ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

Kara S. Schotter

The Graduate School

Morehead State University

April 4, 2022

STUDENT PERCEPTION OF ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY QUALITIES IN A
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE

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Abstract of Capstone

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
Ernst and Sara Lane Volgenau College of Education
At Morehead State University

By

Kara S. Schotter

Corydon, Indiana

Committee Chair: Dr. Fujuan Tan, Associate Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

April 4, 2022

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

STUDENT PERCEPTION OF ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY QUALITIES IN A
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE

Essential Employability Qualities, also known as soft skills, are becoming just as important for new college graduates to demonstrate during the hiring process as job-specific skills (Hart Research Associates, 2018; National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018). A review of the literature reveals that employers (Ahmad, 2019; Chhinzer & Russo, 2018; Durrani & Tariq. 2012; Finch et al., 2013; Gruzdev et al., 2018; Robles, 2012; Ortiz, 2016), college faculty (Cotronei-Baird, 2020; Huang et al., 2016; Paterson, 2017; Tang, 2019), and students (Ahmad, 2019; Jackson, 2015; Maguire, 2018; Pheko & Molefhe, 2017) recognize the importance of soft skills during the hiring process, however a gap exists in the research focusing specifically on student perception of soft skills during enrollment in a first year experience course. First-year experience courses have been implemented at institutions of higher education in an effort to lay the foundation for student growth throughout the remainder of the college experience (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016). However, first year experience courses often do not explicitly introduce essential employability qualities.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore student perception of essential employability qualities during enrollment in a first-year experience course at Jefferson Community and Technical College and compare and contrast the

perceptions to employer perceptions within the literature. The main findings indicate

that the study participants recognized the importance of both job-specific skills and

soft skills in the hiring process. In contrast to employer expectations found in the

literature (Hart Research Associates, 2018; National Association of Colleges and

Employers, 2018), the participants felt adequately prepared with necessary soft skills

and placed emphasis on their expected development of job-specific skills during the

process of earning a college degree.

KEYWORDS: Essential employability qualities, soft skills, job-specific skills, first-

year experience, employability, student perception

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STUDENT PERCEPTION OF ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY QUALITIES IN A
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE

By

Kara S. Schotter

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CAPSTONE

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The Graduate School

Morehead State University

April 4, 2022

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April 4, 2022

DEDICATION

To my husband Steven who has stood by me, supported me, did all the

household chores, and reassured me that I would make it through this program. To

Owen and Henry, your smiles, hugs, and kisses gave me strength to carry on and get

the work done. To my mother, my first teacher, for always being there to listen,

provide words of advice, and support me in my never-ending desire to learn and do

more. To my mother and father in-law, who agreed to let me move in with them 10

years ago so that I could pursue my dreams of being a college professor full-time.

Thank you for all the hours of baby-sitting, giving us property to live on next door,

and the love and support. To my favorite teacher, mentor, and surrogate father,

Charles Mills. Thanks for pushing me to become a teacher when Pharmacy school did

not work out. You were right, teaching has turned out to be way more rewarding than

counting pills.

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Thank you to all of my friends and colleagues at Jefferson Community and Technical College, especially those in the Allied Health department, for supporting me on this journey. Working with all of you every day to change the lives of students is truly a joy. A special thank you to Dr. Telly Sellars, for supporting me, giving me opportunities to grow my skill set, and demonstrating what being a good leader looks like.

I would also like to acknowledge Karin Admiraal, Karol Johansen, and Amanda Hedrick. Entering this program, I had no idea that I would form a bond with three beautiful souls that would support and encourage me throughout this process. Together we are and will always be Boundaryless.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

For new graduates seeking employment, the ability to demonstrate essential employability qualities (aka soft skills) is becoming just as important as having a college degree (Gruzdev et al., 2018; Velasco, 2012; Finch et al., 2013). Essential employability qualities typically sought by employers during the hiring process include communication, teamwork, inquiry, collaboration, critical thinking, numeracy, and problem solving (Durrani & Tariq, 2012; Gruzdev et al., 2018; Quality Assurance Commons, 2019; Robles, 2012). Within current literature, employers (Ahmad, 2019; Chhinzer & Russo, 2018; Durrani & Tariq. 2012; Finch et al., 2013; Gruzdev et al., 2018; Robles, 2012; Ortiz, 2016), students (Ahmad, 2019; Jackson, 2015; Maguire, 2018; Pheko & Molefhe, 2017), and college graduates (Velasco, 2012) alike have identified a need for institutions of higher education to enhance curricula to include the explicit introduction of essential employability qualities.

Employers often use a set of essential employability qualities to filter resumes and the ability of college graduates to demonstrate these soft skills during a job interview often have an impact on the hiring decision. Despite the impact that essential employability qualities can have on a college graduate's chances of getting a job, not all college students have the same perception of the skills that are necessary for employment. In exploration of student perception of essential employability qualities, Pheko and Molefhe (2017) conducted a study with students enrolled in Psychology courses and found that the skills and attributes perceived as important for

employability included job-specific skills, commitment, and personal presentation. In contrast, Paterson (2017) conducted a study with business administration and economics students and found that the employability skills perceived as important included assertiveness, critical thinking, communication skills, and language skills. Pheko and Molefhe and Paterson demonstrate the inconsistency that exists in current literature related to student perception of essential employability qualities.

The inconsistency in student perception of essential employability qualities is amplified by the results of research conducted by McGraw Hill Education in 2018. In the McGraw Hill Education (2018) study, 60% of the students surveyed at two- and four-year institutions nationally indicated that they leave college feeling underprepared for the workforce. In addition, the students indicated that their college instructors and the courses they completed had the biggest impact on their preparation for the workforce. Within this study and others, an obvious parallel exists between the completion of college courses and the impact an instructor can have on a student's preparation for the workforce (Huang et al., 2016; Nitecki, 2011; Paterson, 2017).

In response to the parallel that exists between student preparation for the workforce, course completion, and instructor impact, many institutions of higher education have begun exploring ways to enhance student exposure to essential employability qualities within college curricula. To provide students, the best college learning experience and preparation for the workforce, Kuh (2008) recommends that institutions of higher education create opportunities for all college students to engage in at least two high impact practices during their undergraduate coursework. High

impact practices include "first year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning/community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects" (Kuh, 2008, pp. 9-11). More specifically, Kuh recommends that students participate in one high impact practice during their first year of college and one within their chosen field of study.

In alignment with the high impact practice recommendations provided by Kuh (2008), many institutions of higher education have implemented first-year experience courses that are designed to equip students with general skills and knowledge that assist the student in overcoming obstacles to attending college. The content and focus of a first-year experience course varies from one institution to another (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016). Even though there are numerous models for creating first-year course curricula, first-year experience courses are typically designed to provide first-time college students with knowledge about campus resources, career paths, and study skills.

It is often assumed that among the foundational elements of college success and career-planning students enrolled in a first-year experience course are introduced to the essential employability qualities; however, current research is not available to support this assumption. This study will focus on this gap within instruction of the first-year experience course at Jefferson Community and Technical College. Specifically, students enrolled in the first-year experience course at Jefferson

Community and Technical College will be introduced to essential employability

qualities alongside introduction to career pathways, campus resources, and study

skills. Once students enrolled in the specified sections of the first-year experience

course have been introduced to essential employability qualities, student perception

of essential employability qualities will be explored via a qualitative interview with

the researcher.

Background and Statement of the Problem

A review of current literature revealed a variety of research focusing on

student engagement in first-year experience courses. Research has been conducted in

the following areas related to first-year experience courses: student perception of a

first-year experience course completed at a community college (Acevedo-Gil &

Zerquera, 2016), student perception of intrusive academic advising during the first-

year of community college (Donaldson et al., 2016), the impact participation in a

first-year seminar course has on student retention (Ben-Avie et al., 2012), and the

benefit of campus resource identification during a first-year experience course

(Wismath & Newberry, 2019).

The problem being addressed in this study is that it is often assumed that

students are introduced to essential employability qualities during the first-year

experience course to a level that is sufficient for students to understand the

importance of soft skills development throughout their college experience. This study

will address the lack of research by exploring student perception of the essential

employability qualities during student enrollment in a first-year experience course at Jefferson Community and Technical College.

Local Context of the Problem

Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) serves approximately 10,000 students in and surrounding metropolitan Louisville, Kentucky. The institution's values include accessibility and collaboration. The institution strives to provide all students with meaningful educational opportunities, and is committed to preparing graduates with skills that meet the expectations of local employers. These skills include essential employability qualities. In an effort to explore the preparation of program graduates with essential employability qualities as well as the faculty perspective of essential employability qualities, JCTC participated in a Kentucky Council for Postsecondary Education (CPE) initiative with the Quality Assurance Commons.

During the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years, the Kentucky Council for Postsecondary Education (CPE) engaged programs at six institutions throughout the state in the Quality Assurance Commons Essential Employability Qualities Certification and the Essential Employability Qualities Faculty Fellows. Three programs at Jefferson Community and Technical College including Medical Assisting, Computer Information Technology, and Advanced Manufacturing were engaged in the intensive review process and two faculty were engaged in the Quality Assurance Commons Faculty Fellows.

All of the programs engaged in the Quality Assurance Commons Essential Employability Qualities Certification were required to create a curriculum map that included the identification of the Quality Assurance Common's eight essential employability qualities within course learning outcomes. The eight essential employability qualities included communication, critical thinking, inquiry, teamwork, adaptability, ethical, professional, and lifelong learning. In addition to identifying the essential employability qualities within the curriculum, each program submitted artifacts that demonstrated graduate preparation, student career development and support, employer engagement, student and alumni engagement, and the program information that is provided to the public.

All of these elements were compiled within a comprehensive report that was submitted to the Quality Assurance Commons for review by a team of experts. The experts then reviewed each program's curriculum map and artifacts and determined the proficiency level to which graduates from each program are being prepared with essential employability qualities. In the spring of 2020, 10 programs within the state of Kentucky that participated in certification process were granted the Essential Employability Qualities Certification. Two of the three programs from JCTC received the Essential Employability Qualities Certification including the Medical Assisting program and the Advanced Manufacturing program.

The two faculty that were engaged in the Essential Employability Qualities Faculty Fellows, including the researcher proposing this study, conducted an internal scan at Jefferson Community and Technical College focusing on the depth and

breadth of essential employability qualities within courses and programs offered at

the college and met with two local healthcare employers to discuss their perception of

essential employability qualities and the preparation of JCTC's graduates for the

workforce. From the internal scan and the discussions with the healthcare employers,

the researcher and her colleague identified a need for the consistent introduction of

essential employability qualities throughout the student experience at JCTC. The

internal scan revealed that the introduction of essential employability qualities

depends on course learning outcomes specific to each course and the instructor

teaching each course. Therefore, each student's engagement and development of

essential employability qualities varies.

      During engagement with the Quality Assurance Commons Faculty Fellows,

the researcher and her colleague realized that the first-year experience course is the

only course that the majority of first-time students are required to complete. The

researcher proposed the idea of introducing the essential employability qualities to

students enrolled in the course as a starting point for embedding the essential

employability qualities in all courses offered at JCTC. The enhancement of essential

employability qualities within instruction of the first-year course was the focus of a

proposal drafted by the researcher and her colleague as their culminating project for

the Quality Assurance Commons Faculty Fellows.

      The first-year experience course (FYE 105) is required for completion of an

Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree. The first-year experience course is

also completed by the majority of students pursuing an Associate of Applied Science

degree. During the fall 2020 semester 1600 students were enrolled in the course and

in the spring of 2021, 723 students were enrolled in the course. The student learning

outcomes of the course that have been vetted by the faculty of the Kentucky

Community and Technical College System include:

1. Develop an educational plan that leads to a career path.

2. Research and understand career choices.

3. Research and understand transfer options.

4. Locate and utilize campus resources.

5. Demonstrate use of information technology (KCTCS email, Blackboard,
   Student Self-Service/PeopleSoft, and college website).

6. Develop self-management skills

7. Develop strategies for academic success.

   Based on these student-learning outcomes, there are underlying assumptions

that students will develop essential employability qualities within this course, but the

explicit understanding of the qualities is not a current requirement for this course. In

order to embed the development of essential employability qualities throughout

college curricula, a strong foundation and understanding of essential employability

qualities is necessary within the first-year experience course. In alignment with the

purpose of this study, and the learning outcomes of the course, the essential

employability qualities were introduced during the instruction of all sections of the

first-year experience course offered at the College. After the introduction of the

majority of the course learning outcomes, student perceptions of essential

employability qualities were collected by the researcher via individual interviews.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore student perception of essential

employability qualities during enrollment in a first-year experience course.

