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THESIS

**SEMINARIES IN THE SYSTEM: THE EFFECTS
OF PRISON SEMINARIES ON RECIDIVISM, INMATE
VIOLENCE, AND COSTS**

by

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December 2019

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ON RECIDIVISM, INMATE VIOLENCE, AND COSTS**

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ABSTRACT

Rehabilitation is one of the main goals of the correctional system, with numerous and varied programs being implemented for centuries. The United States spends millions on rehabilitation programs, yet recidivism rates, prison violence, and correctional costs continue to rise. This thesis explores how prison seminaries are addressing these issues and in the process, changing inmates' attitudes and behaviors. Examining Angola, the first prison seminary that became a model for many subsequent prison seminaries, including interviews with inmates and prison staff, reveals how inmates' attitudes and behaviors changed as a result of their seminary. Similar programs that follow Angola's model were also reviewed to determine if there was a reduction in acts of violence and a change in inmates' prosocial behaviors as a result of the programs. This thesis analyzed quantitative evidence in the form of prison statistics and inmate conduct records to determine if prison seminaries lower rates of recidivism as well as inmate violence. Legal case studies were used to evaluate the constitutionality of prison seminaries. Finally, this thesis identified reasons why prison seminaries are changing the overall culture of prisons, including individual identity transformations, the activities of inmate ministers, and participation in religious activities. The findings reveal prison seminaries are reducing both recidivism rates and inmate violence, which reduces the overall costs of incarceration.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
ADOC	Alabama Department of Corrections
AU	Americans United for Separation of Church and State
BC	Bible College
BCC	Bible College Inmates Who Participated in Congregations
BCNC	Bible College Inmates Who Did Not Participate in Congregations
CBT	Cognitive Behavior Therapy
CDCR	California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
CIU	Columbia International University
FFRF	Freedom From Religion Foundation
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GBSF	Global Prison Seminary Foundation
GDC	Georgia Department of Corrections
MDOC	Mississippi Department of Corrections
NBC	Non-Bible College Inmates Who Participated in Congregations
NBNC	Non-Bible College Who Did Not Participate in Congregations
NCDPS	North Carolina Department of Public Safety
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
NOBTS	New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
NYTS	New York Theological Seminary
SBTS	Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
SCA	Second Chance Act
SCDC	South Carolina Department of Corrections
TDCJ	Texas Department of Criminal Justice
WIEA	Wisconsin Education Association

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. has the world's largest prison population, and many states are looking for rehabilitation programs that lower recidivism rates, reduce inmate violence, and decrease correctional costs. Rehabilitation is one of the main goals of the correctional system, yet state prisoners reoffend at an alarming rate, with over 76 percent rearrested within five years after release.¹ Prisons are legally required to provide for inmates' safety, but the climate of violence affecting both prisoners and prison staff is deep-seated and life-threatening. Ballooning costs can mount up to \$60,000 per inmate, per year, with almost \$300 billion spent annually on the total justice system.² While it is valuable to offer rehabilitation and violence prevention programs to inmates, it is a waste of money if they are not successful. Unfortunately, after vast sums of money have been spent, many states have found their programs to be ineffective.

In 1995, the first prison seminary program began at Louisiana State Penitentiary, not with the goal to reduce recidivism, but as an option to replace college programs affected by the loss of Pell Grant funding.³ Combining faith-based programs with a four-year college degree, prison seminaries are a unique and increasingly popular prison education program. Unlike programs that focus on reentry into the community, these privately-funded programs have a vested interest in the students they enroll. Most of the seminaries follow a model that provides students with the opportunity to become Inmate Ministers once they graduate. Prison seminaries look for graduates to become agents of change. These graduates have proven to be a rewarding investment in the struggle to change the overall

¹ Mariel Alper, Matthew R. Durose, and Joshua Markman, *2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-up Period (2005-2014)*, NCJ 250975 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018), <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=6266>.

² Christian Henrichson, Joshua Rinaldi, and Ruth Delaney, *The Price of Jails: Measuring the Taxpayer Cost of Local Incarceration* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2015), <https://www.vera.org/publications/the-price-of-jails-measuring-the-taxpayer-cost-of-local-incarceration>; Hyland, "Justice Expenditure And Employment Extracts, 2016 - Preliminary," Bureau of Justice Statistics, November 7, 2019, <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=6728>.

³ Michael Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

prison culture. Rather than partnering with outside agencies, the successful partnership between the prison, the department of corrections, and the seminary has also shown to be a successful partnership with the inmates who participate in the program. This strategy is producing the added benefit of changes in behavior that improve both recidivism and violence.

How are prison seminaries changing prison systems in regard to recidivism, inmate violence, and correctional costs? There have been numerous well-funded federal and state prison rehabilitation programs with little or no success in affecting positive change. While prison seminaries concentrate on academics and theology they add elements of hope and relationship-building that are missing from most federal and state programs.

The literature reveals the differences in the way federally funded programs and seminaries address prison issues. The government largely focuses on recidivism and reentry programs and uses three to five years as the standard for measuring recidivism, but prison seminaries are hoping for a lifelong change. A large number of prison seminary students have no chance of parole and some of the seminaries' guidelines require a minimum time, such as ten years, left on a prisoner's sentence to be eligible for the programs. Seminary programs expect a change in the lives of their participants while they are still in prison and while they have many years left to influence other inmates as well as staff with their changed lives.

Louisiana State Penitentiary, also known as Angola, is America's largest maximum-security prison.⁴ Since Angola partnered with New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1995, 338 Angola inmates have graduated with bachelor's degrees and 22 have earned master's degrees.⁵ Three years before the seminary began, Angola reported 1,346 assaults; in 2015 the number was 343, a 75 percent reduction.⁶ Angola did not expect to be an example for future prison seminaries but because of Angola's drastic change in

⁴ Hallett et al.

⁵ Dr. Rick Sharkey, personal communication, October 21, 2019.

⁶ Jeffrey Goldberg, "The End of the Line: Rehabilitation and Reform in Angola Penitentiary," *The Atlantic*, September 9, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/a-look-inside-angola-prison/404377/>.

reputation and proven drop in violence, other prison seminaries began to follow their model.⁷ Darrington Penitentiary in Texas, which followed the successful Angola model of moral rehabilitation and the use of inmate ministers, now houses the world’s largest prison seminary.⁸ There are 14 states that have prison seminaries modeled after Angola.⁹ Inmates are not alone in their anticipation of the benefits of a seminary at their prison. States are taking notice as they hear success stories regarding reduced violence and changes in prison culture in facilities where seminaries are operating.¹⁰

Studies identify several reasons why prison seminaries are changing the overall culture of prisons, including individual identity transformations, the activities of inmate ministers, and participation in religious activities.¹¹ Religion and faith played a major role in the transformation of Angola’s prisoners and the prison culture as a whole.¹² Prison seminaries are using education, and religion and faith to equip inmates with knowledge and training to lead religious services, share their personal faith stories, and give hope to fellow inmates.¹³

Prison seminaries are changing prisons from the inside out. They are changing inmates’ attitudes and actions. Studies reveal prison seminaries are reducing recidivism rates and inmate violence, which in turn reduces the overall costs of incarceration. The findings also indicate that while there may be a concern by some that prison seminaries violate the Establishment Clause, the prison seminaries have overcome these concerns by being privately funded and not restricting application into the programs.

⁷ “The Darrington Seminary: Building a Culture of Safety and Forgiveness,” Heart of Texas Foundation, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://heartoftexasfoundation.org/current-projects-heart-of-texas/the-darrington-seminary-why/>.

⁸ Heart of Texas Foundation.

⁹ “Global Prison Seminaries Impact Map,” Global Prison Seminaries Foundation, October 8, 2018, <http://globalprisonseminaries.org/impact-map/>.

¹⁰ Global Prison Seminaries Foundation.

¹¹ Hallett et al.

¹² Hallett et al.

¹³ Hallett et al.

Prison seminaries are not asking for government funding but are looking to work alongside correctional institutions to meet the needs of people whose needs are great and give inmate ministers the opportunity to be an integral part of the process. Research funds need to be allocated to study the processes and outcomes of Angola as well as other prison seminary programs so legislators can have the facts they need to make informed decisions. The human and financial costs are too high to continue the cycle of experimenting with programs, researching their unsuccessful outcomes, and trying again. There will never be a program with a 100 percent rate of rehabilitation, but research suggests that prison seminary programs that focus on transformation rather than reformation are strong contenders as viable options for rehabilitation. Embracing prison seminary education as a successful solution to an overwhelmed corrections system would reduce recidivism and inmate violence, save taxpayers millions of dollars a year, and transform overall prison culture.

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I. STATE OF THE SYSTEM

Every day, there are more than 2.3 million people behind bars in state or federal prisons in the U.S.¹ For years, politicians, police officials, and the public have been saying something has to change in the prison system. Many states are looking for rehabilitative programs that lower reincarceration rates, improve prosocial behaviors, and are cost effective.

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Recidivism rates that exceed 50 percent, increasing inmate violence, and growing correctional costs, are plaguing the nation's criminal justice systems. While few would argue that it is valuable to offer rehabilitation and violence prevention programs to inmates, it is a waste of money if they are not successful. The success of these programs depends upon their effectiveness at reducing the number of offenders who reoffend or their ability to make institutions safer by reducing violence within their walls. Unfortunately, after vast sums of money have been spent, many states have found their programs to be ineffective.

Despite recent declines in imprisonment rates, recidivism rates demonstrate that prisons are not successful in reforming individuals to lessen future occurrences of imprisonment. State prisoners reoffend at an alarming rate, with over 67 percent rearrested during the first three years of their release, and over 76 percent within five years of release.²

Since 2012, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has expanded its rehabilitation programs, including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), vocational education, and academic education, and increased its budget from \$234 million

¹ Wendy Wagner and Peter Sawyer, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019," Prison Policy, accessed October 26, 2019, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019.html>.

² Alper, Durose, and Markman, *2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-up Period (2005-2014)*.

in 2013 to \$298 million in 2018 for in-prison rehabilitation programs.³ In a 2019 review, the state auditor looked at several of these programs that were specifically created to address inmates' individual issues such as "drug abuse, anger management, job skills, literacy etc."⁴ The recidivism rates of participants in the CBT programs were similar to those of non-participants, leading the president of the Association of Deputy District Attorneys Michele Hanisee, to claim "the effort is a disaster."⁵ Even with an increased budget and the creation of specialized programs, the state's recidivism rate is still at 50 percent.⁶ "The State Auditor said the failures highlight an urgent need for corrections to take a more active and meaningful role in ensuring that these programs are effective."⁷

The California programs were not patterned after currently successful models and did not incorporate the CBT goals that focus on changing an inmate's patterns of thinking or the behaviors that cause a person to recidivate. Even though the criminal justice system has pumped millions of dollars into creating and funding numerous prison rehabilitation programs, all with similar goals of changing behavior, studies show limited success in long term change based on consistently high recidivism.

Not only are the rates at which released inmates are returning to prison astonishing, but the prisons themselves are alarming. U.S. prisons have become increasingly violent environments. The climate of violence not only affects those living in the prison but extends to the prison staff. While prisons are legally required to provide for inmates' safety, homicides, sexual assaults, and stabbings are regularly reported. Riots often end in inmate

³ California State Auditor, *California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: Several Poor Administrative Practices Have Hindered Reductions in Recidivism and Denied Inmates Access to In-Prison Rehabilitation Programs*, Report 2018-113 (Sacramento, CA: California State Auditor, 2019), <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2018-113.pdf>.

⁴ California State Auditor.

⁵ Michele Hanisee, "CDCR Rehabilitation Programs Documented to Be Total Failure," Association of Deputy District Attorneys, February 5, 2019, <https://www.laadda.com/cdcr-rehabilitation-programs-documented-to-be-total-failure/>.

⁶ California State Auditor, *California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: Several Poor Administrative Practices Have Hindered Reductions in Recidivism and Denied Inmates Access to In-Prison Rehabilitation Programs*, Report 2018-113 (Sacramento, CA: California State Auditor, 2019), <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2018-113.pdf>.

