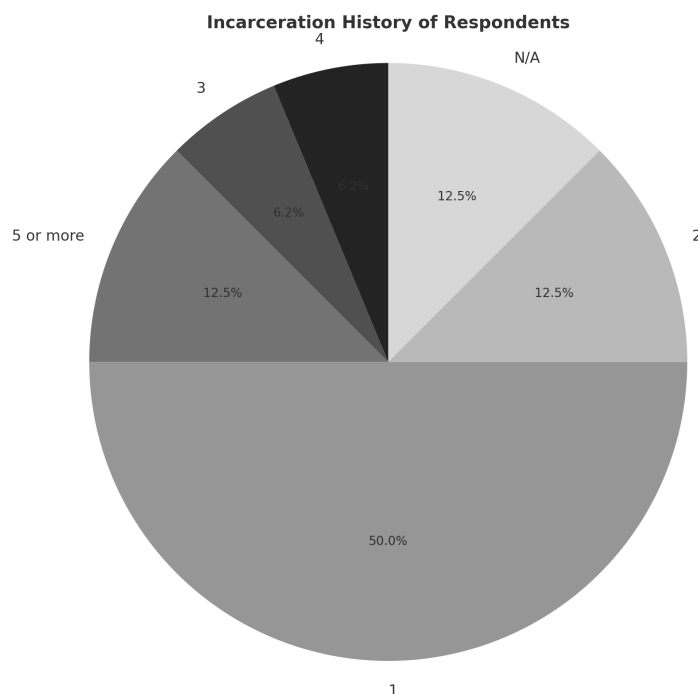
Race/Ethnicity of Respondents (Multiple Selections Allowed)



Self-identified race and ethnicity of respondents.

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This pie chart shows the racial and ethnic identities of participants. Respondents were allowed to select more than one category so that total percentages may exceed 100%. Categories include White (European/American), Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American/Indigenous.



Self-reported history of incarceration among respondents.

This pie chart displays the number of times participants reported being incarcerated. Responses were grouped into categories such as “1,” “2,” “3,” “4,” and “5 or more” to reflect the frequency of incarceration. Responses marked “N/A” indicate non-disclosure or non-applicability.

Of the 11 interviewees, 70% identified as white, 10% as Middle Eastern, and 20% did not share their ethnicity. 60% identified as female, 10% identified as male, 10% non-binary, and 20% chose not to answer. Of the staff I interviewed, I had multiple categories: Admin, Peer learning assistants, and teachers. Administrators were defined as people who handle the program's administrative process, such as registration and recruitment. Peer learning assistants are often students at Clark who act as a teacher's helper, and teachers are the professors who teach the course.

Procedure

Collecting my data started with reaching out to one of the co-directors of LARC, Shelly Tenenbaum, who then introduced me via email to all of the other LARC staff and professors. She told them who I was and what I was doing about my thesis. After she sent the email to professors, I followed up with a separate email to professors teaching in a specific module, asking permission to go into their classroom to speak and collect survey data. I planned the day I would go into the school around the end of their modules, so the participants had time to adjust and learn about the program if this was their first class. After I set up a specific day and time for me to go in, I gave my approved recruitment speech about my evaluation and handed out paper surveys for students to fill out. I sat outside the room with a bucket for the students to leave the classroom and ask me questions or drop off their complete survey. In addition to handing out the survey, I gave information about the participants being interviewed and the consent form. If students are interested in being interviewed, they can fill out the interview consent form, which also has students put their preferred method of contact to set up an interview. They could return the consent form with their survey to me if interested. After collecting the information about who would be interested in being interviewed, I reached out according to their preferred contact method, and we set up a time to conduct an interview using my pre-approved questions. While collecting data, I will also email LARC staff, including teachers, administration, and peer-learning assistants, asking if they would be interested in being interviewed. I will also send over the interview consent sheet so they can look at what the interview is for more clearly. Once I hear back from the staff, I will set up an interview in person or online with my pre-approved questions. However, when completing these procedures with my data, I had to be flexible and make many changes; for example, I could not interview participants due to the lack of response. I

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also had to cut off the number of interviews I was completing because the number of interviews and survey data was becoming too much. Data collection questions:

Data Type	Description	Rationale	Challenges/ Limitations	How did I inform my data analysis?
Interviews	I have conducted seven interviews, with more scheduled for the future. Each interview was audio recorded. I conducted surveys of both the staff and participants.	One-on-one interviews allowed me to ask questions about individuals' experiences with the program.	Some of the challenges I faced were finding times and places for individuals to meet for the interview. When interviewing participants specifically, it was challenging to overcome technology barriers.	All of these interviews helped me analyze and code how individuals felt about the program.
Anonymous surveys	I have received seven responses to my anonymous paper survey. I will be going into another module next month to collect more data.	Since it is difficult to find time for interviews, having options to have a survey would be beneficial. I can receive qualitative data about the program.	Challenges included reading handwriting and not having detailed answers to open-ended questions.	This informed my data analysis, so I added qualitative data and, specifically, more information from program participants.
Handwritten notes	During interviews, I also conducted handwritten notes	During interviews, I could write down ideas that weren't audio recorded, such as body language, exactly.	N/A	This would help me look behind the audio recordings of the interviews.

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Ensuring I asked the right questions when conducting my survey and interviews was crucial to this project's development and research goals. All of my questions related to my main research questions or goals were of interest to the program. After creating my first draft of survey questions, I sat down with the director of LARC, where we went over each question I was going to ask and edited them to make sure they aligned with my project and what the program was looking for. The survey questions were subject to a lot of change, including adding many questions that the program itself was interested in. For example, I was asked to add questions about employment and the impact of business class, as it is a part of the LARC program's mission statement to help individuals have opportunities. I also wanted to see if there was a correlation.

When it came to my interview questions, my initial idea was to have three different sets; however, when I submitted it to Clark's IRB, they had issues about having the other interview questions specifically because of how small the program is and how giving away interviews standing within the program can be to identify. After receiving the revisions from the Clark University IRB, I decided to make one interview question sheet that would apply to staff, administration, and student peer learning assistants. The questions I created to apply to all levels looked at individual experiences and how they would view and work within the program. I looked at material that interested me in the community and training/ onboarding ideas. The more interviews I completed, the more I fine-tuned the questions and how I asked them. There were some questions I would get rid of later in my interview, as there wasn't much being said about the question.

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Survey questions:

- Gender
- Age
- Race/ Ethnicity (check all that apply)
- Do you live in Worcester?
- If so, do you live in Main South?
- Are you employed?
- Do you own your own business?
- If you answered yes, did participation in LARC help you start or grow your business? If so, how?
- Does participation in LARC provide employment opportunities? Can you explain?
- What is your highest level of completed education?
- Have you taken a college course before enrolling in LARC?
- Did you have access to any educational opportunities while being incarcerated?
- If so, can you briefly describe them? Including current classes, how many LARC classes have you taken?
- Would you take another LARC course? Why?
- How did you hear about the LARC program?
- Why are you taking a course with LARC?
- If you do not have a college degree, are you interested in earning one?
- LARC classes will help create opportunities for me to succeed professionally.
- Has LARC created opportunities to be part of a community?
- What do you like the most about LARC?

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- What do you like the least about LARC?
- Do you have any recommendations for LARC?
- How would you describe LARC to a friend? Please list 1-3 favorite LARC classes.
- Please list additional classes you would like to see offered in LARC.
- Do you like the 7-week model?
- Would you like to see a 14-week model?
- Do you like the pass/fail model?
- Would you like to be assigned letter grades for your courses?
- How long were you incarcerated for?
- How many times have you been incarcerated?
- Please enter any further thoughts or questions you have below.

Interview Questions:

Demographics:

- Ethnicity
- Gender

Questions:

- How would you describe the LARC program?
- How long have you been involved in LARC?
- What were your initial thoughts about this program? Did they change during your experience?
- How would you describe the people who are a part of the program and the administration?
- Do you feel supported in your role
- Has the program impacted you professionally, socially, or academically? Can you elaborate?

