Jacksonville Ex-Offender Employment Opportunities Study:

Phase I

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Abstract

The inability to find legitimate and gainful employment immediately following incarceration is a significant barrier to successful reentry. Despite evidence that ex-offenders who are unemployed are 500 times more likely to recidivate, 60% of employers surveyed in 2006 (Pager) claim that they would not knowingly hire an applicant with a criminal background. The Jacksonville Reentry Center has been established to increase public safety by reducing recidivism rates. One of the best ways this goal can be accomplished is by providing employment opportunities to ex-offenders as they return to our community. In order to better understand the potential employment barriers faced by ex-offenders returning to the community, a telephone survey was conducted with some of Jacksonville’s largest employers and community business leaders. In a contrast to Pager’s findings (2006) 56% of the Jacksonville employers surveyed were currently hiring ex-offenders. Sixty-two percent of those surveyed said they would be more willing to hire ex-offenders if they had adequate education and/or training.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express sincere appreciation to the students enrolled in my Research Methods course this summer for their outstanding work. These students are: Charlee Anderson; Criscilla Anderson; Zlatan Avdic; Courtney Beideman; Samuel Brettell; Michael Brooks; Lauren Brown; Tiffany Brown; Richard Collins; Matthew Czwornog; Jeremy DeStafney; Samantha Decker; Mary K. Ference; Joseph Goosey; Emily Guiragossian; Amir Hadziavdic; James Harrell; Abbey Hicks; Adam Hiers; Angelica Jordan; Jason Junker; Peter Kuhlman; Kimberly Lawson; Vanizia Leon; Marisol Lucas; Paul Nguyen; Mary Oberry; Joel Perales; Boris Petrovic; Andrew Pica; Annie Pitts; Nadine Robertson; Amanda Smith; Justin Stemen; Daniel Stephenson; Elizabeth Strout; Carl Switzer; Jessica Tyjewski; and Jason Weaver.
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Introduction

Background

This study was designed to work with the Jacksonville Re-entry Center (JREC) in order to provide data that will assist ex-offenders in gaining employment upon release from incarceration. Over 650,000 people are released from federal and state prisons each year (Anonymous, 2007). Approximately two-thirds of these individuals are re-arrested and one-half are reconvicted within a three year period (Visher, 2007). At the local level over 38,000 individuals were released from one of our local facilities in 2006 and approximately 44% of these individuals were re-arrested before December 31, 2007 (JSO, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

A lack of employment prospects coupled with a deficit in appropriate life skills are among the biggest barriers ex-offenders face when trying to re-enter society (Henderson, 2001; Hicks, 2004). In an effort to help these men and women the federal government has spent over $100 million dollars to develop re-entry programs to provide ex-offenders with the skills needed to better prepare them for success upon their release (Farkas & Miller, 2007). Despite such efforts by our government, more than sixty percent of employers claim that they would not knowingly hire an applicant with a criminal background (Pager, 2006). Although gainful employment is cited as the number one component to successful re-entry (Pograsky, 2006; Burrell, 2007; Lichtenberger, 2006) those with a criminal past simply cannot find a job (Pager, 2006). As current studies have shown, the reduction of the recidivism rates of ex-offenders is related to the retention of employment (Burrell, 2007; Lichtenberger, 2006).
Purpose of the Study

The Jacksonville Re-entry Center (hereinafter JREC) was transferred to the authority of the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office in October of 2007. Since this transfer took place JREC has focused on helping former offenders overcome barriers to successful re-entry. Previous literature cites the dangers of un-employment for ex-offenders in terms of higher rates of recidivism (Harrison & Schehre, 2004; Kilcommmins, 2007). However, to date, statistics on the number of Jacksonville area employers that currently will not hire ex-offenders is unknown. This information will allow us to determine how much of a potential barrier un-employment will be for former offenders returning to the Jacksonville area. If the results indicate that the majority of companies in the Jacksonville area are unwilling to hire ex-offenders a public service campaign may be suggested. In order to overcome barriers such as this, certain cities including Boston, San Francisco, and Minneapolis have been campaigning for cities to voluntarily “Ban the Box,” which refers to eliminating the box that asks whether or not the applicant has been convicted of a crime(s) (Henry & Jacobs, 2007).

Hypotheses

**H01:** Most employers will be unwilling to hire ex-offenders.

**H02:** Most businesses will not be aware of the potential tax credits associated with hiring ex-offenders.

**Ha3:** Most employers will be more willing to hire ex-offenders when given monetary incentives.

**Ha4:** Most businesses will participate in the practices identified as being barriers to employment for ex-offenders.

**Ha5:** There will be a relationship between perceived conflict and whether or not an employer currently hires ex-offenders.

**Ha6:** There will be a relationship between amount of direct contact an employee has with customers and whether or not an employer currently hires ex-offenders.
Definitions

Barriers- Conditions that prevent an ex-offender from successfully re-entering society after incarceration.

Bonding- (a.k.a. the Federal Bonding Program) Encourages businesses to hire at-risk, hard to place job seekers by providing insurance policies that protect against employee theft or dishonesty. The bonds provide six months of coverage ranging from $5,000-$25,000, are available at no cost to the job applicant or the employer, and require no paperwork on the part of the employer.

Conditional Release- Those individuals who have been released from a correctional facility and are now under supervision of an officer (traditionally known as probation).

Employment – Being legally employed and/or legally earning a living.

Ex-offender - Anyone with a record of arrest, conviction or imprisonment, and anyone who has ever been on probation or parole. A person who committed a misdemeanor or felony and has completed their sentence and is returning to society (specifically Jacksonville for the purposes of this study).

Housing- A permanent or temporary recognized dwelling where an individual may reside. This includes but is not limited to houses, mobile homes, apartments, halfway houses, residential treatment facilities, emergency shelters, etc.

Largest Jacksonville Employers- This group consists of those companies that hire more than 100 people to work in the Jacksonville area.

Probation – An individual may be placed on probation as a condition of release stipulated by a Judge at the time of sentencing or as an alternative to incarceration. Persons on probation are supervised by a designated probation officer.

Recidivism - An additional arrest within a three year period following a person’s release from incarceration.

Rehabilitation Programs - Organizations that will train and prepare individuals to successfully re-enter the workforce and/or society in general after their time is served.

Second Chance Act - In 2007 President Bush agreed to provide financial support to programs that help offenders become productive members of society while maintaining public safety.

Tax Credits- (a.k.a. Work Opportunity Federal Tax Credit) Businesses that hire workers that face barriers to employment, such as those with criminal records, may be eligible for a federal tax credit of up to $2,400 per qualifying employee.
Limitations & Delimitations

1. Only the largest employers in Jacksonville and those persons considered community business leaders were contacted and asked to participate in this study.

2. The sole use of the telephone for survey delivery limited our response rate.

3. The Win CATI software used in the Public Opinion Research Lab (hereinafter PORL) also limited our findings by limiting our sample.

4. Our telephone survey time period was restricted.

Assumptions

We are assuming that individuals who answer the survey are qualified to do so and will answer honestly; that the list provided to us from the Sheriff’s Office included the largest Employers in Jacksonville and Community Business Leaders.

Justification

Over 95% of individuals who are incarcerated in the United States will be released. Recent statistics provided by the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office indicate approximately 38,000 individuals are released from local correctional facilities and return to the Jacksonville area each year (JSO, 2008). A startling 40-60% of these individuals have been re-arrested within three years of release (JSO, 2008). One of the most substantial barriers to successful re-entry is unemployment. If local businesses are unwilling to hire ex-offenders then the number of re-arrests and re-incarcerations will continue to climb at an alarming rate putting the citizens of Jacksonville at an increased risk of victimization.