Research Questions

The research questions for this qualitative study are grounded in the

understanding that students will have some knowledge of soft skills prior to

enrollment in a first-year experience course at JCTC, but the level of understanding

has not been explored. The research questions for this qualitative study were:

1) What skills do students enrolled in a first-year experience course at JCTC

    perceive that employers are looking for in college graduates?

2) How are the perceptions of students in a first-year experience course at JCTC

    of essential employability skills similar to or different than the skills

    employers are seeking in new graduates (as demonstrated in the literature)?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was that the exploration of student perception of

essential employability qualities within the first-year experience course would

provide a baseline from which curricula could be developed to assist students in the

growth of their knowledge and ability to demonstrate essential employability qualities

throughout other courses within the programs offered at JCTC. Explicit introduction

to essential employability qualities throughout college coursework beginning with the

first-year experience course will make students more prepared for future careers. This

research also contributed literature to the field of higher education by specifically

focusing on student perception of essential employability qualities within the first-

year experience course. Current literature does not exist that explores student

perception of essential employability qualities within a first-year experience course to

employer perception of essential employability qualities.

Definition of Terms.

Essential Employability qualities- also known as soft skills, include skills such as:

communication, problem solving, inquiry, teamwork, responsibility, ethics, and life-

long learning.

First-year experience- course or intentional experience completed by first-time

college students during their first year of college for the purposes of increasing

student retention and completion of a college credential.

High impact practices- intentional experiences such as first-year experiences,

common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses,

assignments and projects that require collaboration, global learning, e-portfolios,

community-based learning, internships, and capstone projects with the goal of

increasing student retention, success, and career preparation.

Job-specific skills: often called technical skills include skills learned during college

course work within a specific field of study represented by completion of a college

degree within the field of study. For example, if a student earns a college degree in

nursing, they will know how to take a person's blood pressure. If a student earns a

degree in construction technology, they know how to use a hammer to frame a structure like a house.

Summary

Numerous employers have expressed college graduate awareness and demonstration of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, inquiry, numeracy, and critical thinking do not meet their expectations (Durrani & Tariq, 2012; Finch et al., 2013; Gruzdev et al., 2018; Quality Assurance Commons, 2019; Robles, 2012; Velasco, 2012). As a result of increased scrutiny from employers in relation to graduate preparation for employment, many institutions including of higher education, including Jefferson Community and Technical College are evaluating how soft skills are embedded in student experiences and program curricula (Quality Assurance Commons).

In order to provide meaningful learning experiences and career preparation for all graduates, Kuh (2008) recommends that institutions of higher education create opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in at least two high impact practices. Kuh specifically recommends that students should be engaged in at least two high impact practices during their undergraduate studies; specifically, all students should be engaged in a high impact practice such as a first-year experience course during their first-year of college and a high impact practice within their field of study during the third or fourth year of college.

In response to Kuh's (2008) recommendations, approximately 80% of two-year institutions (Skipper, 2017), including Jefferson Community and Technical

College (JCTC), require first-time freshmen students enroll in a first-year experience

course during their first semester of college. The content and focus of the first-year

experience course varies from one institution to another (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016), and

the development of an understanding of essential employability qualities is often not

explicit within the course learning outcomes. At JCTC, the first-year experience

course primarily focuses on the student identification of a career path and the

development of strategies for academic success. .... The lack of current literature

focusing on the explicit introduction of essential employability qualities within first-

year experience courses and the underlying elements of essential employability

qualities within the learning outcomes for the first-year experience course at JCTC

served as the problem and foundation for this study. To address this problem, the

research questions for this qualitative study were:

> RQ1: What skills do students enrolled in a first-year experience course at
>
> JCTC perceive that employers are looking for in college graduates?
>
> RQ2: How are the perceptions of students in a first-year experience course at
>
> JCTC of essential employability skills similar to or different than the skills
>
> employers are seeking in new graduates (as demonstrated in the literature)?

The purpose of this study was to explore student perception of essential

employability qualities during enrollment in a first-year experience course at JCTC.

The significance of this study within the context of JCTC, was that the student

perceptions collected from this study will provide insight into student development of

essential employability qualities throughout the college experience at JCTC. Student

perceptions of essential employability qualities during the first-year experience

course at JCTC will provide a baseline from which essential employability qualities

can potentially be embedded within all courses throughout the college. Embedding

essential employability qualities throughout all college courses in a meaningful way

will meet the expectations of employers. This study is significant to the field of

higher education by contributing student perception of essential employability

qualities within a first-year experience course that can be compared to employer

perceptions of essential employability qualities that exist within the literature.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Essential employability qualities are becoming as important as technical skills for new graduates entering the job market (Hart Research Associates, 2018; National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018). Essential employability qualities, also called soft skills, are recognized, and defined in different ways by employers, faculty, students, and college program graduates. Lists of soft skills typically sought by employers include skills such as communication, teamwork, inquiry, collaboration, critical thinking, numeracy, and problem solving (Durrani & Tariq, 2012; Gruzdev, 2018; Quality Assurance Commons; Robles, 2012). The level of emphasis being placed on essential employability qualities by employers has lead institutions of higher education, including Jefferson Community and Technical College, to examine the emphasis being placed on essential employability qualities within the courses and programs being offered including first-year experience courses.

This literature review provides background information about the perception of the development of soft skills in undergraduate education coursework from the employer, student, and faculty perspectives; provides examples of soft skills assessments; discusses variations that exist in first-year experience courses; and provides a context for the proposed study. The proposed study is based on the lack of current research that combines the explicit introduction of essential employability along with the other learning objectives within first-year experience courses. First-

year experiences courses are typically designed to help students create a career plan

and become more aware of resources available at the institution that can help them

persist to graduation (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016; Ben-Avie et al., 2012;

Wismath & Newberry, 2019). Many of the essential employability qualities are skills

that not only enhance student employability but increase college student retention and

success, therefore exploration of student perception of essential employability

qualities within the first-year experience course is significant for both JCTC and the

field of higher education.

Employer Perceptions of Essential Employability Qualities

Employers are quite upfront about the gap that exists between the skills they

seek in employees and the preparation of college graduates with the essential

employability qualities necessary to be successful in the workforce. In a 2018 survey

of 1000 business executives and hiring managers conducted by Hart Research

Associates on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, both

business executives and hiring managers identified the ability to communicate orally

as the skill with the highest level of importance. However only 40% of executives

and 47% of hiring managers rated recent college graduates as adequately prepared

with the necessary communication skills (Hart Research Associates, 2018).

In a similar study conducted by the National Association of Colleges and

Employers (2018), only 43% of employers indicated that college graduates are

proficient in professionalism and work ethic. Statistics like these have gained the

attention of college and university administrators throughout the country. In the last

decade, employers have voiced their concerns about recruiting, training, and retaining

employees to meet job expectations via a variety of studies conducted by

organizations and researchers.

     The array and scope of the existing research focusing on employer perceptions

of college graduate readiness for the workforce has enhanced the recognition of an

existing skills gap (Ahmad, 2019). The skills gap is acknowledged and addressed in

different ways throughout current literature on human resource management and

higher education curriculum development (Maguire, 2018; Paterson, 2017; Pheko &

Molefhe, 2017; Winstead et al., 2009). Some of the research has been conducted by

public facing organizations with a goal of increasing public awareness of the need for

preparation for workforce entry as well as advancement in the workforce (Manpower

Group, 2020; McGraw Hill Education, 2018). Other research has focused on the

identification of essential employability qualities perceived by employers as

necessary for entry and advancement in the workforce and communication of the

need for these skills to institutions of higher education (Ahmad, 2019; Finch et al.,

2013; Ortiz, 2016; Robles, 2012; Velasco, 2012).

     The public-facing employment agency, the Manpower Group keeps a pulse on

the global need for skilled workers within the various employment sectors. In the

Manpower Group's 2020 "Talent Shortage" survey, 69% of companies globally

reported talent shortages and the greatest shortages occurred in the following roles:

skilled trades, information technology personnel, marketing, technicians, and

engineering. Employers indicated the cause of the talent shortage occurs due to a

lack of applicants, applicants lack experience, and applicants lack hard skills and/or

human strengths necessary for top performance within their company. More than half

(56%) of employers surveyed indicated that communication skills, collaboration, and

problem solving are the most important human skills necessary for success within

their companies. In response to the survey data, the Manpower Group suggests that

employers can retain employees by aligning their company's mission and values with

the desires and needs of the employees.

       In contrast to the Manpower Group survey, much of the research described in

the current literature focuses on the employer identification of the essential

employability qualities that are sought in employees. The set of essential

employability qualities identified as important varies form one study to another and

the terminology used to describe the various skills varies from one survey to another

(Ahmad, 2019; Ortiz, 2016; Robles, 2012). Similarities exist in the results obtained

from several studies. In a survey of eighty-six employers in the business sector,

Ahmad (2019) identified the top five skills sought in potential job candidates in order

of priority as "honesty/integrity, communication (verbal and written), strong work

ethic, interpersonal skills (relates well to others), and motivation/initiative" (p. 51).

Robles (2012) surveyed fifty-seven business executives and all of the respondents

indicated that integrity and communication are very important or extremely important

skills they seek in employees. Both Ahmad and Robles include communication as an

essential soft skill for success in the workforce.

Evaluation of the importance of communication in employability also appeared in the literature as the primary focus of a study conducted by Ortiz et al. (2016). In this study, 72 employers in the United States and identified the following communication/essential employability qualities as important skills for new hires: using proper grammar, team communication, engaging in conversation, participating in meetings, telephone, informing customers about products, and giving feedback. In addition to answering Likert scale questions, respondents were also asked to provide feedback via an open-ended question that asked which oral communication skills new hires most lack. Responses to the question included "…knowing when to put the cell phone away"; "trusting their own instincts and abilities to get things done"; "clear communication"; "…clearly articulate thoughts in a logical, easy to comprehend, manner" (pp. 326-327). This study demonstrates that communication skills can be broken into subcategories and employee awareness of the subcategories is important to employer perception of performance within a company.

Durrani and Tariq (2012) focused on the importance of numeracy skills in graduate employability. Fifty-one percent of the 165 employers surveyed indicated that they currently use numeracy tests during employee recruitment and expect sixty percent competency on the numeracy test. The numeracy skills that received the highest rankings on the survey included: calculating percentages, interpreting data, using spreadsheet software, and numerical problem solving. Undergraduate students were also surveyed as part of this research to determine the level of student awareness and recognition of the importance of preparation for employer numeracy tests.

Eighty percent of the students surveyed indicated that they were not aware of the types of numeracy tests used by employers to determine proficiency in numeracy. This research demonstrates a common trend in the research; the disconnect between employer expectations and undergraduate student awareness of employer expectations.

Surveys that included specific questions related to higher education preparation of employees demonstrated the need for an enhanced focus and collaboration between employers and higher education institutions. Gruzdev et al. (2018) surveyed 185 managing directors and personnel managers in both the public and private sectors in Russia and found that social interaction within a team; time management and life-long learning; critical analysis of situations and development of an action plan were the essential employability qualities are most valued by employers. As part of the survey, employers also consistently indicated that employees that are graduates of higher education institutions typically are not as prepared for success within the organization as expected. A similar study conducted by Velasco (2012) found that employers in the field of management in Spain do not hire candidates based solely on grades or degrees earned in college, employers seek identifiable hard skills and essential employability qualities such as enthusiasm, personality, teamwork, and work ethic. Both Gruzdev et al. and Velasco emphasize the expectation of college graduates to be well equipped with essential employability qualities in conjunction with technical skills.

In a study similar to Velasco (2012), Finch et al. (2013) conducted a mixed methods study in which they established five composite categories of employability and asked employers to evaluate the level of importance of each of five categories including essential employability qualities, problem-solving skills, academic reputation, and pre-graduate work experience when hiring new college graduates. Based on survey data, the essential employability qualities category received the highest ranking and problem-solving skills, which are often included in essential employability qualities in other studies, received the second highest ranking. Contradictory to what some researchers might expect, the academic reputation category received the lowest rating, meaning that pre-graduate work experience is even more important to employers during the hiring process than academic performance in college.