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- Has this program made a difference in how you view specific issues?
- What was your biggest takeaway from the program? Is there something that you would like everyone to know?
- Was there any specific training you had to undergo to participate in the program?
- How does grading take place?
- Was this your first time working with formerly incarcerated individuals?
What have you done before?
How has this been similar or different from your past experiences?
- What are your positive and negative experiences with LARC?
- Should LARC move towards offering certificates and/or a degree?
- What is the main population that LARC targets?
 - o Why this population?
 - o Why would these individuals benefit from this program?
 - o Why must participants have a GED or high school diploma?
 - o Why are classes non-matriculating Do you agree with this?
 - o How do you conduct outreach to have participants?
What is the registration process like?
- How do you decide what teachers and classes to hold during semesters?
 - o Is there any specific training that teachers go through
 - o How do you decide what PLA's to have?
 - o What Is the training process for the PLAS?
- How does the funding part of LARC work?
- What is the structure of LARC?

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- How do you see this program impacting your students? Can you see a difference?
- o Do you also see a difference in teachers and peer learning assistants?

Data Analysis

Research questions:

- How does Clark's Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens program impact its participants?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of Clark's Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens?
- What improvements can be made to LARC by the current staff?
 - ◆ What improvements can be made to the program to make it more beneficial for students?
 - ◆ What improvements can be made to the program to make it more beneficial for the Staff?

Coding

The coding and data analysis of my project took place over many weeks. As I received the information, I began to code it. When I first did my data analysis, I did not understand or find themes; instead, I found categories. I was also so used to collecting data and doing thematic analysis that learning to analyze data differently was challenging. I struggled with the sheer amount of data I received throughout this process and being able to code all of it thoroughly, giving each piece of information the same amount of attention. It was also a process of figuring out how to analyze data at multiple levels of information that I was recording, for example, coding staff's thoughts versus coding participants' ideas. I spent a lot of time reading transcripts and answers and re-reading them.

I created a codebook of over 400 words for my survey, which I turned into categories. I then, in a separate code book, coded my interviews. After making the interview categories, I

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compared the categories of my ideas and turned them into themes. I struggled a lot with the thought that my unit of analysis (e.g., code) was too small, but the most significant help throughout my coding journey was having a frequency count for repeated thoughts or notes. After printing my codes, I organized them into categories and themes. I grouped similar categories; for example, codes such as grants, money, funding, and start-up funds were all grouped to create a category. I then grouped those findings into a theme of structural barriers because of how they all develop structural barriers and impact the program's structure.

I also used discourse analysis for my interviews, a qualitative research method for analyzing data in a social context, how language is engaged within the context, and how it all correlates. I would also look over all of my data multiple times and do more than one data analysis on a specific piece of transcript. After doing discourse analysis, I wrote out everything and every piece of information and code. I then formed categories that then turned into themes.

My biggest struggles were analyzing and coding survey and interview data from different perspectives and learning how to combine them. With the survey, I would analyze and code question by question, not by the person who responded.

Analysis as Sense-Making

Making sense of the information includes looking at everything as a whole. It can be challenging to look at everything from everyone's point of view. For example, analyzing teachers versus administration versus participants' perspectives. This analysis has many intricate parts; it is essential to look at them separately and collectively. There may be different coding that takes place between teachers and students. However, when coding and analyzing, I also have to look at it from a larger-scale view. I must compare and combine the different ideas and viewpoints to

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make sense of the analysis. When making sense of everything, I must look at the responses compared to real-world experiences and how the codes impact components outside and inside the program. How I make sense of the data changed significantly throughout my data analysis process. It took a lot of me going back and forth and doing trials to understand what people were saying and what people meant by what they were saying. I had a lot of conversations with different people about ideas that were spoken about in my surveys and what they took away from them. I also looked at what I thought people were saying and looked at it from multiple points of view, which was crucial.

I also found my experience with staff and participants when collecting information and communicating with each other interesting, and I journaled about it. The staff I contacted and interviewed were always super responsive and understanding. They were some of the sweetest people who spoke highly of the program's mission and community. Most people wanted to be interviewed and participate in this evaluation. Handing out the survey to the participants was a great experience, and all the students were some of the kindest and most welcoming people I have ever met. They were so interested in the project and what I was doing that they actively asked questions about the program evaluation and Clark in general. When I left the room after handing out the survey to wait outside, I could hear the students having an in-depth conversation about each question and what they thought about it. Their conversations were so rich, and because of their discussions, it took them about 30/35 minutes to complete the survey, when it could have been completed in 15 minutes.

Turns:

As a part of our senior year's fall and spring semesters, we give a "turn". In the first semester of the fall, a turn was when each of us brought in a one-sheet write-up of a dilemma we

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were struggling with in the early stages of our project; our dilemma could involve anything from data collection, research questions, or theory questions. We would then get feedback from everyone in the class about what they thought about our dilemma and the assumptions they found embedded in the problem. In the second semester of our senior year, we had the choice to either take on a dilemma like last semester or bring in a piece of our research to evaluate. I chose to bring in a piece of survey data that I was struggling to understand and analyze. I truly enjoyed having a turn each semester because I could work through issues I was stuck on with my project. Hearing everyone's point of view helped shape my project and gave me great advice and ideas in creating new and lasting changes to my project. Each turn and reflection helped and changed ideas in my thesis that benefited it in the long run.

My Turn #1

For my turn, I brought up an issue I have been struggling with in my research: what does it mean to have meaningful connections about research? Is it possible to form meaningful connections through an anonymous survey? I brought up these questions because I have been having a dilemma about what it means to be a researcher in a space I have previously not been involved with. This idea stems from the issue of wanting to avoid making participants feel used and that my research would not benefit them. Even though it could help them, I want to ensure that I am the best researcher and person. When I brought this dilemma to the class, I received fantastic feedback and new ideas I would want to implement or think about more.

One of my favorite ideas that was brought up was including participants in the meeting I would have with LARC to open the floor to have conversations with all levels, which could be super beneficial in creating a sense of community and allowing all voices to be heard. Since I have been active in communicating with the LARC directors and seeing what they are looking

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for in terms of research and how it could now be very beneficial in creating these same spaces with LARC participants, I also wonder what it would look like in terms of the IRB and if I would have to let the IRB, know if I was more active in participating with the participants of the program. I also enjoyed all of the ideas of going and observing a class to let people know who I am and introduce myself, while also getting hands-on experiences with what I am researching. I listened to students to see what they would be interested in, how they would want to be part of the research, and what they would expect me to do about researching a community they are a part of. While also increasing opportunities for students to participate in the research and conversation. Also, I will focus on embracing my outsider positionality and being something that can be helpful.

It was interesting to hear the conversation about being an outsider and what that means concerning research. Listening to people's opinions about how being an outsider can be good and isn't inherently bad was also interesting. Someone also pointed out what being an outsider means, because I work closely with the directors. This got me thinking about my relationship with the directors and how I do, in some aspects, have an insider point of view, especially in interviewing Clark staff who are a part of this program, with whom I have also had previous relationships. Also, bringing in the question of what the participants are looking for and that they may prefer someone as an outsider was vital for me to hear. It also examines what it means to be a researcher and how relationships affect research and data collection.

Something that I picked up from this discussion that I would need to do and focus on is journaling and challenging what it means for me to be an outsider and what that would look like. I also need to look at what community and connection mean to me and what is essential, specifically to me, in terms of research and connections. Would having a strong connection with

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this site impact my research? What would that look like? I also need to ask participants and include them in what I am to them and what they want me to be.

My Turn #2

During my second turn for data analysis, I brought in a couple of survey questions, including "Does participation in LARC provide employment opportunities? Can you explain?" "How would you describe LARC to a friend?" and "What do you like the least about LARC?" I asked a couple of questions and asked for help coding the responses to these questions. The questions I asked the class included. How do you analyze data that combines quantitative and qualitative data (like questions that repeat yes/no multiple times but also ask for an explanation), and how do you code that? Moreover, how do you present that/write about that? By asking these questions, we discussed what it means to be employed and how to write about our findings.

