

Module 1

BUILDING A STRONG COHORT

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE LAB

Module 1

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

What are the advantages of the cohort model for a HEP program? 3

What are the challenges and limitations of the cohort model for a HEP program? 4

What makes for a strong cohort, and how can a HEP program build one? 5

- Step 1: Recruitment 6
- Step 2: Informational Meeting 6
- Step 3: Applications and Interviews 7
- Step 4: Admissions 8

How can we leverage data to build community and improve student and cohort outcomes over time? 10

- Goal 1: Affirming students' personal identities 10
  - Special Dates 11
  - Dietary Needs and Preferences 11
- Goal 2: Identifying trends and student needs 12
  - Living Arrangements 12
  - Access Needs 14

Resources for supporting cohort data collection 14

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Definitions 15
- Tab 1: Student-Level Data 18
- Tab 2: Program Baselines 18
- Additional Tabs 19

Additional Resources 19

How can we create spaces for community building in a prison setting? 20

Recap Of Module 1: Building a Strong Cohort 22

Endnotes 23
Appendix A: Recruitment Poster 25
Appendix B: Program Brochure 26
Appendix C: RJ Lab Application 27
Appendix D: All About Me Worksheet 30
Appendix E: Codebook 31

Module 1

BUILDING A STRONG COHORT

At a Glance

This module provides an overview of the following topics:

- **Defining the cohort model**
- **Building the cohort**
- **Collecting student data to understand the cohort**
- **Cultivating spaces for the cohort to thrive**

Guiding Questions:

1. **What are the advantages of the cohort model for a HEP program?**
2. **What are the challenges and limitations of the cohort model for a HEP program?**
3. **What makes for a strong cohort, and how can a HEP program build one?**
4. **How can we leverage data to build community and improve student and cohort outcomes over time?**
5. **How can we create spaces for community-building in a prison setting?**

A **cohort** refers to a group of students who start and progress through an educational program together with the expectation that they will complete the program at the same time. This approach fosters a sense of community, peer support, and shared learning experiences that can enhance student engagement and success.

What are the advantages of the cohort model for a HEP program?

The use of a cohort model in the context of a higher education in prison (HEP) program is relatively common and therefore not unique to the Restorative Justice (RJ) Lab program.

Specialized programs with a set curriculum such as ours have found this model to be beneficial. Not only does it enhance student engagement and community building, it also allows program faculty and staff to deliver a more tailored and customized experience for students. We chose this model for the RJ Lab because of its ability to enhance student relationships and foster a sense of belonging. It creates a foundation for exploring, learning, sharing, connecting, and establishing a sense of trust and safety that paves the way for vulnerability. This module is designed to assist other programs that seek to build that foundation as well.

Although the general benefits of HEP have been well documented, there is limited empirical research on cohort models in HEP. The existing literature relies primarily on case studies or personal accounts from higher education staff and is therefore lacking in rigorous design (quasi-experimental designs, survey designs, secondary data analysis) to evaluate the effectiveness and potential replication of cohort models in different settings.

> "The cohort model allows for opportunity to be vulnerable with invdividuals who you would usually not trust. And I've learned to trust the people because I found that I could trust the process."
>
> *– RJ Lab student*

Nevertheless, the evolving research shows that this model has distinct advantages:



- Students experience enhanced relationship building with each other.
- Students experience enhanced trust, communication, and relationship building with their instructors.[1]
- Students have greater ease in navigating course selection and registration within a structured curriculum.[2]
- Programs see higher levels of student engagement.[3]
- Programs see higher rates of student retention, especially for students who need consistent support.[4]
- Program administrators are better able to track student progress.[5]

Our program hopes to strengthen this body of research through the participatory action program evaluation we are launching, which we describe in depth in *Module 5: Creating Opportunities for Continuous Engagement*.

What are the challenges and limitations of the cohort model for a HEP program?

Although there are many advantages to the cohort model, programs considering implementing the model should be mindful of the following challenges and limitations in HEP settings:

- The model requires buy-in from all participants.[6]
- The model limits flexibility in course offerings, which is especially difficult in degree programs.[7]
- The model does not easily accommodate transfer credits from other programs.[8]
- The model can be challenging for integrating students' varied education levels in a single classroom environment.
- The model can be disrupted by changes in students' release dates or transfers.[9]

We also have experienced challenges with this model. When students leave or are removed from the program, the loss is acutely felt in a cohort setting. Cliques may form within cohorts, and we have also experienced territoriality and competition between cohorts. We provide strategies for working through these challenges in *Module 2: Strengthening Relationships* and *Module 3: Managing Conflict*.

Although we have a set and standardized curriculum, we have been able to create a customized student experience using the cohort model. For example, each cohort creates and continuously revises its own community agreement, which we detail in *Module 3: Managing Conflict*. In addition, our student handbook, which we describe in greater depth in *Module 4: Modeling Accountability*, is built around and adapted to the needs of each cohort. Study hall materials and academic support also are customized. Students in each cohort select topics for our noncredit professional development workshops offered during the winter and summer terms. Finally, each cohort also selects a name to distinguish and commemorate

its contribution to our program. Our inaugural cohort calls itself "Voices for Change," a name that is documented on rubber wristbands we distributed to reward their work on our student advisory council.



What makes for a strong cohort, and how can a HEP program build one?

What constitutes a strong cohort will vary based on each facility and program. However, HEP programs that strive for accessibility and equal opportunity should create cohorts that



- reflect the descriptive demographics of the broader prison community at your facility;
- include students with varying levels of and experiences with education;
- include students with various backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to share; and
- include students who live in different housing units within the facility (especially if at a maximum-security facility).

The shape of your cohort may also depend on your program's targeted outcomes. For example, one of the evaluation domains for our discussion-based coursework is "perspective taking." Consequently, we seek to create student cohorts that reflect the different cultures and ideologies within the broader facility.

> "The cohort model gives us as individuals a chance to meet people from different backgrounds. We learn to respect the values of others as well."
>
> *– RJ Lab student*

This section contains steps for recruitment and admissions, which may need to be modified based on each facility's security level. We provide our own strategy as a point of reference. Keep in mind that facility-wide recruitment is most challenging in maximum-security settings like ours and may be implemented more easily in medium- and minimum-security settings.

