UNDERSTANDING CAREER READINESS AMONG STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS AT A PUBLIC TEXAS INSTITUTION

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how student affairs educators make meaning of the concept of career readiness among undergraduate students they directly advise or supervise at a public, research institution in Texas. This study was driven by the increased pressure of higher education as a whole to highlight college graduates' employability and their articulation of skills gained during their collegiate experience. The exploration of how student affairs educators foster the connection of co-curricular experiences to career readiness development was examined in this study. The definition and application of career readiness had to be explored and understood through the lens of participants in this study to determine action items moving forward. The data showcased that participants conceptualized career readiness through the following ways: (a) informal knowledge (e.g., lived experiences), (b) formal knowledge (e.g., formal training or education), and (c) daily student interactions. The student affairs educators interviewed tied their meaning making of career readiness to innate skill development (i.e., soft skills) and affirmed the importance of career readiness development among the students they directly work with in their roles.

The findings also indicated that an advisor-driven student learning design and department student learning design were used to reach the desired outcomes of preparing career-ready students whose skill sets aligned directly with the National Association of College & Employers (NACE) competencies and skills desired by employers. Ultimately, my research reinforced the notion that career readiness development is embedded within higher education and is an integral part of learning both in and outside of the classroom for undergraduate students. Fostering career readiness in a student affairs realm is something that has become more grounded through this

empirical research. This research study provides a foundation in understanding career readiness and can serve as a framework to produce practical implications in student programming moving forward.

DEDICATION

To those that believed in me and provided encouragement: Thank you for your unwavering support during my doctoral journey. I would not have made it through without the encouragement and cheering as I balanced being a full-time, student affairs professional and student. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In 2015, Texas developed a strategic plan that would focus on economic and workforce development for the state through higher education. The plan calls for 60% of Texans in the age range of 25-34 to complete a college degree or certificate by 2030 (60x30TX website, 2020). One of the tenets of this state goal is specifically related to students being able to articulate marketable skills gained from their academic degree programs and institutions of higher learning. States, including Texas, are placing more focus on career readiness due to employers' concern for stunted economic growth due to a work force that lacks sufficient skills to be able to grow businesses and remain competitive (Koc & Koncz, 2015). Career readiness is defined as the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that can broadly prepare students for successful transitions in the workplace (NACE, 2015).

Research indicates that students are not getting enough on-the-job training and employer dissatisfaction continues to grow due to recently hired college graduates' lack of soft skills (Capelli, 2012). This prioritized focus is placing a spotlight on career services units and calling attention to what career readiness is and what all it entails (pas & Real, 2010). Student affairs is an identified co-curricular learning arena that can possibly assist with career readiness development. Positive correlation exists between student engagement and educational outcomes and, "[Students] significantly enhanced interpersonal skills that are important to job success through co-curricular activities" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 624). The goal of this study to

understand student affairs educators' definition of career readiness and how they may teach necessary soft skills through co-curricular education to student populations they work with.

Statement of the Problem

Universities are under increasing pressure to highlight the capacity and potential of college graduates through career readiness initiatives (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017). However, research indicates that there is lack of preparation from higher education in preparing students for the workforce and they struggle to articulate their strengths and skillsets to future employers as they near graduation (Peck, 2017; Capelli, 2012). In addition to that, job markets are fiercely competitive and employers are seeking individuals with necessary soft skills to go the extra mile for their organizations (Eisner, 2010). Therefore, state strategic initiatives such as 60x30TX, have been created to intentionally target the development of marketable or "soft skills" in efforts to assist students in communicating their employability to a competitive, global workforce. Campus partners, alumni, faculty, and student affairs educators have the ability to intentionally provide curriculum aimed towards career readiness and fill the perceived 'skills gap'. It is pivotal that higher education and industry highlight expectations from each other and create open dialog to mold college graduates moving forward and beyond. Co-curricular education may be one resolution towards filling the 'skills gap' related to career readiness, but the definition and application of career readiness has to be understood through the lens of student affairs educators in efforts to determine action items moving forward.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how student affairs educators make meaning of career readiness and how they might incorporate career readiness into the co-curricular education they provide to undergraduate student populations they directly advise or supervise. Ultimately, I

explored the steps student affairs educators can foster when bridging co-curricular experiences outside of the classroom to students' career readiness development as they prepare to enter the workforce. The emphasis on bridging the perceived 'skills gap' in students' employability to the workforce is necessary for both industry and higher education as both entities work to break the silos that have been created over time (Peck & Preston, 2018).

Multiple entities are tasked with ensuring that career readiness is developed and that students can clearly communicate their employability (Kinash et al., 2016; Jackson, 2016). However, student affairs educators may be able to address this in co-curricular settings quicker than most units. Higher education is often steeped in tradition and slow to change, yet learning outcomes associated with specific co-curricular experiences can be more fluid and responsive in addressing necessary changes as they arise (Peck & Preston, 2017). Co-curricular learning could have significant impact on students' employability and the articulation of skills employers are looking for (Peck et al., 2016). Therefore, I explored how student affairs educators in Texas understand career readiness, what frames their understanding, and explored if career readiness is currently incorporated into any of their intentional learning outcomes in undergraduate student populations they directly advise or supervise at a public, research institution in Texas.

Research Questions

The primary research question is: How are student affairs educators making meaning of the concept of career readiness among undergraduate students they directly advise or supervise at a public, research institution in Texas? In addition, I explored two subset of questions that include:

1. What guiding principles/theories or knowledge (informal or formal) frame student affairs educators' understanding of career readiness?

2. How do student affairs educators design student learning to align with their desired learning outcomes related to career readiness?

Significance of the Study

The workforce will become more competitive over time and students will need to be equipped to dive into a fast-paced, globally oriented environment. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) continues to gather feedback from employers that indicates recent college graduates are not hitting desired satisfaction levels in the workplace. When making hiring decisions, employers are looking for specific attributes in graduates that are skill-oriented (Koc & Koncz, 2015) such as:

1. Teamwork
2. Leadership
3. Problem solving
4. Verbal and written communication
5. Analytical and quantitative skills
6. Initiative
7. Work ethic
8. Flexibility and adaptability
9. Technical skills

Student affairs educators have the unique opportunity to influence and develop necessary soft skills needed for future college graduates to thrive in future endeavors. New programs can help refine skills desired by employers that could positively affect and provide advantages to disadvantaged students from various backgrounds as well (Griffin et al., 2017). This study will hopefully draw attention to understanding career readiness better within the context of student

affairs and provide insight on how student affairs educators can positively influence students' career readiness for the future.

Key Concepts and Definitions

60x30TX – A strategic state plan for Texas that promotes increased college completion rates, articulation of marketable skills, and less student debt by 2030. The goal of this strategic plan is to have 60% of individuals in the age range of 25-34 complete a college degree or certificate by 2030 (60x30TX website, 2020).

Career readiness - The attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that can broadly prepare students for successful transitions in the workplace (NACE, 2015).

Co-curricular education or learning – "Structured learning activities that complement the formal curriculum" (Rutter & Mintz, 2016, pg. 1).

Employability – "A set of achievements-skills, understandings, and personal attributes –that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations" (Yorke, 2004, p. 7).

Marketable skills – "Interpersonal, cognitive, and applied skill areas that are valued by employers, and are primary or complementary to a major" (60x30TX website, 2020, para. 1).

NACA Next (Navigating Employability and eXperience Tool) – "NACA Next is a new tool designed to help students as they prepare for their next steps after graduation" (NACA NEXT, 2019, para. 1).

National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE) – A professional association that I referenced who conduct research and surveys related to employment of college educated individuals (NACE website, 2020).

Professional identity – How one perceives them self, occupation they are entering, career goals, and how they explain "self" to others (Cordies et al., 2019).

Self-authorship – "The internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations, has emerged in the past fifteen years as a developmental capacity that helps meet the challenges of adult life" (Baxter-Magolda, 2008, p. 269).

Skills gap – A perceptual gap between employers and students related to students' lack of career preparedness in the workforce.

Soft skills – Skills that include emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and intangible skills that make an individual a better employee and are often unmeasurable (Deep & Setha, 2013).

Student affairs educators – Trained, educators that deliver and facilitate co-curricular learning at higher education institutions.

Student engagement – The time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities (Kuh, 2001a).

Student development – Guided theories that explain the rationale and link to calculated design of programs and practices to obtain desired student outcomes and holistic development (Branch et al., 2019).

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) – governing board that coordinates and provides leadership for public Texas higher education institutions.

Organization of the Dissertation

In the following chapter, I introduce the review of literature and conceptual framework I utilized for this study. Chapter three outlines my methodology, research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. The findings from my proposed study are presented in

chapter four. Then, lastly chapter five covers my summary/discussion of findings, as well as implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide a review and synthesis of the literature related to career readiness that supports the rationale for my research study on student affairs educators' understanding of career readiness in co-curricular education. I highlight information related to Texas's 60x30TX strategic plan and the importance of career readiness from the state's lens. From there, I explore how career readiness is defined and provide examples of soft skill development. Lastly, I deliver an overview of the importance of career readiness, current discourse with employers, and career readiness within student affairs.

60x30TX

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) launched a state strategic plan in 2015, known as 60x30TX. This plan is a roadmap to help Texas build a "skilled and dynamic workforce" through higher education (60x30TX website, 2020). THECB argues that higher education is more important than ever and that Texans' college completion rates are not improving quickly enough to keep up with the economy (60x30TX website, 2020). A college degree can aid in students' access to certain industries within the workforce and potential higher compensation. The Texas Workforce Commission indicates that by 2020, 65% of all new jobs in the state will require postsecondary education (THECB, 2013). Furthermore, college graduates with bachelor's degrees will earn $1.6 million more in compensation over a lifetime as compared to individuals without a degree (Flores, 2015). The main goal of 60x30TX is to ensure that 60% of Texans in the age range of 25-34 will complete a certificate or degree by 2030 in efforts to stay competitive in today's global economy (THECB website, 2020). There are four components

to 60x30TX that include: a) increasing the obtainment of degrees/certificates, b) growing completion rates across the state, c) identifying marketable skills obtained through public Texas institutions, and d) lowering student debt (60x30TX website, 2020).

The goal of communicating more marketable skills to students while at a public Texas institution was created as a part of 60x30TX because THECB argued that students are "not always able to articulate how their educational experiences and extracurricular activities contribute to their value in the workplace" (THECB, 2019, para. 1). Marketable skills directly correlates to students' career readiness and institutions are being asked to display this in efforts to reach the state's goals. THECB stated that one of its targets is that, "By 2020, institutions will have created and implemented a process to identify and regularly update marketable skills for each of their programs, in collaboration with business and other stakeholders" (THECB, 2019). As of spring 2018, 41% of public Texas institutions had accomplished this, 17% said they had started the process but not carried it out, and then 42% did not provide any kind of update regarding their progress (THECB, 2019). Performance-based funding is driving this state strategic plan forward and universities are expected to perform and display their efforts through reported metrics (Ellis, 2016). In my study, I explored if student affairs educators are incorporating career readiness development into co-curricular education in order to help undergraduate students' better articulate employability to future employers.

Additional State Initiatives

Industry and government have attempted to inform higher education programs on their academic program outcomes and employability skills through surveys and studies that measure satisfaction levels among employers regarding college graduate hires' abilities in the workforce (Moore & Morton, 2017). Within the last five years, state governments are attempting to make

higher education become more accountable in employability development among students in efforts to sustain the broader state economies. The Obama administration focused on setting college completion goals across the nation, arguing that three-fourths of the fastest-growing occupations will require more than a high school diploma and that graduate earnings are factored into college rating systems moving forward (Russell, 2011; Stokes, 2015). State initiatives similar to 60x30TX were created to encourage completion rates and the development of marketable skills. Some of those strategic plans include Complete College Georgia, Tennessee's "Drive to 55", and Complete College America (Oklahoma). The commonalities in these programs is to not only increase college completion rates, but to improve their own state's economic and workforce development during the years of 2023-2025 (TBR website, 2020; CCG website, 2020; Complete College America website, 2020). Therefore, higher education is expected to cultivate career readiness and deliver explicit skills to students at their respective institutions in effort to meet these state goals.

Linking College to Career

The connection of college to career services is one of the main goals in higher education dating back to the colonial era. The earliest colleges were designed to train students to become clergymen and leaders in their community and since then curriculums have been created to equip students with preparation for specific career paths (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). "Colleges have [always] maintained a multifaceted purpose centered on cultivating academic and intellectual skills, as well as developing leaders in key professions and occupations" (Mayhew et al., 2016, p. 421). Students continue to seek college as a means to gainful employment and more opportunity in a competitive workforce.

Robinson's (2018) study highlights how students perceive college degrees as their tickets into desired occupations and beliefs that the obtainment of a degree ultimately leads to a better life and job. Specific learning outcomes in higher education directly align with career readiness development. For instance, the Association of American Colleges & Universities (2007) outlined essential learning outcomes for students who attend college that includes knowledge of human cultures and the physical/natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative learning. Higher education outcomes and what students seek after completing a college degree are specifically related to graduation and retention, career, financial, learning, and soft-skill development (Zipper, 2017; Robinson, 2018; Eagan et al., 2015; Jackson, 2016). Therefore, graduate employability remains pivotal to universities moving forward due to the consistently changing natures of the labor market among college graduates, mass participation in higher education, pressures on student finances, competition to recruit students, and expectations from students, employers, parents, and the government (McNair, 2003; Teichler et al., 2014; Mayhew et al., 2016). Career success will measure the quality of education in both K-12 and higher education now and moving forward (Teichler et al., 2014).

Career Readiness Defined

Career readiness is a timely, hot topic within higher education as pressures increase to better cultivate career readiness in college students (Peck, 2017; Stokes, 2015). The National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE) defines career readiness as the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that can broadly prepare students for successful transitions in the workplace (NACE, 2015). Jackson (2019) states higher education should work to develop career-ready graduates and that career readiness is synonymous with the development of certain skills and attributes. Career readiness emphasizes the cultivation of skills and the need

to understand individual strengths that can be relayed to others. Campbell and Price (2016) affirmed these definitions and stated that career readiness captures different capabilities and attributes required by college graduates to successfully navigate the workforce characterized by rapid change and ambiguous employment practices. As a result, educators are encouraged to work closely with employers to define what career readiness looks like and how higher education can help equip students with the right academic courses and employability development to prepare for the workforce moving forward (Stokes, 2015).

Soft Skill Development

Soft skills refer to competencies that education should provide regardless of the specific field and that can be used in a variety of tasks (Jaasekla et al., 2018). As the workforce continues to evolve and change, soft skills should remain consistent and prepare students for the world of work and is the particular skillset that career readiness initiatives promote (Chapman et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2008; Gammie et al., 2002). For example, group work is fairly common in higher education and promotes collaborative learning, teamwork skills, and life-long learning (Natoli et al., 2014). Group work fosters individuals' abilities to work with others and the ability to effectively work as a team member has been identified as a skill that can increase students' employability in a globalized workforce (Freeman et al., 2008). Additional soft skills examples include communication, courtesy, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal skills, positive attitude, professionalism, teamwork, leadership, and work ethic (Robles, 2012). Soft skills are personal qualities of an individual that are often difficult to measure (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

Employability skills. Equipping students with soft skillsets during their collegiate experiences is paramount to enhancing their employability. Exposure to various experiences outside of the classroom can influence career readiness development within a student. Dearing

(1997) stated employability is linked to specific skills regarding communication, numeracy, information technology, and learning. This learning is viewed as a social construct, where various concepts and skills are applicable to many contexts (Paterson, 2017). Furthermore, employability is arguably related to "complexability" in a creative world, where necessary social networks, confidence and the ability to deal with change are constantly occurring (Higdon, 2018). Professionalism, networking, and initiative are examples of employability skills (Evetts, 2003; Foucault, 1973; Wilson et al., 2013). Additionally, Higdon (2018) argues that exploring the meaning of employability should be holistic, collaborative, and involve reflection/evaluation with undergraduate students. Multiple avenues within the college realm can equip students with the necessary employability skills and fostering self-efficacy can enhance not only perception of their own career readiness, but their professional image too (Paterson, 2017).

The Importance of Career Readiness in Higher Education

Industry and government have attempted to inform higher education programs on their academic program outcomes and employability skills through surveys and studies measuring satisfaction levels among employers regarding college graduate hires' abilities in the workforce (Moore & Morton, 2017). State governments are attempting to make higher education more accountable when it comes to career readiness by placing emphasis on marketable skill development into state strategic plans (i.e. 60x30TX, "Drive to 55", and Complete College initiatives). Andrewartha & Harvey (2017) argue that universities are under increasing pressure to demonstrate the capacity and potential of college graduates to the workforce, yet disparities remain.