The responses from my turn were constructive as they gave me multiple perspectives on my data and how to analyze it. One idea I got through my turn was looking at specific questions from a person's point of view to see how they defined employment and how the questions can differ from person to person. Having multiple people look at my data was helpful, and it made me talk to many other people in my cohort about how to get involved and look at data. The more people look at data, the more ideas there are, and the more understanding there is to help create themes in categories that align with multiple perspectives. Having numerous perspectives gave me many more ideas about what participants may have met and when. Writing also made me look at my positionality and my perspectives. This affects how I analyze data and how my perspectives and positionality can impact findings, which helps me take a step back from that and look at all of my findings and data from a different point of view.

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Conversations with people who gave me ideas about how to incorporate multiple ideas into survey and interview data helped set the basis for the rest of my data analysis. Not only was it good to hear various perspectives, but I could also speak out loud and work through ideas that I was grappling with throughout my data analysis. For example, the group I was working with worked into my conceptual framework, examined what it means to be employed, and defined it myself, so going forward, I know what to look for. The feedback I received from my turn included doing a frequency count on quantitative feedback, for example, counting the yes, no, and maybes, and then looking at the other responses separately from the qualitative data. One super interesting thought that got brought up in my group was what nothing or no means about my questions, and how do you interpret and write about that? Ideas followed, such as looking at the language around the nothing and using context and cultural models to understand the importance of words.

Findings

After conducting my research and analyzing it using discourse analysis, coding, and thematic analysis, I came up with findings. Three main themes from my research include LARC's positive effect on all participants and structural and systemic barriers. Through my research, it is clear that LARC has positively impacted every single level of participants in the program; structural barriers also affect the program, specifically how the program is run and the structure of classes and modules. Lastly, there was a theme of systemic obstacles, which can either be barriers that impact LARC participants or that are impacted by LARC participants.

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LARC's positive effect on all participants

My most significant finding throughout every piece of data is the program's impact on people (participants and staff) who spoke about the program. As there are always areas for improvement, it is also essential to highlight the exceptional work this program is starting to create. The way participants and staff spoke about the program made it obvious there was a lot of love and support throughout every level of the program. There is also a high retention rate of staff and participants who will retake the classes and continue their experiences with the program. Every survey response I received when asked if the students would take another course at LARC all said yes. Students spoke about continuing to take classes through LARC because of its opportunity to learn and access. When I walked into the room to collect data, it was clear how many communities and friendships I saw being formed, students were talking about their weekends, and asking each other questions. They were all talking about their Harry Potter house and guessing which house everyone is a part of. In these classrooms, when I would also leave the room, I would hear people have meaningful discussions about my surveys.

Impact on Participants

Through my research, it has been clear that LARC has a positive impact. One of the participants stated I am taking a course with LARC to help myself become a better person." (Survey, 2025) Each person I have interviewed and gotten data from has complimented the program and the positive impacts it is making on not only the participants but themselves as well. This is also a testament to the program's impact on transformative education and how education can positively impact individuals. "Nobody is judged. Everybody is treated fairly" (survey, 2025), and "The teachers and the students are cool" (Survey, 2025). They speak about

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the course and how it impacted them professionally and socially. The program must create change in an environment where students are comfortable. The transformative power of education connects to how education can, in turn, help individuals create change within their own lives and think critically.

The participants actively discuss how the program affected them socially and academically, including why they continue to take courses. Many participants spoke about the positive opportunities that were created and that they were actively involved in. One participant stated, "Yes, taking the LARC Course, I have been exposed to great opportunities, networking, and a plethora of resources." (Survey, 2025) LARC as a program has continued to grow, and in turn, it allows more opportunities for participants. When asked if they would continue to take courses through LARC, every response was a yes, showing the program's positive impact and how its retention rate continues to grow. It also discusses how participants value access to free education and college credit. It is a good stepping stone for students to get re-involved in education in an accessible way. "Yes, they are free. I earned college credit and would like to further my higher education in science. I did not finish college the first time." (Survey, 2025) A community within participants and a safe space for participants create a learning environment where students want to continue their learning and work with one another in multiple classes.

When staff spoke about the program participants, they spoke highly about the participants and the impact the program had on them. Interviewee 1 said, "The participants are some of the kindest humans I have ever met, (Interview, 1, 2025). Another staff member said, "The students are extremely hardworking and committed to their education." (Interview, 9, 2025). The students who are a part of the program have many people who speak very highly of them. Specifically, the high praise that staff give students shows how the program has a community and how staff

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truly enjoy working with this demographic. Staff member number 2 said, "They are just wonderful students." and "My sense is people are very committed, and we hope our students are getting a lot out of it, which I think they are. But we are just getting an incredible amount." (Interview, 2, 2025). A community within a classroom creates lasting change and positive experiences that can lead individuals to be more active and engaged.

Impact on Staff

Not only are the participants speaking positively about this experience and program, but so are the staff. When staff were asked if they felt supported, 100% said they were. "100% supported... so when I am driving back, and it might be 10:00, and I am on the Mass Pike, and I am going to get a call from Shelly asking how the class went. You know, so you feel supported." Interviewee 9 (Interview, 9, 2025). Staff also spoke about a community within each other and how they feel supported within their roles. When asked if they feel supported in their roles, staff member number 7 said, "I do... there are times where I am like, I wish I could do more." (Interview, 7, 2025) in supporting other staff with more responsibility.

One of the questions I asked staff was if this program impacted the way they viewed specific issues. Every staff member responded that it did impact their views, whether it made them more set in their ideals or helped them realize other impacts. Staff member number 2 said, "It made me much more sensitive." They also said, "It made me much more aware of how much reform needs to be done in this country regarding prison and justice systems." (Interview, 2, 2025) Having real-world experience with a specific population can impact someone's view on particular issues. Staff member number 7 also spoke about how working at LARC made them change their point of view and understanding of many real world issues." like coming back into

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society after being incarcerated has been like, really changed my point of view, cause its like stuff you don't think about, like the phone and computer stuff." (Interview, 7, 2025) We do not realize that many situations impact people and that having different points of view can impact society.

The transformative learning theory also shows up in the responses from staff. They speak about how this program impacted them, their understanding of specific barriers, and the incarceration system. As adults, the staff also learned from their students and adjusted their thinking based on conversations and new experiences they were learning about.

Community

There is a strong sense of community within LARC, not only among its staff but also among its participants. This community allows students to continue returning and engaging in educational opportunities that help them academically and socially. When participants were asked if LARC created opportunities to be a part of a community, 43.8% said they strongly agree, 31.3% stated that they agree, and 25% said no impact (Survey, 2025). One important thing to consider when speaking about the 25% that said no impact is how an individual may choose to define community. Everyone has a different understanding of what community is. There may also be individuals who do not want a community and would prefer to be by themselves. When asked about LARC's community, and throughout the survey, there were overwhelmingly positive responses about staff and other students. For example, one participant said "professors and facilitators that teach the courses are always great. The courses they offer are always exciting and helpful"(Survey, 2025), another student said "How it creates friends and builds community creating opportunities." (Survey, 2025), a different student said "The teachers and the students

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are real cool” (Survey, 2025), and another student said “Classmates, professors, SHELLY” (Survey, 2025). These are just some of the participants' quotes about LARC's community. Students have formed communities not only within the classes but outside the classes as well. One of the students said they like LARC because of “How it creates friends and builds community, creating opportunities.”(Survey, 2025) Staff even spoke about how they would see groups of students hanging out around campus and how they formed friendships and relationships in and outside of the classroom.

Each individual has a different definition of community. Some may believe that community involves making friends, others think it requires just being in the same environment, and others believe it is being in a classroom. Many individuals may define it as being welcomed to an environment or enjoying the teachers and students. Individuals may also speak about how having a community means having resources and opportunities, being listened to, and having academic interests that align with them.