Step 1: Recruitment

The RJ Lab operates at a maximum-security facility. We recruit participants from as many housing units as possible so that restorative justice principles and practices can have a foothold across the facility. However, because movement is very restricted in this setting, we work with the facility to create events where potential participants from across the prison can gather to learn more about the program. Additionally, because people at this facility do not often get to interact with one another across housing units, we must be even more deliberative in our community-building strategies within these shared spaces.

Programs working at other maximum-security facilities may find it difficult to communicate and work with facility staff to create recruitment events. We suggest communicating well in advance of the program's application deadline in order to coordinate these efforts. Even for programs that operate at medium- and minimum-security facilities, space may be at a premium. Working with staff to locate and suggest shared spaces that are empty for blocks of time during the day (e.g., gymnasium, chapel) can help facilitate this process.


University of NORTH ALABAMA

Certificate in Restorative Justice

Beginning Fall 2024

- Earn college credit
- Take classes with campus-based students
- Learn about the global history, practice, and impact of restorative justice
- Become part of the transformative justice movement

An interest meeting will be held **May 1, 2024 at 10:00 am in the gym.**
Sign up below if you would like to attend:

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15.
16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30.

See Appendix A for a full-size image of a recruitment poster with an attached signup sheet that we hang in each of the housing units as well as the cafeteria.

Following the deadline, we collect the posters and invite each person who has signed up to an informational meeting where they can meet alumni and ask questions about the program.



Step 2: Informational Meeting

The informational meeting for our program is held in the facility's gymnasium. We use a microphone and sound system to address participants. We discuss the application and interview process as well as the structure of the program. Our student alumni model a talking circle so

that participants can glimpse the kind of work that we do. We then invite participants to join breakout sessions in different parts of the room, where they can access program brochures, fill out applications, and talk with program staff and alumni. We keep the formal program short so that we have plenty of time to talk and build relationships with potential students one on one. See Appendix B for RJ Lab's program brochure.

Step 3: Applications and Interviews

The application and interview process is your program's first opportunity to learn about prospective students. Our application includes questions about descriptive demographics that help to inform our admissions decisions. We consider what kind of broad representation and balance we want to see within the cohort as a whole. We also use descriptive demographics to build student profiles that become the basis for our new student orientation. For example: How many students in this cohort will be first-generation college students who may need extra support with navigating college standards? How many have been locked up since before laptops were widely used? Based on our past and current student demographics, we have built more tiered and targeted instructional technology components into the orientation and noncredit workshops. For learners who are less familiar with technology, we hold general workshops on topics such as how to navigate laptops with track pads; we have also added self-paced typing programs to student laptops for use during study hall sessions. For more advanced learners, we have conducted workshops that model how to use more sophisticated features of specific software programs such as Microsoft PowerPoint, Microsoft Excel, and SPSS.

The application gives us a sense of how potential students see themselves through reflective prompts that ask them about their personal and intellectual journeys. Pragmatically, it also allows us to examine student writing on a diagnostic level. Some students have sophisticated ideas but need extra support with writing mechanics and grammar. Others need help developing ideas and staying focused on guiding prompts. We ask students to respond to one essay question in writing, and the other essay question is delivered in oral format during our interview. Some students are more comfortable articulating their ideas out loud rather than in writing.

Once we collect student applications, we schedule interviews. We require both an application and an interview to set expectations for student commitment. Often, students will submit applications without appearing for their interview. The interview provides us with another opportunity to

build individual relationships with potential students and make sure they understand the program and its expectations.

See Appendix C for the RJ Lab application.

Step 4: Admissions

Admissions guidelines will vary by program type and desired outcomes. We offer a certificate program, which means that our students are considered non–degree seeking. As a result, we are able to be more flexible in our admissions criteria than the university. (We clarify for students that, if they want to continue their education beyond the certificate program, they would have to meet the University of North Alabama's admissions standards.) We do not, for example, require a GED or high school diploma for admission, although we do ask students to report their education level on the application so that we know the extent of their formal schooling.

Once we make our admissions decisions, we submit our final list of students to the facility for approval. Facilities often remove students based on their disciplinary history, and programs may not be in a position to negotiate these decisions. We clarify on our application that applicants must be in compliance with the facility's requirement of remaining free of disciplinary infractions for a year in order to be eligible for programming.

We distribute admissions letters to applicants and place some on a wait list. It is not unusual to lose students during the first semester of coursework. If a spot becomes available, we admit students from the waitlist for the second semester (and they finish the program a semester late). After that, the cohort is closed and we do not admit any new students until we open up applications for the next cohort.

Make sure you complete these steps while leaving enough time to orient the cohort to your program. We cover the content of our new student orientation in *Module 4: Modeling Accountability*.

Sample Timeline

STEPS	TIMELINE FOR ACTION ITEMS
Step 1: Recruitment	Hang flyers in March
Step 2: Informational Meeting	Hold meeting in April
Step 3: Applications and Interviews	Collect applications and schedule interviews in May
Step 4: Admissions	Notify students of decisions in June
New student orientation	Multi-day orientation or summer bridge program in July
Program begins	Mid-August

"The cohort model allowed me to get to know my classmates on a deeper level than I would have by just taking a single class together and then going our separate ways. The amount of time we spend together allows me to get to know different aspects of others' perspectives and gives room for me to better appreciate them as unique individuals. I hope it did the same for them toward me."

– RJ Lab student

How can we leverage data to build community and improve student and cohort outcomes over time?

Once you have admitted your cohort, collect student data that can be used to achieve the following goals:

Goal 1: Support and enhance your program's community-building efforts by affirming students' personal identities and encouraging connection within the cohort

We have worked with partners in the field to identify some of the data points that they see as vital for affirming students' personal identities as well as encouraging them to feel connected to their classmates in the cohort. Our friends at Collective Justice have developed a worksheet called "All About Me." It asks students to describe themselves by identifying their needs and assets. See Appendix D for the worksheet.

Exercise

We begin by asking students to complete this worksheet in pairs. They record their responses and trade with a partner. We task them with memorizing as many facts about their partner as possible. They are then responsible for introducing their partner to the broader group. This exercise encourages students to tap into their own needs and resources while simultaneously decentering themselves and practicing deep listening. Often, the exercise also sparks additional conversation that allows students to explore surprising areas of common ground.