The responsibility of educating students on the importance of career readiness and cultivation of skills falls on multiple groups within higher education ranging from academic

classrooms, to co-curricular programming, internships, student employment, and career services. Kinash, Crane, and Judd (2016) affirm that enhancing employability on a college campus involves three main stakeholder groups that include alumni, employers, and education personnel. Education personnel encompasses a mixture of faculty in the academic realm of higher education and those individuals that offer student services (i.e. career services or functional areas within student affairs). Specifically, the value of university career services departments, coupled with the importance of inter-departmental cooperation within the university environment and industry can assist students in bridging university and industry needs for the future (Ayoubi et al., 2017). The link between students and stakeholders is pivotal in shaping personal and career identities as students near college graduation (Jackson, 2016). The opportunities and benefits that universities are able to deliver to college graduates after completion of their degrees serves as one of the main recruitment methods in ensuring a return on students' investment in postsecondary education. Stakeholders want to ensure that students are prepared for their career aspirations, so colleges are expected to do more in preparing students for the workforce (Stokes, 2015).

Lack of preparation and articulation

However, research shows that there is a lack of preparation by higher education on how students articulate their skillsets to potential employers and how students are not obtaining as much on-the-job training when entering the workforce as compared to the past (Peck, 2017; Capelli, 2012). Hullinger (2015) stated that students are entering the workforce ill-prepared in problem solving, communication, and leadership skills. The lack of skills and inability of students being able to articulate their employability to future employers has placed a spotlight on how career services units operate at college campuses. Career centers are being forced to implement a comprehensive approach and explore how to communicate career readiness in

multiple facets of college (Dey & Real, 2010). Some groups may question why the responsibility of developing career readiness and employability is the job of higher education institutions, while others recognize the shift and realist perspective on how the function of higher education will continue to evolve over time (Stokes, 2015). The art of equipping students with necessary skills makes practical sense as the workforce continues to change.

Employer dissatisfaction. As a result, the lack of career readiness development leads to discourse between college students' employability and employer satisfaction overall. Higher demands from employers regarding career readiness, professionalism, and the ability to work with people from all different backgrounds serve as examples of unmet needs employers are voicing of recently hired college graduates through National Association of College & Employers (NACE) surveys and research (Fabris, 2015). Employers rely on innovative employees that can articulate clear ideas and solve complex problems in the workplace (Hart Research Associates, 2013). Placing career development at the center of curriculum both in and outside of the classroom in higher education will be essential to helping students navigate the complexities associated with entering the workforce and ultimately reaching the desired indicator of success (i.e. a well-paying job) after completion of a college degree (Peck, 2017; Mayhew et al., 2016). Stokes (2015) further argues that university leadership, employers, and policy makers need to reflect on their strengths and plans to tackle these challenges associated with cultivating career readiness among students.

Employer dissatisfaction is a not a new phenomenon and has been published in academic journals for the last three decades. Consistently employers state that skills related to communication, punctuality, critical thinking, interpersonal and leadership development, and working with others are areas college graduates could improve in when entering the workforce

(Davison et al.,1993; Paranto & Kelkar, 2000; Stevens, 2005). In 2015, AACU conducted a survey of questions for employers and college students. The results yielded concern among employers regarding students' skill areas specifically in communication and teamwork, while students ranked themselves higher in those categories (Jaschik, 2015). This discrepancy is referred to as the 'skills gap' in research regarding perceptions related to employers and students' career readiness (Moore & Morton, 2017). Therefore, action steps need to be taken to ensure students are bridging the gap by understanding their own development and career readiness.

Student Affairs and Career Readiness

One of the delivery methods for career readiness education can be through co-curricular learning opportunities managed outside of the classroom. Co-curricular learning incorporates an integrative learning approach through programs and activities outside of coursework that includes intentional learning and development that can be connected directly to competencies related to students' academic and/or career goals (Vong & Vrkljan, 2020). Students spend significant amounts of time outside of an academic classroom through student organization involvement, service learning opportunities, and volunteering (Roberts, 2017). Through student engagement and various academic experiences, students form pre-professional identities that determine their influence on how they will engage with employers and explain credibility, strengths, work experiences, skills, etc. (Jackson, 2016). Student affairs in particular, has the opportunity to equip students with necessary skills needed outside of classroom learning (Peck, 2017). Skills gained from participation in co-curricular experiences is essential because it can lead to job preparation after college graduation (Griffin, 2016). Consequently, co-curricular experiences provide a foundation for students to foster skill development, showcase talents, and

enhance skillsets as students prepare to enter a competitive global workforce (NACE, 2015; Peck, 2017).

Additionally, student engagement and career readiness is tied to students' awareness of where they are on the identity development spectrum and where they would like to be (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). "A student can only learn effectively when he/she undertakes a particular skill or competence in an environment as close to real life as possible" (Berger & Wild, 2017, p. 431). The exposure and learning opportunities students gain from co-curricular experiences can impact holistic development, which directly transfers into the workplace (Peck, 2017). For student affairs to be sustainable and thrive, finding ways to teach students to understand and articulate the skills gained from employment and involvement in co-curricular experiences is essential (Peck et al., 2016). Furthermore, co-curricular experiences could have a significant impact on students' employability and the development of skills employers are looking for that can be taught through various learning outcomes.

The Importance of Career Readiness in Student Affairs

NACE's (2015) definition of career readiness aligns with various functions of student affairs' understanding of holistic student development as well. Student affairs professionals might not recognize how their roles impact students' career readiness, but it is imperative that students affairs is ready to fully participate in new models of higher education and contribute as policy and changes occur (Kruger & Peck, 2017). Research suggests that areas within student affairs contributes to the development of soft skills employers seek through co-curricular programs that include leadership, communication, critical thinking, global awareness, and conflict resolution (Swan & Arminio, 2017; Athas et al., 2013).

Students undergo dramatic formation as they develop their thoughts, values, thinking, and how they feel about one's self during collegiate experiences and co-curricular learning provides the opportunity to develop one's identity through dynamic environments and social groups (Liversage et al., 2018). Exploring ways to improve co-curricular experiences outside of the classroom contributes to the holistic development of students and provides opportunities for them to reason, problem solve, organize, interpret information, and exercise critical thinking when needed (Boden & Nedeva, 2010).

Career Readiness and Student Development

Student development is not new and researchers continue to refine co-curricular education to enhance desired student learning outcomes related to a variety of experiences that could include student organization involvement, study abroad opportunities, student employment, or community service (Peck & Preston, 2017). As a student develops, they become more complex as developmental capabilities grow and advance as a result of being in a collegiate environment of higher learning (Sanford, 1967). Student development theory explains the rationale and link to calculated design of programs and practices to obtain desired student outcomes (Branch et al., 2019), such as career readiness. Student development theory identifies and addresses student needs, policy changes, program designs, and environments that stimulate healthy, positive advancement in students as well (Patton et al., 2016). Outside of the classroom, co-curricular educational experiences shape students' career readiness and assist in career decision choices for the future (Peck et al., 2016). Through student engagement and academic experiences, students form their sense of identity and desire for intended professions and pre-professional identities that eventually influence how students engage with employers in explaining credibility, strengths, work experiences, and skills (Jackson, 2016). It is important to

highlight how learning and identity development are intertwined (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010).

Examples of Career Readiness in Student Affairs. The first example of career readiness in student affairs is the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) and NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation collaborated on a study that highlighted linkage between students' professional growth and co-curricular involvement/employment. With reflective activities, students could learn to couple not only technical skill development, but also interpersonal skill development during their collegiate time (Peck et al., 2016). Moreover, student involvement, whether it is through student organizations or student employment can holistically influence competencies and skills that could increase students' career readiness (Peck, 2017). A second example is about a study conducted in 2013 that highlighted how employment within a student affairs division assisted students in linking knowledge and real-world application through their student worker position to the foundations of soft skill development. The results yielded positive impacts on students' interpersonal skill development, personal wellness, sense of belonging to a community, and self-efficacy (Athas et al., 2013). Lastly, in a 2001 study, participants in leadership activities perceived personal growth and development through co-curricular involvement. The authors (Cress et al., 2001) suggested enhancement of leadership curriculum could positively impact students' development and understanding of global issues and societal pressures they will inevitably face after graduation. The commonalities between these studies incorporates reflection and specific curriculum that focuses on student development and explicit recognition of soft skill development for students to comprehend and articulate.

Student organizations and co-curricular learning opportunities provide outlets of support and community for students while obtaining their academic degrees. These experiences can potentially have a lasting impact on how students interact with the world according to a longitudinal study conducted (Bowman et al., 2015). Bowman et al. (2015) conducted a three-part survey during a student's freshman year, senior year, and six years after their college graduation. The results showed positive correlation associated of student involvement to volunteer work, community leadership, donation of money, news consumption, and multicultural awareness.

Professional identity and relation to career readiness development. Professional identities are born through co-curricular learning and student development opportunities as well. Professional identity is how one perceives them self, occupation they are entering, career goals, and how they explain their "self" to others (Cordie et al., 2019). The ability to link pre-professional identities to how students engage with employers is an important concept to teach (Jackson, 2016b). Educators must show how characteristics to the learner, academic program, and workplace links directly to skill transfer (Jackson, 2016; Jackson, 2016a). Obtaining a positive professional identity is important when increasing self-confidence, self-esteem, and interpersonal communication among students (Haghighat et al., 2019). Student affairs educators have co-curricular education learning opportunities and physical spaces for students to develop and engage through a variety of facets. Increasing intentionality in programming and teaching transferable skills is positively reinforced in research conducted thus far (Cress et al., 2001; Athas et al., 2013; Bowman et al., 2015; Peck et al., 2016).

Literature Review Discussion

After reviewing the research literature in this chapter, it is clear that student affairs plays a pivotal role in examining career readiness development among students at a higher education institution. The literature revealed that students currently struggle to understand and articulate their career readiness to future employers, stakeholders, and sometimes themselves. The research literature highlights the importance of career readiness in both higher education and student affairs and the pivotal role career readiness development plays in performance based funding moving forward for certain state models (Ellis, 2016). In addition to that, the literature defines what soft skills are, why employers are dissatisfied with recently hired college graduates, and provides context into better understanding students' inability to articulate career readiness to others. By creating more focus on career readiness in various arenas that can include the classroom, co-curricular learning, student employment, or other learning facets outside of the classroom – students can better articulate their worth and what they can offer to future employers. Additionally, unique research studies captured how intentional learning outcomes can positively influence students' understanding of themselves and specific skill development (Cress et al., 2001; Athas et al., 2013; Bowman et al., 2015; Peck et al., 2016). Shared communication between stakeholders such as educational personnel, alumni, and employers will be essential in bridging the 'skills gap' and reinforcing the importance of career readiness in higher education (Capelli, 2012; Moore & Morton, 2017).

Furthermore, student affairs educators are trained and educated on student development theory application and provide learning opportunities to promote individual institution's goals of learning and state strategic plans. The biggest challenge is to figure out what career readiness means to student affairs educators and if they are intentional in developing learning outcomes to

address career readiness to students, which is the main goal of my phenomenological study. Overall, this literature review provides context, reasoning, and action items that can be explored when embedding career readiness development into the structure of higher education institutions moving forward.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions will be judged on how they react to social and economic needs of society, especially when it comes to social mobility and careers (Tang, 2019). Career readiness is a known phenomena in higher education, but educators must attempt to figure out how to embed career readiness into academics and co-curricular education outside of the classroom (Stokes, 2015; Peck, 2017). Critical reflection, self-belief, career identity, lifelong learning, global citizenship, and resilience are underlying in conversations around career readiness, which undergraduates must engage with during college (Jackson, 2016). Co-curricular education and direct work with student affairs serves as an arena to accomplish this task. Student affairs, higher education administrators, and faculty know there is a current demand from industry to be able to effectively focus on career-related outcomes moving forward (Kruger & Peck, 2017). Therefore, educators must rise to the challenge in efforts to stay relevant and provide realistic products (i.e. career readiness) for college graduates after the completion of their degrees. This review of literature reinforces my decision to further explore student affairs educators' perceptions and understanding of career readiness. In the following chapter, I discuss methodology and the research design utilized in the execution of my study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

This dissertation study is guided by the following research question: How are student affairs educators making meaning of the concept of career readiness among undergraduate students they directly advise or supervise at a public, research institution in Texas? Because meaning making of career readiness among student affairs educators is the phenomenon under study, my dissertation findings helped me address the following subsequent research questions:

1). What guiding principles/theories or knowledge (informal or formal) frame student affairs educators' understanding of career readiness?

2). How do student affairs educators design student learning to align with their desired learning outcomes related to career readiness?

Within this chapter, I explain why I chose phenomenology as the approach to conduct this qualitative dissertation study, including but not limited to, providing a critique of phenomenology's historical and contemporary relevance and a discussion of its two types and corresponding features. Next, I outline my research design for this phenomenological study. A discussion of the research design includes an explanation of: a) my research(er) paradigm and positionality, b) the study's setting, c) a description of the sample, d) the specific methods I used to collect data, while also e) detailing my approach to data analysis and establishing trustworthiness of my findings. I simultaneously make clear connections on how all researcher decisions are informed by a phenomenological approach. Finally, the discussion of maintaining

credibility, trustworthiness, confirmability, and dependability concludes this chapter before proceeding to data collected in chapter four.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology was chosen because, “Phenomenology investigates the lived experience of various psychological phenomena” (Percy et al., 2015, p.77). Consequentlly, phenomenology makes the most sense as my qualitative method to implement in this study due to my efforts in trying to understand participants’ lived experiences and how student affairs educators approach the phenomena of career readiness in their daily work with students. Phenomenology is defined as the science or study of phenomena and is able to transform meaning into consciousness when conducting research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Zahavi, 2018). In the 1890s before World War I, phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl. This methodology is currently used as a guide to explore and analyze topics related to intentionality, perception, emotions, and general meaning of humans’ lived experiences. The focal point of phenomenology is centered on the intersection of mind and world, which relies heavily on how one makes sense of the world and experiences they encounter in life (Zahavi & Martiny, 2019; Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Phenomenology emerged during a time when psychology was beginning to be recognized as a scientific discipline. Husserl deemed phenomenology as a “descriptive psychology” because basic questions of one’s reality is rooted in the nature of the mind (Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Researchers argued that phenomenology possesses strong philosophical undertones. As a result, Stewart and Mickunas’s research (1990) clarified and emphasized four key philsophical perspectives that can be found in phenomenology, which include:

(a) Grounded in the Greek conception of philosophy’s search for wisdom,

(b) Suspend all presumptions about what is "real" until they are founded on a more certain basis,

(c) The idea that consciousness is always directed towards an object,

(d) The reality of an object is only developed through the meaning of an experience from an indivdual.

Then, the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, refined the idea of phenomenology to being a "study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2013, para. 1). Kant argued that humans naturally are able to spontaneously order a sequence of thoughts or intuition into a general type, which is recognized as "understanding" (Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Content is necessary to create thought and senses are needed to form intiution, which allows cognition (i.e. understanding) to develop when unifying these conceptual ideals. Foundationally, phenomenology can be captured through telling stories as a meaning-making process, where individuals select details of their experience(s) from their own stream of consciousness (Butcher, 1902). For my study, I sought to discover and explain meaning from the participant's point of view during data collection, which aligns with the main goal of qualitative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For clarity, note that qualitative inquiry is a broad approach to examine social experiences through the utilization of senses (i.e. see, her, and feel) in individuals' lived experiences (Liamputtong, 2019).

Phenomenology is significantly different than other philosophical thought. For instance, naturalism sought to reduce everything, including the human subject and its experiences, to the status of measurable physical objects (Brough, 2003). "The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenonmenon to a description of the universal essence" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 177). A researcher gathers multiple peoples' viewpoints who have

experienced the pheononmena and develops information as a whole from all people interviewed (Moustakas, 1994). You will find that phenomenology is often sought as a qualitative method to use in both social and health sciences. The next section highlights the different types of phenomenology that can be used in qualitiative studies.

Types of Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990) and psychological phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) are the two methodological approaches utilized in qualitative studies. With phenomenology today, it is mainly divided by two types that include descriptive (hermeneutic) and interpretative phenomenology (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). One of the underlying assumptions associated with hermeneutic phenomenology is that all participants experience the same phenomena based on the emotional, psychological, and social impact on one's lived experiences. For instance, in one study hermeneutic phenomenology was used to explore manifestations of mourning that young adults had with the loss of a parent. The researcher assumed that all young adults mourned their parents and that it impacted transitions into adulthood (Selene, 2020). Therefore, the researcher interprets lived experiences through their own critical lens with the hermeneutic approach.

