Work Ethic Skills and a Liberal Arts Education: Using Work-Integrated Learning in a Liberal Arts Course to Enhance Students' Work Ethic Skills and Demonstrate the Practicality of a Liberal Arts Education.

Jennifer M. Lopes
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by

Jennifer M. Lopes

Bachelor of Arts
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997

Master of Arts
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002

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Accepted by:
Toby Jenkins-Henry, Major Professor
Suha Tamim, Committee Member
Douglas Smith, Committee Member
Brad Griggs, Committee Member
Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
Dedication

To my beautiful daughters, Lisbon and Francesca, you are my inspiration, my heart and my soul. Thank you for your patience and understanding as I embarked on this journey.

To my husband, Pedro, you are my rock. Your love and support saw me through the journey.

To my parents, Deon and Dianna Rooks, you are my biggest fans. Your constant love, support, and encouragement made all my dreams a reality. Without you, none of the journeys would have been possible.
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Abstract

To address the gap in employability skills among recent college graduates, the proposed intervention seeks to integrate work ethic skills (WES) into the general education curriculum in a practical, efficient, and effective way to develop and enhance students’ professional skills. Work-integrated learning (WIL), if done properly, is the most effective method for students to learn, practice, and apply professional and academic skills. Problematic is the fact that general education courses have tenuous WIL connections because they are not “job specific. Hence, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory is applied as the theoretical framework for creating effective and meaningful learning experiences via ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) to enhance students’ WES. These alternative forms of WIL had a significantly positive effect on students’ perceptions, confidence, meta-cognition, and ability to transfer WES knowledge and skills to other environments and situations.
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List of Abbreviations

DACA ................................................................. Deferred action for childhood arrivals
DACUM .................................................................... Development of a curriculum
ELT ........................................................................... Experiential learning theory
ESOL ......................................................................... English as a second or other language
MMAR ........................................................................ Mixed-methods action research
GACC ......................................................................... Green Acres Community College
SPA .............................................................................. Spanish
WES ............................................................................. Work ethic skills
WIL .............................................................................. Work-integrated learning
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Intelligence plus character – that is the true goal of education”

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

Although recent college graduates possess the disciplinary knowledge needed to perform on-the-job technical skills, employers criticize their lack of generic professional and employability skills that ensure success in the workplace (Claxton, Costa, & Kallick, 2016; Cumming, 2010; Harris & King, 2015; Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014; Nunn, 2013; Green Acres Community College, 2014; Tran, 2017). According to the Adecco Group, while technical colleges do an excellent job in teaching hard skills, 60% of employers found the majority of graduates are unprepared in soft skills (as cited in Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014, p. 3). Hence, the 21st century educational institution must evolve to meet student needs by incorporating a mix of soft and hard skills into the curriculum so as to instill the “whole person” (DeWitt, 2014, p. 13)

Rising costs of tuition, an economic downturn after the global financial crisis in 2008, and the advancement of neo-liberal ideologies have all contributed to the redefining of the aim of education from one of knowledge and enlightenment to one of means to employment (Harris & King, 2015; Knight & Yorke, 2003; MacKay, 2010). In fact, 67.4% of employers believe institutions of higher education should teach soft skills to future employees (Pritchard, 2013). Consequently, colleges and universities have been tasked with teaching employability skills by incorporating them into the academic curriculum (Bowers-Brown & Harvey, 2004; DeWitt, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Oria, 2012;
Pritchard, 2013; Tran, 2017; Tymon, 2013). Harvey (2005) advocated for “a more holistic approach that embeds employability as part of academic learning” (p. 16). To master basic soft skills, students need recurring occasions, assistance, and encouragement to practice in a variety of contexts and situations (Claxton et al., 2016). A multi-faceted implementation of strategies is suggested that includes: integrating employability skills into the academic curriculum, providing centralized career services support, incorporating work-integrated learning opportunities when possible; and engaging in purposeful reflection on and documentation of these experiences (Harvey, 2005; Knight & Yorke, 2003; Tokke, 2017). More importantly, research confirms that work-integrated learning (WIL) is the integral, most effective component of enhancing employability skills (Harvey, 2005; Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014; Jackson, 2015; Mason, Williams, & Cranmer, 2009; Smith, Ferns, & Russell, 2016; Tymon, 2013).

Under what Cornford (2005) described as “an exceptionally instrumental approach” (as cited in Tymon, 2013, p. 847) to education and what Wilton (2008) called “an economic ideology of higher education” (as cited in Tymon, 2013, p. 847), the liberal arts have quickly lost their value in favor of more practical and specialized degree programs (Baker & Baldwin, 2015). Many question the ability of liberal arts courses to provide students with practical employability skills much less to develop methods for embedding these skills within the liberal arts curriculum (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Dowling, Rose, & O’Shea, 2015; MacKay, 2010). Therefore, this study intends to explore a non-traditional experiential approach for incorporating WIL into a general education course so that it is meaningful, practical, and effective in achieving both the WES and general education course objectives. These objectives include increasing
students’ awareness of and capacity to demonstrate employability skills while simultaneously cultivating students’ appreciation for the liberal arts.

**Problem of Practice**

In 2014, Green Acres Community College’s (GACC) *Developing a Curriculum (DACUM): Soft Skills for Employability* (Green Acres, 2014) highlighted a soft skills gap in recent GACC graduates. As participants in the study, representatives from local industries defined fundamental soft skills needed for successful employment noting that, “There are an increased number of entry-level employees without basic soft skills. Workers without the appropriate soft skills are at a major disadvantage. [They are] either not hired or dismissed” (Green Acres, 2014, p. 7). As a result of the 2014 DACUM, GACC formed a committee on work ethics skills (WES) to address these needs, of which I am co-chair.

In 2015-2016, the WES committee collaborated with Microburst Learning Inc.¹ to conduct a pilot program in which 13 faculty members from multiple disciplines were trained on how to teach employability skills to students. However, further research proved that work-integrated learning (WIL) and active involvement on the part of employers in curriculum design are the most effective and preferred strategies for teaching employability skills (Harvey, 2005; Jackson, 2015; Mason et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2016; Tymon, 2013).

In fact, a Chegg survey found that “82% of employers want new graduates they hire to have completed a formal internship” and the majority of students who participated in one felt prepared for the job market (Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014, p. 11). In the

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¹ Microburst Learning creates interactive eLearning modules for professional and technical development. More information about their organization can be found at [www.microburstlearning.com](http://www.microburstlearning.com)
mid–1990s, Harvey and Blackwell’s (1999) study of approximately two thousand art and design students in Britain found that students who participated in a work–related learning experience were more successful in gaining full–time, permanent employment. The study also revealed that students had a more positive view of degree programs with WIL and felt WIL had a significant impact in developing their work ethic skills (Harvey, 2005).

Therefore, phase two of our WES pilot involved working with GACC’s Mechatronics and ZF Transmissions, Inc. apprenticeship program. Through collaboration with the GACC Mechatronics faculty and management at ZF, work-integrated learning (WIL) was incorporated into the Mechatronics curriculum and a WES rubric was developed to evaluate students’ WES both in the classroom and workplace. This model could be applied to other apprenticeship programs at the college with the assistance of local industry and Apprenticeship Carolina.

While work-integrated learning (WIL) is a feasible and inherent option for our career and technical educational programs that develops organically, it presents substantial financial, logistical and legal challenges for the general education transfer courses that constitute the Associate of Arts (A.A.) and Associates of Sciences (A.S.) degree programs at a two-year college. Primarily, the problem lies in the fact that liberal arts courses/degrees are not “job specific” and have no direct connection to any exact profession, resulting in a nebulous connection to WIL that runs the risk of being trivial if not structured within a proper theoretical framework.

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2 Apprenticeship Carolina is a part of the SC Technical College System and works with employers to form partnerships and apprenticeship programs with local technical colleges. More information about their organization can be found at http://www.apprenticeshipcarolina.com/index.html
Scholarly Literature

The importance of work-integrated learning. Research studies conducted by Mason et al. (2009) and Tymon (2013) revealed findings that not only confirm the importance of WIL for developing WES but also indicate that simply embedding WES in the academic curriculum and integrating WES-related activities in the classroom without any work–integrated elements are ineffective strategies that rarely, if at all, enhance employability skills. Using a mixed-methods approach, Mason et al. (2009) conducted interviews with 60 academic staff and 10 career staff in 34 departments in eight British universities and analyzed data from the First Destination Survey of 3589 graduates from those departments in the year 2000 in order to determine the impact and effectiveness of employability initiatives in higher education, including: integrating WES into the curriculum, the extent of employer involvement in course design, and student participation in WIL.

These departments consisted of five subject areas: biological sciences, business studies, computing, history and design. The faculty in business studies, computing, and design already saw their courses as practical and employment oriented, and the biological studies faculty recognized the importance of teaching students employability skills in addition to discipline-related skills. However, despite acknowledging that their graduates enter a variety of occupations, the History faculty continued to focus exclusively on discipline-related skills (Mason et al., 2009). All departments, with the exception of history, were able to produce examples of WES related activities and assessments, such as oral presentations, group work, real-world scenarios, and capstone projects, that had recently been added to the course.
The amount of WIL occurrences varied by subject, with business studies and design offering the most WIL opportunities and history offering little to none. Mason et al. (2009) also found employer involvement in course design and delivery varied in form and by location (i.e., convenience) with considerable involvement by employers in design studies, moderate involvement in computer studies, and no involvement in history. Using a four-point scale and six criteria, Mason et al. was able to quantify the different levels of involvement in developing WES in each department, with the liberal arts program ranking the lowest in all three initiatives. The first three criteria were scored based on responses from a written questionnaire in which respondents were to rank the importance of employability skills in teaching, learning, and assessment. The last three criteria were based on answers to interview questions and data provided by departments.

Using data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency’s First Destination Survey, Mason et al. (2009) were able to determine the probability that graduates are (a) employed and (b) employed in a job commensurate with level of education while factoring in extraneous variables such as individual, departmental, and university characteristics. Regarding students simply being employed, results showed a strong, positive correlation between acquiring employment and WIL. However, they demonstrated no correlation or support between probability of employment and employer involvement in course design and/or the use of embedded WES activities in the curriculum (Mason et al., 2009). As they pertained to employment status with consideration for extraneous variables, findings from the study showed a positive and significant correlation between WIL and obtaining employment in a job commensurate with level of education. Interestingly, employer involvement in the course did have a
positive, significant correlation ($p < 0.001$) with graduates’ ability to obtain employment in their field of study, while the correlation with integrating WES activities into the classroom was zero. Substantiating these results, in 1995-1996, the United Kingdom’s Higher Education Statistics Agency surveyed 74,922 graduates in 33 disciplines and found that students who participated in a degree program with WIL were 14% more likely to procure post-graduation employment than students who did not participate in WIL (Bowes & Harvey, 1999; Harvey, 2005).

Similarly, in his qualitative study of first-, second-, and final-year students of business, human resources, and marketing in a British university, Tymon (2013) substantiated the overwhelming effectiveness of WIL in developing WES while simultaneously discrediting the embedment of WES in the curriculum/classroom as a viable strategy for improving employability skills. Using focus groups, Tymon (2013) collected data from approximately 50% of the sample population of first-year students, 65% of the sample population for second-year students, and 5% of the sample population for final-year students. The final-year participants included both students who had participated in WIL and those who had not; final-year students who did not participate in WIL submitted responses via questionnaire. When asked to define and explain the university’s role in developing students’ employability skills and how the university supports the development of employability skills, respondents indicated that placement, job search support, and experience were the most significant and gave very little importance to embedded classroom activities (Tymon, 2013).
Areas for improvement in work-integrated learning. While Mason et al. (2009) and Tymon’s (2013) findings suggest institutions of higher education wishing to include WES as a student learning objective should focus their time and attention on incorporating WIL into the curriculum, both researchers are hesitant to completely dismiss the possible impact on WES via embedded WES activities in the classroom, such as: group work, oral presentations, meeting deadlines, and activities designed to improve communication skills. Mason et al. (2009) recognized the limited resources in the study devoted to these types of activities as well as the narrow scope of employability skills that were the focus of the study, and Tymon (2013) considered the possibility that students place so little importance on WES classroom activities because they may not fully understand the objective and motivation behind the activity.

This link between understanding and motivation is highlighted by Knight and Yorke (2003) as they encouraged the development of the ‘knowing’ student through “learning cultures that help them to know what they are learning and why, and that help them to know how to develop the claims to achievement that make them more employable” (p. 14). Harvey (2005) concurred that there has been a “shift in pedagogy from ‘knowing what’ to ‘knowing how to find out’”, which can be achieved through reflecting on work experience (p. 17). This strong connection between reflection and understanding must also be present in WIL in order for the experience to be meaningful and for students to extract the maximum benefits possible (Harvey, 2005; Jackson, 2015; Smith et al., 2016). In both studies, Jackson (2015) and Smith et al. (2016) lamented the fact that the framework for using WIL to enhance WES has predominantly focused on outcomes rather than giving much deserved attention to the process itself. The two
studies advocate for the careful design and evaluation of WIL curricula to focus more on “what, how and from whom students acquire skills through placement” to better understand outcomes (Jackson, 2015, p. 351). Using online surveys, Jackson (2015) and Smith et al. (2016) had consistent findings that stressed six essential curriculum factors for effective WIL: authenticity, preparation, supervision/coaching, debriefing, reflections, and assessment.

In the study conducted by Smith et al. (2016), 997 students from nine Australian universities who had participated in WIL were surveyed on items related to both the six essential curriculum factors (independent variable) and employment-readiness factors (dependent variable). Using a Likert rating system, students were asked to rate their WIL experience as well as their cognitive and professional abilities, providing data that was quantified into percentages, means, and correlation factors using a two-tailed test. The results established a positive relationship between the six curriculum factors and students developing employability skills. Conversely, Jackson’s (2015) survey of 131 students who participated in WIL combined both closed and open questions, allowing the researcher to use a mixed-methods approach to collect qualitative data as well. Through coding and thematic analysis of the data, Jackson (2015) was able to identify emerging themes. Overall students reported that integrated WES activities in the classroom were ineffective and insufficient for preparing students for the workplace. However, students also reported challenges in meeting workplace expectations, working with others, and developing self-awareness while on placement. To overcome these challenges, students expressed a desire for more coaching opportunities with their workplace supervisor/mentor. They also valued class time and classroom activities as ideal venues
for documenting, debriefing, and reflecting on their WIL experiences through class discussions, journaling, ePortfolios, and records of achievement (Knight & Yorke, 2003). Furthermore, the study revealed that workplace standards and expectations differ from those in the classroom, suggesting the need for more collaboration, communication, and mutual understanding between institutions of higher education and employers regarding WES objectives and assessment of these objectives.

**Liberal arts: A complementary curriculum to enhance work-integrated learning.** In an era in which “the liberal arts faculties … are under significant pressure to justify their existence or to restructure” (Dowling et al., 2013, p. 54), due to a decline in full-time employment rates, a perceived lack of practical skills, and non-specific career paths, a liberal arts education, and hence, general education courses, may provide the ideal venue for this crucial component of reflecting on and recording of workplace experiences (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Keller, 2018). In the early 2000s, MacKay (2010) conducted a study on 780 University of Lethbridge alumni regarding their perceived value of their liberal arts education. In a quantitative approach, MacKay (2010) used a survey adapted from *Employability Skills 2000+* by the Conference Board of Canada, which was distributed through email. Alumni were asked to rate their education regarding specific employability skills using a seven-point Likert scale. Data revealed that liberal arts courses excel in written communication, personal qualities, and research skills, and, in total, 70% of respondents indicated that their liberal arts education was valuable, with Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education majors ranking their liberal education as being more valuable than did graduates with a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Management.
Inherently centered on written communication, personal qualities, and information retrieval, the liberal arts courses are natural settings for WIL reflection, assessment, and recording of experiences through journaling, ePortfolios and records of achievement (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Regrettably, while many liberal arts faculty appreciate the benefits and value of WES, they perceive “employability as an outcome of their teaching rather than a goal within the B.A. curriculum” (Dowling et al., 2013, p. 55) and fear, that by incorporating these skills into the curriculum, they are condoning the human capital theory and contributing to neo–liberal capitalism at the expense of teaching students social criticism, social justice, and civic responsibility (Doweling et al., 2013; Hjelde, 2015; MacKay, 2010; Oria, 2012). However, Knight and Yorke (2003) argue that WES and WIL are not contrary to quality learning and that, in reality, they share a symbiotic relationship.