> "I realized during this exercise that my partner and I had both spent 17 years in prison. We had an instant connection. We trusted that we could understand each other's experiences. We really bonded after that."
>
> *– RJ Lab student*

Below are some of the information items that we pull from students' applications and the "All About Me" worksheet that serve as a basis for building relationships and creating a warm environment.

We keep track of these details using a spreadsheet that becomes an important reference point for our in-class celebrations.

Special Dates

We keep track of student birthdays through a shared class calendar. We acknowledge these days by singing "Happy Birthday" and offering affirmations for the birthday person in our circle's opening ceremony. We also consult the spreadsheet to find out the birthday person's favorite snack, and we buy enough for the class as part of this celebration. Honoring birthdays helps students feel seen on an individual level and promotes a sense of collective celebration.

When students mark important personal dates such as anniversaries that mark grief, we also honor these dates by offering to hold space for students who need and request this practice. You can read more about holding space in *Module 5: Creating Opportunities for Continuous Engagement*.

Dietary Needs and Preferences

We record and track students' dietary needs and preferences when we are able to bring food for study hall sessions, special workshops, and end-of-semester celebrations. Some of our students have food allergies; some have health conditions that require low-sodium or low-sugar diets; some adhere to ethical practices such as vegetarianism; and some observe religious dietary restrictions, including fasting during certain times of the year. Sharing food is an important ritual that builds community, and we take individual needs into account so that everyone can participate. The practice of identifying and meeting student needs also establishes a baseline for a supportive environment.

For special events and celebrations, we use consensus-building techniques to decide on menu items that closely reflect student preferences. These are occasions for us to practice some of the skills we discuss in *Module 3: Managing Conflict*. When we cannot reach consensus, we build in variety by allowing for different food or drink options.



Goal 2: Identify trends within and across cohorts that can inform improvements to both the student experience and the overall cohort and program design, helping you strengthen outcomes and adapt to evolving student needs

Living Arrangements

One particular data point we are actively tracking is where students are living. Below is a description of how and why living arrangements impact the social dynamics within a HEP program's cohort.

Most instructors do not necessarily know much about the housing units to which their students return after class. As some students in our program began to form impromptu support groups outside of class and others struggled to get to class on time, we realized the importance of understanding these dynamics by tracking each student's living arrangements.

Different housing units have different living structures. Some of our students live in single cells with cellmates while others are in open bay areas. Students in cells experience greater privacy and report that they are able to focus on their homework. Students in open bay areas collaborate with one another on homework assignments but report that they are frequently interrupted by people outside the program.

We take living arrangements into account when we create pods for small-group work. When creating and shuffling learning pods for study hall sessions, which we detail in *Module 2: Strengthening Relationships*, we encourage the development of new relationships by grouping students who do not live in the same housing units. However, for accountability pods, which we detail in *Module 4: Modeling Accountability*, we encourage students to lean on those they already know and trust.

Students who do not share a housing unit with other cohort members have reported feeling isolated. Our program staff manages this by performing additional check-ins with students who are not housed with other cohort members. Physical isolation can also make it difficult for students to get to the classroom, especially in a maximum-security facility. If students are missing, knowing which housing unit these students live in is essential for helping facility staff to locate and escort them to class. Housing units that are distant from the classroom may have additional security checkpoints than can present barriers for students as they travel across the facility grounds.

Additionally, students are frequently moved from one housing unit to another for a variety of reasons—administrative, disciplinary, or for access to more structured programming. These relocations can be extremely disruptive for students who are trying to anchor themselves in a sense of community. Often, program staff and faculty will be notified of these changes by students rather than by the facility, so it is important for programs to keep lines of communication open with students through advising appointments and other check-in opportunities.

> "Being in prison, we are subject to being moved from housing unit to housing unit due to many reasons, from safer environments to more violent environments and vice versa, which is out of our control sometimes. The cohort really grounded me through my journey of being relocated eight different times while in the RJ program and even being set off for parole my second time coming up. Having brothers to fall back on, really show concern for my well-being, and being able to talk to and shed tears in front of without being judged was the greatest factor in keeping me grounded and kept my mind from really falling back into my old thinking. I like to think I'm a very strong man, but I know the cohort really played a big part in helping me continue to stay on the right path."
>
> *– RJ Lab student*

Attention to living arrangements can explain some of the social dynamics that play out in the classroom. If a majority of students in the cohort live in the same housing unit, they can form study groups and practice RJ techniques together outside of class. At the same time, cliques may also form based on this arrangement, with students who live outside of the housing unit feeling isolated or alienated. In the RJ Lab, we take living arrangements into account when we are admitting students to each new cohort. We attempt to provide a balance of students from a variety of housing units while knowing that these living situations will change over the duration of the program.

Access Needs

Students in a prison setting may have needs that instructors do not anticipate or recognize. For example, in the RJ Lab, we now schedule **biobreaks** halfway through our 3-hour class period so that students may be escorted by an officer to an adjacent building to use the nearest restroom. Because our class does not always start on time, and because students arrive from different parts of the prison and at different times, students are not always able to use the restroom beforehand. Until they named this access need, we did not realize it was necessary to build a biobreak into our schedule.