Community within the staff

Staff spoke openly about the community's impact on participants, how it affects retention, and how they see it take place. One of the biggest ideas that got repeated in my interviews with staff was the end-of-year celebration. During this end-of-year celebration, everyone got together and watched a performance by the students of what they had spent the entire semester working on. Staff spoke about the impact and how they saw firsthand everyone in the program showing up and supporting each other's achievements. A guitar performance and a student spoke about their work in all the different classes. This was also an important event because it discussed the value of including and showing off students' incredible work, which affects their experiences.

Structural barriers

One of my most significant findings was the impact of structural barriers throughout the program. Its structure was one of the program's most important barriers and areas for improvement. Structural barriers relate to how systems are in place in large, specific settings, such as classes. Therefore, for a program to be successful, it needs to have strong structural integrity that can sustain and continue to grow throughout challenges and obstacles.

Class Structure and Length

One of the most significant patterns I saw throughout the interviews and survey data was the desire to change the class structure and length. There were mixed reviews when I spoke to teachers and administration about the 7-week vs. 14-week model. Many students wished they had more time in a class or had that class again in the next module. When participants were asked if they liked a 7-week model, 75% answered yes; however, when asked if they wanted to see a 14-week model, 68.8% said yes, 6.3% said maybe, and 25% said no (Survey, 2025). 75% of participants liked the 7-week model, and 68.8% wanted a 14-week model (Survey, 2025). Many staff thought that students would like something other than the 14-week model. One thing that would be a barrier to the 14-week model is that many professors are volunteers and may need more time to give to the 14-week model. However, every single professor who has taught at large has requested to return and teach another course. It could be beneficial if there were an option for students, for example, having one class be 14 weeks and the other be 7 weeks, so students have more options.

Another structural LARC issue that was brought up was being assigned letter grades instead of only being allowed pass-fail. Every participant who has taken my survey is interested

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in receiving a college degree; letter grades on a transcript can be crucial when students apply to other colleges or transfer credits. As Clark undergraduate students, we can choose whether to take a course pass/ fail or get a letter grade. The LARC students would benefit from having that same option. When participants were asked if they liked the pass-fail model, 81.3% (Survey, 2025) said yes; when asked if they wanted a letter grade for a course, 31.3% said yes, 56.3% said no, and 12.6% said they didn't care. This means that 81.3% of participants liked the pass-fail model. In most of Clark's other classes, students have an option to choose whether they want to take the course pass or fail., Having options can always be beneficial for individuals.

When students were asked if they were interested in a degree, 100% of respondents said they wanted a degree in the future or were working towards a degree themselves. When asked if they had any recommendations for LARC, responders suggested that having a program for a degree or even a certificate could be extremely enticing and helpful.

Environmental Barriers:

There are also many environmental structural barriers within LARC. Specifically, regarding the time the class takes place, when asked if there were anything participants would change about Clark, some of the responses included frustration with the time of the class: "the busses stop running at or before the classes end." and "Night classes." and "no cure, maybe day classes, little more help for people with learning disabilities." (Survey, 2025) The Worcester bus stops running around 8:30 pm, 30 minutes before the LARC classes end. As many of the participants are Worcester natives, it makes sense that the buses may impact many students, as they rely on them for transportation. Many students may struggle with night classes as they may also work the entire day. Some students also brought up the idea that the placement of the classes

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can be a barrier. One student said that one of the barriers to coming to LARC is "climbing those stairs" (Survey, 2025), so even where the class is may impact an individual.

Attendance/ participation

One thing always comes up throughout the interviews, specifically with adults: a lack of attendance or attendance issues. Within LARC, structures in place impact the attendance and overall well-being of the program. According to one staff member, the most significant issues they face in this program are attendance and participation in classes. The program policy is that if you miss more than two classes, you will automatically be withdrawn from the program. As the program is only 7 weeks, missing 2 weeks of classes can be very difficult, as much material is covered within the 3-hour classes once a week. Almost all of the staff I interviewed said that attendance was difficult. Still, they try to be understanding as people have a lot going on in their own lives, such as being in the winter semester, and there is often a lot of sickness. Still, the maximum two absences can make it too difficult for staff and participants. The program is flexible and accommodates many different needs. Staff tend to have to stick to the two-absence rule, but even if you have two absences and are withdrawn from class credit, you can still attend and not receive credit.

Training and screening

In my interviews with LARC staff and administration, I learned much about their experiences working with formerly incarcerated individuals. In many cases, this program was their first opportunity to get involved. In getting involved with the program, the only thing staff had to do was reach out to one of the directors, or the directors, reaching out to a specific person

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to be a part of the program. Other than that, the onboarding process consisted of conversing with one of the staff members and being "vibe-checked." After committing to a position within the program, there may be one or two conversations with the admin, but nothing else, including no training.

In many of the interviews I held with staff about their onboarding experiences and training, they expressed how they understood the program. However, quick training could be beneficial or just a basis for understanding. Many even said it would be helpful to have skills if needed; they would like sensitivity and de-escalation training, which could be extremely helpful. Staff member number 1 said, "Right, it's if something gets heated; it is de-escalation skills, right? So I do not know that special training would be necessary; I think some sensitivity to the population might be nice." Having sensitivity training can be helpful, and it can also inform the population that the staff is working with. Staff member number 7 said, "A foundational understanding of where people are and the common issues people face will make it smoother." (Interview, 7, 2025) Staff member number 8 stated, "Like language training and a basic understanding of the carceral system." (Interview, 8, 2025) As many staff members might not be aware of the logistics within the carceral system, even having a basic understanding of it can help staff navigate a new teaching environment. Staff member number 3 stated, "People come to us with specific kinds of trauma that we should be aware of so that we are cautious in how we approach certain topics." (Interview, 3, 2025) to speak about how important language is when engaging with specific communities.

Some even stated that they might not want formal training, but just a conversation between staff about their experiences and ideas that worked and did not work within their positions. Staff member number 2 said, "Maybe a group of us together and talk about this is what

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you can expect. I got informal feedback from a different teacher, but I think that would be helpful. I mean, it is like very different kinds of things." (Interview, 2, 2025) Capitalizing on the community that LARC already has among its staff is extremely helpful in communicating and supporting each other.

Difficult Dialogue

Throughout my research, a theme that kept coming up was that assumptions were being made about what students wanted. There was a theme that staff would make assumptions about what a student wished to do outside the program without conversing with the students. For example, in one of my questions, I asked the students if they wanted to see a 14-week model instead of a 7-week model. Most of the responses I got were that students wanted to have that 14-week model. However, the concern around the staff was that participants would not want a 14-week module. No staff member said they would be interested in a different class module. For example, staff member number one stated, "Some students might find it easier to dedicate 7 weeks rather than the whole 14". (Interview, 1, 2025) Staff member number 10 said, "I'm not sure. Would I think some students would love it? I think there have been some courses here students have wished this was longer... I have students maybe you know, they have responsibilities," (Interview, 10, 2025) even the language that is taking place within these interviews such as "I am not sure" or "maybe" it seems as if there may be a lack of communication and discussion. I also noticed this regarding other ideas, such as whether students want to receive grades, pass or fail classes, or how they feel about matriculating classes. Staff often made broad assumptions about what students were looking for or wanted.

Funding

In 2022, LARC got its start-up and seed money through Clark University. After receiving the start-up fund, LARC was able to create the program and start having professors and classes; as the money ran out, LARC became completely reliant on grants to receive any type of funding. Mostly, the staff and professors do the work at LARC voluntarily. This can create barriers to work and the amount of effort a professor can put in. Staff member 8 stated, "I feel like the only thing that would hold people or the program back is the amount of staff they have, and I also know that the professors who teach aren't paid." (Interview, 8, 2025) Staff member number 8 also stated that money is that "I feel like... that everyone could benefit from more money. But I feel like the program is, you can kind of tell, is just starting." (Interview, 7, 2025) Relying on grants to receive funding is a lot of work and impacts the program and the amount of work an individual can put in.

