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Analyzing Career Outcomes and Experiential Activities:
A Constructivist Grounded theory Approach

by

Frederick Troy Kase

A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
the Department of School Psychology and Educational Leadership
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Committee Approval

To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of Frederick Troy Kase find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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Frederick Kase
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RE: regarding study number IRB-FY2019-134 : ANALYZING CAREER OUTCOMES AND EXPERIENTIAL
ACTIVITIES: A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

Dear Mr. Kase:

Thank you for your responses to a previous expedited review of the new study listed above. This is to confirm that I have approved your application.

Notify the HSC of any adverse events. Serious, unexpected adverse events must be reported in writing within 10 business days.

You may conduct your study as described in your application effective immediately. The study is subject to renewal on or before December 21, 2019, unless closed before that date.

Please note that any changes to the study as approved must be promptly reported and approved. Some changes may be approved by expedited review; others require full board review. Contact Tom Bailey (208-282-2179; email humsubj@isu.edu) if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Ralph Baergen, PhD, MPH, CIP
Human Subjects Chair

November 1, 2019

Frederick Kase
Counseling and Testing Center
MS 8108

RE: Study number IRB-FY2019-134: ANALYZING CAREER OUTCOMES AND EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES: A
CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

Dear Mr. Kase:

You are granted permission to continue your study as described effective immediately. The study is next subject to continuing review on or before October 31, 2020, unless closed before that date.

As with the initial approval, changes to the study must be promptly reported and approved. Contact Tom Bailey (208-282-2179, humsubj@isu.edu) if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Ralph Baergen, PhD, MPH, CIP
Human Subjects Chair

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Analyzing Career Outcomes and Experiential Activities:

A Constructivist Grounded theory Approach

Dissertation Abstract--Idaho State University (2022)

Higher education continually faces scrutiny regarding the value of a degree and the investment of money and time. Is a college degree worth the cost of attendance? Do graduates face a burden of financial debt that is crippling them and/or society? Should the government limit funding to educational institutions that are unable to establish that their graduates are succeeding? This has led to demands to provide answers to these questions and define pathways to employment success for their graduates. Internships and other experiential activities are promoted as pathways to enhance employment outcomes and by employers as a means for employee recruitment.

Studies have indicated that student internship participation has led to increased success in the job search process than for those who do not participate in these experiential activities. However, there are shortcomings within the existing literature. Most studies have been limited to specific groups of student majors, specific types of institutions, or have not included other career-related activities and work experiences.

The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory of how employment recruiters valued and regarded the impact/influence of career/job-related experiences of liberal arts graduates. I used a constructivist grounded theory study design to develop a grounded theory for further inquiry. I interviewed 23 employers who were actively involved in the job recruitment process from liberal arts institutions in the Great Lakes region.

This study resulted in a deeper understanding of the factors that employers considered when evaluating students for employment. This included the development of the grounded theory that while internships are important, other factors contributed significantly to the employability of liberal arts graduates. Respondents, in this study, indicated that employers primarily desired the skills promoted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers and the American Association of Colleges and Universities. The respondents indicated that these skills are developed through many different experiences and are not confined to internship participation.

Keywords: Frederick Troy Kase, Internships, Liberal Arts, Career-Related Activities, Employers

Chapter I: Introduction

Internships and experiential education have long been considered to be an important part of the collegiate experience. Perlin (2012) discussed the internship phenomenon and noted that internships were often promoted as a requirement to enter the workforce. Perlin argued that this requirement created an environment rife with the abuse of interns. Internships were promoted as a method for students to gain valuable experiences that increased their employability while providing inexpensive labor for employers (Gardner, 2010). The overall benefits of internships, as studied by Gardner, indicated that these experiences enhanced employability. Participation in internships has been thoroughly discussed and promoted in higher education leading to this activity being promoted as a part of the higher education experience.

In addition to internship experiences, higher education leaders have promoted other experiential activities such as studying abroad and providing community service. For example, DePaul University in Chicago required that all students participate in an experiential activity such as study abroad, independent study, volunteering, or internship (DePaul University, 2016). Gardner (2010) completed a survey of students that inquired about their motivations for completing internships. Students in Gardner's study indicated that marketability and employability were their primary motivating factors. As higher education continues to promote and market experiential activities, there is a need for further studies to understand the benefits of these experiences.

The benefits of participating in internships and activities that promote positive employment outcomes have been explored. Completing an internship, while in college, generally led to positive outcomes for graduates including being able to more easily

secure employment (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Gardner, 2012; Knouse et al., 1999; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Taylor, 1988). Another benefit of internship participation was an increase in perceived job skills and abilities (Astin, 1993). Researchers have studied the differences of interning at large and small companies, as well as different outcomes depending on the time of year the internship was completed (Robeck et al., 2013). Along with the benefits of internships, Gardner (2012) also explored career outcomes when students participated in more than one internship, and compared results of employability when students completed unpaid or paid internships.

Internships are an important topic in higher education as employability continues to be an important indicator of the value of a higher education degree. In a recent popular culture book, Zakaria (2015) discussed the public and governmental pressures on education to provide programs that led to employment. This was a shift from previous attitudes that valued educating students in broad areas; promoting knowledge in many subjects while developing the faculties of the mind. Zakaria indicated that the percentage of graduates in English and Philosophy fell from 7.6% in 1971 to 3% in 2012, while the percentages of graduates in fields such as healthcare and business increased. Zakaria stated that there were verbal assaults on liberal education and that these assaults moved from mere discussion into action. Zakaria indicated that the governors of Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Wisconsin stated that they did not plan to continue to subsidize a liberal arts education at state-funded institutions. Zakaria stated that these discussions had even moved to the federal level with former President Obama making glib comments about the earning potential of liberal arts graduates. These observations indicated that

there are public and governmental pressures for higher education to produce graduates that lead to employability.

Statement of the Problem

Several studies have analyzed recent graduates of public universities. Many of these studies have focused on graduates of programs where internships were common, such as engineering and business (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Taylor, 1988). Missing from studies were examinations of students outside of public universities and information about the effects of internship completion after the timeframe that immediately followed graduation. The studies also did not consider those students that went directly onto graduate school after completing a bachelor's degree and may not have emphasized internship participation during college. These students have been inappropriately included in calculations with those students who have ambitions to secure a job immediately following the completion of their undergraduate education. Also needed, is a close examination of those students that simply work during school, in the summer months, and during other available times. Researchers have not fully considered how participation in various work experiences also promoted gainful employment upon graduation. The gaps in the literature have led to a multitude of possibilities for a deeper understanding of experiential activities and their effect on employability.

Callanan and Benzing (2004) indicated that there needed to be more empirical research regarding internships and employability. They suggested the possibility of gathering data at periodical intervals after graduation. Callanan and Benzing promoted a longitudinal approach that provided for further examination of a possible correlation

between internship participation and employability. Callanan and Benzing also suggested that exploring the initial advantages of students that completed internships was warranted. However, college and university personnel are keenly aware of how difficult it can be to survey alumni and collect this type of data (Gardner, 2012).

There is limited research that promotes the broadly held assumption that internship participation improves one's employability. Gardner (2012) indicated that students fared better in their job search if they completed one or two internships. Gardner also noted that students participating in more than two internships produced negligible benefits. While Gardner supported students participating in internships, he indicated that research on this topic was scarce. Furthermore, the research surrounding employability factors and internship participation largely focused on state universities and not within small liberal arts colleges. The gap in research was further compounded by a primary focus on those majors, such as business, engineering, and marketing that are often associated with internship participation. These majors were chosen for studies since it was easier to find a sample population that supported the research parameters.

Internships are often promoted as an important step that students use to increase their marketability and employability. Unfortunately, there were relatively few studies that provided a thorough study of internship participation (Gardner, 2012). Other experiential activities, such as community projects, research, senior projects, service learning, and study abroad were also promoted as useful paths to increase employability upon graduation (Hart Research Associates, 2018). These assertions often lacked evidence that the activities served as an effective means to achieve this goal. Taylor (1988) tested these assumptions by providing different resumes to various companies.

Taylor's study used resumes that varied in the amount of internship and work experience reported, with some resumes showing major relevant internship experience and others with unrelated summer work experience. While Taylor's study showed strong support for completing internships, the employer sample reviewing the employability of these hypothetical applicants was largely focused in areas where internships were a traditional path to employment success (manufacturing, insurance, banking, retail, personnel, and actuarial). Also, students selected for this study were from academic departments that encouraged internship participation but did not require it. The students came from business, engineering, industrial relations, interior design, and journalism at a large Midwestern university. Taylor also indicated that, while employability outcomes seemed quite intuitive, very few studies have been completed to test this hypothesis. Internships are strongly promoted in higher education using unsubstantiated evidence and assumptions.

Gardner (2012) indicated that there is little research that has provided details about the benefits of internships to students' job search success. He stated that this problem was compounded by the lack of higher education databases tracking all internships, including those that are unpaid. Gardner stated, however, that student job searches were positively impacted when students completed two internships. but did not do progressively better when students completed more than two internships. Hart Research Associates (2018) reported that 79% of employers indicated that they desired colleges to increase the promotion of internships or community-based field projects. They stated that these experiences helped students use knowledge formulated in the classroom in real-life situations (Association of American Colleges & Universities and Hart

Research Associates, 2010). The field of higher education has indicated an awareness of the lack of evidence for internship participation.

The Wagner Plan (Aldas et al., 2010), presented an approach to measure successful internship programming in higher education. The Wagner Plan used the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) outcomes data to conclude that strong outcomes resulted from experiential activities, such as internships. However, the data from the Wagner NSSE results focused on student engagement rather than career outcomes. This study resulted in predictive evidence regarding student engagement and learning outcomes but did not necessarily provide evidence of positive career outcomes.

Gardner's (2010) study pointed to the importance that students placed on internships. Students reported that employment outcomes were the most important factor to consider when contemplating participation in an internship. This notion further promoted the idea that internship outcomes and employability factors needed to be researched further. Gardner also indicated that economically disadvantaged families tended to place a higher value on internships. This result indicated additional importance of studying outcomes of internships, as those students at the lower end of the socioeconomic continuum may have the most to lose or gain from participation.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory of how employment recruiters valued and regarded the impact/influence of career/job-related experiences of liberal arts graduates. The study sought to understand the effect of internship participation on the employability of liberal arts students from small, private, liberal arts institutions. As higher education programs continue to receive pressures related to

employability, the experiences that lead to positive employment outcomes must be studied and communicated. Also, students often received advice to participate in internships or other experiences that do not pay wages to enhance their prospects of future employment (Gardner, 2012). Additional research is needed to better understand these results within the broader categories of student experiences that positively affect their employability.

Sometimes work-related experiences are designated as an internship because a student receives academic credit for the experience, or because an employer gave the position the title of *internship* in the interest of making it more marketable to students. This study sought to understand the employer perceptions of employability and the experiential activities of internships and other work-related experiences.

Research Goals

The goal of this research was to develop a grounded theory and aid higher education practitioners and researchers in understanding the employability outcomes of private liberal arts graduates. Using this information, higher education professionals will be able to better inform students and prospective students about the professional activities that correlate to positive employability outcomes. As a result of this study, higher education leaders will be able to better understand the topic of employability and guide future studies to provide more relevant empirical evidence about how internships and work experiences contribute to employability following graduation.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

- In the college employment recruiting setting, how do employers evaluate student candidates from private liberal arts institutions that participate in internships?
- In the college employment recruiting setting, how do employers evaluate student candidates from private liberal arts institutions that participate in career-related work experiences that are not internships?

Definitions

It is important to have a common understanding of the terms used in this and other studies. Experiential education definitions were reviewed to develop a consistent understanding of terms. Gardner and Bartkus (2014) provided the following definitions:

- *Career and technical education* refer to education that develops core workplace competencies.
- *Community/civic engagement* refers to work between an institution and a community for the mutual benefit of both parties.
- *Cooperative and work-integrated education* is a term developed to attempt to encompass a multitude of terms that describe work-education experiences and is a demonstration of the need for a more comprehensive term.
- *Experiential education* refers to direct skill development but does not necessarily require work experience.
- *Experiential learning* focuses on independent experiences and recognizes the learning that can happen when experiences are combined with education.

- *Professional development* is commonly used when referring to the skills and knowledge needed to advance one's career.
- *Project-based learning* does not require work experience but focuses on practical experience, which results in a finished product such as a report.
- *Vocational education and training* differ by the region of the country where it is being used, but generally refers to training that leads to vocational qualifications.
- *Work-based learning* occurs in the workplace or arises out of needs within a workplace.
- *Work-integrated learning* refers to formal coursework combined with learning in the workplace.
- *Work placement* refers to experiences that bridge education and the workplace.

The term *internship* was the one term that the literature did not provide a consistent definition for or state that there is a common understanding (Gardner & Bartkus, 2014). Interestingly, they indicated that this was the one term that they were unable to find a common definition. In this study, the term *internship* was defined as a college or university-sponsored work experience where a student applied their classroom knowledge in a work situation while enrolled in school. Gardner and Bartkus also indicated that *work-related experience* was a term referring to the delivery of experiences but with a blurred definition. For this study, *work-related experiences* referred to any experience that is a job but not an internship.

Gardner and Bartkus (2014) defined the programs that administer the previously described work-education experiences:

- *Apprenticeships* are longer-term, on-the-job experiences where training in the form of experience and education is used to obtain a professional position.
- *Cooperative education* is the combination of education within a workplace with the workplace providing a productive employment experience.
- *Externships* are usually institution-sponsored and structured short-term job shadowing experiences.
- *Internship* is the most ubiquitous of all program terms and there is very little common understanding of the definition.
- *Practicum* is a broadly defined term that usually refers to regularly scheduled and supervised experiences that bridge theory and practical application.
- *Service-learning* is the combination of academics, experiential learning, and community service.

Gardner and Bartkus attempted to create a shared interpretation of the terms used to describe work-education experiences and programs. They stated that this can be helpful as there are purists that will attempt to strictly adhere to a definition for these experiences and programs. They also suggested that future researchers try to use similar definitions of these terms and realize the common goals among them. Finally, Gardner and Bartkus stated a hope that researchers will continue discussions and come to a more common understanding of programs.

Assumptions

It is important to recognize the assumptions within a study to understand that which is taken for granted. This study assumed the understanding of terms often used in experiential education was consistently interpreted and defined by all respondents. Though the term *internship* did not have a common stated definition, the concept among respondents in this study was assumed to be consistent. Along with an assumption about how respondents understood the term *internship*, this study also assumed a common definition of *career-related experience* was understood by respondents.

In addition to assumptions about shared definitions, this study also assumed that the respondents were willing to share responses to interview questions openly and honestly. Finally, I assumed that reaching saturation of information would require flexibility due to the level of recruiting experience of the respondents.

Limitations

This study was limited to the use of interviews as the primary source of data collection. In a qualitative study, there are multiple options for gathering qualitative data including interviews, photography, videos, pictures, and text (Creswell, 2007). The planned method for gathering qualitative data for this research was solely focused on using interviews. Among respondents, were individuals who held the position of a recruiter for potential employers of liberal arts graduates. However, recruiters can often vary in the level of institutional or historical knowledge they may possess. Hence, this study was also limited by the knowledge of the respondents selected for interviews. Lack of professional recruiting experience could lead to responses that demonstrated a limited level of knowledge of their field. In addition, these professional college recruiting

positions tend to turn over quickly and reliable contact information can rapidly become out of date, consequently, the selection of respondents was not entirely within my control.

In my experience, setting up appointments with recruiting professionals can sometimes be difficult. Therefore, I planned to request that the employer set aside approximately 20-30 minutes to focus on responding to the interview questions. I anticipated the need to keep the meeting format flexible and be willing to conduct interviews through a variety of possible formats including, in person, over the phone, or using web technology. Different interview formats had the potential to limit the amount and type of information collected in this study.