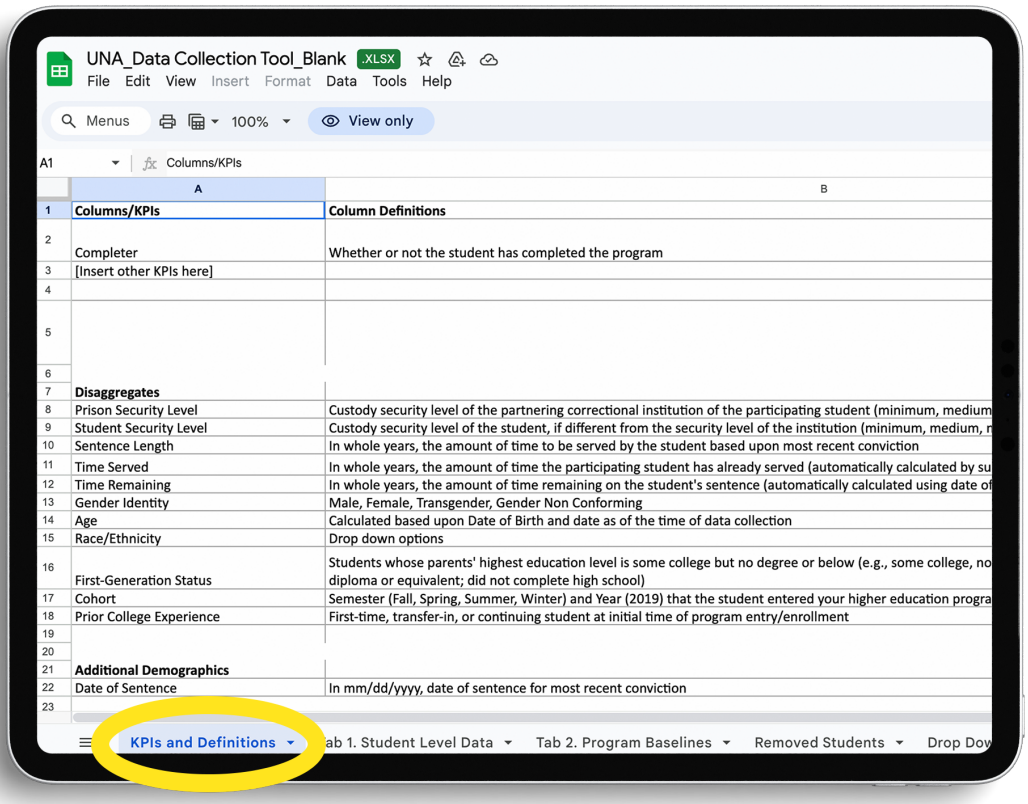
Identifying our access needs allows us to articulate what else is going on in our lives and how that impacts the way we show up. These needs can vary from day to day or week to week. We identify our access needs during our circle check-ins, which we model in the video content for *Module 2: Strengthening Relationships*.

Additionally, many students in HEP classrooms have undiagnosed or undocumented learning disabilities as well as physical disabilities that can impact how they show up in our classrooms. These access needs may require interventions from your university's office of Disability Student Services (DSS). Our university's DSS office holds intake sessions with students in each cohort during our new student orientation, which we detail in *Module 4: Modeling Accountability*. Students may also have physical or medical needs that require **accommodations** during icebreaker exercises in order for these community-building efforts to remain inclusive. Some exercises that require intense physical activity or mobility may leave some students feeling left behind. Games that rely on musical chairs, such as the "common ground" exercise we detail in *Module 2: Strengthening Relationships*, are challenging for students in wheelchairs. Ongoing access needs should be documented by program staff. Creating classrooms based on principles of **universal design** can also help make the space accessible to as many people as possible. For example, we provide closed captioning for video content and we use a microphone and speaker during our circles, not only to accommodate students who have experienced hearing loss, but to clarify and amplify language for all students.

Resources for supporting cohort data collection

SECOND CHANCE
EDUCATIONAL ALLIANCE

Our friends at Second Chance Educational Alliance, Inc. have created an excel spreadsheet for our program that tracks these and other data points related to community building. You can access a template for your own program here: UNA Data Collection Tool



Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Definitions

The first tab contains KPIs and their definitions that explain the columns. Categories such as *prison security level*, *sentence length*, *time served*, and *time remaining* can serve as disaggregates that allow programs to perform more granular analyses of student-level data. We collect this information through our partnership with Cornell's Prison Education Program, which allows us to use their tool, the Education Justice Tracker (EJT). This tool, which scrapes state Department of Corrections (DOC) websites, allows programs like ours to obtain data about our students' sentencing without exposing us to their conviction records. The EJT also automatically notifies program staff of students' upcoming parole dates as well as facility-to-facility transfers. KPIs can be determined by each program, but we provide a brief explanation of ours below, as well as how they contribute to community building.

Veteran Status. Students who are veterans may have access to educational benefits through the federal Department of Veterans Affairs, including scholarships earmarked for veterans. Tracking this status also allows us to honor students on holidays such as Veterans Day. Most importantly, it also allows us to see a clearer picture of the intersection of veteran experience and incarceration. Research shows that veterans are twice as likely as

nonveteran citizens to experience incarceration.[10] Additionally, many veterans experience posttraumatic stress, which has led our program to adopt more trauma-informed practices when our course material addresses wartime violence. "How to Write a Poem in a Time of War," by Joy Harjo (2017) and "The Elephants" by Natalie Diaz,[11] for example, elicited some very strong responses from our students who were veterans. We have learned to provide extra scaffolding and support for class periods that involve this material.

Education, Prior College Experience, and First Generation College Student Status. These categories allow us to better understand the academic support we may need to provide for students who are not familiar with college. It has guided our development of the student handbook and new student orientation materials, which we detail in *Module 4: Modeling Accountability*. The University of North Alabama has a number of initiatives and academic support programs geared toward first-generation college students—your campus might have these as well.

Higher education in prison is an important intervention into the structural inequalities that prevent some people from accessing educational opportunities.[12] When students become the first members of their families to complete college programming, they break generational cycles of poverty and model academic advancement for their own children. In the RJ Lab, nine of the ten student advisory council members from our first cohort identify as first-generation college students! They have sent their graduation photos and copies of their certificates back home to their families for shared celebration and inspiration.

The "prior college experience" column is derived from the "education-cleaned" column. Applicants to our program are asked to list the highest level of education they have completed; we clean the data and sort according to the options on the drop-down menu. This informs whether they are considered "first-time," "transfer," or "continuing" college students.

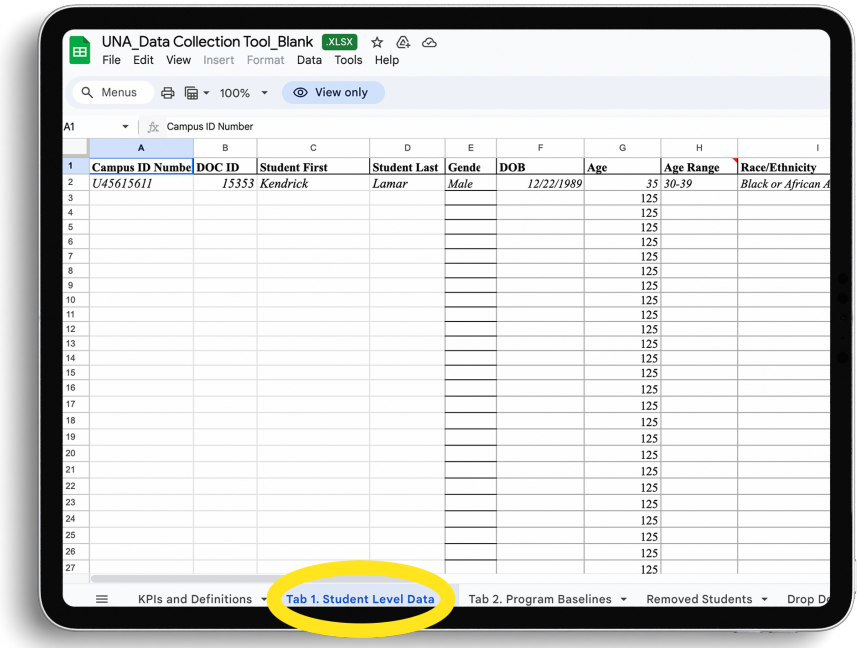
Program Movements and Post-Program Movements. Although understanding the current living arrangement of students is important, it is also important to track the number of times students have been relocated