When the administration realized students struggled to complete work because they couldn't access a computer, they applied for a grant. The grant now allows students to receive one laptop for each student who passes and completes one class. Staff member number 6 spoke about how giving laptops was "no strings attached," meaning as long as you can complete the classes, you can have the opportunity to receive resources. LARC also received more grants, according to staff member number 6: "Anyone who completes three classes will get \$1000, and we now have our second-semester funds for paid internships." (Interview, 6, 2025) Providing resources and money to participants is beneficial as it can help remove some barriers. The LARC program also had a guitar class where they could get donated guitars to use. So, the biggest thing that LARC relies on is grants, as they need money to function.

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Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers are inevitable as they may be outside variables that either impact the program or are impacted by the program. Systemic barriers affect LARC as a program.

Systematic barriers include policies and stigma that might impact LARC and its participants.

These findings also look at how LARC tackles these systemic barriers and obstacles concerning LARC, while others may be on a bigger scale.

Effect on employment and internships

One of the biggest draws to joining the LARC program is its effect on the job market and the ability to get a degree. One of the most significant barriers for formerly incarcerated individuals is that they may struggle to find employment. When participants were asked if LARC provided opportunities to succeed professionally, strongly agreed, 37.5% said they agreed, and 12.5% said there was no impact. For the most part, it was clear how the participants saw the impact or potential impact that LARC has on creating employment opportunities for its students. LARC has held resume workshops, set students up with internships, and helped students connect with professors to do studies or any other independent work. LARC has also elaborated on its effect on creating new ideas for businesses or employment enhancement. Many students spoke about their experience with these opportunities and resources made available for them: "Absolutely. They offer internships that are paid. They hold writer workshops where they help students put together resumes. Their courses teach us general life skills that help us maneuver the world."

(Survey, 2025)

One finding in my survey responses is the definition of employment. Some participants defined employment as having a job, while others described it as having a job and not an internship. For example, "Yes, through internships" and "No, but they provide

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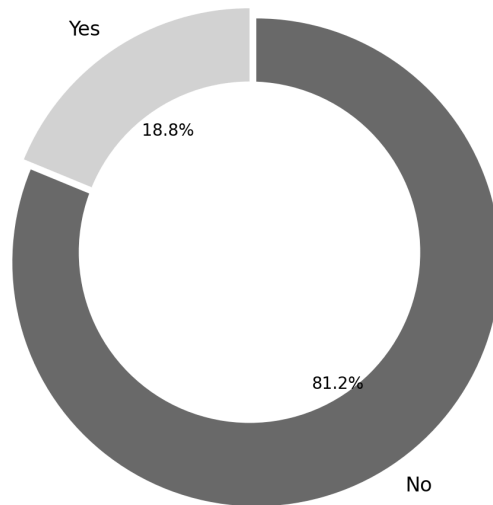
internships"(Survey, 2025). This finding was important because it spoke about what people think of employment and what may qualify as that.

Even if they did not directly set individuals up with employment opportunities, many participants spoke about how it affected them personally to help them with employment. For example, when asked if LARC helped with employment, one student said, "No, but some of the courses can get you into the mindset of becoming your boss "(Survey, 2025), which relates to the physical components LARC impacts and the mental support the program provides.

An article published by the Worcester Telegram & Gazette said, "Clark University program helps recently incarcerated people launch careers" (Collings, 2025). I followed a student who participated in the Clark program LARC; he took classes such as computer science, venture start, and financial literacy, which he said helped set him up for running his own business. Another student spoke about how he has taken multiple entrepreneurship courses through the program and runs many small businesses; the student said, "The courses offer valuable life skills to help anyone, regardless of background, succeed in life" (Collings, 2025). Many of the entrepreneurs who were students at LARC helped each other and worked together to help their businesses. One student created a barber shop, and another set up a bookshelf with children's books so kids could read. LARC creates a class that can help support students and allows students to develop meaningful connections with staff and other administrators.

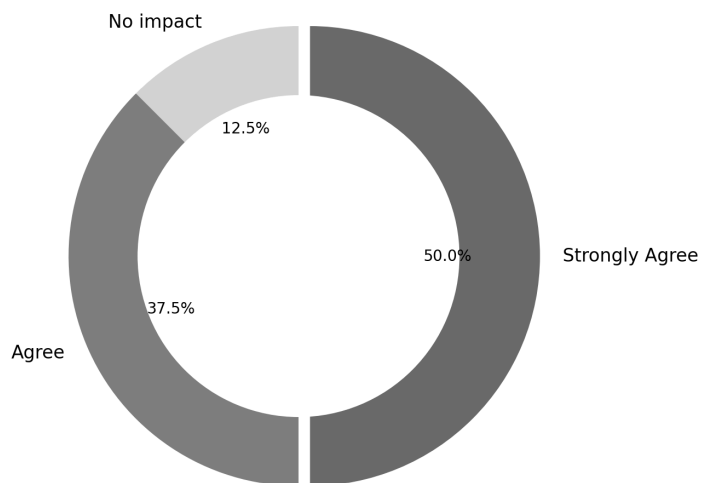
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Figure 1
Percentage of participants who own their own business



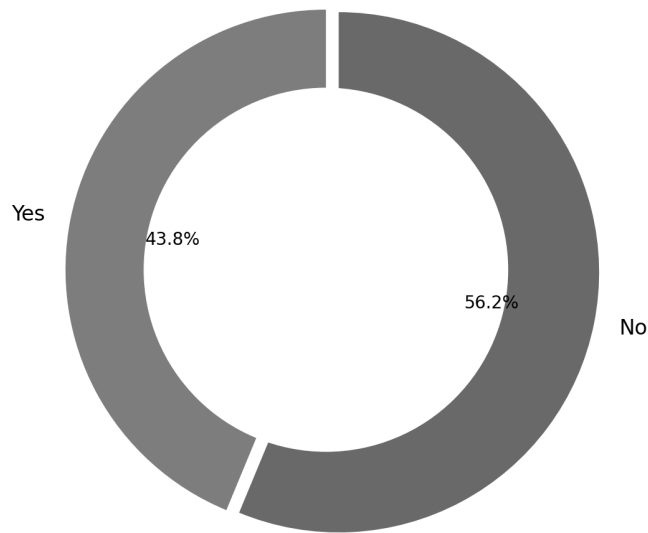
This figure displays the distribution of responses to the question, “Do you own your own business?” Most participants (81.3%) reported that they do not, while 18.8% reported that they do.

Figure 2
Perceived impact of LARC classes on professional success



This figure presents participants’ responses to the statement “LARC classes will help create opportunities for me to succeed professionally.” Half of the participants (50.0%) strongly agreed, 37.5% agreed, and 12.5% reported no impact.

Figure 3
Employment status of participants



This figure illustrates responses to the question “Are you employed?” Over half of the participants (56.3%) reported that they are not employed, while 43.8% indicated they are employed.

Clark vs. LARC

One of the most significant systemic barriers I found when conducting my research is Clark's relationship with LARC. The program began when the current directors, Shelly Tenenbaum, John Dobson, and Jen Plante, entered the idea into a start-up fund that staff could apply to; they ended up winning the money and started the program. Receiving the prize money allowed the program to begin, and seed money and other resources were given to them. They allowed the program access to many campus facilities, including classrooms, the ITS help desk (technology help), and the registrar's office. In addition to having campus facilities, they have access to other resources, including a one-card that allows access to buildings such as the library and the school gym. The biggest thing about this program is waiving students' tuition and allowing participants to receive free college class credits.

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Although Clark University has made substantial contributions to LARC's program, policies and barriers adversely affect it. Clark has made it extremely difficult to register students for classes. The university has been known to put holds on people's accounts for not completing training or having emergency contacts. Staff member number 10 stated, "They were putting holds on our student's accounts because they were not, they had not completed that inclusive training you have to complete... not talking about a bunch of 18-year-olds that need to know how to use alcohol" (Interview, 10, 2025) the students who participate in LARC are primarily adults who do not need the same training that other undergraduate students might need. Staff member number 10 also stated, "you know these policies that are in place, they just do not always fit with a program like this." (Interview, 10, 2025) Even though some of the policies that Clark has in place may benefit undergraduates, LARC has an entirely different demographic, so it would make sense that there would be at least a different type of policy that would apply specifically to the program. Clarks admin has also made it increasingly difficult for participants of LARC to get involved and be a part of the Clarks community; Staff member number 7 shared a story about how a professor wanted a student to help PLA (peer learning assistant) in a class, and the university would not allow it, "(admin) tried getting one of the LARC students to be a PLA in our class this year and like admin, had fake rules, essentially about why this person could not be a PLA," (Interview, 7, 2025) these policies that stopped students from being a part of the program impacted the students and power that the student could have in that classroom, that could share multiple perspectives.