Research indicates that employers “seek law-abiding employees to, among other things, promote the safety of customers and other employees, safeguard the reputation of their businesses, avoid lawsuits for negligent hiring, and minimize workplace disruption from having
an employee accused of a crime” (Pograsky, 2006). We hypothesize that most businesses are not aware of the potential safeguards and rewards for hiring ex-offenders such as the federal bonding program and federal tax credits. If this hypothesis is correct perhaps simply educating local business leaders about these opportunities will increase hiring of ex-offenders and subsequently help to lower recidivism rates.
Chapter II
Review of Literature

Introduction

This study was designed to provide information to the Jacksonville Re-entry Center (hereinafter JREC) that will assist ex-offenders in gaining employment upon release from incarceration. Our study focused on the numerous barriers to employment, statistics of current ex-offender employment, current hiring trends of employers, as well as elements of success for ex-offenders returning to their communities after incarceration. Research indicates that lack of employment prospects coupled with a deficit of appropriate life skills are among the biggest barriers ex-offenders face when searching for employment (Henderson, 2001; Hicks, 2004) after release from incarceration.

In an effort to help these men and women overcome this important obstacle the federal government has spent over $100 million dollars to develop re-entry programs that provide ex-offenders with the services and skills they desperately need upon release (Farkas, 2007; Miller, 2007). Despite such efforts, more than sixty percent of employers claim that they would not knowingly hire an applicant with a criminal background (Pager, 2006). In order to overcome barriers such as this, certain cities including Boston, San Francisco, and Minneapolis have been campaigning for cities to voluntarily “Ban the Box,” which refers to eliminating the box that asks whether or not the applicant has been convicted of a crime(s) (Henry & Jacobs, 2007).

Through the use of our data, JREC, a division of the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office, will be better able to more efficiently place ex-offenders in career programs that will help reduce recidivism and create safer communities for our families and friends. Recent studies have shown that the reduction of the recidivism rates is related to their ability to gain and maintain employment (Burrell, 2007; Lichtenberger, 2006). Therefore the results of this study could
potentially reduce the amount of money we are spending on correctional facilities and the inmates they hold by reducing the number of men and women returning on a yearly basis.

**Statistics**

At the end of the 1960s, there were many blue-collar employment opportunities. This led to a movement that reduced the number of employment barriers faced by ex-offenders. Studies showed a full-time employment rate of around fifty percent for parolees during this time period (Simon, 1993). Today, there are over sixteen million current or former felons in the United States, and this is approximately seven and a half percent of the adult population (Pogarsky, 2006). Approximately six-hundred thousand of these inmates will return to communities across the country each year (Farkas, 2007). However, when they return back to their communities, they will face some serious challenges when seeking employment.

More than sixty percent of employers claim that they would not knowingly hire an applicant with a criminal background (Pager, 2006). For example, out of 192,190 total positions listed in Virginia, only 15,821 would consider hiring an ex-offender. That is only 8.23 percent (Lichtenberger, 2006). The federal government has spent over one hundred million dollars to develop re-entry programs to provide these ex-offenders with the skills needed upon release (Farkas, 2007; Miller, 2007) in order to be productive and successful members of society.

Ex-offenders who are unemployed are more likely to return to prison. In 2003, ex-offenders who were unemployed were 500 percent more likely to have their supervision revoked than those who were employed. Eighty percent of people that had their supervision revoked were unemployed (Raikas, 2005). In 2005, 698,459 offenders returned home. Nearly two-thirds of these offenders will be re-arrested and half will be re-incarcerated within three years of their release (Visher, 2007).
Barriers

Research has shown the ex-offenders who obtain quality employment, such as skilled labor, are less likely to recidivate; however, the majority of ex-offenders lack the education, training, work skills and employment history to obtain such positions (Clarke, 2007; Henderson, 2001; Rakis, 2005; Thompson, 2004; Uggen, 2001). The inability to gain employment is one of the biggest reasons ex-offenders will recidivate (Title 47, 2008). A lack of job prospects coupled with a deficit in basic life skills (i.e. inability to dress, speak and behave properly) are among the biggest barriers ex-offenders face when searching for employment (Henderson, 2001; Hicks, 2004). In addition to overcoming the social stigma attached with a criminal record, ex-offenders must also overcome federal and state work restrictions placed upon them. These barriers along with restrictions placed on federal aid funds ensure that many ex-offenders will recidivate (Harrison, Schehr, 2004; Kilcommins, 2007).

There are many state and federal laws that pose challenges to ex-offenders, including laws pertaining to education, housing, and employment. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act passed in 1994, by Congress abolished Pell Education Grants for state and federal prisoners, which served as the primary funding for inmate education (Thompson, 2004). Without access to these educational programs, ex-offenders are not equipped to obtain a high-quality job and must rely on the parole system and other service providers, both of which are too overburdened to adequately provide support (Henderson, 2001; Rakis, 2005; Thompson, 2004; Uggen, 2001).

Another barrier that ex-offenders face upon release is finding suitable housing. Many inmates return to society under new social circumstances and can no longer rely on a family support system that once was there. Of the 650,000 people that are released from federal and
state prisons each year, 15 to 27 percent seek out help from homeless shelters (O’Hear, 2007).

Most landlords require proof of employment and/or proof of the ability to pay the required rent prior to agreeing to lease out their property to a potential tenant. Then there are special categories of offenders (i.e. sex offenders) who have increased difficulty finding places to live that do not violate local ordinances (i.e. living a certain number of feet away from a school, playground or bus stop). Many public housing agencies seek federal government rewards for documenting that they have implemented certain policies and procedures that make their community safe for residents. These policies include measures such as: evicting individuals who are considered dangerous to the community, and prohibiting admission to applicants who are or have previously been involved in criminal activity (Thompson, 2004). The inability to find suitable housing can directly result in a lack of employment opportunities for ex-offenders, since a permanent address and telephone number is required by individuals applying for work (Roman, 2004; Tewksbury, 2007; Thompson, 2004).

There are also laws that protect companies that openly discriminate and refuse to hire ex-offenders. The Wisconsin Fair Employment Act states that refusal to employ or terminating employment based on conviction record is not employment discrimination if the applicants conviction is directly related to the position sought or if they are not bondable (Wis. Stat. Ann § 111.335). The N.Y. Correct Law and Florida Statue under Title 10 state that a person cannot be denied employment based solely on criminal record unless there is a relationship between the conviction and position sought (N.Y. Correct Law § 752; Title 10, 2008). The N.Y. Correct Law goes on further to say that if there is an unreasonable risk involved towards property, the public, or other employees then employment does not have to be granted (N.Y. Correct Law § 752).
Many states have enacted legislature that prohibits ex-offenders from occupying certain professions. Some states have permanently barred ex-offenders from public employment along with other occupations (Rakis, 2005; Thompson, 2004). Another major obstacle that must be overcome is occupational licensing restrictions, which serve as the primary method for regulating certain businesses. Ex-offenders are excluded from work that requires professional licensing on the basis of the “good moral character” clause (Thompson, 2004). Without a license, ex-offenders are prohibited from occupying jobs such as: lawyers, bartenders, nurses, barbers, plumbers, and many others (Thompson, 2004). Another major obstacle is that inmates in prison are still being trained to perform jobs that they will not be able to perform upon their release, due to the licensing requirements or the fact that the occupation does not exist (Rakis, 2005; Thompson, 2004).