within the same facility. Calculating and analyzing the average number of times our students have been moved has been eye-opening for our program. Some students have remained in the same housing unit for more than a decade, whereas others have been moved multiple times per year. Tracking these movements allows programs to understand whether there is a relationship between students' academic success and the stability of their living situations. We continue to track these movements for our student advisory council after they complete this program.

Time Served/Time Remaining. This information helps to build a more robust profile of our students for the purposes of tailored support. Students who have served more than twenty years may need additional training with our program's technology, such as the laptops they use during study hall sessions. Students with many years remaining will need opportunities for ongoing programming, which inspired us to develop the materials in *Module 5: Creating Opportunities for Continuous Engagement*. Understanding students' sentence lengths helps us better customize their academic experience around their differing needs.

Parole Hearing Dates and Outcomes. Parole hearings are emotionally charged events that create a sense of anticipation and anxiety for students in HEP programs. Parole denials can send students into a spiral of shame, depression, and hopelessness. Students who are preparing for, or recovering from, parole hearings may seem distant and removed from the rest of the cohort. It is important for instructors to know about students' parole hearings so that they can provide support and encourage students to lean on their communities. A positive outcome, on the other hand, creates another opportunity for community building through shared celebration.

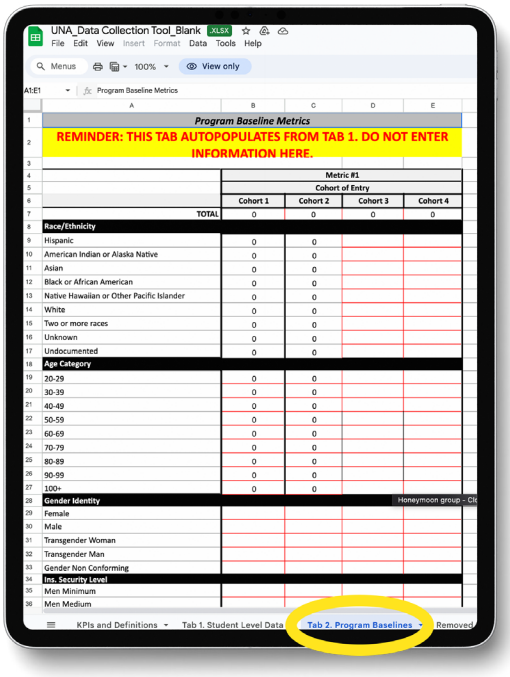
Student and Institution Security Levels. Our program operates at a maximum-security facility, which makes movement across the facility difficult overall; but individual students also have different security levels, including medium and minimum. Understanding students' security levels can help program administrators to understand changes in their status that may impact student retention. For example, if students are reclassified as "minimum security" and able to move into a work release center, they may opt to leave the program.



Tab 1: Student-Level Data

The second tab of the spreadsheet contains "student-level data" categories where you can manually enter your students' data. This data should be available from the program applications, "All About Me" worksheets, and the state DOC's database.

Automated Calculations. *Age* is automatically calculated using students' *date of birth*. *Time served* and *time remaining* are automatically calculated using students' *date of sentence* for their most recent conviction, *sentence length*, and *today's date*.