Student Perception of Essential Employability Qualities

Current literature demonstrates that students and faculty recognize the impact that essential employability qualities have on employability and often identify similar lists of essential employability qualities as those identified as important by employers (McGraw-Hill Education, 2018; Tang, 2019; Paterson, 2017; Ritzer & Sleigh, 2019; Thirunavukarasu et al., 2020). Students consistently indicated that they rely on professors, advisors, and career counselors to help them become employable and many students leave college feeling unprepared for the workforce (Ritzer & Sliegh, 2019; Pott, 2015; Donaldson, et al., 2016). A 2018 study conducted by McGraw-Hill Education is indicative of the feeling of under preparedness of college graduates for

the workforce. According to the results, only 4 in 10 United States college students

feel very or extremely prepared for the workforce. Among those that participated in

the survey, students that entered college immediately following high school were less

confident in their career readiness than nontraditional college students (McGraw-Hill

Education, 2018). Women overall were also less confident in their career readiness

than men (McGraw-Hill Education, 2018).

In relation to college graduates feeling underprepared for the workforce, the

current study pinpoints the early introduction of essential employability qualities as a

potential way to enhance student feeling of preparedness for the workforce.

Exploring student perception of essential employability qualities during a first-year

experience course could provide institutions of higher education with a baseline from

which college curricula can be enhanced to assist students in the development of

essential employability qualities throughout all college coursework. The current study

focuses on student perception of essential employability qualities during the first-year

of the college experience via a first-year experience course as a place to initiate a

much larger analysis of essential employability qualities within all college curricula at

Jefferson Community and Technical College.

Ritzer and Sleigh (2019) demonstrated the effects of short-term messaging

could also potentially influence a student's formation of college goals.   The

researchers divided students into four groups and provided each group with a prompt

(or no prompt) that described one of three goals of education. The three goals of

education included becoming an educated citizen, earning top grades, and preparing

for a career. After reading the assigned prompt, each student completed a series of

evaluations related to the assigned prompt. Regardless of the prompt that a student

received, the student agreed that the prompt matched his personal college goal and

what his high school teachers posed as the purpose for attending college. The

majority of the students, regardless of the prompt they received, indicated career

preparation and becoming an educated citizen were of more importance than earning

top grades.

Ritzer and Sleigh (2019) demonstrated the influence that the presentation of

explicit goals can have on student perception of the purpose of attending college as

well as the influence high school teachers can have on the student perception of the

purpose of attending college. Additional literature exists that sheds light on the

student experience of preparation for the workforce. Topics found within the

literature include the identification of specific essential employability qualities that

should be included in curricula, the impact of messaging, engagement or lack of in

learning opportunities such as internships and work integrated learning, and the

impact the program of study and faculty can have on a student's preparation for the

workforce (Pheko & Molefhe, 2017).

Several studies focus on the student identification of essential employability

qualities, the gap that exists in the development of essential employability qualities in

higher education curricula, and how the gap can be addressed. Pheko and Molefhe

(2017) surveyed college students enrolled in psychology courses in Botswana and

asked them to list characteristics that university graduates should possess in order to

be viewed as employable. The skills perceived as the most important were

enthusiasm/commitment, vocational job-seeking, and personal presentation (Pheko &

Molefhe). When asked how their employability could be improved, students in this

survey indicated that the university and employers should explicitly share the skills

that students need in order to become more employable and increase the availability

of internships, volunteer work, and part-time jobs (Pheko & Molefhe, 2017;

Thirunavukarasu et al., 2020).

Results similar to those obtained by Pheko and Molefhe (2017) were also

found by Ahmad (2019) and Thirunavukarasu et al. (2020). Juniors and Seniors in

business school students surveyed by Ahmad (2019) indicated communication,

honesty/integrity, teamwork, and a strong work ethic as essential to employability.

Many of the same essential employability qualities appear in a word cloud created by

Thirunavukarasu et al. (2020) after interviewing engineering students at varying

levels of program completion. Students that participated in this survey believe that

the engineering program they participate in delivers discipline specific knowledge but

lacks exposure to the level of skills expected by employers (Thirunavukarasu et al.,

2020). Students specifically indicated that opportunities such as internships, industry

projects, and community work programs could provide students with the necessary

experience, however these opportunities are not currently available to all students in

the engineering program (Thirunavukarasu et al., 2020).

In relation to the emphasis placed on the need for increased availability of

internship and work-integrated learning (Thirunavukarasu et al., 2020; Pheko &

Molefhe, 2017), Kuh (2008) identified internships/work integrated learning as high

impact educational practices. In addition to internships/work integrated learning, Kuh

(2008) identified first-year experience courses, common intellectual experiences,

learning communities, writing intensive courses, collaborative assignments and

projects, undergraduate research, global learning, eportfolios, service learning, and

capstone courses as high impact practices that have been widely tested and proven to

increase the retention and success for all college students. Kuh (2008) recommends

that institutions of higher education create opportunities for all students to engage in

at least two high impact practices during their undergraduate coursework, specifically

one high impact practice occurring during their first year of college and one occurring

within their chosen field of study.

In support of Kuh's (2008) recommendations related to internships, Jackson

(2015) focused on student development of employability skills via work integrated

learning experiences and Maguire (2018) focused on the benefits of an early

experiential learning experience on students' confidence in their choice of major and

awareness of career options. Students that participated in Jackson's (2015) study

expressed that scaffolding the learning of skills in the classroom in relation to what

would be experienced during work-integrated learning was beneficial to their

preparation for work-integrated learning. Students in this study also indicated that

goal setting and self-reflection exercises assisted them in their development of

employability skills. In contrast to Jackson (2015), the first year business students

that participated in Maguire's (2018) study indicated that the early integrated work

experience they participated in had little to no effect on their awareness of career options. Maguire (2018) suggests that elements focusing on career preparation, similar to those included in the scaffolding model suggested by Jackson (2015), should be included in the early work integrated learning experience. Even though Maguire's (2018) study lacked the scaffolding that could have enhanced student preparation for employability, after completing the early work integrated learning experience, all of the students indicated they were more confident in their selected major than they were prior to participating in the work integrated learning experience.

Providing all students at an institution of higher education with an opportunity to complete an internship or early work-based learning experience would require additional financial resources and community partnerships that many institutions do not have the resources to invest. Based on a previous research project, the researcher proposes taking a different approach to career exploration by introducing students enrolled in a first-year experience course to essential employability qualities using video recordings of employers that focus on the skills necessary for a career within the field. Introduction of the essential employability qualities and career options early in a student's college experience will provide the student with a foundation upon which they can grow their understanding of essential employability qualities throughout their other coursework in relation to a potential career path.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), 33 percent of first-time, full-time students who began seeking a credential (certificate or associates degree) at a 2-year institution in fall 2016 earned the credential within 3

years. Most 2-year institutions have several programs that have a higher graduation

rate than other programs at the institution and investigating the reasons for the

success can provide a framework for change within other programs at the institution.

Within this area of research, Nitecki (2011) investigated the factors that contribute to

the success of the Paralegal Program and the Early Childhood Education program at

an urban community college in the northeastern United States. Nitecki (2011)

acknowledges that "success" is difficult to define at a community college because of

the various programs and credentials available at most community colleges, including

the college where the study was conducted. In order to remain consistent with other

current research in the field, graduation rate was used as the measure of success for

the study (Nitecki, 2011). At the time of the study, the college's overall 4-year

graduation rate was 12.5%. In comparison, Nitecki (2011) found the Paralegal

program had a graduation rate of 32.2% and the Early Childhood Education program

had a graduation rate of 51.3%. Nitecki (2011) interviewed faculty and students in

both programs and identified several essential elements that made each program more

successful than other programs at the college. The Early Childhood Education

program faculty and students communicate with one another in a family-like

atmosphere, students in the program have a remarkable drive for success and passion

for the field and faculty are dedicated to the education of the whole student. In

contrast to the Early Childhood Education program, the Paralegal program faculty

focus on the development of professionalism and individual student excellence,

require students to meet with an assigned advisor, and completion of an internship is

required for graduation (Nitecki, 2011). From this research, a key takeaway is the impact that program size and positive classroom culture can have on student retention and graduation.

In the context of the proposed study, all students pursuing an Associate of Arts or Science at Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) are required to complete the first-year experience course during their first year of enrollment at the College. One of the learning outcomes of the first-year experience course is the identification of a career path and the corresponding program of study offered at JCTC. If a student struggles to identify a clear career path within the first-year experience course, the student may not persist at JCTC. Since the first-year experience course is the first step in the identification of a career path and corresponding program, it is important that students have a clear understanding of what programs of study are offered at the College and the potential careers that are connected to the programs. The introduction of essential employability qualities via employer interviews and targeted career specific assignments will provide students with career development support prior to their entry into a program of study.

Faculty Perception of Essential Employability Qualities

Despite student inflections that faculty may not explicitly embed essential employability qualities into their teaching, research has demonstrated that faculty recognize the importance of introducing essential employability qualities in college courses. However, there is often a lack of understanding how to articulate essential employability qualities in a way that is understood by students and assess essential

employability qualities in a way that is meaningful to students and faculty (Cotronei-

Baird, 2020; Huang et al., 2016; Paterson, 2017; Tang, 2019). Paterson (2017)

focused on identifying a list of employability skills that lecturers' feel are the most

sought by employers and comparing the list to skills identified by students. The list

of skills identified by faculty included adaptability, analytical skills, communication

skills, presentation skills, team-working, and self-management (Paterson, 2017). The

list of employability skills identified by students included similar key words including

presentation skills, team-working, time management, and communication skills

(Paterson, 2017).

Tang (2019) took a deeper look at the faculty perspective of essential

employability qualities and identified three essential themes. The faculty indicated

that there are a diverse number of methods that instructors can embed in their

instruction to develop essential employability qualities, however essential

employability qualities are not emphasized as much as technical skills within their

institutions (Tang, 2019). In response to the gap that exists between technical skill

training and soft skill development, the faculty suggested that instructors should think

about the purpose of the instructional activities they choose to include in a course.

When choosing course activities, the instructors should consider the essential

employability qualities that can be developed by the chosen activities, and the

application of the activities to the jobs the students will hold in their future careers

(Tang, 2019). The faculty also voiced the importance of essential employability

qualities being taught alongside technical skills and emphasized soft skills cannot be

taught via stand-alone courses. Based on the responses obtained from faculty, Tang

(2019) concluded that most faculty do not adequately embed communication,

personal development, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills into

the typical lecture-based format that most faculty rely on as a foundation of

instruction.

Similar to Tang (2019), Cotronei-Baird investigated faculty perception of

essential employability qualities via qualitative interviews with faculty and found that

faculty recognized the importance of introducing essential employability qualities

during classroom instruction and could provide instructional examples. In addition to

conducting qualitative interviews with faculty, Cotronei-Baird (2020) introduced the

Theories of Action Framework as a means of comparing faculty perceptions of the

importance of essential employability qualities to actual instructional practices. By

observing faculty teaching courses, Cotronei-Baird (2020) identified four types of

teaching practice in which essential employability qualities were introduced. These

four practices included discussion, demonstration, practice, and assessment. From

faculty teaching observations, Cotronei-Baird (2020) concluded that despite faculty

identifying ways in which they introduce essential employability qualities during

instruction, there was a lack of consistency in the use of all four types of instruction

to impart knowledge of essential employability qualities. Faculty participants also

typically assessed student understanding of discipline knowledge and content more

often than essential employability qualities (Cotronei-Baird, 2020). Assessment of

essential employability qualities was an indirect practice and received minimal

attention (Cotronei-Baird, 2020).

Tang (2019) and Cotronei-Baird (2020) are of significance because even

though faculty recognize the importance of providing students with opportunities to

develop essential employability qualities, the introduction and assessment of

discipline specific content often takes precedence over essential employability

qualities. Based on Tang (2019) and Cotronei-Baird, to ensue effective instruction of

essential employability qualities, the qualities may need to be explicitly included in

course learning outcomes. The inclusion of essential employability qualities in the

course learning outcomes is of significance to the current study as the evaluation of

the depth and breadth of the inclusion of essential employability qualities in curricula

would be a necessary step to embedding the qualities throughout curricula.

Huang et al. (2016) were interested in determining instructional strategies

used by faculty teaching future medical professionals to teach critical thinking.

Responses from 44 faculty from eight institutions were organized into three

categories. The categories included what faculty teach to students about critical

thinking, how they teach critical thinking, and why they teach critical thinking. The

majority of the faculty indicated they place an emphasis on critical thinking during

hands-on clinical experience and noted the need for institutions to enhance curricula

to explicitly include critical thinking as a learning outcome in all courses. Huang et al.