Van Manen's approach is oriented towards a lived experience and interpretation of various chapters of life. His approach encompasses identifying the phenomena, themes from said phenomena, and the discovery of what constitutes a lived experience. From there, the researcher develops a description of the phenomena, focus on the topic of inquiry, and mediates or makes an interpretation from the lived experience gathered from an individual participant (Creswell, 2007). With this interpretative phenomenology research design, a researcher is able to examine the convergence and divergence of perceptions across a group of individuals. This approach

allows a single-case analysis for each participant before attempting to discover themes (Miller et al., 2018).

In interpretative phenomenology emphasis is placed on the descriptions participants provide from their lived experiences, rather than the researcher's interpretation (Moustakas, 1994). This approach encourages the researcher to come into the study with a fresh perspective towards whatever phenomena is being explored. From there, the researcher, analyzes the data by reducing down significant statements gathered in participant interviews and attemptes to identify themes (i.e. clusters of meaning) in that data collected (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

For this research study, I explored how student affairs educators made meaning of career readiness and how they incorporated career readiness into their advising practices. Once interviews concluded, I searched for clusters of common themes. Interpretative phenomenology is the methodology I chose to utilize in this research study. This approach is used to explore individuals' meaning making of significant experiences and reinforces a) diversity attached to lived experiences, b) freedom to explore context, and c) understand relationship to life narratives" (Miller et al., 2018, p. 240; Chan & Farmer, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, interpretative phenomenology is a contemporary, structured framework that can explore meaningful topics and provide deeper analysis of participants' interpretations of lived experiences, which ultimately aided my study.

Phenomenological Research Procedures

There are several things to consider when conducting a phenemenological study concerning research procedures. If a researcher is attempting to gather multiple perspectives related to a specific research problem, phenomenology is often a qualitative method that is

explored. “[As the researcher] it would be important to understand common experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop deeper understanding related to the features of the phenomena” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). The term “bracketing out” is used to highlight how researchers need to remove as much of their preconceived notions about the study as possible in efforts of listening to full descriptions of the phenomena that participants could provide during the research study, specifically in the data collection and analysis process where validity can also be demonstrated (Moustakas, 1994; Ahern, 1999; Chan et al., 2007). This is sometimes hard to achieve because the interpretative phenomenological analysis does not provide specific steps to execute “bracketing” (Giorgi, 2011). Hamill and Sinclair (2010) suggested that a literature review be delayed until after the data collection in efforts of not introducing any common themes that would be present in the literature. However, without the linkage of the literature review and research understudy, the justification and overall plan for the study could be lost.

In addition to that, intentionality needs to embedded in the sample population that the researcher seeks to recruit. Phenomenological studies typically incorporate multiple semi-structured interviews with participants that include open-ended questions that allow participants to provide rich descriptions of their lived experiences (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). Sometimes participants with the same lived experiences are recruited when conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological study, while in interpretative phenomenology participants are picked from similar backgrounds or professions to explore different perceptions of their own lived phenomena. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are typically employed in phenemological studies because they allow the opportunity for organic conversations to occur, while also covering necessary questions the researcher has as a part of the study. Then, open-ended questions are developed in efforts of providing textural and structural descriptions of the

experiences had and the components of a phenomelogical interview serve as both a method and technique (Creswell, 2007; Guerrero-Castaneda et al., 2017).

In a phenomenological study conducted in 2015, researchers sought to understand the perception of first-generation college students' career development during their collegiate experiences through semi-structured interviews and a focus group (Tate et al., 2015). This study is an example of how the interviewer serves as the instrument that collects data, but has to coexist with the phenomena as speech is exchanged. In a different study, a researcher examined the alignment of student-athletes' undergraduate major choices and their career field aspirations in life after sports (Navarro, 2015). Dialog and understanding how individuals make meaning of their lived experiences and choices set the foundation for the facilitation of this phenomenological study. For my study, I specifically sought out participants' definition of career readiness and how they delivered or incorporated career readiness topics into student advising. Student affairs educators could have knowledge of career readiness from what their education/training, other resources in the field, or they might not have any definition of career readiness at all. Open dialog and conversation was pivotal to my role as the researcher in this study in effort to understand the phenomena of career readines in co-curricular education.

Through virtual participant interviews conducted in this study, I gained perspective of what career readiness means to student affairs educators and how they incorporated career readiness into co-curricular learning through programming or direct advising with one or more undergraduate students. I chose semi-structured interviews as my form of data collection because I wanted the opportunity to allow participants the floor to share their thoughts related to interview questions posed, as well as having the opportunity to ask necessary follow-up questions if I had any. As the researcher, I relied on participants' lived experiences they have had

when interacting with students in a collegiate setting and gathered data from their interpretation of interview protocol that I shared with them during the semi-structured interviews I conducted. The approach I utilized is grounded in phenomenology's philosophical perspectives as I sought to gain understanding around the phenomena of career readiness and student affairs educators' realities and meaning making of their experiences with students.

Once the data was collected, clusters of meaning were formed through the identification of themes or signature statements present in the data. Van Manen (1997) suggests thorough examination of text is warranted in efforts of reflecting on content that is meaningful and thematic through data interpretation. Phenomenological analysis can be difficult because the views of experience(s) are complex (Smith et al., 2009). In my study, this occurred due to the variety of work experience(s) among my sample population in student affairs, participants' identities and lived experiences, and education or training backgrounds. Some participants appeared to have a lot of exposure and understanding of career readiness, whereas other participants did not have as much exposure or knowledge of career readiness.

In Harrison & Grant's (2016) study, clusters of meanings (themes) were created in efforts of understanding students' perceptions of their work readiness and graduate capabilities in a higher education music program. The researchers relied on what participants disclosed in their interviews and found meaning and commonalities through defining clusters and significant statements gathered. Researchers also suggest the use of a reflexive journal to better undertand how they experience the phenomena they are studying in efforts to draw a deeper understanding and connection of ideas gathered to assist them in data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lastly, I want to highlight more details related to "bracketing." When a researcher "brackets" their perspectives, it is an attempt to develop an open mind in data collection.

Reflection then acts as a tool for the researcher to understand the broader context of the underlying phenomena being studied. “By describing the norms of experience and what justifies both passive and active positings, a phenomenological theory of reason describes when and how consciousness is a consciousness of the world as it is” (Jacobs, 2013, p. 361). As such, I maintained an open mind and challenged myself to preserve that openness through data collection, so participants’ various viewpoints and opinions of career readiness, could inform my understanding of the phemonenon understudy.

Phenomenological Interviewing

Phenomenological interviewing requires the researcher to leave participant questions open-ended in efforts of enabling deeper reflection from participants as they think about those memories or encounters. That is to say, interviewing serves as a basic mode of data collection and attempts to understand how people make meaning of lived experiences, which is the basic function of phenomenological studies (Siedman, 2015; Reason, 1981). Questions were asked during facilitation of semi-structured interviews with participants during data collection. I avoided heavily structured interviews due to negative critiques by researchers who claim it does not allow an explorative qualitative approach to occur with their human subjects (Englander, 2020). I ensured participants were comfortable with me as the researcher and I provided an environment that allowed organic conversation to flow.

Siedman (2015) suggested four phenomenological themes that provide rationale and interview techniques in phenomenological studies and I applied them:

- Phenomenological Theme One: The temporal and transitory nature of human experience
- Phenomenological Theme Two: Subjective Understanding

- Phenomenological Theme Three: Lived experience as the foundation of "phenomena"
- Phenomenological Theme Four: The emphasis on meaning and meaning in context

Siedman (2015) argues that these phenomenological themes provide logic for the structure, technique, approach to analyzing, interpretation, as well as sharing interview material that provides guidance for the interviewer. Polkinghorne (1985) recommends that researchers should interview 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the same phenomena, and sometimes multiple interviews are required. Creswell (2007) also points out that other forms of data including observations, journals, poetry, art, and music can be used. The researcher can then start analyzing the data from question to question to seek out signature themes (i.e. clusters of meaning) and statements that participants may provide. The ability to go through the *how,* the *what*, and descriptively capture responses based on the researcher's own reflection constitutes the basic skills of a phenomenological interviewer (Englander, 2019b).

Role of Literature & Critique of Phenomenology

One of the most debated issues and most misunderstood aspects around phenomenology involves concerns with the phenomenological methods used and if there is one set that is utilized (Zahavi, 2018). With either approach to phenomenology, a researcher has to engage in data collection with an open mind and seek to understand the subjects as they reveal their truth and lived experiences, rather than trying to transfer thoughts or interpretations of their own thinking to participants being researched. As previously mentioned, "bracketing out" is a common method linked to phenomenology, but has no set instructions of how to execute them in a study (Giorgi, 2011). In addition to that, some researchers argue that phenomenological interviewing is passive, while others state that engagement and reflection is pivotal to the qualitiative method (Englander, 2020; Zahavi & Martiny, 2019). In contrast, phenomenology is able to configure meaning into

consciousness when conducting research, but it not always done perfectly (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Signifcant statements or trends captured in the semi-structured interviews need to be identified by the researcher. For my study, I recruited and interviewed participants who work full-time as student affairs educators in the Student Programming Office at State U Texas. In my research design section, I further explain why these specific individuals met the participant criteria for my study.

Comprehension of broader philosophical functions also need to be understood at the beginning of the study from the resesarcher's lens. For my study, I went in with an open perspective as it relates to career readiness prior to conducting my participant itnerviews. I also recognized that the participants' perspectives related to career readiness as a phenomena differed from my own opinion. The research study was grounded in the interpretative phenemonological approach and I, as the researcher, relied on participants' descriptive, lived experiences to better understand career readiness in the realm and realities of student affairs educators. It was helpful to gather collective thoughts on a shared experience or phenomena, but I had to remember the thoughts gathered did not represent all viewpoints on career readiness as a phenomena. Other institutions in a national and global context could have multiple views related to career readiness and co-curricular education as a whole outside of my research study.

A phenomenoglical study and its participants is a snapshot of a particular demographic and cannot reflect the thoughts of a population as a whole. Therefore, I cannot broaden the lived experiences of my participants to fit a box or translate to other populations when presenting my research findings. In addition to those factors, my sample size was fairly small and was the perspective of student affairs educators at one institution. McKenna (1982) also argues that an individual's perception may not represent reality. For example, someone may remember a

particular memory in a different way than someone else who experienced that same memory shared. In this instance, I did not have that appear in my study where people shared common experiences or memories they recalled with each other. Finally, I would need to allow participants to fully describe the phenomena in their own way with no preconceived notions or the reasearchers' own thoughts provided in the interview setting (Creswell, 2007). This was a challenge for me in some of my interviews because I like to discuss things in great detail, but I relied on the interview protocol and provided unbiased space in efforts to capture genuine thoughts and feelings related to the phenomena from the study's participants.

Research Design & Paradigm

When conducting a research study, it is important to identify necessary methodological steps needed to capture data. Specific forms of data are sometimes hard to find, so falling back on an open-ended adaptive intstrument, such as a human being, who can provide firsthand accounts of data is important when conducting a qualitiative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This section of my methodology chapter provides insight into the research(er) paradigm, my positionality, the study setting, participant sample details, study methods, data analysis, and methods to establish trustworthiness throughout the research study.

Research(er) paradigm and positionality

Philosophical assumptions guide research studies and designs (Creswell, 2007; Guba Lincoln, 1994). A research paradigm is a collection of common beliefs and arguments shared between researchers on how to understand and address various problems (Kuhn, 1962). Paradigms, or human constructions, indicate where a researcher is coming from when it comes to constructing meaning found within data (Lincoln, 2000). This section identifies my philsophical

beliefs I carry as a researcher and how applies to this study, along with my researcher positionality.

Constructivist Paradigm. I ascribe to the constructivist paradigm, which states that individuals' interpretations of their world are socially constructed, and therefore their knowledge and understanding of reality develop through individuals' perceptions and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2002). There is "no objective truth waiting for us to discover it" (Crotty, 2003, p. 8). A person can have multiple interpretations of the world that change and adapt as an individual moves through various chapters of life and can redefine the same experiences in different ways (Crotty, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, social constructivism aims to provide meaning on how individuals generate their own realities (Patton, 2002). For instance, a student affairs educator who has been in the field for 50 plus years may have a different understanding or conception of what career readiness is as compared to a new student affairs educator who has been in the field for less than 5 years. Generational differences, location, individuals' own beliefs, etc. construct individuals' truth.

A constructivist paradigm forces a researcher to be aware and mindful of their own biases or things that can influence them as they conduct a research study (Merriam, 2002). This was important for me to be aware of during all facets of the study, especially when it came to ensuring that the participants' voices were heard. I relied on peoples' lived experiences when interpreting data and remembered humans do not merely experience events, they create them (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Social constructions are defined by actors, who are able to make plans and decisions related to their past, current, and future experiences. "Social constructions of reality presuppose the ability to act, because society is more than, and not the same thing as mere coexistence"

(Pfadenhauer & Knobaluch, 2019, p. 65). Social constructions of reality are complex processes that are constantly evolving and changing (Luckmann, 1967). Various participant perspectives were different as they made meaning of professional lived experiences in the field of student affairs when I collected data. This paradigm allowed me flexibility and one's own stories to be embedded within both the data collection and analysis steps of this research study. My particular study is grounded in this paradigm as I sought to understand student affairs educators' definitions of career readiness and how they do or do not embed the phenomena into co-curricular education they deliver in their daily work.

Researcher Positionality

"The process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher" was maintained through reflexivity" (Lincoln et al., 2000, p. 183). This process allowed the researcher to identify biases and assumptions to help the reader understand the positionality of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). My positionality as a student affairs educator and scholar centered the focus of my research on how career readiness development can affect students of all backgrounds in the future. Education and discussion related to this topic has the potential to impact students moving forward and is a bias I carried into the study. If I did not recognize this prior to going into the study, dangers could have emerged such as misinterpretations, misinformation, and misrepresentation of the participants' experience(s) in my data (Milner, 2007). Participants' views, backgrounds, and their understanding varied significantly in data collection, so it was imperative, that I as the researcher, ensured steps (i.e. member checks) to verify that I captured participants' voices correctly.

My positionality is grounded in my identity as a first-generation, middle class, white heterosexual female that grew up in the southern portion of the United States. I have some

understanding of my whiteness, privilege, and power that has allowed me to obtain and navigate educational opportunities throughout my academic career. I did not attend a predominantly white institution for my undergraduate and master's degree. Through that experience, I was able to gain exposure to a variety of identities and diversity education through multiple lens of leadership opportunities I explored as both an undergraduate and graduate student. In addition to that, I believe I gained necessary soft skills through co-curricular opportunities I was given. In those leadership roles, I learned to navigate conflict resolution, how to lead teams, and explored methods of motivating others towards common goals. This is a bias I was aware of when conducting this study. Furthermore, I have only lived and worked in the state of Texas, which limited my exposure to other environments and locations who may operate differently. I have worked in student affairs for a little over a decade at two institutions within the same region – one institution is a PWI and the other institution is comprised of high numbers of minoritized populations and is an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution).

These experiences affected my perception and own experiences related to career readiness in higher education. One of the things that motivated me to complete this study was the effort to break up the monotony that sometimes constructs daily lives of student affairs educators and their educational mission as it relates to career readiness education. Providing a narrative and opportunity to highlight how career readiness does or does not fit into co-curricular education opens up opportunities for more conversations and plans of action for all students in a higher education setting. Milner (2007) suggested a framework to better interpret researchers' racial and cultural positionalities that include researching of self, researching self in relations to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system. This framework helped in my own reflection as the researcher and posed reflexive questions that captured my study's

findings from a broader lens. I found this topic to be important for future generations of college students from all backgrounds. My positionality affected the way I look at higher education policy, strategic goals, and the future of career readiness education outside of the classroom. I took this view and challenged myself to analyze participants' experiences critically in effort to better understand the current state of career readiness education in co-curricular education and comprehend participants' description of career readiness in their daily work with students.

Study Setting

This research study was conducted at a four-year public university in Texas that is a predominantly white institution. I refer to this institution as State U Texas. As of Fall 2019, the institution had more than 50,000 students enrolled. This institution is classified as an R1 institution, where research activities are high. Around 72% of students receive financial aid, and the institution is close to receiving Hispanic-serving institution status. 133 undergraduate degree programs exist and the institution strives to have a global presence. Over 1,100 recognized student organizations are active on campus through a variety of special interest groups, Greek affiliated organizations, and traditions-based programs. Through reported metrics, white students comprised more than half of the student population, Hispanics constitute 22% of the student population, Asians follow behind with 8% of student demographics, and then 3% makes up the Black student population at this institution of higher learning. Less than 20% of the student population identifies as first generation college students.