Finally, a limitation of a qualitative study is the lack of generalizability. Creswell (2007) stated that a grounded theory study promotes a theory to be empirically tested later. While a grounded theory study is not generalizable on its own, it leads to a theory for further studies.

Delimitations

Stating the delimitations of a study helps the researcher disclose those factors that limit the strength of a study but are within the control of the researcher. Respondents interviewed were limited by geographic location and the focus of their recruiting. In the interest of producing usable information and focusing on the stated problem, the respondents and topics cannot be unlimited. The scope of the study, research methods, and research approach were additional delimitations. One of these delimitations stemmed from an inability to conduct an exhaustive qualitative study that encompassed all possible outcomes of recent college graduates. Employers, and not graduate schools, were the focus in selecting respondents. Interviewing representatives of graduate schools was seen

as impractical as the study would have been too large to develop a separate theory about college graduate success. This study's focus was within a relatively select set of employers and a similarly narrow set of topics focused on experiential and career-related skills of graduates from liberal arts institutions.

The student population chosen for the study presented another delimitation as it did not represent the broader higher education enrollment in the United States and focused only on students graduating from liberal arts institutions. Similarly, employers that recruited within the Great Lakes region were the focus of the study.

I limited the study to a grounded theory approach, thus leaving the opportunity for future studies to test the theory developed from this grounded theory research.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter I of this dissertation introduced the issue of understanding how employers view internships and career-related experiential activities of liberal arts students in the hiring process. In Chapter II, the literature review focused on summarizing existing information about employer considerations of internships and other important activities considered in hiring decisions. Chapter III included information regarding the methods chosen for this study including participant selection, coding, and analysis of the information. Chapter IV provides a detailed report on the findings that resulted from the interviews. Chapter V discusses a summary of the research and suggestions for future research and exploration of this topic.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory of how employment recruiters valued and regarded the impact/influence of career/job-related experiences of liberal arts graduates. Data for this study was gathered using a constructivist grounded theory approach. Charmaz (2014) indicated that the literature review process for grounded theory studies has been debated and there was some disagreement about how much the researcher should review the available literature before commencing with a grounded theory study.

Delaying the literature review has been promoted to allow the researcher to remain objective and not see the research through the viewpoints of previous studies. Glaser and Strauss (1967) promoted the idea of delaying the literature review process until after the analysis of data was completed. They suggested that this was necessary to promote the development of original ideas unobscured by expectations of which categories existed or how the data was to be organized. This process allowed the researcher to remain open and not impose previous ideas on their research.

This literature review followed a process of a preliminary review with a further examination that followed the collection of this study's data. This process promoted an open method of exploring ideas as they were discovered. Charmaz (2014) contended that, in principle, the idea of remaining objective and not burdening research with preconceived ideas was a good one but had its downfalls. Charmaz suggested that this process could lead to researchers repeating prior research and even duplicating previous problems with the processes and results. Charmaz stated that it was unlikely that researchers were unfamiliar with previous literature and the idea of not letting previous knowledge of research influence thoughts and direction was likely not achievable.

Charmaz recommended that the researcher complete a critical initial literature review as the researcher categorizes the study's data. I endeavored to maintain an objective outlook during the data collection process and allowed the results to lead me to a strong theory.

This research project was informed by prior research using a brief literature review. A final literature review was completed and discussed with the findings from the interviews and interpretation of the data. The topic researched was one that I acknowledged that I had prior knowledge and biases. There was simply no avoiding the fact that I was already knowledgeable of some of the information related to the study. However, I sought to remain objective and open to new information and potential categories as they were presented. This process allowed me to be informed about this area of research while being critical of and open to new viewpoints and categories as they were presented.

Career Outcomes and Rigor of Experience

The quality of internships influences the outcome of students participating in them. Students that take part in internships that demand a high level of commitment have stronger career outcomes. Robeck et al. (2013) found that students who completed an internship in larger companies had a higher chance of remaining in their chosen industry (fashion, in this study). Robeck et al. attempted to learn more about how the quality of internships affected students' post-graduate careers. They proceeded with the assumption that internships during the summer were more likely to be a true learning experience as opposed to internships during the school year when the experiences were often more routine. Results suggested that students completing summer internships were more likely to remain in the industry and the researchers concluded that summer internships led to

more positive career outcomes. They concluded that students completing internships on a part-time basis during the school year, where they devoted less time to the experience, realized fewer benefits. Robeck et al. also studied the different years of students' academic programs since stricter requirements for internships were progressively instituted. It was concluded that students engaged in internships that maintained stricter requirements were more likely to remain in the industry. Internships, by themselves, did not necessarily predict strong career outcomes, but the quality of the internship and level of commitment from the student(s) was important.

The rigor of an internship was an important factor when considering the learning outcomes of experiential activities. Robeck et al. (2013) measured internship factors that led to positive outcomes for the graduates entering the fashion industry. Overall, the researchers found that the more rigorous the internship, the more likely it was that the students remained employed in fashion. This was completed by analyzing the location of internships, the year of internships, the timing of internships during the academic year, and the size of the company hosting those internships. The study lacked generalizability because the gender of students participating in the internships was overwhelmingly female (98%), and it was very industry-specific to fashion retail. Overall, rigor might be an important factor that promoted more positive career outcomes because of completing an internship, but the study lacked the necessary components to be generalized to other majors and populations.

Benefits of Internships and Unpaid Internship Programs

Internship programs in higher education differ in definition and scope from campus to campus. Such a practice makes it difficult to collect reliable data about their internship practices. Gardner (2012) attempted to gather information about the administration of higher education internship programs, but when Gardner surveyed career offices, it was discovered that many respondents did not complete their survey. In addition to low survey completion, the respondents were involved in a very wide range of campus departments. The researcher surmised that respondents were unable to speak for their institution and subsequently did not continue the survey. Gardner indicated that this was an example of a lack of understanding about higher education internships. Because of problems associated with gathering information on internship oversight on campuses, it has been difficult to gather useful and generalizable information.

This problem has resulted in wide-ranging gaps in information regarding internship activities on campuses. Even seemingly simple information, such as the number of paid internships versus unpaid internships has been difficult to collect. Gardner (2012) stated that media reports about paid and unpaid internship activity were, at best, guesses and did not constitute reliable data. Gardner estimated that 43% of internships completed by students were unpaid. However, Gardner stated that the “media and professional associations have thrown up their hands and accepted a 50-50 split as a reasonably good number” (Gardner, p. 2) of paid to unpaid internships. Gardner pointed to a possible gain in unpaid internships, stating that there was an increase in unpaid interns during an economic downturn as employers took advantage of the employment market. Unfortunately, attempts to study the paid versus unpaid internship debate have

been hampered by an inability to gather meaningful information.

While gathering information has proven difficult, the paid versus unpaid internship debate has been discussed for the past decade. Higher education has attempted to understand the benefits and outcomes of these different internship experiences. Gardner (2012) explored commonly held beliefs about paid versus unpaid internships. Overwhelmingly, people believed that students with professional experience and internships fared better when searching for jobs. Gardner challenged these beliefs when he stated that students often do not progressively do better in their job searches when they engage in more than two internships. Gardner also concluded that multiple short internships were not better than one long experience. Gardner concluded that, in general, internships were beneficial to a student's career. Nonetheless, there was little empirical evidence to back up Gardner's conclusion. Furthermore, there is no verifiable internship database, and few colleges or universities have tracked unpaid internships with any depth. While there are widely held assumptions regarding the benefits of paid internships, the industry does not seem to possess the data to support these claims.

Existing information promoted the idea that there was a benefit to participating in more than one internship. However, there is also information that has indicated diminishing returns and that more has not always been better. Gardner (2012) stated that students do "much better" (p. 4) when they do two internships rather than one, but more than two internships did not largely influence employment outcomes for students. Unfortunately, Gardner did not specifically define *much better*.

Internships and High Impact Practices

While internships differ between institutions, some practices promoted stronger learning experiences. O'Neill (2010) explored the definition of internships and provided suggestions similar to what other authors have discovered; that internships and other meaningful career experiences varied from institution to institution and lack consistency. However, O'Neill stated that the commonalities of these experiences were, "a reflection component, onsite supervision/guidance, and gaining exposure to a career or furthering one's interest in a career" (p. 1). O'Neill used the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) as a source for reviewing internship programs and emphasized reflection, feedback, and deliberate learning as effective feedback approaches used with internships. Internships had the potential to be high-impact experiences, regardless of the variance between institutions, if there were strong expectations for the participating student(s) and supervisor(s).

Important practices have been recognized and defined to assist practitioners in developing strong internship programs. To evaluate high-impact experiential activities, O'Neill (2010) reviewed the 2008 report *High Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. O'Neill indicated that George Kuh used data from the National Survey of Student Engagement to identify six common elements that promoted high-impact practices:

- They are effortful. The activities must require considerable effort that creates a deeper sense of commitment from students.
- They help students build substantive relationships. Students build meaningful relationships with peers and faculty.

- They help students engage across differences. Students experience the diversity of thought.
- They provide students with rich feedback. Students receive consistent feedback on their performance.
- They help students apply and test what they are learning in new situations. Students see what they have learned and how it applies in different situations.
- They provide opportunities for students to reflect on the people they are becoming. Students view themselves within the outer world. (pp. 4-5)

Kuh (as cited in O'Neill) used these six elements to suggest that they must be present in internships and experiential activities to make them high-impact activities.

Wagner Plan and Experiential Activities and Outcomes

Higher education has an expressed interest in internships to promote strong career outcomes among its graduates. Aldas et al. (2010) reported that faculty, staff, and students gathered to discuss the Wagner Plan that was implemented in 1998 at Wagner College. The gathering sought to learn from students using institutional National Survey of Student Engagement data. The review indicated strong outcomes for students' career preparation. Wagner College students participated in internships at a greater rate (96%) than comparable institutions (76%). Wagner College promoted internship experiences to build knowledge, skills, and an ability to contribute to their community at a much higher rate than their peers. Aldas et al. (2010) also reinforced the notion that employers used internships as proving grounds for future employment. Among students who participated in internships, there was evidence that participation increased employability outcomes and was a positive part of the educational experience.

Student Expectations and Internships

In addition to higher education faculty and administrators encouraging internships to promote strong career outcomes, students expressed similar motivations when pursuing these activities. Gardner (2010) explored the motivations and other factors that students expressed when completing internships. Overall, students seemed to be motivated to participate in internships to help them become more marketable and successful in professional settings. Students were less motivated by intrinsic factors such as exploring various careers or workplaces. The least important factor of fourteen different motivators was receiving credit for the experience. Gardner indicated that students at public institutions rated earning income and obtaining full-time employment higher than their counterparts from private institutions. Similar differences were found between majors with business and engineering students placing greater importance on earning money. Students and higher education leaders promoted internships to fortify the educational experience that consequently promoted stronger employment outcomes upon graduation.

While there was a belief that internships led to positive employment outcomes, there was a disparity in how students used their resources to obtain internships. This difference was found in the types of institutions that students attended and the socioeconomic background of these students. Gardner (2010) indicated that there were institutional differences in the resources that students used to obtain internships. Students from private institutions tended to use more personal resources, such as faculty, parents, and career center connections to secure internships than did students from public institutions. Also, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tended to use more

personal resources than did students from families earning less than \$80,000 per year. Students from families earning more than \$120,000 per year tended to rely more heavily on family and friends to secure internships. However, Gardner pointed out that students from low family incomes placed more importance on the value of internships. In all, student access to internship resources differed substantially according to the type of institution and the socioeconomic background of students.

Importance of Internships

The importance of participating in an internship is not new to higher education. This belief is not a recent phenomenon but has continued for decades. Astin (1993) indicated that there was a strongly positive effect between internship participation and one's self-reported growth in job skills. Astin also reported a moderate correlation between participating in an internship and one's college GPA, college satisfaction level, graduating with honors, and completing a bachelor's degree. Additionally, Astin reported a moderate correlation between internship participation and one's self-reported knowledge of a specific field or discipline, growth in interpersonal skills, and self-reported improvement in job-related skills. The benefits of internship participation have been documented for decades and continue to be trumpeted to this day.

Internships and Employability

Employers often assume that candidates were more employable if they had completed an internship. Employers also believed that certain characteristics promote employability. However, the development of these characteristics from internship participation has not been thoroughly studied. Shoenfelt et al. (2013) examined Hogan's three competencies of employability of *interpersonal skills, expertise and relevant*

competencies, and *being able to work hard*. The authors suggested that these competencies were ones that employers desired and were developed through internship participation. Results indicated that internship participation positively contributed to employability. However, while Shoenfelt et al. made a compelling case for increased employability through internship participation, they did not make a direct connection. Shoenfelt et al. seemed to suggest that employers might assume increased employability when it was known that a student participated in an internship. The assumption of skills and characteristics developed from internship participation was an important factor for employers as they considered hiring recent graduate applicants.

Internship participation was an important part of the candidate evaluation process using evidence of the experience to positively rate candidates. Knouse and Fontenot (2008) suggested that participation in an internship increased employability and resulted in quicker hiring. Knouse and Fontenot cited multiple studies that showed students being hired more quickly if they had internship experience(s). While *employability* was not defined, they stated that this factor increased with internship participation. Knouse and Fontenot also stated that students that completed an internship commanded higher salaries. Internship participation was seen as an experience that promoted employability and often resulted in higher wages.

Internship participation led to stronger success with employment outcomes which included the ability to obtain a job offer, higher salaries, and satisfaction with employment (Taylor, 1988). Taylor found that students completing internships fared better than peers who did not participate in internships. The students who completed an internship used their informal job searching sources better, were more positively

reviewed by employers, and accepted higher salary positions. Taylor indicated that this provided evidence that the time invested in an internship was a cost-effective investment for students. Internship participation was seen as a path to greater success at work, promoted an increased understanding of careers, and resulted in a successful job offer.

Some of the studies on internships and employability showed similar positive correlations. However, this information seemed to be focused on certain majors that were likely to require or strongly promoted internship participation. Knouse et al. (1999) also studied the effects of internships on employability. Their research, which was similar to Taylor's (1988), focused on students from a large southern university enrolled in the College of Business Administration. The academic programs were business-oriented and included accounting, business administration, economics, finance, management, marketing, insurance, and risk management majors. Knouse et al. found that, upon graduation, those students who had completed internships fared better in their job search and had more effectively secured employment than those who had not completed an internship. However, at six months post-graduation, the advantage had largely disappeared. Studies showed positive outcomes through internship participation, but, unfortunately, these were focused on specific majors and ones that tended to require internships.

Other researchers have similarly studied the practice of promoting internship participation, but that research has not considered extenuating variables such as students who did not intend on seeking employment after graduation (Callanan & Benzing, 2004). Callanan and Benzing completed a study in which they analyzed the correlation of several variables with internship participation. They also examined the relationship

between obtaining employment upon graduation and completion of internships while in college. Callanan and Benzing found a significant correlation between completing an internship and obtaining a career-oriented position. However, they did not take into consideration or analyze other variables such as students that went on to graduate school and may not have ever intended on pursuing a career-oriented position after graduation. They also studied the level of personal perception of career fit between those students that had completed an internship and those that did not and found no statistical significance. Existing internship studies have omitted other possible important factors, such as interest in graduate school, and have failed to show any statistical significance between internship participation and positive employment outcomes.

While many studies advocated for the idea of students participating in internships to promote strong career outcomes, few studies have identified any significant correlations. NACE (2016) studied employment factors through employer surveys and reports on employment trends. The NACE report indicated that there was little difference in the preference of employers regarding how candidates gained their related experience. The report indicated that 57% of employers preferred that their candidates gain experience through internships or cooperative education experiences. Of these respondents, 43% indicated no preference on how graduates gained their experience. Cooperative education has often been used by engineering-related employers and a full 69% of the respondents in the survey indicated that their institution would be hiring engineering graduates. This indicated an overrepresentation of employers that had a natural preference for cooperative education, such as employers that hired engineers. This

NACE report did not include information on specific majors or colleges where it was less common to participate in internships.