(2016) suggest that college faculty to examine their own teaching practices and

implement exercises that enhance critical thinking opportunities. Huang et al. (2016)

recommend that faculty create opportunities for inquiry to probe students thoughts

and generate discussion, embedding props into instruction that supplement teaching

tools, creating opportunities for students to solve problems in teams, and modeling

the process of critical thinking during all types of instruction. This study is of

significance and value because many of these strategies could easily be used to

provide students with opportunities to develop other essential employability qualities,

including teamwork and communication.

   Even though there is overlap in employer, faculty and student identification of

essential employability qualities, there remains a gap that even faculty recognize in

the extent to which essential employability qualities are emphasized within courses.

The current study at Jefferson Community and Technical College involved the

engagement of a faculty member instructing the first-year experience course with the

researcher. Student engagement in the first-year experience course relied heavily on

the course instructor, therefore students selected to participate in the study were

chosen from two sections of the course taught by the same instructor. Prior to the

selection of the two sections of the course, the researcher discussed the purpose of the

project with the instructor and gained the instructor's buy-in and support of the

research.

Assessment of Essential Employability Qualities

   Despite the employer expectation that college graduates should enter the

workforce well equipped with the essential employability qualities necessary to fulfill

job requirements, gaps exist in the depth to which essential employability qualities

are explicitly embedded in college curricula, including in first-year experience

courses. Several studies suggest that the development of essential employability

qualities assessment tools could prove to be promising practices that insure student

development of essential employability qualities during the completion of higher

education. The essential employability qualities assessment tools developed in

response to employer expectations in partnership with higher education institutions

are both broad and designed to meet the skills expected in certain industry sectors

(Cotronei-Baird, 2020; Devedzic et al., 2018; Winstead et al., 2009; QA Commons;

Sattar Rasul, 2012).

Winstead et al. (2009) focused on the student perception of an essential

employability qualities curriculum developed by faculty and embedded in the

business program at South Carolina State University. The program is called the

Leadership and Professional Development Program (LAPD). The essential

employability qualities embedded in the program include communication,

interpersonal teambuilding and other skills identified by local employers in the

business sector. All business program students are required to enroll in a one-credit

seminar hour course during the sophomore, junior and senior years in the program.

The seminar course meets each week and focuses on self-development during the

sophomore year, interpersonal development during the junior year, and leadership

development during the senior year. In addition to enrolling and participating in the

seminar course, students complete an experiential learning course during the junior or

senior year in which they have the opportunity to demonstrate their soft skill

development. Winstead et al. (2009) were interested in the student opinion of the LAPD program. Quantitative survey results indicated that students perceived the LAPD had a significant impact on their personal development of essential employability qualities. The students voiced an enhanced ability to focus on their career development, time management, leadership style, an understanding of ethical and diversity issues in the workplace, teambuilding, and business etiquette. The significance of this study is the positive student perception of their personal essential employability qualities development by participation in a structured program focused on professional development.

Sattar Rasul et al. (2012) developed a very specific essential employability qualities assessment based on the expectations of employers in the manufacturing industry in Malaysia. Employers from five sectors in manufacturing were surveyed to determine the rank of basic skills, thinking skills, resource skills, information skills, interpersonal skills, system and technology skills, and personal qualities. Basic skills included: reading, writing, math, listening, and speaking. The thinking skills category included creativity, innovation, and problem solving. Resource skills were identified as time management, management of facility resources, and human resources. Organization and maintenance of information and computer processing ability were the skills categorized as information skills. Interpersonal skills being evaluated were teamwork, leadership ability, and appreciation of diversity. System and technology skills were correcting performance errors, use of technology, and troubleshooting. The personal qualities included in the survey were responsibility, self-esteem,

honesty, and adaptability. Mean scores from the employer survey were then used to

create a tool that can be used to assess a student or employee's employability level.

Results in each of the competency categories is summarized to provide an

employability level (excellent, good, moderate, or poor).

As part of a larger research project called Grading Soft Skills (GRASS)

supported by the European Union, Devedzic et al. (2018) conducted two case studies

focusing on the creation of a framework for assessing essential employability

qualities, assisting professors in embedding formative and summative assessments of

essential employability qualities in their courses, and evaluating the professors'

assessment of essential employability qualities within courses they instructed. One of

the case studies was conducted in a college level Java programming course and the

other was conducted in a secondary education Radio and Television Broadcasting

course. The faculty in the Java programing course focused on student development of

collaboration, communication, and problem solving. The faculty teaching this course

assessed student essential employability qualities using a rubric during classroom

observations and evaluated each student's level of contribution to a group project

using a statistical analysis tool. The teacher for the Radio and Television

Broadcasting course focused on the assessment of collaboration. Student

collaboration was evaluated by using a rubric to grade student performance while

reviewing video tapes of students completing assignments working in small groups (3

to 4 students), reviewing students' reflective journals, and analyzing scores on

surveys completed by the students. Several lessons were learned by the researchers

while conducting the two case studies. Specifically, Devedzic et al (2018)

recommend using the GRASS principles as a foundation for evaluating student

development of essential employability qualities. Even though the two case studies

were conducted within specific disciplines, the GRASS principles can be applied in

entirety or in subsets within any secondary or college level course.

      In response to literature emphasizing the importance of student assessment of

essential employability qualities, the researcher for the proposed study evaluated the

instructional outline for the first-year experience course and identified vague elements

of student self-assessment of essential employability qualities. In the current study,

the student self-assessment of essential employability qualities was enhanced by

conducting one-on-one interviews with students focusing on their individual

perceptions of essential employability qualities. The one-on-one interviews required

student reflection on their understanding and perception of the essential employability

qualities and enhanced the participant's attention to the importance of the qualities by

employers during the hiring process. The qualitative interview data provided a

baseline from which the student perception of essential employability qualities within

the course can be better understood by the researcher and by the faculty teaching the

first-year experience course. The data obtained in this study serves as a foundation

for the conclusions and recommendations presented within this paper.

      Since 2016 the Quality Assurance Commons has been working to develop a

series of tools by which programs in higher education can certify the degree to which

they are providing students with the scaffolding necessary to develop essential

employability qualities, also called essential employability qualities (EEQs). The QA

Commons established its core eight EEQs based on feedback from employers and

current research. The EEQs include "communicators, thinkers and problem solvers,

inquirers, collaborators, adaptable, principles and ethical, responsible and

professional, and learners" (QA Commons). In 2018, the QA Commons began an 18-

month partnership with the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) to

conduct a pilot study in which six state institutions chose to assess the level to which

degree programs at each institution faired in the presentation and assessment of the

EEQs, collaboration with employer partners to establish opportunities for growth of

EEQ instruction based on recent program graduates as employees, and student

recognition and evaluation of their own growth of EEQs throughout the program of

study. Each of the program submitted a portfolio demonstrating documentation of

employer engagement, the embedding of EEQs in program level learning outcomes,

and assessment of student development of EEQs. Based on the portfolio evaluation,

the Advanced Manufacturing Program and Medical Assisting programs at Jefferson

Community and Technical College both received the EEQ Program Certification

designation for three years. The QA Commons portfolio process is specially

designed for the evaluation of programs and student development of employability

qualities within programs.

In addition to the certification of essential employability qualities within

programs of study in Kentucky, QA Commons also engaged faculty from each of the

institutions in the assessment of essential employability qualities from the

institutional level. Two faculty from Jefferson Community and Technical College,

including the researcher proposing the current study, participated in the QA

Commons Faculty Employability Fellows during the 2019-2020 academic year. As a

participant in the Faculty Employability Fellows, the researcher and her colleague

collaborated to complete interviews with two local healthcare employers focusing on

employer perception of essential employability qualities. It was via the employer

interviews required for the Faculty Employability Fellows and reflection on current

literature, that the researcher discovered a need for enhanced student introduction to

potential careers as well as essential employability qualities early in the college

experience at Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC). Both of the

healthcare employers being interviewed stated that they felt the JCTC graduates

demonstrated competence in essential employability qualities upon being hired,

however students completing required clinical experiences at their facilities could

benefit from more and earlier exposure to the essential employability qualities

throughout all of their coursework at JCTC.

     As the culmination of participation in the Faculty Employability Fellow, the

researcher and her colleague drafted a proposal for the introduction of essential

employability qualities within the first-year experience course. The introduction of

essential employability qualities within the first-year experience course was proposed

as an expansion of the QA Commons focus on the embedding of essential

employability qualities as learning outcomes with academic programs to a focus on

the course specific level. The proposal developed as the culminating project for the

Faculty Employability Fellows served as the foundation for the current study. The

original proposal was not as in-depth and did not contain connection to the literature

as is included in this study. The original proposal failed to evaluate student perception

of essential employability qualities prior to recommending changes to the learning

outcomes for the first-year experience course. The current study engaged students and

provides insight into their perceptions as well as provides recommendations for

changes to learning outcomes for the first-year experience course.

First-Year Experience Courses

With reductions in federal funding and the emergence of state level

performance-based funding models, many community colleges and universities have

been forced to analyze their metrics for success and identify and implement practices

that elevate student performance and engagement (Dougherty et al., 2014; Hatch &

Bohlig, 2016).   At many community colleges, one area of focus has been the

implementation or enhancement of student success courses (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016).

Much of the research in this area is based on the identification of first-year seminars,

learning communities and student success courses as high impact or promising

practices by Kuh (2008). There is growing evidence that suggests student success

courses, also called first-year experience courses, are successful at equipping students

with general skills and knowledge that assist the student in overcoming obstacles to

attending college that could cause the student to drop-out (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016).

According to Hatch and Bohlig (2016), the content and focus of a first-year

experience course varies from one institution to another. Due to the inconsistency in

content, design, and focus, evaluation of the effectiveness of a first-year experience

course also varies from one institution to another (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016). Even

though inconsistencies in course content exist in the research, first-year experience

courses have proven to be very effective in increasing student retention at some

community colleges. However, a gap exists in the research. A review of the

literature provides neither examples of the explicit inclusion of essential

employability qualities in a first-year experience course nor evaluation of student

perception of the qualities during enrollment in a first-year experience course; hence

exploration of student perception of essential employability qualities to provide

recommendations as to how to enhance the introduction of the qualities in a way that

is meaningful to students.

Several pieces of literature exist that share insight into student perceptions of

the first year of college and student success courses (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016;

Ben-Avie et al., 2012). At some colleges and universities participation in a first-year

experience course is optional but often recommended for low-income students who

are first generation college students. Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera (2016) focused on

first-year experience course access, experience, and success from the perspective of

low-income students. Since participation in the first-year experience course was

optional at the institution where the study was conducted, Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera

were interested in determining why students chose to participate in the course, the

benefits of participating in the course, and how participation in the course prepared

students for success beyond the first year of college. Many of the students that

participated in the course enrolled after receiving advice from family members and friends about their own college experiences and the benefits they experienced from completing the course. The students also recognized the value of understanding the access available to academic resources, including tutoring, on campus and the benefit of the relationship they developed with their classmates and faculty by completing the first-year experience course. Based on the responses of students that participated in the study, Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera suggest that the first-year experience course should be embedded in all programs throughout higher education institutions.

Engagement in a first-year experience course can also have an impact on a student's grade point average. Ben-Avie et al. (2012) evaluated a comprehensive first-year experience program at a year institution which included orientation, learning communities, academic support, campus activities, and an Inquiry seminar. Due to a limited number of course offerings, only about half of the first year students (561 students) were able to enroll in the Inquiry seminar. The students that participated in the Inquiry seminar were more aware of campus resources, earned higher semester and cumulative grade point averages, completed more credit hours, and were retained at a higher rate for seven semesters than students that did not have the opportunity to participate in the Inquiry seminar. Ben-Avie et al. (2012) suggest that participation in a first-year seminar course leads students to be more future oriented than students that do not have the opportunity to participate in a structured first-year experience. To increase student success, Ben-Avie et al. (2012) recommend

that institutions seriously consider implementing mandatory first-year seminar courses into all curricula.

In contrast to Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera (2016) and Ben-Avie et al. (2012), in the proposed study, all students seeking an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree as well as most students seeking an Associate of Applied Science degree at Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) are required to complete the first-year experience course. The first-year experience course at JCTC is foundational to student identification of a program of study and the development of a career plan. The course learning outcomes include introduction to much of the same information proposed by Ben-Avie et al. (2012). The learning outcomes for the first-year experience course at JCTC are as follows:

1. Develop an educational plan that leads to a career path.

2. Research and understand career choices.

3. Research and understand transfer options.

4. Locate and utilize campus resources.

5. Demonstrate use of information technology (KCTCS email, Blackboard, Student Self-Service/Peoplesoft, and college website).