⁷ Hanisee, "CDCR Rehabilitation Programs Documented to Be Total Failure."

deaths. In April 2019, the Department of Justice conducted an inspection of the Alabama prison system and found prisoner-on-prisoner violence to be deep-seated and life-threatening, documenting over 30 homicides between January 2015 and June 2018, and instances of prisoner-on-prisoner violence had steadily increased from an average of 100 per month in the first quarter of 2013 to over 200 reported acts of violence per month in the third quarter of 2018.⁸ Prison violence, including prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff, is most prevalent in maximum security prisons where inmates feel they have nothing to lose in committing violent crimes.⁹ One way prisons are hoping to reduce violent incidents by both inmates and staff is by installing cameras and microphones throughout their buildings and grounds, but according to an organizer with Fight Toxic Prisons, an organization fighting against dangerous prison conditions, “Having more video cameras doesn’t actually make anyone safer, it just makes it documented.”¹⁰

In 2018, a South Carolina prison riot resulted in the death of seven inmates and at least 17 others were seriously injured.¹¹ One prisoner stated, “The riot could have been avoided if there was incentive to do better, but with no rehabilitation programs, inmates get fed up about it and lash out after a while.”¹² As the State Auditor in California realized, when there are no programs with an active and meaningful role in inmate experiences there is no incentive for changed lives.

American taxpayers foot the bill for these programs, as well as feeding, housing, and securing people in state and federal penitentiaries. Incarceration costs average more

⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, *Investigation of Alabama’s State Prisons for Men* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2019), https://cdn.vox-cdn.com/uploads/chorus_asset/file/16008048/DOJ-Report-on-Alabama-Prisons.0.pdf.

⁹ Daniel P. Mears, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Supermax Prisons” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, March 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1037/e719972011-001>.

¹⁰ Raven Rakia, “Alabama Prisoners Say They’ve Been Punished for Trying to Reduce Violence,” *The Appeal*, April 25, 2019, <https://theappeal.org/alabama-prisoners-say-theyve-been-punished-for-trying-to-reduce-violence/>.

¹¹ German Lopez, “South Carolina Prison Riot Characterized as ‘Mass Casualty’ Event,” *Vox*, April 16, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/4/16/17243598/south-carolina-prison-riot-violence>.

¹² Heather Ann Thompson, “How a South Carolina Prison Riot Really Went Down,” *New York Times*, April 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/28/opinion/how-a-south-carolina-prison-riot-really-went-down.html>.

than \$47,000 per inmate, per year, with some states spending as much as \$60,000 per inmate.¹³ These costs per inmate emphasize the financial strain imposed on society as a result of the large numbers of incarcerated prisoners. When calculating the cost of the total justice system, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) includes police protection, judicial and legal costs, and correction costs.¹⁴ Almost \$300 billion is spent annually on the total justice system (\$295.6 billion as of 2016 with costs increasing annually according to BJS).¹⁵ It should be noted that while cost is being used as a monetary figure, emotional, mental, and physical costs of incarceration to family, friends, victims, and the offenders themselves are also very high. It stands to reason that reducing the rate of recidivism and reducing inmate violence would greatly reduce the overall costs in the correctional system. While the federal government spends millions of dollars on programs and then millions more on studies that show their programs are not working, prison seminaries are actually changing lives, at no cost to the system.

Religious advocates and faith-based practitioners believe that offenders can change. Faith-based programs and religious services have long been used in an effort to improve behavior while in prison. Prison seminaries differ from other programs that simply aim to keep released inmates from going back to prison. They look for graduates to become agents of change inside the facility where they graduate or where they are assigned to minister. This strategy is producing the added benefit of changes in behavior that improve both recidivism and violence. Because the programs are privately funded they are also a cost-effective rehabilitation tool for both the prison and the taxpayer. There have been numerous well-funded federal and state prison rehabilitation programs with little or no success in affecting positive change. While prison seminaries concentrate on academics and theology they add elements of hope and relationship that are missing from most federal and state programs. There will never be a program with a 100 percent rate of rehabilitation, but

¹³ Henrichson, Rinaldi, and Delaney, *The Price of Jails: Measuring the Taxpayer Cost of Local Incarceration*.

¹⁴ Hyland, "Justice Expenditure And Employment Extracts, 2016 - Preliminary."

¹⁵ Hyland.

research suggests that prison seminary programs that focus on transformation rather than reformation are strong contenders as viable options for rehabilitation.

B. BACKGROUND AND NEED

In 1994, Congress ended a federal grant that helped fund higher education behind bars. The Basic Educational Opportunity Grant Program, renamed the Pell Grant, was established as a part of the 1972 Higher Education Act.¹⁶ The Pell Grant Program was created to assist low income students in getting funding for college and included prisoners as beneficiaries of the grant program.¹⁷ As a result, prisons had over 350 degree or certificate programs by the early 1980s and almost 800 before the grants ended in 1994.¹⁸

When Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994, taking away Pell Grants for prisoners, it substantially reduced postsecondary education in prisons.¹⁹ With the loss of federal funding, colleges and universities could no longer offer their programs to prisoners.²⁰ That same year, a study conducted by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice showed that the higher the level of education a prisoner receives the less likely he is to reoffend.²¹ The study evaluated prisoners released between September 1990 and August 1991, and found those with an associate's degree were 13.7 percent less likely to reoffend, those with a bachelor's degree were 5.6 percent less likely, and those who completed a master's degree did not reoffend.²² A 2013 RAND study concluded that "inmates who participated in correctional education programs had 43

¹⁶ "Pell Grants," New America, accessed October 18, 2019, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/topics/higher-education-funding-and-financial-aid/federal-student-aid/federal-pell-grants/>.

¹⁷ "Pell Grants."

¹⁸ Jordan Smith, "How the Federal Government Undermines Prison Education," *The Intercept* (blog), February 18, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/02/18/pell-grants-for-prisoners-education-behind-bars/>.

¹⁹ Cassandra Dortch and Nathan James, *Prisoners' Eligibility for Pell Grants: Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. R45737 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service), accessed October 5, 2019, https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R45737.html#_Toc9588589.

²⁰ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

²¹ Dan Pens, "Prisoners Lose Pell Grants | Prison Legal News," Prison Legal News, December 1994, <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/1994/dec/15/prisoners-lose-pell-grants/>.

²² Pens.

percent lower odds of recidivating than those who do not.”²³ A 2018 update to that study “found that inmates participating in correctional education programs were 28 percent less likely to recidivate when compared with inmates who did not participate in correctional education programs.”²⁴ Although these studies show that education, and more specifically higher education, is an important factor in lowering recidivism rates, the prison systems were left without federal funding for education. As the programs provided by colleges and universities closed, prisons began looking for educational alternatives.²⁵ To fill the educational void left by funding deficits, some prison systems began incorporating seminary education in an effort to change the overall culture of violence and hopelessness and give prisoners a new identity.

Congress, also seeing the ongoing issue of recidivism enacted the Second Chance Act (SCA) in 2007. The Second Chance Act gave grants to government agencies and nonprofits to create rehabilitative programs in an effort to reduce recidivism.²⁶ The Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative, started by the Department of Education, began offering education to a limited number of inmates in the fall of 2016.²⁷ Students must be eligible for release within five years of enrollment as a requirement of the experiment, which is in direct contrast to most privately funded higher education programs.²⁸

A 2017 study, *Evaluation of Seven Second Chance Act Adult Demonstration Programs: Impact Findings at 18 Months*, supported by a \$2,999,998 grant award from the

²³ Lois M. Davis et al., “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults,” Product Page, 2013, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html.

²⁴ Robert Bozick et al., “Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Postrelease Outcomes? A Meta-Analysis of Correctional Education Programs in the United States,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 14, no. 3 (September 2018): 389–428, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-018-9334-6>.

²⁵ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

²⁶ Second Chance Act of 2007, H. Res. 1593, 110th Cong., 2nd sess., GovTrack.us, accessed October 10, 2019, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/hr1593/text>.

²⁷ Alex Boldin, “Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative Update,” Vera Institute of Justice, October 17, 2019, <https://www.vera.org/publications/second-chance-pell-experimental-sites-initiative-update>.

²⁸ Department of Education, “Experimental Sites Initiative,” Federal Student Aid, September 19, 2019, <https://experimentalsites.ed.gov/exp/>.

National Institute of Justice (NIJ), looked at grantees and the performance of their programs in reducing the recidivism of adults returning to their communities after release from prison.²⁹ The study found program participants who received SCA services were just as likely as those who did not receive services to recidivate and their recidivism time was not shorter.³⁰ In 2018, a follow-up study, *Evaluation of Seven Second Chance Act Adult Demonstration Programs: Impact Findings at 30 Months*, funded by an additional \$554,359 NIJ award, found the same recidivism results among the program participants and the control group.³¹ The program group did have higher rates of employment than the control group because of SCA’s job training focus, but the overall goal of the SCA to reduce recidivism failed according to the report.³²

In 1995, the first prison seminary program began, not with the goal to reduce recidivism, but as an option to replace lost college programs due to the loss of Pell Grant funding.³³ Combining faith-based programs with a four-year college degree, prison seminaries are a unique and increasingly popular prison education program. Unlike programs that focus on reentry into the community, these privately funded programs have a vested interest in the students they enroll. Most of the seminaries follow a model that provides students with the opportunity to become Inmate Ministers once they graduate.

²⁹ Ronald D’Amico, Christian Geckeler, and Hui Kim, *An Evaluation of Seven Second Chance Act Adult Demonstration Programs: Impact Findings at 18 Months* (Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates, 2017), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/251139.pdf>; Department of Justice, “Awards Made for ‘NIJ FY 10 ORE Evaluation of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Second Chance Act Adult Demonstration Projects,’” Department of Justice, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://external.ojp.usdoj.gov/selector/title?solicitationTitle=NIJ%20FY%2010%20ORE%20Evaluation%20of%20the%20Bureau%20of%20Justice%20Assistance%20Second%20Chance%20Act%20Adult%20Demonstration%20Projects&po=All>.

³⁰ D’Amico, Geckeler, and Kim, *An Evaluation of Seven Second Chance Act Adult Demonstration Programs: Impact Findings at 18 Months*.

³¹ Ronald D’Amico and Hui Kim, *Evaluation of Seven Second Chance Act Adult Demonstration Programs: Impact Findings at 30 Months* (Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates, 2018), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/251702.pdf>; Department of Justice, “NIJ Award Results \$554,359,” Department of Justice, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://external.ojp.usdoj.gov/selector/awardDetail?awardNumber=2010-RY-BX-0003&fiscalYear=2012&applicationNumber=2012-91402-CA-IJ&programOffice=NIJ&po=All>.

³² D’Amico and Kim.

³³ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

These graduates have proven to be a rewarding investment in the struggle to change the overall prison culture where the seminaries are located. Rather than partnering with outside agencies, the successful partnership between the prison, the department of corrections, and the seminary has also shown to be a successful partnership with the inmates who participate in the program.

In 1979, violence was included in the Surgeon General's Report, *Healthy People: The Surgeon General's Report on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention*, as one of the 15 problem areas requiring action within the next decade. Goals for violence prevention were established but did not include prevention measures for incarcerated persons.³⁴ In 1990, violent and abusive behavior was again included in the *Healthy People 1990* report.³⁵ Individual states, recognizing the need, had already been funding psychiatric teams in prisons for decades but it was not until 1992 that the CDC began receiving federal grants directed toward violence prevention.³⁶ One of those state psychiatrists, James Gilligan said, "The most effective way to turn a nonviolent person into a violent one is to send them to prison. Whether or not a person is mentally ill, prisons provoke violence."³⁷ Unfortunately, between 1986 and 2004, the "tough on crime" years, many prisons lost state funding for psychiatric treatment and the CDC focused its research on the general public rather than violence in prison.

The first prison seminary, which began in Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, did not expect to be an example for future prison seminaries but because of Angola's drastic change in reputation and proven drop in violence of almost 75 percent, other prison seminaries began to follow their model.³⁸ Darrington Penitentiary in Texas, looking to

³⁴ "History & Development of Healthy People," Healthy People, accessed December 3, 2019, <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/About-Healthy-People/History-Development-Healthy-People-2020>.