The relationship between quality education and employability is based on the belief that ‘employability’ should not be directly correlated with getting a job. Instead, ‘employability’ should be realistically viewed as a set of skills that will increase a student’s chances of acquiring employment and finding success in the workplace. Employment, due to multiple factors such as the labor market, economy, degree program, discrimination, and skills, cannot be a guaranteed result of any WES initiative (Harvey, 2005; Knight & Yorke, 2003). Furthermore, Knight and Yorke (2003) contended that WES is about “Skills plus” (p. 7) with the ‘plus’ consisting of critical understanding, meta-cognition, malleable self-theories, and locus of control. Well-developed instruction within vertically aligned programs create learning environments that enrich self-theories, motivation, reflection, and interpersonal relationships in which students are encouraged
to understand and reflect on concepts rather than simply memorize them; work and collaborate in groups; and make connections between classroom practices, program objectives, and practical applications (Knight & Yorke, 2003).

Social justice and civic responsibility are concurrent to these “Skills plus” and, as WIL takes on many forms (Jackson, 2015), social criticism, ethics and philosophies can co-exist and flourish in a WIL environment. Traditionally, WIL has been an integral component of the degree program in the form of clinical or practice placement, internships and apprenticeships. However, WIL can also occur externally through volunteer work, community service, and service learning (Harvey, 2005), exposing students to community needs, increasing awareness of community issues, and garnering support and resources for social change. Interestingly, Harvey (2005) endorses using students’ part-time employment and/or extra-curricular activities as a form of ‘ad hoc’ work experience, making good use out of current circumstances in which many students must work while pursuing a degree. Moreover, students’ extra-curricular activities can offer viable opportunities to teach employability skills (Tran, 2017; Tymon 2013). Thus, Dowling et al. (2013) asserted that the “underlying issue relating to defining and embedding graduate employability skills in Bachelor of Arts programmes results from the perception of academics” (p. 55).

Theoretical Framework

This investigation of the current state of higher education, with a focus on the liberal arts and employability skills, is contextualized by the perceived role of higher education in the 21st century and the future of the liberal arts. Furthermore, the teacher-researcher addresses the obstacles impeding the implementation of experiential learning
in general education courses through the application of Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory.

Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) is founded in the constructivist ideology that the learner actively constructs knowledge based on his or her prior knowledge and experiences. As such, knowledge is highly contextual, integrated, and autonomous (Sisselman-Borgia & Torino, 2017; Srinivasan, 2011). Building on the work of Dewey (1938), who first gave importance to experience in the learning process, Lewin (1951), who emphasized the role of active participation in the learning process and developed the adult learning cycle, and Piaget (1970), whose theory suggested that the interaction of an individual with the environment leads to intelligence (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988; Turesky & Gallagher, 2011); Kolb originated a dynamic theory of learning that depicts how learners are continuously connecting experience with a body of knowledge.

Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as a “holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, cognition and behavior” (p. 21) and “a continuous process grounded in experience” (p. 41). In this model, learning takes place as an individual regularly spirals through four modes of learning: concrete experience, reflection observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Kolb (1984) explained these four modes of learning occur within two main continuums of cognitive growth: the concrete-abstract continuum and the reflective-active continuum and stressed all four modes of learning are necessary for effective learning.

Using Kolb’s (1984) ELT as a theoretical framework to define what constitutes an educative experience, the teacher-researcher incorporates innovative and flexible forms
of WIL as experiential learning to enhance students’ WES. Furthermore, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory presented a viable means for transferring knowledge gained in general education classes to practical, work-related experiences that will enhance students’ work ethic skills (WES). Lastly, the researcher exposes gaps in the literature and presents a hypothesis on how to integrate WIL as a form of experiential learning to improve students’ WES while simultaneously maintaining the human, civic, and social justice elements of the liberal arts.

**Objectives of Study**

There were three main objectives for the outcomes of this study. First, it offers a blueprint for GACC liberal arts faculty to provide a more comprehensive education through positive cultural change toward collaboration, self-awareness, social intelligence, and socio-political relevance. This transformation meets the goals outlined in the GACC 2015-2018 and 2019-2021 Strategic Plans (Green Acres, 2016a) and aligns with the college’s mission of offering: knowledge and skills for successful employment; a cooperative environment that enhances the awareness, understanding, and celebration of differences; training for business and industry to meet the needs of the community; and community and workforce development and economic prosperity through partnerships with business, industry, and community agencies (Green Acres, 2016b). Next, through this study, I hope to provide a feasible and effective solution to the 2014 DACUM by establishing relationships and creating partnerships between the college and the local community/employers in order to meet the 21st century needs of students, the community, and local industry. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, findings from this study might provide evidence that a liberal arts education and employability skills are not mutually
exclusive, demonstrating that liberal arts programs can make practical contributions to the world of work without compromising the ethical, social, and political philosophies of these courses (Dowling et al., 2015; Hjelde, 2015; MacKay, 2010).

Research Question

Therefore, this study was guided by the following research question:

RQ: How does work-integrated learning (WIL), especially via ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual work’ experiences (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013), impact students’ work ethic skills (WES) in general education courses?

Positionality

As I addressed my research question, it was important that, as an ‘insider’ researcher, I remained conscious of any implicit biases I may hold as a result of my position at the college as well as my personal background, education, and age. Current college students perceive the sole purpose of education to be gainful employment that provides individual benefits such as job security, higher wages, and varied employment options that allow more time for personal leisure (Tymon, 2013). Furthermore, Millennials value technical skills and digital networking over interpersonal relationships and professional skills. However, my generation, Generation X, and older generations generally have a wider view of education and employment as having both intrinsic and extrinsic values that benefit society as a whole. Therefore, the researcher-practitioner and student participants in the study may have conflicting philosophical views regarding the aims and objectives of education and employment.

Other stakeholders include both local employers who participate in the study and my colleagues at the college whose educational philosophies and teaching methodologies
may be influenced by the results of this study. Plausibly, employer participants may espouse a more neo-liberal agenda, valuing student participants as human capital rather than as “human beings” navigating and constructing socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, liberal arts faculty at the college may believe the aim of education is knowledge for the sake of enlightenment and preservation of democracy alone; not solely to get a job, and, therefore, believe employability skills have no place in the liberal arts curriculum. Many of my colleagues may view incorporating employability skills into the liberal arts curriculum as catering to the neo-liberal agenda.

Having been taught the value of work and a hard earned dollar and experiencing socio-political economic realities throughout Latin America and southern Europe, these lived experiences steer my teaching and research goals towards issues that focus on work ethic, culturally diverse classrooms, an awareness of global perspectives, an understanding of the global workforce, the need for students to be flexible and creative, social injustices, and practical applications of knowledge and real-world connections; a practical teaching approach that retains the element of humanity.

As a humanities instructor, I have a vested interest in finding compatibility between a liberal arts education and developing employability skills, yet, ironically, unlike many academics, I have always been taught, and, therefore, view, education as a means to both enlightenment and employment for a better standard of living: physically, financially, and mentally. To mitigate these potential personal biases and conflicts of interests, I engaged in self-reflection through journaling and field notes as well as disclosed such information in my research report (Herr & Anderson, 2015).
Methodology

According to de Schutter and Yopo (1981), problems conducive to action research are those in which “theory and practice are integrated” in such a way that results can be applied to immediate and tangible circumstances (as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 17). Furthermore, ideal problems of action research should be collaborative, have ecological validity, have basis in a critical incident, and should be critical or wary of social engineering.

Work Ethic Skills (WES) is an appropriate fit for action research because it is a problem that arose from a need in local industry. More specifically, feedback from local employers in the Upstate region of South Carolina in the form of a DACUM (Development of a Curriculum) (Green Acres, 2014) is helping Green Acres Community College to design and evaluate the curriculum to meet the needs of the community and students. Work Ethic Skills is a “hands-on” topic that involves a variety of practitioners from multiple disciplines in education, such as faculty and students, as well as ‘outsiders’ from the community in the form of local employers. It is, therefore, a collaborative effort to evoke changes in educational practices and resources at GACC that will directly improve the educational experience for students and enhance employment opportunities in the community. Findings from this research will have direct impact on curriculum, teaching practices, and student learning objectives.

Both my philosophical view of education and my Problem of Practice influenced my research approach. Overall, I view schools as complex microcosms of society with multiple realities that cannot be easily reduced and understood through simple numbers
and statistics. Therefore, I used a mixed-method approach in order to enhance the validity of my results and gain a more holistic, in-depth understanding of my findings.

A mixed methods study is defined as when “the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws interferences using both quantitative and qualitative methods or approaches in a single study or program of inquiry” (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p. 4). For this study, I used a concurrent Quan + Qual MMAR design in which the quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed separately (Ivankova, 2015). However, data results from both the quantitative and qualitative strands were compared using combined data analysis, which involved combining quantitative and qualitative results for a more holistic interpretation and understanding of the study’s findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Numerical data (quantitative) helped determine the overall effectiveness of the study, and analysis of students’ opinions, attitudes, and perceptions (qualitative) highlighted predominant themes and patterns. The purpose of a concurrent mixed-methods design was “to compare or merge quantitative and qualitative results to produce well-validated conclusions” via the triangulation of confirmatory and exploratory data on the same topic (Ivankova, 2015, p. 129). Through triangulation of data, the qualitative results provided a comprehensive explanation of and gave meaning to the numerical data.

Quantitative data was collected using students’ results from identical pre- and posttest assessments, students’ WES scores using the WES rubric, and a post-intervention survey. The pre- and posttests scores were tallied and recorded in order to provide benchmark indicators and demonstrate changes in students’ knowledge of WES over time. Likewise, the midterm and final WES scores were tallied and recorded in order to
provide benchmark indicators and demonstrate changes in students’ demonstration of WES over time. A two tailed paired sample $t$-test was used to measure the differences in scores, and $p$ value was calculated to evaluate the statistical significance of change in scores. Furthermore, a Cohen $D$ score was calculated to determine the effect of the intervention. Results from the post-intervention survey were used to analyze students’ opinions, attitudes, and perceptions on the effectiveness of the study. A Cronbach Alpha score was calculated for the survey to establish reliability and internal consistency of the instrument. Finally, data was converted into descriptive statistics for purposes of discussing the means ($M$) and standard deviations (SD) of the results.

Qualitative data was collected from two student reflection assignments; a semi-structured group interview; and my own practitioner-researcher journal containing observations and field notes. An inductive coding method of analysis was used to record emerging codes from the raw data. These codes were classified in categories by themes. In turn, via the process of code weaving, codes, categories and themes were analyzed for patterns that were used to construct a comprehensive narrative to supplement my understanding of the quantitative data results.

A detailed letter explaining the purpose and methodologies of the study was presented to the administration at GACC requesting permission to conduct the study (see Appendix A). Upon administration’s approval, a second letter, also stating the purpose and methodologies of the study and confirming permission by the college, was given to each student requesting his or her permission to participate in the study (see Appendix B). Students had the right not to participate in the study or withdraw from the study at any time. The decision of whether or not to participate in or withdraw from the study did
not affect the students’ grade in the course, and all students in the course, whether they participated in the study or not, were taught and assessed on the same course material/content. The letter asking for students’ permission to participate provided a detailed explanation of how students who elected not to participate or withdrew from the study would be treated.

Furthermore, potential WIL institutions, organizations, and supervisors were identified and contacted via written correspondence (see Appendix C and Appendix D) explaining the purpose and methodologies of the study. The correspondence contained a detailed explanation of what would be required of the participating WIL organization and supervisor, along with a request for permission to participate in the study. Similarly, potential WIL organizations and supervisors had a right to not participate in the study or withdraw from the study at any time. Participating WIL organizations and supervisors were asked to evaluate student participant WES scores. The identity of all participants, both students and WIL supervisors/organizations, were kept confidential.

**Key Words/Glossary**

**Employability.** Complicating the matter is the fact that work ethic skills and what constitutes employability are subjective and multifaceted. Employability skills are influenced by internal and external dimensions and can be understood and defined from three different perspectives: that of the student, the institution of higher education, and the employer (Harvey, 2005; Knight & Yorke, 2003; Oria, 2012; Tymon, 2013).

Ideal for the purpose of my study was Yorke’s (2004) definition of employability as “a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes, that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations,
which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (as cited in Tymon, 2013, p. 842).

**Work ethic skills (WES).** Work ethic skills are a set of skills that characterize positive interpersonal relationships; complement technical skills; and influence success in the workplace. Work ethic skills and employability [skills] are used interchangeably throughout the study.

**WES rubric.** The WES rubric is a percentage-based rubric designed by the WES committee at GACC to evaluate students’ awareness, understanding, and mastery of six fundamental skills/criteria for employability as determined by local industry leaders in the DACUM (Green Acres, 2014) and establishes the framework for what constitutes WES in this research study. The six criteria are: attendance, professionalism, self-management, productivity and quality of work, communication, and teamwork (see Appendix E). The WES rubric delineates the criteria needed to score within the “exceeds,” “meets,” or “needs improvement” categories for each skill. Mastery of each skill is assessed on a scale of one to ten, with 9-10 being “exceeds”, 7.5 – 8.9 being a “meets”, and a 7.4 and below being a “needs improvement”. The highest score a student can earn is a 60.

**Work-integrated learning (WIL).** Work-integrated learning “[encompasses] many forms, each one encouraging students to experience authentic work practices and learn and practice applying skills and knowledge in a real-world context” (Jackson, 2015, p. 350), including internships, apprenticeships, service learning, volunteering, community service, work study, study abroad, leadership positions, extra-curricular activities, and part-time or temporary employment (Harvey, 2005; Tymon 2013).
**Liberal arts.** Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines liberal arts as “college or university studies (such as language, philosophy, literature, abstract science) intended to provide chiefly general knowledge and to develop general intellectual capacities (such as reason and judgment) as opposed to professional or vocational skills.” Cohen et al. (2014) describe the liberal arts as “providing contexts for understanding rather than the knowledge that some bit of esoteric is true or false” (p. 267). Continuing their definition, Cohen et al. (2014) explain the liberal arts “help people evaluate their society and gain a sense of what is right and what is important” (p. 267).

**General education.** Johnson (1952) defines general education as:

That part of education which encompasses the common knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by each individual to be effective as a person, a member of a family, a worker, and a citizen. General education is complementary to, but different in emphasis and approach from, special training for a job, for a profession, or for scholarship in a particular field of knowledge. (p. 2)

For purposes of this study, the terms general education and liberal arts are used interchangeably.

**Limitations**

Realistically, limited support and legal liabilities may prevent organizations and outreach programs specifically aimed at assisting the Hispanic community within the local vicinity of the college from participating in the study. This could result in the potential weakness of not being able to procure enough course related WIL placements for all participants. Furthermore, although the results of the DACUM (Green Acres, 2014) suggest local employers/supervisors will want to actively participate in the study,
many may find the study to be too time consuming and decline to participate. The scope of the study could be a potential weakness as well. I expect the sample size to be approximately 10-15 students, which is extremely small and threatens to invalidate any findings. Moreover, a 16-week semester may be too short a time period to acquire and assess any gains in WES from a WIL placement. Finally, this study may appeal more to students who are interested in improving their employability skills. Therefore, since participation is voluntary, it is possible that the majority of students who partake in the study are those who already have good WES or are highly motivated to advance their WES.