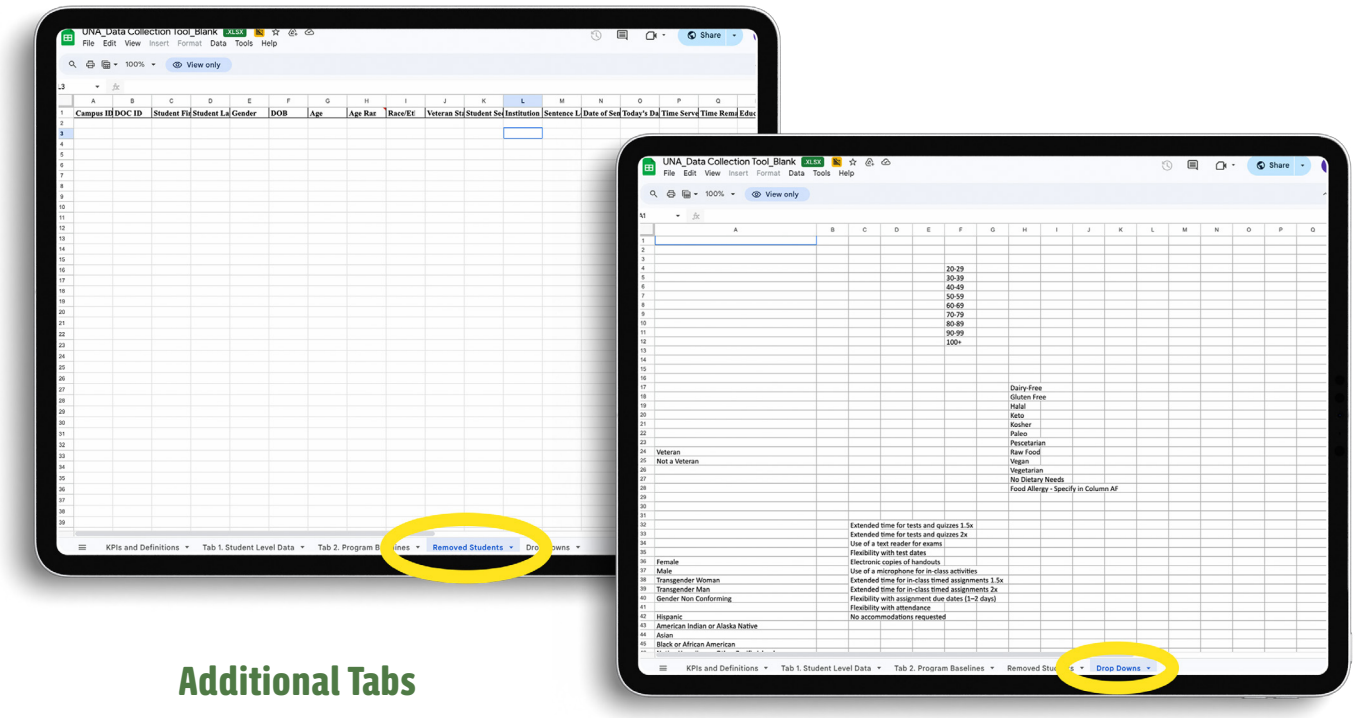


Tab 2: Program Baselines

Tab 2: Program Baselines autopopulates from Tab 1: Student-Level Data. It allows programs to understand student-level data from a bird's-eye view. Analyzing patterns and trends can help program faculty and administrators better understand social dynamics within and across cohorts.

Case study

The RJ Lab experienced some difficulties with students who were not following program boundaries in the second cohort. Our demographic data revealed that students in this cohort were substantially younger than students in our inaugural cohort: almost 50% of students in this cohort are between the ages of 20 and 39. We have responded to this data point by creating more opportunities for combined programming with our inaugural cohort so that program boundaries could be modeled by program alumni; we also worked more deliberately on developing and strengthening our accountability materials, which we detail in *Module 4: Modeling Accountability*.



Additional Tabs

The "removed" tab allows administrators to track students who left or were removed from the program. When students exit the program, they can be moved from Tab 1 to the "removed" tab.

The "drop-downs" tab indicates the drop-down options for nominal categories.

Additional Resources

For programs that would like to utilize SPSS to analyze their program data in greater detail, we include a codebook and link to a template that can be found in Appendix E.

"The cohort model is family—not always functional, but always available in the sense of having a group of people sharing with you a common goal. The cohort becomes a safe space, an educational assistance tool, and again a family of individuals who are able to encourage one another because they have come to know each other."

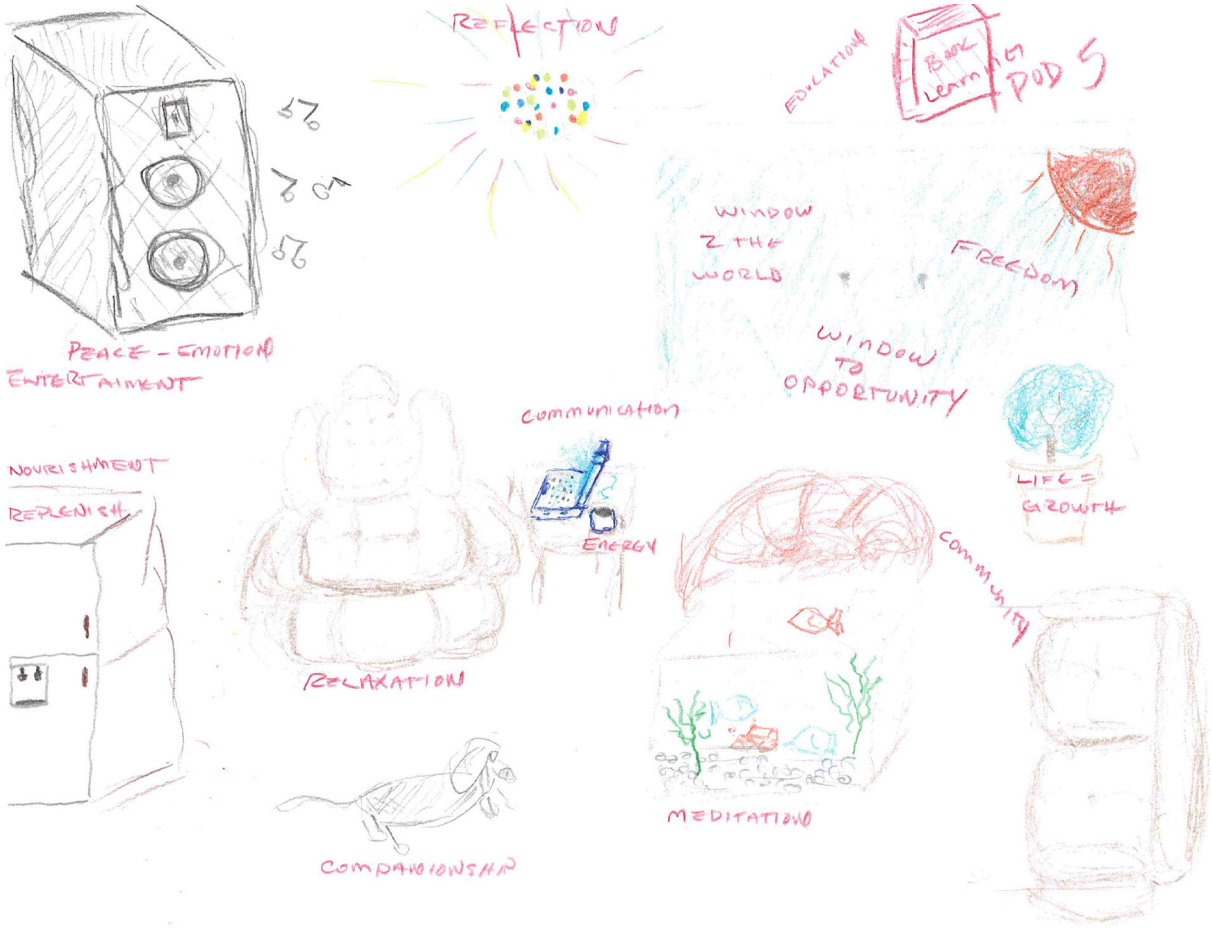
– RJ Lab student

How can we create spaces for community building in a prison setting?

Building a strong cohort requires co-creating a space that is conducive to learning and growth. Our classes are conducted in circle formations with a centerpiece and talking piece, which we discuss further in *Module 2: Strengthening Relationships*. The cohort model can help to create a space where students lean on trusted relationships as they make themselves vulnerable in an educational setting.