As of 2018, 20 to 1 is the reported student to faculty ratio and 15,000 to 18,000 degrees were awarded the last five years. Student organizations are spread out through various tiers. For instance, some student organizations are not advised by full-time staff members in a student affairs office, while other organizations receive department funding and are advised by full-time

staff members in a student affairs unit. These department student organizations are split between offices housed within the Division of Student Affairs. Some student organizations have dedicated space to utilize at any point in time, while other student organizations have to seek and reserve or book their own meeting spaces. Different advising methods are utilized in two separate programming areas as well. One department maintains a coaching philosophy where students are able to make decisions, while another department follows a true programming model, where staff have more influence over decision-making within a group. I interviewed a unit that coordinates and facilitates a true programming model.

Description of the Sample

Phenomenology is commonly used when a researcher is seeking to analyze interpreted experiences from a specific environment (Percy et al., 2015). Therefore, I used criterion sampling to select participants. Criterion sampling means that all cases meet the same criterion mainly to ensure quality assurance (Creswell, 2007). Participants for this study were full-time student affairs educators who have direct interaction with undergraduate students in an advising/supervision role, regardless of their identity and identity statuses, training, years of experience, or position level. By advising role, I mean that participants had direct oversight over a student involvement committee or student organization. The selection of this sampling method aligned with the interpretative phenomenological approach I chose for this study because I sought people with similar backgrounds who interacted with the phenomena of career readiness in their co-curricular programming they oversaw. The participants' experiences with the phenomena varied, but their advising of students or student organizations aligned. The sample consisted of eight participants and did not maintain racial and gender diversity. To identify

potential participants, I obtained public personnel information from the student programming department staff webpage, which was accessed online in December 2020.

To recruit participants, I contacted the director of the student programming department at the beginning of December 2020 (see Appendix B) and asked for permission to send a recruitment email to their staff regarding the invitiation to participate in my research study. Once permission was obtained from the director of the student programming department, I emailed all staff who fit the criterion from the student programming department and invited them to participate in the study in the early portion of January 2021 via email (see Appendix C). In that initial recruitment email, an overview of the study and a Qualtrics link (see Appendix D) was provided that routed potential participants to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire collected the following information:

- What functional area the individual works in
- How long they have been working in the field of student affairs and how long they have been at the institution where research is being conducted
- How long have they been advising or working with students in higher education
- Inquire if they currently advise or supervise students in their role(s)
- Inquire if they are interested in proceeding forward with the study

The question about if they currently advise or supervise students in their role(s) helped me determine who to include or exclude in the study.

Participant Profiles. The following description of the eight participants interviewed in my research study is highlighted below. This information provides additional insight and sets the stage to provide nuances and similarities captured in the data before proceeding to my summary statement of findings in chapter four. My study had eight participants who worked full-time in

the student programming department in the Division of Student Affairs at State U Texas. Their experiences varied and a table is included below highlighting some of the differences captured in my participant profiles that were gathered from the Qualtrics survey participants answered prior to their interviews hosted via Zoom. All of the participants interviewed had advising assignments for one or more student committees. These advising assignments are directly tied to their full-time roles and is a part of their job descriptions.

Table 1

Profiles of Participants

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Title	Advising Experience	Education
Louis	White	59	Assoc. Dir.	5-10 years	Master's deg.
Sarah	White	37	Program Coord.	5-10 years	Master's deg.
Monica	Black/African Am.	49	Stu. Dev. Spec. III	10+ years	Master's deg.
Rebecca	White	52	Assistant Dir.	10+ years	Master's deg.
Tyler	White	26	Graduate Assistant	1-3 years	Bachelor's deg.
Rose	No Answer	No Answer	Stu. Dev. Spec. III	5-10 years	Master's deg.
Kayleigh	White	41	Assistant Dir.	10+ years	Master's deg.
Alyssa	White	27	Stu. Dev. Spec. II	5-10 years	Master's deg.

As you can see from Table 1, my sample varied in age, levels within student affairs (e.g., new professional and mid-level professionals), and advising experience. Education varied amongst my participants as well. Everyone had a master's degree in higher education, besides Rose, Tyler, and Monica. In the next section, I provide context and highlight a common career

readiness tool that was utilized by the advising team in the student programming department until 2020.

National Association of Campus Activities (NACA) NEXT Use. NACA NEXT is a career readiness tool that was created by NACA and research partners to help students connect their co-curricular learning to skillsets desired by employers and is designed to aid in developing students' employability through reflection, according to NACA's website (https://www.naca.org/BLOG/Pages/3-31-2021-whats-next.aspx). Some of these skillsets include communication, influencing others, teamwork, and problem solving. State U Texas was selected as a host institution for a national pilot study on NACA NEXT back in 2015 and is one of the two pilot study locations in the state of Texas. Through direct communication with the associate director of the student programming department, I learned that he worked closely with NACA in ensuring NACA NEXT was being used by the advising team in his department. NACA NEXT became a required tool student affairs educators had to use who advised students in leadership roles housed under the student programming department. The required use of NACA NEXT started in 2015 and ended in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. NACA NEXT surveyed ratings related to a student's skill development through the lens of the chief student leader/committee executive team member taking the survey and the lens of the advisor that worked directly with that individual student. The surveys were administered around the start of an academic year (August/September), mid-point of the academic year (December/January), and the end of an academic year (April/May). Both the student and advisor would review the completed surveys and host one-on-one discussions related to the ratings. This process continued to rotate with new student leaders every academic year in the student programming department. The student programming department was the only department in the Division of Student Affairs

at State U Texas who utilized NACA NEXT between 2015-2020. The use of NACA NEXT was not a part of the criterion sampling used.

Study Methods

I utilized an interpretative approach to phenomenology in my exploration of how student affairs educators made meaning of career readiness. All interviews were conducted virtually via the Zoom platform. Due to my methodological approach, a smaller sample size of eight participants benefitted me in efforts of gathering rich, descriptive information to understand the phenomena of career readiness (Patton, 2002). Eight participants were sent the consent form in the middle of January 2021. Staff who did not meet the criterion to move forward with interviews, were contacted at the same time to inform them interviews would not be scheduled with them. From there, I proceeded scheduled participant interviews with the individuals selected via Zoom. The next section highlights how I conducted the study step by step.

Participant Interviews. Selected participants completed one semi-strucutured interview that was recorded via Zoom over the months of January and February 2021. The interviews averaged around 60 minutes. Prior to the interview being scheduled, I provided the participant with a consent form to sign electronically, that explained the reasoning behind the conducted research study, how I would maintain confidentiality, and gratitude for taking the time to participate in the study. The consent form (reference Appendix A) was collected via email, with detailed descriptions of how to sign the form. The consent form served as an agreement between myself, as the researcher, and participant to a) partake in the interview and b) to have the interview recorded via Zoom. The interview was recorded and a transcript generated after the Zoom interview. I also took meticulous handwritten notes during the interview and ensured I asked clarifying questions from participants if I did not understandig something. I used interview

protocol (see Appendix F & G) to guide the interview(s) as each participant was asked the same open-ended questions and I probed for additional context when needed. From that point, participants answered the interview protocol and provided their own meaning-making context of experiences had (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), which aligned with the phenomenological methodology used.

Interview Protocol Development. I developed an interview protocol to guide and gather answers to research questions by allowing participants to share their perspectives and lived experiences through their student affairs work experiences and knowledge of career readiness education. The initial questionnaire sent in the recruitment email helped me gather participant data and knowledge of their experiences in student affairs thus far. Once that review of the questionnaire was complete, I formed questions that explored how they advised or supervised students, what their programming models look like, and how they formulated learning outcomes related to the programs or student organizations they oversaw when it comes to curriculum development. These questions were addressed in the initial interview. The interview protocol as a whole provided the platform to display how participants understood and defined career readiness. From there, I was able to better understand if student affairs educators planned and developed their learning outcomes with career readiness as an objective in mind when creating learning and programming outcomes.

Data Analysis

Phenomenology is portrayed as an ideal qualitative research design because the researcher must make their own interpretation of the data and "mediate" between various meanings they come across in the research (Van Manen, 1990). As a researcher explores the phenomenon in their study, it is not easily translated until you gather and understand individuals'

subjective experiences (Wertz, 2005). It is also important to allow unexpected meanings from the data emerge and maintain an open attitude (Chan et al., 2007). When looking at past phenomenological studies on career readiness, reflection was one of the main components in how researchers structured questions posed to participants. Phenomenology seeks to understand "the essence or structure of a phenomenon" (Merriam, 2002, p.93), so the presence of incorporating reflection in those studies connects with the foundation of phenomenological research designs. Miles & Huberman (1994) stated that it is common for a researcher to begin data analysis during the data collection process in efforts to start identifying themes and make modifications to interview protocol if needed.

Evaluating patterns and themes in the interviews conducted is something I conducted after every interview. During this, I analyzed the data and grouped large clusters of ideas with support of reasoning included (Creswell, 2007). Stake (1995) refers to this portion of analysis as the development of issues. Recording the interview and obtaining an audio transcript assisted me in my review and I listed to the recordings multiple times to identify themes and patterns that participants identified. When determining codes and themes, it was important to allow them to emerge and revise as necessary, especially in the early stages of data analysis in efforts of exploring different interpretations of discovery that is present in the data (Mertens, 2019). From there, I used first and second-cycle coding to derive patterns and themes from the data (Mertens, 2019). I also used cross-case analysis when looking at multiple interviews. Cross-case analysis can be used to assist in making interpretations of the meaning making participants provide (Merriam, 1988).

Trustworthiness

I used three procedures to establish trustworthiness in this interpretative phenomenological study: a) credibility, b) transferability, and c) dependability. I bracketed out prior knowledge and preconceived notions, and relied on the data collected in interviews to interpret the results gathered (Creswell, 2012). Thus, the judgments I made about my data emerged from participants' viewpoints, helping me to establish credibility of my findings. I also conducted member checks (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Once the interview was transcribed, a copy of the transcript was sent to the participant for review. Member checks allowed individuals to clarify things that were said during an interview and provide any additional meaning, if needed, behind the words shared during the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability was supported through rich context in my interpretation of the findings. The researcher "can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). My use of thick description helped me to interpret and feel the context, voices, feelings, actions, and interaction I shared with participants when relaying my findings (Creswell, 2007). Further, rich descriptions allowed me to discover apparent themes collected in the interviews and descriptive details, which can assist in replication of the study.

Lastly, I maintained an audit trail to help me determine the dependability of my findings in the tracking of my thought process throughout data collection and analysis. An audit trail "describes in detail how data was collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the research inquiry" (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). Being conscious of my decisions, as I made interpretations of what the participant told me, helped me to establish

trustworthiness (Rodham, et al., 2015). Through these steps taken, I identified clusters of meaning and relied on the participants' viewpoints to guide my interpretation of the data. I also relied on my dissertation committee's expertise as it relates to qualitative research.

Study Limitations

As in any research study, findings have some limitations. First, I chose to focus on participants that directly advise or work with students individually and in organizations in a specific division of student affairs. The selection of this sample population provided the lens needed to understand the perceptions of career readiness and the field of student affairs through a direct firsthand lens of student affairs educators' advising experiences. Other entities and professionals could be delivering career-readiness education at the university, but a sample from this specific population was selected for the study. The representation and views of student affairs educators from my study's site may not be representative of the views of others at different institutions.

Second, this study was not representative of all student affairs educators. Participants have a variety of advising assignments that expose them to various student populations. Student affairs professionals with various identities may not be fully represented in this study. The study highlighted a sample of a population and participants cannot be assumed to be the voice of all advisors. Furthermore, the study site was a predominantly White, public 4-year institution in Texas. Other institutions in the state with different demographics could potentially be implementing career-readiness education differently. Moreover, it may be that Texas's 60x30TX strategic plan is similar to other U.S. states' strategic plans, but it is not the same.

Finally, the last limitation was related to my short time spent in the field. A span of 8 weeks and multiple interviews with various student affairs educators in one unit only yields a

limited point of view from one study setting. I do not foresee this unit's definition of career readiness being dramatically different from other functional areas in student affairs, but different definitions of career readiness might exist cross departments and I am not able to gather all of that data from the institution as a whole.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological steps that were taken and utilized in this study. The goal of this research study was to better understand career readiness within co-curricular education outside of the classroom. In this chapter, I provided the reasoning as to why phenomenology was the qualitative method selected for this study, critiques of historical and contemporary relevance related to phenomenology, and various features related to both interpretative and descriptive phenomenology. My research paradigm, positionality, the study setting and details, and how I collected data and ensured a rigorous research process was also introduced. My intention for this study is to fill holes in the literature related to career readiness education in student affairs. In the next chapter, I present my research findings collected from interviews conducted.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present an analysis of my data and answer my dissertation study's primary research question: How are student affairs educators making meaning of the concept of career readiness among undergraduate students they directly advise or supervise at a public, research institution in Texas? I also answer the two secondary research questions pertaining to my dissertation study:

(a) What guiding principles/theories or knowledge (informal or formal) frame student affairs educators' understanding of career readiness?

(b) How do student affairs educators design learning outcomes to align with their learning outcomes related to career readiness?

Consistent with an interpretative approach to phenomenology (Miller et al., 2018), I include accounts of the eight participants to illustrate how they appeared to make meaning of career readiness. This chapter concludes with an analysis of student-learning designs implemented by individual participants and the department, along with student learning designs that promote professional competencies as defined by NACE.

Participants Make Meaning of Career Readiness Differently

My analysis revealed informal (e.g., lived experiences) and formal (e.g., training) experiences in student affairs and through daily interactions with students differently shaped participants' conceptualization of career readiness. That is, there was an understanding of career readiness that emphasized NACE's developmental outcomes (see Appendix I). Thus, with my findings I was able to simultaneously answer my study's primary research question and the first

secondary research question about informal and formal knowledge. Conceptualization of career readiness varied from participant to participant. I use the term *conceptualization* to highlight those variations in how participants describe career readiness, through my discussion of the first theme: Informal Knowledge.

Informal Knowledge

Three participants tied their conceptualization of career readiness to specific memories and experiences gained. I categorized data as *informal knowledge* that emerged from personal memories or lived experiences in work-place environments that shaped participants' approach to career readiness today. For instance, Louis and Rose stated previous careers guided their understanding of career readiness. Louis and Rose previously worked outside of higher education and articulated those careers influenced their conceptualization of career readiness. Louis worked in the banking and construction industry. Rose worked for a global company and created their own career counseling business to assist college graduates and middle-aged professionals seeking career opportunities.

Both Rose and Louis expressed their current positions as positions from which they wanted to retire. "Career readiness is giving opportunities to develop skills they [students] will use while they are in school and involved in student organizations," said Rose. Louis supported Rose's perspective, asserting career readiness is (a) an opportunity to understand what students are getting out of co-curricular learning and (b) being able to apply and communicate the learning or skills gained.

Rose and Louis were the only participants that had experience outside of higher education. Their understanding of career readiness proved to be more in depth as compared to other participants. I feel this is largely in part due to their time of working in both industry and

higher education, along with knowledge of what employers are looking for in new hires firsthand. Rose also volunteered information related to the career counseling business they ran after working for a global company. Rose voiced:

> When I first started my business, I was in the Denton/Dallas area and I thought there would be a line of young people out my door with various colleges nearby. However, once I hung my shingles, most of the people who asked for my services were mid-level professionals who had decided they wanted to change their career path, and younger people did not come to me unless their parents solicited me.

The realization that young people or people new to the job market did not prioritize career readiness shocked Rose because they remembered how critical career services were when they worked at the global company. In that position, Rose served as a liaison to students from Saudi Arabia, who were completing degrees in the United States and participating in a scholarship program. For every year of education the student received, the student had to pay back the company in years of service and employment. Rose stated:

> This really shaped where I went after that because I encountered a lot of students who signed onto this program at their parents' encouragement . . . but the students ended up in majors they were not happy with. For a student to change majors and abandon that scholarship, meant a financial hit for them and their families.

Rose recognized a gap they could assist in and this lived experience served as their main motivation to start a career counseling business. Rose felt they could help counsel students early, which would help students select career paths without changing majors repeatedly. Rose thought their main duty as an advisor was to "help prepare students with the skill sets they need, not only to be student leaders, but to use in a career." The experiences Rose had prior to their current

position shed light on the importance of informal knowledge and the way participants related it to their conceptualization of career readiness.

Louis also pulled his definition of career readiness from previous work experiences. Louis worked in both the banking and construction industry as an independent contractor before venturing to higher education. Louis expressed "culture shock" starting a career in higher education, after being in the private sector for so long.

Louis described career readiness as a "creative element when talking to students." Louis pointed out gaining skills is important, but he also said, if "[student affairs educators] do not help [students] round out, I think we do a great disservice." Louis also stated his perspective on career readiness was broad due to his work experiences because he wanted to broaden students' experiences and push students' to attempt challenges (e.g., public speaking) outside of their comfort zones. The perspectives of career readiness Rose and Louis shared were directly tied to previous work experiences outside of higher education, exposure that influenced their understanding of career readiness differently from other study participants.