**Significance of the Study**

Through this study, I hoped to develop new and meaningful ways to help students make connections between liberal arts courses and the world beyond the classroom. WIL that is course related consists of community service and volunteering for organizations that are involved with and support the local Hispanic community. By engaging in this type of WIL, students, in addition to enhancing their WES, become cognizant of the local Hispanic community’s needs and gain new perspectives of their community, state, country, and world. Through awareness and knowledge of community needs and the liberal arts objective of civic responsibility, students can be motivated to become agents of change for social justice. This study can help instructors of general education courses re-evaluate the relationship between WES and the objectives of a liberal arts education, demonstrating the feasibility and effectiveness of incorporating WIL into their course to develop WES and promote social change. Making courses in the liberal arts programs relevant to the real world, connecting discipline skills with employability skills, and
developing WIL with a social justice component can help change current pessimistic opinions of liberal arts programs into more favorable ones.

**Conclusion**

While colleges do an excellent job in teaching hard skills, 60% of employers found the majority of graduates lacked necessary work ethic skills to be successful in the workplace (Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014). With the reconceptualization of higher education as more of a means to employment and economic production (DeWitt, 2014; Oria, 2012; Pritchard, 2013), 21st century educational institutions must evolve to meet student needs by incorporating a mix of employability and technical skills into the curriculum so as to instill the “whole person” (DeWitt, 2014). One effective way of doing so is through work-integrated learning (WIL). However, because a liberal arts education lacks hands-on, applicable skills, faculty and students alike wonder exactly what constitutes WIL for a liberal arts course and how can it be incorporated into a general education course in a meaningful and practical way. This study examined the feasibility, effectiveness, and multiple perceptions of WIL in a SPA 101 course at Green Acres Community College. Successful WIL in a general education course could help redefine the liberal arts role in contemporary philosophical views on the aims and objectives of higher education as well as prompt other general education faculty members to reconsider the relationship between WES and academics.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation serves to introduce the reader to the problem of practice (PoP) being addressed in the study, including the significance and theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant literature of Kolb’s experiential learning theory and offers a conceptual understanding of what
constitutes experiential learning, potential obstacles to experiential learning, and possible interventions that facilitate WIL in a liberal arts course at a community college. Chapter 3 outlines the methodologies used in the study, offering a detailed description of the setting of the study; the demographics of the student and employer participants; the instruments used to collect and assess data; and how and when the teacher-researcher collected data. Chapter 4 reveals the results of the study and explicitly reviews the data. An overall discussion of the study’s findings is presented in Chapter 5, along with the teacher-researcher’s recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

“The value of an education in a liberal arts college is not the learning of many facts, but the training of the mind to think something that cannot be learned from textbooks.”

– Albert Einstein

Although recent college graduates possess the disciplinary knowledge needed to perform on-the-job technical skills, employers criticize their lack of generic professional and employability skills that ensure success in the workplace (Claxton et al., 2016; Cumming, 2010; Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014; Nunn, 2013; Green Acres, 2014). Ironically, when polled, 90% of graduating students felt well prepared in work place employability skills (Nunn, 2013). Consequently, institutions of higher education have been tasked with teaching employability skills by incorporating them into the academic curriculum (Bowers-Brown & Harvey, 2004; DeWitt, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Oria, 2012; Pritchard, 2013; Tymon, 2013).

A multi-faceted implementation of strategies is suggested that includes: integrating employability skills into the academic curriculum, providing centralized career services support, incorporating work-integrated learning opportunities when possible; and engaging in purposeful reflection on and documentation of these experiences (Harvey, 2005; Knight & Yorke, 2003; Tokke, 2017), with research confirming that work-integrated learning (WIL) is the integral, most effective component of enhancing employability skills (Harvey, 2005; Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014; Jackson, 2015; Mason et al., 2009; Rosario, Flemister, Gampert, & Grindley, 2013; Smith et al., 2016; Tymon, 2013). Yet, many question the ability of a liberal arts degree
to provide students with these necessary employability skills, much less to embed these skills within the liberal arts curriculum (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Dowling et al., 2015; MacKay, 2010).

**Problem of Practice**

In 2014, Green Acres Community College (GACC), a pseudonym for a small, rural community college in the Southeastern region of the United States, conducted a Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) workshop with participating local industry and business leaders. Findings from the workshop showed a deficiency in soft skills for employability among recent GACC graduates. Representatives from local industries defined fundamental soft skills needed for successful employment and noted “there are an increased number of entry-level employees without basic soft skills. Workers without the appropriate soft skills are at a major disadvantage. [They are] either not hired or dismissed” (Green Acres, 2014, p. 7). As a result of the 2014 DACUM, GACC formed a committee on work ethic skills (WES), of which I am co-chair.

For years, career and technical students at community colleges have been placed in internships, clinics, and other service learning programs as part of their curriculum. Historically, this has not been the case with liberal arts students (Nutting, 2013). While work-integrated learning (WIL) is a feasible option for GACC’s career and technical educational programs, it presents substantial financial, logistical, and legal challenges for the general education transfer courses. The problem becomes how to incorporate WIL into a general education course at GACC in a meaningful, practical, and effective way with the goal to increase students’ awareness of and capacity to demonstrate employability skills.
Historical and Theoretical Background

This investigation of the historical and current state of higher education, with a focus on the liberal arts and employability skills, centers on seven important sub-themes that constitute the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of my study: the perceived role of higher education in the 21st century, the future of general education, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, potential forms of experiential learning, what constitutes an educative experience, obstacles to implementing experiential learning in general education courses, and gaps in the research. To establish the conceptual framework of my study, the review begins with the historical background and leads up to the current view of higher education and, in particular, the liberal arts.

Next, Kolb’s experiential learning theory is presented as a viable theoretical framework for transferring knowledge gained in general education classes to practical experiences that will enhance work ethic skills (WES). Then, the literature examines all possible barriers and obstacles to incorporating experiential learning into the general education curriculum. Lastly, I expose gaps in the literature and present a hypothesis on how to integrate experiential learning so as to improve students’ WES and simultaneously circumvent common obstacles and barriers.

Role of Higher Education in Modern Society

In the current neoliberal political and economical environment, higher education has not escaped the harsh realities of the global market and the latching on to Becker’s human capital theory (1964) in which individuals are valued for contributing to the economy and deemed a “loss” if their contributions are considered insignificant or nil. Following this view, humans are profitable and, therefore, prized as producers and
consumers. Governments and industry are pressuring higher education institutions to enhance this human capital stock by imparting employability skills, both hard and soft, to their students. This newly acquired responsibility of higher education has compelled institutions to tout employability as an institutional outcome and asset as opposed to the traditional educational aims of intellectualism and personal development (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Harvey, 2001; Keller, 2018).

This is especially true of the American community college where the “traditional emphasis on teaching is rapidly being replaced by an emphasis on training” (Alford & Elden, 2013, p. 84). At the expense of student interaction and participation, the present day curriculum of the community college focuses exclusively on job training, information exchange, and technology. According to Alford and Elden (2013), “workforce training has become the mantra of college presidents and politicians in a national chorus of praise of how ‘cheap’ and ‘sensible’ training at the community college can prepare students for jobs” (p. 81). Cohen et al. (2014) echo this sentiment when they note there are “those who view the community college’s main role as helping people prepare for the workplace” (p. 286).

This shift in perception has transformed the role of higher education in the eyes of many to assume a more utilitarian purpose by teaching practical and transferable skills that will prepare students for the workplace (Colletta, 2011; Dowling et al., 2015; Knight & Yorke, 2003; MacKay, 2010; Oria, 2012; Tymon, 2013). Oria (2012) noted that, “despite the general acknowledgments by the academic community that the achievement of learning outcomes in higher education should be regarded as a value in itself, it seems that this functionalist view of the role of universities is prevailing” (p. 219). Even more
alarming is how institutions of higher education have fallen victim to the deregulated
capitalistic market by undergoing a corporatizing of the institution’s management. Under
this style of management, competition is encouraged among scholars in a scarce job
market to produce tangible results via research publication and number of annual
graduates churned out. Additionally, administrators promote the use cheap labor in the
form of graduate students and/or adjunct faculty. Disciplines that cannot economically
prove their worth in the neoliberal market are threatened with budget cuts or elimination
(Colletta, 2011; Donoghue, 2008; Menand, 2010).

The Fate of the Liberal Arts

Nowhere is this threat more prevalent than in the liberal arts. However,
Donoghue (2008) argues this crisis is not as recent as many academic scholars believe.
He demonstrates that corporate dissatisfaction with higher education arose at the turn of
the 19th century and started with a disdain for the liberal arts. In 1891, at a
commencement address at Pierce College of Business and Shorthand of Philadelphia,
Andrew Carnegie exclaimed that the liberal arts were a waste of time and money that did
not prepare students for life on this planet (Donoghue, 2008). Clarence F. Birdseye, in
1907, urged institutions to adopt a more businesslike efficiency and operate under
corporate terms, and, from 1909 to 1911, Richard Teller Crane published three pamphlets
in which he refers to the liberal arts as impractical and unworthy (Donoghue, 2008). The
appearance of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s Principles of Scientific Management (1911)
reinforced these ideas of efficient and systematic labor. In 1909, when Henry S.
Pritchett, then president of MIT, asked Taylor for advice on how to conduct an economic
study of education, higher education instantly collided with the market and the perception of the university as a functional institution began to take hold (Donoghue, 2008).

Although the liberal arts experienced a boom between 1945 and 1975, in what is often referred to as the golden age of higher education in America, when the number of undergraduates rose by 500% and the number of graduate students grew by 900%, the esteem for the liberal arts has been on a steady decline (Menand, 2010, p. 64). Menand (2010) warned that “the danger that faces liberal education today is the same …it will be marginalized by the proliferation, and the attraction, of non-liberal alternatives” (p. 53).

Presently, the U.S. economy is still recovering from the Great Recession of 2008 and the dramatic increase in the cost of higher education has lead to rampant student loan debt. Parents and students alike are conscious of local and global job markets and comprehend the urgency of securing gainful employment upon graduation. Many college administrators, politicians, parents and students question the utility of general education courses. They view the liberal arts as impractical, not specialized nor associated with a specific profession, outdated, and leading to meager employment opportunities and wages (Alford & Elden, 2013; Battistella, 2009; Casement, 1999; Colletta, 2001; Galotti, Claire, McManus, & Nixon, 2016; Hersh, 1997). Furthermore, in the community college’s rush to provide quick “in and out” skills training through condensed certification programs, the current modus operandi is “if it has no obvious immediate application to job training … drop the requirement” (Altshuler, 2013, p. 22). Ultimately, and perhaps most worrisome, is the fact that most students and their parents do not have a clear understanding of what a liberal education is nor its purpose (Hersh, 1997; Moore, 2006).
Nonetheless, the survival of the liberal arts is crucial to achieving social justice and economic equality, preserving democracy, and developing civic-minded and moral leaders in a global economy (Alford & Elden, 2013; Hanson, 2013). In order to safeguard its place in higher education, the liberal arts must undergo a rebranding of sorts, launching a marketing campaign in which the practicality and importance of a liberal arts education in the 21st century is clearly defined, demonstrated, and publicized (Alford & Elden, 2013; Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Battistella, 2009; Casement, 1999; Cohen et al., 2014; Keller, 2018; Zinser, 2004). Historically, academics have touted the intrinsic, intellectual value of the liberal arts as the sole benefit of a general education. Yet, the liberal arts have consistently provided practical value to everyday life by establishing critical thought, ethics, communication skills, interpersonal intelligence, and cultural literacy (Cohen et al., 2014; Hanson, 2013; Keller, 2018; Nutting, 2013).

While rarely defined and discussed, cultural literacy is an understanding of foundational, cultural knowledge that allows one to make connections between knowledge and ideas from different sources. A liberal arts education also builds “general intelligence,” which helps one see the “big picture” and how to apply comprehensive, general knowledge to multiple situations (Casement, 1999; Zinser, 2004). Although cultural literacy and general intelligence are not “job specific” skills, together they can be applied to any job in any profession at any time in the form of communication, interpersonal relationships, problem solving, and critical thinking (Cohen et al., 2014; Casement, 1999). Moreover, surveys conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities reveal employers prefer graduates who have good
interpersonal, critical thinking, and communication skills; skills that are correlated with a general education. In short, employers favor “broadly educated people” (AACU, 2013).

Furthermore, these important 21st-century skills are not mutually exclusive of other essential liberal arts’ objectives, such as social justice, civic duty, and ethics. Yet, the liberal arts have done a poor job demonstrating the link between these skills and objectives and even poorer job marketing just how practical and valuable these skills and objectives are when it comes to preparation for employment (Casement, 1999; Zinser, 2004). Case in point, a study of 100 students at a rural community college in Mississippi found that while both career technical students and academic (e.g. transfer) students understood the importance of employability skills to their success in the workplace, academic (e.g. transfer) program students perceived their competency in these skills as much lower than did their career-tech counterparts (Harris & King, 2015).

Even though Casement (1999) acknowledged the age-old argument of acquiring knowledge for knowledge’s sake is still a valid one, he cautioned that vague statements, generalizations, and arguments that fail to touch upon the political and economical realities of today will never persuade the public to see the value in a general education. Furthermore, Cohen et al., (2014) warns “the fact that the liberal arts courses have been around for centuries is no longer evidence enough of their effectiveness” (p. 272).

Indeed, Cohen et al. (2014) go as far to claim “the liberal arts often ignore the realities of their students’ lives” (p. 286). Instead, Casement (1999) contends that faculty and administration should provide specific examples of how a general education can provide practical value to everyday life. For example, in a survey of 780 alumni who graduated with a liberal arts degree from a specific university, MacKay (2010) found that
70% of respondents rated the importance of their liberal arts education as important, particularly in the areas of communication, information retrieval, and personal attributes.

Likewise, Humphreys (2014) conducted a study in which compiled data from multiple national surveys of employers conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) were analyzed along with data from the US Census to determine how liberal arts graduates fair in terms of employment and wages as compared to their counterparts who majored in STEMs. Finding from the study suggest that although STEM graduates earn a higher wage than graduates with a liberal education, towards the peak of their career, there is a significant narrowing of the wage gap. Furthermore, even though liberal arts majors may earn a lower wage than a STEMs major, a liberal arts graduate pursues a variety of different professions that are deemed socially valuable. Lastly, upon further compilation of data, research suggests that the economy is fueled by innovation, critical thinking, and diversity and that employers value these skills above all others (Humphreys, 2014).

Alford and Elden (2013) challenge us to reflect on what is means to be educated in the 21st century and suggest the real “defense of a 21st century humanities has to engage real students in real life circumstances” (p. 82). Zinser (2004) further suggests designing the general education curriculum around the needs of the 21st-century learner, a learner who does not learn for the sake of learning alone but also seeks practical and relevant application of knowledge. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2014) state that “students must practice their craft, not merely talk about it” (p. 277). Path and Hammons (1999) concur that the same holds true for the community college and recommend “the
development of new general education programs that will more directly meet the needs of the students and promote development of the total person” (p. 469).

As the liberal arts curriculum adapts to the needs of the 21st century student, Moore (2006) reasoned that with this change, the liberal arts must also reevaluate the aims and purpose of a liberal education to include a holistic understanding of a student’s education and educational development. To achieve these goals, the liberal arts will need to incorporate more active, reflective, and collaborative learning (Zinser, 2004) along with non-traditional learning experiences that help students transfer knowledge obtained in the classroom to practical experiences in the real world (Steffes, 2004). These types of non-traditional learning experiences can be accomplished by using Kolb’s experiential learning theory (1984).

**Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory**

Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) is founded in the constructivist ideology that the learner actively constructs knowledge based on his or her prior knowledge and experiences. As such, knowledge is highly contextual, integrated, and autonomous (Sisselman-Borgia & Torino, 2017; Srinivasan, 2011). Building on the work of Dewey (1938), who first gave importance to experience in the learning process, Lewin (1951), who emphasized the role of active participation in the learning process and developed the adult learning cycle, and Piaget (1970), whose theory suggested that the interaction of an individual with the environment leads to intelligence (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988; Turesky & Gallagher, 2011); Kolb originated a dynamic theory of learning that depicts how learners are continuously connecting experience with a body of knowledge.
Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as a “holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, cognition and behavior” (p. 21) and “a continuous process grounded in experience” (p. 41). In this model, learning takes place as an individual regularly spirals through four modes of learning that occur within two main continuums of cognitive growth: the concrete-abstract continuum and the reflective-active continuum (see Figure 2.1). Kolb (1984) stressed all four modes of learning are necessary for effective learning. The Concrete Experience (CE) mode requires the learner to actively experience an activity or event that provokes intuitive and affective responses to the situation. The learner then transitions into the Reflective Observation (RO) mode to reflect on the experience and relate it to prior knowledge and experiences so as to construct personal meaning and understanding of the concrete experience. Using this understanding and deductive reasoning, the learner enters the Abstract Conceptualization (AC) mode and is able to construct a theory to conceptualize their learning. In the Active Experimentation (AE) mode, the learner sets out to test his or her ideas and theories. Tested theories can be implemented, aid in planning for future experiences, or be disregarded, which leads the learner back to the Abstract Conceptualization mode to conceptualize and create more plausible theories (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988; Burke & Bush, 2013; Glazier, Bolic, & Stutts, 2017; Kolb, 1984; Russell-Bowie, 2013; Turesky & Gallagher, 2011; Srinivasan, 2011; Steffes, 2004).

Kolb’s ELT has been praised for its flexibility and epistemological balance in that it is easily adapted to virtual any learning environment, accounts for various learning styles, and offers a continuous vertical spiral of learning (see Figure 2.2). It connects theory to

Figure 2.1 Kolb’s model of experiential learning.

Note. This figure illustrates to the two continuums of cognitive growth: receiving/perceiving information and processing/acting on information.

Figure 2.2 Continuous learning spiral of Kolb’s experiential learning theory.
Forms of Experiential Learning

Research for this study found nine non-traditional experiences commonly used for experiential learning purposes. At Elon University, where experiential learning is required, experiential learning consists of study abroad, undergraduate research, internships, service learning, and leadership experiences (Coker et al., 2017). Internships help students connect classroom learning to a profession, aid in students’ career planning and decisions, provide networking opportunities, and are desired by employers when considering candidates for hire (Hennemann & Liefner, 2010; Rosario et al., 2013; Steffes, 2004). Regarding undergraduate research, Steffes (2004) emphasized that the research need not be complex or in-depth but rather focus on the “process of creating new knowledge” (p. 47). She encouraged the focus in undergraduate research be on “the research process itself, ethical issues in research, how research funds are obtained, and analyze who benefits from research” (Steffes, 2004, p. 48).

In her study and evaluation of a service learning project offered in an introductory psychology course, Kretchmar (2001) distinguished between volunteer work, service learning, and community service. For her, service learning is integrated into the academic course and offers an equal exchange of learning and service to the community. In order to be considered service learning, both the student and the community must benefit. The community receives a public service while the student learns to transfer knowledge from the classroom into practice and acquires new knowledge that is related to the course content and objectives (Kretchmar, 2001).

Conversely, volunteer work provides a one-way benefit for the community or organization. Kretchmar (2001) argued that since volunteer work is not integrated into an
academic course, content, or learning objectives, it lacks the fundamental experiential learning components of reflection and discussion. Without these two essential components of Kolb’s ELT, the learner acquires very little or no knowledge from the experience. Likewise, community service, as defined by Kretchmar (2001), lacks connection to the curriculum and, therefore, offers no opportunities for reflection or discussion. Worse, Kretchmar (2001) warned that community service often takes the form of charity, which can create “a patronizing distinction between those serving and those seeking services” (p. 5). Clearly, according to Dewey’s definition, Kretchmar would consider both volunteer work and community service to be miseducative experiences.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) has emerged as another form of experiential learning and is defined as “the practice of combining traditional academic study…with student exposure to the world-of-work in their chosen profession [and] has a core aim of better preparing undergraduates for entry into the workplace” (Jackson, 2015, p. 350). Work placements, apprenticeships, internships, field work, sandwich year degrees, job shadowing, service learning and cooperative education can all be considered a form of WIL (Von Treuer, Sturre, Keele, & McLeod, 2010). The Dearing report urges educators to realize that “students can benefit from experience in many different settings, structured and informal, paid and unpaid” (NCIHE, 1997). For Harvey (2005), WIL includes job shadowing, collaborative projects with local industry, organized work experience external to the course content, and ad hoc work experience via casual, part-time, and vacation/holiday work.
Institutional surveys show that a staggering 50%-60% of full-time students work an average of 10-14 hours a week during the school year, and approximately 80% of full-time students work when classes are not in session. Data indicates that these numbers are rising, particularly among low-income, marginalized, and older students (Harvey, 2005). Harvey (2005) applauded the:

… changing view toward part-time working [as] indicative of pragmatic acceptance of students’ need to work while studying because state support is no longer sufficient. Rather than ignore it or regard it negatively, academics are trying to get students to think positively about what they learn from their part-time work (p. 21).

However, Tymon’s (2013) report on a study of over 400 business, marketing, and human resource management undergraduate students and their views on employability exposed how little value was given to casual work, student-driven activities, societies, leadership positions, and extracurricular opportunities in developing students’ employability skills.

Tran (2017) confirms this finding in a study on developing employability skills through extra-curricular activities in Vietnamese universities. After interviewing 18 students and collecting survey responses from 423 students, Tran (2017) concluded that students’ inability to relate extra-curricular activities to the workplace hindered their learning experiences while engaging in these activities. Thus, results from both studies indicate the importance of making the student, faculty, and employer aware of the connection and relevance between extra-curricular activities and professionalism in the workplace in order to ensure an educative experience (Tran, 2017; Tymon, 2013).
Lastly, in Glazier et al.’s (2017) self-study on what it really means as a teacher to engage in experiential learning with students, the researchers accompanied their education students on a week-long experiential residency. One instructor and her students spent a week in the mountains on an Outward Bound course with no access to computers or phones. They hiked, went camping, rock climbed, and participated in other outdoor activities. The other instructor and her students spent a week engaging in ground maintenance projects on a farm. These types of extended experiential residencies focus on transferable skills such as team/community building, teamwork, problem solving, interpersonal relationships, and communication (Glazier et al., 2017).

**Educative and Miseducative Experiences**

Dewey (1938) cautioned that not all experiences are equal and that educative and miseducative experiences exist. According to Dewey (1938), an experience that results in cognitive growth and continuous learning can be considered an educative experience. On the contrary, “any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience…Each experience may be lively, vivid, and ‘interesting’, and yet their disconnectedness may artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits” (Dewey, 1938, p. 13).

Since forms of experiential learning are so varied, and with the unique perspectives of Tymon’s (2013) and Tran’s (2017) extracurricular activities and Harvey’s (2005) ad-hoc work experience, both of which are informal and unstructured, how can an educator determine if the experience in which the student is engaging is an educative or miseducative one?
Fink’s (2013) taxonomy of significant learning hinges on the belief that learning is a change that results in personal and/or scholastic growth. For change to occur, the learning experience must be both practical and relevant to students’ personal and/or academic lives. According to Cherrington and Van Ments (1994), depending on an individual’s educational aims, an educative experience achieves one of three possible objectives of experiential learning: (a) affect changes in the practice, structure, and purpose of higher education; (b) affect social change; and/or (c) further personal growth and development. Steffes (2004) asserts that Kolb’s experiential learning theory is a “powerful framework” for achieving these goals (p. 46), as it combines both theory and practice.

Undoubtedly, successful learning experiences require structure, institutional support, student preparation, clearly defined learning objectives, well-developed assessment tools, and constant communication and feedback between the placement host and the educational institution (Eyler, 2009; Harvey, 2005; Jackson, 2015; Kretchmar, 2001; Smith et al., 2016; Wickam, 2018). However, it can be argued that the Reflection Observation (RO) stage is the most critical stage for effective learning (Coker & Porter, 2015; Eyler, 2009; Harvey, 2005; Hennemann & Liefner, 2010; Jackson, 2015; Knight & Yorke, 2003, Smith et al., 2016; Steffes, 2004). Barnes and Caprino (2016) conclude that “reflection necessarily considers and extends academic content to move students to new understandings” and that any experience devoid of reflection will result in superficial learning (p. 570).

In fact, a study of 997 students from nine universities in Australia who participated in work-integrated learning, when surveyed, revealed that “looking back
and making sense of experiences after the fact” positively contributed to the learning experience (Smith et al., 2016, p. 199). Likewise, a survey of 131 undergraduate students from a university in Western Australia who participated in WIL found that reflection was extremely beneficial both before and after the placement (Jackson, 2014). Reflection before the work placement helped prepare students for what to expect upon entering the workplace in terms of interpersonal relationships, workload, company policies, and social and personal responsibility while reflection exercises during and after the placement helped students make meaning of what they learned and experienced. Interestingly, results also showed that due to limited time and high stress in the workplace, the students found the classroom provided an ideal environment in which to discuss and reflect upon their experiential learning (Jackson, 2014).

Knight and Yorke (2003) related employability and the ability to transfer knowledge to a well-developed metacognition. Reflective exercises aid in students’ understanding of the importance, meaning, relevance, and value of the learning experience. In turn, they become “knowing students” (p. 14). Knight and Yorke (2003) suggested that “we need learning cultures that help [students] to know what they are learning and why, and that help them to know how to develop the claims to achievement that make them more employable” (p. 14). Furthermore, Coker and Porter (2015) believed that having students “reflect on their experiences through the lens of liberal-learning outcomes can be transformative” (p. 71).

Barnes and Caprino’s (2016) qualitative study on students’ reflections of a service learning experience supplemented these findings but also underscored the importance of quality reflective assignments. Barnes and Caprino’s (2016) study demonstrated that
significant learning through change and action can only be achieved through critical reflection, which requires structure and guidance. For students to achieve high quality reflection, Barnes and Caprino (2016) recommend educators use Fink’s (2013) taxonomy of significant learning as a solid framework for structuring and guiding students’ reflection assignments.

Fink’s (2013) taxonomy of significant learning suggests meaningful learning can only be achieved through critical reflection, and Barnes and Caprino’s (2016) recommendation is based on the flexibility of Fink’s (2013) taxonomy and the fact that it considers both academic and personal growth (see Figure 2.3). The three categories that influence academic growth are: foundational knowledge, application, and integration. Foundational knowledge promotes student recollection and understanding of information and ideas that are presented and discussed in class. Application occurs when students can clearly apply content knowledge to the experiential learning environment. Integration transpires when students make connections in their learning and with their knowledge and personal experiences. The three categories that influence personal growth are: human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn. The human dimension takes into consideration self-awareness and what students learn about themselves during the experiential learning. Caring acknowledges the developing interpersonal relationships, feelings, interests and values as a result of the experiential learning. Learning how to learn recognizes enhanced meta-cognitive skills and the assuming of responsibilities as a self-directed learner.
Notably, Fink’s (2013) taxonomy is not hierarchical. Therefore, learning outcomes for the six categories can be addressed individually or simultaneously and in no particular order.

Figure 2.3 Six Categories of Fink’s Taxonomy of Significant Learning.

This flexibility allows instructors and learners to concentrate on various learning outcomes at different stages in the learning process. However, for significant and meaningful learning to occur, Fink (2013) advocates learning outcomes that address some, if not all, of the six categories of his learning taxonomy as these categories ensure learning is practical, relevant, and personal.

Obstacles to Implementing Experiential Learning in the Liberal Arts

Given the flexibility in form, experiential learning can fit easily into almost every discipline (Eyler, 2009) and speaks directly to the mission of a liberal education (Zlotkowski, 2001). In fact, experienced-based learning is essential to clearly defining the liberal arts and the meaning of a liberal arts degree (Patterson & Wolfson, 2001) and
helps further the aims of a general education by having students contribute to the community, be active civic agents, define possible career choices, and develop practical 21st century skills such as: communication, critical thinking, interpersonal relationships, and other essential employability skills (Colletta, 2011; Fox, 2016; Freeland, 2009).

After analyzing a variety of case studies in which experiential learning has been associated to the liberal arts at various universities, Freeland (2009) found that while the movement to link a general education to practical experience has gained momentum, experiential learning still remains at the margins of mainstream academia. At these institutions, experiential learning is viewed as an “added-on” learning experience neither explicitly nor formally tied to a liberal arts program (Freeland, 2009).

Moreover, although regularly seen as hubs for innovation and change, the community colleges are also failing miserably when it comes to making general education studies more practical in order to meet the needs of the 21st century student. In fact, a study involving Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) from 181 community colleges found that 84.5% of the institutions surveyed still used a traditional, subject-centered approach for their general education programs (Path & Hammons, 1999). Despite the fact that the majority of the CAOs surveyed (51%) indicated a preference for a more student-centered approach for their general education programs, most community colleges continue to rely on general education studies as a “distribution of requirements [from which] students graduate with fragments of unrelated knowledge rather than a coherent general education” (Path & Hammons, 1999, p. 479). So, what is holding the liberal arts back when it comes to integrating experiential learning into the liberal education curriculum?
Many colleges and universities face unique obstacles related to their financial situations, demographics, and environments that impede their ability to renovate general education programs and fully incorporate experiential learning in general education courses (Walsh & Cuba, 2009). Most CAOs in the Path and Hammons (1999) study agreed that core barriers preventing the move to a more student-centered, experiential learning approach in general education programs at the community college were: faculty resistance to change (23%), transfer problems with other institutions (20%), logistical difficulties in organizing changes (20%), and inadequate funds to implement changes (14%).

**Faculty resistance.** Facing the decline of the liberal arts, general education faculty call for a strengthening of the four pillars of academia: academic freedom, tenure, faculty governance, and general education (Donoghue, 2008; Ferrall, 2011; Menand, 2010; Schrecker, 2010), an appeal Kimball (2015) blasts as blatant evidence of the liberal arts faculty’s unrealistic desire to relive the heyday of the liberal arts academe. This reluctance to accept the new “norm” of higher education, due to their own resistance to change, will perpetuate the slow decline of their disciplines (Kimball, 2015).

As fervent supporters of the scholar academic ideology as the basis for curriculum theory, many, if not most, academics perceive the academic disciplines as determining the canon of knowledge that encompasses all of man’s knowledge and accomplishments (Schiro, 2013). Familiarity with the canon is essential for developing students’ cultural literacy; cultural literacy being an understanding of the foundational cultural knowledge that allows an individual to make connections with and draw meaning from knowledge and ideas that stem from different sources (Casement, 1999). Academics have dedicated
their lives to studying and becoming experts in a specific discipline, and, within the
scholar academic ideology, only academics can disseminate knowledge of their discipline
(Schiro, 2013). This one-way transmission of knowledge is disseminated from
professors, who are vessels filled with knowledge, and passively received by students,
who are empty vessels ready to absorb knowledge (Schiro, 2013). This ideology is
conducive to didactic pedagogical methods in which the faculty member is the ultimate
source of knowledge (Schiro, 2013) and supports the belief that the purpose of education
is knowledge for knowledge’s (i.e., enlightenment) sake.

Within these philosophical beliefs, many faculty deem it is “not their job” to teach
employability and other practical skills and, to do so, would only devalue traditional
learning and the academic and analytic nature of the discipline (Bloomgarden &
O’Meara, 2007; Freeland, 2009; Walsh & Cuba, 2009). Furthermore, faculty have
dedicated much time and effort to becoming experts within their academic discipline.
Practical experience is outside their realm of expertise (Freeland, 2009) and experiential
learning would require faculty to step outside of their academic comfort zone.