6. Develop self-management skills

7. Develop strategies for academic success.

The content of a first-year experience course impacts the perception of the value of the course to a student. Wismath and Newberry (2019) collected pre and post

survey data from students enrolled in a first-year experience course and analyzed

work from students who completed the course to identify the level at which the

various goals of the course were achieved. Common goals of a first-year experience

course are identification of resources available on campus to assist students,

community building, teamwork, and development of writing skills. Participants in

the first-year experience course indicated an increased level of comfort in

participating in class, interacting with professors during class and visiting office hours

for assistance, awareness of campus resources available to support student success,

and indicated they valued the goal setting activities embedded in the course. In the

review of student comments and student work, Wismath and Newberry (2019)

identified some noteworthy student comments such as "this course has allowed me

the opportunity to view university less as a competition to be won and more as a

journey to be had, with bumps in the road and changes of plans" (p. 48).

　　　In contrast to Wismath and Newberry (2019), the proposed study will focus

on student experience related to one specific part of the course content, essential

employability qualities. For the purposes of evaluation of the overall student

experience within the first-year experience course, students enrolled in the first-year

experience course at Jefferson Community and Technical College receive an end-of-

course survey in which they are given the opportunity to share their thoughts and

experiences from participation in the course. The end of course survey is a Likert-

type survey that is administered to students in every course at the institution. The

survey completion rate varies from one course to another. In order to obtain a

meaningful set of responses related specifically to student perception of essential employability qualities and how students perceive their education as a whole at JCTC will impact their education, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with students enrolled in two identified section of the first-year experience course.

Recent research conducted by Turner (2016) demonstrates that freshman male students often need additional support in order to remain enrolled and complete a credential or degree. Turner was specifically interested in the freshman male student perspective and his primary qualitative research question was "How do the participants describe and reflect on their first-year college experience?" (p. 88). To get a broad range of perspectives, Turner interviewed male students who were currently enrolled or were previously enrolled at the same institution. Based on the categorization of participant responses, Turner identified several major themes that served as support structures and as challenges to freshman male student retention and success. The themes were the importance of opportunities for social engagement, underdevelopment of study habits, and development of meaningful relationships with instructors. Turner suggests that institutions should encourage male students to participate in campus social and professional events, implement academic advising strategies that assist students that are facing academic challenges, and provide professional development for faculty that focuses on the use of best teaching and learning practices for male students.

In light of Turner (2016), during the recruitment of student participants for the proposed study, students will be given the opportunity to disclose their gender. In

order to minimize the impact that gender could have on student perception of

essential employability qualities, a cohort of students comprised of both male and

female students will be identified for participation in the one-on-one interviews with

the researcher.

Some institutions include academic advising as an essential element in first-

year experience course or as a stand-alone student retention initiative. Donaldson et

al. (2016) focused on the relationship between intrusive advising and college student

success at an urban community college. In intrusive academic advising, students are

typically required to meet with an assigned academic advisor at least one time during

the semester, commonly prior to registration for classes for the next semester.

Donaldson et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative individual interviews with students

that completed at least one required meeting with their assigned advisor. The coding

of data collected from the student interviews revealed several major themes. The

themes included the benefits of having an assigned advisor, the feelings about being

required to participate in advising, the importance of creating a degree plan with a

knowledgeable advisor, and receiving individual assistance overcoming barriers to

success. In addition to the positive benefits, some students indicated that their advisor

did not use all of the tools available to assist them, there are not enough advisors

available to fully meet the needs of students, and the need for additional support and

advise while transitioning to college. From this study, the conclusion can be drawn

that intrusive academic advising can be a beneficial part of career planning for first

year college students. However, a gap exists in the extent to which intrusive advising

alone can provide a student with a clear career plan and preparation for the future workforce.

Participation in academic advising for the purposes of career planning is an essential part of the first-year experience course at Jefferson Community and Technical College, however the advising process at JCTC typically focuses on student enrollment in courses required for completion of an academic program. The advising process does not engage student in reflection regarding their preparation for the workforce in relation to technical skills or development of essential employability qualities. During the advising process, if the need arises for a student to further explore career options and the skills required for a specific career, the student is referred to the career development center (CREW) for additional assistance. However, not all students take advantage of the services offered by the career development center; therefore to ensure that all students receive the same exposure to essential employability qualities during the first-year experience course at JCTC, the current study provides data from the student perception that serves as the foundation for recommendations related to the introduction of essential employability qualities within the instruction of the first-year experience course.

The expectations of mature students from advising and career counseling services are very different than the expectations of younger students (Pott, 2015). Mature students are typically identified as students over the age of 21 who pursued careers prior to entering higher education. Mature students differ from younger students in how they view their educational needs and they often experience a

changes in their self-identity while attending college (Pott, 2015). Many mature

students enter college questioning their previous career decisions and struggle to

identify a new career they feel will be a good fit for them. Career services are often

tailored to assist mature students in exploring potential careers and include personal

counseling, however little research exists to demonstrate the effectiveness of

engagement with these services. Pott (2015) was interested in how mature students

describe their relationship with their career counsellor. Using critical incident

technique, Pott (2015) categorized the mature students' responses into several themes.

The themes that the students indicated assisted them in building a positive

relationship were the level of respect the counselors displayed while helping the

mature students conduct career research, the discussion of careers in the context of

the whole student, and the disclosure of personal information by the counselor in

order to build a relationship with the student (Pott, 2015). These findings are

significant because many community colleges including Jefferson Community and

Technical College serve both young and mature students. College administrators

should consider student age when developing courses and support programs.

Summary

        Based on the current literature, it is safe to conclude that employers, students,

and faculty value the development of essential employability qualities during

undergraduate education and recognize the importance of essential employability

qualities during the employment process. However, a variety of teaching methods by

which essential employability qualities can be addressed within curricula exist and

the effective evaluation of essential employability qualities may require embedding

the skills into program level learning outcomes. In relation to embedding essential

employability qualities into every course, there is no available literature to

demonstrate the introduction or evaluation of essential employability qualities within

a first-year experience course. First-year experience courses are typically designed to

introduce students to campus resources, advising, career counseling, and study skills.

The introduction of essential employability qualities within the first-year experience

course could provide students with a foundation for a heightened awareness of their

individual development of softs skills throughout the rest of their undergraduate

experience.

          The purpose of the current study was to explore student perception of essential

employability qualities within a first-year experience course offered at Jefferson

Community and Technical College (JCTC). Elements of essential employability

qualities exist within the learning outcomes for the first-year experience currently

taught at JCTC, however the essential employability qualities are not currently being

explicitly introduced within the course. Based on the data obtained from in-depth

interviews with students enrolled in the first-year experience course, the researcher

will provide recommendations for how JCTC can begin enhancing student awareness

of essential employability qualities sought by employers in the conclusions and

recommendations section of this paper.

          Many of the studies within this literature review that focused on student

perception were conducted via a qualitative interview. To achieve the purpose of the

proposed study, a diverse group of students enrolled in a first-year experience course

were selected and a qualitative one-on-one interviews was conducted with each

participant after the introduction essential employability qualities occurred within the

course. Qualitative interview questions that were used for the completion of the

interview were developed based on the following research questions:

1) What skills do students enrolled in a first-year experience course at JCTC

   perceive that employers are looking for in college graduates?

2) How are the perceptions of students in a first-year experience course at JCTC

   of essential employability skills similar to or different than the skills

   employers are seeking in new graduates (as demonstrated in the literature)?

Chapter 3

Methodology

Based on the exploratory nature of the concept of student perception of soft skills, a qualitative design was chosen as the research method for this study. This chapter provides a detailed discuss of the rationales for choosing qualitative in-depth interviews as the method for data collection, describes the specifics of the study design including the number of participants, interview questions, validity, and data analysis.

Rationales for a Qualitative Research Design

As demonstrated in the literature review, employers, higher education faculty, and students recognize the importance of essential employability qualities development during college level coursework, however a gap commonly exists in the introduction and instruction of essential employability qualities within college level curricula. As discussed in the review of the literature, the researcher identified a potential gap within the college curriculum at Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) in the first-year experience course (FYE 105). The learning outcomes for the FYE 105 course include underlying assumptions of essential employability qualities development but essential employability qualities are not explicitly included in the course learning outcomes. The purpose of this research was to explore student perception of essential employability qualities in the first-year experience course at JCTC.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest the use of a qualitative design for exploration of concepts and perceptions of individuals participating in a course of study, such as the first-year experience course. Qualitative studies are often used for exploration of complex factors that surround a central phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The central phenomenon in this study is the connection between student enrollment in a first-year experience course and student perception of essential employability qualities. When the central phenomenon is complex and impacted by numerous factors, a qualitative design allows for the exploration of the varied perceptions of the study participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)). Saldana (2011) recommends the use of in-depth interviews as a qualitative data collection method when the researcher wants to solicit and document individual "perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs about their personal experiences and social world, in addition to factual information about their lives" (p. 32). The use of a qualitative method allows for the exploration of how patterns and categories emerge within individual responses and how the patterns and categories are interrelated (Saldana, 2011).

In contrast, in a quantitative study a researcher tries to make predictions about the relationships between and among variables in an attempt to make generalizations about a specific population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldana, 2011). Within the current study, there were numerous variables and factors and each student experience was unique. Based on the uniqueness of the student experience with essential

employability qualities, a qualitative one-on-one interview approach was the method

of choice for this study.

      The choice of a qualitative design for the current study was also supported by

current literature. Within current literature, there are several other studies from which

one-on-one interviews provided meaningful student insight into the development of

college level courses and programs. For example, Nitecki (2011) conducted one-on-

one interviews with students enrolled in two programs to explore why students within

the programs had a higher grade point average than other programs within the

institution. Via the one-on-one interviews Nitecki was able to ask students follow-up

questions and capture additional insight that might not have been effectively captured

via a quantitative design. Pheko and Molefhe (2017) used a qualitative interview

design to capture student perceptions of essential employability qualities for

comparison of the qualities to those found within the literature from the employer

perspective.

Qualitative Study Using In-depth Interviews

      This current qualitative study was conducted via in-depth interviews. The

exploratory nature of the student perception of essential employability qualities and

the emerging concept of essential employability qualities development within

curricula supported the use of such a qualitative design. Creswell and Creswell

(2018) and Saldana (2011) suggest the use of an in-depth interview study design for

the analysis of a program or course by collecting data from participants while they are

engaged in the program or course. Collecting data in a natural setting and providing a

holistic account of a complex problem are two essential elements of a qualitative

study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldana, 2011). In order to provide a holistic

account of the first-year experience course and the introduction of essential

employability qualities within the course, one-on-one interviews were conducted with

each student participant after the introduction of essential employability qualities

within the course.

The interview questions used to conduct the one-on-one interviews, were

created by the researcher after reviewing interview questions used in similar studies

found within the literature (Paterson, 2017; Pheko & Molefhe, 2016; Winstead et al.,

2009) in an effort to answer the research question (RQ1): What skills do students

enrolled in a first-year experience course at JCTC perceive that employers are looking

for in college graduates? The four primary interview questions and a fifth question

providing participants an opportunity to provide additional comments used to conduct

the in-depth interviews were as follows:

IQ1: What skills do you think employers look for in college graduates?

(*If a participant asks for clarification of "skills." The following definition will*

be provided: Skills are the expertise or talent needed in order to do a job or

task.)

IQ2: Read the definitions below.

Job-specific skills: skills that are often learned during college coursework

within a specific field of study represented by completion of a college degree

within the field of study. For example, if a student earns a college degree in

nursing, they know how to take a person's blood pressure. If a student earns a

college degree in construction technology, they know how use a hammer to

frame a structure like a house.

<u>Soft skills</u>: soft skills include skills such as communication, problem solving,

inquiry, teamwork, responsibility, ethics, and life-long learning.

Pick the statement (only one) which you most agree with and give your

explanation.

A) Employers believe job-specific skills are more important than soft skills

B) Employers believe soft skills are more important than job-specific skills

C) Employers believe job-specific skills and soft skills are equally important

   Explanation:

IQ3: Do you think you currently possess the soft skills that employers seek? If

so, what skills do you possess and where did you learn the skills? If not, what

skills do you need to develop?

IQ4: Do you think your education at JCTC will influence your preparation for

the workforce? If so, how? If not, why?