Clark faces numerous challenges that impact the implementation of the LARC program; one major issue revolves around technology and Clark's relationship with technology. Students often face difficulty completing school work, having access to emails, or registering for classes.

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A persistent problem that students often face is issues with two-factor authentication. Staff member number 9 noted, "Sometimes you think you would be emailing a student, but they could not access their Clark email." (Interview, 9, 2025) This creates barriers to connecting with students. Clark University makes connecting to any of its servers extremely complicated. So many students cannot connect with staff members outside of class because they can not figure out how to get access to online programs. Staff member nine also shared a story about a student who did not have access to the phone; they stated, "How are you supposed to do two-factor authentication to get on your email?" It is possible but difficult to get around the two-factor authentication. However, it is incredibly tedious; staff member 10 stated, "He had no phone. He could not do multifactor. It took me a whole semester to get him what is called a FOB, which the IT has". (Interview, 10, 2025) Two-factor authentication policies create complex barriers that the University of Clark does not consider, impacting a student's ability to succeed. Staff member number 10 spoke about how even any type of use of technology can create barriers, "Uploading a photo for an ID, even uploading the high school diploma, can be roadblocks for them.", they also spoke about how there are many students who have never touch a specific electronic device " "we have realized how we have students who have never touched a keyboard in their, whole life they were inside (prison)"(Interview, 10, 2025) . Clark also is known to put holds on people's accounts for not following their policies, "The third is to entire an emergency contact because nobody can do anything with an emergency contact, so they put a hold on your account."

I found it intriguing to hear my classmate's opinions on LARC during my research. I was surprised to discover that many undergraduate students at Clark were unaware of what LARC is. Staff member 7 stated that when they learned about this program, they thought, "Why have I never heard of this before?"(Interview, 7, 2025). Also spoke about their experience within the

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program and how Clark University admin talked about this program: "A big celebration dinner, whatever, and here was like all these like admin people there and like Fithian was there and like the provost was there, and I was like never seen you guys come to a LARC thing before, and they were talking about how important this program is,... I was just like, but nobody knows about it, and you do not talk about it as if it is like the new sustainability program". (Interview, 7, 2025)

The idea that the admin is only interested in one part of the program is something that many others have also brought up. Also, the idea that no one knows this program has been a big topic. I have shared information about this program with numerous individuals, and many have expressed interest in getting involved. Ideas like this and similar projects would likely benefit from more discussions in undergraduate environments.

Praxis Project

One of the most significant impacts of doing research is creating a plan for how you will use said research. As a part of praxis, one of the main components is taking action with your research. In my case, I decided to work with LARC and give back my data effectively, including real and sustainable actions that would last. Not only did I want to include recommendations in my action plan for staff, but I also wanted to include students. I decided to do a presentation and discussion of my research findings. I created a slide show and lesson plan to hold an effective conversation. I went back and forth when deciding what action I wanted to take. Because of my close relationship with the site and the fact that the site asked me to do an evaluation, it made sense for me to do an assessment, get recommendations, and give them back. However, I wanted to do that sustainably, where both staff and participants would be a part of the recommendations and the discussion, rather than me telling them what to do. I want to ensure the best

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recommendations and receive as much feedback as possible. I will postpone my presentation after submitting my thesis and completing all the revisions and feedback to ensure I have not missed any crucial factors. So over the summer or early next fall, I plan on finishing the action part of my recommendations.

Recommendations:

I will be contributing easy-to-implement, sustainable recommendations to the program. Some of my most significant recommendations will impact the structure of LARC, the program, and the classes.

Recommendations that will impact students:

Regarding class structure, specifically for pass/ fail or a letter grade, I recommend giving students an option on how they choose to take a course. Some students want a grade option because it helps with credits when transferring to other institutions. I recommend having one class, a module, or a semester that would be a complete 14-week module to see if it is popular. I recommend having other courses that are shorter and using the 7-week model. It could also be beneficial to implement a course that has two parts but is part of two different modules. Therefore, individuals who want to continue the course will have the opportunity to do so, having more support for those with learning disabilities, and perhaps getting involved with student accessibility services to help students who need extra support. Having one early class in the day could also benefit transportation and give students more options for which type of learning and class they want to participate in.

Another recommendation would be to have more workshops for students interested in employment, such as resume building and creating a cover letter. Also, bringing in employers for

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a career fair can help students get involved and continue to improve employment opportunities among participants. Also, creating opportunities for research and working with peers and professors to further their experiences could be engaging and beneficial for students. Creating classes that also have a hands-on experience could be engaging and beneficial for students. More options, such as career fairs and workshops, directly relate to my findings and create more opportunities for students to prepare for employment.

Students would like to see classes in the future in psychology, songwriting, starting a business, social media entertainment, coding class, marketing, criminal justice, history, medicine, media editing and production, beekeeping, law, business, science, economics, computer, abnormal psychology, anthropology, arts and literature, sociology, and management. These class suggestions come directly from the students who filled out the survey.

Another recommendation directly impacting students is the weekly dinner they get in class. The peer learning assistants usually pick up dinner and give it to the students. The dinners can vary depending on where they are ordered from. Three students responded that the pizza was their least favorite part of LARC. This directly relates to my recommendations of ordering from different places and switching up what meals are offered.

Recommendations that will impact staff:

One recommendation is to have open dialogue with students, teachers, and staff at least once per module so that everyone can engage with each other. Having an open dialogue helps everyone stay on the same page and continue to work together to create a program that benefits everyone. Staff training, including de-escalation and sensitivity training, is also recommended. I also suggested that the program use Zayda Waters' action plan, which includes a professional development training about her specific praxis project. Their project was specifically about

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creating training on how to educate teachers or professors on the impact of education and disciplinary actions on the prison pipeline. I also recommend that there is at least a basic understanding of what the criminal justice system is and how education can impact it. How do you teach and work with a specific population?

One of the most significant barriers to LARC may be one of the difficult recommendations. As it came up in my findings, there is tension between LARC and Clark. One of my recommendations for LARC is that the program advertises itself more to Clark students, so the students know about this specific program. Also, in the future, have classes mixed with Clark and LARC students. I also recommend that LARC send Clark newsletters about the positive impact that LARC has on the community and its students. Also, I recommend contacting the media to write stories about this program; the more eyes are on it, the more Clark may take it seriously. Also, creating backroads for overcoming technology issues, such as working with ITS and having annual meetings with ITS to ensure students are supported.

In-person recommendations:

Lesson Plan:

Recommendations For LARC

Lesson Plan for handing back recommendations

Prepared by Jennie Rosen

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

The purpose of returning these recommendations is to inform and evaluate LARC's current program and identify some steps to create sustainable change in the near and far future.

OBJECTIVES

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1. Understand LARC where it is in its current state
2. Present ideas about the future of LARC and where the program wants to be.
3. Discuss the ideas presented
4. Create sustainable ideas together with the presenter, staff, and students.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Slide show
2. Note cards
3. Writing utensils
4. Box

ACTIVITY

1. 5-minute introduction
 - a. What is this project?
 - b. Why did this Project take place?
 - c. What were the goals of this project?
2. 35-minute presentation
 - a. Where is the program at?
 - i. Demographics
 - b. What are some of my recommendations?
 - i. How can we implement these recommendations
3. 20-minute discussion
 - a. Come up with ideas about recommendations and thoughts about recommendations
 - b. Have an anonymous box of recommendations
 - i. To answer after the slide show, or any recommendations in general
4. 5-minute conclusions
 - a. What are the next steps?