As proof, Glazier et al. (2017) conducted a self-study in which the
researchers/educators recorded and analyzed field notes and journal entries to report on
their challenges, insights, and experiences as educators engaging in experiential learning.
During the study, the researchers/educators reported being challenged physically,
spiritually, emotionally, morally, intellectually, and socially. Moreover, they felt
vulnerable as they relinquished some of the responsibility of learning to their students.
As a misplaced sage, the researchers/educators encountered role confusion and were
obligated to accept “the unknown and unscripted” (Glazier et al., 2017, p. 243). All in
all, experiential learning for faculty, although ultimately a positive and valuable
experience, was found to be “complex, messy, and challenging” (Glazier et al., 2017, p.
234).

An even more seemingly insurmountable challenge is faculty’s skepticism towards
experiential learning, which prevents them from fully embracing experiential pedagogy.
Some faculty regard experiential learning as “faddish” or as having little substance. Other
instructors reject experiential learning as acquiescing to the neoliberal instrumental views
on education. Still others are convinced that, even if it were an effective method for
preserving the liberal arts by making general education more relevant, experiential
learning does not fit neatly within the diverse disciplines on the grounds that it demands
too much time from a full curriculum and an already overworked faculty (Abes, Jackson,
& Jones, 2002; Bloomgarden & O’Meara, 2007; DiConti, 2004).

Lastly, a number of educators believe that social and emotional intelligences (i.e.,
intelligences upon which employability skills are based) are either innate or are instilled
during the formative years within the dynamics of the child’s family culture and values.
They doubt whether non-cognitive intelligences can be taught or learned. Yet, studies
have demonstrated that behavioral and affective knowledge can be taught. These non-
cognitive intelligences are more malleable than cognitive intelligence, and students who
engage in experiential learning exhibit growth in and display higher levels of social and
emotional intelligences than students who are only exposed to didactic learning
environments (Celio et al., 2011; Davis & Leslie, 2015; Kyllonen, 2013; Simons &
Cleary, 2006).
Finally, faculty lack the motivation to overcome these challenges to even attempt integrating experiential learning into their curriculum. A lack of rewards (both intrinsic and extrinsic), a void in institutional and administrative support, and insufficient training make experiential learning, with all its challenges, unattractive to educators, even to those who appreciate the added value of a lived learning event (Abes et al., 2002; Bloomgarden & O’Meara, 2007; Darby & Newman, 2014; DiConti, 2004; Guarasci, 2006; Patterson & Wolfson, 2001; Walsh & Cuba, 2009; Zlotkowski, 2001). Educators, who are already overworked and sorely underpaid, feel that the added exertion of integrating experiential learning into their course will have little to no effect on tenure, promotion, recognition nor increase in salary, as these tend to be based solely on research, publication, and student evaluations (Bloomgarden & O’Meara, 2007; Darby & Newman, 2014; DiConti, 2004; Guarasci, 2006; Patterson & Wolfson, 2001; Walsh & Cuba, 2009; Zlotkowski, 2001).

To combat faculty resistance, researchers recommend that academic institutions support faculty both financially and logistically by offering course releases, stipends, training, support groups, and other campus resources. Furthermore, it is suggested that faculty who engage in experiential learning methodologies be recognized for their work through extrinsic rewards, be it through a raise, a promotion, evidence for tenure, or public praise (Darby & Newman, 2014; Guarasci, 2006; Walsh & Cuba, 2009; Zlotkowski, 2001). In fact, in response to Boyer’s (1991; 1994) suggestion that scholarship should be redefined to fulfill the mission of the New American College and meet the needs of American society, many institutions have expanded tenure and promotion documents and guidelines to include service. Syracuse University, the
University of California Monterey Bay, Portland State University, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, and the University of Georgia are just a few examples of institutions that have embraced service as a valid form of scholarship (O’Meara, 1997; Saltmarsh et al., 2014). By applying ‘the Wisconsin idea’ of its mission statement to scholarship, tenure, and promotion, the University of Wisconsin Madison displays its adaptability and ability to evolve. By declaring “the boundaries of the University are as open as the boundaries of the state” (O’Meara, 1997, p. 6), the University of Wisconsin Madison is able to respond to challenges and meet the needs of community as they arise.

However, Guarasci (2006), in his case study of the learning communities model at Wagner College, claimed that true educational reform within the liberal arts will only transpire once faculty experience a rediscovery of their academic integrity; recognize the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration; and become lifelong learners who embrace change and evolution within education. Through this rediscovery of academic integrity, faculty will recognize their membership of a profession that has an obligation to its students (Guarasci, 2006). This obligation entails meeting the needs of the 21st-century student and fulfilling the missions of the institution, which, more than likely, will require some faculty members to re-evaluate their outdated philosophical views of education to develop a more current definition of education that encompasses a more holistic view the educational process and objectives to include cognitive, behavioral, and affective skills through practical learning (Guarasci, 2006; Moore, 2006; Patterson & Wolfson, 2001; Zlotkowski, 2001).

**Student resistance.** Students face their own share of challenges that can prevent them from taking full advantage of experiential learning. Research shows that time...
constraints and transportation logistics were the two most common obstacles encountered by students when participating in experiential learning (Burke & Bush, 2013; Kretchmar, 2001). These obstacles were particularly prevalent amongst non-traditional students, who, because of family and financial responsibilities, have work commitments in addition to their studies (Burke & Bush, 2013; Harvey, 2005). Transportation to and from work or service placements present a challenge to students who do not have their own form of transportation, do not have access to public transportation, live in rural or distant locations, lack gas money, or take online classes and rarely come to campus (Burke & Bush, 2013; Kretchmar, 2001).

Another stumbling block students may face is difficulty within the work or service placement host. Experiential learning objectives that are not clearly communicated to the placement host can lead to misunderstanding and confusion, particularly when it pertains to jobs, tasks, and responsibilities that will be undertaken by the learner. Unfortunately, this scenario has resulted in students participating in learning experiences that are less than meaningful, and therefore, ineffective (Kretchmar, 2001; Whannell, Humphries, Whannell, & Usher, 2015).

Even when learning objectives are clearly communicated and understood such that assignments, activities, and tasks are aligned with the learning goals, students may encounter situations or realities that are strikingly different from their own. Reactions to these encounters can vary widely (Kretchmar, 2001). Faculty must be sensitive to the fact and provide training and/or opportunities for reflection/discussion for students about what they may potentially confront in a placement before they commence with the learning experience (Eyler, 2009; Kretchmar, 2001; Smith et al., 2016).
Occasionally students in work-integrated placements are unsure of the standards to which they are being held and, therefore, feel inadequate and isolated. Others struggle with working alongside diverse populations, have episodes of miscommunication, and grapple with resolving conflicts (Jackson, 2015). Open and continuous communication between instructor, student, and supervisor is essential to resolving issues such as these. In fact, placement supervisors should be made aware of the student’s learning objectives, be committed to the learning experience, provide constructive feedback and guidance to the learner, and report progress and setbacks to the instructor (Smith et al., 2016; Eyler, 2009; Harvey, 2005; Jackson, 2015; Kretchmar, 2001).

Regardless of how well structured and supported a learning experience may be, students bring their own personal attitudes, preconceptions, and stereotypes that stem from their cultural background to the learning environment (Coker & Porter, 2015; Darby & Newman, 2014, Patterson & Wolfson, 2001). In Coker and Porter’s (2015) study of graduating seniors from Elon University who participated in the university’s experiential learning requirement (ELR), it was discovered, through data gathered from surveys, interviews, round tables, and experiential and academic transcripts, that “narrow preconceptions and stereotypes are correlated with minimal participation, less learning, and an inability to describe their experiences to potential employers and graduate programs” (p. 70). These same negative attitudes, narrow preconceptions, and cultural stereotypes may contribute to a student’s lack of commitment to the learning experience, which, ironically, in turn, diminishes faculty’s morale and motivation (Darby & Newman, 2014).
Areas for Further Research and the Future of WES, WIL, and the Liberal Arts

New and evolving forms of experiential learning and emerging best practices for experiential learning in general education courses may provide viable options for both faculty and students. However, little to no research has been conducted on the effectiveness of blending these best practices with unconventional forms of experiential learning in general education courses.

The future of experiential learning. Bush and Burke (2013) offered a glimpse into the future of experiential learning when, at the end of their survey of both qualitative and quantitative items exploring 52 students’ attitudes and perceptions towards service learning, they pose a new challenge for “teachers to think about these barriers and the evolving nature of higher education and then creatively design service learning requirements into their curricula” (p. 67). Furthermore, Fraser’s statement, “if we pin down experiential learning it folds its wings and dies” (as cited in Cherrington & Van Ments, 1994, para. 1), encourages educators to be innovative when it comes to experiential learning; a sentiment echoed in Coker and Porter’s (2015) suggestion that faculty and educational institutions “create a strategic array of experiences so that students can match their interests and developmental needs with the opportunities available” as “one size does not fit all” (p. 68). This novel approach to experiential learning, also reflected in the alternative approaches to WIL advocated by Harvey (2005), NCIHE (2007), Tran (2017), and Tymon (2013), makes experiential learning more accessible to all students (Coker & Porter, 2015; Harvey, 2005; NCIHE, 2007; Tymon, 2013).
A second emerging theme in the future of experiential learning is the proposal of broad liberal learning outcomes as the objectives for the lived learning experience. Coker and Porter (2015) explained that “each experiential-learning opportunity should be delivered in a way that helps students develop a broad range of knowledge and skills...[which] enables students to maximize their learning, transfer that learning to other situations, and frame their experiences for postgraduate opportunities” (p. 70). Establishing broad liberal learning objectives will minimize time demands on faculty, facilitate logistics, seamlessly integrate within any discipline, alleviate faculty’s anxiety, and enhance students’ ability to achieve the learning outcomes.

**Best practices in experiential learning and the liberal arts.** Nevertheless, naysayers insist effective learning experiences must be relevant to the course content and relate to academic goals (Eyler, 2009; Kretchmar, 2001). DiConti (2004) stressed that the learning experience should complement and enhance classroom learning and not distract from or substitute the academic learning. Furthermore, some research indicates that in order for the concrete learning experience to be meaningful, it must be authentic, relegate appropriate levels of autonomy and responsibility to the learner, and have real consequences for the learner or others (Bergsteiner & Avery, 2013; Smith et al., 2016). Other studies emphasize the length (i.e., time spent) of the learning experience, giving preference to those that span multiple semesters (Coker et al., 2017).

Yet, the purpose of a liberal education is to build “general intelligence” which helps one see the “big picture” and apply broad, general knowledge to multiple situations. While this general knowledge is not “job specific”, it can be applied to any job at any time (Cohen et al., 2014; Casement, 1999; Fox, 2016). Within this objective of “general
“intelligence” are important 21st century skills that include, but are not limited to, communication, interpersonal relationships, and critical thinking. Interestingly, when asked in a national survey, college bound students; their parents; CEOs and human resource managers; faculty and administrators; and recent university and liberal arts college graduates all agreed these abilities constituted essential career skills (Hersh, 1997). Therefore, it can be argued that these general intelligences, by virtue of the aims of a liberal education, relate and are relevant to all general education course content and will only enhance academic learning. Moreover, given the current utilitarian view of higher education, academic goals should encompass social, emotional, and work ethic skills.

In fact, Hennemann and Liefner’s (2010) survey of 257 geography graduates from 1960s to 2007 indicates that higher education curriculum may focus too much on content knowledge and not enough on the soft skills. Using qualitative and quantitative data elicited from a three-part questionnaire, they found that students’ knowledge of theories, concepts, models, and facts of the discipline’s core content was grossly over-developed for what was required and practical for the workplace. In terms of hard skills and knowledge of methods, the curriculum adequately prepared students for the workplace. However, in terms of competency, or the ability of students to use both theoretical knowledge and hard skills in various contexts, the curriculum was grossly inadequate in preparing learners for the workforce (Hennemann & Liefner, 2010). Ironically, the same study revealed that competency was the most desired skill in an employee followed by knowledge of the hard skills, creating a mismatch between skills desired and skills taught.
in range of 50%. The least desired skill by employers was conceptual and theoretical knowledge of the discipline (Hennemann & Liefner, 2010).

Likewise, in response to those who doubt the efficacy of short-term learning experiences, the Coker et al. (2017) case study of five graduating classes from Elon University found that, while both “in-depth” (i.e., long-term) experiences and “breadth” (i.e., shorter but varied) experiences are beneficial to students, shorter (16 weeks or less) but varied learning opportunities enhance soft skills and promote the ability to work well with others (p. 20). Furthermore, data gathered from Elon Experiences Transcripts (EETs) and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results of 2,058 students, coupled with NSSE data from 38 additional institutions, determined that shorter but varied experiences had more of an impact on students’ “career planning, general education, practical competence, and personal and social development” (Coker et al., 2017, p. 8).

**Research gaps in unconventional experiential learning.** Short-term, diverse learning opportunities with broad liberal learning outcomes seem to provide a viable solution for many of the challenges educators and students face when engaging in experiential learning. However, relatively little, if any, research has been done on the effects and learning outcomes of unconventional and innovative forms of WIL with generic liberal education objectives.

Therefore, in response to this gap in the research, my study operated on the hypothesis that active learning experiences, even brief, unconventional experiences, are meaningful, effective and practical if they meet four criteria; that the experience: (a) incorporates the four elements of Kolb’s ELT (1984); (b) works towards one of the main
objectives of experiential learning (Cherrington & Van Ments, 1994); (c) has clearly stated WES learning outcomes that are general in nature; and (d) is framed by a process that is structured in preparation, collaboration, reflection that is valuable and continuous, and evaluation that is appropriate. Innovative experiential learning is practical in that it overcomes many of the challenges faced by faculty and students when engaging in experiential learning. By being meaningful and effective, I hypothesized that even unconventional forms of experiential learning work towards solving my problem of practice by: increasing students’ understanding of WES; enhancing students’ development of WES; improving student and public perception of general education in teaching WES and other transferable skills; and boosting faculty’s motivation for and possibilities of effectively and efficiently incorporating WIL in general education courses.

**Conclusion**

Clearly, an examination of the literature demonstrates the need for college graduates to possess employability skills upon graduation and the urgent need for the liberal arts to reestablish their worth within the current utilitarian view of higher education. Innovative and unconventional forms of Kolb’s ELT (1984) may help develop students’ work ethic skills while simultaneously promoting the practical and transferable general intelligence skills of a liberal education without the logistical complications of traditional active learning experiences. As a result, experiential learning would become more accessible to faculty and students.
Chapter 3: Overview of the Study

“No research without action, no action without research”

-Kurt Lewin

This study addressed the gap in employability skills among recent college graduates. Despite possessing a strong understanding of the hard (or technical) skills, a lack of desired employability skills impedes many college graduates’ ability to succeed in the 21st century workplace. Therefore, the proposed intervention sought to integrate work ethic skills (WES) into the general education curriculum in a practical, efficient, and effective way to develop and enhance students’ professional skills. By doing so, the study simultaneously focused on rectifying the perceived devaluation of the liberal arts by demonstrating the practical value of a general education curriculum.

Demonstrated research supports work-integrated learning (WIL), if done properly, to be the most effective method for students to learn, practice, and apply professional and academic skills. Using Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory as a theoretical framework for substantiating effective and meaningful learning experiences, the study proposed the use of ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) to circumvent certain hurdles identified by students when integrating WIL in general education courses and sought to discover how these ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) impact students’ WES.

This chapter provides specific details and insight about the study’s mixed methods research design and proposed intervention. Using a rudimentary road map of
the study below (see Figure 3.1), a rich description of the study’s setting and participants is presented along with a comprehensive explanation of research procedures employed throughout the study, including data collection methods for both quantitative and qualitative data, data integration, and data analysis.