Some researchers suggest that criminal histories should not be so easily obtained and should be expunged after a certain period of time, provided the ex-offender remain crime free. This would allow ex-offenders to obtain legitimate work much easier, which would “provide financial support and in general, helps ex-offenders be productive, develop valuable life skills, and strengthen their self-esteem and social connectedness” (Pograsky, 2006). Further findings indicate that those ex-offenders who are employed and have stable employment patterns, earn more, and are less likely to recidivate than those who are unemployed or are employed but have unstable patterns of employment. Most ex-offenders are only able to find employment in low-level occupations, with low rates of job retention, and limited customer contact. Identifying and directing ex-offenders to those employers with a consistent history of not discriminating against persons with a criminal past is only one aspect of a successful transition (Lichtenberger, 2006). “There are over 16 million current or ex-felons in the United States, which is seven and a half
percent of the adult population (Pogarsky, 2006).” In order to improve their chances of being hired, their criminal history should not be accessible after a specified period of time. Legitimate employment is the key to success for ex-felons. This employment allows ex-offenders to successfully reintegrate into society. Criminal history is a particular concern when employers are considering hiring ex-offenders. Employers “seek law-abiding employees to, among other things, promote the safety of customers and other employees, safeguard the reputation of their businesses, avoid lawsuits for negligent hiring, and minimize workplace disruption from having an employee accused of a crime” (Pogarsky, 2006).

**Training and Partnerships**

Part of the requirement for successfully re-entering the workforce after incarceration is having a degree of employability. There are organizations that will help train and prepare ex-offenders to re-enter the workforce after their time has been served (Carter, 2007). They provide participants with structure, activities, instill good work habits, enable participants to earn a daily income, test participants' readiness for placement in a permanent job, and generate income that helps cover day-labor expenses. In Baltimore, the Maryland Department of Parole and Probation have established a program to provide pre-GED and GED classes as well as interview skills training, resume preparation, and job application completion (Finn, 1998).

In order to be successful in gaining employment or to even be seriously considered a person must have knowledge of the application and hiring processes. This is why it is crucial to have established partnerships between the correctional facilities and private agencies that are willing and able to properly train and adequately prepare these individuals to overcome these employment related challenges prior to their release (Sachwald, 2008).

Work Net Solutions offers a career development program for individuals who are deemed
“difficult to place.” This includes but is not limited to those individuals who have been incarcerated. The Work Net Career Development Model boasts an impressive 84% placement rate followed by a 64% retention rate measured within a one year period and a 30% job upgrade rate also occurring within the first year of employment (Work Net Solutions). The Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office Department of Corrections will hold the first Work Net Training Program graduation at the John E. Goode Pre-Trial Detention Facility on August 1, 2008 at 10am. Eleven participants will graduate from the class of career development training. This was an eight-week course that addressed employment challenges ex-offenders face upon their release from incarceration. Mr. Emerson L. Wright, Work Net Facilitator, helped individuals determine their strengths, goals, barriers, fears, interests, skills, and motivations in order to prepare them for a successful career search and long-term success. Work Net focuses on identifying fears and barriers to employment, and developing the attitude, outlook and answers to overcome them. This is done through career exploration and training on what is expected in U.S. Business Culture and understanding the needs of employers.

The Illinois Department of Corrections realized this fact too and implemented a job readiness program called Safer Sheridan that teaches inmates the “soft skills” needed to obtain employment. This program is offered in addition to the education and coaching programs that already exist in most correctional systems. The Illinois based program is structured to provide inmates with employment opportunities after release. “Early outcomes based on the first 12 releases show that within the first few weeks of release, 80 percent of the Safer Sheridan graduates have been placed in living wage, full-time employment positions within the identified industries (Hicks, 2004).” This program is one of many nationwide designed to help ex-offenders overcome the barriers associated with gaining employment after incarceration.
Entering the labor market can be a confusing and sometimes overwhelming experience for anyone but this is particularly true for those individuals with a criminal record (Carter, 2006). The Offender Workforce Development Specialist Partnership Training Program (hereinafter, OWDS) was developed to address this issue. The program’s training team stays committed, as well as focused on meeting the offender’s needs in their search for employment. This program covers employment training, placement and retention services and career counseling for offenders coming out of the prison system and returning to the workforce. In order to successfully complete this program an offender must devote plenty of time and effort. This particular program consists of five weeks of classroom and e-learning modules that are set up to minimize the disruption of the offender’s current job responsibilities (if employed). The classroom learning is set up for three sessions of four and a half days occurring every other week; the e-modules are completed between each classroom session. Upon successful completion, they are granted one-on-one instructor on-site training, which applies their recent knowledge from the previous program.

**Current Trends**

There are many initiatives that are attempting to help ex-offenders obtain jobs and to receive a better education. The Second Chance Act of 2007 is one such initiative intended to do just that, to help ex-offenders obtain the education and training that is necessary to maintain a job (Anonymous, 2007). The underlying rationale of such initiatives is by employing these men and women we are subsequently reducing recidivism rates and not only increasing public safety but also potentially reducing the amount of money spent to arrest, prosecute and incarcerate those who would otherwise commit another crime.
According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics upon re-arrest 89 percent of parole and probation violators were un-employed (Lichtenberger, 2006; Tarlow & Nelson, 2007) and after one year of release from prison 60 percent of ex-offenders were still un-employed (Anonymous, 2007). Currently employers are more willing to hire ex-offenders in the fields of manufacturing, construction, transportation, and in fields that require a lower level of customer contact (Lichtenberger, 2006). As a result most ex-offenders end up in low paying jobs with a low rate of job retention (Lichtenberger, 2006). In order to break some of the employment barriers some major U.S. cities like Boston, San Francisco, and Minneapolis have been campaigning for companies to voluntarily “Ban the Box” (Henry & Jacobs, 2007). Ban the Box refers to eliminating the box that asks whether or not the applicant has been convicted of a crime.

Another current trend that is attempting to deal with high rates of recidivism is the Center for Employment Opportunities (hereinafter CEO). The greatest risk for re-offending occurs within the first six months after release (Tarlow & Nelson, 2007). Armed with this knowledge the CEO starts working with offenders three months before release which contains four days of job readiness instruction and for approximately two months the offenders participate in paid transitional work followed by placement in a permanent job (Tarlow & Nelson, 2007).