Gainful Employment and Pressures on Higher Education

Higher education has been pressured to show that a college education produced employment results worthy of the government funding that it received. Selingo (2013), expressed a critical view of higher education and accused it of often poorly preparing graduates for a career. Selingo discussed the use of standardized outcomes and measures for higher education to determine the employment results of students. He stated that higher education had been unable to develop common standards and, consequently, the federal government may ultimately dictate the reporting requirements. He asserted that the government supplied a significant level of funding to higher education and it had the right to request accountability for the investment.

Higher education has recognized the importance of solidifying knowledge about experiences that contribute to positive employment outcomes. Colleges and universities have worked toward a common understanding and method for gathering graduate information. In 2012, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) produced a position statement that indicated the importance of employment reporting. The report stated, “NACE recognizes the important public discourse regarding the escalating cost of higher education and the perceived returns on the significant investment in time, effort, and resources expended by college students and their families. (para. 1). The position statement advocated for a set of standards for collecting graduate employment data that can be used to compare institutions and promote transparency in higher education. The pressure to produce and display employment outcomes in higher

education indicated a desire for educational insiders and outsiders to know which activities produced positive results for graduates. Higher education has endeavored to develop a consistent method of gathering and reporting graduate information. However, information on internship participation has not been among the standard information gathered by institutions.

The pressure on higher education to promote career prospects has placed increased attention on these employment outcomes. The change represented a shift from previous attitudes that valued educating students in broad areas; promoting knowledge in many subjects while developing the faculties of the mind. Zakaria (2015) indicated that the number of graduates from traditional liberal arts majors were declining while graduates in career training programs were increasing. In addition, Zakaria stated that state and federal government representatives had increased the rhetoric directed at liberal arts schools which were funded with public monies. Higher education has been under increased pressure to endorse college activities that promote employment after graduation, thus creating an environment where activities, such as internship participation, were especially important.

Strong pressures for liberal arts colleges and programs to produce graduates that were ready for the workplace exist. Bok (2013) noted that liberal arts colleges were under increased pressure to promote transferable skills such as critical thinking, effective communication, ethical reasoning, adaptability, and the ability to work effectively with diverse colleagues. Bok indicated that this approach contrasted with the assumption that employers were increasingly seeking specialized vocational training. However, Bok also stated that the traditional model of liberal arts education could be taken too far and might

not have a strong value for students that have a vocational orientation. The pressure to produce graduates who are prepared for the workforce continues to be an important focus for higher education.

The value of obtaining a college degree has been debated and challenges have been identified regarding the investment of time and money. The Bipartisan Policy Center and AAC&U (2021) indicated that there was a persistent narrative questioning the value of a college degree. However, 60% of the public agreed that a college degree was worthwhile, but this percentage went up to 87% when answered by American employers. People with various socioeconomic, educational, and political backgrounds had distinctively different perceptions of the worth of a college degree. While there has been debate about the value of a college degree, most of the American public still agreed that a college degree was worthwhile, with the caveat that this opinion differed according to whom and how the question was asked.

Historical and Current Discussions of Vocationalism and Liberal Arts

Higher education has long debated the prospect of educating students with vocationalism as a primary goal or preparing students with broad exposure to topics and the ability to critically process information. Several scholars regarded narrow learning to obtain employment as insufficient and advocated that students acquire a liberal arts education that included such topics as ethical reasoning, diversity, literacy, and communication (AAC&U, 2007; Brody, 1943; DuBois, 1903; Washington, 1903). The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 promoted education for career paths like agriculture, mechanics, mining, and the military while using land sale proceeds to fund the investment (Thelin, 2004). However, the Morrill Act did not specifically state which

courses were to be taught and encouraged states to offer the liberal arts (Thelin). Booker T. Washington emphasized the need to develop everyday trades and skills but also stated this should be taught alongside a liberal arts education (Washington, 1903). DuBois (1903) took a more direct posture and promoted teaching the liberal arts to promote character and citizenship while supporting vocational marketability. The Harvard Report, one of the most important documents in the history of American education, promoted *general education* (i.e., liberal education for all) and encouraged finding relationships between natural sciences and humanities (Brody, 1946). The Association of American Colleges & Universities (2007) reiterated the belief that students needed to have a global education in the liberal arts of learning, ethical reasoning, diversity, literacy, and communication. The group also stated that liberal education must adapt to the needs of our current time and must be more holistic and broad.

Higher education has recognized the longstanding debate regarding vocationalism versus liberal arts education (Godwin & Altbach, 2016). They stated that career preparation in college was a central element within higher education except for the American higher education system as it was the only system where specialized education was not the norm. However, Godwin and Altbach indicated that there is a resurgence for liberal education to better prepare graduates for a volatile job market. They stated that there is a need for soft skills and a broad understanding of various areas of knowledge. Godwin and Altbach indicated that the promotion of liberal arts is longstanding and has roots in early Chinese education, India, and Islam where broad perspectives and knowledge were promoted. They stated that the western model of liberal arts education is modeled after the education systems of Greece, Italy, France, England, and other

European countries. While liberal education has its roots in cultures from around the world, the United States is known for being the home of liberal arts in the modern age (Godwin & Altbach). The authors stated that American higher education received strong pressures for vocationalism while there was increased worldwide support for liberal arts education. This worldwide increase in support for liberal arts was a reaction to the desire to increase general skills to better prepare graduates for a knowledge economy. (Godwin & Altbach).

The authors, Grubb and Lazerson (2005) suggested that higher education shifted away from occupations focusing on industrial production to focusing on knowledge and information. The document, *The Educational Gospel*, promoted increased attention to transferable skills communicated as the “skills of the 21st Century.” They stated that these skills were necessary to keep up with ever-changing needs for knowledge to keep pace with changes in technology and industrial expectations. The authors argued that vocationalism is irrecoverably embedded in higher education but there was a need for revision to promote broader goals to teach morals, civic awareness, and intellectualism. Grubb and Lazerson suggested that increased attention to vocationalism began to emerge in the early 1800s and throughout the 19th century. Quickly following this period, higher education connected curriculum to specific careers. Grubb and Lazerson stated that this trend continued with a majority of students enrolled in institutions to promote employability with two-thirds of the higher education student population enrolled in professional fields. The authors indicated that higher education is continuing to move towards education for vocation but promoted the goal of developing skills needed in today’s society and workplace.

The Committee of the Corporation and the Academic Faculty (1828) produced the Yale Report that promoted a classical curriculum with Latin and Greek literature at the core, as opposed to a more open curriculum of an elective system. The Yale Report proposed that a classical curriculum produced well-rounded and well-educated graduates. The report argued against a curriculum that taught specific content designed to prepare students for a vocation. This report influenced other institutions to adopt a more classical curriculum focusing on developing the minds of students. This debate, while nearly 200 years old, closely mirrors the debate of vocationalism within liberal arts education that exists today.

After World War II, the debate and discussion regarding vocationalism in higher education continued. Following the war, attending college was increasingly seen as a way to increase employability and social status (Lazerson, 1998). College graduates were earning increasingly higher wages, governmental investments expanded, and employers recruited more on campuses. The idea of vocationalism had been a part of higher education since the professional schools of the late nineteenth century and continued immediately after World War II and with the governmental investments in higher education of the 1960s (Lazerson). Through all the success and expansion of higher education, Lazerson indicated a disappointment in the accessibility of higher education because of costs and accessibility. Education was seen as a vehicle to access the middle class through good-paying jobs, but with increasingly prohibitive costs.

Some scholars continued to push for an increase in vocational training and others promoted the skills and characteristics prominent in a liberal arts education. Bok (2013) discussed the value of the liberal arts and the pressures on liberal arts institutions to

promote more vocationalism. Bok noted that vocationally-focused schools were also pressured to encourage students to take a variety of classes that promoted skills such as civic engagement and the ability to work in diverse environments. Bok suggested that liberal arts students did not always achieve the goals of critical thinking and criticized that student expectations were not set very high. Neither the schools that focused on a liberal arts education nor those that were vocationally focused seemed to evade criticism of promoting one form of education over the other. The discussion of the value of a liberal arts education has been an ongoing one and even those important works that argue for vocationalism still promoted the liberal arts.

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory of how employment recruiters valued and regarded the impact/influence of career/job-related experiences of liberal arts graduates. I used a qualitative research design to study the employer perceptions of career-related experiences that students participated in while enrolled at liberal arts institutions. Creswell (2007) stated that this approach was useful to generate or discover a theory that would explain a process and could be used for further research. Creswell suggested a grounded theory approach to qualitative research could be used to reveal a theory that was grounded in data collected from respondents. Creswell indicated that in a grounded theory approach, a key idea was based on the data obtained from respondents and that a grounded theory approach could be used to develop a theory where one had not previously existed. This was also true when the sample populations studied in existing literature did not match the population for which information was sought. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that grounded theory can help researchers provide explanations of the quantitative results of studies, in addition to generating original theoretical underpinnings of a phenomenon. Using this method, I sought to identify new, emergent data from the qualitative results. The grounded theory approach, while certainly not exhaustive, was an effective approach to develop a qualitative theory to be empirically tested in future quantitative studies.

Creswell (2007) stressed the importance of explicitly stating the researcher's set of beliefs or paradigms that were brought into the research. Creswell suggested that qualitative research involved making certain philosophical assumptions. The qualitative assumption in this research was axiological, wherein I assumed that all research was

value-laden, and subsequently stated the role of values and openly discussed values that shaped the interpretation of information (Creswell). This study began with a structured format while also recognizing the constructivist nature of grounded theory. Charmaz (2014) acknowledged the inherent subjectivity in how the researcher constructed the interpretation of data. Also, indicated by Charmaz, is the flexible nature of a constructivist approach that does not strictly adhere to recipes and guidelines of the traditional grounded theory approach. This approach resisted mechanical applications of traditional grounded theory through flexibility that compliments other approaches (Charmaz). Mills et al. (2006) indicated that constructivism recognized that the researcher was influenced by his/her worldview, history, and cultural point-of-view which led to a denial of objective reality. Recognizing the constructivist nature of the approach, this study openly recognized existing values, assumptions, and biases.

Respondents and Sampling

I anticipated interviewing up to 30 individuals. Creswell (2007) suggested that a researcher would typically interview 20-30 respondents to reach data saturation in grounded theory research. Mason (2010) researched Ph.D. studies to analyze the sample sizes used in the grounded theory studies. Mason reviewed 174 studies that used a grounded theory methodology and found that the average sample size for Ph.D. studies using grounded theory was 32. For this study, I interviewed respondents until saturation of data was reached. Charmaz (2014) stated that saturation is often considered to be the point when a researcher finds no new properties within theoretical categories, and the existing properties display patterns within those categories. The most important goal in determining the final number of interviews was to reach this level of saturation.

The respondents were selected from employers who consistently, though not exclusively, recruited employees from liberal-arts institutions. Prospective respondents were derived from annual recruiting events that occurred in and around the State of Michigan and from recommendations from career office personnel placed in regional private liberal-arts institutions. Annually, approximately twelve private higher-education institutions in Michigan organize a recruiting event in which students participated by networking and interviewing with possible employers that consistently recruited at liberal arts institutions. The primary source of respondents for this study came from employers belonging to a Michigan group called *JobPursuit*. JobPursuit is the oldest employment recruiting consortium organization in Michigan, serves private colleges, and has been operating since 1978 (JobPursuit, 2017). As a result of historical data collected from this organization, contact information for employers who consistently participated in the event and were committed to recruiting from these types of institutions was readily available. Several employers consistently attend this and similar events which made them familiar with liberal-arts candidates' backgrounds. Employers from this group or suggestions from similar regional education institutions provided a representative group of employers that this study used to develop a grounded theory of their recruiting preferences. While these employers were familiar with the liberal arts environment, it was not expected that they hired exclusively from liberal arts institutions. This selection of respondents assisted me in understanding more about hiring from liberal-arts institutions.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling was employed to develop and confirm the theory. Creswell (2007) suggested that this was a process of selecting participants based on the potential contribution to the developing theory. Charmaz (2014) stated that theoretical sampling was conducted to contribute to the properties of a researcher's categories until no new properties emerged. This selection process helped me test the information discovered during the coding process and added to the existing understanding of the recruiting practices of students from liberal-arts institutions. Since the research used a qualitative component, a phenomenological approach was incorporated to select respondents who had experienced a similar concept. Creswell indicated that this approach can be used to describe a human experience. In this case, the phenomenon was the experience of interviewing and hiring liberal arts graduates. Charmaz indicated that using theoretical sampling was an effective tool to develop properties within categories and emerging categories until little new information was revealed. This approach was employed to test my assumptions about categories that arose from the interviews and coding process. Initially, the coding resulted in broad categories that focused on work experiences and transferrable skills. This led to refined properties of the broad category of work experiences into the identification of the main category of *any professional experience is good*. This refinement resulted in a narrowed focus on professional work experiences and transferable skills. Once the categories were narrowed and the properties of the main categories were defined, I used theoretical sampling to further understand their meaning.

The emergence of categories occurred through the process of analyzing interview responses, rather than the specific selection of respondents. As the interviews progressed,

questions and discussions with the respondents were adjusted to test the assumption that transferable skills were the primary concern of employers and that they had little preference for the types of experiences where these skills were gained. I ensured that the respondents selected were experienced employers that would be able to articulate the process of evaluating skills resulting from work-related experiences. Included within this last set of 11 interviews, was only one inexperienced respondent; the average years of experience among the others was 11.5 years. The information gleaned from the one inexperienced respondent, confirmed the need for more experienced recruiters to discuss and understand the relationship between skills and candidate experience. Charmaz (2014) stated that theoretical sampling was emergent and how it was practiced depended on the researcher's objective.

Instrumentation

Qualitative information was gathered through individual interviews using consistent questions and conversation topics. I conducted interviews through a combination of phone calls, video calls, and in-person conversations. These interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed for the coding process. The transcriptions were all placed into Dedoose (<https://www.dedoose.com>) to streamline and organize the approach to coding. Coding only took place using this digital platform which assisted the process of developing codes and categories.

I anticipated that my relationship with the respondents would be an important consideration in the research. Creswell (2007) indicated that in grounded theory research, the researcher's relationship with respondents begins with permission to be included in the study. Appendix A represents the consent form that was used to establish

respondents' permission. Creswell also stated that the researcher should have some established rapport with the respondents to assist them in disclosing important perspectives. In this study, I had previously established rapport with a pool of individuals who would serve as respondents. This rapport was established through the existing relationships between the employers and the individual college that I represented. The target participant group was primarily chosen through the JobPursuit consortium, which my college has been a member of since the inception of the group. My institution is also a member of the Great Lakes Colleges Association where I had access to additional employer contacts. Developing rapport with study respondents was not a challenge given the nature of existing relationships and the fact that the topic being discussed was relatively innocuous and had little or no potential for harm.

To maintain objectivity and to control for bias, I developed and employed purposeful strategies. During conversations with respondents and before the actual interviews, I declined to converse about subjects that were planned for discussion. During each discussion, I was careful to not express support, or lack of support, for answers. Mentally, I removed myself from the relationship to remain as objective as possible. During the interview process, I express an indication that I understood what was stated or I expressed a reflection statement of what was expressed. These strategies helped me to minimize any biased interactions with the respondents.