For example, Kayleigh voiced her understanding of career readiness came from watching how her father treated employees and gauged their success. Kayleigh stated her father set high expectations, believed the best in people, and tried to find those opportunities for people to flourish in the workplace. Kayleigh also recalled memories of her interactions with two mentors as an undergraduate student and described how those experiences impacted the value and learning she took away from her collegiate experience, leading her to pursue a career in shaping how students develop. Kayleigh's responses during the interview were extremely straightforward, which complimented their blunt advising style. Kayleigh stated:

> I do think a lot of my strengths and weaknesses are that I work from my gut. These are the lessons that I have learned myself the hard way or encountered. I think a lot of that is honestly career readiness.

Kayleigh then shared what was being done in the department shaped her approach to career readiness. According to Kayleigh, the department's required use of National Association of Campus Activities (NACA) NEXT and its career-readiness evaluations breeds an environment where students are able to fail and learn.

Rose's, Louis's, and Kayleigh's perspectives illustrate how personal memories and lived experiences in the workplace contribute to the informal knowledge that shapes student affairs educators' understanding of career readiness. My data analysis revealed informal knowledge and lived experiences provides students' confidence in understanding advisors' perspectives and from where their guidance or advice is derived. In summary, the informal knowledge of memories and lived experiences highlighted these participants' viewpoints and how they conceptualized career readiness. In the next section of my discussion findings, I analyze the second theme: Formal Knowledge.

Formal Knowledge

My analysis suggested formal knowledge was gained through academic courses, participation of career services, and other types of professional training. For instance, Tyler voiced he took a career development course as an elective in his graduate program. From the course, he learned career readiness, in his mind, resembled a scatter plot and was not a linear function. Tyler stated, "Career readiness is being able to understand your own individual passions, whether that is correlated to a specific job or even broader than that." Tyler expressed people in general associated career readiness with being able to fully understand, prepare, and

use strengths and interests to a potential career. Monica framed her understanding in career readiness in soft and hard skills that included, "leadership, communication skills, and fiscal responsibility. . . . I provide my documentation and feedback to my students to fully develop in their leadership roles." Monica differed from Tyler when they stated, "NASPA [Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education] and NCORE [National Conference on Race and Ethnicity] values are something that I think about. The NASPA values are a checklist for me and were also a guiding practice at my previous institution." Sarah, however, stated her understanding of career readiness comes from the professional development training the Division of Student Affairs at State U Texas hosted. Lastly, Alyssa grounded her understanding of career readiness in services offered through career services units—including resume preparation, networking, interview prep, and career counseling. Alyssa did not provide a definition of career readiness and, when I asked for clarification on certain questions, circled back to career services offered. Alyssa later stated she used rubrics provided through the division and resources from her alma mater's career development page to provide resources to assist students' with understanding their career readiness. Rebecca and Sarah were the only participants that categorized their understanding of career readiness into NACA NEXT and knowing what skills employers want.

These examples of formal knowledge related to career readiness vary, but importance can be found in each one as it relates to that specific participant. My analysis suggested formal knowledge provides student affairs educators with deep and concrete understanding of career readiness needed to make college students career ready. Moreover, knowledge not only contributes to student affairs educators' conceptualization of career readiness, but also provides resources and various career-readiness tools that can be discussed with or provided to students. To summarize, examples of formal knowledge included: (a) academic courses related to career

readiness, (b) guiding practices from NASPA and NCORE, (c) professional training, (d) career services offered, and (e) NACA NEXT. In the next section, I provide analysis of the final and third theme I discovered: Daily Student Interactions.

Daily Student Interactions

Student affairs educators frequently described students as career ready when they could articulate what they had learned clearly and skills developed aligned with employer needs. My analysis suggested participants assessed students' career readiness through daily student interaction. Although career readiness may not have been a daily topic discussed among participants, responses related to future plans or ideas of how this student programming department planned to address career readiness appeared. For instance, Tyler voiced, "being able to fully understand, prepare, and utilize the strengths and interests that you have to a potential career is oftentimes when people think of career readiness." Tyler, along with other participants such as Rose, Kayleigh, Alyssa, and Louis, stated they enjoyed helping students make learning connections and creating an environment where conversations could happen. The ability of students to articulate and market themselves was a component these student affairs educators emphasized during interviews. Furthermore, Monica stated, "This [fully developing students in their leadership roles] happens through meeting facilitation, project management, and the student actualizing tasks." Monica has both team and individual meetings with student leaders weekly and is constantly prompting them to use a best practices chart (see Appendix N) to tackle efficiency. In addition, Monica consistently tasks students with critically thinking through an event and developing risk management protocols for diversity education programs, workshops, and the annual conference Monica's committee hosts. The student leaders in the student

programming department and a portion of the advising team[1] interviewed for this study interacted a lot throughout an academic year, if not daily. My analysis suggested these student interactions were pivotal to advisors because these participants felt interactions with students was where learning related to career readiness was reinforced.

The state of Texas's 60x30TX strategic plan includes an emphasis on the education and connection of marketable skills to the state's undergraduate student population. The state wants students to be able to articulate what skills they have gained and market themselves well in the workforce according to the 60x30TX website (http://www.60x30tx.com/). Students struggling to make the connection from co-curricular learning to career was captured in a statement Alyssa provided: "My agriculture and pre-veterinary students struggle the most to make the connections about skills gained from their co-curricular experiences. This particular student population thinks special events they host are "just for fun" and they have a harder time making the connection to skills they are garnering." Alyssa discussed how daily interactions with students helps her determine which students need support in becoming more career ready. Alyssa said, "I am personally of the school of thought that transferable skills are the goal of student affairs and transferrable skills are going to go into anything." Alyssa's statement reinforces research studies highlighted in Chapter 2 that indicate student affairs educators perceive their work directly correlates to career readiness and soft skill development (Jackson, 2016; NACE, 2015; Peck, 2017).

Alyssa's experiences highlighted how sometimes students are slow to or fail to see connections between skills learned through co-curricular involvement and skills needed in their

[1] Advising team is specifically related to a team embedded in the department that advised the student committees that fell under this unit. Some participants were a part of this team.

future career. Still, participants I interviewed emphasized daily student interactions is what helps keep career readiness at the forefront of conversations. Students learning of career readiness may at times be sporadic and not always consistent, but my analysis suggests participants' daily interactions with students help students they advise and supervise to bridge the connection of their learning and application to their futures. Daily student interactions encapsulates the full circle of how advisors are able to employ informal and formal knowledge into developing students for their desired futures. Although advising styles and career-readiness tools used may vary advisor to advisor, participants voiced conversations about students' development and career readiness occurs in the department. The next section covers how I used data to answer my secondary research questions.

Student-Learning Alignment to NACE Competencies

My dissertation study addressed a secondary research question related to how student affairs educators design learning outcomes to align with learning outcomes related to career readiness. My analysis suggested participants and the department designed student learning aligned with NACE competencies and skills employers desired (see Appendix J). Throughout my analysis I made note of career-readiness tools used at both the advisor and department levels. I begin with a discussion of advisor-driven student-learning designs and conclude with a discussion of student-learning designs related to NACE professional competencies.

Advisor Student-Learning Designs

Through my analysis, I discovered advisor and department student-learning designs were largely intertwined, though the advisor student-learning designs varied. Only one learning design was utilized by the advising team. My analysis revealed participants, as members of the advising

team, chose a specific soft skill to focus on during a 1–5 year period. Over the last several years, the advising team has focused on critical thinking as a skill. They have developed case studies related to critical thinking and have emphasized critical thinking in the program-approval process. Outside of this one team effort, the learning designs fell on the advisor. However, I quickly discovered advisors inherit learning outcomes from previous advisors that are related to specific committees and do not have a hand in creating them. I presumed the reasoning behind advisors' lack of involvement in developing learning outcomes was likely due to mission statements of these various committees rarely change. However, yearly goals did change, and participants voiced they had more of a role in shaping goals executive teams want to accomplish on an academic year basis. The career-readiness tools I discuss in the following section played a role in these learning designs and I think autonomy was left up to the advisor with how they implement goals committees set. I did not make note of commonalities between the career-readiness tools shared with me. Additionally, my analysis suggests these career-readiness tools had not been shared among advising team members. In Chapter 5, I explore recommendations for the advising team on aligning efforts and learning designs as a team.

Career-Readiness Tools of Advisors

All participants used career-readiness tools. Most of these tools were specific to a participant. My analysis revealed the only universal tool department staff used was NACA NEXT, discussed earlier, and the program-approval process. In this section, I highlight various tools—including physical forms, trainings, the program-approval process, evaluations, networking, websites, and career services—being used to teach career readiness in the department.

Physical Forms. Tyler, Kayleigh, Monica, and Rose used physical forms as a career-readiness tool. They incorporated forms into their advising styles and most of these forms were specific to each student, minus the leadership-learning contract. Participants that used these physical forms kept these forms throughout an academic year to reference and remind students of what they had agreed to.

Leadership-Learning Contract. Kayleigh has served on a variety of committees at the institution related to student learning. Through these experiences, she developed a leadership-learning contract. Kayleigh did not provide this document, but voiced the document she used highlights goals and concepts a student leader wished to learn during an academic year. Tyler, who Kayleigh supervises, adopted the same form to use with student leaders. Tyler voiced there are two to three questions on that document that focus on developing specific traits, not only leadership, but across the spectrum of career preparedness and vocation. Kayleigh also emphasized the learning contract incorporates undergraduate learning outcomes the university set forth. Some of the undergraduate learning outcomes of the institution were tied directly to soft skills and included: critical thinking, effective communication, collaborative work, and practice of personal and social responsibility.

Check-In Form. Rose used a check-in form on a weekly basis with student leaders. The form asked: What did you celebrate this week? What challenge did you face this week? What lesson did you learn this week? Then, the form outlined discussion items that needed to be focused on during one-on-one meetings between Rose and a students and what both the leader and Rose would do for that week's to-do list. Rose voiced they liked using these check-in forms because it forced students to stop, pause, and reflect on everything going on in life, school, and co-curricular involvement. Rose also used the challenge question to gauge where students were

that week and what their capacity might be. For instance, if a student had exams coming up, they may have delayed a project to the following week. The lesson portion was also beneficial to Rose because Rose usually tied it back to a specific skill or component of career-readiness development when meeting with the student. For the check-in form, see Appendix O.

Leadership Profile and Evaluation Form. Monica shared two forms she used with student leaders. The first form (see Appendix L) was a leadership profile. On the leadership profile form, she had students select a university core value they embodied, three elements from the periodic chart of best practices they wanted to focus on, a description of their working style, and their committee job description. The leadership profile form was a resource Monica had on hand for individual meetings she had with students and with the student committee she oversaw. In addition to the leadership profile form, Monica also shared a peer evaluation form (see Appendix M) used to evaluate students' performances as it related to a specific event hosted by Monica's committee she advises. Some of the attributes evaluated included: workload management, work quality, attitude, leadership, initiative and creativity, and ability to work with others. Monica enjoyed the use of these forms because it helped increase students' efficiency, maintained awareness of items they wanted to focus on during their leadership tenure, and was a great tool to deliver effective feedback.

Trainings. Trainings occurred biweekly for the upper echelon of student leaders. The training topics varied—sometimes the training topics included career-readiness education or diversity education; other times guest speakers were invited to speak on professional development topics as a whole. These trainings were formal and the advising team in the department oversaw them. Sometimes trainings were linked to the various program assemblies the committees fell under. There were several assemblies, including visual and arts, culture and

education, and leadership and service. Outside of trainings for upper leadership, trainings sometimes occurred in committees. Usually guest speakers or specific departments were invited by student executive boards to present to the general body of these committees. Participants presented examples involving career-services presentations, presentations related to the nature of a specific committee, and presentations by alumni involved in the committees as students. Louis also hosted budget trainings that all committees had to participate in during the academic year and Rose was a certified StrengthsQuest facilitator and enjoyed delivering those trainings to student groups.

Program-Approval Process. Every participant mentioned the program-approval process. Participants felt the program-approval process in general generated career-readiness development because there was so much involved in it. The program-approval process involved student committees communicating ideas of programs and events they wanted to host to the programming board. The program-approval process also involved other skills, such as project management skills, public speaking, and critical thinking. Rose stated "career-readiness development [was] not one sided when it [came] to the program-approval process." Rose voiced career readiness and skill development occurred for both presenters and reviewers. Reviewers had to think critically and deliver feedback effectively to peers. Kayleigh expressed the program-approval process was what broke silos among committees and incorporated a sense of connection with the 18 committees that fell under the student programming department. In addition to navigating the program approval process, committees had to link what undergraduate student learning outcomes their program would support when delivering those presentations.

Evaluations. The peer evaluations Monica used after every program Monica's committees did contained specific content unique to those committees and individual leaders.

However, evaluations occurred for all committees for any special event or program. In efforts to obtain money to host various events, committees went through the program-approval process and had to provide an event report back to the program board to discuss how it went. These evaluations related to the programs and events hosted out of the department were important because they incorporated reflection and mandated students analyze elements on a deeper level, both as individuals and as a committee.

Networking. There were numerous conferences student committees hosted, which presented a unique opportunity for students to engage with a variety of people, including institutional leaders, executives in various industries, and decorated military personnel. The opportunity to network was high. Kayleigh stated, "We are very good at staying connected with our students, especially the ones that matriculate to a specific level of leadership." In addition to that, it is common practice to invite alumni to speak to committees they were involved in. Then, the executive student leaders got a lot of interaction and opportunities to connect with university leadership and prominent alumni. These students were invited to the chancellor's box at football games, banquets, and special events other students would not have been able to attend.

Websites and Career Services. O-Net online is a website Alyssa uses with students. The website is a search engine where students can input their skillets into a search and it generates potential career opportunities to explore through the O-Net online website (https://www.onetonline.org/). In addition to O-Net, Alyssa uses rubrics provided through the Division of Student Affairs and her alma mater's career development page. Alyssa, Rose, and Tyler voiced sometimes career services is sought out to present to committees at different points in the years as well. These presentations usually highlight services offered and provide education related to resume building, networking, interview preparation, and career counseling. Resume-

building workshops were also hosted in the department to assist students in translating co-curricular involvement.

Department Student-Learning Designs

The department student-learning designs center on the learning outcomes the Division of Student Affairs at State U Texas defined. The department's implementation and use of NACA NEXT required the advising team to use the same tool when working with students. However, I learned through my analysis the NACA NEXT tool is no longer being used after the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020–2021. Advisors branched out to implement their own learning designs and career-readiness tools on an individual level, and the department had oversight of some of the larger learning design that related directly to the program-approval process. Louis also revealed the associate director of the department was in the process of planning synergized learning outcomes, including an outcome related to career readiness that can be universally applied to all committees, regardless of mission. My analysis revealed advisors only used one department student-learning design—NACA NEXT. I briefly explore the use of NACA NEXT as a career-readiness tool in the next section.

Career-Readiness Tools of the Department

This next section highlights a specific tool utilized by the programming department's advising team. For more contextual information related to NACA NEXT and how this department selected this formal career readiness tool to use when working with students, please reference chapter three.

NACA NEXT. The department also used a formal knowledge tool the National Association of Campus Activities (NACA) and Campus Labs formulated specifically for it to use called NACA NEXT. NACA NEXT was specifically designed to help students self-evaluate in

co-curricular settings as they prepare for their career according to the NACA's website (https://www.naca.org/BLOG/Pages/3-31-2021-whats-next.aspx). The survey tool was developed as a direct response to a survey that NACE conducted, in which they facilitated the collection of responses from employers that identified specific skills sought in college graduates. State U of Texas was one of the few institutions to be selected as a pilot study for NACA NEXT. Through interviews, I learned the associate director of the student programming department and representatives from NACA and Campus Labs have been collecting data from the department for close to 5 years. The use of NACA NEXT with students was an expectation for advisors prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Rebecca and Sarah categorized their understanding of career readiness into the skills NACA NEXT listed in self-evaluations the students completed and their understanding of what skills employers want. Rebecca and Sarah specifically mentioned evaluations and surveys students and they themselves completed three times per academic year. The first evaluation happened in August, the second evaluation occurred in December or January, and the final evaluation was in April or May. Students had the opportunity to rank themselves on various skills employers want. Participants in my research study described how students often ranked themselves higher on the surveys in the beginning of the year, thinking they had more skills, abilities, and knowledge. As the year went on, however, participants said students would become more self-aware and critical of their development in various areas and self-rankings would lower. Rebecca and Sarah found the use of NACA NEXT to be helpful because they felt they had to help students comprehend what employers were looking for and found using categories presented in NACA NEXT assisted them in helping students to better understand their own development and learning. Through my analysis, I concluded the use of this formalized tool created more intentionality in conversations advisors conducted with

students and created additional learning opportunities for advisors to know what skills employers were looking for in college graduates. NACA NEXT stopped being used by some of the student affairs educators in the programming department during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and it is unclear to me if the department will revert back to this tool or formulate a new one. The use of this tool undoubtedly affected the way the advising team operated with students and increased awareness related to career readiness as a whole, as some of the examples Sarah and Rebecca provided indicated.