Women face additional barriers after incarceration due to the limited programming available to them while serving time. Traditionally women in prison could only receive training in fields such as cosmetology and hair dressing but the opportunities are starting to expand. The issue with these types of programs rests in the adoption of state laws that prohibit convicted felons from holding licenses in these specific fields. More recent prison based programs focused on professional fields in which women can receive training in typing and interaction with other people, or if they prefer they can pursue an education (Case & Fasen & Sarri & Phillips, 2005).
Benefits to hiring individuals with criminal pasts

Perhaps the most enticing incentive for hiring an ex-offender is one of a financial nature. The federal government provides financial compensation in the form of tax credits for those companies that choose to hire ex-offenders. One such federal tax credit is better known as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

The Work Opportunity Credit provides an incentive to hire individuals from targeted groups that have a particularly high unemployment rate or other special employment needs. In most cases, the credit can be as much as 40% (or $2,500) of the "qualified first year wages" you pay to individuals who begins to work for you before September 30, 2011. If the individual is a disabled veteran, the credit can be twice as much. If the individual is a long-term family assistance recipient, the credit is available over a 2-year period and is calculated on a greater amount of wages. The credit is claimed by filing Form 5884 (PDF), Work Opportunity Credit, with the business's tax return (IRS, 2008). An individual is a member of a targeted group if he or she is: a qualified recipient of assistance under temporary assistance for needy families (TANF); qualified veteran; qualified ex-felon; designated community resident; high-risk youth; vocational rehabilitation referral; qualified summer youth employee; qualified food stamp recipient; qualified SSI recipient or a long-term family assistance recipient. Another similar tax credit, the Welfare to Work Tax Credit allows an employer to claim up to 35% of an employer’s wages made during their first year of employment (Welfare to Work Partnership, 2008). A third federal financial opportunity is made possible through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and is available to employers who are willing to train and provide work experience to ex-offenders (Smart solutions, 2008).
Aside from the financial incentives listed above other benefits include support from service providers and supervision agencies within the community. There are agencies within Jacksonville (i.e. WorkNet) that help businesses hire with confidence by acting as intermediaries between the employer and the job applicant (Smart solutions, 2008). While programs vary in the services offered it is a worthwhile investment to check some of these programs out. There are also work release programs in Jacksonville that require participants to maintain employment as an alternative to incarceration. Individuals involved in these programs face incarceration for failure to report to work and are often the most reliable source of labor some business employ.

Probation officers are also beneficial if the ex-offender applying for your vacancy has one. These individuals are charged with ensuring that this individual continues to demonstrate acceptable social behavior. Individuals on probation are often required to maintain employment, refrain from drug use, and most importantly not commit any new crimes. The penalties for violating a condition of one’s probation could be as severe as additional jail or prison time. Probation officers can serve as a valuable resource for employers.

1966, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) created the Federal Bonding Program (FBP) as an employer job-hire incentive that guaranteed the job honesty of at-risk job seekers. Federal financing of Fidelity Bond insurance, issued free-of-charge to employers, enabled the delivery of bonding services as a unique job placement tool to assist ex-offenders, and other at-risk/hard-to-place job applicants (e.g., recovering substance abusers, welfare recipients, poor credits, etc.).

The Federal Bonding Program provides bonding insurance to employers willing to hire certain high-risk job applicants who may otherwise be denied coverage from commercial bond carriers. This is a program that is sponsored by the Department of Labor. According to the
Federal Bonding Program’s website, “Having a record of arrest, conviction or imprisonment functions as a significant barrier to employment since employers generally view ex-offenders as potentially untrustworthy workers and insurance companies usually designate ex-offenders as being ‘not bondable’ for job honesty.”

**Elements of Success:**

In order for ex-offender reintegration to be successful there needs to be partnerships established between law enforcement and corrections as well as community partnerships. This partnership requires an open line of communication and data sharing between the community and the agencies. One must keep in mind that it is not the sole responsibility of the correctional department, but of the community as a whole that ensures reentry is a success. Local businesses must be fully informed of the potential costs and benefits associated with hiring ex-offenders. Public awareness is paramount to overcoming the tremendous obstacles ex-offenders currently face concerning successful reentry.
Chapter III
Methodology

This was an exploratory study aimed at discovering employment practices of large Jacksonville area employers, specifically concerning the hiring of ex-offenders. This is the first of a multiple phased project that will continue through December of 2008. A focus group is scheduled for September 25, 2008 at 2pm and is open to the first 10 employers who agree to participate. The Jacksonville Re-entry Center will also be seeking additional information from all Jacksonville area employers in order to create a master list of employers willing to hire ex-offenders. The study was based upon previous literature concerning the employment barriers that are often faced by ex-offenders. Gainful and steady employment for ex-offenders is a matter of public safety in that it is cited as the number one component to successful re-entry (Pograsky, 2006; Burrell, 2007; Lichtenberger, 2006). As current studies have shown, the reduction of recidivism rates for ex-offenders is directly related to their retention of employment (Burrell, 2007; Lichtenberger, 2006). Therefore the findings from this study are essential in being able to identify where companies currently stand on hiring those with a criminal record. Perhaps of even more importance, these findings will allow us to determine what else needs to be done to increase public safety by reducing recidivism through identifiable employment opportunities.

Research Design

This study was both exploratory and purposive in nature and is an example of applied research. It was exploratory in that the researcher sought to answer many questions about employment practices like: how many employers were currently hiring ex-offenders, whether these experiences were positive or negative, whether there were specific crimes which would automatically disqualify an applicant from being hired, how long after release employers would
be comfortable hiring someone with a criminal record, etc. This study was purposive in nature because the population from which we sampled was limited to business leaders and the largest employers in our area since these are often the first places people look for employment (i.e. are more likely to post job vacancies on popular websites and in commonly searched newspapers and are often thought to provide higher monetary compensation and better benefits to their employees because they are more financially stable). This study is also an example of applied research due to the fact that the results will be used by the Jacksonville Reentry Center to try and increase the number of employers willing to hire ex-offenders in our community. A survey instrument was administered via telephone using Win CATI software.

Participants

The researcher hoped to achieve a 10% response rate from the targeted population. This population consisted of 669 of the largest Jacksonville area employers and community business leaders. The overall response rate was 17% and provided us with an overall sample of 113 businesses.

Instrument

A survey instrument was designed as part of a class project during the summer of 2008. Students enrolled in Dr. Elizabeth McMullan’s Research Methods in Criminology & Criminal Justice course carefully designed this survey instrument based upon a review of relevant research literature. A copy of this survey instrument appears as Appendix A and a list of student names appears in the acknowledgement section of this document as well as in Appendix B. Experts from the Jacksonville Reentry Center were consulted to assess the construct and face validity of the survey instrument used in this study. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach’s alpha (.763).
The survey consisted of 19 questions. Most of the questions asked were about the company’s practice or position on hiring ex-offenders. This began with the obvious yet critical question, “does your company currently employ ex-offenders?” and included others either posed by the Jacksonville Reentry Center or based in research findings. The researcher wanted to know whether the company’s experience with hiring an ex-offender had been positive or negative and thus a 10 point likert scale question was posed to address this issue. Specific questions about hiring practices were also asked to gain a better understanding of common practice. These questions asked about background checks, specific crimes that would disqualify a person from being hired, consideration of the age at which the crime was committed, the maximum number of convictions allowed for consideration, and how long a person had to be released before a company was comfortable hiring them. The researcher also thought it was important to ask how much contact employees had with customers to determine if this would have an impact on whether or not the agency was willing to hire ex-offenders.

A few questions addressed their knowledge of and/or preference for incentives associated with hiring ex-offenders. We hypothesized that most businesses would be unaware of federal tax credits available to them for hiring ex-offenders. The question, “are you aware of financial incentives for employers to hire ex-offenders, such as tax credits up to $2,100 per ex-offender?” was posed to address this hypothesis. Since the Federal Government intended for this tax credit to serve as an incentive for employers to hire these otherwise hard to place employees the next question followed up to determine whether this incentive would be effective. The Federal Bonding Program was another incentive created by the Department of Labor as a way of enticing employers to consider individuals whom they otherwise would dismiss not due to lack of
qualification but rather due to the fact that they could not afford to insure them. This was the basis for the question, “Would you hire an ex-offender if they were bonded?”