This qualitative study used interviews to gather information and develop a grounded theory resulting from the respondents' answers. Creswell (2007) suggested four or five open-ended questions to be presented during the interview. I expected that the questions would be altered as themes emerged throughout the study. The initial question,

“When hiring new graduates, how do you view experiences such as internships, summer jobs, temporary, and part-time positions?” This question was seen as important to set the tone, keep the interview on track, and focus the discussion on experiential qualifications since the hiring process contained much more context than internships or other work experiences and included considerations such as interpersonal interaction, resume organization, writing skills, interviewing abilities, and standardized testing. I anticipated that the initial question would guide respondents away from skills and abilities-related answers. Creswell indicated that the questions should be a “narrowing of the central question and sub-questions in the research study” (p. 133). The next two questions were intended to focus more on specific experiential activities being evaluated in this study. The second question, “Tell me more about the value of internships when evaluating candidates” and the third, “Please discuss how you assess summer jobs, temporary experiences, and other work-related activities when evaluating candidates.” The subsequent prompt, “Discuss your ideal candidate’s experiences while in college” attempted to pull the previous two questions together and encouraged the respondents to discuss their ideal candidate and their experience background. The final interview prompt explored the topic of paid versus unpaid internships to better understand how this issue affected the hiring process of liberal arts students. The final prompt, “Discuss your perceptions of paid versus unpaid internship experiences in your hiring decisions.” At the end of each interview, I provided an opportunity for an open-ended discussion of any other factors that were considered when evaluating candidates. I embraced flexibility to promote a constructivist approach while altering the questions as the process uncovered themes and categories to be explored further.

Procedures

The study was conducted using the assumption that there are *best practices* associated with qualitative studies. Creswell (2007) indicated that using these best practices when conducting interviews helped to ensure the quality of the text to be analyzed. The first best practice consisted of creating an interview protocol that included an opportunity for notetaking during the interview. Appendix B provides an example of the participant questions and notetaking sheet used for each interview to help fulfill Creswell's recommendations. Second, Creswell reminded the researcher that adequate recording technology should be used in any study and suggested microphones that were sensitive enough to adequately record all verbal responses in a way that could easily be transcribed. For this study, the audio equipment used was thoroughly tested to promote high-quality recorded audio for the transcriptions. Much of the audio recording took place during phone conversations rather than during in-person interviews. This process allowed me to conduct more interviews than a strictly in-person interview protocol would have allowed due to time and travel restrictions in place during the coronavirus pandemic. With recording devices and notes available, the interviews were documented and presented for transcription. These best practices associated with qualitative research promoted consistency and professionalism in the interview process.

Design

The study was conducted with the understanding that qualitative research recognizes the researcher's biases and interpretations (Creswell, 2007). A grounded theory study used these assumptions. Using a constructivist, grounded theory approach, I was able to remain open and responsive to the emerging themes emanating from the

interviews. Creswell discussed two popular types of grounded theory; one was a systematic approach, and the other was a constructivist approach. The constructivist approach fit the goals of this study because it allowed a researcher to recognize their own worldview and interpretations of data and it provided the flexibility to adapt to emerging themes and individual assumptions of those involved in the study.

A constructivist viewpoint was asserted because it recognized the researcher's subjectivity in the research (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz indicated this since the researcher acknowledges their involvement in the construction and interpretation of the data. Knowledge is influenced by the researcher's position(s) in society. Charmaz postulates that the researcher's subjective position is inherent in one's existence. I have recognized my position in the field of career services and fully disclose my biases.

Data Collection and Analysis

According to Creswell (2007), the grounded theory approach seeks to develop a theory that explained a process, interaction, or phenomenon. In this approach, the researcher typically interviews 20-30 respondents to saturate categories to the point where no new categories are discovered. Saldaña (2016) promoted that anywhere from 10 to 40 interviews were needed to reach saturation for an adequate grounded theory study. Creswell suggested that as the researcher gathered qualitative data, the researcher should immediately begin an analysis, and then return to the field to gather more data. It was recommended that this process continue until the researcher developed no new categories and has worked through the process of theoretical sampling (Creswell). Creswell indicated that theoretical sampling involved the selection of respondents that contributed to the development of further information within categories emerging from existing data.

While theoretical sampling was considered for this research, it was not the primary factor in participant selection. Throughout the interviews, I selected respondents that could help the development and understanding of categories. For instance, there are often many layers of recruiters within companies including recruiters that have many years of experience versus new recruiters. I capitalized on the varying experience levels of recruiters and selected respondents using this information. Using a constructivist approach also allowed me to adapt while gathering data. Charmaz et al. (2018) suggested that researchers, using a constructivist grounded theory approach, should engage in flexibility throughout the inquiry. I assumed multiple realities and shifted the research process as new information was revealed (Charmaz et al.). Charmaz (2014) suggested that constructivist, grounded theory researchers opposed mechanical tendencies and desires of grounded theory and embraced greater flexibility. With this assumption or understanding of reflexivity, subjectivity, and adaptability, I maintained the ability to modify the data collection process as these data were gathered and categories were established.

The coding and analysis process occurred concurrently with data collection and helped guide future interviews. I anticipated discovering emerging categories through interactions with respondents. According to Charmaz et al. (2018), the coding process of grounded theory consisted of at least two phases; initial and focused coding. However, Creswell (2007) suggested three phases of open, axial, and selective coding. Charmaz et al. advised spending more time on initial coding during the first part of the research. During the initial or open coding phase, I remained very open to the interpretation of the data and the bigger picture that emerged from the study. This phase of coding included

simple, precise, and active codes (Charmaz, et al.). Creswell suggested that open coding produced categories used to directly focus the study.

This study used a process of open coding, followed by axial and selective coding, to lead to the formulation of a grounded theory. Creswell (2007) recommended a process of coding that moved from open coding, where a central or main theme was discovered, which subsequently drives further coding to help explain the theme. Creswell suggested selecting categories that helped to explain the central theme then returning to the data or collecting additional data by using axial coding to better understand the emerging categories. From this point, I organized these data to form a theory. I formulated a grounded theory that connected the categories generated from the axial coding process (Creswell). Creswell also suggested that grounded theory research was not highly structured and included variability from one researcher or study to the next. I used a combination of the initial prescribed method and adaptability to promote the process of discovering the central phenomenon, selecting categories, and organizing the data within categories.

The process of coding in this study included an understanding of the terms and words used to develop codes throughout each process. Saldaña (2016) suggested basic coding techniques that allowed for flexibility throughout a study. Saldaña stated that initial coding (open coding) was the first major stage for grounded theory coding and was open-ended allowing for the researcher to review the data. Initial coding can incorporate considerations such as using the respondents' words or phrases, as in *in vivo coding*, and observable and conceptual actions as in *process coding* (Saldaña). Saldaña indicated that *in vivo coding* was appropriate for all qualitative research, beginning qualitative

researchers, and particularly grounded theory research. The *in vivo* process involved using the respondents' language and verbatim codes. This process had the benefit of understanding the respondents' comments by processing their thoughts and using their words (Charmaz, 2014). Saldaña stated that process coding was action-oriented and involved broader conceptual evaluation. Like *in vivo*, process coding should not be solely used and occurred during initial and axial coding. Saldaña stated the initial coding was often referred to as *open coding* and involved the researcher coding with an open mind and considering all theoretical directions while employing various coding methods, such as *in vivo* or process coding. In this research, I used the process of *in vivo* and process coding throughout the initial open-coding to capture respondents' words and actions. Saldaña also stated that initial coding was appropriate for nearly all qualitative research and particularly for grounded theory research. Using these coding techniques of *in vivo* and *process* during initial coding, an understanding of categories emerged in this study.

During the coding process, I developed individual codes, categories, and sub-categories. 91 total codes were developed and these were categorized into groups of codes with similar characteristics. The codes were developed into 13 categories and subcategories. To assist the process of assessing the importance of categories, I attributed a count for each category equal to the total of the codes within the category. This assisted me in the process of understanding the central themes or axis of the study.

Moving into the second cycle of coding methods, I employed one main coding process of axial coding. Saldaña (2016) indicated that axial coding helped the researcher categorize the data by discerning which codes were the dominant ones and which ones

were less important. I determined the significant codes to link categories and subcategories and established the relationship(s) between them.

In axial coding, I ensured that all codes were properly and consistently applied throughout the transcripts. Through this process, I assigned additional codes that were developed throughout the initial coding of all interviews. It was important to analyze the number of occurrences of codes within the categories. This assisted me in understanding the importance of each category. The *importance of transferable skills* category had more importance than any other category. This was determined by reviewing the prominence of both codes within the category and how many times a general discussion of transferable skills was mentioned. The Category of *any professional experience is good* was examined in the same manner and was secondary to *importance of transferable skills*. *Importance of transferable skills* was determined to be the primary axis of the study with *any professional experience is good* as an additional axis. These two categories were central in conversations and this notion was supported through quantitative information.

In the final coding process of selective coding, I systematically reviewed the central categories and related them to other categories (Creswell, 2007). I analyzed the occurrence of categories (and codes) with both categories of *importance of transferable skills* and *any professional experience is good* to establish and explain interrelationships. Both *importance of transferable skills* and *any professional experience is good* consistently co-occurred throughout the study. In addition, *importance of internship* co-occurred nearly as many times with *importance of transferable skills* as *any professional experience is good*. Other categories and codes such as *summer and temporary jobs as*

important, college activities as important, and athletic experience important were also deemed to be important influences on the main categories. This led me to understand the factors that influenced the main categories and assist in the development of a grounded theory.

The data collection and coding process was not necessarily a linear process, but this research followed a planned course. Saldaña (2016) suggested that grounded theory research began with collecting data while simultaneously coding using initial coding methods. I followed the process of moving through initial, axial, and then, selective coding. Through coding, I developed emergent categories, a central/core category, and a grounded theory.

This study used data analysis software to code and analyze the text from all the completed interviews. Saldaña (2016) suggested using software to assist the qualitative researcher in organizing, storing, and managing qualitative data. There are many Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) options available. One of the advantages for a researcher using CAQDAS is the ability for the researcher to search, organize, and group codes. I chose to use the software *Dedoose*. Assistance with this software readily existed and the program was recommended as one that did not add to the steep learning curve associated with the qualitative research process.

Methods Summary

The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory of how employment recruiters valued and regarded the impact/influence of career/job-related experiences of liberal arts graduates. Using a qualitative method approach, this study developed a deeper understanding of employer perceptions of experiential learning in the hiring process. This

approach promoted a deeper understanding of these perceptions to serve as a theoretical guide for future studies.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory of how employment recruiters valued and regarded the impact/influence of career/job-related experiences of liberal arts graduates. I interviewed 23 respondents between February 2019 to October 2020. The respondents were employers that normally took part in the hiring process of liberal arts graduates. These respondents were chosen because they were familiar with the process of interviewing and hiring liberal arts graduates. I concluded the interviews once respondents began providing redundant responses and saturation was realized. Participant responses were quickly transcribed following the interviews for coding and analysis. These responses were transcribed and entered into the qualitative research software *Dedoose*. It was important to quickly enter the transcripts and code them to retain the initial thoughts and general context of the discussions. The interview results produced a theoretical statement that can be empirically tested in future studies. While the results paralleled my expectations, new connections were discovered that would benefit from deeper study.

Research Process

Permission to interview respondents was obtained from the Idaho State University Human Subjects Committee (HSC). The approval was granted in December of 2018 and extended for an additional 12 months in November of 2019. An extension was necessary because of the difficulty of getting respondents to agree to a conversation and scheduling these interviews. The interviews concluded in October of 2020. In all, 23 respondents with a broad range of recruiting experiences provided data. All respondents had a relationship with liberal arts colleges in the Michigan area and all had knowledge and

experience in interviewing hiring liberal arts students. Respondents were identified using contacts from prior recruiting events that focused on hiring liberal arts graduates. I avoided employers that hired at liberal arts schools but had a focus on STEM majors and other technical areas such as accounting since these employers tended to hire for very specific positions and expected specific hard skills. This precaution was taken since many liberal arts institutions also have technical majors. The technical-oriented majors have been previously studied and present different hiring trends than was the focus of this study. I anticipated that some potential respondents might hire from a very broad base of majors and that I might need to direct or redirect conversations to focus on the liberal arts candidate. I made note of times when the interview had to be redirected away from these more technical majors. While this happened several times, it was not difficult to steer the respondents back to the primary focus of the study. As indicated, research already existed related to STEM and technical majors and would have been unproductive in determining an understanding of experiential activities when hiring liberal arts majors. The interviews proved to be very productive in adding to my understanding of the central phenomenon; the link between career-related experiences and hiring decisions.

Saturation was determined when I recognized that no new information was revealed, and no new categories were developed. At 16 interviews, I hypothesized that saturation was materializing. I continued to interview until a total of 23 interviews were completed to ensure that saturation was reached. A surprise in this study was that I had assumed that it would be relatively easy to attract respondents. I was familiar with and had a relationship with many of the prospective respondents. However, many invitation emails went unanswered. Follow-up emails were sent to help the study reach enough

different respondents that saturation was achieved. While 23 interviews occurred, there were a total of 62 invitations and subsequent follow-up communications distributed to secure those interviews. I assumed a higher level of acceptance since I had a professional relationship with most of the potential respondents. Ultimately, a 37% participation rate resulted from the invitations and follow-up communications. The initial participation rate was low, however, I followed up unanswered interview requests approximately two weeks after the original requests had been made. During the follow-up communications, I indicated to the prospective respondents that I intended to only ask questions that were innocuous and did not ask anything that would prompt answers that would disclose proprietary information. A list of the questions was included with the emailed invitations to allow prospective respondents to preview the nature of the questions. This process helped to secure additional interviews and ultimately reach a point of saturation.

Researcher as Co-Participant

Recognizing and understanding bias in this research project was an important part of the process. Charmaz et al. (2018) indicated that the researcher's perspective influenced their interpretation of information received from respondents. This included my personality, social status, race, gender, and sexual orientation. In addition to my personal biases, I included biases that might occur from my position as the Director of a career services office at a liberal arts institution in Michigan. I am a Caucasian, heterosexual male living in Michigan with a family that places high value on educational achievement. My spouse has a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT), and we have a daughter that graduated from the same institution where I work. My daughter also participated in experiential activities promoted by the institution and she has succeeded in

establishing a post-graduate career with a very traditional liberal arts institution majoring in Religious Studies and Public Policy. My personal and professional life may have had some effect on the interpretation of the interviews. However, the bulk of preconceived perceptions come from my professional background and current position. I developed the project because of an assumption that specific experiential activities, such as internships, were not consistently necessary to produce positive career outcomes for liberal arts graduates. My experience has indicated that students often succeed in the job search process regardless of their participation in internships when they can identify, and subsequently, articulate the skills they have developed. These skills often came from various experiences in which students developed transferable skills that were attractive to employers. This assumption was especially true for liberal arts graduates, where the degree did not produce job-specific skills, but rather more transferable skills considered important in many professional fields. While I recognized my bias, I also accounted for it, understood where it was apparent, and ensured that it did not exceedingly influence the way I conducted the interviews or interpreted the information provided by the respondents. Throughout the process, I also took carefully calculated precautions to not influence the respondents' answers. By recognizing researcher biases and carefully controlling interactions with respondents, I was able to keep from influencing responses.

I have worked in higher education career services for over 20 years. This experience has exposed me to students from all backgrounds. Working at a public university for over 14 years has exposed me to an extremely broad group of students; from students enrolled in brief vocational certificate programs to students receiving doctoral degrees. Following my work at a public institution, I accepted a position as the

Director of the Career and Internship Center at a private liberal arts college in Michigan. Students in these various programs and institutions have as diverse experiences as they have diverse degrees. Regardless of students' educational level and their experiences, it has been my job to help provide them with opportunities and help them develop the skills necessary for career success. A component of this process has been to help students recognize and articulate their skills and abilities using examples from activities in which they have participated. Students have often communicated that they believed internships were important, whether they participated in them or not. Regardless of internship participation, I helped students see what they have learned in all experiences and how to articulate these skills to potential employers. I have often shared with students a list of skills published by NACE annual Job Outlook Survey and encouraged students to highlight and provide examples of as many skills and characteristics as possible on their resumes and during job interviews. Students who can communicate these skills, whether they participated in an internship or not, were the ones that have been most successful in the job search process. It has been my long-held belief and practice that skills recognition and articulation from either internships or other on-the-job experiences were the most important factor in the post-graduation job search. This differs slightly from other professionals in the field, who placed a higher value on experiences as opposed to recognition and articulation of skills from all experiences. It is important to recognize and articulate these biases when reporting on the results from this study. While I recognized that these biases existed, I was careful to not let them overly influence interpretations of the interviews.