**Figure 3.1 Roadmap for implementing WIL to develop WES.**

**Action Research: Design and Intervention**

The current study was one of action research, which is defined as “an inquiry conducted by educators in their own settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students’ learning” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 2). This was an authentic
study derived from an immediate and local concern regarding students’ gap in employability skills, a call for action to develop these skills among students, and an urgent need to demonstrate the practicality of the liberal arts with the core objective of empowering educators to evoke practical and necessary change within their own curriculum (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). According to de Schutter and Yopo (1981), action research is when “theory and practice are integrated, research and action become a single process, and the results of the research are immediately applied to a concrete situation” (as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 17). Focusing on a local community matter, I collaborated with local student participants and local employer/supervisor –participants in this action research study to offer pragmatic results on how best to incorporate WIL into the GACC general education curriculum in order to enhance students’ WES.

**Mixed methods action research (MMAR).** In keeping with the objectives of action research, this study assumed an exploratory stance in which I investigated the effectiveness and feasibility of using Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory with ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) to teach WES in a general education course. To accomplish this, I elected to use a mixed methods design for the study. Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) define a mixed methods study as when “the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both quantitative and qualitative methods or approaches in a single study or program of inquiry” (p. 4). Furthermore, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest a mixed methods design is needed when findings from one data set may require further
explanation and results from a small exploratory study will need to be generalized for a larger population, as is the case with the current study.

For this study, I used a convergent Quan + Qual MMAR design in which the quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed separately (Ivankova, 2015). However, data results from both the quantitative and qualitative strands were compared using a combined data analysis (see Figure 3.2), which involved merging quantitative and qualitative results for a more holistic interpretation and understanding of the study’s findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). By utilizing a mixed methods design, I was able to capitalize on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods to offer multiple perspectives, obtain more robust evidence, and provide real-life, contextual understanding of numerical data (Ivankova, 2015).

![Figure 3.2 Convergent Mixed-Methods Design](image)

This triangulation of multiple quantitative and qualitative data sources enhanced the quality and credibility of any meta-inferences that originated from the study’s outcomes (Ivankova, 2015). Quantitative data was essential for measuring the central tendencies of a sample group and verifying knowledge. In the current study, the
numerical data was converted into descriptive statistics used to measure change in students’ knowledge and understanding of WES as well as in their ability to demonstrate WES. Qualitative data was crucial for understanding patterns in data, discovering potential relationships among variables, uncovering individual perceptions, and generating knowledge (Ivankova, 2015). Reoccurring patterns and themes in students’ reflection assignments and interview responses were used to give meaning to the descriptive statistics and assist in identifying the most effective elements of the study, particularly in regards to the WIL component.

Results of this study helped establish the practicality of using WIL to teach WES in general education courses at GACC and provide guidance for future research on how to integrate WIL and WES into GACC’s liberal arts curriculum.

**Intervention.** Student participants enrolled in a first-year general education course committed to participating in 12 hours of WIL, traditional or ‘ad hoc’, over the duration of 16 weeks, or one academic semester. Traditional forms of WIL include internships, apprenticeships, and service learning projects. More ‘casual’ forms of WIL include community service; ‘ad hoc’ work experience; study abroad; work study positions; tutoring; volunteer work; student driven projects and events; and extracurricular activities. Provided these ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ WIL experiences (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) are structured within the framework of Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT); they should offer viable and flexible WIL options to students who face considerable time and transportation constraints due to personal and professional obligations while still affording students the same employability skills and general knowledge commonly associated with more traditional forms of WIL.
Because the study was conducted with my Elementary Spanish 101 class (SPA 101), student participants who were not currently employed or involved in extracurricular activities or community service projects were encouraged to engage in WIL that could be tied to the linguistic and/or cultural content of the course by working with the Hispanic community through a local organization or college affiliated project. WIL opportunities that could develop WES, enhance students’ awareness of issues involving the local Hispanic community, and encourage students to become agents of social justice included but were not limited to: working with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals\(^3\) (DACA) students on campus; working as a Spanish tutor on campus; volunteering at a local school district to assist with ESOL classes; organizing a cultural event on campus; volunteering for ESOL classes offered at local churches; volunteering as a homework tutor for Hispanic students offered through the local public library; aiding in fundraising for tuition for DACA students with local non-profit organizations; engaging in community awareness and educational campaigns about DACA; collaborating with PASOs\(^4\) and the local city council to promote cultural diversity and appreciation of the local Hispanic community; engaging in community awareness and educational campaigns for Hispanic students born in the United States to parents who are illegal immigrants; or teaching a basic Spanish class to elementary students in the area.

In keeping with the educational philosophies of Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984), an educative experience results in cognitive growth, and, therefore, WIL arrangements

\(^3\) Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is immigration legislation for minors who are brought to the United States illegally by their parents/guardians. More information about DACA can be found at https://www.ilrc.org/daca

\(^4\) PASOs is a non-profit organization in South Carolina that works to support the Hispanic community in South Carolina through education, advocacy, and leadership. More information can be found at http://www.scpasos.org/
for this study were connected to the student learning outcomes of the course. During the study, student participants actively experienced and engaged in WES while in the WIL environment as the concrete experience (CE) phase of Kolb’s (1984) ELT. Periodically, student participants reflected on these experiences in class via journals, class discussions, and reflective responses, realizing the reflection observation (RO) phase of Kolb’s (1984) theory. Follow-up discussions, feedback, and development of a plan for improvement allowed student participants to achieve the abstract conceptualization (AC) phase of the theory in which student participants began to conceptualize their learning. Upon return to the WIL environment, student participants had the opportunity to actively experiment (AE) with their newly formed theories of learning. Furthermore, having added WES to the student learning outcomes for the course, I introduced WES content into the course curriculum by integrating WES activities, assessments, and evaluations throughout the semester (see Figure 3.3).

Class activities consisted of group work, videos, surveys, personal inventories, and current events related to professionalism. Examples of group activities included having students, working in groups of 2 or 3, to list the six WES skills in order of importance and explain why. Groups were also tasked with listing factors contributing to poor attendance/punctuality and then provide a solution for each factor. In addition, students were grouped by their weakest teamwork skill and given common issues that occur when people work as a team. The groups had to resolve each issue as a team. Lastly, groups were given examples of poorly written emails. Members of the groups had to work together to re-write each email to make the communication more effective.
Individually, students in the class completed a time management survey and a time inventory sheet. This helped account for their use of time. Students also completed a teamwork skills inventory to determine their individual strengths and weakness as a team member. Furthermore, each student brought an attendance policy from a local employer to class. As class, we reviewed the various attendance policies and discussed the differences. Finally, class discussions revolved around videos on employability skills that were shown in class, assigned articles/readings on employability skills, and current events related to professionalism, communication, interpersonal skills and diversity.

![Kolb’s ELT as a framework for the study.](image)

**Figure 3.3.** Kolb’s ELT as a framework for the study.

**Study Setting and Participants**

Green Acres Community College (GACC) is a two-year community college located in a suburban town in the southeast region of the United States. The college is located in a county where roughly 79.9% of the population holds a high school diploma or higher and only 23% hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. The median household income is $36,045, and 22.1% of the population lives below the poverty line (U.S. Census, 2010).
Low cost of living, cost-efficient labor, favorable labor laws for corporations, minimal tax rates, and an agreeable climate have attracted many multinational companies to area. In fact, the college is within short driving distance of several multinational manufacturing plants. Local industry investment has increased employment opportunities for workers who are educated in both the technical and soft skills. Needless to say, many of the college’s students view higher education as a means to better employment opportunities and desperately need the work ethic skills (WES) to be successful in the workplace, yet they face the same aforementioned challenges and obstacles with experiential learning.

Green Acres Community College offers a university transfer curriculum with transfer opportunities to more than 40 colleges and universities in addition to a variety of career studies programs that prepare students to immediately enter the workforce. GACC offers over 80 academic programs and continuing education courses for personal and professional development, many of which are specifically tailored to workforce training for local industry and manufacturing.

The college serves seven surrounding counties and enrolled 6,195 students during the 2017-2018 academic year. Females account for 63% of the student body, while males account for 37%, and 41% of GACC’s students are between the ages of 18 and 21. Students between the ages of 22 and 34 constitute 37% of the student body, and the most common student age is 18. Approximately 65% of the students are part-time students, and close to 98% of students enrolled at GACC receive some type of financial aid (Community College Review, 2018; Green Acres, 2018.). The GACC student body
demographics are: 67% White; 31% African American; 1% Hispanic; and 1% two or more races (Community College Review, 2018).

**Participants.** This study was conducted using a convenience sample from my Spanish 101 Elementary Spanish I (SPA 101) class taught during the spring 2019 semester, allowing me “to quickly select the study participants affected by the problem that requires an immediate solution” (Ivankova, 2015, p. 189). Participation was open to any student enrolled in this class who was interested in participating in the study. Interested students had to first read the letter of intent and full disclosure of the nature of the study and sign the consent form in order to be considered a participant.

I elected to create a study sample from my SPA 101 students for two main reasons. First, most four-year degrees require at least one semester of foreign language, and students who plan to transfer need it for their degree. Therefore, almost all of the associates of arts and associates of science majors at GACC take SPA 101, making it a high enrollment class. Second, since most students at the college take SPA 101, the convenience sample is likely to be representative of the entire GACC student body population as described above. Employer/supervisor participants were also a sample of convenience determined by the WIL experiences in which student participants chose to engage. Therefore, the variety of employer/supervisors who participated adequately represents multiple sectors of local business and industry. This ensured that all stakeholders’ (students and employers) were represented in the sample.

In fact, of the 17 students enrolled in the course, 10 (59%) were White, five (29%) were African-American, and two (12%) were Hispanic. The class consisted of three
males (17%) and 14 females (82%). These class demographics are reflective of the demographics of the entire GACC student body (see Figures 3.4 & 3.5).

Figure 3.4 Gender statistics for SPA 101 class compared to gender statistics for the entire GACC student body (Community College Review, 2018).

Figure 3.5 Students’ race and ethnicity in SPA 101 class compared to demographic on race and ethnicity of the GACC student body (Community College Review, 2018).

A total of 13 students signed and submitted the letter of consent. However, only 10 students completed the study. Attrition in the sample population was due to one participant’s failure to attend class and two participants not fulfilling the WIL commitment required for the study. Although the sample size dwindled slightly, Richardson and Reid (2006) attest that the “triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative types of data from multiple sources” in a mixed methods research study is a
“design strength” that mitigates the deficiencies of a small sample size (p. 62). Likewise, the demographics of the sample population continue to reflect those of the GACC student body (see Figure 3.6). Of the sample, two students (20%) were males and eight (80%) were females (see Figure 3.7). Further breakdown of the sample demographics reveal seven Whites (70%), two African-Americans (20%), and one Hispanic (10%).

![Gender statistics](image1.png)

*Figure 3.6* Gender statistics for study sample population in SPA 101 class compared to gender statistics for the entire GACC student body (Community College Review, 2018).

![Race and ethnicity statistics](image2.png)

*Figure 3.7* Race and ethnicity of study sample population in SPA 101 compared to demographics on race and ethnicity of the GACC student body (Community College Review, 2018).

All student participants were between 18 and 22 years of age, and five participants (50%) were already employed part-time at the time of the study. This number accurately reflects national averages in which approximately 50% of students enrolled full time at a two year college are employed (NCES, 2018). These five participants
elected to use their current employment to fulfill the WIL component of the study and worked in the fields of sales (1), fast-food (1), assisted-living caregiver (2), and babysitter (1). Two students opted to fulfill their 12 hours of WIL with a service learning experience that was closely related to the linguistic and/or cultural content of the course. Of these two students, one worked as a Spanish tutor at GACC. The other served as an aid for an ESOL (English as a second/other language) classroom at a local elementary school. The remaining three students participated in ‘ad hoc’ activities such as volunteer work (childcare), community service (assistant coach at a local private school), and extra-curricular activities (officer of a student club) on campus (see Figure 3.8).

Participants' Areas of WIL

![Participants' Areas of WIL](chart)

*Figure 3.8. Study participants’ areas of WIL.*

**Quantitative Data Collection, Measures, Instruments and Tools**

Data collection methods should be selected and/or created to so as to provide meaningful information and understanding of the research problem driving the study and seek to provide answers to the research question around which the study is designed (Efron & Ravid, 2013). For this study, quantitative data was collected using the WES pre-and posttests, the WES rubric scores, and a post-study survey (see Table 3.1) and was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive
statistics calculations were performed to generate the means ($M$) and standard deviations (SD) for the three quantitative data sets.

Table 3.1 Research Design for Quantitative Strand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Constructs and Abbreviations:</th>
<th>Research Question:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructs:</strong></td>
<td><strong>RQ1:</strong> How do ‘ad-hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) impact students’ work ethic skills (WES) in general education courses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• WIL – Work integrated learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• WES – Work Ethic Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Abbreviations:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• SS = Student participants</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• ES= Employer/supervisor participants</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• PR = Practitioner-researcher</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Design Plan</th>
<th>Data Source # 1 Pre/Post Assessment on WES</th>
<th>Data Source # 2 WES Scores</th>
<th>Data Source # 3 Post Study Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What research question will this data address?</td>
<td>RQ #1</td>
<td>RQ #1</td>
<td>RQ #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What construct is being addressed?</td>
<td>WES</td>
<td>WES</td>
<td>WES / WIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What source will this data come from?</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>SS; ES; PR</td>
<td>SS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What instrument will be used to collect the data?</td>
<td>Identical Pre/post tests on WES</td>
<td>WES Rubric</td>
<td>Likert survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will the data be collected?</td>
<td>Students will individually complete an online assessment outside of class</td>
<td>Students will be scored using the WES rubric based on meeting criteria through observation and reflection</td>
<td>Students will complete an online Likert survey outside of class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| When and how often will the data be collected? | Pre/Post Intervention:  
- Beginning of the semester (Jan.) – approx. one week before intervention.  
- End of the semester – approx. one week after intervention (April). | Pre-intervention:  
- Students self-assess their WES skills using the WES rubric and score themselves  
During intervention  
- PR and ES score students using the WES rubric at midterm. Scores are based on observations  
Post-intervention  
- Once at the end of semester – approximately one week after intervention (April). |
| Is this data for the | R – assess the | R – assess the | R – assess student-participants’ opinions on |
| Researcher, | effectiveness of | effectiveness of | the significance and |
| Practitioner or both? | the intervention in the | the intervention in the | effectiveness of the |
| | development of | development of | study |
| | students’ WES | students’ WES | |
| How will this data be analyzed? | Quantitative – a two-tailed paired t-test using SPSS will be used to measure any change in students’ scores and assess change in acknowledge and/or understanding of WES | Mixed: WES score is quantitative and is tallied and recorded. A two-tailed paired t-test using SPSS will be used to measure any change in students’ scores and assess change in mastery and/or demonstration of WES | Mixed: 13 responses will be recorded using a Likert scale of 1-5. These responses will be tallied and recorded as quantitative data. |
| | Cohen’s D will be used to determine the size of the effect of the intervention on WES pre- and posttest scores. | Cohen’s D will be used to determine the size of the effect of the intervention on WES scores. | The last question is open response and will provide qualitative data to help supplement and enrich the quantitative data. |
| | Quality will be addressed through content validity (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 150–151) | WES rubric offers space for comments, observations, and reflections. This qualitative data helps explain the quantitative WES score. | Reliability and internal consistency will be established using a Cronbach Alpha analysis (Cronbach, 1951) |
| When will this data be analyzed? | Pre-intervention: in Jan.; one week prior to intervention | Data will first be analyzed at midterm (March) – when initial SS self-evaluations are compared to PR and ES evaluations at midterm. | Post-intervention: in April one week after intervention. |
intervention

Scores and comments will be analyzed to tailor intervention for students’ needs. PR and ES will conference on any WES scores that differ greatly.