Student Learning Design to Promote NACE Career-Readiness Outcomes

My analysis revealed both the advisor and the department student-learning designs were meant to align with competencies NACE has defined as preparing career-ready graduates. The intentionality and desire to enhance students' leadership skills, soft skill development, and areas of improvement was captured directly through participants' accounts. In the following section, I illustrate how participants' characterized desired learning outcomes into two categories: student-leader learning outcomes (SLLOs) and skill development.

SLLOs

Kayleigh stated, "When I switched from focusing on the programs we [department] are doing to focusing on the learning that they were experiencing from the programs, everything about my work really changed." In this quote, Kayleigh emphasized the realization and impact of student learning in the department. Kayleigh and Monica found merit in embracing the SLLO the Division of Student Affairs at State U Texas defined. They were the only ones to mention the use of SLLOs for the groups they advised.

> The Student Leader Learning Outcomes (SLLO) Project provides universal methods and tools for staff to use with student leaders in student organizations, programs, or activities

> to help in the assessment and documentation of enhanced learning in relation to the students' leadership experiences (SLLO Committee, 2021, para. 1)

The Division of Student Affairs sponsored the SLLO project and Kayleigh worked on this project in the past. The SLLO project also provides a plan to help students master the following skills:

- Master the depth of knowledge required for a degree
- Demonstrate critical thinking
- Communicate effectively
- Practice personal and social responsibility
- Demonstrate social, cultural, and global competence
- Prepare to engage in lifelong learning
- Work collaboratively (SLLO committee, 2021, para. 2)

The SLLO project focuses on student leaders and student employees and through a theory base of student learning and student leadership, it provides a guide for student affairs educators and is an exploration of realities in the current state of higher education (Collins & Roberts, 2013).

Monica said the learning outcomes for her committees were derived from SLLOs. Monica tried to channel the use of SLLOs in her advising and created the tagline of "Understanding SLLOs + Implementing SLLOs = Great Events" when working with students. Students were expected to educate peers on various SLLOs through programs they planned and create evaluations through event surveys of SLLOs for events they hosted. Performance evaluations were also done with the committee chair after each event or program to reflect on SLLOs. Monica closed the participant interview by stating she enjoyed the use of the tools

mentioned because it fostered accountability, helped students stay on track, and facilitated holistic development.

Without capturing assessments as it relates to student learning, the story of student affairs and its mission becomes harder to tell. SLLOs provide the opportunity for student affairs educators to take theory-based knowledge and put conceptual ideas into action when working with students.

Skill Development

The mention of skill development was prevalent in all interviews. Student affairs educators acknowledged there were experiences and skills gained from student involvement in the department. These participant accounts supports research that has highlighted how skill development has happened in co-curricular education and how student affairs educators have helped students make meaning of experiences gained and assisted in their ability to articulate what was learned to others (Berger & Wild, 2017; Peck, 2017; Peck et al., 2016).

Two advisors, Sarah and Louis, emphasized hard-skill development is relayed to the student populations they work with. Sarah mentioned using tools such as Adobe graphics and Louis mentioned various budgeting tools he shared during budget trainings he hosted. Soft-skill development was the main skill development participants focused on. Communication (both verbal and written), critical thinking, and the ability to work with others were the top soft skills advisors discussed. Other skills such as public speaking, conflict resolution, global competencies, and leadership were mentioned, but were not nearly as popular as the top-three soft skills mentioned. The development of soft skills directly correlates to preparation of a career-ready graduate (NACE, 2015) and participants recognized the value soft skills held. Advisors placed a heavy emphasis on soft skills and advocated soft skill-development took place

in the committee experiences, the program-approval process, and challenges student leaders faced on a daily basis. Participants also addressed how important it was for students to be able to relay soft skills gained and experiences to others. The term “transferable skills” came up in multiple interviews and advisors thought skills garnered through co-curricular education did not only correlate to what student leaders needed in college, but what they needed to succeed in the workforce.

Conclusion

Many elements, including conceptualization of career readiness, career readiness tools used by individuals and the programming department, along with student learning designs were presented in the data analysis for this study. The first item discussed was the answer to the primary research question related to how student affairs educators made meaning of career readiness with undergraduate student populations they directly advised or supervised. Through my analysis, I discovered informal and formal knowledge, and daily student interactions, were components participants used to conceptualize career readiness. From there, I provided a deeper analysis addressing the secondary research questions related to how advisors designed student-learning designs to align to career readiness. Advisor-driven student-learning designs were highlighted and various career-readiness tools participants used were shared. Some of the career-readiness tools included: leadership learning contracts, website use and career services, leadership profile and evaluation forms, and the program-approval process. Next, I discussed NACA NEXT, the departmental career-readiness tool, and student-learning designs that promoted NACE competencies.

This chapter also highlighted the exceptional efforts related to career-readiness development participants and the department at State U Texas have been facilitating. In the final

chapter, I discuss the relevance and implications of my findings, strengths and limitations of this study, recommendations for future research, and my overall conclusion.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study explored how student affairs educators (i.e., advisors) make meaning of career readiness and how they incorporate career readiness into the co-curricular education they provide students they directly advise or supervise at a public, research institution in Texas. Eight full-time staff members employed in a student programming department housed in the Division of Student Affairs were interviewed. This chapter includes a discussion of findings in relation to current, pertinent literature presented in Chapter 2. I also present implications of this research and limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and practice, and a conclusion to this study.

Discussion of Key Findings Related to Current Literature

Through the data collected, I discovered the following answers to my research question(s): Firstly, I discovered informal knowledge, formal knowledge, and daily student interactions shape student affairs educators' conceptualization of career readiness. Secondly, I found advisors used student-learning designs and department student-learning designs to obtain the desired learning outcomes (as NACE defined) to prepare career-ready graduates. An analysis of these patterns discovered and their importance in the current literature are provided in the following section.

The Conceptualization of Career Readiness

Participants conceptualized career readiness differently, as I expected. Monica was the only participant to link her definition of career readiness to her understanding and knowledge

presented through national organizations (including NASPA [Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education] and NCORE [National Conference on Race and Ethnicity]). However, all of the other participants linked their conceptualization of career readiness to the development of skills and enhancement of abilities employers seek, which aligned to the National Association of College and Employer's (2015) definition: "[Career readiness] as the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that can broadly prepare students for successful transitions in the workplace" (para. 1). This link between the literature's definition of career readiness and participants' conceptualization of career readiness is important. Through semi-structured interviews, I found student affairs educators recognize the importance of cultivating skillsets and strengths in student populations they work with. Kayleigh even pointed out students failing in the collegiate environment is okay because there will be lessons, they inevitability take forward that will help them succeed in the future, and Louis voiced, "If we [student affairs educators] do not help round them [college students] out, we do a great disservice." The literature presented in Chapter 2 that highlighted how student affairs is responsible for cultivating learning outside of the classroom and students' strengths to prepare them for the future (Campbell & Price, 2016; Jackson, 2019; Stokes, 2015) directly aligned with and supported participants' viewpoints. In the next section I highlight additional thoughts participants shared when discussing their conceptualization of career readiness related to soft skills and group work and showcase their link to relevant literature presented in Chapter 2.

Soft Skills. Participants also believed students should have certain skillsets from co-curricular experiences—some of those skillsets included budgeting, communication, leadership, and ability to work with others from diverse backgrounds. Each committee in the department may have had different missions or things they were tasked to accomplish, but through my

observation, all of the advisors that work with these different student groups agree skillsets are being refined through co-curricular learning experiences and involvement. Some career readiness tools examples used to showcase this learning were used through tools advisors developed or used. For instance, Monica used peer-to-peer feedback sessions after programs and leadership profiles to hone in on students' soft skill development. Rhonda used weekly check-in forms and Kayleigh and Tyler used leadership-learning contracts to hold students accountable in shaping experiences they wanted out of co-curricular learning and skills they desired. The most fascinating tool used to measure soft skills development was NACA NEXT. The department measured student leaders before, midway, and after the academic year by having individuals complete surveys on their skillsets employers' desire. Participants named some skillsets captured in NACA NEXT surveys, including critical thinking, communication, and leadership. The importance of finding and pointing out soft skills development was apparent in words and perspectives student affairs educators provided during interviews. Participants supported the notion that as the workforce continues to evolve and change, soft skills will be needed and education can provide the development of these skills in a variety of student learning environments and tasks (Chapman et al., 2019; Gammie et al., 2002; Hancock et al., 2008; Jaasekla et al., 2018).

Group Work. The element of group work, which promotes collaborative learning, teamwork skills, and life-long learning (Natoli et al., 2014), was embedded into all of the student committees advisors discussed. A review of the department's mission revealed the mission highlights elements of group work and stated the department's goal is to facilitate leadership development through programming and service opportunities in preparation to develop well-rounded graduates for engagement in a global society. The element of group work appeared to be

embedded within the department as a whole when reviewing descriptions and missions of the 18 student committees listed on the department's website. Through practice of these core values, soft skills are fostered among students and incorporated into the department's culture. One of the things the department uses to foster group work and soft skills development is the program-approval process. If a student committee wants to host a program, it must all go through the program-approval process, which involves representatives from all of the different student committees facilitating a formal program presentation review. All advisors mentioned the program-approval process at some point during interviews and most believed the program-approval process intentionally fostered both soft and hard skillsets when students did presentations or garnered feedback from one another. I believe the program-approval process will be a tool used in the department for the foreseeable future due to skills and critical thinking posed during the approval process that advisors voiced.

Informal and Formal Knowledge

Informal and formal knowledge were the first and second components I highlighted in my data analysis (see Appendix I). I was not surprised both informal and formal knowledge contributed to participants' conceptualization of career readiness. Lived experiences and formal experiences (e.g., training, presentations, and conference experiences) live in tandem in one's mind when it comes to understanding career readiness. Out of the eight participants, I was shocked only three participants—Louis, Rose, and Kayleigh—recalled past memories or experiences when relaying how informal knowledge shapes understanding of career readiness. I perceived informal knowledge would be more prevalent than formal knowledge due to participants' lived experiences around career readiness. Louis and Rose shared experiences outside of higher education influenced their conceptualization of career readiness, and Kayleigh

voiced observations of her mentors and father contributed to how she understood career readiness early in life. Formal knowledge highlighted how academic courses, participation of career services, NACA NEXT, and professional associations' guiding practices, and professional training contribute to conceptualizations of career readiness. Formal knowledge is something that was more prevalent when participants shared how their conceptualization of career readiness was formed. The use of both informal and formal knowledge encapsulates how participants made meaning of career readiness. In the next section, I cover the last pattern discovered in how participants conceptualize career readiness: daily student interactions.

Daily Student Interactions

I discovered student learning and support was at the forefront and core of what participants shared. Their advising styles provided guidance, grace, and structure. Some advisors communicated their advising styles, although other advisors did not. Kayleigh, Rose, and Monica were the most structured when it came to discussing ways they deliver career-readiness education. Due to this highly structured approach, they were also the only ones that had high, clearly defined expectations with student groups. All advisors voiced enjoyment in helping facilitate those learning connections for students and breeding environments where transparent communication could take place. One tactic advisors used to establish transparent communication and create a supportive environment with students was reflection. Some formal reflection methods were shared, such as having students write their own letters of recommendation or providing outcomes for learning contracts. Informally, reflection seems to be embedded in the department's practices as well. Some of these examples the department fosters includes: various workshops/trainings, the program-approval process, and weekly one-on-one meetings with executive leadership for each committee and the advisor. Helping students

become aware of their own development through reflection was a component I introduced in Chapter 2. Student engagement and career readiness is tied to students' awareness of where they are and want to be, but student affairs educators must find ways to teach students to understand and articulate learning and skills gained (Daniels & Brooker, 2014; Peck et al., 2016).

Every participant voiced having once-a-week to biweekly meetings with the committee leadership they advise. As mentioned in Chapter 4, different committees breed different experiences as it relates to career readiness and not every committee experience is the same. Through participants' viewpoints, they recognize their involvement in enhancing students' employability and providing opportunities to network, develop skills, and provide resources to students. These perspectives affirmed participants acknowledged their role as a main stakeholder group in enhancing employability and interdepartmental liaising to provide better opportunities for students in their daily interactions in the co-curricular learning environment (Ayoubi et al., 2017; Jackson, 2016; Kinash et al., 2016). The combination of these three components – informal knowledge, formal knowledge, and daily student interactions – provides the foundation of how my participants in this study conceptualized career readiness, which answers my study's primary research question. While the verbatim descriptions of career readiness varied among my participants, they all pulled from these three categories. Various tools advisors used in helping to facilitate students' career-readiness development were also shared. I discuss advisor and department student-learning designs that garner desired outcomes related to career readiness in the next section.

Student Learning Alignment to NACE Competencies

In this section, I provide discussion and importance in my discovery of answers to my secondary research questions related to how student affairs educators design learning outcomes

to align learning outcomes related to career readiness. Appendix J showed the combination of advisor student-learning designs and the department student-learning designs contributes to desired outcomes for students as it relates to the eight NACE competencies: (a) communication, (b) critical thinking, (c) equity and inclusion, (d) leadership, (e) professionalism, (f) teamwork, (g) technology, and (h) career and self-development (NACE, 2015). NACE (2021, para.1) stated, "Career readiness is a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management." Both individual advisors and the department use various tools to promote student learning and career-readiness development. In the next section, I highlight the importance of the advisor student-learning designs.

Advisor Student-Learning Designs

The career-readiness tools advisors used was the most fascinating pattern discovered in the study because there were tools participants mentioned I had never thought of before and every advisor appeared to be doing something different. Besides the program-approval process and networking, advisors used all tools in various ways and there was no synergy in regard to use of the same tools. The department did not provide career-readiness tools for advisors to use besides NACA NEXT and some tools are items advisors created themselves and use in the student committees they solely advise. Even though there were not commonalities among the career-readiness tools advisors used, advisors took students' development seriously and constructed various methods to use when engaging with them outside of the classroom. This awareness tied directly into research presented in Chapter 2 that demonstrated how student affairs contributes to development of soft skills employers seek through co-curricular learning (Athas et al., 2013; Liversage et al., 2018; Swan & Arminio, 2017). The link between my

participants' awareness and research reinforces that implementing advisor student-learning designs when developing career readiness could positively influence student's career readiness development and employability. In the next section, I highlight and discuss the importance of the department student-learning design.

Department Student-Learning Designs

Departmental student-learning designs also contributed to students' learning and development. The program-approval process was unanimously confirmed as a departmental career-readiness tool. Advisors voiced both hard and soft skills have to be sharpened and refined when presenting or communicating new ideas forward. I discovered networking seems to also be embedded in all of the student committees and eight committees are dedicated to hosting conferences where they seek alumni or guest speakers for various programs. Several participants spoke about the alumni connections the department maintains and the fact they can have alumni support various initiatives they were once a part.

NACA NEXT Provides Awareness of Career-Readiness Development. The combination of these tools provides insight on how the department puts career readiness at the forefront of student learning. I believe one of the reasons the department is ahead of the curve when it comes to career-readiness development in co-curricular learning is partially due to exposure to NACA NEXT and selection of their unit to be in the pilot study related to NACA NEXT. Although not all participants find merit in NACA NEXT as a career-readiness tool to use with students, they did discover the importance of developing skillsets and encouraging students to start practicing the articulation of those learned skillsets. Some of the career-readiness tools specific to participants may have been something they used prior to the use of NACA NEXT, but undoubtedly the forced use of NACA NEXT in the pilot study conducted at State U Texas in this

department raised some levels of awareness regarding career-readiness development and enhancing students' employability. The exposure to co-curricular learning outside of the classroom is reinforced by the department and supports the notion learning opportunities impact holistic development, which directly transfers into the workplace (Berger & Wild, 2017; Peck, 2017; Peck et al., 2016).