I have also held the belief that students do not absolutely need to participate in internships and can overcome perceived deficits through other strong experiences such as part-time jobs, summer jobs, and extra-curricular activities. Over the years, I have worked with students who have not completed internships while attending college. It has been my professional position that these students still see post-graduate career success, as long as they have participated in experiences that help them develop and communicate skills related to the job they were seeking. Sometimes students work summer jobs, temporary positions, or part-time or full-time jobs while in college. In my experience, these students still see nearly identical levels of job search success. I believe that the less technical the student degree, the more this assumption holds. Often, students have not participated in internships for several reasons, including that they cannot afford to do internships, cannot secure a position, or cannot locate an appropriate position. Regardless of the reason, I have held an assumption that these students still succeed in their job search if they are working and gaining experience in any position and can articulate the skills that they have gained.

Throughout my 20+ years in career services, one of the most satisfying experiences has been helping students feel confident about their ability to succeed in their careers. I cannot ignore my passion for helping students see their marketability, regardless of internship participation. This often included minimizing student concerns about not participating in internship experiences. While I fully recognized this bias, I sought to minimize this bias during interactions with respondents. It was occasionally difficult to not state that I agreed with the responses provided. All interviews, except for 3, took place on the phone, and I believe that any non-verbal communications that would

have indicated predispositions were minimized as a result of this process. Throughout the interviews, evidence of researcher biases was kept at a minimum and likely did not influence the respondents' answers.

Participant Questions and Revisions

I asked questions to get the respondents to articulate their thoughts about student experiences while in college which made these students marketable. When the answers began to be consistently focused on the skillsets of candidates rather than specific experiences, the interview questions were updated to reflect the expansion and clarification of this developing theme. As a co-participant in the study, I adjusted the questions asked during the interviews. I realized a developing category through continual open coding that focused on the skills of candidates resulting from experiences rather than focusing on the experiences themselves. A slight adjustment in the interview questions was made to promote additional discussion regarding the skills and how they related to candidate experiences. Creswell (2007) stated that the constructivist perspective of grounded theory allowed for flexible guidelines. The adjustment of questions occurred after nine interviews. No additional adjustments were subsequently deemed necessary. The remaining interviews followed a similar format to the questions used at the beginning of the study with some minor adjustments to gather additional data on the emerging theme.

Early in the interviews, I considered re-writing the interview questions to reduce redundancy. I developed a "sheepish" feeling about asking questions that seemed to request nearly the same information as the previous questions. I even indicated to early respondents that the questions were likely to be edited to reduce this redundancy.

However, the respondents did not react negatively towards this redundancy, and I realized that this approach was promoting a deeper discussion and the extraction of additional details.

Not only did I consistently recognize and apologize for redundant questions, but also continued to ask the questions that seemed repetitive, while acknowledging that similar questions had already been asked. In each of the interviews, I stated this while indicating that the repetitive nature of questions led to additional information and expansion of previous responses. While the questions were not edited again, I continued to remark that I understood the repetitive nature of the questions and explained that it helped to tease out additional information and details.

Late in the interview process, I sent respondents the questions in the invitation email. Some of the invited respondents had indicated a reluctance to participate because they were concerned about divulging proprietary information. One prospective respondent was emailed the list of questions to help her understand the general nature of the conversations and that she was not being asked to answer questions that could lead to a loss of a competitive edge in recruiting college graduates. This resulted in an unexpected outcome of the respondents reading through the questions and providing additional detail without the prompting that had been required in previous interviews. As a result of this, I continued to send prospective respondents the list of questions to help them understand the nature of the questions and to promote some forethought that might produce more detailed responses. In reviewing the transcripts, the respondents receiving the list of questions had transcripts that were 23% longer than those that were not provided the questions before their interview. I also assumed that sending the prospective

respondents these questions would increase the acceptance of an interview invitation. However, those prospective respondents receiving the list of questions in the invite did not accept the invitation at a higher rate. Of the 22 prospective respondents invited using the list of questions, eight agreed to an interview for an acceptance rate of 36% compared to a 37% overall acceptance rate. Overall, sending a list of questions in the email invitations proved to be beneficial to promote additional detail, but did not increase acceptance of an invite.

The adjustment in the questions and processes reflected the flexible nature of the constructivist grounded theory approach. Charmaz et al. (2018) promoted the researcher understanding and disclosing positions in the research process. I had long assumed that candidate skills were one of the most important considerations in the hiring process and that internships were not as important as higher education had indicated. As I adjusted the questions, it was important to recognize the biases I held and how this might affect question development and discussions. I did not expect, however, that discussions would end up focusing so much on skills rather than experiences. This open coding process led to a discovery of categories and a return to the data and questions for further exploration of main categories (Creswell, 2007). The flexibility allowed within grounded theory helped this study promote a better understanding of an emerging theory surrounding candidate skills.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling was to be used to help contribute to the theory being developed and contribute to a better understanding of the initial process of coding. In a broader perspective, this sampling technique was used to aid in learning more about the

focus on skills uncovered during the beginning process of coding. The reality was that there was a common need for employers to evaluate the skills of their candidates. I did not adjust or choose respondents that I believed could talk specifically about the connection of skills to experiences when evaluating their hiring decisions since every employer that I spoke to discussed this. When I discovered the link that skills evaluation had with candidate experiences, I sought to ensure that respondents had the experience to expand on this developing theory regarding the need for transferable skills. I ensured that the respondents were experienced and likely able to speak to the importance of skills connected to students' career-related experiences. However, these were likely the same employers that would have been chosen without this consideration. Therefore, this study ended up inherently using theoretical sampling, but not in the strict sense of choosing different respondents based on the developing theory.

Data Collection

I began emailing employers from a list obtained through the JobPursuit group. Since I held a leadership position within the group, I had immediate access to the database of contacts. In the JobPursuit group, I served as the Marketing Chair and oversaw the employer registrations which included communication with employers, processing registration, and completing the billing. To maintain a strong organization of the invitees, I emailed approximately six invitees at one time. After waiting at least two weeks for a response, I emailed the unresponsive contacts one additional time before I discontinued efforts for an interview. I was cautious to avoid annoying the invitees and did not initially follow up with a third email to those that did not respond. However, it became clear that I would need to send follow-up communications to secure a

satisfactory number of interviews if prospective respondents did not respond after the first invite. After 42 invitation emails, I began sending one additional follow-up email to each contact that had not initially responded. This produced a higher rate of accepted interview invitations. Once I had connected with 62 potential interviewees and interviewed 23 respondents, the information from the interviews was deemed to be repetitive, and I was adding no new codes or information. At this point, I determined that saturation had been reached. Through contacts in the JobPursuit group and other professional connections, I was able to interview enough respondents to reach data saturation and develop a theory.

Initial Coding and Overview of Discussions

I used the coding approach promoted by Charmaz (2014) and Creswell (2007) of open, axial, and selective coding using Dedoose. Since open coding occurred in Dedoose, the process of organizing these codes based on emerging categories assisted me in analyzing each interview and the data collected throughout the study. After each interview, I transcribed and coded the interviews one at a time. This process forced me to develop categories in Dedoose as the study progressed. At the beginning of the interviews, I was in a constant state of developing new codes. After 16 interviews, or the last third of the interviews, no new codes were developed, and I focused on categorizing codes within the main themes. I began the process with the assumption that the questions would substantially change to adapt to the answers and the developing categories. However, it became apparent that the respondents were going to discuss candidate skills and not necessarily focus on the experiences of candidates. The initial questions were

adjusted slightly, but I did not end up with significant changes with the questions that were asked of the respondents.

I experienced a few interesting and unexpected responses from the respondents. Initially, the respondents indicated that the process of talking about the evaluation of candidates was very helpful for them. Respondents stated that they have not previously given their evaluation of candidates this level of detailed thought. Nearly all respondents seemed to be genuinely interested in learning more from the results of this study. I intended to lead a presentation and discussion during a conference in Michigan following the completion of the study. The second, and most important discovery was the focus on skills rather than experiences. This category developed very early on in the study, and I quickly learned that this was likely going to become the focus of the study. This selective coding process helped me understand and theorize the connections between the desired skills of candidates and the experiences that employers valued. The respondents were much more interested in discussing skills than specific experiences of their candidates. These two unexpected outcomes increased my understanding of the study and will promote an increased understanding of the field for future studies.

During the interviews, I recognized a holistic view of influences in constructing meaning from the interviews including my relationships with the respondents. Charmaz (2014) stated that a constructivist approach includes attention to the researcher's relationship with respondents and how the researcher constructs meaning from the respondents' stories. During the coding of my interviews, I recognized meaning beyond the words themselves and constructed an understanding that was likely influenced by previous conversations and my understanding of the meaning behind the statements.

During the interviews, there was communication such as silence and laughter that did not get transcribed, but it did become part of how I constructed meaning and coded the conversations. Recognizing the importance of the interactions with respondents and understanding the pauses, sighs, and laughter, produced a more thorough understanding of the interactions. Charmaz stated that it is this broad understanding of an interview, as well as the explicit content of what was said, that helps the researcher construct meaning.

Initial Preference for Internship

Many of the respondents indicated that they preferred that candidates participated in internships during college. Respondents indicated that these internships helped students practice and develop skills. However, when questioned further, these respondents also indicated a preference for any professional experiences, whether they were internships or not. These experiences included part-time jobs, temporary positions, campus activities, and other campus work experiences. Employers indicated a desire for applicants to demonstrate skills that assisted them in succeeding in the workplace. Many of the respondents expressed that they wanted their applicants to simply have professional work experience, but also stated that internships were common among their preferences. The experiences described were positions such as summer jobs, where students were trained on and learned the importance of customer service skills. Customer service was repeatedly stated as an important skill in the workplace since it was a skill that applied to almost any industry and position. Whether the experiences occurred during a temporary position, summer job, or volunteer position, employers did not discount the importance of these experiences. However, internships were certainly the most mentioned preference of experience for the candidates.

While it did appear that respondents favored internship experience over other professional experiences, this preference was not abundantly clear. Of course, the results from a grounded theory research project cannot be generalized and are meant to provide a theory to be tested by subsequent empirical studies. However, this observation matched my assumptions and biases when entering this research. One respondent in the insurance industry, who recruits for corporate positions, stated the consideration that internship participation was important but also indicated that any experience was viewed positively. This statement of preference for an internship, with an openness to all experiences, was not uncommon among respondents. A human resources manager hiring for management trainee positions, displayed a lack of clear preference for internship by stating, “. . . whether it is a part-time job, full-time job, internship, or summer job, I just like experience on the resume” (Respondent W). In the very next statement, the respondent said, “internship would definitely be a preference, but then again, I think that you can still learn a lot of essential skills through a summer job, temporary job, or part-time position” (Respondent W). This type of ambiguous preference for internship experience and apparent contradictions led to a lack of clarity about preferred experiences.

Internships are commonly promoted as a method for students to increase their marketability and develop skills. Much of the inconsistencies in the preference of experience that this study identified were echoed in an article by Day (2016). Day reported on the importance of internships while also describing the importance of various experiences such as on-campus employment and other experiences related to students’ career interests. Throughout the interviews, I discovered similar rhetoric that internships

were important, but it was often a segue into the value of any experience that built skills and promoted employability.

Throughout this study, it was not obvious that there was a clear preference for internships over other experiences for this group of respondents. Respondents would often state that they ranked internships higher than temporary jobs, part-time positions, campus experiences, and volunteer opportunities. One respondent stated that he only ranked internships higher if they were in the same industry and provided experience related to the position being recruited. He said, “I don’t see an internship certainly as being any better than an experience that you’ve had in the summer job unless it is related to the, you know, the industry that you are applying to. . .” (Respondent U). Remarks such as this were common. Respondents frequently discussed the value of these other experiences and completely omitted discussions of internships. When this occurred, I would politely point out the inconsistency and the respondents, without exception, agreed with my observation about the incongruent remarks. During another interview with an employer that recruits for approximately two dozen companies, the employer responded to the stated inconsistency by saying. “I don’t care where they get those skills, as long as they can demonstrate them to me in the interview process” (Respondent J). This comment occurred after the respondent indicated a preference for applicants who had participated in an internship. The following was a statement that represented a common interaction that conflicted with respondents’ preferences for internship experiences.

. . . [W]e actually can deal [sic], if a student has previous mortgage internship experience, that's great. That's a, that's a positive. But that's, that's so few and far between what what [sic] a student can control, especially as a freshman,

sophomore, is, is [sic] what, what [sic] they can control. Um, and a lot of times it isn't getting an internship, that's, that's going above and beyond during your time at school, or, you know, looking for a job, or I guess, the internship is, is just a very small piece of the pie in my opinion. (Respondent S)

While this was one instance when I pointed out to a respondent that they discussed the importance of internships and then went on to focus on skills, this occurred on multiple occasions. Respondents would initially and briefly discuss the importance of internships and then go on to discuss how they actually rated candidates, and those discussions often did not include participation in an internship. I pointed this out on multiple occasions and the respondent usually indicated a level of surprise and agreement with this position.

Often, respondents indicated agreement with this observation and that they had not realized that they were doing this during their candidate evaluations.

Employers Value Any Experience

As indicated, many discussions with respondents produced a preference for internships. However, this was often followed by an indication that any experience could promote the same skill development that they desired from candidates that participated in internships. Respondents stated that various experiences such as student athletic experience or other temporary positions were attractive. A respondent at a large mortgage company stated, "If they're a student-athlete, they're telling me how they've had to, they've had to be coachable, they had to be adaptable, they . . . have to get up early in the morning to work hard" (Respondent S). Respondents indicated that when applicants stated that they had various on-campus or off-campus experiences, it showed that they can communicate, were coachable, learned from failure, provided customer service, dealt

with difficult personalities, were adaptable, and generally worked hard. Respondents discussed various experiences such as summer jobs that helped candidates navigate the professional work world. A human resources manager stated, “I see it as work ethic, personable [sic] communication . . . so I do see a lot of value in part-time jobs, temporary jobs, or just summer jobs” (Respondent W). Even if these experiences lacked the depth that an internship might have provided, respondents concluded that the candidate could navigate a professional environment with other employees and the associated professional expectations. This indicated that students gained the desired skills through a broad range of experiences and was a recurring theme seen in the coding of this study.

Furthermore, respondents expressed an assumption of dedication when candidates stayed with a temporary position or returned to the same employer summer after summer. A few respondents even indicated some preference for this type of candidate versus a candidate with internship experience. This viewpoint was expressed by a respondent hiring for management trainees, “Whether that be temporary or summer job, just to, kind of, display work ethic, and especially if it's a summer job where somebody works seasonally. . . and it's something that they continually go back. To me, that shows a lot of dedication” (Respondent G). These types of experiences seemed to elevate a candidate to a higher level or exceeded the level of those with internship experience. Dedication and other skills quickly became a theme of this study and were consistently mentioned throughout the interviews.

While many respondents did not stress the importance of internships over other experiences, there were a few that strongly preferred internship experience. This preference for internships, however, did not seem to be a consistent theme among the

respondents. This seemed to be true among respondents that relied on specific skills as opposed to those employers that focused on transferable skills. A recruiter for an insurance company indicated a strong preference for candidates with internship experience and suggested that the internship experience was required to even qualify for an interview. It should be noted that this respondent was located within minutes of a college that has a specific insurance program, taught specific skills for the industry, and regularly hired graduates and interns from this program. I consistently tried to redirect this conversation to focus on the hiring process for positions that did not require specific training or education. However, this reliance on internship experience, as a qualifier, did not seem to be a dominant theme among all respondents.