³⁵ Healthy People.

³⁶ Center for Disease Control, "Home Page," Violence Prevention, November 6, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/index.html>.

³⁷ TakePart, "Rehabilitating Violent Offenders Is Possible. Why Aren't We Doing It?," TakePart, accessed December 3, 2019, <http://www.takepart.com/feature/2016/09/19/violence-and-redemption-rehabilitation>.

³⁸ Heart of Texas Foundation, "The Darrington Seminary."

change the culture of its prison, followed the Angola model of moral rehabilitation.³⁹ As one study of Darrington puts it, “Moral rehabilitation is what we’re after. Moral people don’t rob, steal, take your car, your life. Moral rehabilitation is the direct result of spiritual transformation. When a person’s heart changes, their behavior changes.”⁴⁰

C. RESEARCH QUESTION

How are prison seminaries changing prison systems in regard to recidivism, inmate violence, and correctional costs?

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive studies on recidivism have been completed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the Vera Institute of Justice, the Pew Center for the States, and the RAND Corporation. Although recidivism and reentry seem to be the focus of most studies, recidivism and reentry are not the direct focus of prison seminaries. A large number of prison seminary students have no chance of parole and some of the seminaries’ guidelines require a minimum time, such as ten years, left on a prisoner’s sentence to be eligible for the programs. This makes it clear that many of the seminary programs not only hope for change, but expect a change in the lives of their participants while they are still in prison and while they have many years left to influence other inmates as well as staff with their changed lives. A review of the case studies of two long standing prison seminaries and an analysis of studies conducted on other prison seminary programs within the last decade show the benefits of these programs and how they reduce recidivism rates, inmate violence, and correctional costs.

The Angola Prison Seminary: Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation, a book that documents a three-year on-site study, conducted surveys and interviews of inmates and correction staff to examine the

³⁹ Heart of Texas Foundation.

⁴⁰ Heart of Texas Foundation.

role of the prison seminary at the Louisiana State Penitentiary and the history of Angola.⁴¹ It is the best documented source of evidence from an individual case study. *The Angola Prison Seminary* illustrates the change in culture as a direct result of prisoners' heart changes.⁴² The book documents over 2,200 inmate surveys and over 100 life-history interviews of inmates and staff.⁴³ Because Angola is the model for many of the prison seminaries that follow, studies of similar programs show similar results.

There have been at least two studies and several published articles on the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's (TDCJ) prison seminary program, located at its Darrington Unit. One study, *Bible College Participation and Prison Misconduct: A Preliminary Analysis*, examined the inmate disciplinary records to determine the effect of participation in the Bible College. A second study, *Prisoners Helping Prisoners Change: A Study of Inmate Field Ministers Within Texas Prisons*, looked at how the use of Inmate Ministers reduced violent tendencies and promoted prosocial behaviors. The authors of this study suggest additional research be done using a larger sample over a longer observation period, but just as prison seminaries are privately funded, much of the research that has been done on these programs also has been privately funded. Both the Angola and Darrington studies were made possible by a \$1,300,000 grant provided by Premier FOTO, LLC to Baylor University in 2012.⁴⁴ There has been no government funding for additional research at Darrington.

In addition to these studies, I examined the official TDCJ's correction records from 2014 through 2018 regarding inmate acts of violence from each prison (Belo, Coffield, Darrington, Ellis, Estelle, Ferguson, Michael) that had Inmate Ministers placed within their institutions. This information was obtained directly from the Texas Department of Criminal

⁴¹ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

⁴² Hallett et al.

⁴³ Hallett et al.

⁴⁴ "\$1.3 Million Grant Awarded to ISR to Study the Impact of Prison Seminaries," accessed October 27, 2019, <http://www.baylorisr.org/2012/10/09/1-3-million-grant-awarded-to-isr-to-study-the-impact-of-prison-seminaries/>.

Justice and allows for a comparison to determine the change or lack thereof associated with having Inmate Ministers from 2014 through 2018.

In 2013, Lois Davis and her colleagues included 58 studies of correctional education programs in a meta-analysis for the RAND Corporation supported by a Bureau of Justice Assistance grant award of almost \$2,500,000.⁴⁵ They published two reports at the time with their findings: *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education* and *How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?* to look at the relationship between education and recidivism. They also compared the cost of correctional education with the cost of recidivism.⁴⁶ The study based its conclusions on previous studies such as the Pew Center’s 2011 study, *State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of America’s Prisons*.⁴⁷ The Pew study found that recidivism rates vary greatly from state to state with Minnesota having the highest rate at 61.2 percent in 2004 and Oregon having the lowest rate at 22.8 percent.⁴⁸ This is a good example of how statistics do not tell a complete story. Oregon was not necessarily focused on changing inmate behavior but how persons on parole, who violated their terms, were treated. The report states, “Oregon officials attribute their success to a comprehensive approach to reform and a commitment to change...”⁴⁹ Unfortunately, reform and change included everyone except the offender, as their statement continues, “that reaches across all levels of government—from the supervision officer in the field, to the judiciary, through the state corrections department and up the ranks of legislative leadership.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Davis et al., “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education,” 2013; “NIJ Award Results \$2,463,635,” Department of Justice, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://external.ojp.usdoj.gov/selector/title?solicitationTitle=BJA%20FY%202010%20Second%20Chance%20Act%20Program%20to%20Evaluate%20and%20Improve%20Educational%20Methods%20for%20Incarcerated%20Adults%20and%20Juveniles&po=BJA>.

⁴⁶ Lois M. Davis et al., *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR266>.

⁴⁷ Davis et al., “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education,” 2013.

⁴⁸ Pew Center on the States, *State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of America’s Prison* (Washington, DC: Pew Charitable Trusts, 2011), https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2011/pewstateofrecidivism.pdf?_ga=2.176513957.1662953254.1571497988-1748886400.1571497988.

⁴⁹ Pew Center on the States, 20.

⁵⁰ Pew Center on the States, 20.

A review of research literature from 1996–2016 by Katherine Auty and her team at Cambridge University, evaluating the effectiveness of psychoeducation programs on violent behavior in prison, found that while most studies did show a reduction in violence in the program groups versus the control groups, the reductions were so small they generally would not be considered statistically significant.⁵¹ The programs with the most potential were therapeutic communities. A few of the studies on communities, such as separate residential drug treatment programs inside the prisons, did show statistically significant reductions in violence.⁵²

The 2013 RAND study, looking at cost, also concluded “spending on correctional education ultimately saved four to five times that amount as a result of reduced re-incarceration rates.”⁵³ The estimate does not take into effect savings associated with reducing the burden on the criminal justice system and losses suffered by the victims of crime. This research was limited as it focused on education for prisoners and its effectiveness in reducing recidivism rates and overall costs, but did not take into account the specific influence of prison seminary education.

Examining the literature reveals the differences in the way federally funded programs and seminaries address prison issues. The government largely focuses on recidivism and reentry programs because recidivism is an immense and on-going issue. Prison seminaries focus more on changing the overall culture inside the prison. While most government statistics use three to five years as the standard for measuring recidivism, prison seminaries are hoping for a lifelong change.

A Bureau of Justice report that analyzed criminal history records of prisoners in 30 states over nine years found that 83 percent of state prisoners released in 2005 were

⁵¹ Katherine M. Auty, Aiden Cope, and Alison Liebling, “Psychoeducational Programs for Reducing Prison Violence: A Systematic Review,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Systematic Reviews In Criminology, 33 (March 1, 2017): 126–43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2017.01.018>.

⁵² Auty, Cope, and Liebling.

⁵³ Davis et al.

arrested at least once during that period.⁵⁴ If the Marshall Project is correct when explaining that recidivism statistics are underestimated—because former prisoners who continue to break the law but do not get caught are reoffending, but left out of the numbers—then the rate of recidivism is actually higher than 83 percent.⁵⁵ After reviewing these studies, it can be hypothesized that more than 83 percent of all prisoners are not changed while incarcerated.

Much more research needs to be done including whether or not nonfaith-based education and faith-based educational programs provide similar results among inmates. About 1000 students have graduated through the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites program which may yield interesting results. The program is about to begin its fourth year, but only a limited amount of research has been done on its data. In a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report released in April 2019, the GAO recommended that the Secretary of Education review, evaluate and report on the program.⁵⁶

E. SCOPE AND RESEARCH DESIGN

A review of prison seminary studies, legal case studies, correctional data, scholarly articles, and media reports was conducted as the basis of this study. There are limited studies related to the effects of prison seminary programs, although this field of research is expanding. The studies conducted to date have been funded by non-profit organizations and are therefore limited in size and scope. Because of the lack of government funding, there have only been two comprehensive studies of prison seminaries, one at Angola Prison, the other at Darrington Penitentiary. Because of the lack of studies, much of the available evidence is found in interviews with prisoners, prison officials and state legislators. A review of the qualitative evidence shows a reduction in acts of violence and

⁵⁴ Alper, Durose, and Markman, *2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-up Period (2005-2014)*.

⁵⁵ “The Misleading Math of ‘Recidivism,’” The Marshall Project, December 4, 2014, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2014/12/04/the-misleading-math-of-recidivism>.

⁵⁶ Government Accountability Office, *Federal Student Aid: Actions Needed to Evaluate Pell Grant Pilot for Incarcerated Students*, GAO-19-130 (Washington, DC: April 4, 2019), https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-19-130?utm_campaign=usgao_email&utm_content=daybook&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery.

a change in inmates' prosocial behaviors as a direct result of these programs. A review of available quantitative evidence shows lower rates of recidivism as well as inmate violence. A review of legal case studies, scholarly articles, and media reports revealed a concern that prison seminars may be a violation of the Establishment Clause, however, that concern has yet to produce any significant legal challenges.

II. PRISON-BASED SEMINARIES

Inmates find themselves behind bars for a multitude of reasons, including a lack of education, encouragement, or opportunity. Prison seminaries can offer all three, yet just as each inmate is different, each seminary program is unique. Not only are prison seminaries different from federally funded programs, they are distinct from each other because each state has specific laws and each prison has its own culture. Some prisons use seminary graduates as Inmate Ministers to serve in a variety of roles, while others focus on providing Masters level programs to better equip their prisoners to have an impact in their communities after release. Prison seminaries find common ground in the positive outcomes they exhibit.

A. LOUISIANA STATE PENITENTIARY (ANGOLA)

1. Background

Louisiana State Penitentiary, also known as Angola, is America's largest maximum-security prison.⁵⁷ In 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which disqualified inmates from receiving Pell Grants, prompted Angola's Warden, Burl Cain, to look elsewhere for educational and social programs for the prisoners because there was no money for academics in Angola's budget.⁵⁸ In 1995, the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) initiated a program inside the prison at the request of Warden Cain.⁵⁹ NOBTS created an accredited program that allowed graduates to receive a four-year, 121-hour Bachelor of Arts in Christian Ministry degree.⁶⁰ The program includes classes in Christian ministry but also general education classes such as math,

⁵⁷ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

⁵⁸ Hallett et al.

⁵⁹ Hallett et al.

⁶⁰ "New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary," Leavell College, accessed October 28, 2019, <http://www.leavellcollege.com/>.

science, world history and English composition.⁶¹ Angola does not require its applicants to commit to a particular faith prior to acceptance and the seminary has graduated Jews, Catholics, Muslims, and atheists.⁶²

Graduates of the bachelor degree program are now able to continue their education at Angola by earning a Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry, a 36 credit hour degree program, or a Master of Divinity, an 84 credit hour degree program. Since the seminary began, 338 Angola inmates have graduated with bachelor degrees and 22 have earned master degrees.⁶³ Proponents credit the Angola seminary with providing improved morality, and with education and experience that is life-changing for inmates upon completion of the faith-based program. They believe that in order to change a culture, those who make up the culture have to change and the seminary provides the opportunity for that change.