In-class exercises can be designed to help transform the barren environment of the prison into a space for community building, as well. One of our program instructors has created the following "restorative spaces" group exercise:

- *Envision your ideal restorative space: what does it look like, feel like, smell like, and so on? Describe it and try drawing it with colored pencils. Tie aspects of the room to restorative values: For example, a large window represents communication, a fluffy chair in the corner represents comfort, a plant represents care and growth. Come back and share with the greater group.*



We strive to create an environment that is responsive to the student needs articulated in these drawings. For example:

- Arts and Entertainment
  - ◇ We coordinate theater and visual arts performances and workshops so that students can explore aspects of restorative justice through creativity.
- Education
  - ◇ We maintain a library of restorative justice books and materials for students to check out for extracurricular reading and professional development.
- Nourishment
  - ◇ When permitted, we supply fresh produce and baked goods so that students can study with open minds and full bellies.

> "On the days I come to UNA, my morning is filled with nothing but joy. I love it here."
>
> *– RJ Lab student*

- Meditation
  - ◇ We begin and close each class period, conducted through Circle processes, with meditative and breathing exercises to ground ourselves.
- Windows
  - ◇ We bring special guest artists, RJ practitioners, and workshop facilitators into our space to provide windows into the broader community for additional learning and networking.

Recap Of Module 1: Building a Strong Cohort

Key takeaways from this module:

- **Cohorts create a sense of trust and safety.**
- **Cohorts enhance student engagement.**
- **Cohorts should reflect the descriptive demographics of the facility.**
- **Building a cohort requires recruitment and admissions strategies that make the program maximally visible and operate on a clear timeline.**
- **Collecting and analyzing student data helps program administrators understand cohort dynamics.**
- **Cohorts thrive in spaces that are customized to their needs.**

In the next module, we will explore how to further develop and deepen relationships between instructors and the cohort as well as within the cohort itself.

Endnotes

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H. Unzueta, Whitney Moores-Abdool, and Dolores Vazquez Donet, "A Different Slant on Cohorts: Perceptions of Students and Special Education Doctoral Students" (Paper #226155 accepted for presentation, American Educational Research Association, Special Interest Group: Special Education Research, March 1, 2008), https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED500897.pdf; West, "Rethinking the Student Experience."

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster



An interest meeting will be held **May 1, 2024 at 10:00 am in the gym.**
Sign up below if you would like to attend:

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Appendix B: Program Brochure

"I've really enjoyed everything this program offered. Learning how to restore and heal harm is very important, as is rebuilding lives and community through relationships."

"I matter, and I can change. I can be part of a community, knowing my voice matters."

"This program will both challenge and elevate who you are, in a good way."

"This program has been a life-changing experience. I have learned to look inside myself before responding to situations that require confrontation."

"If you wish to take the blinders off and are open to change, this is the program to take."

This program is made possible thanks to the following partnerships:

ALABAMA HUMANITIES ALLIANCE

Ascendium
Elevating opportunity

LAUGHING GULL FOUNDATION
COMMITTED TO JUSTICE. ROOTED IN THE SOUTH.



Certificate in Restorative Justice

University of NORTH ALABAMA

What is the Certificate in Restorative Justice?

The Certificate in Restorative Justice is an interdisciplinary program that includes six offerings in Restorative Justice coursework spanning Criminal Justice, English, Psychology, and Sociology.

Through this program, you will develop skills in perspective-taking, social engagement, accountability, and creating systemic change.

We will study the theory, history, and practice that has emerged from the field of restorative justice through the model of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, which brings university campus ("outside") and incarcerated ("inside") students together in the same classroom.

Student will also have professional development opportunities through additional trainings and workshops in-between semesters.

Required Courses:

CJ 260: Introduction to Restorative Justice

SO/CJ/WS 345:The Justice System: Race/ Class/ Gender

CJ 440W: Research Methods in Criminal Justice

EN 492/592/PS 490/CJ 491: Restorative Storytelling

Students will be able to choose two of the following three electives:

CJ/SO 323: Criminology

EN 397: Reading and Writing through Harm

PY 490: Social Health and Relationships

CJ- Criminal Justice
EN- English
SO- Sociology
PY- Psychology
WS- Women's Studies

How long will it take to complete the program?

The program will take two years to complete. UNA will offer two courses in the first year and four courses in the second year. All courses are credit-bearing for inside students.

Who covers the cost?

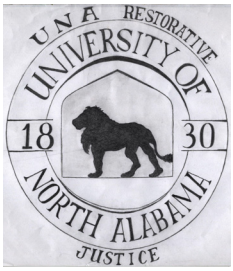
All expenses for the program (including tuition) are covered thanks to funding from the University of North Alabama, the Alabama Humanities Alliance, Ascendium, and the Laughing Gull Foundation.

How will I access course materials?

Books and supplies will be provided. Students will also have access to laptops during designated study hall sessions to complete course assignments.

Appendix C: RJ Lab Application

University of North Alabama
Restorative Justice Certificate Program



PROGRAM APPLICATION

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Legal Name (First, Middle, Last):_____

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy):_____ AIS Number:_____

Address: _____

Housing Unit/Wing/Cell/Bed:_____ Social Security Number: _____

What is your legal sex? Please circle: Male Female

How do you identify in terms of gender?(Optional) Please circle:

Male/ Female/ Trans man/ Trans woman/ Nonbinary/ Gender nonconforming / Other

What is your ethnicity? Please circle:

Non-Hispanic/Latinx Hispanic/Latinx

How do you identify in terms of race? Please circle:

Asian Black/ African American/ American Indian/ Alaska Native/ White/ Caucasian/ Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander

Birth City:_____ Birth State:_____ Other (if outside U.S.): _____

Are you a first-generation college student?(You are a first generation college student if your parents did not complete a bachelor's degree.) Yes:_____ No:_____

Are you a military veteran? Yes:_____ No:_____

For how long have you been incarcerated? _____

**Note: Applicants must adhere to the facility's disciplinary policies for eligibility.*

AVAILABILITY:

The Certificate in Restorative Justice will take two years to complete. Will you be at the facility long enough to complete the program? _____

Will you be available for class each week on Tuesdays from 1-3:30 pm and Thursdays for study halls from 1-3:30 pm in Year 1? _____

Will you be available for class each week on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1-3:30 pm and Wednesdays for study halls from 1-3:30 pm in Year 2? _____

EDUCATION:

Please circle the level of education you have completed (if currently enrolled, the highest degree you have received).