Respondents indicated that professional experience of any kind was the most important factor when considering candidates from liberal arts institutions. The code *any professional experience is good* accounted for the third-highest count of all codes. Comments included within this code generally regarded preferences for any type of work experience without specification for a particular area of experience. Respondents indicated support for candidates that simply had any type of experience as an employee at some point in a student's life. An employer responding to a follow-up question about internship versus any professional experience stated, "I would look at the professional experience, almost the same. . ." (Respondent T). It should be noted that this respondent did indicate that they would place preference on professional experience related to the company (logistics), but they also indicated that this is very rare to find a candidate with this background. Throughout this study, respondents stated the importance of

professional experiences, of any kind, that had helped to build the skills needed for the professional workplace.

Candidate's Employability Depends on Skills

Regardless of a candidate's experience while they were attending college, their employability depended on their skills. This category was formed early in the interview coding process and was evident throughout the study. After nine interviews were completed, I adjusted the questions to expand more on skills information when it became apparent that the respondents were focusing on skills and not necessarily the experiences themselves. Charmaz (2014) promoted a flexible process to expand the open coding process that produced clarity in categories. The interviews began to reflect the importance of skills and I wanted to learn more about where and how the respondents preferred that students obtained these skills while in college. After 16 interviews, I began to find the interviews repetitive. The respondents would speak about candidate experiences, but then they became more focused on skills development and articulation. On occasion, respondents would even discuss the importance of internships, then go on to discuss the skills that they searched for, without even mentioning the internship experience again. While interviewing many respondents, I pointed out the focus on discussing skills and the shift away from internships and the respondents would respond in acknowledgment.

During the initial interviews, the focus was primarily on the experiences of the candidates and later shifted to skills. It was a result of probing questions about experiences that led me to gather additional information about the skillsets gained during work-related experiences. Often, I would hear respondents discuss their preferred

experiences and then talk briefly about why these experiences were important. In an interview with a respondent from a national insurance company about various unrelated experiences on a resume, the reaction was, “What skills did you gain out of that because I know that you gained something” (Respondent E). This response assumed that skills were gained from all experiences, regardless of titles or how professional the experience might have been. I would often ask probing questions to get respondents to expand on why these experiences were important and articulate what it was about the experiences that led an employer to prefer certain candidates.

Of course, the most prominent category in this study focused on skills development. The interview question that asked respondents about their perfect candidate elicited different responses. I asked respondents about the type of candidate that they preferred to hire. I wanted to know more about that candidate that became the “star” candidate at recruiting events. As a career services professional, I have often seen the lists of students that were chosen to interview by multiple recruiters from different companies. I wanted to learn more about the qualities these candidates possessed that made them rise above the other applicants. I asked one respondent, who hires management trainees for a large business-to-business corporation, to tell me more about these experiences and why a candidate needed to have them.

Yeah, I would say it puts them at the top for [sic] when they when they [sic] have a lot of experience, I think it puts them at the top because of the skills that they've gained throughout their different experiences. So, when you're trying to balance schoolwork, whether [sic] and then on top of that a sport. So, for these athletes, the extracurriculars, the internships, and the job. Like I said, communication is

huge. But time management, because to be involved in so much, you have to have good time management skills. And, I know our place of business, we're really busy. And, you have to be able to keep up with the workload, and having good time management skills is huge, and organization [skills] too. So, I would say it's really not only just the different things that they're involved in but the skills that they gained through those extracurriculars. So, the responsibilities that they're taking on. So that's why I think when an employer sees all those things, that's why they're moved to the top where everybody wants them. (Respondent W)

This was a typical response from respondents when asked this question. This respondent spoke about experiences with candidates at a career fair.

. . . [I]f all things are equal in terms of experiences and a broad kind of scope of those things is the ability to just really just communicate openly. Was it an awkward conversation, or just were able to kind of get to know you in a few minutes, when you came by my table and was [sic], were you talking with you and hearing you [sic], kind of, share with me what your experiences have been, you know? If it's [sic] easy conversation, you know, can I see you fitting in and being able to, kind of, work. Again, as I said before, collaboratively, in a team environment, working and, you know, as a competent individual that's going to help bring issues to the table and to think critically about things that we have to deal with, and will help us to advance our, our product in that way. . . So, the students that do that are going to have a leg up, in addition to having the well-rounded experiences through internships and summer jobs and other school and

volunteer-related activities that they've chosen to get themselves into, to continue to develop their skills. (Respondent U)

While the respondents did not always mention specific skills, they often discussed the importance of candidates' skills in general terms. These transferable skills were discussed by all respondents and quickly became a category and focus of this study.

Respondents indicated that the existence of transferable skills was extremely important when considering a candidate. The *importance of transferable skills* code was the most prevalent code developed throughout this study. Within this category, respondents stated that the following were important: the ability to learn, adaptability, communication, competition, conflict resolution, customer service, exposure to diversity, helping others, interpersonal, leadership, multi-tasking, organization, proactivity, problem-solving, resilience, results-driven, being supervised, teamwork, technology, time management, and work ethic. Throughout the interviews, respondents consistently tied experiences to these transferable skills which quickly became a theme resulting in the interview questions being adjusted to accommodate this theme.

Of course, the preference for transferable skills often co-occurred with codes for activities. The most common categories or codes that co-occurred with *importance of transferable skills* was *any professional experience is good*, *importance of internship*, followed by *summer and temporary jobs*. The difference between the third-highest code and the fourth-highest code (*college activities as important*) was pronounced (see Table 4.1). So, while respondents indicated that internships were important, they also indicated that any professional experience was important and there did not seem to be a clear preference for where candidates gained their transferable skills.

Using open coding, transferable skills quickly became the most consistent theme when considering hiring students. However, respondents indicated various experiences and backgrounds that they believed led to the development of these skills. The discussions of experiences leading to transferable skills often seemed to be contradictory. Respondents often mentioned internships, while also stating that it did not matter where candidates developed those skills. To explore the causes or factors that respondents tied to developing transferable skills, axial coding was used to develop a better understanding of the initial codes and to better understand how these codes were categorized. The study began exploring the development of a grounded theory to understand experiences that led to better employment outcomes, but the initial and axial coding indicated that there might be an intermediate step between experiences and consideration of employment. Since transferable skills development was the most important factor, I wanted to explore more about the types of experiences that led to the development of these skills. Through axial coding, I explored emerging themes and assumptions about the experiences that led to these outcomes. This process helped to test assumptions about developing themes. Axial coding was used to understand how internships and other professional experiences led respondents to assert that a candidate had the desired skills.

Throughout the axial coding process, I worked to ensure that all codes from open coding relating to broader categories were coded within the appropriate categories. The coding became apparent when comments regarding broader thoughts were expressed. These codes were then added but added within a category. In addition to adding new codes, I was also able to categorize other codes that were previously used. All transferable skills received a code for the category of *importance of transferable skills*.

Using the Dedoose software, this process became natural throughout the coding process, since each passage coded was chosen from a list of codes or a new code was created.

Throughout this process, these codes were grouped as the categories and themes developed. As a result of this coding process, I quickly recognized these categories and themes and was able to continually apply codes within categories while coding.

Using the process of selective coding, I reviewed the co-occurrence of codes that appeared to have predictive relationships. Since respondents consistently discussed transferable skills while they discussed candidate experience, I wanted to explore whether any experiences seemed to predict the outcome of transferable skills. I reviewed the transcripts and coding to ensure that the coding for skills and experiences also had a corresponding code to help understand or formulate a grounded theory of a predictive relationship. Upon reviewing the co-occurrence of transferable skills and experiences, I found that mention of the importance of transferable skills coincided with discussions of various types of experiences. Table 4.1 indicates the top six experiences in which a co-occurrence of transferable skills was coded. It became clear that respondents expressed three areas important to viewing an applicant as qualified and a belief that transferable skills were key to a candidate being qualified. The most important categories and codes were: *importance of transferable skills*, *any professional experience is good*, *importance of internship*, and *summer and temporary jobs as important*. When coding *any professional experience is good*, comments around experiences that the respondents regarded as professional were coded. This was the case when the respondents spoke of professional experiences within offices or positions where the student was in a position that was more than a summer or temporary position and might even resemble an

internship, though not titled as such. The *importance of internship* code indicated discussions regarding candidates participating in a position labeled as an internship. Lastly, *summer and temporary jobs* indicated comments around the typical summer and temporary positions that college students might have participated in during college. These positions included summer camps, restaurant positions, construction, lawn care, and positions relating to the tourist industry. While there were other types of experiences that seemed to produce an expectation of transferable skills, these garnered the most attention and discussion.

Table 4.1

Co-Occurrence of Code with Importance of Transferable Skills

Co-Occurring Code	Number of Co-Occurrences
Any Professional Experience is Good	17
Importance of Internship	16
Summer and Temporary Jobs as Important	14
College Activities as Important	7
Athletic Experience Important	7

The importance of transferable skills was the most common statement coded. These skills and characteristics closely relate to the annual research published by NACE (2019). The NACE Job Outlook report surveyed employers across a broad spectrum of majors and career fields. Table 4.2 displays the importance that employers placed on attributes found in candidates' resumes. This annual report asked employers, as they were

reviewing a resume, what skills and characteristics they focused on to make hiring decisions.

Table 4.2

Attributes Employers Seek on a Candidate's Resume

Attribute	% of Respondents
Problem-solving skills	91.2%
Ability to work in a team	86.3%
Strong work-ethic	80.4%
Analytical/Quantitative skills	79.4%
Communication Skills (written)	77.5%
Leadership	72.5%
Communication Skills (verbal)	69.6%
Initiative	69.6%
Detail-oriented	67.6%
Technical Skills	65.7%
Flexibility/adaptability	62.7%
Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)	62.7%
Computer skills	54.9%
Organizational ability	47.1%
Strategic planning skills	45.1%
Friendly/outgoing personality	29.4%
Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker	24.5%
Tactfulness	24.5%

Attribute	% of Respondents
Creativity	23.5%
Fluency in a foreign language	2.9%

The results of interviews conducted in this study indicated similar results; noting the importance of transferable skills linked to various experiences. Respondents generally focused much of their conversations around these skills, which are displayed in Table 4.3. The two main skills mentioned, when discussing transferable skills, were *communication* and *work ethic*. Following these two skills, were additional transferable skills, but there was a considerable difference between the second most-mentioned skill and the third most mentioned.

Table 4.3

Co-Occurrence of Skills Codes with Importance of Transferable Skills

Co-Occurring Code	Number of Co-Occurrence
Communication	26
Work Ethic	22
Time Management	12
Teamwork	11
Adaptability	10
Problem-Solving	9
Leadership	8
Resilience	7

Articulation of Skills

While transferable skills were gained in all kinds of experiences, the importance of being able to articulate what they had learned and how they could apply them in a job setting was often mentioned as being integral to the job search process. These types of statements were echoed throughout the interviews. While respondents might assume some skills stemming from experiences, it became clear that they expected that applicants could articulate how they were successful in these positions and how the experiences will help them to be successful in future positions. As a respondent hiring for management trainee positions explained, “. . . it really comes down to how they translate those skills into what it is that we are looking for” (Respondent G). While skills quickly became an important part of this study, it became apparent that being able to communicate the benefits of any experience was as important as anything learned in experiences.

Redundancy of Questions

It quickly became apparent that the interview questions were redundant, and I questioned whether there was a need for a revision. I openly questioned the need for revision with some of the respondents. However, I also discovered that the redundancy promoted increased depth in the respondents' answers. Each time that a redundant question was asked, respondents provided additional and helpful information. I found, through a review of memos, that I had commented many times about my uneasiness when asking questions that seemed to be a repeat of a previous question. I soon started to explain that I was aware of the repetition but had found that this approach prompted additional levels of detail. These redundant questions ended up being an important aid

and assisted me in teasing out details beyond basic experiences and prompted responses pointing to the underlying skills developed through these experiences.

Participant Demographics

Throughout the respondent selection process, I worked to select a broad representation of employers from various fields. Table 4.4 represents a summary of the individuals selected for the study. To adhere to the agreement made with respondents, no identifiable information was included. Rather than providing a specific title, each participant is listed with a generalized title to capture the nature of their position without naming a specific title or including identifiable information. The respondent's average number of years in a recruiting-related position was 10.3 years. Of the respondents included in this study, 65% of them were male. This group of respondents represents a broad selection of professionals involved in the process of recruiting liberal arts students. While most of the respondents did not exclusively recruit liberal arts students, all of them regularly participated in recruiting this subgroup of students. The titles do not completely reflect the activity of recruiting, but each of them was chosen as a result of them participating in recruiting.

Table 4.4

Participant Demographics

Adjusted Title	Years of Experience	Gender
Recruiting Manager	1	Male
Recruiting Manager	15	Male
Partner	15	Male

Adjusted Title	Years of Experience	Gender
Partner	5	Male
Recruiting Manager	3	Female
Sales Manager	15	Male
Program Manager	5	Female
Recruiting Manager	1	Male
Recruiting Manager	5	Female
Vice-President	11	Male
HR Manager	20	Male
Vice President	11	Male
Analyst	2	Male
Recruiting Specialist	9	Female
Recruiting Specialist	42	Female
Headhunter/Recruiting Manager	3	Male
Headhunter/Recruiting Manager	7	Male
Recruiter	6	Male
HR Director	23	Female
Recruiting Manager	23	Male
Recruiter/Trainer	6	Male
Recruiting Specialist	5	Female
HR Manager	5	Female

Unpaid Versus Paid Internships

During this study, the final question considered employer preferences of paid versus unpaid internships. As a result of the ongoing discussion about paid versus unpaid internships and a general assumption that paid internships lead to career success (Gardner, 2012), this was an important topic to cover. However, the responses did not produce a significantly increased understanding of the topic. The final question asked respondents about their preferences for students that had completed paid or unpaid internships. This question ended up being the most difficult question to code into something useful. Respondents repeatedly wanted to discuss the internship programs within their organization and explain why they chose to pay or not pay their interns. Respondents also tended to promote their internships and explain why their opportunities were better than others. This type of response was not entirely surprising, given my relationship with the respondents and the tendency for them to *sell* their experiences. When redirected back to how respondents evaluate candidates and their choice to use this information, respondents often said something like, “I think they're getting the same experience, whether they're being paid or not” (Respondent O). Not all respondents replied in this manner, and many would go on to describe the skills that they desired, including the perceived skills and characteristics of a student that chose to participate in an unpaid experience. While this question did not provide the expected answers, it was, nonetheless, helpful to develop additional information about respondents' views of experiences and their desired transferable skills.

Validity and Reliability

This qualitative research met and exceeded expectations regarding the study's accuracy and quality. Creswell (2013) indicated that qualitative research has been pressured to express the quality of research in quantitative terms such as reliability and validity. Creswell stated that validity in qualitative research was demonstrated by assessing the accuracy and trustworthiness of the research. This included the time spent in the field, the researcher's immersion in the study, and closeness to the issues being studied. In this situation, I was fully immersed in this field of study and consistently used this data, every day, in the distribution of my professional duties. Creswell recommended qualitative researchers use at least two of eight different strategies to address study validity. In this study, I met at least three of Creswell's recommended strategies. The first of these strategies was the prolonged engagement that helped me trust that the information received from the respondents was accurate. Second, was the use of triangulation for corroborating evidence using multiple sources and methods to collect data. I interviewed respondents from 19 different companies and 11 different industries. In addition, I confirmed the interview data with existing literature on transferable skills and to the limited literature regarding preferred experience. The third was clarifying researcher bias. This strategy was recognized and reported, along with careful interactions with respondents not to influence their responses. A consideration of the quality of a study is an important factor in qualitative studies and this study met and exceeded factors set forth by prominent qualitative researchers.

Reliability for this study was demonstrated through multiple methods to demonstrate the propensity for repeated analyses to replicate results. Creswell (2007)

indicated that a method for achieving reliability was to record conversations and transcribe the conversations. This practice ensured that the researcher understood the nuances of the discussions. I recorded all the conversations and personally transcribed them. This process helped me to truly understand the conversations and what was stated during the interviews. Each transcribed interview helped me develop a deeper understanding of each conversation. Creswell (2013) also discussed a method to demonstrate reliability through a theoretical code diagram. Figure 4.1 is a visual representation of the most frequently occurring codes that led to the development of categories tied to transferable skills. All of the codes displayed co-occur with *importance of transferable skills*. Figure 4.2 represents the proposed theory that there was not a clear respondent preference for internships. In this figure, the codes and categories are tied to respondents' preferences for experiences surrounding this proposed theory. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 provide a visual representation of the two main theories arising from this study.