Angola has always had religious worship services and prayer services available, but having a seminary is different. The professors are not preaching to a congregation; they are teaching eager students. They are teaching math and English, counseling and theology. “It’s making me a better person,” said 41-year-old Marquis McKenzie, who was sentenced to life for first-degree murder. “I think differently now. I read well, speak well, write well, and think well.”⁶⁴

2. Studies

The Angola Prison Seminary represented a unique opportunity to study the lives of maximum-security prison inmates on a large scale. Survey research titled “Baylor Study of Life in Prison,” was the first structured study to report on the Bible College at Angola. About 3000 inmates were given an anonymous survey and about 75 percent of the

⁶¹ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

⁶² Michael Hallett et al., “‘First Stop Dying’: Angola’s Christian Seminary as Positive Criminology,” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 61, no. 4 (2017): 445–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X15598179>.

⁶³ Dr. Rick Sharkey, personal communication, October 21, 2019.

⁶⁴ Religion News Service, “Seminaries Partner with Prisons to Offer Inmates New Life as Ministers,” Religion News Service, November 14, 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/11/14/seminaries-partner-with-prisons-to-offer-inmates-new-life-as-ministers/>.

population returned it.⁶⁵ The survey included questions related to the existence of a conversion narrative as a measure of self-identity.⁶⁶ In historical religious writings, a conversion narrative is a testimony of spiritual rebirth.⁶⁷ In modern times, it is viewed as a sudden and fundamental shift in worldview.⁶⁸

The researchers conducted an analysis of the data and divided the participants into four groups: Bible College (BC) inmates who participated in congregations (BCC), Bible College inmates who did not participate in congregations (BCNC), non-Bible College inmates who participated in congregations (NBC), and non-Bible College inmates who did not participate in congregations (NBNC). The researchers then analyzed the number of reported disciplinary convictions among the BC and non-BC inmates and found significant differences. The findings indicate BC inmates were approximately 40 percent less likely to have disciplinary actions than their non-BC counterparts.⁶⁹ BC inmates also were more likely to have a conversion narrative.⁷⁰

This study is the most extensive research to date in regard to evaluating a prison seminary and its effects on prison violence and changing the overall prison culture. One unique characteristic of this program is that graduates become Inmate Ministers where they serve as church leaders, as well as counselors delivering death notices and conducting funerals. They also become chaplains' assistants, and some become seminary tutors.⁷¹ Inmate Ministers also become mediators between inmates and prison security to reduce

⁶⁵ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*, 90.

⁶⁶ Hallett et al., 89.

⁶⁷ europeanconversionnarratives, "What Is a Conversion Narrative?," *Conversion Narratives in Early Modern Europe* (blog), December 1, 2010, <https://europeanconversionnarratives.wordpress.com/2010/12/01/what-is-a-conversion-narrative/>.

⁶⁸ Anna Mansson McGinty, "The Conversion Narrative," in *Becoming Muslim: Western Women's Conversions to Islam*, ed. Anna Mansson McGinty, Culture, Mind, and Society (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2006), 33–52, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780312376215_3.

⁶⁹ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

⁷⁰ Hallett et al.

⁷¹ Hallett et al.

conflict or alert staff to possible dangers.⁷² Inmate Ministers must display the highest character and model good behavior with both their words and actions. Interviews with these inmates show how the seminary has changed their lives, even as they continue to live their lives behind bars. Angola Inmate Minister Kyle Herbert had 98 prior convictions before he came to Angola. Seventeen years later, Herbert has never received a single disciplinary write up. Herbert credits the program's curriculum as being transformational by taking away his constant hurt from serving a life sentence.⁷³ Warden Cain, now retired and the founder of the Global Prison Seminary Foundation (GPSF),⁷⁴ claims, "The moral rehabilitation that happened at Angola was a result of bringing in a seminary program and allowing inmates to be trained to be ministers to their peers."⁷⁵ According to Cain, the concept of sending Inmate Ministers to other prisons proved to be an effective tool to change the violent culture within other prisons throughout Louisiana and give inmates hope.⁷⁶ Angola continues to improve the Inmate Minister model. The seminary designates some ministers to be mentors to new prisoners as they arrive at Angola. Inmate ministers help the new arrivals adjust to prison life by teaching them coping skills, communication techniques, and sharing their transformation story.⁷⁷

The Angola study presents the Christian ideas of becoming a new person with a new identity and that all things can be used for the greater good as essential in criminal desistance.⁷⁸ According to Oxford Bibliographies, desistance is the cessation of offending

⁷² Hallett et al.

⁷³ Hallett et al.

⁷⁴ Global Prison Seminars Foundation provides a model for establishing a prison seminary within the correctional system. They give steps for implementation and facilitate the establishment of partnerships between accredited schools with degree programs, private donors to fund the school's services, and department of corrections.

⁷⁵ "Home," Global Prison Seminars Foundation, accessed January 4, 2019, <http://globalprisonseminaries.org/>.

⁷⁶ Global Prison Seminars Foundation.

⁷⁷ Paul Purpura, "At Angola Prison, Short Timers Learn Trades, Coping Skills from Lifers," *Times-Picayune*, November 26, 2014, https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/article_fe6d2fe0-876b-5bab-97a8-b9df194693d9.html.

⁷⁸ Global Prison Seminars Foundation, "Home."

or other antisocial behavior.⁷⁹ The study also indicates that the prosocial behaviors of a prisoner are enhanced when inmates can create their own self-projects.⁸⁰ Self-projects include leading church services, organizing Bible studies, and conducting counseling services.⁸¹ This study does show a positive change in the prisoners' prosocial behaviors, a reduction in inmate violence, and a steady change in the overall prison culture from the inception of the program to the present. Prison statistics verify the information gleaned from the Baylor study. In 1992, three years before the seminary began, Angola reported 1,346 assaults, in 2015 the number reported was 343, a 75 percent reduction.⁸²

A concrete monument inside the main entrance to Angola quotes Philippians 3:13, urging inmates to forget about the things that are behind them and pressing on toward the things that are in front of them.⁸³ The place that everyone used to describe as the bloodiest prison in America now offers hope and opportunity to those living there.⁸⁴

B. TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE AT DARRINGTON PENITENTIARY

1. Background

In 2011, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) started a Bible College in association with the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) which offers a four-year, 125-hour Bachelor of Science in Biblical Studies degree to inmates at the

⁷⁹ "Desistance - Criminology," Oxford Bibliographies, accessed October 24, 2019, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396607/obo-9780195396607-0056.xml>.

⁸⁰ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

⁸¹ Hallett et al.

⁸² Goldberg, "The End of the Line: Rehabilitation and Reform in Angola Penitentiary."

⁸³ "Angola Prison," Warren Christian Apologetics Center, accessed November 7, 2019, <https://warrenapologetics.org/articles-the-bible/2017/2/27/angola-prison>.

⁸⁴ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

Darrington Unit.⁸⁵ The seminary does not require inmates to adhere to a particular religion to be a part of the voluntary program.⁸⁶ In order to apply, inmates must have a minimum of 19 years remaining on their sentence, which leaves 14 years before their possibility of parole.⁸⁷ Selectees must transfer to Darrington, a maximum-security prison, in order to participate.⁸⁸ The program includes general education courses in English, science, Western civilization, and mathematics, and equips students to serve as Inmate Ministers after graduation.⁸⁹ Darrington's Inmate Ministers help to make possible other individuals' dramatic life changes as well as changes in prison culture through peer-to-peer ministry.⁹⁰ Prison officials and legislators modeled the program on Angola after witnessing the change in culture and the benefits of Inmate Ministers following a visit to Angola's seminary.⁹¹

In 2015, the Darrington seminary graduated its first class of Inmate Ministers and launched them into the Texas prison system.⁹² Thirty-three field ministers were sent to correctional facilities at Beto, Coffield, Darrington, Ellis, Estelle, Ferguson and Michael.⁹³ TDCJ Executive Director Bryon Collier said, "They bring a tool that none of us have, which is credibility with the offender population. They have more credibility with those

⁸⁵ "Darrington Prison Extension Campus," Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed January 4, 2019, <https://swbts.edu/academics/campuses/extension-centers/darrington-prison-extension-center/>.

⁸⁶ Sung Joon Jang et al., "Prisoners Helping Prisoners Change: A Study of Inmate Ministers Within Texas Prisons," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 2019, 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X19872966>.

⁸⁷ Jang et al.

⁸⁸ Jang et al.

⁸⁹ Jang et al.

⁹⁰ Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Darrington Prison Extension Campus."

⁹¹ Jang et al., "Prisoners Helping Prisoners Change."

⁹² Keith Collier, "First Seminary Prison Program in Texas Graduates 33 Inmates, Sends Them Out as 'Agents of Mercy,'" Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 13, 2015, <https://swbts.edu/news/releases/first-seminary-prison-program-texas-graduates-33-inmates-sends-them-out-%E2%80%98agents-mercy%E2%80%99/>.

⁹³ Collier.

other offenders because they have walked in those shoes.”⁹⁴ A review of records for Darrington indicates a remarkable reduction in serious acts of violence. According to the TDCJ prison records, in 2016, the year the first seminary graduating class began as field ministers, there were 224 serious acts of violence with a weapon.⁹⁵ In 2017, in the same category, there were zero.⁹⁶ In 2018 there were zero.⁹⁷ Texas Senator John Whitmire credits the dramatic reduction in violence at Darrington as a result of the seminary: “When we started this, (Darrington) was one of our toughest, problematic units, and I’m here today to announce that it’s now one of our best.”⁹⁸

2. Studies

A study conducted by Baylor University Institute for Studies of Religion at TDCJ’s Darrington Unit evaluated whether participation in the program changes inmate misconduct.⁹⁹ The study involved 380 inmates who had applied for the Bible College from 2011–2014, and the 158 who were selected and enrolled in the program. The misconduct records of those who enrolled in the program indicate a significant reduction in disciplinary convictions as compared to those who applied but did not attend.¹⁰⁰ This suggests that “participation in the Bible College significantly improved offender behavior, reducing

⁹⁴ Robert Arnold, “Choosing a Different Path: Turning Inmates into Ministers,” *Click 2 Houston*, May 30, 2019, <https://www.click2houston.com/news/investigates/choosing-a-different-path-turning-inmates-into-ministers>.

⁹⁵ Data received from Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Received via open records request for acts of violence from 2014–2018 at the following prisons: Belo, Coffield, Darrington, Ellis, Estelle, Ferguson, and Michael.

⁹⁶ Data received from Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Received via open records request for acts of violence from 2014–2018 at the following prisons: Belo, Coffield, Darrington, Ellis, Estelle, Ferguson, and Michael.

⁹⁷ Data received from Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Received via open records request for acts of violence from 2014–2018 at the following prisons: Belo, Coffield, Darrington, Ellis, Estelle, Ferguson, and Michael.

⁹⁸ Keith Collier, “Inmates Complete 1st Seminary Prison Program in Texas,” *Baptist Courier*, May 18, 2015, <https://baptistcourier.com/2015/05/inmates-complete-1st-seminary-prison-program-texas/>.

⁹⁹ Grant Duwe et al., “Bible College Participation and Prison Misconduct: A Preliminary Analysis,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 54, no. 5 (2015): 371–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2015.1043481>.

¹⁰⁰ Grant Duwe et al., “Bible College Participation and Prison Misconduct: A Preliminary Analysis,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 54, no. 5 (July 4, 2015): 371–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2015.1043481>.

misconduct by one discipline conviction per participant.”¹⁰¹ Additionally, participation lowered the risk of receiving reprimands for misbehavior, “lowering it by 65 percent for minor misconduct, 80 percent for major misconduct, and 68 percent for any misconduct.”¹⁰² The study notes that its findings are consistent with other research that shows participation in faith-based programs in prisons reduces correctional violence.¹⁰³

A second study, also conducted by Baylor University, utilized a self-administered survey at three Texas Department of Corrections maximum-security prisons to determine the effect of Inmate Ministers within the prisons. Researchers received a random sample of the inmates from TDCJ along with their sociodemographic and criminal history.¹⁰⁴ Of the random sample, approximately two-thirds (163) agreed to be a part of the study. The average education level was less than ninth grade.¹⁰⁵ The study indicated an overall reduction in acts of violence within the three prisons and a positive prosocial change among those who had been affected by the interaction with an Inmate Minister.¹⁰⁶ Having fewer violent prisoners lowers prison costs, but those are not the only ways prison seminaries are lowering costs. Before inmates started receiving degrees from seminaries, prisons would have to hire counselors, teachers, and pastors.¹⁰⁷ Inmate Ministers are now filling those roles at the Texas prisons where they have been assigned, saving those prisons additional costs.