Slideshow:

LARC (Liberal Arts For Returning Citizens) Impact on all participants

Project Recommendations



Clark University

Presented by:
Jennie Rosen

Date Presented:
April 28th, 2025

Agenda

- Site Overview
- Participant Demographics
- Why this research?
- Research questions
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Conclusion



LARC

- The LARC program was established in the fall of 2022 by Clark staff.
- The LARC program allows formerly incarcerated individuals to enroll in specific courses to gain credits that can be transferred to other institutions or used on transcripts
- These courses are free
- The only requirements that one must meet to be able to participate in this program are that an individual has been involved with the incarceration system and have a high school diploma or GED
- Each class lasts 7 weeks, usually five different modules the entire year. There are often at least two classes being run during each module.
 - The classes taught each module vary.

Participants

Students

- 17 hand written surveys

Staff

- 11 interviews
- 30-45 minutes
- Administration, peer learning assistants, professors

Findings

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Positive Impact Of
LARC

Structural Barriers

Systemic Barriers

LARC's Positive effect on all participants

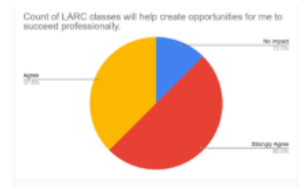
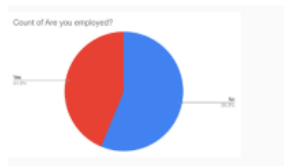
- Community
 - "How it creates friends and builds community creating opportunities." (Survey, 2025)
- Impact on participants
 - "to help myself become a better person." (Survey, 2025)
- "nobody is judged. Everybody is treated fairly" (survey, 2025).
 - Impact on staff
- "It made me much more sensitive." (interview, 1, 2025)
- "It made me much more aware of how much reform needs to be done in this country regarding prison and justice systems." (interview, 1, 2025)

Structural Barriers

- LARC'S Module structures
- When participants were asked if they liked the pass-fail model, 81.3% said yes (Survey 2025)
- Environmental barriers
 - "the busses stop running at or before the classes end." (Survey, 2025)
- Training and screening
 - "A foundational understanding of where people are and the common issues people face will make it smoother." (Interview, 5, 2025)
- Funding
 - "I feel like... that everyone could benefit from more money. But I feel like the program is, you can kind of tell, is just starting out." (interview, 8, 2025)

Systemic Barriers

- Effect of employment:



- Clark vs. LARC
- "He had no phone.. He could not do multifactor.. Took me a whole semester to get him what is called a FOB, that the IT has". (interview, 2025)
-

Recommendations

Have options for class structure

Have open recommendation and feedback form

Implement a training or basic development program

Implement more resume workshops/ career fairs

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Classes To Consider

Classes that students would like to see in the future include psychology, songwriting, starting a business, social media entertainment, coding class, marketing, criminal justice, history, medicine, media- editing and production, beekeeping, law, business, science, economics, computer, abnormal psychology, anthropology, arts and literature, sociology, and management.

Discussion Questions:

1. What were your original thoughts when seeing these results?
2. How would you feel about training?
3. How do you feel about the recommendations? Do you agree? Disagree?

Impact of LARC

4. How do you think this can be sustainable?
5. Are there any other suggestions that are important for the recommendations?

Grant:

Another part of my action plan is that my data, LARC, can be used in my research. Grant research, the first evaluation done by LARC, doesn't have a lot of concrete data about the program. When I was asked to do this project, the site leader gave me specific questions that would benefit the research and be used for grants. As this program mainly relies on grants, it needs actual data to receive money and funds to keep the program running. My data has already been used for specific grants, and having particular, concrete data on the program's impact on students and staff can directly relate to the site being able to submit this data for grants and receive more money. When the site gets more money through grants, it can impact everything, from the food to the technology to the teachers; it can help the site grow and evolve. My research directly supports the program's ability to get money from grants.

Use of research in the future:

The whole point of my project is that it is the first evaluation. My ultimate goal for this project is that it will be able to be replicated in a couple of years, or that more research can come from my research. I don't want the research on LARC to stop with me. I hope the program can continue growing and have a larger impact on the world. This research project can not only be a blueprint for LARC but also a blueprint for other programs and research looking to do something similar. Many of the issues addressed within my thesis are issues and barriers that may also show up in similar programs, so having a basis for understanding other programs is essential. During Clarkfest, one of the admin let me know that there would be another evaluation of LARC and

Impact of LARC

that they wanted to look at my thesis as they began their research. I want this to happen, as I want to share my research and continue to make positive impacts.

Conclusion/ Discussion

In conclusion, this is just the beginning of research that can be done to show the impact of college education programs on formerly incarcerated individuals. My project was to look at the birds-eye view of LARC (Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens) and give the program feedback. I spoke to and received data from staff and participants, which led me to analyze the information provided. After analyzing the data, I then created recommendations and sustainable ideas that the program can implement. The beginning of this project started with a passion and an idea to do something that could create positive change and a lasting impact. I formed incredible relationships with the people who were at my site. This project and research meant so much to me, and I am grateful for the opportunity to carry out something that I consider a passion project. Although my time doing this thesis has ended, I do not want to end this project here, and I want to continue to work on it and make it better in every possible way. Throughout this year and a half, I focused on three main research questions:

- How does Clark's Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens program impact its participants?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of Clark's Liberal Arts for Returning Citizens?
- What improvements can be made to LARC by the current staff?
 - What improvements can be made to the program to make it more beneficial for students?
 - What improvements can be made to the program to make it more beneficial for the Staff?

Impact of LARC

My findings directly relate to my recommendations and where I see this program going. They speak about not only the positives of LARC and how it creates positive change within society, but also about how many barriers are in place that directly impact the program. There are many systemic barriers, meaning that they are outside issues that directly affect the program or that the program directly impacts the program and its participants. There are also structural barriers that LARC deals with every day in their classrooms that need to be addressed and adjusted to ensure the program can make a positive impact.

My findings speak about all aspects of the program, including the positives and the fantastic work that the program is doing, as well as some areas of improvement. This program has had such a positive impact on its participants, whether that be allowing for a community or giving access to resources. However, as this program is still new and developing, much program growth can still be achieved. For example, even just creating more training and policies is helpful. Speaking about and educating on the other systemic barriers is also essential. When all is said and done, this program is truly amazing and has the potential to continue to impact a dark and sometimes debilitating issue. The staff and participants are some of the kindest and most driven people I have ever met, and I am excited for this program to continue to grow and evolve.

Personal Implications:

One of the most significant impacts of this project was on me. Over this past year and a half, I have seen myself grow in more ways than I could have imagined. I learned so much about myself. I realized what I am passionate about and discovered that I love researching. I knew that, even in difficult times over the past year, I would still find joy doing research and being a part of something bigger than me. I gave my all to this project and spent many sleepless nights writing

Impact of LARC

and thinking about this project and my role in society. This project challenged me to think about my positionality and my role in the cycles that take place. I have grappled with feeling complacent, wanting to teach, and going into a system that is already broken. I have always wanted to teach, and my main goal for a long time was to teach in prisons. However, I struggled with whether this was my goal through this project. Does that make me complacent in a broken and harmful cycle? How can you create change, and is it even possible to create change? This project reframed my thinking to look at the little things and how one small project can make a greater impact. When doing this project as well, there have been a lot of changes regarding policy at the government level. It can feel hopeless to want to do a project like this, knowing that many parts of the government are trying to eliminate these programs. I am forever grateful to this project for allowing me to continue learning more about a subject I care deeply about.

Limitations

My study had many limitations, including limitations with time and structure. As this was my first time conducting my research project with my questions, I fine-tuned some questions later on, or some interviews that I wish I had done differently, and asked more or different follow-up questions. Other limitations include time and capacity. Because of the timeline, I could only attend two classes to collect survey information. In the future, I would love to attend more courses to get more information from more perspectives. However, if I had more time, I would have received beneficial data from interviews with participants, which I did not have enough time to do. I also had to stop collecting interview data at one point because I had too much and could not analyze all of it. One issue I realized after handing out the survey is that there was no way to know if someone took it twice, as it is anonymous.