Data will again be analyzed at the end of the semester (April) when final WES scores will be compared with midterm WES scores to determine if there has been any improvement and where. Notes & comments will be analyzed to better understand final WES scores. PR and ES will discuss any WES scores that differ greatly. ES will self-evaluate again post intervention and reflect on their initial and post self-evaluations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How is this data collection connected to quality criteria?</th>
<th>Assessment that provides baseline/benchmark indicators &amp; demonstrates change over time; comparison between baseline indicators and final indicators.</th>
<th>WES scores provide benchmark indicators and demonstrate change over time.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrates effectiveness of intervention/action.</td>
<td>Allows PR to triangulate data from 3 different sources: SS, ES, and PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes &amp; comments help enhance understanding of QUAN data and allow description.</td>
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**WES Pre-and Posttests.** The WES pre/posttests were identical online assessments testing students’ understanding and awareness of WES (see Appendix F). During the first week of class, prior to intervention, all 10 student participants were required to complete the WES pretest to determine their pre-existing knowledge of and
experience with WES. The online assessment was located in our learning management system course shell. Students completed the pretest outside of regular class time and were given a full week to do so. Because “longer tests provide a more consistent sample of students’ abilities and performances,” the pretest consisted of 50 multiple choice, multi-select, and true/false questions (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p 143). The categorical breakdown of questions was as follows: ten questions focused on attendance, seven on communication, ten on professionalism, eight on time management, three on productivity and quality of work, and six on teamwork. An additional six questions concentrated on the six WES skills in general. Students had two hours to complete the test and were allotted one attempt. An identical WES posttest was administered online at the end of the semester approximately one week after the intervention.

To establish content validity, or the degree to which the assessment aligns with the learning objectives (Efron & Ravid, 2013), I created the online pre/posttests using feedback provided from local industry leaders in the DACUM (Green Acres, 2014) and information gained from informal conversations and feedback from local human resources managers when I presented on the WES program at various conferences, meetings, and professional development workshops, including: the Western Green Acres Education Consortium (2017): the Green Acres Area Human Resource Association (2017); the Upper Savannah Council of Governments (2017): the Greenwood Industry Council (2017); the South Carolina Technical Education Association (SCTEA) conference (2018); the South Carolina State Academic Affairs Leadership Institute (2018); the New Directions in Student Development Conference (2018); the 1st Annual ITW Welding Instructors Conference, Appleton, WI (2018); Advisory Board Meetings
for the HVAC, Welding, Mechatronics, AA/AS, and CNC Machine Tool (2018); the Edgefield School District (2018); and the Counseling and Career Development Workshop with the Western Green Acres Education Consortium (2018); and the 2019 South Carolina Technical Education Association (SCTEA).

Pre/post assessments provide baseline indicators that can demonstrate change over time when there is a comparison between baseline indicators and final indicators. Data from the pretest assessment was used to determine students’ pre-existing knowledge of WES and shape the WES curriculum for the study. Using Gosset’s two tailed paired sample t-test (Student, 1908), student participants’ pretest scores were compared to their posttest scores to assess any statistically significant change in awareness, knowledge, and understanding of WES. Any change in scores from the pretest and posttest were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention in regards to students’ knowledge, understanding, and awareness of WES after being exposed to the WES curriculum and participating in their WIL assignment. Cohen’s $D$ (Cohen, 1992) was used to determine the effect size of the difference between pretest and posttest scores (see Figure 3.9).

\[
Pooled SD = \sqrt{\frac{(SD_1)^2 + (SD_2)^2}{2}}
\]

\[
Cohen's d = \frac{(M_2 - M_1)}{Pooled SD}
\]

$SD_1 =$ standard deviation of group 1  \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} $M_1 =$ mean of group 1

$SD_2 =$ standard deviation of group 2  \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} $M_2 =$ mean of group 2

**Figure 3.9** Cohen’s $D$ formula.

**WES Rubric.** Created by the WES committee at GACC, the WES rubric evaluates six major employability skills (attendance, time management, professionalism, communication, productivity and quality of work, and teamwork) and delineates the criteria needed to score within the “exceeds,” “meets,” or “needs improvement”
categories for each skill. Attendance includes class and work attendance. Time management includes punctuality and the ability to meet deadlines. Professionalism encompasses a student’s/employee’s conduct, attitude, and personal presentation. Communication defines an effective communicator as having excellent listening, verbal and written skills. An effective communicator knows how to prioritize communications and confirms the message has been received and understood. Productivity and quality of work comprise work ethic, preparedness, use of time, effort, and quality of work. Lastly, teamwork assesses the ability to work with a diverse group of peers.

Mastery of each skill is assessed on a scale of one to ten, with 9-10 being “exceeds”, 7.5-8.9 being a “meets”, and a 7.4 and below being a “needs improvement”. The highest score a student can earn is a 60 (see Appendix E). This breakdown of skills allowed me to measure which, if any, of the skills were enhanced by the ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013). Moreover, triangulation of student participant WES scores from three different sources helped calibrate and align standards of evaluation between me, the student participant, and the WIL employer/supervisor, further enhancing the content validity and reliability of the rubric.

Copyrighted by the college in 2017, the WES rubric was developed and designed based on: results of the DACUM (Green Acres, 2014); feedback from a panel of industry experts; feedback from the WES pilot program involving 13 faculty members from various divisions at the college that was conducted in 2015 with Microburst Inc.; feedback from industry leaders and faculty members in a second phase of the WES pilot program involving the apprenticeship program with the Mechatronics program at GACC

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5 Microburst Learning creates interactive eLearning modules for professional and technical development. More information about their organization can be found at [www.microburstlearning.com](http://www.microburstlearning.com)
and ZF Transmission, Inc.; and research conducted on soft skills rubrics used at other institutions of higher education. Valuable insight provided by experts and extensive research on soft skills assessment instruments used at other institutions also contributed to the content validity of the WES rubric (Ivankova, 2015).

Student participants were evaluated at three separate times throughout the semester on their demonstrated mastery and application of WES using the WES rubric. Each time student participants were evaluated they received a WES score. One week prior to the intervention, student participants were asked to self-evaluate their WES and score themselves using the WES rubric. This was done in class so I could answer any questions or provide more explanation about the rubric. The initial self-assessment WES scores were later used as baseline indicators and compared with the midterm and end of semester WES evaluation scores.

Once the intervention began and student participants had provided me with the contact information for their WIL supervisor, I reached out to each supervisor to share the WES rubric, provide instructions on how to use the rubric to assess the student’s WES in the workplace, and let them know that I would be contacting them again next month for the student’s midterm WES evaluation. As such, WIL supervisors were given ample time to familiarize themselves with the WES rubric and contact me with any questions or concerns before assessing the student and completing the midterm WES evaluation. Additionally, instructions were sent to the WIL supervisors that clearly outlined the skills they would be assessing and provided examples. No supervisors contacted me with any questions or concerns. Three supervisors contacted me to show
support for the study and thanked me for the opportunity to participate in the study. All contact was through email.

At midterm, the WIL employers/supervisors and I evaluated the student participants separately using the WES rubric and independently gave each student participant a WES score. Approximately eight weeks into the semester, I contacted the WIL supervisors again, asking them to evaluate the students’ WES in the workplace using the provided rubric. At this time, WIL supervisors were given an electronic pdf version of the WES rubric in an attachment. The electronic version of the rubric was “fillable” and enabled supervisors to complete the WES evaluation on the computer, save it, and send it back to me via email, facilitating the process for supervisors and eliminating the need to print evaluations. More importantly, supervisors were able to return the evaluation directly to me (via email) instead of having to return the evaluation with the student. As such, supervisors were more apt to give honest feedback.

Simultaneously, I evaluated students using the same rubric and also gave them a midterm WES score. My evaluation was based on class attendance, meeting due dates, in-class group work, email etiquette, class participation, and productive use of class time up to that point in the semester. The student participants compared the midterm WES scores from me and their WIL employer/supervisor with their initial self-assessment, reflected on any discrepancies, and developed a plan for improvement. Student participants had an opportunity to conference with me to discuss strategies to improve their WES score.

At the end of the intervention, WIL employers/supervisors and I evaluated the student participants again using the WES rubric and separately gave each student
participant a final WES score. At the conclusion of the semester, I contacted the WIL supervisors via email and asked for the students’ final WES evaluation, using the same process, instructions, and attached pdf version of the WES rubric as with the midterm evaluation. Likewise, I also completed an end of semester WES evaluation for the students. The WES scores were tallied and recorded in order to provide benchmark indicators and demonstrate change over time. Again, using Gosset’s two-tailed paired sample t-test, students’ average final WES scores were compared with their average midterm WES scores to determine any statistically significant change in the student participants’ demonstrated mastery of WES and assess the effectiveness of the intervention in the students’ application of WES (Student, 1908). Cohen’s $D$ (see Figure 3.9) was used to determine the effect size of the change in scores (Cohen, 1992).

Students whose average final WES score (average of the instructor and WIL supervisor final WES scores) was a greater than or equal to a 54 out of 60 (90% or higher) earned a WES “Exceeds” digital badge and certificate (see Appendix G). Students whose average final WES score was greater than a 45 but less than a 54 (75% to 89%) earned a WES “Meets” digital badge and certificate (see Appendix H). Students who scored lower than a 45 on their average final WES score were considered as “Needing Improvement” and did not receive a digital badge or certificate. Digital badges are stored in the students’ ePortfolios and can be shared electronically with employers.

**Post-intervention survey.** Upon completion of the study, student participants completed a post-intervention Likert scale survey. To encourage honest and thoughtful feedback, students completed the survey online, outside of class, and with no time constraints. The Likert scale survey consists of fourteen items that are divided into three
parts (see Appendix I). Part one included five items used to assess student-participants’ opinions on the importance of incorporating WES with a WIL component into the curriculum at GACC. For each of the five items, student-participant responses were recorded on a scale of one (very unimportant) to five (very important). Part two of the survey included eight items and was used to assess student-participants’ opinions on the effectiveness of the study and, specifically, the WIL component. For each of the eight items, student-participant responses were recorded on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Part three was open response prompt asking student-participants to offer any further comments or suggestions.

To establish reliability and internal consistency of the survey, a Cronbach Alpha analysis (see Figure 3.10) was performed on parts one and two of the survey (Cronbach, 1951). Part one consisted of five items and had a Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.9415$. An alpha of $\alpha \geq 0.9$ indicates excellent reliability and internal consistency.

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N - 1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

- $N$ = number of items
- $c_{\text{bar}}$ = average of covariance between item pairs
- $v_{\text{bar}}$ = average variance

*Figure 3.10. Cronbach Alpha formula (Cronbach, 1951).*

Therefore, the ability of part one of the survey to measure student-participants’ opinions on the importance of incorporating WES with a WIL component into the curriculum can be considered highly reliable and consistent. Part two included eight items and had a Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.815$. An alpha of $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$ indicates good reliability and internal consistency. Thus, part two of the survey can be considered
reliable and consistent in terms of measuring student-participants’ opinions on the
effectiveness of the study, particularly in regards to the WIL component (Cronbach,
1951). Results from the survey will be reported using descriptive statistics.

**Qualitative Data Collection, Measures, Instruments and Tools**

Qualitative data was collected from three main sources: two reflection assignments, one semi-structured group interview, and my own practitioner-researcher journal containing observations and field notes (see Table 3.2).

**Reflection assignments.** The two reflection assignments (see Appendix J) were informal writing activities that allowed student participants to reflect on their learning experiences, share personal thoughts and perspectives, and engage in meta-cognition. These assignments helped student participants engage in the reflection observation (RO) phase of Kolb’s (1984) theory, reflecting on concrete experiences in the WIL and classroom environments while simultaneously contemplating strategies and theories so as to develop an abstract conceptualization (AC) of their learning (see Figure 3.3). To ensure students engaged in *critical* reflection, the assignment prompts incorporated five of the six categories of Fink’s (2013) taxonomy of significant learning (see Figure 3.11).

![Figure 3.11](image)

_Figure 3.11_ Fink’s (2013) Taxonomy and WES Reflection Assignments
At the beginning of the semester and midterm, student participants were required to complete a reflective assignment (two in total). To allow sufficient time to reflect, these assignments were completed outside of class and then submitted to the students’ ePortfolio. Reflection #1 was assigned pre-intervention, and student participants were asked to reflect on the importance of WES (foundational knowledge), the WES they would need in order to be successful in their WIL (application), and which WES they would they like to focus on during the study and why (human dimension).

Table 3.2 Research Design for Qualitative Strand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Constructs and Abbreviations:</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructs:</strong></td>
<td><strong>RQ1:</strong> How do ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) impact students’ work ethic skills (WES) in general education courses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIL – Work integrated learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WES – Work Ethic Skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abbreviations:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS = Student participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES = Employer/supervisor participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR = Practitioner-researcher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Design Plan</th>
<th>Data Source #1</th>
<th>Data Source #2</th>
<th>Data Source #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PR Journal &amp; SS Reflections</td>
<td>WES evaluation notes/comments/observations</td>
<td>Semi-structured group interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What research question will this data address?</td>
<td>RQ #1</td>
<td>RQ #1</td>
<td>RQ #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What construct is being addressed?</td>
<td>WES, WIL</td>
<td>WES</td>
<td>WES; WIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What source will this data come from?</td>
<td>SS; PR</td>
<td>SS; ES; PR</td>
<td>SS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What instrument will be used to collect the data?</td>
<td>Journals; Reflection Assignments in ePortfolio</td>
<td>WES Rubric</td>
<td>Semi-structured group interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will the data be collected?</td>
<td>SS will individually submit 2 reflection assignments to ePortfolio. PR will keep a journal with field notes, observations.</td>
<td>Students will be scored using the WES rubric based on meeting criteria through observation and reflection</td>
<td>Use of recording device &amp; note-taking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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When and how often will the data be collected?

- Two reflection assignments will be submitted by SS at the beginning (pre-intervention) and midterm (mid-intervention) of the semester.
- PR will keep a weekly journal to be analyzed at midterm and end of the semester.

Is this data for the Researcher, Practitioner or both?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Researcher (R)</th>
<th>Practitioner (P)</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>- assess the effectiveness of the intervention in the development of students’ WES.</td>
<td>- assess effectiveness &amp; efficiency of intervention for future curriculum development.</td>
<td>- assess the effectiveness of the intervention in the development of students’ WES.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How will this data be analyzed? How will quality be addressed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Analysis Method</th>
<th>Quality Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative – SS reflections</td>
<td>- SS can provide comments/notes as well.</td>
<td>- Triangulation, member-checking (by providing a transcript to avoid researcher bias).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed: WES score</td>
<td>- PR and ES score students using the WES rubric at mid-term. Scores are based on observations.</td>
<td>- Content validity using a panel of experts (Ivankova, 2015, p. 262) and triangulation (i.e. comparison of scores &amp; notes/observations between ES and PR).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative – responses</td>
<td>- ER, PR score students using the WES rubric at the end of the semester. Scores are based on observations and reflection.</td>
<td>- Triangulation, thick description, &amp; member-checking (by providing a transcript to avoid researcher bias).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During intervention

- PR and ES score students using the WES rubric at midterm. Scores are based on observations.

Post-intervention

- ER, PR score students using the WES rubric at the end of the semester. Scores are based on observations and reflection.

Post-intervention:

- End of semester – approximately 1 week after intervention (April).
bias through PR’s practice of reflexivity in the PR journal (Ivankova, 2015, p. 150 – 151) – also known as disciplined subjectivity (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 80)

When will this data be analyzed?

- Reflection #1 will be analyzed at the start of the intervention to help direct intervention.
- Reflection #2 will be analyzed mid-intervention to evaluate intervention and make necessary changes.
- PR will keep a weekly journal to be analyzed at midterm and end of the semester.

Themes, patterns and categories from reflection assignments and journals submitted at midterm will be compared to themes, patterns and categories from interview and researcher journal at the end of the semester to provide a more thorough understanding of how themes developed and evolved during the intervention process.

Data will first be analyzed at midterm (March) – when initial SS self-evaluations are compared to PR and ES evaluations at midterm. Scores and comments will be analyzed to tailor intervention for students’ needs.