Darrington’s first seminary graduates were dispersed as Inmate Ministers to seven Texas prisons. A review of TDCJ correctional data in regard to acts of violence from 2014, the year prior to the first graduating class, through 2018, indicated a dramatic reduction in

¹⁰¹ Duwe et al.

¹⁰² Duwe et al.

¹⁰³ Duwe et al., “Bible College Participation and Prison Misconduct.”

¹⁰⁴ Jang et al., “Prisoners Helping Prisoners Change.”

¹⁰⁵ Jang et al.

¹⁰⁶ Jang et al.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Hallett, “Confronting Christian Penal Charity: Neoliberalism and the Rebirth of Religious Penitentiaries,” *Social Justice* 45, no. 1 (2018): 99–119,132.

recorded offenses. Each of the seven Texas prisons shows a reduction in acts of violence from 2014 through 2018¹⁰⁸ (see Figure 1).

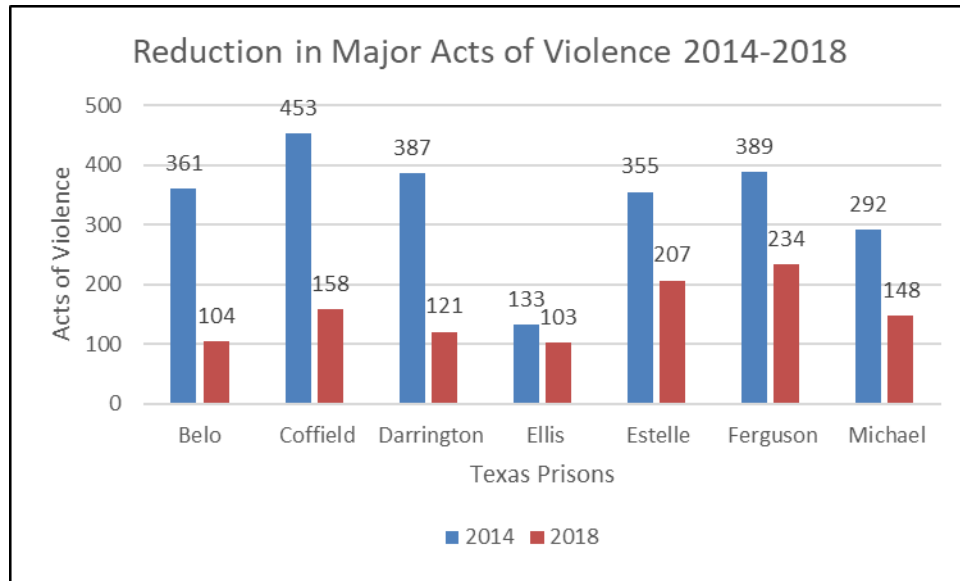


Figure 1. Major acts of violence in Texas prisons, 2014–2018¹⁰⁹

The studies associated with TDCJ’s Darrington seminary are encouraging in regard to a reduction in acts of violence and a change in the overall prison culture. There is a lack of research on recidivism because of the program’s relative newness. Even without statistics, prison officials and legislators are impressed with the perceived impact the seminary is making within their prison system. Senator John Whitmire, after serving his state for over 30 years, said, “I have scores of programs that I’ve worked in, including drug and alcohol programs and other major initiatives to clean up the prison system and rehabilitate inmates. But ... nothing is more impressive and moving than to be a part of

¹⁰⁸ Data received from Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Received via open records request for acts of violence from 2014–2018 at the following prisons: Belo, Coffield, Darrington, Ellis, Estelle, Ferguson, and Michael.

¹⁰⁹ Data received from Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Received via open records request for acts of violence from 2014–2018 at the following prisons: Belo, Coffield, Darrington, Ellis, Estelle, Ferguson, and Michael.

this program.”¹¹⁰ Whitmire believes the change in culture brought about by the seminary gives him an argument to challenge the state’s guidelines regarding parole considerations.¹¹¹

C. OTHER PRISON SEMINARIES

1. New York’s Sing Sing Correctional Facility

Sing Sing is different from Angola or Darrington as applicants must already have an undergraduate degree to apply. Since 1982, New York State’s Sing Sing Correctional Facility has partnered with the New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) to offer a Master of Professional Studies degree, a 36 credit hour course that teaches inmates religious education, pastoral care and counseling, and other service oriented skills.¹¹² Many students transfer from low and medium security prisons to Sing Sing, a maximum security prison, in order to be a part of the program.¹¹³ Students forfeit visits with family and friends during their year of study.¹¹⁴ The courses teach students “spiritual integration, community accountability, and service to others.”¹¹⁵ After graduating, inmates serve as peer counselors, chaplain’s assistants, or tutors in prisons throughout the state.¹¹⁶

According to NYTS’s website, recidivism rates for over 400 graduates since 1982 are under 10 percent over the duration of the program and almost zero for those released in the last five years, which is remarkably lower than the New York average of 49 percent.¹¹⁷ David Markus, who is a rabbi and seminary teacher and also has a career in

¹¹⁰ Collier, “First Seminary Prison Program in Texas Graduates 33 Inmates, Sends Them Out as ‘Agents of Mercy.’”

¹¹¹ Collier.

¹¹² “Master of Professional Studies,” New York Theological Seminary, August 28, 2011, <http://www.nyts.edu/prospective-students/academic-programs/master-of-professional-studies/>.

¹¹³ Emilie Babcox, “Maximum-Security Seminary,” In Trust Center for Theological Schools, Autumn 2011, <https://www.intrust.org/Magazine/Issues/Autumn-2011/Maximum-security-seminary>.

¹¹⁴ Babcox.

¹¹⁵ New York Theological Seminary, “Master of Professional Studies.”

¹¹⁶ New York Theological Seminary.

¹¹⁷ David Markus, “What Men In Jail Can Teach Us about Joy,” *The Wisdom Daily* (blog), December 26, 2018, <http://thewisdomdaily.com/what-men-in-jail-can-teach-us-about-joy/>.

government and public policy, visited Sing Sing to ask its students what they had learned about joy. He writes, “I wished that all of my students, all my colleagues, and everyone in the world could see what I saw. I wished they could see and feel the holy power of redemption, inner discipline, emotional authenticity, gratitude and radical truth as rungs on the ladder of spiritual joy.”¹¹⁸ Sing Sing Superintendent Louis Marshall, when talking about the benefits of the prison seminary said, “Housing people is probably one of the saddest things. People are going to think — they’re not going to stop thinking because they’re in prison. The question is what do you introduce in their lives while they’re incarcerated? It’s not only the individual that you’re helping. You’re helping him plus others who are observing his conduct, behavior, and change.”¹¹⁹ One graduate described his change, “As a consequence of our spiritual and mental transformation, we are remorseful about our crimes and the pain we have caused others. Yes, we have done wrong, and we apologize, but we need to be given a chance to make amends. Our commitment to change has been facilitated through the process of critical education, which has mobilized us toward liberation, redemption, empowerment, and transformation.”¹²⁰ Reverend Darren Ferguson, a NYTS graduate, claims “There is a thing called redemption, nobody is beyond hope, and that from the worst circumstances can come some of the greatest results.”¹²¹

2. Seminaries Modeled After Angola

Fourteen states have prison seminaries modeled after Angola: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.¹²² When states model their

¹¹⁸ Markus.

¹¹⁹ Lucky Severson, “Sing Sing Seminary,” *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* (blog), January 8, 2009, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2009/01/08/january-9-2009-sing-sing-seminary/1886/>.

¹²⁰ Manning Marable, Ian Steinberg, and Keesha Middlemass, “New York Theological Seminary Prison Program: Sing-Sing Correctional Facility Our Context,” in *Racializing Justice, Disenfranchising Lives: The Racism, Criminal Justice, and Law Reader*, ed. Manning Marable, Ian Steinberg, and Keesha Middlemass (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 347–51.

¹²¹ Ray Downs, “Prisoners to Pastors: NYC Seminary Educates Convicts Who Feel ‘Called’ to Ministry,” *Christian Post*, December 1, 2011, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/prisoners-to-pastors-nyc-seminary-educates-convicts-who-feel-called-to-ministry.html>.

¹²² Global Prison Seminaries Foundation, “Global Prison Seminaries Impact Map.”

programs after Angola, it is important to understand the seminary did not bring religion to the prison. Angola's inmate-run churches existed long before the seminary program began, so programs at other institutions may never have graduates who preach to a congregation inside their walls, yet graduates are still enacting change just by living their daily lives right where they are.

a. Kirkland Correctional Institution

In 2004, South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) officials, after visiting Angola, approached Columbia International University (CIU) about a partnership to create a program similar to the one at Angola.¹²³ The first class began in 2007 at the Kirkland Correctional Institution. Inmates attend classes five days a week.¹²⁴ CIU's Prison Initiative is fully funded by donors, estimated to be \$30,000 per student.¹²⁵ CIU has graduated 157 students who are serving as Inmate Ministers at 23 other South Carolina facilities, and two additional graduates volunteered to help the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) launch their own prison seminary.¹²⁶ Twenty-seven CIU graduates have been paroled or released from prison, and all are employed and working in their communities. None have recidivated.¹²⁷ According to SCDC Director Bryan P. Stirling, "This collaboration with CIU is a vital part of our effort to reduce recidivism and make our prisons safer."¹²⁸ In 2016, the Alabama Department of Corrections and Birmingham Theological Seminary initiated a prison seminary modeled after Angola. Two South Carolina Department of

¹²³ Columbia International University, "Prison Initiative: Facts & FAQ's," Columbia International University, October 3, 2018, <https://advancement.ciu.edu/projects/prison-initiative/facts-faqs>.

¹²⁴ T. Michael Boddie, "SC Prisoners Train to Help Prevent Suicides by Fellow Inmates," *Post and Courier*, June 14, 2019, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/sc-prisoners-train-to-help-prevent-suicides-by-fellow-inmates/article_4afcb0ae-8e1c-11e9-ab8e-cfc25efa450b.html.

¹²⁵ Columbia International University, "Prison Initiative: Facts & FAQ's."

¹²⁶ Columbia International University.

¹²⁷ Columbia International University.

¹²⁸ Bob Holmes, "CIU Prison Initiative Graduates Hear from an Alumnus of the Program," Columbia International University, December 18, 2018, <http://www.ciu.edu/newsstory/ciu-prison-initiative-graduates-hear-alumnus-program>.

Corrections Inmate Ministers transferred to Alabama, which offers a two-year Master of Arts in Biblical Studies and a certificate curriculum.¹²⁹

b. *Phillips State Prison*

In 2006, the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) and NOBTS established a prison seminary at Phillips State Prison. The first class started in 2008.¹³⁰ The Angola-designed program is a four-year, 126 hour Bachelor of Arts in Christian Ministry, fully funded by the Southern Baptist Convention and NOBTS.¹³¹ Inmates must have at least five years remaining on their sentence upon graduation in order to fulfill their Inmate Minister duties.¹³² There have been 56 graduates since the inception and Inmate Ministers currently serve in 22 GDC facilities across the state.¹³³ GDC Commissioner Homer Bryson said “The impact of this ministry is not only seen in the transformational behaviors of the inmates, but also within the walls of the facility resulting in a reduction of violence.”¹³⁴

c. *Parchman Prison*

In 2009, the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) and NOBTS began a prison seminary in Parchman Prison.¹³⁵ The program is modeled after Angola and

¹²⁹ Associated Press, “14 Alabama Inmates Graduate from New Prison Seminary Program,” WHNT 19 News, September 23, 2018, <https://whnt.com/2018/09/23/14-alabama-inmates-graduate-from-new-prison-seminary-program/>.