In addition to the use of NACA NEXT, career readiness is a topic often talked about in the Division of Student Affairs at State U Texas. Professional development opportunities hosted in the division have caused staff to bring up this topic numerous times. Sarah mentioned not only did her career-readiness knowledge come from NACA NEXT, but it also came from division meetings. When I reflect on topics I have attended as a staff member in the Division of Student Affairs at State U Texas, career readiness has come up at least once in an academic year at these meetings. Sometimes the division has hosted guest speakers or representative from career services staff to discuss career readiness and what student affairs professionals can do to aid in students' employability. To reach the desired outcomes as NACE competencies outlined, all tools contribute to greater holistic development and students' preparation for the workforce.

Desired Outcomes

In this section, I discuss the final pattern discovered in the pursuit of answering my research questions. As previously mentioned, no universal learning outcomes are used in all 18 student committees. The department's mission statement was fairly simple—to develop and shape the next-level leaders of tomorrow. Most of the student committees have set learning outcomes that did not change year to year, but after gathering data from participants, it was evident goals in the committee tend to shift every year. Advisors allow this approach to be student driven and assist when needed. Over the last 5 years, the advising team has worked to

develop efforts in enhancing a particular skillset over the course of an academic year. The advising team is in the process of selecting another skillset to focus on, but the one they have focused on the last 5 years was critical thinking. One reason I believe the advising team used this approach is because they wanted this skillset to apply to all committees and their learning development, without having to alter or change learning outcomes and goals for each specific committee. The skillset can be weaved in through discussion, execution of special events and programs, and reflection. As for the department student-learning design, it was unclear what they will use moving forward. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the required use of NACA NEXT is no longer implemented and the department is looking for another tool to replace it.

As a department, it was clear Kayleigh and Monica utilized the student-leader learning outcomes (SLLOs) project housed in the Division of Student Affairs often. Both Kayleigh and Monica use of this tool and incorporated it into advising with students. SLLOs are student-learning theory based about intentional student development and enhancement of student leadership. Monica's tagline of "Understanding SLLOs + Implementing SLLOs = Great Events" was a phrase that stuck out to me and highlighted the emphasis she places on these desired learning outcomes. SLLOs continue to provide the opportunity to take student-development-theory-based knowledge and put these ideas into actions. Because only two participants mentioned SLLOs in interviews, I do not believe the SLLOs are universally used in the department, nor the division. As a full-time staff member of the division, I am aware of the SLLOs, but I have not been given any further information on them, unless I choose to seek it out. Revisiting SLLOs for the advising team in the department could be beneficial to help synergize efforts related to career readiness for the future.

The desired outcomes mentioned all work toward the common goal of developing students for their futures. The skillsets and learning that takes place in the department directly aligns to the university learning outcomes and defined NACE competencies. Advisors recognize the importance of developing and reaching the desired outcomes they, the department, and the division set. The combination of advisor-driven student-learning designs and department student-learning designs places value on career readiness development within this departments in ensuring undergraduate students make a smooth transition into the workforce, with confidence and knowledge of what they are able to bring to a team/employer. In the next section, I outline nuances related to the research questions.

Nuances Related to Research Questions

For my primary research question, I asked: How are student affairs educators making meaning of the concept of career readiness among undergraduate students they directly advise or supervise at a public, research institution in Texas? Through analysis of participants' definitions of career readiness in the previous section, it was clear participants tied their meaning making of career readiness to innate skill development (i.e., soft skills) that employers desire. The student affairs educators found meaning in work with students and affirmed the importance of providing the platforms for learning about career readiness in various committees they advise. However, they do not provide answers of career-readiness making in the student populations they supervise. Four participants indicated they supervised students, and three of these four participants indicated they supervised undergraduate students specifically. However, when posed with the initial research question on career-readiness meaning making with undergraduate students they directly advise or supervise, all participants left out supervision. One reason I believe supervision was left out is due to participants' primary job responsibilities in advising

student committees. Supervision may be less than 15% of their job description. During interviews, participants naturally gravitated to what they primarily do in their working roles with student committees. I was surprised no one brought up supervision during interviews and I wonder if advisors apply different learning designs with students, they advise versus supervise. The supervision part of this research question was left unanswered. However, discovery of career-readiness making in the student advising realm was captured and is clear.

Secondary Research Question 1

The first secondary research question was: What guiding principles/theories or knowledge (informal or formal) frame student affair educators' understanding of career readiness? Informal knowledge from experiences lived, formal knowledge gained through work experiences, and daily student interactions shaped student affairs educators' conceptualization of career readiness. No guiding principles or theories were disclosed during interviews in aiding student affairs educators' understanding of career readiness. The informal knowledge is what Kayleigh, Rose, and Louis drew upon when answering questions related to this during interviews. Rose and Louis were the only participants to have worked outside of higher education, so they drew upon those experiences gained. Kayleigh reflected on the observation she made of others—including her father and mentors in higher education—to make meaning of what career readiness meant to her. These informal experiences laid the foundation for Kayleigh, Rose, and Louis to build a foundation of understanding as to what career readiness means.

Formal knowledge was also sought and most of this knowledge or information comes from the workplace. Some examples shared included: formal training and tools, professional associations, and academic courses related to career-readiness development. The formal training and tools mentioned specifically referenced trainings the department and division hosted,

information career services units shared, and NACA NEXT. One participant, Monica, voiced her understanding of career readiness comes from the professional associations NASPA and NCORE. The formal knowledge gained through work, coupled with informal knowledge some participants shared, provides a lens into how participants capture and relay their meaning making of career readiness.

With both informal and formal knowledge shaping participants' understanding of career readiness, influences daily student interactions when teaching students career readiness. As mentioned earlier, *career readiness* was defined by participants as innate skills employers' desire. The shaping of student-learning designs varied, but when looking at all methods mentioned, the learning advisors design was aimed at enhancing soft skillsets and increasing students' awareness about their career readiness and employability. There is no student-development theory specifically for career readiness (Patton et al., 2016); therefore, I can see why student-development theory was not articulated during interviews. Career readiness is a component of student learning and development, yet was not clearly shown in this particular research study. Participants placed career readiness into a category on its own. Moving forward, I feel that career readiness is something that should be incorporated into student development theory courses in efforts to better educate student affairs educators in their degree programs. What my participants shared in this study highlights their viewpoints of career readiness being a component of student development, but participants struggled to link career readiness directly to student development. Linking career readiness to student development theory and highlighting career readiness as a component of students' developmental stages could possibly help student affairs educators better understand how career readiness fits into a student's development trajectory while in college.

Secondary Research Question 2

My last research question was how do student affairs educators design learning outcomes to align with their learning outcomes related to career readiness? The simple answer to this question is advisors inherit learning outcomes from their predecessors and do not have a hand in designing learning outcomes for the committees they advise—or in the department. Nevertheless, advisors did express they could advise and assist in goals student committees set each academic year. There were no learning outcomes or goals specifically designed for career readiness. However, with some of the career-readiness tools mentioned, advisors can weave career-readiness learning outcomes into students' co-curricular learning informally.

Practical Implications Moving Forward

As it pertains to higher education and student affairs practice, my study findings suggests: a) no consistent definition of career readiness likely exists among student affairs educators, b) students affairs educators tend to place heavy emphasis on fostering career readiness among students they advise than those they supervise, and c) student affairs educators rarely draw upon their higher education/student affairs preparation in their conceptualization of career readiness and/or design of career readiness tools. In the next section, I provide an analysis of these implications within my data.

No Consistent Career Readiness Definition Exist

Besides the departmental goal of "developing the next level leaders of tomorrow" (department website, 2021, para. 1) it appears there was no synergy with any other departmental student learning outcomes or definitions of career readiness. When speaking with Louis, he advised the associate director for the department was planning on revamping departmental learning outcomes. The associate director was trying to identify universal learning outcomes for

all student committees and advisors. Career readiness is supposed to be embedded into these upcoming learning outcomes, and it will be interesting to see how career readiness is defined from a departmental level in the future. A definitive deadline was not provided as to when the associate director will complete these new learning outcomes. This could be helpful for this department moving forward, because data clearly yielded different definitions of career readiness from participants, and no one had a scripted definition of career readiness. The definitions of career readiness came from participants' informal and formal knowledge of career readiness and was loosely defined. Although, participants clearly grounded their constructs of understanding career readiness through the National Association of College & Employers' developmental outcomes (NACE, 2021). I find it beneficial for student affairs educators to draw from the same definition of career readiness in efforts to be on the same page of what it means and what they/the department want to do with career readiness development moving forward. The creation of new learning outcomes, especially one with career readiness incorporated, will increase the advising team's awareness of career readiness, refine their definitions, and may introduce conversations among the advising team to align efforts with certain career-readiness tools they use. The more aware the advising team can become of career readiness, the more likely they are to be more cognizant of incorporating career readiness into interactions with students.

Advising vs Supervision

The second implication is that advisors in this programming unit are doing a variety of activities on their own within the department to facilitate student learning. The career-readiness tools some advisors have personally developed may be beneficial to share with the advising team moving forward. Everyone does not have to do the same thing, but a brainstorming session to discuss current tools could be beneficial in identifying a new universal tool (outside of NACA

NEXT) for the department to use or enhancing some of those career-readiness tools already in place. Rather than working in a silo, discussion as a team and bringing ideas forward related to career readiness could potentially provide a renewed sense of purpose and a different lens when developing career readiness in working with student populations. In addition, whatever is created out of these discussions as a team could be used as practical tools with student workers employed in the department. Discussions related to career readiness as a whole are worth exploring if the department wants to pursue career-readiness development as one of its departmental goals.

Student worker supervision and career readiness is something that should be addressed moving forward as well. As mentioned in a section earlier, supervision was something that participants did not bring up, despite it being incorporated into the interview protocol. Student employment is defined as a high impact practice within student affairs (McClellan et al., 2018). As the researcher, it was concerning to not hear that mentioned. I am unsure of why it was not mentioned, but it may be due to participants placing more emphasis on their advising roles with the questions I posed in this study, as compared to the supervision piece. Furthermore, supervision may be a small percentage of their job responsibilities as compared to their advising roles, so there is the possibility that participants did not find merit or think to mention it with questions I posed during their semi-structured interviews. Exploration of how career readiness development is happening within this department's student employee population needs to be explored if the department is planning on incorporating career readiness into their overall student learning outcomes.

Higher Education/Student Affairs Preparation

The third implication I want to highlight is the fact that higher education/student affairs preparation did not emerge within the data, most especially the relevance of student development

theory. The majority of the participants have master's degrees in higher education. However, formal knowledge gained through participants' education did not support or contribute to their understanding of career readiness, with the exception of the one career development course that Tyler mentioned in his graduate program. One of the reasons I believe this did not present itself in the data is largely due to the fact that participants may not see career readiness as a part of student development. Reflecting back on the student development theory courses I personally had at the master's level and doctoral level, career readiness was not presented as its own student development theory and was not something discussed in the courses. Therefore, there may not be as much merit or emphasis that is placed on career readiness from a student developmental lens in the academia realm. I provide the argument, especially with the emphasis placed on career readiness development in the data I collected, that career readiness is a part of student development. The student affairs educators interviewed all acknowledged that career readiness development was linked to soft skill development, which can be easily translated into student development theory. In efforts to place more emphasis on career readiness in the future, from a professional education standpoint, I believe it needs to be highlighted in academic coursework. I feel that career readiness can be incorporated into a student development theory with its own section in a course, or it could potentially be a standalone course as an elective or course that falls under adult learning. The data showed that participants did not draw from their education as a whole in understanding career readiness and I feel that is an important gap to emphasize within this study.

In conclusion, with career readiness being a fairly frequently discussed topic in higher education, the student affairs profession needs to know what career readiness means and what they can do moving forward to enhance students' career readiness. The snapshot of

understanding this research study demonstrates student affairs staff at this university understands career readiness and wants to take steps to enhance students' employability for the future. The knowledge shared, the career readiness tools mentioned, and the insight participants had to share in this study is valuable and can be expanded upon in the future. The department will be even more ahead of the curve when they start to align and synergize efforts among their advising team and department as a whole when it comes to career-readiness education with student populations they advise and supervise. A future study looking at the research questions again in 2 or 4 years could potentially yield even more information than what is captured in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this section, I outline ideas for future research to expand the higher education literature on career readiness and student affairs. Firstly, multiple student services or programming units could participate in this study at one institution. Tailoring some of the interview protocol questions (see Appendix F) to be more pointed in regards to student-learning design, career-readiness tools used, and how career readiness is incorporated into students' learning would be beneficial. Expanding this study across Texas could also shed new light on what other institutions in the state are doing in relations to career readiness. Reviewing schools that are a part of a specific university system in various states or conferences could be a starting point. A longitudinal research design could also be worth exploring, to see how career-readiness development evolves over a period of time. Students being able to articulate their employability and market themselves is a component of Texas's, or 60x30TX strategic plan, so it would be enthralling to see if institutions' responses to career-readiness development morphs or remains stagnant with those changes at the state level.

Regarding content that can be explored in future research studies, I would want to explore what skills programming unit staff think they are fostering when it comes to working with students in a co-curricular setting. A snapshot is provided in this study of what is occurring at a public, research institution in Texas, but being able to see what different institutions are doing, even outside of Texas, would be beneficial. Different states have implemented different initiatives (e.g., Tennessee's "Drive to 55," Complete College Georgia) and I am unsure of how career readiness aligns to respective state goals and how staff addresses those plans into the work they do with students.

Exploration of efforts around career-readiness development with student workers is another idea for future research because a gap in research still exists on student employee and career readiness development. For instance, my research study did not capture anything related to student supervision and understanding the "why" behind why this was not included is something I can look into down the road. Reaching out to student workers that have recently graduated and worked in this programming unit is another idea for potential research. Questions could be posed to these previous employees to investigate what career readiness development, if any, occurred for them within this programming department.

This research can be tailored and further explored in a variety of ways in the future. This initial research study has set the foundation for me to build off of it in years to come. Career readiness is something that will remain at the forefront of higher education goals for multiple stakeholder groups. My goal is that this dissertation will serve as a catalyst to enhancing my identity as a scholar and practitioner in attempts to fill research gaps related to career readiness development in co-curricular settings within higher education. I also hope that this study will yield readers, specifically those who work in education, to reflect upon what they are currently

doing when it comes to career readiness development and potentially take ideas or various tools to employ in their own arenas of learning when educating students.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I presented the issue I explored, a literature review, my research methodology, and a discussion and analysis of the data. I successfully answered the research questions posed through discovery and exploration of participants' responses. My research reinforced that career-readiness development is embedded into the fabric of higher education and is an expectation that will not dissipate at any point in the near future (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Mayhew et al., 2016). The obtainment of a college degree comes with the presumption of it leading to better lives and jobs. Career-ready college graduates are something employers expect and something higher education is expected to deliver (Robinson, 2018; Zipper, 2017). Therefore, career readiness remains an integral part of learning both in and outside of the classroom.

This study focused on a department's efforts to deliver well-rounded, career-ready undergraduate students through co-curricular involvement. The various workshops advisors hosted, the multiple career-readiness tools they used, and their desire to help students articulate co-curricular involvement into specific skill development was captured in the data. By stating there was a disconnection for students when linking co-curricular experiences to items they could place on a resume, advisors affirmed the literature. However, various initiatives housed in the department were used to circumvent that notion through attempting to satisfy and develop, through co-curricular learning, necessary skills employers want.

Conceptualizations of career readiness, the use of certain career-readiness tools, and lack of involvement in planning student development outcomes were mixed. More conversations and

the sharing of ideas as it relates to career readiness and different initiatives committees explore are tactics the department could implement in the attempt to synergize student development as a whole moving forward. The department recognized the need to establish formal learning outcomes prior to this research study and findings of this research study may have an impact on what staff do moving forward. Regardless of that plan, fostering career readiness in a student affairs realm is something that has become more grounded through this empirical research study. In multiple interviews, participants expressed they did not realize how much they were doing in regard to cultivating career readiness and they are excited to see what more could be done for future students in this programming area. This study can serve as a framework to produce practical implications in student programming.

Fostering an avenue for participants to share current practices in this research study was rewarding. The data yielded new concepts and ideas I had not thought of as a student affairs practitioner and scholar. Figures I developed provide a visual framework to better understand how student affairs educators conceptualize career readiness and what goes into achieving desired outcomes in student populations as NACE defined. This research study provides a foundation in understanding career readiness and serves as a prelude to additional research that can be explored in the future for the enhancement of students' development and entrance into the workforce.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Purpose of Study
The purpose of this form is to provide an overview of this study to aid in your decision to either participate or not participate in this study. If you decide to proceed forward by participating in this study, this form will be a record showing your consent to move forward with answering questions related to the study.

You have been sought out to participate in the study that will study career readiness in co-curricular learning outside of the classroom. This research study will examine how student affairs professionals understand career readiness. It will also explore how student affairs professionals do or do not link career readiness education into their advising of individuals/student organizations. You have been selected as a potential participant due to your role within the Division of Student Affairs and the student advising assignment you have in your professional role. This study is being completed in efforts to fulfill necessary requirements required for a dissertation.