IQ5: Do you have any additonal comments regarding soft skills you would

like to share?

The second research question (RQ2) for the current study was: How are the

perceptions of students in a first-year experience course at JCTC of essential

employability skills similar to or different than the skills employers are seeking in

new graduates (as demonstrated in the literature)? In order to address this question,

in-depth analysis of student responses to the interview questions occurred and student

responses were compared to employer expectations of new graduates found within

the literature. Specific results of this comparison are shared in the Findings section of

this paper.

Interview Participants

To identify study participants, prior to the start of the Fall 2021 semester, the

researcher identified an FYE instructor that was teaching multiple sections of the

course and introduced the instructor to the purpose of the study. The instructor

assisted the researcher by allowing the researcher to come and discuss the purpose of

the research in-person with the students enrolled in two sections of the course. The

instructor used the same course syllabus for both the sections of the course, and the

syllabus included the student learning outcomes that vaguely emphasize student

development of essential employability qualities.

The researcher attended a meeting of both class sections of the course and

provided the students with a letter of introduction to the study as well as a potential

participant survey. Students interested in participating were asked to complete the

participation survey indicating their name, email address, phone number, age, gender,

race, and career goal (Appendix A). Forty-one students enrolled in one of the two

identified sections of the course were encouraged to complete the potential participant

survey. Of the 41 students invited to participate, 14 completed and returned the

potential participant survey to the researcher. The researcher corresponded with each

of the 14 potential participants via email and was able to schedule and conduct an in-depth interview with 10 participants.

Prior to the individual in-depth interview, the 10 student participants were asked to complete the participant consent form (Appendix B). The consent form contained information about the purpose of the interview, audio and video recording, and use of responses. Via the consent form and verbally before each interview, participants were made aware that they were able to withdraw from the interview process at any time and that their participation/withdraw and/or responses to the interview questions would not have any effect or influence on their grade in the first-year experience (FYE 105) course.

Data Collection

The 10 study participants were interviewed individually during the month of November, prior to the end of the Fall 2021 semester, after a brief introduction of essential employability qualities during the first-year experience course. The researcher conducted the one-on-one interviews with each study participant at a time that worked best for each participant. Each interview lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes. Interviews were conducted either in-person in the researcher's office at Jefferson Community and Technical College and recorded via Microsoft Teams or were conducted and recorded exclusively online via Microsoft Teams. As previously discussed, the questions used during the interview process were open-ended (Appendix C) and the researcher asked additional follow-up or clarifying questions to add depth to each participant's perception and individual experience.

Data Analysis

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest a series of steps for the analysis of

qualitative data. The first step is to prepare data for analysis. In this study, a

transcript of each interview was recorded via Microsoft Teams and converted into a

Microsoft Word document and edited for accuracy by listening to the audio recording

of each interview. The second step was importing all of the edited transcripts into

QSR NVivo. Once all of the transcripts were imported into QSR NVivo, all of the

participant responses were read, and responses were compared to one another. With

more in-depth review, it was determined that similarities in participant responses

depended on the interview question being answered. To facilitate the analysis of the

similarities in participant responses related to the interview questions, a code was

created for each interview question and participant responses to each interview

question were then placed in the corresponding code. A series of subcodes were then

created that narrowed the scope of the participant responses for each interview

question into a series of sub-themes.

The emerging themes related to each interview question provided a holistic

approach to addressing RQ1: What skills do students enrolled in a first-year

experience course at JCTC perceive that employers are looking for in college

graduates? In-depth discussion of the emerging themes linked to this research

question can be found in the Findings section of this paper.

RQ2, "How are the perceptions of students in a first-year experience course at

JCTC of essential employability skills similar to or different than the skills employers

are seeking in new graduates (as demonstrated in the literature)?" was then addressed

by comparing the participant responses to employer perceptions found in the

literature. This detailed comparison can be found in the Findings section of this paper.

Validity

In order to ensure validity in a qualitative study, Creswell and Creswell (2018)

suggest that researchers incorporate validity strategies into research plans. The

recommended strategies include triangulation and member checking. In the current

study, data obtained from student interviews was reviewed and compared and

contrasted to other studies found within the literature and themes were generated

based on the convergence of the data collected in the current study with the literature.

According to Creswell and Creswell, the generation of themes based on similarities

and differences to other studies within the literature can add to the validity of a study

and is called triangulation. As recommended by Creswell and Creswell, member

checking was conducted by asking the 10 study participants to review the transcripts

of their individual interviews and provide any corrections or feedback.

Summary

An in-depth interview qualitative design was used to conduct this study. The

purpose of this research was to explore student perception of essential employability

qualities in the first-year experience course at JCTC. Four open-ended interview

questions and an opportunity for participants to provide additional comments were

developed to address RQ 1. Ten study participants were identified from among

students enrolled in two sections of the first-year experience course at JCTC. The

individual interviews were audio/video recorded and transcribed via Microsoft

Teams. Transcriptions were edited and imported in QSR NVivo for coding purposes.

Emerging themes were identified based on the interview questions and several sub-

themes were identified within each theme. In an effort to address RQ2, participant

responses were compared and contrasted to current literature.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore student perception of essential employability qualities during enrollment in a first-year experience course (FYE 105) and compare and contrast student perceptions to employer perceptions found within the literature. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What skills do students enrolled in a first-year experience course at JCTC perceive that employers are looking for in college graduates?

RQ2: How are the perceptions of students in a first-year experience course at JCTC of essential employability skills similar to or different than the skills employers are seeking in new graduates (as demonstrated in the literature)?

This chapter contains the demographics of the 10 study participants, the data collected via participant responses to the four in-depth interview questions and a comparison of participant responses to employer responses demonstrated in the literature.

Participant Demographics

Potential study participants were asked to complete a participation survey that included their name, email address, phone number, age, gender, race, and career goal. The researcher received 14 completed participation surveys and was able to make arrangements with 10 participants that completed the in-depth interview. As shown in Table 1, participants were anonymized and represented numerically. Participants will be referred to numerically throughout the remainder of the discussion of this study to

indicate individual responses as needed. Six of the study participants identified as

female and 4 identified as male. Six identified their race as white and 4 identified as

either biracial, African American, or Latino. Eight study participants ranged in age

from 18 to 23 years of age and the remaining study participants identified as 30 and

49 years of age. Three of the study participants indicated their career goal as

obtaining a career in computer information technology. The remaining participants

indicated their career goals as professions such as counseling, nursing, radiography

technology, aviation maintenance, and chemical engineering.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Career goal
1	18	Female	White	Psychology/Therapist
2	18	Male	--	Computer App Development
3	18	Female	White/Middle Eastern	Chemical Engineering
4	18	Female	African American	Nursing
5	19	Male	Latino/Brazil	Computer Programming
6	19	Male	White	Cybersecurity
7	20	Female	White	Radiography Technician
8	23	Female	Black/White/Native American	Aesthetic Nursing
8	30	Male	White	Aviation Maintenance
9	49	Female	White	Counseling

Themes

The in-depth interview questions were created to address RQ1: What skills do

students enrolled in a first-year experience course at JCTC perceive that employers

are looking for in college graduates? Emerging themes were identified within the

participant responses to each in-depth interview question. To provide a context for the

emergence of the themes, in this section of the paper, the interview questions from

which the themes were coded serve as the foundation for the presentation of the

results. Following the presentation of the themes identified within the participant

responses to the interview questions, participant responses are compared and

contrasted with the employer perceptions found within the literature to address RQ2,

"How are the perceptions of students in a first-year experience course at JCTC of

essential employability skills similar to or different than the skills employers are

seeking in new graduates (as demonstrated in the literature)?"

Skills Employers Look for in College Graduates

Participant responses to IQ1: "What skills do you think employers look for in

college graduates?" were categorized into 3 sub-themes. As shown in Table 2, the

sub-themes included job-specific skills, soft skills, and education qualifications.

Several participants included one or more of these sub-themes in their individual

response to the interview question, therefore the maximum number of potential

responses for any one sub-theme was 10. A list of keywords indicative of each sub-

theme was created based on the participants' responses.

Table 2

Skills Employers Look for in College Graduates

Sub-theme	Number of responses	Keywords

Job-specific skills	8	Computer programming, computer information technology, hands-on labor, well-versed in field, vary based on job
Education qualifications	4	Level of education, alignment of education with position being filled, college degree, overall grade point average in college level coursework
Soft skills	6	Time management, loyalty, honesty, hard worker, organization skills, confidence, ability to trust, communication, teamwork, reliability, respect for diversity, good at studying, listening, following instructions, trainable, being hospitable, common sense, being a leader, knowing what's expected of you

Eight of the 10 participants' responses were categorized as job-specific skills. A participant's response was categorized as indicative of employers seeking job specific skills during the hiring process if the participant chose a specific field of study upon which to provide their explanation of the skills employers seek in college graduates or if job specific skills were mentioned in some context. Four of the participants mentioned skills related to information technology and computer programming including basic programming and application of programming techniques outside of the workplace to create personal websites or applications. For example, Participant 5 stated, "they look for things you do outside of work like…you made a game by yourself, or you made a website by yourself." In addition to the emphasis placed on the demonstrable use of technology, participants also mentioned

the importance of previous experience with hands-on labor, being well versed in multiple areas of a field such as teaching or counseling, meeting a business's requirements for being able to do a job and that the necessary skills would depend on the job that an individual is seeking. In relation to being well versed, participant 10 stated, "I think diversity, well roundedness…being well versed in multiple areas within an industry." To demonstrate the connection of the necessary skills as dependent on the job an individual is seeking, prior to providing a response, to IQ1, participant 9 asked, "What employers?" and participant 1 stated, "it depends on what job you would like."

In addition to 8 of the participants placing emphasis on job-specific skills, four of the participants' responses were categorized as the educational qualifications necessary for a position as included in a job posting. More specifically, the participants mentioned employers reviewing a job applicant's level of education, alignment of education with the position being filled, college degree, and overall grade point average in college level coursework. To demonstrate the importance of grade point average, Participant 9 stated, "If you got a 4.0 that tells them a lot without you saying anything. Without them seeing your work, that lets them know you are good at doing your chores."

Six of the 10 participants provided responses that were categorized as soft skills. Keywords that appeared in the participant responses that were indicative of employers looking for college graduates with soft skills during the hiring process included: time management, loyalty, honesty, a hard worker, organization skills,

confidence, ability to trust, communication, teamwork, reliability, being able to relate

to other people that are different from you, good at studying, good at turning things

in on time, listening, following procedures, someone that is trainable, good at

prioritizing tasks, being hospitable, showing love towards other people, helping

others, standing your ground, not being a follower but a leader, common sense, and

knowing what's expected of you. Within the soft skills mentioned, confidence,

communication, and teamwork appeared in the responses provided by two

participants. The other soft skills were unique and each provided were by individual

participants.

Job-specific Skills, Soft Skills, or Both

For the second interview question, participants were provided with the

following definitions of job-specific skills and soft skills:

Job-specific skills: skills that are often learned during college coursework

within a specific field of study represented by completion of a college degree

within the field of study. For example, if a student earns a college degree in

nursing, they know how to take a person's blood pressure. If a student earns a

college degree in construction technology, they know how use a hammer to

frame a structure like a house.

Soft skills: soft skills include skills such as communication, problem solving,

inquiry, teamwork, responsibility, ethics, and life-long learning.

The participants were then asked whether employers believe: (a) job-specific

skills are more important than soft skills, (b) soft skills are more important than job-

specific skills, or (c) job-specific skills and soft skills are equally important.

Participants were asked to choose the statement they agree with the most and provide

an explanation for their response. As shown in Table 3, participant responses were

categorized into sub-themes based on the multiple-choice options provided in the

interview question.

Table 3

Job-specific Skills, Soft Skills, or Both

Employers believe	Number of Responses	Example quotes
(A) Job-specific skills are more important than soft skills	1	"In a perfect world I would say that some employers look for soft skills, but nowadays a lot of them are looking for what college degree I got, probably what grades that you had…So I think that nowadays it is more job specific over soft skills even though I think both could have been equally important."
(B) Soft skills are more important than job-specific skills	3	"Every job comes with training so you're going to learn how to do it. I mean the basics is always helpful, but they're going to teach you that anyways. So really, if you can show that you can learn and communicate properly then you are already going to learn how to do the job."