¹³⁰ Georgia Department of Corrections, “Offender Chaplaincy Services” (Atlanta, GA: Georgia Department of Corrections, January 2015), http://dcor.state.ga.us/sites/all/files/pdf/Research/Fact_Sheets/Info_Sheets_Chaplaincy.pdf.

¹³¹ “Offenders Graduate from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary - Bachelor of Arts Degrees in Christian Ministry Earned,” Georgia Department of Corrections, accessed October 14, 2019, http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/NewsRoom/PressReleases/PR_150616.

¹³² Georgia Department of Corrections.

¹³³ “Whitworth Women’s Facility Hosts Open House,” Georgia Department of Corrections, accessed October 19, 2019, <http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/NewsRoom/PressReleases/whitworth-women%E2%80%99s-facility-hosts-open-house>.

¹³⁴ Georgia Department of Corrections, “Offenders Graduate from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary - Bachelor of Arts Degrees in Christian Ministry Earned.”

¹³⁵ Alex Paton, “14 Parchman Inmates Awarded Ministry Degrees,” *News Mississippi* (blog), May 31, 2018, <https://newsms.fm/14-parchman-inmates-awarded-ministry-degrees/>.

originally offered an associate degree but added a bachelor degree in Christian Ministries beginning with the second class.¹³⁶ Inmates must have at least 10 years remaining on their sentence in order to attend.¹³⁷ The program is funded mostly by the Mississippi Baptist Convention.¹³⁸ As of 2018, the seminary has graduated 65 students with bachelor degrees.¹³⁹ “This program is another example of the many partnerships MDOC has in providing meaningful rehabilitation,” MDOC Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said. “Faith-based initiatives are important to our success.”¹⁴⁰

d. Calvin Prison

In 2015, Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) was launched after Michigan State Representative Joe Haveman and Michigan Department of Corrections officials visited Angola.¹⁴¹ CPI offers a five-year program where students earn a Bachelor of Arts in Faith and Community Leadership.¹⁴² Prison officials witnessed an immediate change in the prison’s culture. In 2014, prior to the first CPI class, there were 853 acts of misconduct; three years later there were only 257 acts of misconduct, a 70 percent reduction.¹⁴³

e. Nash Correctional Facility

In 2016, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS), Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Game Plan For Life developed a prison seminary

¹³⁶ Paton.

¹³⁷ Paton.

¹³⁸ Paton.

¹³⁹ Paton.

¹⁴⁰ Paton.

¹⁴¹ Ted Roelofs, “Ionia Warden: Calvin College Program Is Transforming My Prison,” Bridge, July 10, 2018, <https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-government/ionia-warden-calvin-college-program-transforming-my-prison>.

¹⁴² Roelofs.

¹⁴³ Roelofs.

program at the Nash Correctional Facility.¹⁴⁴ The Angola-structured program is a four-year Bachelor of Arts in Pastoral Ministries with a secondary emphasis in counseling and psychology.¹⁴⁵ The seminary is fully funded by Game Plan For Life, a nonprofit started by Joe Gibbs.¹⁴⁶ Applicants must have at least 12 years remaining on their sentence.¹⁴⁷ NCDPS Secretary Erik A. Hooks said, “Programs like this demonstrate the importance of providing hope to incarcerated individuals, as well as having a profound positive impact on the overall culture of state prisons.”¹⁴⁸

f. Waupun Correctional Institute

After meeting with Darrington Inmate Ministers and witnessing the transformation brought on by their participation in a prison seminary, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections partnered with the Wisconsin Education Association (WIEA)¹⁴⁹ and Trinity International University to form a prison seminary in 2017.¹⁵⁰ The four-year Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies program requires inmates to attend classes six hours a day, five days a week and is fully funded by donors through WIEA.¹⁵¹ The first class of 25 students will graduate in 2021 and be sent to other maximum-security prisons throughout

¹⁴⁴ North Carolina Department of Public Safety, “NC DPS: N.C. Field Minister Program Begins Year 3 at Nash Correctional Institution,” *North Carolina Department of Public Safety* (blog), August 22, 2019, <https://www.ncdps.gov/blog/2019/08/22/nc-field-minister-program-begins-year-3-nash-correctional-institution>.

¹⁴⁵ Religion News Service, “Seminaries Partner with Prisons to Offer Inmates New Life as Ministers.”

¹⁴⁶ Religion News Service.

¹⁴⁷ Religion News Service.

¹⁴⁸ North Carolina Department of Public Safety, “NC DPS: N.C. Field Minister Program Begins Year 3 at Nash Correctional Institution.”

¹⁴⁹ Wisconsin Education Association is a non-profit charitable organization that “exists to bring peace, forgiveness and reconciliation to prison inmates in the state of Wisconsin.”

¹⁵⁰ “Overwhelmed with Grace,” Wisconsin Inmate Education Association, accessed October 25, 2019, <https://wisinmateedu.org/overwhelmed-with-grace/>.

¹⁵¹ “Operation Transformation: An in-Prison College Curriculum to Transform Inmates, Families and Communities,” Wisconsin Inmate Education Association, accessed October 25, 2019, <https://wisinmateedu.org/>.

Wisconsin. According to a current unnamed seminary student, “I will be empowered to go where few dare to go, reaching those who may have been overlooked.”¹⁵²

Inmates are not alone in their anticipation of the benefits of a seminary at their prison. States are taking notice as they hear success stories regarding reduced violence and changes in prison culture in facilities where seminaries are operating. There are currently an additional 14 states that are in negotiation or have already secured plans to open seminaries in their prisons.¹⁵³

Most of the prison seminaries are modeled after Angola and have similar requirements and qualifications for applicants.¹⁵⁴ Inmates need a high school diploma or GED, a remaining sentence of 10 years to life, and no disciplinary actions within the last year.¹⁵⁵ Sing Sing is the main exception as they require applicants to hold a bachelor degree in order to apply for their master’s program.¹⁵⁶ Students of all faiths are welcome to apply in an open, competitive application process.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, some programs require recommendations from prison officials and chaplains. Inmates are evaluated and chosen by working groups consisting of seminary staff and prison officials. In order to be accepted into the Inmate Minister program, inmates need a letter of recommendation from the program director, prison security, and an inmate religion leader upon graduation.¹⁵⁸ This allows them extended access throughout the prison and into special sections of the

¹⁵² “WIEA Fundraiser 2019 by Wisconsin Inmate Education Association,” Give Lively, accessed October 25, 2019, <https://secure.givelively.org/event/wiea/wiea-fundraiser-2019/wiea-fundraiser-2019>.

¹⁵³ Global Prison Seminaries Foundation, “Global Prison Seminaries Impact Map.”

¹⁵⁴ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

¹⁵⁵ Hallett et al.

¹⁵⁶ New York Theological Seminary, “Master of Professional Studies.”

¹⁵⁷ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

¹⁵⁸ Hallett et al.

prison such as hospice section and death row.¹⁵⁹ Programs are managed and taught by representatives of the theological institutes in collaboration with prison officials.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Hallett et al.

¹⁶⁰ Hallett et al.

III. INSPIRING CHANGE

Angola's radical cultural change from an extremely violent institution before the introduction of a seminary inside the prison to one whose seminary model is either currently or in the process of being replicated by over half the states is partly due to the use of Inmate Ministers and the power of a religious conversion that is giving prisoners an alternative self-identity. Religion and faith played a major role in the transformation of Angola's prisoners and the prison culture as a whole. Prison seminaries are using education, and religion and faith to equip inmates with knowledge and training to lead religious services, share their personal faith stories, and give hope to fellow inmates. Studies identify several reasons why prison seminaries are changing the overall culture of prisons, including individual identity transformations, the activities of inmate ministers, and participation in religious activities.

A. THE TRANSFORMATION OF IDENTITY

Researchers struggle to identify a specific reason why individuals commit crimes. Studies indicate a combination of biological, sociological, or psychological influences that play a role. Many prison programs focus on job training or life skills rather than identifying the heart of the problem. Prison seminaries believe the heart is the problem and assert that belief and trust in something other than one's own self can transform a person's life. Though the prison seminary at Angola was implemented to provide education as a productive option to occupy prisoners' time, it correspondingly provides the tools that an inmate can use to change his identity from a prisoner to a person of worth. Many studies show that prison seminary participation helps reduce recidivism and inmate violence, but an often overlooked or undervalued benefit is an inmate's personal transformation or conversion. Conversion is "a change of attitude, emotion, or viewpoint from one of indifference, disbelief, or antagonism to one of acceptance, faith, or enthusiastic support."¹⁶¹ "The Latin *convertere* means to revolve, turn around, or head in the opposite

¹⁶¹ "Conversion," in *Dictionary.Com*, accessed November 29, 2019, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/conversion>.

direction.”¹⁶² This is what is happening to some inmates whose lives have been turned around.

The authors of *Why God is Often Found Behind Bars: Prison Conversions and the Crisis of Self-Narrative* describe conversion this way: “Essentially, to convert means to reinterpret one’s autobiography...”¹⁶³ They also say, “The topic of jailhouse conversion remains largely unexplored in criminological research.”¹⁶⁴ Perhaps this is because conversion, or a new-found faith, is personal and unique to each individual, often depending on their past experiences.

Prisons house those convicted of serious, often violent crimes, and who have long sentences. Inmates with very long or life sentences may never be released from prison and might have no motivation to abstain from bad behavior. Those with a conversion narrative commit substantially fewer acts of violence.¹⁶⁵ Upon arriving in prison, inmates are arguably in the midst of an identity crisis.¹⁶⁶ They have just lost relationships, their personal belongings, and most importantly their freedom; they are looking for direction and guidance and ways to fill the void of their loss. As stated by Jang and Johnson, “religion is one of the few sources of prosocial coping available in prison.”¹⁶⁷

According to Maruna et al., inmates use “transformed ‘self-narratives’...as valuable coping mechanisms for the shame and isolation of incarceration.”¹⁶⁸ An individual’s redemptive story helps him form a new self-identity that gives him direction

¹⁶² H. Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices* (New York: Springer, 2010), 10.

¹⁶³ Shadd Maruna, Louise Wilson, and Kathryn Curran, “Why God Is Often Found Behind Bars: Prison Conversions and the Crisis of Self-Narrative,” *Research in Human Development*, 2006, 161–84.

¹⁶⁴ Maruna, Wilson, and Curran.

¹⁶⁵ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

¹⁶⁶ Hallett et al.

¹⁶⁷ Sung Joon Jang et al., “The Effect of Religion on Emotional Well-Being Among Offenders in Correctional Centers of South Africa: Explanations and Gender Differences,” *Justice Quarterly* 0 (November 15, 2019): 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2019.1689286>.

¹⁶⁸ Maruna, Wilson, and Curran, “Why God Is Often Found Behind Bars: Prison Conversions and the Crisis of Self-Narrative.”

and hope for the future whether that future is inside the prison or back in the community.¹⁶⁹Maruna states that inmates who claim a religious conversion while incarcerated typically share conversion stories that highlight the following:

- Creates a new social identity to replace the label of prisoner or criminal.
- Imbues the experience of imprisonment with purpose and meaning.
- Empowers the largely powerless prisoner by turning him into an agent of God.
- Provides the prisoner with a language and framework for forgiveness.
- Allows a sense of control over an unknown future.¹⁷⁰

As a result of their new identity, prison seminary participants with a conversion narrative offending less, due to a new outlook that promotes good behavior and a new sense of hope.¹⁷¹

B. INMATE MINISTERS

This individual identity change infiltrates the darkest corners of the prison as inmate ministers serve the needs of their brothers and it is changing the way of life inside the prison as the overall culture is altered. Toward the end of the 1960s, Angola had no inmate churches, no non-profit groups supplying services, and no paid or volunteer clergy.¹⁷² After inmates sued the prison for the harsh living conditions in the early 1970s, the prison was ordered to create programs that would benefit the prisoner's physical and psychological well-being.¹⁷³ The mandate brought additional assets to the prison that

¹⁶⁹ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

¹⁷⁰ Maruna, Wilson, and Curran, "Why God Is Often Found Behind Bars: Prison Conversions and the Crisis of Self-Narrative."