One of the barriers uncovered during the review of relevant literature was the inability of ex-offenders to find suitable housing. This can directly result in a lack of employment opportunities for ex-offenders, since a permanent address and telephone number is required by individuals applying for work (Roman, 2004; Tewksbury, 2007; Thompson, 2004). Based on this information the question, “Does your company hire individuals without a permanent address, such as those living in half-way houses?” was included in the survey instrument. The recent trend of providing work readiness programs in correctional settings is intended to help these individuals overcome perceived obstacles they face after release. The question, “Would you be more willing to hire an ex-offender if they had adequate formal education and/or training in your industry or business?” was asked to determine whether offering these programs could be justified. We also wanted to determine how many companies were currently working with offender rehabilitation programs. The researcher wanted to determine if employers would hire those individuals that had case management or supervision. Although the literature reviewed listed a variety of incentives for employers to hire ex-offenders the researcher thought it would be beneficial to ask an open ended question addressing this concept. The question, “What would be a good incentive for your business to hire an ex-offender?” was asked to determine whether or not there was an incentive that could be offered that was not already being done.

There were also two strictly demographic questions asked. The first asked for the zip code at their physical location in an effort to position them on a map of Jacksonville. The second demographic question asked how many people were currently employed at their business and this was done to determine how many businesses surveyed followed the target population of 100
or more employees. It is assumed that those not falling in this designated category were included because they were considered local business leaders.

**Procedure**

This project was requested by the Jacksonville Re-entry Center and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Florida (see Appendix C). The Director of the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office Department of Corrections sent out a letter (see Appendix D) explaining the study and requesting participation from the largest Jacksonville employers and community leaders one week prior to surveying. There were a total of 19 questions on the survey instrument and completion required approximately 5 minutes of the participant’s time.

A purposive sampling method was used for this study. The target population was comprised of the largest Jacksonville employers and community leaders. A list of 669 business names and numbers were provided by the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office. The largest Jacksonville employers were targeted for the first phase of this research project based on the fact that most large businesses have the financial resources to advertise with online job search engines (i.e. Monster.com), are typically thought to provide more competitive wages to their employees and are often the first agencies people contact or think to contact when looking for employment. Several community business leaders were also surveyed at the request of the Jacksonville Re-entry Center in an effort to gain additional insight from those involved in our community’s decision making process.

The researcher contracted with the University of North Florida’s Public Opinion Research Lab where the phone calls were made. The list of names and telephone numbers for the largest Jacksonville employers was provided to the Public Opinion Research Lab (hereinafter PORL). These names were removed prior to survey implementation by the PORL to maintain
confidentiality. Win Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) software was used to ensure randomized number selection and automatic dialing. Calls were placed to the largest Jacksonville employers from students at the Public Opinion Research Lab (hereinafter PORL) on July 15th, 17th and 22nd between the hours of 9am and 12noon. During the administration of the survey several employers provided alternative numbers and requested call backs at a later date and these were carried out by Dr. Elizabeth C. McMullan and five of her students on July 22, 2008. Additional calls to Community Business Leaders took place on July 24th between the hours of 9am and 5pm.

Debriefing sessions were held on July 17th and 22nd and provided students with an opportunity to express any concerns that they had about their experience. The content of these debriefing sessions will be presented in the results section.

**Delimitations & Limitations**

There were several delimitations and limitations associated with this study which would prevent these findings from being generalized to the larger population. The first limitation is based upon the fact that we used a purposive sampling technique and targeted only the larger employers in Jacksonville and community (business) leaders. This study was the first step in uncovering Jacksonville employer’s willingness to hire ex-offenders upon their re-entry into our community. As such, the largest employers in our area were targeted first since these are often the first places people look for employment (i.e. are more likely to post job vacancies on popular websites and in commonly searched newspapers and are often thought to provide higher monetary compensation and better benefits to their employees because they are more financially stable). A list of the largest known Jacksonville employers was provided by the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office but was not an exhaustive list of all Jacksonville employers and subsequently
limits our research findings. Consequently, this substantially limits our findings in that it does
not represent Jacksonville employers as a whole.

The sole use of the telephone for survey delivery limited our response rate in that it
excluded all businesses registered with privacy director and excluded businesses with unlisted or
cellular phone numbers. Furthermore, not all of the employers listed included telephone
numbers or the numbers that were included were wrong (i.e disconnected, no longer in service,
wrong number, facsimile number or were considered long distance). Research indicates that
using multiple modes of survey delivery increase response rates (Dillman, 2000). Due to the
costs associated with the administration of a telephone survey the time period was restricted.
calls were made on four separate days within a two week period between the hours of 9am and
12pm. Research (Keeter et al., 2000) indicates that this potentially limits our response rates as
standard telephone surveys are conducted over a five day period.

The WinCATI software used in the Public Opinion Research Lab (hereinafter PORL)
prevented direct dialing in instances where the person contacted wanted to provide an alternative
name and number for contact purposes. Long distance numbers (including 1-800 and 1-888)
were also excluded due to the subsequent costs associated with dialing them and/or the
alternative dialing method required for making the calls (dialing 8 then the number as opposed to
dialing a 9). Many of our phone calls went directly to voicemail or were answered by fully
automated systems which did not include an option to speak with a human resource company
representative. The 65 calls that were disconnected during the delivery of the survey were not
allowed to be re-dialed as per PORL policy.
Data Analysis

The data collected during this study was analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. The primary mode of analysis was frequency distribution. These results are presented in graphical format throughout the results section of this report. A cross tabulation was also calculated to determine whether there was a relationship between the amount of contact employees had with employees and whether or not employers were currently hiring ex-offenders. A cross tabulation was the best method for determining relationship since both variables being measured were nominal. Open ended responses were coded and placed into categories. These categories are presented by the frequency in which they occurred. Debriefing sessions held on July 17th and 22nd uncovered additional information worthy of mention and are presented at the end of the next chapter. Results of this study were presented to the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office on Monday, July 28th, 2008.

Names of businesses are excluded in the results section to maintain confidentiality as per the requirement of the University of North Florida’s Institutional Review Board.
Chapter IV
Results

Students attempted to make contact with the 669 business phone numbers over a four day period. At the conclusion of the 4th day a 17% response rate had been achieved. A breakdown of contact reveals that there were 113 completions, 70 hang-ups, 65 refusals, 71 phone numbers listed with privacy director and 350 phone numbers were called multiple times without receiving a response (i.e. answering machine, voicemail, or automated system). The final sample size is 113 (n=113). The results will be presented below their corresponding question in graphical format.

There were several hypotheses established prior to collection of data. These hypotheses served as the basis for most of the questions in the survey instrument. Our first hypothesis was that most employers would not be willing to hire ex-offenders. As the results presented below indicate this hypothesis was incorrect and the researcher instead now concludes that most employers surveyed did currently employ ex-offenders and therefore obviously are willing to hire them. The second hypothesis presented in the first chapter of this report was that most businesses would not be aware of the potential tax credits associated with hiring ex-offenders and this hypothesis was correct. Another hypothesis was that most employers would be more willing to hire ex-offenders when given monetary incentives. The fourth hypothesis was that most businesses would participate in the practices identified as being barriers to employment for ex-offenders (i.e. background checks, requiring permanent address). The last two hypotheses examined relationships between whether an employer currently hired ex-offenders and a perceived conflict or the amount of contact the employee would have with customers.
Question 1: Does your company currently employ ex-offenders?