		"I feel that soft skills are something that you kind of learn over a long period of time, not something that you can be taught in a short amount of time but I think job specific skills are something that someone could teach you in a short amount of time."
		"I feel like soft skills are inherited. Usually just due to growing up. It's much easier. Soft skills are abstract. They're much easier to learn and obviously once you learn those, you can incorporate those into a job specific skill."
(C) Job-specific skills and soft skills are equally important	6	"For example, you could be the best baseball player but if you cannot work well with your team you are useless. It's not going to help you be better, it's not going to help the company be better."
		"Communication is really important…sometimes you run into things that they might not have shown you in nursing school and you might have to ask a more senior nurse to address this."
		"Because you need to know how to work something before you guess and do it

	on your own…because you could mess up and make everybody be off track."
	"Personally, if I were hiring, I would want to know that their skills are up to par, but that they can also really sit down and work with other people and problem solve."
	"You need to be able to do your job, you need to be able to do what is expected of you…you should still be able to communicate with a patient and be able to get their needs through without them feeling uncomfortable."
	"You need to know how to do the job, but you also need to know how to deal with the other employees."

One participant indicated that employers believe job-specific skills are more important than soft skills (Table 3). The participant explained that he believes that in a perfect world job-specific skills and soft skills could be equally important, but employers place a lot of emphasis on the college degree that an individual has earned, the grades an individual earned during college, and what college an individual attended. In explanation of the importance of degree and grades, the participant expressed that employers believe an individual's grades are a good representation of what an individual's performance may be like in the workplace.

Three participants responded that employers believe soft skills are more important than job-specific skills (Table 3). One of the three participants explained that every job comes with training that focuses on the job-specific skills necessary to do a job, so if a potential employee demonstrates his ability to learn and communicate, then the individual can be taught to do the job effectively. The second participant that indicated soft skills are more important explained that soft skills are learned over a long period of time and cannot be taught in a short period of time. However, job-specific skills are something that someone can teach a potential employee in a short amount of time. The third participant explained that soft skills are an abstract concept. Soft skills like teamwork and problem solving are fundamentals of all jobs, learned by growing up, easier to learn than job-specific skills, and serve as a foundation upon which job-specific skills can be built.

Six of the 10 participants responded that employers believe job-specific skills and soft-skills are equally important (Table 3). Each participant provided an in-depth explanation for their choice. All the responses included emphasis on the importance of being able to perform a job while also being able to communicate and collaborate with others as a member of a team. One participant stated, "For example, you could be the best baseball player but if you cannot work well with your team, you're useless." A second participant stated, "Personally, if I were hiring, I would want to know that their skills are up to par, but that they can also sit down and work with other people and problem solve." A third participant stated, "You do need to know how to do the job, but you also have to know how to deal with the other employees."

A fourth participant emphasized the importance of being able to ask questions about work processes and procedures because mistakes made by one employee can "make everybody off track." The two remaining participants used the nursing example provided in the definition of job-specific skills to explain that nurses have to know how to take a person's blood pressure, but they also have to know how to communicate with patients and other employees to provide the best care for patients. In the nursing context, communicating with other employees involves asking for assistance from more senior level professionals to address patient care needs.

Prepared with the Soft Skills Employers Seek

When asked IQ3, "Do you think you currently possess the soft skills that employers seek? If so, what skills do you possess and where did you learn the skills? If not, what skills do you need to develop?" All 10 of the participants stated that they possess the soft skills that employers seek. The skills that participants expressed they possess varied, as did where the skills were learned (Table 4). Seven of the participants indicated that they possess communication skills. However, 4 participants indicated that they could continue to develop their communication skills. For example, one participant indicated that they have good communication skills but explained the need to continue to develop communication skills, "I think there is always room for personal improvement, [like] paying more attention when someone is talking to you." In addition to placing emphasis on continuing to develop communication skills, 3 participants indicated the importance of continuing to develop soft skills in general throughout one's life. For example, one of the

participants stated about soft skills, "I'm sure by the time I'm 50 or 60 I'll have even more." Overall, even though all of the participants indicated that they possess the soft skills that employers seek, the majority recognized the need to continue to develop their soft skills.

Table 4

Skills Possessed, Where Learned, and Skills Continuing to Develop

Theme	Number of responses
What skills do you possess?	
Communication	7
Teamwork	5
Problem solving	4
Life-long learning	2
Honesty	1
Loyalty	1
Time management	1
Good work ethic	1
Responsibility	1
Respect for diversity	1
Where did you learn the skills?	
Family/upbringing	8
Work experience	7
Playing sports	2
School	2
What skills do you need to develop?	

Communication	4
Continue to develop all soft skills	3
Responsibility	1
Organization	1
Professionalism	1
Problem Solving	1

When asked to explain where they learned the soft skills they currently

possess, 8 of the participants indicated that they learned the skills from observing and

interacting with their families (Table 4). One participant stated, "My parents always

told me to communicate to talk to them, to tell them my problems…so that was my

upbringing." A second participant stated, "My mom especially. We are immigrants.

She had to learn English and she currently works somewhere that she has to talk with

customers all day and she has an accent, so she has to deal with people who are

saying stuff like, I don't want her because of the way she talks." A third participant

stated, "My parents always taught me to work with others and even if you don't agree

with someone, you just respect them…" A fourth participant stated, "In my family, I

think it was important that we were ready for the job world so we always learned all

the responsibilities and as a family we've always worked together." Overall examples

set by parents and interactions with family members was a primary driving force in

the development of soft skills among the participants. The two participants that did

not mention family as an important factor in their soft skills development emphasized

the importance of their previous work experiences; this is not indicative that family is

not important to these individuals, but that family development of soft skills was not

the first thing that came to mind for the participants.

Seven participants cited previous work experience as one of the ways in which

they developed soft skills (Table 4). At various points in the interview process, the

participants shared a variety of previous work experiences including working in fast-

food, teaching swimming lessons, working in customer service, being a hairdresser,

working in retail, and working at United Parcel Service. Four of the participants

explained that at previous or current places of employment they held supervisory

roles. One of the participants shared that she managed a hair salon for three years and

found that being a manager was difficult. She explained, "You lose the one on

one…it is difficult to be their boss and be their peer. I didn't like that." Another

participant shared that he has had various leadership roles and is currently a team lead

at United Parcel Service, where he has had the opportunity to enhance his

communication skills "UPS has taught me a lot of different ways to communicate

with people and different types of people to communicate with." Overall, the majority

of the participants have had very little leadership responsibility within the workplace,

but work experience has impacted the majority of the participants development of soft

skills.

Impact of Education at JCTC

When asked IQ4, "Do you think your education at JCTC will influence your

preparation for the workforce? If so, how? If not, why?" all of the study participants

indicated that their education would influence their preparation for the workforce by preparing them with the job specific skills that are embedded within a college degree in a specific field. In their individual explanations each of the participants referenced their career goal and the importance of learning skills related to the field (Table 5). One participant stated, "I'm here to learn about my job" and another said, "…figuring out the work that I will be doing to help me proceed in the career that I want." In addition to the importance of learning job specific skills, 4 participants vaguely mentioned that their education at JCTC would help them develop soft skills (Table 5). One of the participants stated that their education at JCTC would, "prepare me with both soft skills and job specific skills." A second participant stated that the education they receive at JCTC will "get me ready to work with diverse groups and many people on one thing, like getting good at communicating." Another participant indicated that the English class she was enrolled in had helped her learn how to communicate in a more professional manner, especially in email communication. Even for those that mentioned the importance of gaining soft skills throughout their education, the importance of a degree and job specific skills outweighed the level of importance of developing soft skills.

Table 5

Impact of Education at JCTC

Education at JCTC will influence my…	Number of responses
Development of job-specific skills	10

Development of soft skills	4

Summary of Themes

Student responses to the four interview questions were organized into themes

and sub-themes in an effort to answer research RQ1: What skills do students enrolled

in a first-year experience course at JCTC perceive that employers are looking for in

college graduates? Based on the themes and sub-themes, the students recognize the

emphasis placed on both job-specific skills and soft skills by employers during the

hiring process. More specifically, 6 out of 10 students indicated that job-specific

skills and soft skills are equally important during the hiring process (Table 3). All of

the students indicated that they feel they possess the soft skills that employers seek

and the majority (8 out of 10) indicated that they learned the skills from interactions

with family members (Table 4). Homing in on the specific skills students possess,

seven out of 10 of the students indicating that they possess communication skills

sought by employers (Table 4). Reflective of the students' individual perceptions of

preparedness with the soft skills sought by employers, all of the students also

indicated that their education at JCTC would assist them with the development of job-

specific skills; only 4 students indicated that their education at JCTC would influence

their development of soft skills (Table 5).

Emerging Themes Compared to the Literature

To address RQ2, "How are the perceptions of students in a first-year

experience course at JCTC of essential employability skills similar to or different than

the skills employers are seeking in new graduates (as demonstrated in the literature)?", the emerging themes within the participant responses to the interview questions were compared to employer expectations found within the literature. This section of the paper shares the researcher's analysis of the emerging themes of this study compared to themes found within the literature.

Based on the emerging themes generated from participant responses to the interview questions, many of the participants recognized the importance of both job-specific skills and soft skills to employers during the hiring of college graduates. In response to the first interview question, 8 of the 10 participants included keywords that were categorized as job-specific skills and 6 of the 10 participants included keywords that were categorized as soft skills (Table 2). The depth of explanation of the soft skills employers seek varied from one participant to another, just as the list of soft skills sought by employers found within the literature varies from one employer to another. Some of the keywords participants included in their responses that were indicative of soft skills included: communication, teamwork, reliability, organization skills, time management, and honesty (Table 2). Many of the same terms appear in the list of soft skills that employers seek in college graduates found within the literature. A typical list of soft skills sought by employers found within the literature includes communication, teamwork, inquiry, collaboration, critical thinking, numeracy, and problem solving (Durrani & Tariq, 2012; Gruzdev, 2018; Quality Assurance Commons; Robles, 2012).

In response to the second interview question, 6 of the 10 participants indicated that job-specific skills and soft skills are believed to be equally important to employers, 3 participants indicated that soft skills are more important to employers than job specific skills, and 1 participant indicated that job-specific skills are more important to employers than soft skills (Table 3). These findings contrast to the equal importance employers typically place on job-specific skills and soft skills found in the literature (Ahmad, 2019; 2013; Ortiz, 2016; Robles, 2012; Velasco, 2012) and the complete lack of emphasis placed solely on job-specific skills demonstrated by college performance (Finch et al., 2013).

As indicated by the participant responses to the third interview question (Table 4), all the participants perceive that they possess the soft skills that employers seek. Seven of the participants specifically mentioned feeling adequately prepared with communication skills and 5 participants mentioned teamwork as one of their strengths (Table 4). The majority of the participants did not provide specific soft skills that they needed to continue to develop. Three participants shared their perception that individuals should continue to develop their soft skills throughout life and 4 participants acknowledged that they could improve their communication skills (Table 4). The majority of the participants' perceptions of the adequacy of their soft skills is a contrast to employer perceptions found in the literature. According to a 2018 survey conducted by Hart Research Associates, only 40% of business executives and 47% of hiring managers surveyed rated recent college graduates as adequately prepared with the necessary communication skills. In addition to

employers surveyed by Hart Associates (2018), employers surveyed by Gruzdev et al. (2018) consistently indicated that college graduates are not adequately prepared with the soft skills necessary for success within their organizations.

In response to where they learned the soft skills they currently possess, the majority of the participants indicated that they learned the skills from interactions with their family (8 participants) and/or through work experience (7 participants). Only 2 participants included their education experiences as having had an impact on their development of soft skills (Table 4). This finding conflicts with the increased emphasis that employers and institutions of higher education alike have placed on student development of soft skills via participation in education (Devedzic et al., 2018; QA Commons; Sattar Rasul et al, 2012; Winstead et al., 2009).

The lack of emphasis placed on the development of soft skills via education was also evident in participant responses to the fourth interview question (Table 5). Only 4 of the 10 participants included the development of soft skills as one of the ways in which their education at JCTC would prepare them for the workforce (Table 5). This finding supports the consistent recommendation that employers and institutions of higher education should work together to create meaningful curriculum that emphasizes soft skills development while also making students aware of the soft skills they are developing (Huang et al., 2016; Paterson, 2017; QA Commons; Tang, 2019)

Summary

The participants' responses indicated that the participants recognized the importance of both job-specific and soft skills in the employment process. The participants included many of the same soft skills in their responses as those included in the typical list of skills sought by employers. However, in contrast to employer expectation found in the literature, the participants placed more emphasis on the development of job-specific skills via education than soft skills. Also, in contrast to the literature, the majority of the participants indicated that they currently possess the soft skills employers seek.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore student perception of essential employability qualities within a first-year experience course (FYE 105) offered at Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC). This purpose was achieved by conducting in-depth interviews with 10 students enrolled in the first-year experience course (FYE 105) at JCTC focusing on their perceptions of essential employability qualities. Several conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the participants' interview responses and recommendations can be suggested with current literature as the foundation. This section of the paper shares the conclusions, describes limitations of the study, and provides recommendations for future research.