A. No schooling completed
B. Kindergarten through 8th grade
C. Some high school, no diploma
D. High school graduate, diploma, or equivalent (including GED)
E. Some college credit, no degree
F. Trade/technical/vocational training
G. Associate's degree
H. Bachelor's degree
I. Master's degree
J. Professional degree
K. Doctorate degree

List all programs (academic, vocational, self-help) you have completed, beginning with the most recent. Include programs you are currently enrolled in. Continue listed on the paper provided at the end of this application, if necessary.

Name of Program	Program Dates

ESSAY QUESTIONS: Below are 5 possible essay topics/prompts. Please **respond in writing to one** and **prepare an oral presentation for a second topic**. Please pay attention to grammar, spelling, and the organization of your thoughts in addition to content. These questions are designed for us to get to know you as people and as learners, and also to observe your writing level. Essays should be approximately 500 words. Eligible applicants will be contacted afterward for an interview that will include the oral presentation. **Essay paper is attached to this application.**

1. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

2. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma – anything of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

3. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

4. Describe an educational experience that has changed the way you see the world.

5. Why do you want to earn an undergraduate certificate in Restorative Justice? What are your goals for earning this certificate?

CERTIFICATION

By signing this application, I hereby affirm that, to the best of my knowledge, all the information on and with this application is complete and accurate, true and of my own original work. I understand that withholding information requested or giving false information may make me ineligible for admission or continued enrollment. I understand that completion of this application does not guarantee admission to the University of North Alabama. I also agree that my personal data will be available to the University of North Alabama for internal use.

_____ _____

Signature Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), affords students certain rights with respect to their education records. Members outside of the university community are not allowed to review your student records (including your employer or family members). You have the right to inspect and review your education records, you have the right to request the amendment of your education records that you believe are inaccurate. You have the right to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained in your education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent. One exception is disclosure to school officials with legitimate educational interests. You have the right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by State University to comply with the requirements of FERPA.

Appendix D: All About Me Worksheet



All About Me

Using restorative practices in circle work is all about building relationships and trust. All About Me is one of the many activities that supports us in connecting. It is a fun way to share some information about yourself and get to know one another!

Name: B-day (month and day):

Special Days (cultural holidays, anniversaries):

How to acknowledge special days:

People I love (family, chosen family, friends, partner(s), pets):

I am most proud of:

Favorites!

Treat:

Food or Meal:

Any dietary restrictions/needs:

Beverage:

Color:

Authors / Books:

Music / Group / Artist:

Quote:

I Love Receiving:

Activities I Enjoy:

Anything else:

collectivejusticenw.org

Appendix E: Codebook

Campus ID (Continuous variable)

DOC ID (Continuous variable)

Student Last Name

Student First Name

Gender Identity (If applicable)

1 = Female

2 = Male

3 = Transgender Woman

4 = Transgender Man

5 = Gender Non-conforming

DOB (Year, date)

Age (Continuous variable; age in years of the student is recorded)

Age Range (Ordinal measure)

1 = 20=29

2 = 30-39

3 = 40-49

4 = 50-59

5 = 60-69

6 = 70-79

7 = 80-89

8 = 90-99

9 = 100+

Race/Ethnicity (Self-identified, nominal)

1 = Hispanic

2 = American Indian/Alaska Native

3 = Asian

4 = Black or African American

5 = Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

6 = White

7 = Two or More Races

8 = Unknown

9 = Undocumented

Veteran Status

1 = Yes

2 = No

Student Security Level

1 = Men Minimum

2 = Men Medium

3 = Men Maximum

4 = Men Super Maximum

5 = Men Mixed Levels

6 = Women Minimum

7 = Women Medium

8 = Women Maximum

9 = Women Super Maximum

10 = Women Mixed Levels

Prison Security Level

1 = Men Minimum

2 = Men Medium

3 = Men Maximum

4 = Men Super Maximum

5 = Men Mixed Levels

6 = Women Minimum

7 = Women Medium

8 = Women Maximum

9 = Women Super Maximum

10 =Women Mixed Levels

Sentence Length (In whole years, amount of time to be served by the student based upon most recent conviction)

Date of Sentencing

Today's Date

Time Served (In whole years, the amount of time the participating student has already served; automatically calculated by subtracting Remaining Sentence from Sentence Length)

Time Remaining (In whole years, the amount of time remaining on the student's sentence; automatically calculated using date of data completion, updates daily)

Education Cleaned (Students' attained education level, ordinal)

1 = Some high school

2 = High school credential

3 = GED

4 = Some college, no degree

5 = Completed College – CC

6 = Completed College – 4 year

Prior College Experience

1 = First Time

2 = Continuing

3 = Transfer

1st Gen Status (Students whose parents' highest ed level is some college but no degree or below)

1 = Yes

2 = No

Cohort – Semester

1. = Fall

2. = Spring

3. = Summer

4. = Winter

Cohort Year

Housing Unit

Wing #

Bunk #

Bed

Program Movements (# of movements, continuous)

Accommodations

1 = Extended time for tests and quizzes 1.5x

2 = Extended time for tests and quizzes 2x

3 = Use of a text reader for exams

4 = Flexibility with test dates

5 = Electronic copies of handouts

6 = Use of a microphone for in-class activities

7 = Extended time for in-class timed assignments 1.5x

8 = Extended time for in-class timed assignments 2x

9 = Flexibility with assignment due dates (1–2 days)

10 = Flexibility with attendance

11 = No accommodations required

Access Needs (Open-ended item pertaining to any access need)

Dietary Needs

1 = Dairy Free

2 = Gluten Free

3 = Halal

4 = Keto

5 = Kosher

6 = Paleo

7 = Pescatarian

8 = Raw Food

9 = Vegan

10 = Vegetarian

11 = No Dietary Needs

12 = Food Allergy (Specify in "Food Preferences")

Food Preferences

Post-Program Movement (# of movements, continuous)

Completer

1 = Yes

2 = No

Parole Hearing

Parole Outcome

Notes


UNA RESTORATIVE
UNIVERSITY OF
18
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NORTH ALABAMA
JUSTICE