- Yes: 56%
- No: 43%
- Refused: 1%

Question 2: On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the LEAST positive and 10 being the MOST positive, how would you rate your company’s experience with hiring an ex-offender?

Most employers who had hired ex-offenders in the past rated their experiences between mediocre and most positive. Eighteen percent of those surveyed refused to answer this question or replied they did not know the answer to this question.
Question 3: In your hiring practices, are background checks performed on all applicants?

![Pie chart showing 79% Yes, 18% No, 3% Refused]

Question 4: Are there specific crimes which would automatically disqualify an applicant for hire?

![Pie chart showing 78% Yes, 18% No, 4% Depends]

When probed for the specific crimes they would automatically disqualify an applicant for, the most common responses were (in order of frequency): violent crimes, any felony, sex crimes and theft.
Question 5: Do you take into consideration the age at which the crime was committed before making an employment decision?

- Yes: 69%
- No: 12%
- Refused: 19%

Question 6: If an ex-offender were seeking employment, what would be the maximum allowed convictions on his or her record in order to be employed?

Most (54%) of the employers surveyed said they could not answer this question because they simply did not know. Of those that responded, 30% of them said one or two was their limit. However, 6% of employers indicated they were willing to consider hiring individuals with five or more offenses on their record.
Question 7: How long after release from incarceration would you feel comfortable hiring an ex-offender?

Thirty-four percent of employers responded more than 1 year and many specified it would take at least 7 years after their conviction before they would consider hiring someone with a felony.

Question 8: Would hiring an ex-offender cause a conflict in your business?
Question 9: Are you aware of financial incentives for employers to hire ex-offenders, such as tax credits up to $2,100 per ex-offender?

- Yes: 35%
- No: 56%
- Refused: 9%

Question 10: If you were approved for governmental tax credits, would you consider hiring ex-offenders?

- Yes: 43%
- No: 26%
- Don’t know: 18%
- Refused: 13%

Question 11: Would you hire an ex-offender if they were bonded?
Question 12: Does your company hire individuals without a permanent address, such as those living in half-way houses?

Question 13: Would you hire an ex-offender if they had case management?

Question 14: Would you be more willing to hire an ex-offender if they had adequate formal education and/or training in your industry or business?
Question 15: Does your company currently work with any offender rehabilitation programs?

Those who said they currently worked with rehabilitation programs the following agencies were listed: Operation New Hope; Salvation Army; Dinsmore Work Release; Empowerment of Florida; Help Center; Goodwill; Jacksonville Hospitality Institute; Gateway; Prisoners of Christ; Jacksonville Area Legal Aid; and the Justice Coalition.
Question 16: What would be a good incentive for your business to hire ex-offenders?

Most employers responded they would be motivated with better preparation on the part of the applicants in terms of education and training that provide them with the job skills and experience they need to perform their jobs well. One company specifically stated they would be more inclined to hire ex-offenders if they received certification through programs like those at FCCJ. Others echoed this idea and stated the most important factor would be the applicant’s qualifications. This sentiment was followed closely with requests for financial incentives like the tax credit or a tax exemption of some kind. A few companies listed case management and/or supervision as an incentive. A couple of other businesses stated they would be more inclined to hire ex-offenders if there was some way to insure or protect the company in the event the
employee committed a new crime while employed. One company suggested a probationary hiring period to make sure the employee was going to work out first would be very appealing. Some of the other responses included: “market conditions,” “a guarantee that our hire would not cause reputable damage to the company,” “best incentive is the applicant’s desire to stay clean,” and “keep them off the streets”. A few stated they do not need an incentive to hire an ex-offender.

Question 17: What is your company’s zip code?
Question 18: How many people are currently employed at your business?

- 49% have 1 to 99 employees
- 24% have 100 to 500 employees
- 10% have 501 to 1000 employees
- 9% have over 1000 employees
- 8% have refused to answer
- 10% have none

Question 19: How much direct contact do your employers have with customers?

- 60% have a lot of contact
- 11% have some contact
- 10% have a little contact
- 7% have none at all
- 12% have refused to answer
Ancillary Findings

The debriefing sessions held on July 17th and 22nd produced a number of ancillary findings. The first finding was that many of the employers were not familiar with the existence of the Jacksonville Reentry Center. Another finding was that many of the businesses surveyed were not aware of the Federal Bonding Program. Several were not sure what “bonded” meant in Question 11 and asked for clarification. Another significant finding was that many employers expressed that they did not consider individuals who committed crimes classified less than a felony (misdemeanor offenses) to be ex-offenders. We were unable to locate information about the Federal Bonding Program on the Florida Department of Labor’s website.

Conclusions

The results of this research endeavor are encouraging in that most of the larger employers surveyed were currently hiring ex-offenders. As current studies have shown, the reduction of the recidivism rates of ex-offenders is directly related to their retention of employment (Burrell, 2007; Lichtenberger, 2006). However, such employment cannot be obtained because of various obstacles such as an ineligibility of required licenses, a lack of higher education, a lack of housing, and perhaps most restrictive of all is an employer’s natural inclination to not hire those with a criminal past (Albright & Denq, 1996; Clarke, 2007; Henderson, 2001; Kilcommins, 2007; Pogarsky, 2006).

Recommendations

Due to the fact that most businesses were unfamiliar with the Jacksonville Reentry Center (JREC) we recommend that a JREC link be provided on the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office webpage. Employers were largely unaware of the potential Federal Tax Credit for hiring ex-offenders and the Federal Bonding Program. Therefore, the researcher recommends the
Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office make efforts to educate local businesses of these opportunities. We suggest that this information be included on the Jacksonville Reentry Center’s webpage with appropriate links to the IRS and Florida Department of Labor. We further recommend that the Florida Department of Labor provide information to employers on their website about the Federal Bonding Program. Research also indicates that employers are concerned about qualifications and therefore we suggest that the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office invest in programs that will better prepare inmates for employment after release.

The Jacksonville Area Discharge Enhancement (JADE) committee lead by Chief Stephanie Sloan-Butler has recommended that the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office create standards for those programs that provide offender rehabilitation, job skills training and education to ex-offenders. Those programs that adhere to these standards should be listed on the Jacksonville Reentry Center’s website as JSO approved agencies. This is needed to provide Jacksonville area employers with a certain level of confidence in hiring ex-offenders associated with these programs. This is also a recommendation that is made to ensure our efforts to increase public safety by reducing recidivism are not undermined by those who are not able to provide the services they claim to offer.

We strongly recommend more dialogue occur between the providers of service within the Jacksonville community, Jacksonville area employers seeking quality applicants and the Jacksonville Reentry Center. This is a task that requires commitment from the entire community.

**Future Research**

As mentioned throughout this report, this is the first phase of a multi-phased research agenda. Future research efforts should include a focus group with Jacksonville employers to
probe deeper into the issues which may prevent them from currently employing ex-offenders and seeking their advice on how to overcome some of the employment barriers that currently exist. A follow-up with recent Work Net graduates should take place within 6 months to find out about their employment seeking experiences. This group should be compared to a group of non-Work Net graduates who can be matched on a variety of factors such as age, race, gender and type of crimes committed to determine if there are any statistically significant differences in the experiences of graduates and non-graduates (i.e. ability to find employment, ability to maintain employment, mobility within jobs selected, contact with law enforcement, and recidivism).