What will you be asked to do?
If you agree to move forward, you will be asked to provide professional demographic information needed for the study via email and availability for the months of January through March 2020. You will also be asked to complete a recorded interview over Zoom that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. You could be contacted to clarify any necessary information in efforts of managing accuracy throughout the study. A recording and handwritten notes from the interview will be taken and maintained by the lead researcher. You may be asked to review transcribed versions of notes taken from your individual interview to verify your words were captured accurately.

What are the risks associated with this study?
The risks are minimal in this study and will not interfere with anything you encounter on a daily basis. This study is meant to gather information and firsthand perspectives related to career readiness and co-curricular education.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
There will be no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, you will be assisting the Department of Education Administration & Human Resource Development move forward in providing meaningful academic work to develop better understanding for professionals centered on career readiness. You may also be inspired to potentially introduce new learning outcomes focused on career readiness for your students to utilize in the future.

Do I have to participate?
No. The decision of participation is completely up to you. You can decide not to participate or withdraw at any point in time during the study without being affected in any way. You may also decline to answer some or any of the questions throughout the interview.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?
The study is confidential and all records related to this study will be kept private. No specific identifiers will be linked to you to highlight or show your participation in this study. Research records will be stored in an encrypted electronic file that only Kalyn Cavazos will have access to. Findings from the research study itself will be published in a dissertation.

If you do decide to move forward with participating in the study, please note you will be recorded through video and audio on the Zoom platform. All audio and video recordings will be stored on an encrypted electronic file that only Kalyn Cavazos will have access to. The recordings will be erased after three years.

Whom do I contacted with questions about the research?
If you have any questions, please reach out to Kalyn Cavazos (krc021@tamu.edu) or Dr. Chayla Haynes Davison (chayla.haynes@tamu.edu).

Who do I contact about my rights as a research participant?
This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participants, please contact irb@tamu.edu or (979) 458-4067.

Signature
Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions related to the study, and feel comfortable moving forward with the study. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this form, you agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Participant:_____ Date:_____

Printed Name: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:_____Date:_____

Printed Name: _____

APPENDIX B

EMAIL REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONTACT STAFF REGARDING RECRUITMENT FOR STUDY

Howdy Mr. Robbins,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University. I am in the process of moving forward with data collection and want to seek permission to send a participant recruitment email to your staff for my research study. The research study will examine how student affairs professionals understand career readiness. The study will also explore how student affairs professionals do or do not link career readiness education into their advising of individuals/student organizations. This study is being completed in efforts to fulfill necessary requirements for my dissertation.

Your staff will have the opportunity to decide if they do or do not want to move forward with the research study. Clear instructions will be provided in the initial recruitment and your assistance in helping me recruit participants would be greatly appreciated. Please let me know your decision by December 11, 2020. Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

If you have any questions, here is my contact information: Kalyn Cavazos, M.A., Student Services Bldg., 2nd Floor (Dean's Office), 1257 TAMU, College Station, TX or you can email krc021@tamu.edu.

Sincerely,
Kalyn Cavazos

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR PARTICIPANTS IN STUDY

Howdy,

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University in hopes of exploring career readiness in co-curricular learning. The purpose of this study is to examine how career readiness is used in co-curricular learning outside of the classroom, through the lens of a student affairs practitioner. Participants will describe their advising experiences with students they have or have worked with in the past at Texas A&M University in high-impact practices. You have been selected because of your role and advising assignments related to high-impact practices at the university. Your experiences and opinion about career readiness in co-curricular education can provide meaningful data that can assist the field of student affairs moving forward.

The attached form is meant to provide details related to the study that may affect your decision as to whether or not you want to participate in the study. If you decide to participate in the study, a record of consent will be sent in a follow-up email. If you agree to move forward in the study, professional demographic information and time for two virtual interview will be needed. 60-90 minutes will be the time commitment for both interviews and the researcher may need to reach out to you to clarify necessary information as needed for accuracy.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please fill out this preliminary questionnaire [hyperlink to Qualtrics survey] by January 15, 2020. If you have any questions here is my contact information: Kalyn Cavazos, M.A., Student Services Bldg., 2nd Floor (Dean's Office), 1257 TAMU, College Station, TX or email krc021@tamu.edu.

Sincerely,
Kalyn Cavazos

APPENDIX D

QUALTRICS SURVEY QUESTIONS

1) Would you like to proceed forward with study screening questions?
2) Name:
3) What team are you a part of in the programming department?
4) What is your position?
5) Describe your highest level of education and training.
6) What is your age?
7) What is your racial or ethnic identification?
8) What is your gender identity?
9) How long have you worked in the programming department?
10) How long have you worked at State U Texas?
11) How long have you been advising or supervising students in a higher education setting?
12) Do you advise students in your current role?
13) What programs or committees do you advise?
14) What do the students you advise do in their roles?
15) Are the students you advise monetarily compensated in any way?
16) Do you advise undergraduate students, graduate students, or both?
17) How are your students recruited for their positions?
18) Do you supervise students in your current role?
19) What do the students you supervise do in their roles?
20) Are the students you supervise monetarily compensated in any way?

21) Do the students you supervise work part-time or full-time?

22) Do you supervise undergraduate students, graduate students, or both?

23) How are students recruited for their positions?

24) By completing this Qualtrics questionnaire, you agree to be contacted for a potential Zoom interview related to this research study (IRB2020-1451M).

APPENDIX E

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS AFTER COMPLETION OF QUALTRICS

Howdy,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to examine how career readiness is used in co-curricular learning outside of the classroom, through the lens of a student affairs practitioner. Participants will describe their advising experiences with students they have or have worked with in the past at Texas A&M University in high-impact practices. All records and all files associated with the study will be managed and stored through an encrypted electronic file that will only be maintained by Kalyn Cavazos and Dr. Chayla Haynes Davison. The Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may also access the study to ensure the study is being facilitated correctly and data is being maintained. Information about you and your participation in this study will stay and remain confidential throughout the study.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact this office at irb@tamu.edu or (979) 458-4067.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and there is no penalty if you choose to not participate. The risks associated in the study are minimal, and are not greater than risks encountered in daily life. No incentive or compensation will be provided for participation in this study; however, your responses can assist the field and practitioners within student affairs moving forward with career readiness education.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact:

Kalyn Cavazos, M.A., Student Services Bldg., 2nd Floor (Dean's Office), 1257 TAMU, College Station, TX; krc021@tamu.edu

Please be sure you have read the attached consent form, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction regarding the study. If you respond to the researcher with a comment that you **will** be a part of the study, you are giving the researcher permission to reach out for additional information related to research purposes. If you respond that you **will not** be a part of the study, you will not be contacted for research purposes. Interviews will be scheduled pending your availability starting the first week of February 2021.

Sincerely,

Kalyn Cavazos

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Overarching Research Question: How are student affairs educators making meaning of the concept of career readiness among undergraduate students they directly advise or supervise at a public, research institution in Texas?

Sub Question 1: What guiding principles/theories or knowledge (informal or formal) frame student affairs educators understanding of career readiness?

Sub Question 2: How do student affairs educators design student learning to align with their desired learning outcomes related to career readiness?

Interview Protocol

1) **Can you tell me more about yourself and how you began working in student affairs?** This will be an ice-breaker question to help the participant and I get acquainted with each other.

2) **NACE defines career readiness as "the attainment and demonstration of requisite compentencies that can broadly prepare students for successful transition in the workplace." Having that context, what does career readiness personally mean to you?** This question will provide context of how career readiness is currently defined by NACE and what their meaning of career readiness is.

3) **How would you describe the concept of career readiness in your daily work with students? What source information from our field (or otherwise) or guiding principles frame your understanding of career readiness?** This question will provide insight on if career readiness is incorporated into their work with students.

4) **How often does career readiness or career aspirations come up in your interactions with the students you advise/supervise? And under what context do these interactions occur?** This question will provide clarity on how often career readiness/aspirations come up in conversation with students supervised or advised by student affairs educators and in what context it is typically presented.

5) **How do you or your department support career readiness development with undergraduate students you work with? How if at all is your approach different for upper vs. lower division students?** This question will provide an overview of what the individual or unit does to support career readiness with upper division vs. lower division undergraduate students.

6) **Are there any tools you utilize in supporting career readiness within this population?** This question will highlight if they are currently utilizing any tools (i.e. NACA NEXT) to help support this student population.

7) **Describe the learning outcomes and activities/programs you have to develop career readiness in the students you advise or supervise? If not, who does create learning outcomes for the programs and student groups you work with? If you have not identified specific learning outcomes, why do you think that is?** This question will help me understand if the department sets their learning programs or if individuals get to share in creativity and ownership in developing learning outcomes themselves for programs or student organizations they directly advise.

8) **How do those learning outcomes align to career readiness to prepare undergraduate students for future employment?** This supports my last research question and will identify if their program or student advising learning outcomes support career readiness development.

9) **Is there anything else you'd like to add that I may have not asked you about that would aid in this research study?** This is an intentional open-ended question to close out the interview and allow the participant to share anything else that they feel is relevant to my study.

APPENDIX G

RECRUITMENT AND DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

Mid-Oct or Nov 2020	Seek approval for research study from IRB
Dec 1, 2020	Permission email will be sent to the Director of the Student Programming Office seeking permission to contact staff regarding participant recruitment for study
Dec 11, 2020	Deadline to hear back from director regarding participant recruitment
Dec 15, 2020	Collect and gather staff data from public office webpage
Jan 6, 2021	Initial recruitment email will be sent to staff
Jan 15, 2021	Deadline to complete Qualtrics survey and hear back from staff
Jan 20, 2021	Follow-up email to final sample selection and consent form will be sent
Feb 1 – Mar 12, 2021	Interviews via Zoom
Mar 22, 2021	Deadline to have all interviews transcribed
Mar 24, 2021	Send member checks to participants for review
April 5, 2021	Begin data analysis

APPENDIX H

CODING TABLE

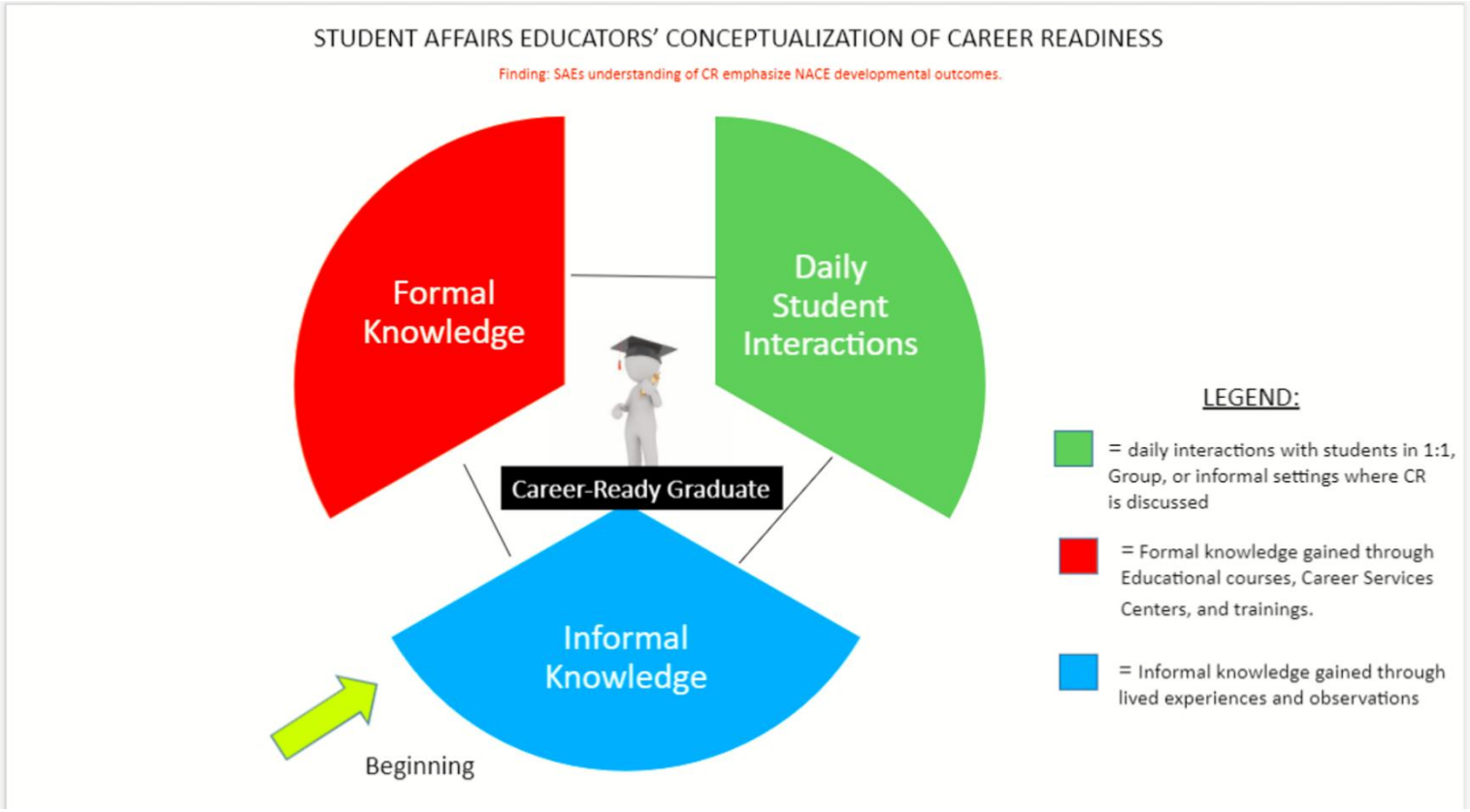
	1st Cycle Code Category (Line-by Line)	2nd Cycle Code Category (Focus Code)
1.	Alumni Connection	Career Readiness Tools
2	Best Practices Chart	Career Readiness Tools
3	Case Study	Career Readiness Tools
4	Check-in Form	Career Readiness Tools
5	Education on budget process	Career Readiness Tools
6	Evaluations	Career Readiness Tools
7	Lack of Career Readiness Tools	Career Readiness Tools
8	Leadership Learning Contract	Career Readiness Tools
9	NACA NEXT	Career Readiness Tools
10	Professional Profiles	Career Readiness Tools
11	Program Approval Process	Career Readiness Tools
12	Project Mgmt. Tool	Career Readiness Tools
13	Resume Preparation	Career Readiness Tools
14	Student Leader Learning Outcomes	Career Readiness Tools
15	Trainings	Career Readiness Tools
16	Website Use	Career Readiness Tools
17	Career Readiness Communication	Communication about Career Readiness

18	Career Center	Conceptualization of Career Readiness
19	Career Counseling Business	Conceptualization of Career Readiness
20	Career Development Course	Conceptualization of Career Readiness
21	Career Readiness Definition	Conceptualization of Career Readiness
22	Career Readiness Preparation	Conceptualization of Career Readiness
23	Career Readiness Subjective Among Committees	Conceptualization of Career Readiness
24	Consistent Approach to All Students When It Comes To Career Readiness	Outcomes/Theory
25	Career Readiness Development within Department	Outcomes/Theory
26	Create More Formal Learning Outcomes	Outcomes/Theory
27	Advisor Team Planning	Outcomes/Theory
28	Mission Statements/Goals Embed Career Readiness	Outcomes/Theory
29	No Participation in Creation of Learning Outcomes	Outcomes/Theory
30	Outcomes/Goal Setting with Students/Committees	Outcomes/Theory
31	People/area that support Career Readiness	Outcomes/Theory
32	Student Development Theory	Outcomes/Theory
33	Career Readiness Not a Daily Focus	Skill Development

34	Hard Skills	Skill Development
35	Struggle to Make Connection About Transferrable Skills	Skill Development
36	Transferrable Skills	Skill Development
37	Advising Style	Student Learning & Support
38	Conference/Committee Experience	Student Learning & Support
39	Effective Feedback	Student Learning & Support
40	Freshmen Early Development	Student Learning & Support
41	Global Career Path	Student Learning & Support
42	Junior & Senior Career Preparedness	Student Learning & Support
43	Permission to Fail	Student Learning & Support
44	Reflection	Student Learning & Support
45	Role of an Advisor	Student Learning & Support
46	Sophomore Career Preparedness	Student Learning & Support
47	Student Leader Learning Outcomes	Student Learning & Support
48	Student Support & Development	Student Learning & Support
49	Synergizing Efforts	Student Learning & Support
50	Upperclassmen = More Career Readiness Opportunities	Student Learning & Support
51	Writing Their Own Letters of Recommendation	Student Learning & Support

APPENDIX I

FIGURE 1



APPENDIX J

FIGURE 2