Conclusions and Discussion

Based on the participants responses to the in-depth interview questions which were tailored to answer RQ1, each participant's perception of the skills sought by employers varied. Prior to being provided a definition of job-specific skills and soft skills, some of the participants included specific soft skills in the list of skills that employers seek, while others focused on the job specific skills that they are hoping to gain in a specific field by attending college. Once provided definitions of job-specific skills and soft skills the majority of the participants recognized the value that employers place on both job-specific skills and soft skills during the hiring process. Despite recognition of the equal value that employers place on job-specific skills and soft skills, most of the participants expressed that they feel they are prepared with the

necessary soft skills and attending college would most benefit their development of job-specific skills. This finding is significant when compared to McGraw-Hill Education (2018) study in which only 4 in 10 United States college students expressed that they felt very or extremely prepared for the workforce. The McGraw-Hill Education study did not specify a focus on what skills the students felt they were lacking, whether those skills were job-specific skills or soft skills, but the level of confidence in preparation for the workforce is assumed to include both job-specific skills and soft skills.

The previous and current work experiences of the participants varied, therefore the real-life experience of the emphasis placed on soft skills within the interview process and in the workplace varied. The majority of the participants shared their current and previous work experiences and most emphasized the importance of being able to communicate with other people in a workplace. Communication even appeared as the top skill that most of the participants felt they possess. Only 4 of the participants felt they could improve their communication skills. The comparison of the participants' perceptions to employer expectations of new college graduates within the literature provide an answer to RQ2. The participant findings in comparison to the literature are concerning because of the emphasis placed on communication skills by employers (Ahmad, 2019; Manpower Group, 2020; Ortiz et al., 2016; Robles, 2012) and the feeling that college graduates are not adequately prepared with the necessary communication skills (Hart Research Associates, 2018).

Surprisingly, the majority of the participants included family experiences and previous/current work experiences, rather than via education, as the main ways in which they had learned soft skills. This presents a question regarding whether the participants were explicitly introduced to soft skills during elementary and/or secondary education. Regardless of the level of explicit introduction of soft skills during previous educational experiences, the participants also expressed that their college education would assist them more with developing job specific skills than developing soft skills. This is noteworthy because students within the literature typically rely on their college instructors to help them develop the skills, including soft skills, necessary to become employable (Pheko & Molefhe, 2017; Thirunavukarasu et al., 2020).

Recommendations

Based on the data obtained from the analysis of student responses to the in-depth interview questions and comparison of the student responses to literature, the researcher has several recommendations for improvement of the first-year experience course at Jefferson Community and Technical College. Prior to being provided a definition of job-specific skills and soft skills, the students' responses to the skills that employers seek varied. Some of the students included soft skills in their responses, while others focused specifically on job-specific skills. Based on this finding, the researcher recommends that the understanding of definitions for soft skills and job-specific skills be embedded into the learning outcomes for the first-year experience course at JCTC. Presenting students with concrete learning definitions of job-specific

skills and soft skills and holding them accountable for understanding the definitions

related is supported by the desire that students demonstrated in Pheko and Molefhe

(2017) to be told explicitly by college faculty what skills employers are looking for

during the hiring process. Along with holding students accountable for understanding

the definitions of job-specific skills and soft skills, it is important that students be

exposed to data demonstrating that employers have expressed concern that college

graduates are lacking the expected skills.

Course learning outcomes serve as the goals for student learning within a

course, and Ritzer and Sleigh (2019) found that when goals are clearly articulated to

students, students have a better understanding of the skills they are learning by

attending college. Based on the emphasis the students in the current study placed on

the development of job-specific skills rather than soft skills via their education at

JCTC, including specific goals related to soft skills development as related to career

path could enhance student understanding of the importance of soft skills within a

career preparation context. To effectively create individual goals, students should be

engaged in self-assessment of soft skills. Several tools exist within the literature that

could be adapted for use within the first-year experience course (Devedzic et al.,

2018; QA Commons). After students have initially assessed their soft skills during the

first-year experience course, individual reassessment of soft skills should occur at

appropriate intervals of program completion, perhaps at the end of every semester of

coursework with the assistance of the student's academic advisor or the coordinator

for the program in which the student is enrolled.

Students in the current study indicated that they learned most of their soft skills from their families or from previous work experiences. To ensure that students understand that they also learn soft skills from participation in school (elementary, secondary, and post-secondary), it is imperative that faculty teaching the first-year experience course provide students with adequate introduction to the skills. Based on the literature, faculty often place less emphasis on soft skills than on job-specific skills (Tang, 2019).   To address this concern, the researcher recommends creating a series of assignments focusing on soft skills and their connection to various career paths. The assignments should be required as part of the instruction of all sections of the course. In a previous project, the researcher video recorded several interviews with employers discussing the soft skills they seek when hiring employees. Expansion of this video series and use of this series by first-year experience instructors would be an additional way to enhance student exposure to soft skills as related to career path.

Embedding a definition of job-specific skills and soft-skills within the first-year experience course, providing faculty with resources to ensure adequate introduction of soft skills within the course, and implementing student self-assessment of soft skills, could spur conversation on the potential need to evaluate student understanding and development of soft skills throughout all curricula at JCTC. To ensure adequate introduction of soft skills throughout all courses and programs offered at the institution, programs of study should be engaged in curriculum mapping. Within the curriculum map, soft skills should be embedded with both programmatic learning outcomes as well as course learning outcomes.

Embedding soft skills at both the programmatic and course level would place much needed emphasis on the instruction and evaluation of student development of soft skills by faculty.

Limitations of the Study and Implications

This study was conducted at Jefferson Community and Technical College and participants were enrolled in one of two sections of the first-year experience course (FYE 105). Several limitations to the study occurred due to the setting and selection of study participants. The study was conducted solely at JCTC. Students enrolled in a first-year experience course at another community college may or may not have led to different results. To address this limitation, the study could be expanded to include other community colleges and data obtained could be compared and contrasted to the current study.

A second limitation of the study was that participants were volunteers that were enrolled in one of two sections of the course taught by the same instructor. The instructor's presentation of the course content, including the connection of the course learning outcomes to soft skills development may or may not have influenced student perception prior to the in-depth interview. This limitation could be addressed by expanding the study to include sections of the first-year experience course (FYE 105) taught by other instructors at JCTC and comparing the data obtained to the data from the current study findings.

A third limitation of the study was that the participants were volunteers and were academically successful and passed the course. The level of engagement of the

participants may or may not have been reflective of other students enrolled in the course. To address this limitation the study could be repeated, and criteria could be created to capture students at varying academic levels of performance prior to the in-depth interview. This would allow for the comparison of student responses based on academic performance.

This study focused specifically on student perception of soft skills during enrollment in a first-year experience course. To expand upon the current study, the students that participated in this study could be interviewed after completing their coursework, earning a degree from JCTC, and gaining employment in their designated field of study. Expanding the study in this way would provide a more complete picture of each student's perception of soft skills, the impact their education at JCTC had on their preparation for the workforce, and their individual readiness for the workforce. In addition to tracking the progress of the study participants through graduation and on to employment, interviews could also be conducted with each participant's employer to determine if the student received the soft skills preparation necessary for work within the field.

The perceptions of soft skills by the faculty at Jefferson Community and Technical College were not captured by this study. Future research could focus on faculty development of effective methods of embedding soft skills within course instruction. Creating faculty discussion groups for the purposes of comparing and contrasting the level of emphasis placed on soft skills in various courses by various instructors could assist instructors in identifying their strengths and weaknesses in

embedding soft skills in their instruction. This could also allow for the creation of a

collection of assignments in which soft skills are emphasized and the assignments

could be used as a template for the creation of assignments focusing on soft skills

throughout the curricula.

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Appendix A

Greetings potential participant,

I am writing this letter to ask whether you have any interest in participating in an interview for a research project entitled "Student Perception of Essential Employability Qualities in a First-Year Experience Course." Participation is completely voluntary.

The purpose of this study is to gather student perceptions on the skills sought in recent college graduates as potential employees. The data gathered will be used for instructional purposes at Jefferson Community and Technical College to promote the student development of soft skills. Data from interviews with other students enrolled in the first-year experience course will be compiled for the creation of a research report. Within the research report, your identity will remain anonymous. A pseudonym will be used for any direct quotations of your responses.

If you are chosen to participate, you will be interviewed via a virtual platform at a time you select and the interview will be audio and video-taped (The interview will take 10 to 15 minutes).

If you are interested in participating, please complete the attached survey and return it to your first-year experience course instructor. If you are chosen to participate in the study, you will be contacted via email or phone with additional information.

I look forward to your response.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Kara Schotter

Institution name: Morehead State University

Contact: 502-213-4245

MSU IRB office contact: 606-783-22

Potential Participant Survey

Name (First and Last):_____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

Age:_____

Gender:_____

Race:_____

Career Goal (program of study or profession planning to pursue):

_____

Appendix B

Interview Participant Consent Form

The purpose of this study is to explore student perception of essential employability qualities during enrollment in a first-year experience course. The research is expected to illuminate particular areas of promoting soft skills during student preparation at Jefferson Community and Technical College.

The interview will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Your identity will remain confidential and only the researcher will have access to your responses.

Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time.

The interview in which you will participate will be audio/video taped.

Within a research report, your identity and responses will remain anonymous and will be compiled along with responses from other participants. For any quotation of your responses, a pseudonym will be used in place of your name.

Please indicate your consent to participate by signing the statement below:

I understand the information expressed above. I consent to participate in an interview for this research project and to allow my interview data to be used in a research report. I understand that my responses will remain confidential within the research report. My name will not be used in any reporting or publication of research data. I also agree to allow my responses to be audio and video-recorded for review by the researcher.

Participant printed name:

_____

_____   _____

 Participant signature   Date

Contact information of the researcher:

Kara Schotter
kschotter@moreheadstate.edu, kara.schotter@kctcs.edu

502-213-4245
MSU Institutional Review Board office:
606-783-2278
JCTC Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning
502-213-5155

Appendix C

Questions for student participants in JCTC first-year experience course (FYE 105)
focusing on perception of essential employability qualities

1. What skills do you think employers look for in college graduates?
    (*If a participant asks for clarification of "skills." The following definition will
    be provided: Skills are the expertise or talent needed in order to do a job or
    task.*)

2. Read the definitions below.

    Job-specific skills: skills that are often learned during college coursework
    within a specific field of study represented by completion of a college degree
    within the field of study. For example, if a student earns a college degree in
    nursing, they know how to take a person's blood pressure. If a student earns a
    college degree in construction technology, they know how use a hammer to
    frame a structure like a house.

    Soft skills: soft skills include skills such as communication, problem solving,
    inquiry, teamwork, responsibility, ethics, and life-long learning.

    Pick the statement (only one) which you most agree with and give your
    explanation.

    D) Employers believe job-specific skills are more important than soft skills
    E) Employers believe soft skills are more important than job-specific skills
    F) Employers believe job-specific skills and soft skills are equally important

        Explanation:

3. Do you think you currently possess the soft skills that employers seek? If so,
    what skills do you possess and where did you learn the skills? If not, what
    skills do you need to develop?

4. Do you think your education at JCTC will influence your preparation for the
    workforce? If so, how? If not, why?

5.   Do you have any additonal comments regarding soft skills you would like to
    share?

VITA

KARA S. SCHOTTER

<u>EDUCATION</u>

December, 2006   Bachelor of Science
                      University of Southern Indiana
                      Evansville, Indiana

May, 2005   Bachelor of Science
                      University of Southern Indiana
                      Evansville, Indiana

May, 2012   Master of Arts
                      University of Louisville
                      Louisville, Kentucky

Pending   Doctor of Education
                      Morehead State University
                      Morehead, Kentucky

<u>PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES</u>

2015-Present   Dean of Allied Health
                      Jefferson Community and Technical College
                      Louisville, Kentucky

 2012-2015   Pharmacy Technology Instructor
                      Jeffeson Community and Technical College
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