The researcher also suggests that all local businesses be contacted and asked to submit information as to whether or not they are currently willing to hire ex-offenders, what skills and/or other qualifications are required, and what types of offenders they are and are not willing to hire. This would greatly help in the referral process that currently takes place at JREC. This would also help employers find applicants that are best suited for their company’s needs.

We would also like to encourage partnerships between the Jacksonville Reentry Center, Vocational Technical Programs, Local Community Colleges (i.e. FCCJ) that offer certification programs for industry related jobs and local businesses to come up with arrangements for job placement when an offender completes the employers requested skills training or educational programs. This process should begin while the person is incarcerated to ensure employment quickly after release and further reduce the likelihood of them committing further criminal acts.
References


N.Y. Correct Law § 752; Title 10, (2008).


Appendix A
Survey Instrument

Hello, my name is ________, and I am a student calling from UNF here in Jacksonville on behalf of the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office. This is not a sales call. We’re calling to ask some questions to businesses here in Jacksonville. May I speak with the person in your organization that is responsible for hiring employees?

(There are about 20 questions and questioning takes about 5 minutes)

Question 1: Does your company currently employ ex-offenders?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Question 2: On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being LEAST positive, and 10 being MOST positive, how would you rate your company’s experience with hiring an ex-offender?

☐ 1  ☐ 2  ☐ 3  ☐ 4  ☐ 5  ☐ 6  ☐ 7  ☐ 8  ☐ 9  ☐ 10

Least Positive  Most Positive

☐ 98 (Do not Know)  ☐ 99 (Refused to answer)

Question 3: In your hiring practices, are background checks performed on all applicants?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ 99 (Refused)

Question 4: Are there specific crimes which would automatically disqualify an applicant for hire?

☐ Yes (if yes then list the crimes below)  ☐ No

Question 5: Do you take into consideration the age at which the crime was committed before making an employment decision?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ 99 (Refused)

Question 6: If an ex-offender were seeking employment, what would the maximum allowed convictions on his or her record be in order to be employed?

☐ 1  ☐ 2  ☐ 3  ☐ 4  ☐ 5  ☐ 6-8  ☐ 9-11  ☐ More than 11  ☐ 99 (Refused)

Question 7: How long after release would you feel comfortable hiring an ex-offender?

☐ Less than one month  ☐ 1-6 months  ☐ 6months-1 year

☐ 98 (Do not know)  ☐ 99 (Refused to answer)

Question 8: Would hiring an ex-offender cause a conflict in your business?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ 98 (Do not know/it depends)  ☐ 99 (Refused)

Please turn page over ->
Question 9: Are you aware of financial incentives for employers to hire ex-offenders, such as tax credits up to $2,100 per ex-offender?
☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐ 99 (Refused to answer)

Question 10: If you were approved for government tax credits, would you consider hiring ex-offenders?
☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐ 98 (Do not know/it depends)    ☐ 99 (Refused)

Question 11: Would you hire an ex-offender if they were bonded?
☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐ 98 (Do not know/it depends)    ☐ 99 (Refused)

Question 12: Does your company hire individuals without a permanent address, such as those living in halfway houses?
☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐ 99 (Refused to answer)

Question 13: Would you hire an ex-offender if they had case management?
☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐ 98 (Do not know/it depends)    ☐ 99 (Refused)

Question 14: Would you be more willing to hire an ex-offender if they had adequate formal education and/or training in your industry or business?
☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐ 98 (Do not know/it depends)    ☐ 99 (Refused)

Question 15: Does your company currently work with any offender rehabilitation programs?
☐ Yes (please list below)    ☐ No    ☐ 99 (Refused)

Question 16: What would be a good incentive for your business to hire ex-offenders?

Question 18: What is your company’s zip code? (Enter zip code on line below)

Question 19: How many people are currently employed at your business?

(Enter # on the line)
Question 20: How much direct contact do your employers have with customers? Would you say:

□ A lot □ Some □ A little □ None at all □ 99 (Refused)

Those are all the questions I have to ask you. Thank you very much for your time, and have a nice day!
Appendix B

CCJ 3700 Research Methods in Criminology & Criminal Justice

Summer B 2008:

Anderson, Charlee; Anderson, Criscilla; Avdic, Zlatan; Beideman, Courtney; Brettell, Samuel;
Brooks, Michael; Brown, Lauren; Brown, Tiffany; Collins, Richard; Czwornog, Matthew;
DeStafney, Jeremy; Decker, Samantha; Ference, Mary K.; Goosey, Joseph; Guiragossian, Emily;
Hadziavdic, Amir; Harrell, James; Hicks, Abbey; Hiers, Adam; Jordan, Angelica; Junker, Jason;
Kuhlman, Peter; Lawson, Kimberly; Leon, Vanizia; Lucas, Marisol; Nguyen, Paul;
Oberry, Mary; Perales, Joel; Petrovic, Boris; Pica, Andrew; Pitts, Annie; Robertson, Nadine;
Smith, Amanda; Stemen, Justin; Stephenson, Daniel; Strout, Elizabeth; Switzer, Carl;
Tyjewski, Jessica; and Weaver, Jason.
MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 11, 2008

TO: Dr. Elizabeth McMullan,
Criminology and Criminal Justice

FROM: Dominique Scalia, Research Integrity Coordinator,
On Behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board

RE: Review by the UNF Institutional Review Board IRB#08-107:
“Jacksonville’s Ex-Offender Hiring Practices”

This is to advise you that your study, “Jacksonville’s Ex-Offender Hiring Practices,” has been reviewed on behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board and has been declared exempt from further IRB oversight.

This approval applies to your project in the form and content as submitted to the IRB for review. Any variations or modifications to the approved protocol and/or informed consent forms as they relate to dealing with human subjects must be cleared with the IRB prior to implementing such changes.

Should you have any questions regarding your approval or any other IRB issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at 620-2443 or d.scalia@unf.edu.

Thank you.
University of North Florida  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  

REQUEST FOR REVIEW BY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE  
PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS  

NEW PROTOCOL  

Principal Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth C. McMullan  
Co-PI(s):  

Student Researcher(s): Students enrolled in Dr. McMullan’s CCJ 3700 Summer B course  

Department (PI): Criminology & Criminal Justice  

Campus Address & Phone (PI): 51, Rm 2124 & (904) 620-3879  

Email Address (PI): elizabeth.mcmullen@unf.edu  

Project Title: Jacksonville’s Ex-Offender Hiring Practices  

Informed Consent: ❑ Documents included ❑ Request for Waiver included  

Project Type: ❑ Non-funded ❑ Externally Funded Research (Attach Grant)  

Supporting Agency (if any) Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office (J.R.E.C.)  

Project Termination Date: August 1, 2008  

Type Review Requested: ❑ Exempt/Cat# _____ ❑ Expedited/Cat# _____ ❑ Full IRB ❑ Admin. Review  

CITI Course Completion Date: ________________ (attach completion report if affiliation is other than UNF)  

IRB USE:  

Regulatory/Ethical justification for type of review: 45 CFR Part 46  

Type of Review: ❑ Same as Requested ❑ Other than Requested (Type) _____  

Risk to Subjects: ❑ Minimal or less ❑ Greater than minimal  

Potential benefits justify proceedings: ❑ Yes ❑ No  

Informed Consent: ❑ Written ❑ Other than written ❑ Waived  

Forms approved: ❑ Yes ❑ No  

1st Review By: Dominique Scala _______(signature and date)  
❑ Approved ❑ Modifications Required ❑ Referred to Full IRB  

IRB meeting date (full IRB review) _____  

2nd Review By: ___________________________(signature and date)  
❑ Approved ❑ Modifications Required ❑ Referred to Full IRB  

IRB meeting date (full IRB review) _____  

UNF IRB Number: 08-107  

Approval Date: 7/11/08  

Rev. September 2007  

Revision Date:  

08-107
JACKSONVILLE EX-OFFENDER HIRING PRACTICES APPROVAL REQUEST

Please read the following guide and use it as a checklist for your approval request. **Be sure to address each issue listed below** in the appropriate section and as thoroughly as possible.