Figure 4.1

Theoretical Code Diagram - Transferable Skills to Positive Employment Outcomes

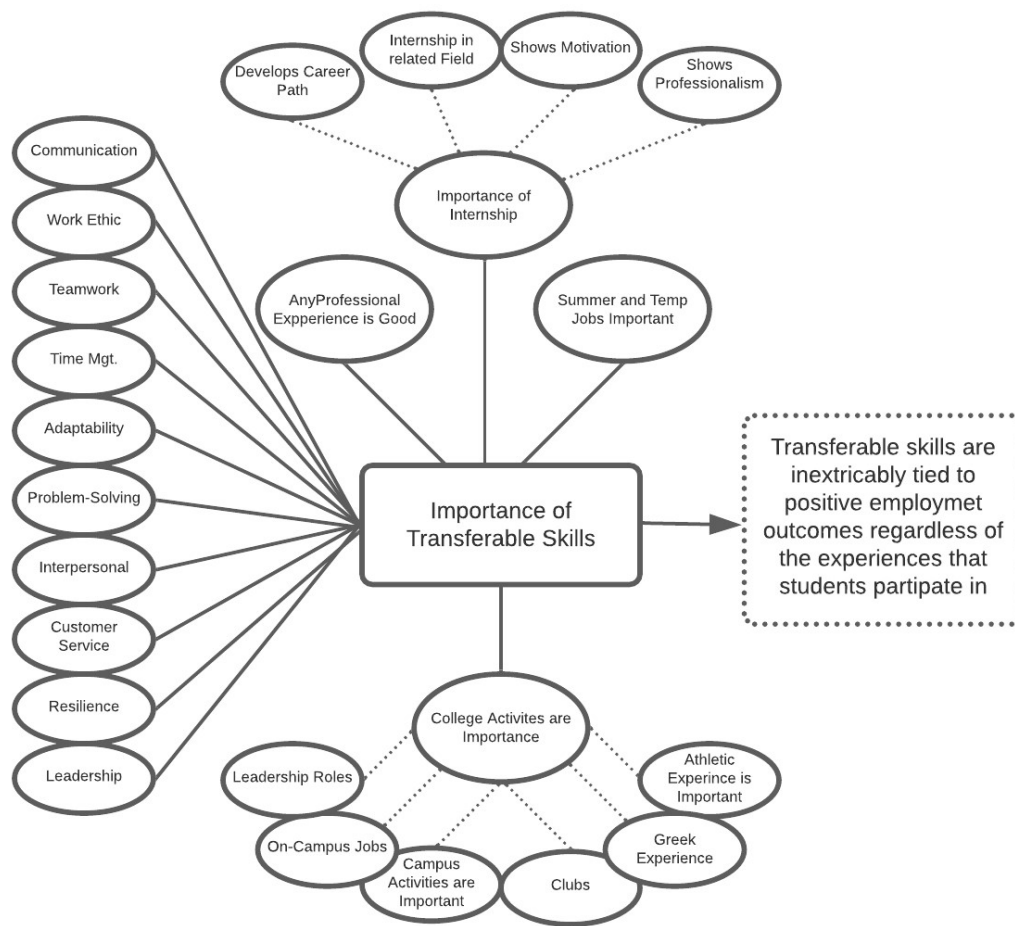


Figure 4.2

Theoretical Code Diagram – Internships AND Career-Related Activities Promote Positive Employment Outcomes



Results Summary

The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory of how employment recruiters valued and regarded the impact/influence of career/job-related experiences of liberal arts graduates. A total of 23 interviews, collected over 20 months were conducted with professionals involved in the recruiting process of liberal arts students for positions that did not require specific majors. Throughout the interviews, respondents discussed the types of experiences that led them to evaluate liberal arts students more positively for employment. These interviews often ended up focusing on skills and the types of experiences where students obtained the skills. The skills identified were closely aligned with characteristics and skills identified in national studies, often described as transferable skills. While experiential activities, such as internships and related job experiences, were certainly important, this study revealed that the depth of the experience and ability to articulate the application of the skills in the workplace were more important than the type of experience. The interview data provided valuable information to reveal professional experience factors that contributed to the employability of liberal arts students upon graduation.

Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory of how employment recruiters valued and regarded the impact/influence of career/job-related experiences of liberal arts graduates. Over 20 months, I interviewed 23 respondents and gained a better understanding of the experiential activities that were promoted in liberal arts higher education to prepare students for their careers. This study focused on employers that were familiar with the liberal arts hiring environment and hired students from those institutions. However, the respondents did not hire exclusively from liberal arts institutions, nor did they hire only liberal arts majors. This approach promoted a better understanding of activities and ultimately led to the development of a grounded theory regarding the experiences and characteristics that employers valued.

Within higher education, internships and other experiential activity participation have been encouraged as experiences that promoted the employability of students upon graduation. As previously indicated, society increasingly expects a return on investment from attending college, and promoting internship participation is one of the practices that is believed to help to meet this outcome. In addition to internships, other activities such as studying abroad, participation in athletics, on-campus employment, part-time employment, and temporary jobs are promoted to enhance the college experience and advance employability. While many experiences are promoted, internship participation is often viewed as one of the most important types of experiential education activities that develop students' ability to gain employment after graduation.

The assumption that internship participation positively influenced employment after graduation has been studied. However, the published literature on this topic has not

gathered enough thorough information and has not been generalizable to a broader population of college students and graduates. Studies have not considered factors such as students intending to enroll in graduate school after graduation and, as a result, were not encouraged to participate in internships. Studies also used samples from business, engineering, and other areas where internship participation was often expected. This was the case when students' corresponding industries had direct ties to their major. Liberal arts education is associated with a broad set of learning outcomes and those graduates often seek positions that do not have specific major requirements. This led to a student population that has not been widely studied regarding the expectation of participating in an internship during college. This study promoted an understanding of what employers of liberal arts students valued in their liberal arts candidates.

This study used a qualitative grounded theory approach to develop a theory. I interviewed 23 respondents to gain a better understanding of the experiences and work-related skills that employers valued from liberal arts candidates. Saturation was achieved when I no longer developed new codes from the interviews and there was no discernable new information realized from the interviews. Throughout the interviews, I developed a theoretical framework that helped develop an understanding of how employers view the experiential and career-related activities of liberal arts college students.

The interviews were coded using the theoretical underpinnings of a grounded theory approach. The study began with open coding to code respondent comments and develop categories. This process led to axial coding to relate the codes and categories to the central category. I subsequently engaged in the process of selective coding to create a central theme with which to relate and organize the categories. This process of coding

developed a centralized theory around the evaluation process that employers used when hiring liberal arts candidates.

While the study helped to develop an increased understanding of how employers viewed the experiential and career-related activities of liberal arts college students, it also helped to reveal employer perceptions of employability. The study began with the goal of generating a grounded theory of how employment recruiters valued and regarded the impact/influence of internship and other career/job-related experiences of liberal arts graduates. It became apparent to me that there was much more depth to this process than I initially understood or that had been discussed in the existing literature. The study revealed the importance of transferable skills gained from a variety of work-related experiences and the importance that employers placed on this rather than specific experiences such as internships.

Existing literature discussed employers' desire for students to possess transferable skills, for higher education institutions to teach these transferable skills, and for the student to participate in experiences, like internships, which increased the development of these transferable skills. However, respondents indicated that it was the skills that were the most important for candidates to possess and they displayed little preference about what types of experiences promoted the development of these skills. Respondents discussed internships but spent far more time exploring the need for students to develop transferable skills through various activities such as internships, temporary jobs, and on-campus activities. By analyzing codes, categories, and co-occurrence of codes, I developed a better understanding of how employers view the experiential and career-related activities of liberal arts college students. Furthermore, I reviewed the co-

occurrence of transferable skills with various experiences to promote the development of a grounded theory. As a result of this process, I developed a theory regarding the importance of internships and other experiential education activities of liberal arts students. The selective coding process revealed an understanding that the issue was not centered on the experiences that respondents valued more, but which experiences led respondents to perceive more transferable skills in liberal arts student candidates. The interviews helped the study develop a new understanding of how employers viewed candidate experiences and additional considerations that had not previously been explored.

There are currently discussions surrounding the topic of employability for college graduates as students, parents, and society expect increased employability resulting from a college degree. Bok (1982) discussed the changing landscape of higher education by indicating that higher education was shifting from the value of being educated for the sake of being educated to promoting education for employability. I began with the goal of discerning the preferences that employers had regarding their candidates' experiences when hiring students. The results indicated that employers had little preference regarding experiences that result in positive evaluations of employability of liberal arts candidates. Zakaria (2015) discussed the increased pressure on higher education to increase the employability of graduates. These discussions consistently led to an analysis of how various experiences developed the transferable skills of candidates. As a result, there was some evidence that this topic might be researched from a different perspective than has been previously studied. I believed that future research should consider findings that were

focused on the types of experiences that employers prefer for liberal arts candidates and where/how transferable skills are developed.

My research developed a substantive theory about how employers that recruit in a higher education liberal arts environment see and evaluate various experiences while in college. I explored what this perception meant for students and employers alike. Employers often suggested a preference for internship experience, but in-depth discussion suggested no clear preference for the specific type of work experience for their liberal arts candidates. The employers required an understanding of skills that were developed during these experiences. The two categories relating to the need for transferable skills and the desire for any professional experiences became an important focus of this study and the development of a grounded theory. The results were directly connected to the data and promoted a theory to be empirically tested in future studies.

Discussion of Findings

The results from this study helped to form a grounded theory to guide future research and an understanding of the factors that promoted the employability of liberal arts graduates. Creswell (2007) indicated that a grounded theory study helped to advance a proposition for further study. This study promoted the theory that employers do not have a strong preference for the type of experience that liberal arts students participate in as long as they are gaining needed transferable skills. The study indicated that employers value internships but not more than other professional experiences. There was little clarity about the experiences that respondents believed were responsible for promoting and developing these skills in liberal arts applicants. I offered insight into the experiences that employers viewed as important to develop transferable skills and indicated that it

was the transferable skills that respondents found the most marketable and could result from various career-related experiences. While respondents often discussed internship experience, further exploration discovered there was no clear preference for the specific type of work experience for their liberal arts candidates

Skills Definitions

While this study discussed transferable skills in considerable depth, there was not a common understanding or definition of *transferable* or *soft skills*. There has been increased attention to soft skills (*transferable skills* was used herein) by educational stakeholders and others across many levels of education (Touloumakos, 2020). However, the definition of soft skills is varied and lacks consistency (Touloumakos). For this study, I used the term *transferable skills*, since this was used by NACE, which is the voice and the national association for higher education career services in the United States.

Touloumakos indicated that the term *skills* was extremely varied. Since there was no common definition of *soft skills*, I used the term *transferable skills*, as used by NACE. Touloumakos conducted a literature review and identified nine categories of soft skills that formed different skill areas, such as leadership, interpersonal, communication, and problem-solving. In addition, Touloumakos suggested that qualities and characteristics such as attitude, professionalism, and intelligence were categories within soft skills. In this study, I considered these categories as transferable skills. *Hard skills* were not included within this study's consideration of *transferable skills*. Touloumakos stated that the term *hard skills* referred to "those skills that were cognitive and technical in nature" (p. 3). This definition of *hard skills* was used in this study. It was important to discuss definitions and understandings of transferable/soft skills since this was a significant topic

in higher education as the industry continued to focus attention on the development of students.

Transferable Skills

The skills identified as important for higher education programs to develop are very similar to the skills that employers seek and are often discussed and emphasized (Hart Research Associates, 2018; NACE, 2019). Employers seek these skills whether they are transferable skills, hard/technical skills, or a combination of both. Higher education institutions have realized the importance of developing these skills in graduates to better prepare them for successful entrance into the professional workplace. Higher education and industry stakeholders have identified the skills needed; however, there remains work to be completed to further understand the types of work-related activities that promote the skills. Higher education needs to continue to discuss these skills and advance existing knowledge.

Transferable skills are widely sought after in the professional world including for business professionals. Robles (2012) identified the soft skills that business executives seek in their candidates. Robles's study identified ten skills that were viewed as the most important: integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic. Bennis and O'Toole (2005) proposed that executives who failed did so not because of a lack of technical skills, but because they lacked interpersonal skills and wisdom. While it was clear that students needed these transferable skills to be marketable in the post-graduate world, it remained unclear which experiences primarily developed these skills. Robles' statement that these skills were important to employers coincided with the Association of American

Colleges & Universities and Hart Research Associates (2010) and the NACE (2019) reports which discussed the skills and attributes that employers sought. Fene et al. (2018) indicated that on-campus student employment promoted these skills. However, many other areas were discussed by this study's respondents that needed to be studied to promote a more thorough understanding of where these skills were developed and where employers perceived these skills were developed. The results of this study indicated the need for further study to determine where these skills are specifically gained and where employers perceive these skills to have been developed.

During the interviews, respondents broadly mentioned the need for transferable skills when hiring recent graduates. I asked them about their preferences of experiences and included questions regarding internships, part-time jobs, summer/temporary jobs, and campus experiences. Rather than discussing these types of jobs specifically, respondents tended to shift focus to the skills of candidates. These were typical responses promoting the theory that employers have little preference for the professional experiences of their liberal arts candidates; they have a strong preference for the development of transferable skills regardless of the experience(s). In the Hart Research Associates (2018) study, the researchers conducted two parallel surveys of employers; one involving 501 business executives and the other 500 hiring managers. The study objective was to measure the learning outcomes that were the most important in today's economy and how prepared college graduates were in these areas. Table 5.1 represents the survey results where hiring managers and business executives rated the skills or knowledge areas on a scale of 0-10. The Hart Research Associates survey provided an important distinction from previous studies that only surveyed executives. In the Hart Research Associates study, both the

executives and hiring managers were asked about the important skills and characteristics of candidates. By asking both hiring managers and executives, the researchers gained a deeper understanding of the desire for these skills because they obtained information from the professionals that perform the hiring duties and the executives that were not directly involved in the routine hiring decisions but still had opinions and influence.

Table 5.2 represents a continuation of the survey results and included knowledge areas that were considered important but slightly less important than the skills in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Hart Research Associates: The Learning Priorities that Executives and Hiring Managers Value Most Highly Cut Across Majors

Skill or knowledge area	Hiring	Business
	Managers	Executives
Ability to effectively communicate orally	90%	80%
Critical thinking/analytical reasoning	84%	78%
Ethical judgment and decision-making	87%	77%
Able to work effectively in teams	87%	77%
Able to work independently	85%	77%
Self-motivated, initiative, proactive: ideas/solutions	85%	76%
Able to communicate effectively in writing	78%	76%
Can apply knowledge/skills to real-world settings	87%	76%

Table 5.2

Hart Research Associates: The Learning Priorities that Executives and Hiring

Managers Value Most Highly Cut Across Majors (Second-Tier)

Skill or knowledge area	Hiring	Business
	Managers	Executives
Can find, organize, evaluate info from many sources	79%	73%
Able to analyze and solve complex problems	75%	67%
Analyze/solve problems w/people from diff. backgrounds/cultures	73%	65%
Able to innovate and be creative	66%	61%
Stay current on changing tech/applications to workplace	73%	60%
Able to work with numbers and statistics	55%	54%
Proficiency in a language other than English	25%	23%

The study by Hart Research Associates (2018) echoed the importance of transferable skills discussed by other studies (Association of American Colleges & Universities and Hart Research Associates, 2010; Gardner, 2021; NACE, 2019; Robles, 2012). The Hart Research Associates study was consistent with the skills that are in demand from college graduates. While tables 5.1 and 5.2 display the results of Hart Research Associates, other studies by Gardner, NACE, and Robles produced similar results regarding transferable skills. In addition, the results of this grounded theory study (Table 4.3) produced an emphasis on skills similar to these previous studies. While the skills that the respondents discussed were closely related to previous studies, the

relationships between activities and skills provided an opportunity for further exploration in liberal arts higher education.