Impact of LARC

One of the other most significant limitations to my findings was figuring out how to analyze both survey and interview data, as it was my first time collecting and analyzing data. It took a lot of trial and error. Once I figured out how to interpret it, though, it was better. I would also love to include more voices and different views, and I wish I had more time to interview participants. I want to collect more than just survey data, even though the survey data was helpful. The official will also interview students, and she may be. I changed some of the questions I asked in the survey and made them more specific. It also makes the study easier to access, whether online or with more people accessing it to get more data. So, it was important for the future to have multiple points of view.

I also want to review the interview and survey questions to ensure they reach the point. Moreover, I may have specific ideas I am trying to find instead. Evaluation would be fascinating if it focused on how LARC affects employment or other particular ideas instead of broad interview questions.

Next Steps

I do not want to be done even after I turn in this thesis. This work is so important to me, and even after this class, I will continue working. I have formed many excellent relationships with many LARC community members. I intend to maintain them. I have also saved all my recommendations and lesson plans to give to my site after this thesis is defended to ensure I share the best recommendations and implement all my feedback. I also hope this research will be the starting point for research in the coming years. I created this project so it could be recreated in the future to continue to see how the program is growing. I also want to continue to work on this thesis as more literature comes out and challenges my ideas and findings. I value this project

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and research paper so much that I will continue to work on it long after it is due because I want it to be the best it can be.

Appendix

Yes	III
Internship	IIII
No	II
Mindset	
Becoming your own Boss	
Several Opportunities	
Lucrative	
Clark/ LARC	
Absolutely	
Internships that are paid	
Workshops	
Resume	
Life Skills	
Educate	
I don't know	
others might	
I believe it does	
hasn't helped me	
Already employed	
Hire	
Directly	
offer knowledge	
Value	
Yes	IIIIIIIIII
Interesting	II
Loves learning	
Learning is apart of my recovery	
opportunities	II
Networking	
Plethora od resources	

Impact of LARC

		Educational	I	
		Illuminating	I	
		Get back to school		
		achieve		
		degree		
		close		
		atmosphere		
		love	II	
		broader		
		Knowledge	III	
		Learn	IIII	
		Pursue		
		College degree		
		Eventually		
		self		
		become		
		Better Person		
		Mindset		
Yes	III	get back		
Internship	IIII	Before		
No	II	Enroll		
Mindset		2 year or 4 year		
Becoming your own Boss		interest	II	
Several Opportunities		Start		
Lucrative		Further		
Clark/ LARC		Non Profit		
Absolutely		Business		
Internships that are paid		Education		
Workshops		Network		
Resume		Create		
Life Skills		Better Opportunity		
Educate		Gain	II	
I don't know		College Credit		
others might		Improve		
I believe it does		Challenge Self		
hasn't helped me		Classes		
Already employed		teachers	III	
Hire		Students	II	
Directly		Real cool		
offer knowledge		Judged		
Value		Opportunities and resources	II	
Yes	IIIIIIIIII	Helpself		
Interesting	II	Attainable		
Loves learning		Free		
Learning is apart of my recovery		Credit		
opportunities	II	Fairly		
Networking		Treated		
Plethora od resources				
Absolutly				
professors and facilitators				
always great				
Helpful				
I Plan to				
Occupy my Mind				
Learn new things				
Free	II			
College Credit	II			
Further Higher education				
did not finish				
First time				
Enjoy learning				
Expanding				
appreiative				
Like to learn	I			
Resharpen				
Skill				

Impact of LARC

Helpself		No	IIII
Attainable		Ethics: responding to wrongs 2	
Free		running smooth	
Credit		Help with Emplyment	
Fairly		full semesters	
Treated		degree program	
college student		day classes	
Learned a lot about myself		help for people with learning disabilities	
challenged		open minded	
more options		questions	
moving forward		challenge narrative	
student		Recommended	
friends		Great	IIII
community		Yes	
creating oppertunities		Absolutely	
laid back		free learning	
pretty nice		opportunity	II
Welcoming		college credit	
treated well		catch up	
Enviroment		todays enviroment	
SHELLEY		meet people	
Learn		learn new things	
Access to facilities		experience colge life	
Connections		educational program	
Tutoring		network	
Shortness	II	pursue	
amount towards credit		high education	
Pizza	III	identify areas	
Intimidating		intrests	
Nigh classes		opportunity	
Nothing	IIII	Involved	
Stairs		College atmosphere	
Students smelling like weed		ease	
advancement		continuing education	
Readings		re-entry	
Busses stop running		mindset	
Hitting roadblock		college/ university	
Questioning		strengthen mind	
Western system		Educational space	
not used to		Help someone	
does not desire		Discouraged	
Control		Leagal baggage	
No	IIII	understand opportunities	
Ethics: responding to wrongs 2		Flourish	
running smooth		Suited for "you"	
Help with Emplyment		Campus inviting	
full semesters		teachers	

Impact of LARC

students			
friendly			
court system			
Entrepreneurship	IIII		
Ethics	IIIII		
Chemistry	III		
Film	II		
Clark Tank			
Venture Start Up			
Philosophy			
Financial Literacy	II		
Sociology of LAW	III		
Oral and writtin communication	IIIII		
Civil rights movement			
Business economics	IIIII		
Song Writing			
English Writing 1010	!!!		
Computers			
Writing			
N/A	II		
Computers			
Economics			
Coding			
Media-editing and production			
Beekeeping			
Law			
Business			
science courses			
History			
Psychology/ abnormal Psychology			
anthropology			
Arts and literature			
sociology			
management			
coding class			
social media entertainment			
Marketing			
Criminal justice			
poetry			
Song writing			
Starting a business			
history			
psychology			
Medical			
Think about it			
Sheriffs Department			
Friend	IIII		
Legendary Legacy			

Impact of LARC

Phone		zoom	
computer		glue	
keyboard		support students	
writing work shop		growth and development	
resume		understanding	
volunteer		academic standered	
no money		open-ended	
prison		disagree	
incaceration		different percepective	
Stipend		reached out	
	2500	decroative plant	
Commision		curiosity	
department of health and human services		training	
40 enrollement		Zoom call	
local		syllabus	
community compass		tutoring	
familiar		assume	
online		get to know each other	
zoom		experience	
directerd study		hard after a full game	
	35	8 hours	
flexible		3 hours on zoom	
vibe checked		kindest humans i've ever met in my life	
didnt have any training		dedicate	
bring food		attendance policy	
insanely informal		two allowed	
do you fit		addiction isuess	
start college career		alcohol	
postive		drug additciton	
expereince		support students	
listen		free courses	
text and calls		administrative stuff	
solitified it more		why have I never heard of this before	
orginized		community building	
education		similar experiences	
community		Valuable point of vie w	
Peety green		expereinces	
Volunteer		expand world view	
past experiences		students have taken multiple class	
classes too easy		email	
graded		how to log on	
constructive		wanting to like grow	
fomilized experience		Willingness	
changed		humility	
more funding		susatinability program	
ironed it out		registering for classes	
accessible		root issue s	
		coming back	

Impact of LARC

coming back	
day to day struggles	
requierment	
GED	
changed my point of view	
technology stuff	
option	
having an option is never gonna be bad	
library	
printing stuff	
hanging out	
few students	
campus	
can I do this again	
finacail literacy	
forget email passwords	
they dont check email as frequently as we do	
how frequently can you come to class?	
Small, small, small college	
google spread sheet	
criminal justice	
meet criteria	
never touched a keyboard	
uploading photo	
uploading high school diploma	
onboarded	
overcome issues	
grant money	
1/2 on a phone	
requires alot more hands	
emergency contact	
themesleves	
policies	
dont always fit in programs like this	
holds	
inclusive training	
not talking about a bunch of 18 year olds	
use alchohol	
roadblocks with almost every department	
registar	
bump heads	
couldn't do multifactor	
Fob	

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