¹⁷¹ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

¹⁷² Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

¹⁷³ Hallett et al.

helped both the chaplain's program and the inmates.¹⁷⁴ Inmates were allowed to initiate inmate-led churches and the chaplain program was able to hire additional staff.¹⁷⁵

However, Angola would continue to deal with racial overtones among its religious community for over 20 years.¹⁷⁶ Inmate pastor Sidney Deloch said, "I think it's a sad injustice to have a predominantly black prison, one of the largest in the country, and not one black chaplain on staff... The truth is the chaplains we have are just not meeting the needs. Prisoners need someone they can feel comfortable with."¹⁷⁷

After Burl Cain became warden, he reached out to Dr. Landrum Leavell, then President of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, in 1995. Dr. Leavell had reservations about offering courses to prisoners since NOBTS's education mission is to train ministers that support local churches.¹⁷⁸ Cain explained how Angola had several inmate-led churches where students could become Inmate Ministers upon graduation and Dr. Leavell agreed this fulfilled their mission.¹⁷⁹ This relationship ultimately helped mend the racial divide by developing black Inmate Ministers to lead congregations and serve inmates in a variety of clergy roles.¹⁸⁰ Most of Angola's 29 inmate-led churches are currently pastored by graduates of the seminary.¹⁸¹ The churches now have a long history of "healing the wounded, caretaking for the poor, and uplifting the broken hearted."¹⁸² Additionally, graduates who become Inmate Ministers conduct bible studies, counseling, tutoring, hospice services, and inmate funerals

174 Hallett et al.

175 Hallett et al.

176 Hallett et al.

177 Hallett et al., 7.

178 Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

179 Hallett et al.

180 Hallett et al.

181 Hallett et al.

182 Hallett et al., 42.

Warden Cain had the instinct to purposefully dispatch Inmate Ministers to work with inmates where they were previously housed and had established relationships, or to camps where they were previously known as an enforcer or troublemaker.¹⁸³ This allowed the Inmate Ministers to have instant respect and credibility with their fellow inmates to make an immediate impact in the lives of the prisoners and the culture within that area of the prison.¹⁸⁴ Staff and prisoners began to take note of an increased care for the prisoners and improvement in security.¹⁸⁵ The use of Inmate Ministers, regarded as one of the most broad-minded correctional initiatives, is a unique aspect of most prison seminaries and is spearheading the change in the overall culture in the prisons where they are living.¹⁸⁶ The authors of the *Angola Prison Seminary* state, "...as important as the seminary has been, it is inaccurate to credit the seminary for every positive change that has transpired at Angola. The real innovation of Angola has been the decision to allow Inmate Ministers, other lay leaders, and the congregations that they lead to serve other inmates in diverse, consequential, and unconventional ways that has been truly transformative for many."¹⁸⁷

Prison seminaries are successful because their model empowers those whose lives have changed and provides not only opportunity for, but a sense of responsibility in, changing other's lives.

C. PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

When people are involved in religious activity such as attending church they become more connected to their community and the social support in that community gives them a sense of belonging. Multiple studies indicate that participating in religious programs results in higher levels of prosocial behaviors. Johnson et al. evaluated Prison Fellowship's InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI), a two-year faith-based prison program, to see what

¹⁸³ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

¹⁸⁴ Hallett et al.

¹⁸⁵ Hallett et al.

¹⁸⁶ Hallett et al.

¹⁸⁷ Hallett et al., 234.

effect the program had on participants reoffending after release.¹⁸⁸ Prison Fellowship, a non-profit that offers education and services to prisoners, first offered the IFI curriculum in 1997 at a Texas prison. The Christian program taught biblical studies, but also basic skills for living and personal responsibility. The study monitored IFI participants and prisoners selected to attend IFI but who did not, for two years following their release. The results were convincing as IFI participants were much less likely to recidivate than their counterparts, 8 percent versus 20 percent.¹⁸⁹ In a comparable study by Duwe and King, results showed similar results for Minnesota participants.¹⁹⁰ Their study, which monitored 732 prisoners released from prison between 2003 and 2009, found IFI participants are “26 percent less likely to be rearrested, 35 percent less likely to be reconvicted, and 40 percent less likely to reincarcerated for a new crime.”¹⁹¹

Less violence and fewer acts of misconduct are also a result of participation in religious activity. According to Jang et al., “As prisoners become more virtuous through participation in religious activities, they come to have a different outlook not only on the future but also on the present reality of imprisonment, thereby coping with the prison environment in a prosocial manner.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*.

¹⁸⁹ Byron R. Johnson and David B. Larson, *The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program* (Waco, TX: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, 2008).

¹⁹⁰ Grant Duwe and Michelle King, “Can Faith-Based Correctional Programs Work? An Outcome Evaluation of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative in Minnesota,” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 57, no. 7 (2012): 813–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X12439397>.

¹⁹¹ Duwe and King.

¹⁹² Jang et al., “The Effect of Religion on Emotional Well-Being Among Offenders in Correctional Centers of South Africa.”

IV. CONCERNS AND CRITICS

Historically, opponents of faith-based prison programs have successfully challenged the constitutionality of these programs when faith-based programs accepted government funding. Prison seminaries bring a new challenge to critics as they are 100 percent donor funded with no government or taxpayer funding. Critics, such as Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and Freedom From Religion Foundation, claim that prison seminaries violate the Constitution, particularly the Establishment Clause that mandates the federal government “shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.”¹⁹³

A. CONCERNS

1. The Establishment Clause

In 1947, Justice Hugo Black in *Everson v. Board of Education* created a definition for the separation of church and state, and this standard is often used as the test to determine whether or not faith-based programs are in violation of the Establishment Clause.¹⁹⁴ This Supreme Court case was based on a New Jersey law that authorized local school boards to pay transportation costs for students who attended both public schools and primarily Catholic private schools.¹⁹⁵ The lawsuit claimed this was a violation of the New Jersey State Constitution and the First Amendment as it paid for costs associated with attending a religious school.¹⁹⁶

Upon losing his case, Everson appealed to the Supreme Court which affirmed the New Jersey ruling that found the reimbursement had been offered to all school children as part of public welfare legislation whether they were attending a public or private school

¹⁹³ *Everson v. Board of Education*, accessed October 7, 2019.

¹⁹⁴ *Everson v. Board of Education*; Megan A. Kemp, “Blessed Are the Born Again: An Analysis of Christian Fundamentalists, the Faith-Based Initiative, and the Establishment Clause,” *Houston Law Review* 43, no. 5 (2007): 1523–62.

¹⁹⁵ *Everson v. Board of Education*.

¹⁹⁶ *Everson v. Board of Education*.

and you cannot exclude someone of a particular faith from public funding.¹⁹⁷ Out of the case came the Establishment Clause interpretation that would guide Court decisions for decades. Justice Black wrote, “Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, support all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions Neither a state nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa.”¹⁹⁸

2. Lemon Test (Lemon v. Kurtzman)

In 1971, *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, modified the Establishment Clause standard. This case combined two Establishment Clause cases in which states were giving financial aid to private schools to pay salaries and purchase books.¹⁹⁹ The *Lemon* Test concluded that for something “to comply with the Establishment Clause, it must (1) have a secular purpose; (2) have a predominantly secular effect; and (3) not foster ‘excessive entanglement’ between government and religion.”²⁰⁰ The Court determined there was “excessive entanglement” in both state cases and they were ruled unconstitutional as there was government funding and the school had administrative oversight of the programs. There have been many interpretations of “excessive entanglement” but most findings have some form of government funding or administrative oversight.

3. Agostini v. Felton

In 1997, the Court further interpreted the Establishment Clause opinions with the *Lemon* test in *Agostini v. Felton*. The Agostini ruling said that the entanglement test needed

¹⁹⁷ *Everson v. Board of Education*.

¹⁹⁸ *Everson v. Board of Education*.

¹⁹⁹ Geoff McGovern, “*Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971),” in *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*, accessed October 7, 2019, <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/437/lemon-v-kurtzman-i>.

²⁰⁰ “Lemon Test,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, May 14, 2009, <https://www.pewforum.org/2009/05/14/shifting-boundaries6/>.

to be considered along with the other circumstances. The new standard was the two-prong *Lemon-Agostini* test.²⁰¹ It was found that the fact “that government would oversee the programs and regulate them to a certain extent, did not violate the Establishment Clause as long as it met the requirements regarding a program’s content and intent.”²⁰²

B. CRITICS

Critics continue to voice their opposition to prison seminaries as they believe they violate the Establishment Clause in some way, and often use *Americans United for Separation of Church and State v. Prison Fellowship Ministries* as an example.²⁰³ However, in this 2003, the Iowa InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI), a program facilitated by Prison Fellowship Ministries, was funded by the Iowa Department of Corrections.²⁰⁴ The courts found the partnership between the state of Iowa and IFI was a violation of the Establishment Clause and ordered that IFI vacate the Iowa prison.²⁰⁵ Those evaluating the outcome of this case point to the use of government funding and the discriminatory practice of only offering acceptance to those claiming to be Christian, neither of which apply to prison seminaries.²⁰⁶

Critics argue that prison seminaries fail to reduce recidivism rates more than other education programs, but in most states other higher education programs are either not available or unaffordable for inmates. They also argue that inmates who are prone to volunteer for these types of programs have already decided to change, yet studies have shown the difference between inmates who simply apply for the programs versus those who are chosen. Another complaint is that, while the prison seminary programs are

²⁰¹ Kemp, “Blessed Are the Born Again.”

²⁰² Ashley Kittrell, “Is Religion an Effective Rehabilitation Method? Comparing the Results” (master’s thesis, Liberty University, 2018).

²⁰³ “*Americans United v. Prison Fellowship Ministries/Ashburn v. Mapes*,” *Americans United for Separation of Church and State*, accessed December 2, 2019, <https://www.au.org/our-work/legal/lawsuits/americans-united-v-prison-fellowship-ministriesashburn-v-mapes>.

²⁰⁴ *Americans United for Separation of Church and State*.

²⁰⁵ *Americans United for Separation of Church and State*.

²⁰⁶ *Americans United for Separation of Church and State*.

privately funded, they cannot provide the same benefits and opportunities to its entire population because their funds and resources are limited. Lastly, critics attack the authenticity of the inmates' conversion stories as being fabricated for their own benefit as a true heart change cannot be proven. However, these complaints have not manifested into legal challenges. While no legal challenges to the constitutionality of U.S. prison seminaries have made it to the courts, there have been attempts to pressure state corrections departments into severing ties with universities who oversee seminaries within their prisons.²⁰⁷ Examples follow.

1. Texas

In 2011, Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) and the Texas ACLU raised constitutional concerns with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice over their joint venture with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Heart of Texas Foundation to establish a prison seminary within their Darrington Correctional Facility.²⁰⁸ AU sent a letter to TDCJ mandating they suspend the partnership as it violated the First Amendment, particularly the Establishment Clause. AU asserted the program allowed the government to show preference to one faith. AU's attorney Alex J. Luchenitser stated, "prisoners will be training to be Baptist clergy while the state gives its full blessing."²⁰⁹ TDCJ rejected the AU letter and in August 2011 the Darrington seminary began classes for its first 40 inmates.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Michael Hallett et al., "U.S. Prison Seminaries: Structural Charity, Religious Establishment, and Neoliberal Corrections," *The Prison Journal* 99, no. 2 (March 1, 2019): 150–71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885519825490>.

²⁰⁸ Americans United for Separation of Church and State, "Prisons And Proselytizing: Baptist Program For Texas Inmates Raises Church-State Questions," *Wall of Separation Blog* (blog), August 29, 2011, <https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/prisons-and-proselytizing-baptist-program-for-texas-inmates-raises-church>.

²⁰⁹ Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

²¹⁰ Lindsay Wise, "Program Will Let Texas Prisoners Study for Ministry," *Houston Chronicle*, August 26, 2011, <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Program-will-let-Texas-prisoners-study-for-2143509.php>.