The skills indicated in the Hart Research Associates (2018) study emphasized skills similar to skills discussed in this study. In a separate Bipartisan Center and AAC&U (2021) study, respondents indicated a need for both technical skills and well-rounded skills for long-term career success. They also found that employers emphasized the need for critical thinking, problem-solving, and written communication. The need for graduates to possess transferable skills is well understood in higher education, which has led to institutions increasing their focus on developing these skills.

In this study, the rank order for the skills-related codes categorized with *importance of transferable skills* is indicated in Table 5.3. This table is similar to the results from the Hart Research Associates study (Table 5.1) and the annual study from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2020) in Table 5.4. These transferable skills present as an integral part of the hiring process for companies.

Table 5.3

Co-Occurrence of Skills Codes with Importance of Transferable Skills

Co-Occurring Code	Amount of Co-Occurrence
Communication	26
Work Ethic	22
Time Management	12
Teamwork	11
Adaptability	10
Problem-Solving	9

Co-Occurring Code	Amount of Co-Occurrence
Leadership	8
Resilience	7

Information related to the skills needed for success in college and the professional workforce has been widely discussed. In a study completed by Peter D. Hart Research Associates (2006), the researchers indicated that employers and recent college graduates believed that higher education should not be narrowly focused on providing the knowledge and skills necessary for a specific field. In addition, the study stated that employers preferred broad skills found in a liberal arts education such as teamwork, applied knowledge, communication, and global awareness. While the Peter D. Hart Research Associates survey discovered and explored these skills, interestingly, it did not mention where students might gain these skills. This study provided information about employer preferences on what experiences provided these skills for their liberal arts candidates. They indicated a preference for professional experiences of any type. Information regarding the desired transferable skills in the workplace is available, however, a gap remains about the understanding of activities leading to the development of the skills.

Work Experiences and Skills Development

While internships are heavily promoted throughout higher education, it was not clear that employers expected to see the skills resulting primarily from internships that students often participate in while in college. Students participate in a broad range of activities other than internships, such as study abroad, volunteering, athletics, and on-

campus employment. Fene et al. (2018) found that student employment experiences increased the transferable skills discussed by NACE (2019). Fene indicated that on-campus employment might lead to an increase in transferable skills, thereby promoting employability. In addition to student employment, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2011) promoted internships as one of ten high-impact practices in higher education. The report indicated that internships provided direct work experience that often correlated with students' career goals. They also expressed that these internships coincided with supervision and coaching. The Association of American Colleges and Universities study also indicated that learning communities, service learning, study abroad, student-faculty research, senior culminating experiences, and internships were all high-impact practices leading to higher levels of success in college learning. In addition to the assertion that internships were important to learning, the Association of American College & Universities surveyed higher education institutions and stated that 62% of colleges and universities were planning on expanding internships at their institutions. The higher education industry continues to promote internships, employers continue to seek them, but questions remained about the effectiveness of the experiences that lead to the transferable skills that employers seek.

While it is difficult to ascertain information about the types of work-related experiences that are expected to develop the skills that employers seek, there is some information available about the campus experiences. The results in Table 5.4 from Hart Research Associates (2018) revealed a preference for internships among the other academic learning experiences. However, this data does not include employer preferences for nonacademic experiences such as part-time positions, seasonal jobs, and on-campus

jobs. This information is congruent with the results of my study that employers seem to value internship participation. However, my study produced valuable information suggesting that employers might have as much or more appreciation for all professional experiences when it comes to transferable skills development of liberal arts candidates.

Table 5.4

Applied and project-based learning experiences, particularly internships or apprentice experiences, give recent college graduates an edge with both employer audiences.

Applied and Project-Based Learning Experiences	Hiring	Business
Would be MUCH More Likely to Hire Recent Grad with this Experience	Managers	Executives
Internship/apprenticeship with a company or organization	52%	60%
Project in community w/people from different backgrounds/cultures	29%	37%
Multiple courses requiring significant writing assignments	29%	23%
Research project done collaboratively with peers	28%	33%
Advanced comprehensive senior project	28%	28%
Service-learning project with a community organization	24%	32%
Study abroad program	18%	16%

Skills Articulation

The need for transferable skills to obtain a position and be successful in the workplace has been well documented. Employers have stated that it was important that

candidates demonstrate their communication skills during the interview process.

Throughout this study, respondents often indicated that it was important for candidates to communicate their skills and tell stories about how their experiences fit with the needs of the position and company. Since this study promotes liberal arts employers positively evaluating all professional experiences to develop transferable skills, the ability to articulate these skills is a primary concern for students. The code, *communicating skills from experiences*, was not an extremely high-occurring code within the entire study, but it was tied for the eighth-highest number of codes. Liberal arts students must not only gain these skills from a variety of professional experiences, they also must be able to articulate their skills. Of course, skills communication in the hiring process occurs in both written and verbal forms. Gardner (2021) reported that 78% of employers indicated that it was important for candidates to communicate their qualifications accurately and concisely during an interview. NACE (2016) indicated that liberal arts degrees helped students gain the skills that employers demand, but that students often had difficulty articulating these skills. The NACE article indicated a two-fold issue with students' inability to articulate their skills. First, students did not fully understand the skills that they had developed. Second, students did not know how to effectively communicate these acquired skills to employers. Gardner (2021) expressed the importance of articulating skills from an indirect viewpoint. Gardner stated that employers expressed concern about students' ability to be flexible and communicate effectively. However, communication was positively rated among the employers who responded in that study, even though they expressed concern. Some of the areas of concern, reported by Gardner, included transferable skills that overlapped with this grounded theory study.

Communicating skills and characteristics to employers is a multifaceted process. In addition to the written forms of communication, a candidate needs to verbally communicate how they see themselves as a good fit within a company/institution. This process usually involved written forms of communication including using emails, cover letters, resumes, and other types of follow-up communications. NACE (2016) indicated the need for a candidate's resume to communicate important skills to employers. Table 5.5 displays the skills and characteristics in the order that employers ranked them in the NACE study.

Table 5.5

Attributes Employers Seek on a Candidate's Resume (NACE, 2016)

Attribute	% of Respondents
Problem-solving skills	91.2%
Ability to work in a team	86.3%
Strong work-ethic	80.4%
Analytical/Quantitative skills	79.4%
Communication skills (written)	77.5%
Leadership	72.5%
Communication skills (verbal)	69.6%
Initiative	69.6%
Detail-oriented	67.6%
Technical skills	65.7%
Flexibility/adaptability	62.7%
Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)	62.7%

Attribute	% of Respondents
Computer skills	54.9%
Organizational ability	47.1%
Strategic planning skills	45.1%
Friendly/outgoing personality	29.4%
Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker	24.5%
Tactfulness	24.5%
Creativity	23.5%
Fluency in a foreign language	2.9%

Table 5.5 displays the important skills that NACE gathers annually. While communicating skills did not become the main theme in this study, it is inextricably tied to the research because it is necessary for students to, not only gain skills but to recognize them and communicate them to employers.

Implications

There were practical implications based on the results of this study. However, the results of this study cannot be broadly generalized. This study was a grounded theory study meant to develop a theory to be empirically tested to determine generalizability (Creswell, 2007). This theory suggested that employers have no clear preference for the specific type of professional work experience for their liberal arts candidates to gain needed transferable skills. The employers indicated a need to understand skills that were developed from a variety of professional experiences to evaluate employability of liberal arts candidates. The primary implication for this study is the development of a theory to

be empirically tested. However, I believe that a result from the information gathered might guide strategies for everyday practices in liberal arts higher education and employment recruiting.

For employers, there are various practical applications resulting from this study, including in the interviewing and hiring processes. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2011) considered internships that included strong supervision and mentoring to be a high-impact practice and recognized that employers valued these experiences. However, using the information gathered in this study, employers need to recognize the need to evaluate all experiences from their liberal arts applicants. This needs to be completed with the understanding that it is the skills that they are likely seeking and they need to emphasize gathering this information on their candidates.

This study viewed existing research about employability and collegiate experiences while focusing on liberal arts students and concluded that there was a lack of research on this subject. Hora et al. (2017) indicated surprise by the lack of empirical data regarding the outcomes of internship participation. Higher education needs to recognize this and consider the lack of evidence about an activity that is widely promoted. This recognition should lead to a more thoughtful approach when promoting different experiences to liberal arts students to focus on skills development and recognition.

Future Research

Information related to skills developed from professional experiences such as internships and other types of concurrent employment in college is needed to understand the hiring preferences of employers recruiting liberal arts students. Further inquiry is needed to better understand the types of work-related and experiential activities that promote the skills discussed within this study.

Employers are included among the groups that have promoted internships. In this study, I experienced respondents having no clear preference for professional experiences to develop transferable skills in their liberal arts candidates. It was very common for them to be inclusive about the types of experiences where students gained needed skills. Additional studies would provide a better and more complete understanding of the theory discovered from this study. This theory advances the idea that employers that were promoting internships might primarily be seeking skills that could come from a variety of other career-related experiences. The Association of American Colleges & Universities (2011) reported that internships were a high-impact campus practice and suggested that these experiences included supervision and coaching. Of course, many temporary jobs, campus activities, part-time positions, and on-campus jobs also have strong supervision and coaching elements embedded in them. Future studies should consider exploring the strength of broad samples of experiences and relationships to building skills in liberal arts students.

This study developed a theory about those experiences and characteristics that promote positive employment outcomes for liberal arts graduates. Grounded theory studies promote generating a substantive theory that can then be tested through empirical

quantitative data (Creswell, 2007). The theory resulting from this study is that employers primarily seek specific skills from new graduates and there is little preference about which career-related experiences provide these skills. It was not clear which experiences were best suited to develop the skills that employers sought from liberal arts graduates. When reviewing the skills that employers identified, it was evident that liberal arts programs need additional information about which experiences promote the development of those skills. Liberal arts higher education needs to know how to advise students about experiences and help students articulate skills to prospective employers. Future studies could test the theory developed from this study and promote stronger employment outcomes for liberal arts students.

Strengths

In the process of increasing knowledge about the types of experiential activities that had a positive influence on employment, this study discovered new information for the field. Higher education can benefit from knowing where information gaps exist between what is learned in college, the skills employers seek, and how to bridge this gap. This study developed a stronger understanding of the skills that employers desire from student candidates. As expected, there was not an overwhelming preference for internships.

This study uncovered an emerging theory regarding why employers might prefer one experience over the other. This provided direction for new empirical studies to better understand the experiences employers believe will help students gain transferable skills. In addition to the assumption that employers have about skills and experiences, it is

equally as important to develop empirical evidence regarding which experiences provide the best opportunity for liberal arts students to develop these skills.

This study followed sound principles of grounded theory research. I followed a prescribed, yet flexible, method of grounded theory research as proposed by Creswell (2007). This study began with a strong argument for using the grounded theory approach since I sought to develop a theory to help explain the process employers use to evaluate students based on the student experience(s). I developed interview questions that prompted respondents to reflect on the recruitment process and the outcomes that contributed to the employment of a suitable candidate. These interviews were conducted primarily on the phone with three interviews being held in person. I began to sense I was reaching saturation after 16 interviews and ended with a total of 23 interviews. I followed a process of open, axial, and selective coding, using Dedoose to assist in organizing the data. Upon completing the interviews, I developed a substantive theory regarding employer preferences of experiences and the factors that were most important to employers. I followed prescribed principles while embracing the suggestion that there was some flexibility allowed (Charmaz, 2014). Because of the research process followed, this study provided a sound theory to be studied in the future.

Limitations

This study was thorough and resulted in a theory to be tested by future studies. However, there are limitations to be noted. This study produced a substantive-level theory; however, it was not an empirically-based study and is, therefore, not generalizable. In addition, the respondents in this study, lacked diversity, both in terms of ethnicity and gender. Among the respondents, seven of the 23 were female. Along with a

disproportionate number of males in the study, only one of the respondents was observably from an underrepresented class. This represents a selection of respondents that do not represent the makeup of society or college students. Furthermore, this study purposefully focused on a limited subgroup of employers (those that hire liberal arts graduates). Future studies might consider broader groups of employer interests.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study represents information that is helpful for employers and higher education advisors. This study developed a theory to be tested through future research with the intent to create a generalizable understanding of the importance of connecting skills and experiences that are common among students attending liberal arts institutions. The results helped to form a theory about employer perceptions of experiential and career-related activities, including internship participation. This study builds on information previously known about employers' desires for transferable skills that lead to positive evaluations of candidates. Through the discussions with the respondents and subsequent coding analysis, I discovered a connection between the development of skills and professional work experiences that deserves more study. Developing a better understanding of this connection between employers, experiences, and transferable skills, whether real or perceived by employers, would be helpful for higher education programs that prepare liberal arts students for today's workplace. This information could assist career-service professionals and employers to prepare students to meet the needs of an evolving workplace.

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide and grant permission to participate in the present study. This interview should only take 15-30 minutes of your time. You are free to decide not to participate or withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher and related institutions.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the different outcomes from those students that complete internships and students that participate in experiences that are closely related to their career objectives. The procedure will be a qualitative study design generally defined as employer perceptions of student marketability according to their previous work activities.

Data, for this study, will be collected through interviews with employer recruiters. Data collection will involve documents (notes and entries made by the researcher and documents provided by the interviewee), audio material (recording of the interview), and interviews (transcripts of the interviews). The individuals involved in the data collection will be the interviewer. Recordings of the interview will be temporarily stored on the researcher's mobile phone. Once the recording has been transferred to the researcher's password-protected computer, the phone recording will be deleted. The researcher will be the only person with access to these recordings.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during participation. I am available to share my findings with you after the research is completed and your personal name will not be associated with the research findings.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation is benefiting the field of recruiting with additional knowledge.

Dissertation Committee Chair: Dr. Richard Wagoner at (208)282-3358,
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Appendix B

Questions for Participants

1. When hiring new graduates, how do you view experiences such as internships, summer jobs, temporary, and part-time positions?
2. Tell me more about the value of internships when evaluating candidates?
3. Please discuss how you assess summer jobs, temporary experiences, and other work-related activities when evaluating candidates?
4. Discuss your ideal candidate's experiences while in college?
5. Discuss your perceptions of paid vs. unpaid internship experiences in your hiring decisions.

Appendix C

Participant Email

Dear Participant,

I am writing to request your time to conduct an interview to collect information for my dissertation study. This interview should only take 15-30 minutes of your time.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the different outcomes from those students that complete internships and students that participate in experiences that are closely related to their career objectives. The procedure will be a qualitative study design generally defined as employer perceptions of student marketability according to previous work activities.

Prior to conducting the interview, I will email you a consent form that further explains the research process, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

If you have any questions regarding the information that I have provided above, please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address and phone number provided below. If you have further questions or do not feel I have adequately addressed your concerns, please contact my dissertation research chairperson: Dr. Richard Wagoner at wagorich@isu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Mr. Tom Bailey, Research Compliance Coordinator IRB/Human Subject, Idaho State University, bailthom@isu.edu, (208)282-2179.

Troy Kase, Idaho State University, Ed.D. Higher Education Administration Doctoral Candidate. (208)851-8094, kasetroy@isu.edu

Appendix D

Questions for Participants (Updated 11/18/19)

1. When hiring new graduates, how do you view experiences such as internships, summer jobs, temporary, and part-time positions?
2. Tell me more about the value of internships when evaluating candidates' skillset?
3. Please discuss how you assess summer jobs, temporary experiences, school activities, and other work-related activities when evaluating candidates' skillset?
4. Discuss your ideal candidate's experiences while in college?
5. Discuss your perceptions of paid vs. unpaid internship experiences in your hiring decisions.