I. Objectives of Investigation
1. The objectives of this study are to determine which companies in Jacksonville are willing to hire ex-offenders and if they are not willing to hire them why?
2. This research project is aimed at answering questions involving employer hiring practices in Jacksonville.
3. Not being able to achieve gainful employment after incarceration is a barrier to successful re-entry (Weygandt, 2003; Petersilia, 2005; Raphael, 2006; Wilson & Davis, 2006; Clarke, 2007; Carter, 2007). An ex-offender who is unemployed is three times as likely to recidivate than someone who has a job (Houston & Moore, 2001). Employers are often unwilling to hire offenders for fear of liability (Seales, 2002). Employment is cited as a variable that is linked with both success and failure of ex-offender re-entry (Harrison & Schehr, 2004). Ex-offenders who go through life skills and job training programs are more likely to obtain employment than those who do not (Finn, 1998).
4. One of the most effective tools for reducing recidivism rates among ex-offenders returning to society is steady, gainful employment. We would like to determine where we should focus our efforts when trying to locate employment for ex-offenders.

II. Explanation for Use and Description of Subjects
1. **This study will involve telephone contact with the entire target population.**
2. The Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office has provided a list of employers registered with the Chamber of Commerce to be contacted for this study.
3. **There are approximately 500 employers on their list.**
4. Bias in selecting subjects is avoided by including the entire population.

III. Methods or Procedures
1. **This research project will involve a telephone interview with a member of human resources concerning their hiring practices**, including:
   - telephone based survey instrument
   - a letter will be sent from the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office alerting local businesses about the study the week before calls begin. Calls will be made from the University of North Florida’s Public Opinion Lab between the hours of 9am and 12noon on July 15, 2008, July 17, 2008 and July 22, 2008.
2. Subjects will be asked to participate in a survey concerning hiring practices.
3. Results from the survey instrument will be analyzed using SPSS.
4. Data will be stored on UNF computers and Students enrolled in Dr. Elizabeth C. McMullan’s CJC 3700 Summer B course will have access to this data for class project purposes, the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office will have access to this data and Dr. McMullan will have access to this data.

UNF IRB Number: 08-107
Approval Date: 7/11/08
Revision Date:
5. Data collected during this study will be destroyed. Additional permission from the IRB will be sought if findings are to be used later for research purposes.
6. Data will be reported in the aggregate for report purposes but the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office has requested a list of agencies willing to hire former offenders for their records as well.

IV. Assessment of Risks and Benefits to Human Subjects
1. There are no known risks associated with participation in this project. Employers who do choose to participate will gain information concerning bonds and IRS tax credits available to companies that are willing to hire ex-offenders. Participation may increase their potential hiring pool and benefit the community by helping to reduce recidivism through providing employment opportunities to ex-offenders.
2. The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits and in relation to the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result because there are no known risks associated with participating in this study.
3. Names of agencies will not be reported to the public and information about hiring practices will be limited to Jacksonville Sheriff's Office inquiry. Information collected by students will remain confidential.
4. There are no perceivable situations wherein the researcher is mandated to disclose certain confidential information (i.e., cannot maintain confidentiality of responses) therefore potentially putting participants at risk for legal action, such as reporting suspected child abuse and/or neglect.

V. Measures to Protect Human Subjects
1. Any adverse events will be reported immediately to the IRB.
2. Data will be collected using the software provided by the University of North Florida's Public Opinion Survey Lab and will not disseminated to anyone other than those persons specified above.

VI. Methods of Obtaining "Informed Consent" from Subjects
1. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office will be sending a letter describing the study and asking for participation the week before phone calls begin. Students making the calls will introduce themselves and provide a brief oral informed consent statement.
2. A copy of the informed consent must be attached to the request for approval.
3. A copy of the debriefing procedure/script must be attached to the request for approval.

VII. How Results Will be Used
1. Results of the study are not going to be published without further IRB approval.
2. Any reports generated from this study will be reported in aggregate form to protect confidentiality.
3. Data will be used subsequently for the purposes of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.
4. Data will be stored on UNF computers, retained by Dr. McMullan and Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.
Hi my name is ____________. I am calling on behalf of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office from the University of North Florida's Public Opinion Research Lab. You should have received a letter from the Sheriff's Office concerning this survey. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and will take approximately five minutes to complete. The results of this study will help inform the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office about employment opportunities for ex-offenders and specific business names will not be made public. Your participation will be very beneficial for the community. Are you willing to participate at this time?
1. Does your company currently employ ex-offenders?

2. If your company has ever hired an ex-offender, what were your experiences?

3. In your hiring practices, are background checks performed on all applicants?

4. Are there specific crimes which would automatically disqualify an applicant for hire?

5. Do you take into consideration the age at which the crime was committed before making an employment decision?

6. If an ex-offender were seeking employment, what would be the maximum allowed convictions on his/her record in order to be employed?

7. How long after release would you feel comfortable hiring an ex-offender?

8. Would hiring an ex-offender cause a conflict in your business?

9. Are you aware of financial incentives for employers to hire ex-offenders, such as tax credits up to $2,100 per ex-offender?

10. If you were approved for governmental tax credits would you consider hiring ex-offenders?

11. Would you hire an ex-offender if they were bonded?

12. Does your company hire individuals without a permanent address, such as those residing in halfway houses?

13. Would you hire an ex-offender if they had case management?

14. Would you be more willing to hire an ex-offender if they had adequate formal education and/or training in your industry or business?

15. Does your company currently work with any offender rehabilitation programs? If so, which one?

16. What would be a good incentive for your business to hire ex-offenders?

17. What type of business is this?

18. Where is your business located?

19. How many people are currently employed at your business?

20. How much direct contact do your employees have with customers?
July 11, 2008

Dear Business Executive:

We would like to ask for your assistance in reducing crime in Jacksonville by helping us reduce recidivism. Research shows that gainful employment after release from incarceration is the best crime prevention tool possible to accomplish this goal. This is where we need your help.

In order for us to work together to reach this goal we would like to know what your thoughts and concerns are about hiring former offenders as they return to Jacksonville.

We are utilizing the services of Dr. Elizabeth McMullan and the Public Opinion Lab from the University of North Florida to poll all major employers in Jacksonville to ascertain their policies on hiring former offenders. The telephone calls will be placed on three separate dates including, Tuesday July 15, 2008, Thursday July 17, 2008 and Tuesday July 22, 2008 between the hours of 9am and 12 noon. I am asking you as an employer and active steward of our community to help this effort by designating an individual to answer the polling questions when your agency receives this call.

For more information about this project or to schedule a different time to answer the poll questions please call our Reentry Center at 588-0164, 588-0165 or e-mail Catherine.Chadeayne@jassheriff.org.

Sincerely,

Gordon A. Bass, Jr.
Director, Department of Corrections