2. Wisconsin

In 2017, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) demanded the Wisconsin Department of Corrections break from their relationship with the Wisconsin Education Association (WIEA) and Trinity International University.²¹¹ According to their website, FFRF is “an umbrella for those who are free from religion and are committed to the cherished principle of separation of state and church.”²¹² FFRF claimed the seminary was a violation of the Establishment Clause because prisoners received a benefit for being part of a religious program and it would be better if they received non-religious education.²¹³ A WIEA representative pointed out that 18 of the 25 inmates making up the first class had voluntarily transferred from minimum and medium-security prisons to Waupun, a maximum-security prison, and will have to live in general population all four years.²¹⁴ Robin Knoll, executive director of WIEA observes that, “For these inmates, moving into a maximum-security prison has been a significant sacrifice.”²¹⁵ Upon their graduation they also will be assigned to maximum-security prisons as field ministers.²¹⁶ The prison seminary’s first class will graduate in 2021.

3. Arkansas

In a letter to the Arkansas Department of Corrections in June 2019, FFRF requested that the department end its plan to create a seminary at the Varner Correction Facility with the same complaints it claimed in Wisconsin.²¹⁷ In spite of this attempt, the Arkansas

²¹¹ Bonnie Pritchett, “Atheist Organization Demands End to Seminary Classes in WI Prisons,” Christian Headlines, December 18, 2017, <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/atheist-organizations-demands-end-to-seminary-classes-in-wi-prisons.html>.

²¹² “About FFRF,” Freedom From Religion Foundation, accessed October 8, 2019, <https://ffrf.org/about>.

²¹³ Pritchett, “Atheist Organization Demands End to Seminary Classes in WI Prisons.”

²¹⁴ Pritchett.

²¹⁵ Wisconsin Inmate Education Association, “Operation Transformation.”

²¹⁶ Pritchett, “Atheist Organization Demands End to Seminary Classes in WI Prisons.”

²¹⁷ Bob Allen, “Secularist Group Raises Red Flag over Baptist Seminary Inside Arkansas Prison,” Baptist News Global, July 2, 2019, <https://baptistnews.com/article/secularist-group-raises-red-flag-over-baptist-seminary-inside-arkansas-prison/>.

Prison Initiative, in cooperation with Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, launched in September 2019 based on the Angola model.²¹⁸

C. CURRENT STATUS

While they do not like the fact that Angola's seminary is faith-based, the ACLU has not filed any lawsuits challenging its constitutionality. "The (Angola) seminary appears to be legal because it is paid for privately, is voluntary, and admits non-Christians," said Marjorie R. Esman, the Executive Director of the ACLU in Louisiana.²¹⁹ According to Dr. Michael Hallet, an expert in the field of prison seminary research, there are no pending lawsuits against any of the established prison seminaries, but he expects challenges are coming in the future.²²⁰

Even with the potential for future legal action, state officials, corrections departments, and the seminaries continue to be enthusiastic and confident about their partnerships. Bryan Collier, executive director of TDCJ recently told a graduating Darrington class, "TDCJ fully supports what you're doing, our wardens fully support what you're doing. We're on the same team. We're excited about the changes that your work is going to bring."²²¹ Bill Sessa, Public Affairs Director for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, in describing the benefits of a prison seminary stated, "Any program that offers inmates the opportunity to gain some introspective and self-study, to change their attitude toward life, is a huge step forward making their lives constructive when they leave prison."²²²

²¹⁸ John Moritz, "Seminary Program Starts at Maximum-Security Prison in Arkansas," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, September 2, 2019, <http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2019/sep/02/seminary-program-starts-at-state-prison/>.

²¹⁹ Erik Eckholm, "Bible College Helps Some at Louisiana Prison Find Peace," *New York Times*, October 5, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/06/us/bible-college-helps-some-at-louisiana-prison-find-peace.html>.

²²⁰ Dr. Michael Hallet, personal communication, October 8, 2019.

²²¹ Alex Sibley and 2019, "Darrington Graduates Commissioned to Share Truth That Sets Men Free," Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed October 19, 2019, <https://swbts.edu>.

²²² Gillian Flaccus, "Prison Seminary Program Expands in California," *Spokesman-Review*, September 12, 2012, <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2012/sep/12/prison-seminary-program-expands-in-california/>.

Not only are they proud of their collaboration, prison officials are thankful for the resources that seminaries provide to their inmates and institutions. Because of budgetary deficiencies, prisons would not be able to provide higher education or the chaplaincy services that are afforded by the seminary. Dr. Kevin J. Brown, NOBTS's Director of Prison Extension Center Education, said, "Angola is our most expensive prison program. Last year we spent approximately \$100,000 across the three degree programs. Other NOBTS programs, those with only one undergraduate cohort, cost approximately \$50,000 per year."²²³ North Carolina's seminary, which costs almost \$300,000 a year, is paid for by Game Plan for Life.²²⁴ The Heart of Texas Foundation funds Darrington's seminary which this year had a budget of \$260,000.²²⁵

Seminary officials understand they have to follow the law and make sure the prisons that they partner with are aware of the significance of their presence. According to the Global Prison Seminaries Foundation, "The department of corrections must understand by allowing the initiation of a Christian seminary within the prison, that all other faith groups are given this same option under the same requirements."²²⁶ States, policy makers, and prison administrators continue to partner with prison seminaries because they reduce recidivism, reduce inmate violence, and are privately funded though they are controversial, and even considered unconstitutional by some.

²²³ Dr. Kevin J. Brown, personal communication, October 21, 2019

²²⁴ Religion News Service, "Seminaries Partner with Prisons to Offer Inmates New Life as Ministers."

²²⁵ Religion News Service.

²²⁶ Global Prison Seminaries Foundation, "Home."

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V. CONCLUSION

A. SUMMARY

Prisons want education for inmates. Colleges want to offer educational programs. Inmates want an education. Lumina Foundation, an independent, private foundation committed to ensuring that 60 percent of Americans hold a credential beyond high school by 2025, argues that providing access to college courses in prison is not enough; programs must be of the highest quality.²²⁷ They also state “religiously-affiliated colleges and universities run some of the longest-standing and most highly-regarded prison education programs.”²²⁸ While politicians, police, and the public continue to say somebody needs to do something, many non-profit, faith-based organizations are doing something and change is happening. Prison seminaries are changing prisons from the inside out. They are changing inmates’ attitudes and actions. When hearts and minds change, then behaviors change and the result of these changed behaviors is lower recidivism and lower acts of violence which, in turn, lowers the overall cost of incarceration.

The degrees offered and the foundations providing the funding differ in each state but most are modeled after Angola. While NOBTS did not bring religion to Angola they do have to follow Constitutional requirements in regard to it. Under the Establishment Clause everyone in the U.S. is free to practice religion, however, it requires prisons that are providing services or programs under their supervision or inside their facilities to be free from religious preference. Angola, and others modeled after its program, meet these requirements by not accepting government funding and being open to all applicants.

Prison seminaries are providing a strong educational foundation but they are also offering hope to those who, in response, are sharing that hope; some as inmate ministers

²²⁷ Lumina Foundation, *A Stronger Nation: Learning beyond High School Builds American Talent* (Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation), accessed October 16, 2019, <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org>.

²²⁸ “Prison Education: Making the Most of a Second Chance,” Lumina Foundation, accessed October 16, 2019, <https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/prison-education-making-the-most-of-a-second-chance>.

after graduation and others who simply want to share their reasons for hope in the prison yard or with their cellmate. “Before we came here a lot of us were living in despair — no hope,” said Inmate James Benoy, who has been taking classes for the past 18 months. “It’s transformed us. We have a purpose, a direction and a mission in life.”²²⁹

When prison seminaries are compared to their government funded counterparts they are a much more fiscally responsible alternative. As of 2018, the Bureau of Justice Assistance has awarded 843 Second Chance Act grants to states at a cost of over \$695,000,000 with the goals of reducing recidivism and increasing public safety.²³⁰ The National Institute of Justice has awarded approximately \$15,000,000 to conduct evaluations of those programs and the evaluations show no effect on recidivism.²³¹ The results expressed in NIJ’s 2018 evaluation report, *Lessons Learned from the Second Chance Act: Moving Forward to Strengthen Offender Reentry*, was that offender behavior and reentry processes are complex.²³² The recommendation for moving forward was more research.²³³

The results expressed in the evaluation of the SCA are correct: offender behavior is complex but seminary programs are having a positive impact because they are addressing the complex issues of the individual. Prison seminaries are building relationships and conveying hope while providing a strong educational foundation for inmates. The SCA research shows that in order to reduce recidivism, programs must “change criminal thinking and increase prosocial relationships and activities.”²³⁴ These are two core

²²⁹ Religion News Service, “Seminaries Partner with Prisons to Offer Inmates New Life as Ministers.”

²³⁰ “The Second Chance Act,” CSG Justice Center, accessed October 26, 2019, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/jc/publications/fact-sheet-the-second-chance-act/>.

²³¹ “Evaluation of Second Chance Act Demonstration Projects,” National Institute of Justice, accessed October 25, 2019, <http://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/evaluation-second-chance-act-demonstration-projects>.

²³² “Lessons Learned From the Second Chance Act: Moving Forward To Strengthen Offender Reentry,” National Institute of Justice, accessed October 26, 2019, <http://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/lessons-learned-second-chance-act-moving-forward-strengthen-offender-reentry>.

²³³ National Institute of Justice.

²³⁴ “Reentry Essentials: A Look at National Progress on the 10th Anniversary of the Second Chance Act,” CSG Justice Center, accessed November 6, 2019, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/posts/reentry-essentials-a-look-at-national-progress-on-the-10th-anniversary-of-the-second-chance-act/>.

objectives and outcomes of prison seminaries. The evaluation's results were also correct to recognize that research does need to continue, but federally funded research has largely excluded prison seminaries. All models need to be incorporated into the research, including prison seminaries, in order to present an accurate analysis of all the available programs.

B. NEXT STEPS

Recidivism and prison violence are nationwide problems but the most successful outcomes have occurred when programs have been initiated at the state level. In the past, it has taken one person with a vision, or someone willing to look at the models that are working and be able to convince the necessary officials and secure the needed funding. At Angola that person was the warden. At Darrington it was the founder of The Heart of Texas Foundation. In Oregon, it was retired Senior Judge Tom Kohl, who stated, "No amount of programs, discipline, or money can accomplish as much as a changed heart in an inmate's life."²³⁵

The government currently provides funding for many social service programs that are accomplished by faith-based organizations. These cost-effective organizations such as Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army have proven experience because of providing assistance to their own members and members of their communities for centuries as acts of service and goodwill. Prison seminaries are not asking for government funding but are looking to work alongside correctional institutions to meet the needs of people whose needs are great and give inmate ministers the opportunity to be an integral part of the process.

The authors of the Angola study point out that it will be practically impossible to duplicate Angola's model of having inmate-led churches inside prisons and have the success that Angola has had "unless inmates are given the freedom to serve others through the churches they attend."²³⁶ Research funds need to be allocated to study the processes and outcomes of Angola as well as other prison seminary programs so legislators can have

²³⁵ "Paid In Full Oregon," Paid In Full Oregon, accessed October 25, 2019, <https://www.paidinfulloregon.org/>.

²³⁶ Hallett et al., *The Angola Prison Seminary Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation*, 234.

the facts they need to make informed decisions about changing policies to allow these churches to exist and allow inmates to be able to guide as well as serve their congregations.

With over two million people in U.S. prisons and the numbers increasing annually, the human and financial costs are too high to continue the cycle of experimenting with programs, researching their unsuccessful outcomes, and trying again. It is time for the federal government to initiate adding successful models to their existing programs. According to NOBTS, the annual cost of their undergraduate seminary programs is approximately \$50,000.²³⁷ While prison seminaries are looking for opportunity rather than funding, if the \$710,000,000 spent on Second Chance Act programs and research were allocated to states, each of the 50 states could pay for the cost of a prison seminary for 284 years. Not only being open to, but openly embracing prison seminary education as a successful solution to a corrections system that is overwhelmed would reduce recidivism and inmate violence and save taxpayers millions of dollars a year while transforming overall prison culture.

²³⁷ Dr. Kevin J. Brown, personal communication, October 21, 2019

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