Data will again be analyzed at the end of the semester (April) when final WES scores will be compared with midterm WES scores to determine if there has been any improvement and where. Notes & comments will be analyzed to better understand final WES scores.

Post-intervention: End of semester – approximately 1 week after intervention (April)
Reflection activities/assignments provide thick description and emphasize patterns/categories to enhance PR’s understanding of the QUAN data.

Demonstrates effectiveness of intervention/action (outcome validity); process validity (Ivankova, 2015, p. 271-272); and addresses positionality & possible biases of PR.

WES scores provide benchmark indicators and demonstrate change over time.

Allows PR to triangulate data from 3 different sources: SS, ES, and PR.

Notes & comments help enhance understanding of QUAN data and show patterns, trends, or categories.

Semi-structured group interview responses provide thick description and emphasize patterns/categories to enhance PR’s understanding of the QUAN data.

Demonstrates effectiveness of intervention/action (outcome validity); process validity; democratic validity; and confirmability of participants’ views & not a PR’s biases (Ivankova, 2015, pp. 266; 271-272);

Reflection #2 was assigned at midterm (mid-intervention). For this assignment, student participants were asked to reflect on both their midterm WES scores from me and their WIL supervisor and compare them to their initial self-evaluation WES score. Then, student participants were to reflect on any similarities and/or differences between the scores and provide a rationale for these similarities and differences (integration).

Subsequently, students were to determine their areas of strength and weakness (human dimension) and develop a plan of improvement (learning how to learn). Finally, students applied their plan during the second half of the semester, both in the classroom and WIL environment (application).

Data derived from students’ reflection assignments provided a thick description of the students’ thoughts, perceptions, and overall reactions/attitudes. Using a general
inductive analysis approach, I was able to discern emerging patterns and themes to interpret the raw qualitative data and enhance my understanding of the quantitative data. An inductive coding analysis “allows the researcher to begin with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” organically and without restriction (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.12). Although inductive coding analysis “permits research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies … [it also] is guided by the research questions evaluation objectives, which identify domains and topics to be investigated” (Thomas, 2003).

As part of the inductive analysis and coding process, I immersed myself in multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data. During my first reading, I adopted an initial coding technique to classify the qualitative data into distinct categories. For my second reading, I employed an in vivo coding, using words or short phrase pulled from actual language in the data. Applying these categories and code words, I used a pattern coding in my third reading to uncover patterns, themes or sets. Themes are reported as descriptive statistics. Finally, through code weaving, I was able to infuse these categories, codes, and themes into a narrative that supplemented and helped explain the findings from quantitative data (Thomas, 2003).

Moreover, the thick description of students’ reflections ensured the study’s findings are valid and objective and do not reflect any of my potential biases. It also demonstrated the effectiveness of intervention (outcome validity) while simultaneously establishing process validity (Ivankova, 2015).
**Semi-structured group interview.** A semi-structured group interview was conducted at the conclusion of the study and used to assess the student-participants’ attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of the study. Responses were also used to measure students’ perceived effectiveness of the intervention and provided detailed information to supplement and enhance the meaning of quantitative data gathered from the pre/posttests, WES evaluation scores, and the post-study Likert survey.

Semi-structured interviews are designed to allow flexibility and for participants to organically “co-construct the narrative and raise and pursue issues that are related to the study but were not included when the interview questions were planned” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 98). Therefore, I prepared 11 open-ended questions prior to the interview based on my problem of practice and research question (see Appendix K) with the expectation that other themes would arise organically as the interview progressed.

Quality of interview questions, and therefore, the raw qualitative data collected from the group interview, was addressed through triangulation of data, an audio-visual recording of the interview, a thick description analysis, and member-checking by providing a transcript to participants (Efron & Ravid, 2013). One student was not able to attend the interview and was given a copy of the interview questions. The student wrote down his/her responses outside of class and personally handed them to me. Another student did not attend the interview. In total, eight students participated in the group interview. All eight participants validated the data in the transcript.

Raw qualitative data from the interview was coded and analyzed using the same inductive coding analysis process used to interpret data from the reflection. Finally, the findings from the interview were used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention
(outcome validity); establish both process and democratic validity; and confirm the outcomes are a result of student-participants’ views and not my own biases (Ivankova, 2015, pp. 266; 271-272).

**Practitioner-researcher journal.** Throughout the study, I kept a practitioner-researcher journal in order to practice *disciplined subjectivity* (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 80). Disciplined subjectivity requires constant practice of self-reflection by journaling in order to address positionality and avoid researcher bias (Ivankova, 2015). Keeping a practitioner-researcher journal also allowed me to take field notes so as to keep an audit trail and make reflective notes about what I observed during the study (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

The journal was used to annotate student participant observations, make field notes, reflect on my own thoughts and feelings as the insider-researcher, and keep an audit trail. By continuously engaging in self-reflection of my own positionality, thoughts, and feelings, I hoped to make transparent any potential, although unintended, biases so as to collect and analyze all data in the most objective and systematic manner possible.
Chapter 4: Findings from the Data Analysis

“For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.”

-Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics

Introduction

Chapter four consists of an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data to understand exactly how work-integrated learning (WIL), especially via ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual work’ experiences (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013), impact students’ work ethic skills (WES) in general education courses. Efron and Ravid (2013) define analysis as “breaking down the whole into elements in order to discover its essential features” and interpretation as “providing a description or explanation of the meaning of the study” (p. 165). Both the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed systematically to ensure accurate and reliable findings. Interpretation involved triangulation of the data sets to understand the “big picture” and form a more comprehensive and meaningful narrative of the findings.

The first section of the chapter provides a brief review of the purpose and objectives of the study to contextualize and prepare the reader for the subsequent findings. Correspondingly, the next section of the chapter will re-introduce the research question which the findings aim to address. Afterwards, results from the quantitative data analysis will be presented followed by those of the qualitative data analysis. Finally, an interpretation of the findings will be offered using triangulation of both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis.
Purpose of Study

This study concentrated on the soft skills gap among recent college graduates, and, although a national crisis, the DACUM (Green Acres, 2014) also highlighted this problem among recent GACC graduates. Research supports work integrated learning (WIL) as the most effective methods for teaching employability skills (Harvey, 2005; Jackson, 2015; Mason et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2016; Tymon, 2013). Yet, the problem lies in the fact that liberal arts courses/degrees are not “job specific” and have no direct connection to any definite profession, resulting in a nebulous connection to WIL that runs the risk of being trivial if not structured within a proper theoretical framework.

Therefore, the proposed intervention sought practical, efficient, and effective ways to integrate work ethic skills (WES) into the general education curriculum in order to expand and improve students’ professional skills. As such, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory was used as theoretical framework to develop effective and meaningful learning experiences via ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013). Non-traditional forms of WIL were adopted to circumvent obstacles in experiential learning as identified by students. Furthermore, the study assessed how these ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) impacted students’ knowledge and mastery of WES. In the process, the study also deliberated on ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL as a possible solution to the perceived devaluation of the liberal arts by demonstrating the practical value of a general education curriculum.

Accordingly, the three main objectives for the outcomes of this study were to offer a blueprint for GACC liberal arts faculty to provide a more comprehensive education through experiential learning, provide a feasible and effective solution to the
2014 DACUM, and provide evidence that a liberal arts education and employability skills are not mutually exclusive. The first objective is in alignment with goals outlined in the GACC 2015-2018 and 2019-2021 Strategic Plans (Green Acres, 2016a) and fulfills the college’s mission. The second objective also meets the college’s mission by establishing and strengthening relationships between the college and the local community in order to meet the needs of students, employers, and the community at large. The third objective demonstrates that liberal arts programs can make practical contributions to the world of work without compromising the ethical, social, and political philosophies of these courses (Dowling et al., 2015; Hjelde, 2015; MacKay, 2010).

To accomplish this, I elected to use a concurrent Quan + Qual mixed methods design in which the quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed separately. Data from both the quantitative and qualitative strands were then compared using a combined data analysis, merging quantitative and qualitative results for a more holistic interpretation and understanding of the study’s findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This allowed me to capitalize on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods and offer multiple perspectives, obtain more robust evidence, and provide real-life, contextual understanding of numerical data (Ivankova, 2015).

**Research Question**

Hence, the subsequent findings are dedicated to answering the following research question:

RQ: How does work-integrated learning (WIL), especially via ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual work’ experiences (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013), impact students’ work ethic skills (WES) in general education courses.


Results of the Quantitative Data Analysis

For this study, quantitative data was collected using the WES pre-and posttests, the WES rubric scores, and a post-study survey (see Table 3.1) and was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A two-tailed paired sample *t*-test was used to measure the difference between students’ pre- and posttest scores and their midterm and final WES scores. A calculated *p* value was used to evaluate the statistical significance of the differences in scores, and a Cohen *D* score was calculated for differences in scores to determine the effect of the intervention. Descriptive statistics calculations were performed to generate the means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) for the three quantitative data sets.

**Pretest and Posttest.** As shown in Table 4.1, there was a wide range of scores on the pretest with the highest score being 48 out of 50 and the lowest score being 35.8 out of 50 (*M*=39.65; *SD* = 3.91).

**Table 4.1 WES Pretest Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>WES Pretest Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD = 3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00251575</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00281509</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00282773</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00284242</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00263097</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00206600</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00271164</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00280269</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00272934</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00284013</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n= 10</td>
<td>Median = 39.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean = 40.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range = 12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since these scores were used as a baseline indicator to assess students’ current knowledge of WES and were later compared to the posttest scores to assess any changes in students’ knowledge, the most telling data from the pretest at this point in the study were the frequently missed questions (see Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1** Frequently Missed Questions on the WES Pretest

Since each question specifically related to one skill, determining the most frequently missed questions helped highlight the skills needing the most improvement and, thus, drive the development of the WES curriculum for the study.

For the purposes of this study, a frequently missed question was defined as that which was answered incorrectly on the pretest by at least 50% (5 students) or more of student participants. There were nine frequently missed questions. Seven students (70%) missed question #3 about attendance, and six students (60%) missed question #23 which focused on the importance of all six WES skills. Seven (70%) students missed question #15 and six (60%) students missed questions #16 and #36 respectively, all three of which were about time management. Eight (80%) students missed questions #26 and #32 on
communication skills. Questions #38 and #46 focused on teamwork and were missed by 5 students (50%) each. As a result, in-class WES activities for this study would focus mainly on attendance, time management, communication, and teamwork.

During the last week of class (post-intervention), student participants were required to take the WES posttest. The posttest was identical to the pretest. Nine students (90%) scored higher on the posttest than the pretest, indicating growth in their awareness and knowledge of WES. One student’s (10%) score was the same on both the pre- and posttests (see Figure 4.2). In fact, the average increase in scores from the pretest to the posttest was 3.07 points (see Table 4.2).

The two data points were analyzed using a two tailed paired sample $t$-test in which $\alpha = 0.05$ and $H_0 = 0$. Results of the $t$-test indicated a $t$ value of 3.716 and a $p$-value of 0.0048, indicating that average increase in scores from the pretest to the posttest was

![WES Pretest & Posttest Scores](image-url)

*Figure 4.2* Changes in WES pretest and posttest scores.
Table 4.2  *WES Pretest and Posttest Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>WES Pretest Score SD = 3.91</th>
<th>WES Posttest Score SD = 3.80</th>
<th>Change in Score SD = 2.48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P00251575</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00281509</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>+ 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00282773</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>+ 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00284242</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>+ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00263097</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>+ 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00206600</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>+ 7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00271164</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>+ 4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00280269</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>+ 4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00272934</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>+ 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00284013</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>+ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n= 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Median = 39.65, Mean = 40.43, Range = 12.2
Median = 44.6, Mean = 43.5, Range = 13.1
Median = 2.75, Mean = 3.07, Range = 7.1

statistically significant (see Figure 4.3). Moreover, with a Cohen’s *D* score of 1.17, the effect of the intervention on pretest/posttests scores was quite large (Cohen, 1951).

![Figure 4.3 T distribution for difference in posttest and pretest scores (DF = 9).](image)

Furthermore, results from the posttest showed overall improvement on the frequently missed questions from the pretest (see Figure 4.4). There was significant improvement on questions #15, 23, 36, 38, and 46 from the pretest to posttest. On the posttest, only one (10%) student answered question #15 (time management) incorrectly compared to seven (70%) students on the pretest.
Two students (20%) missed question #23 (importance of WES) on the posttest versus six students (60%) on the pretest. Six students (60%) missed question #36 (time management) on the pretest, but only four students (40%) missed the same question on the posttest. Five students (50%) missed question #38 (teamwork) on the pretest versus two students (20%) who missed it on the posttest. Question #46 (teamwork) was answered incorrectly by 5 students (50%) on the pretest but was only answered incorrectly by two students (20%) on the posttest.

What is more, there was marginal improvement from the pretest to the posttest on questions #16 and 26. On the pretest, 6 students (60%) answered question #16 (time management) incorrectly whereas on the posttest 5 students (50%) answered the same question incorrectly. Eight students (80%) answered question #26 (communication) incorrectly on the pretest, and six students (60%) answer the same question incorrectly on the posttest. Results from question #32 (communication) experienced no change from the pretest to the posttest with eight students (80%) answering the question incorrectly on
both tests. Interestingly, results from question #3 (attendance) actually worsened from the pretest (70% of students answered incorrectly) to the posttest (90% of students answered incorrectly).

**WES Rubric.** Throughout the semester, student participants were evaluated on their mastery and demonstration of WES using the WES rubric. The WES rubric evaluates six major employability skills (attendance, time management, professionalism, communication, productivity and quality of work, and teamwork) and delineates the criteria needed to score within the “exceeds,” “meets,” or “needs improvement” categories for each skill. Mastery of each skill is assessed on a scale of one to ten, with 9 -10 being “exceeds”, 7.5 – 8.9 being a “meets”, and a 7.4 and below being a “needs improvement”. The highest score a student can earn is a 60.

Using the average of both the instructor’s and WIL supervisor’s midterm WES scores, seven students (70%) scored themselves lower on their initial WES self-assessment than did their WIL supervisor and instructor at midterm. Three students (30%) gave themselves approximately the same score on their initial WES self-assessment as did their WIL supervisor and instructor at midterm (see Table 4.3).

A comparison of the average final WES scores with the average midterm WES scores revealed mixed results (see Table 4.3). Five students’ (50%) average final WES score was higher than their average WES score at midterm, indicating improvement in their mastery and demonstration of WES in a period of approximately eight weeks ($M = 1.4$). However, over the same time period, five students’ (50%) average final WES score was lower than their average midterm WES score ($M = -1.31$). WIL supervisor feedback in the form of comments on the midterm and final WES rubrics indicate that this decline
may have been a result of WIL supervisors, over time, becoming more familiar with the work ethic skills of the student.

Again, I used a two-tailed paired sample $t$-test in which $\alpha = 0.05$ and $H_0 = 0$ to determine the statistical significance of the difference between the two WES scores. Results showed a $t$ value of 0.0634480 and a $p$-value of 0.95, indicating the difference between the midterm and final WES scores were too small to be statistically significant (see Figure 4.5). As well, a Cohen’s $D$ score of 0.02 suggests that the effect of the intervention on students WES scores was very small.

![Figure 4.5] T distribution for difference between midterm WES scores and final WES scores (DF = 9)

Finally, seven students (70%) had an average final WES score that was higher than their initial WES self-assessment score. Two students (20%) had an average final WES score that was slightly greater than or equal to their initial WES self-assessment score. Only one student (10%) had an average final WES score that was lower than his/her initial WES self-assessment score. Overall, the results of the study point to a small but positive average change ($M = 0.045$) between students’ midterm and final WES scores. (see Table 4.3).
Table 4.3 *Comparison of Students’ WES Scores over the Course of a Semester*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>WES Self Assessment</th>
<th>WES Midterm Evaluation (instructor)</th>
<th>WES Midterm Evaluation (WIL)</th>
<th>Average Midterm Score</th>
<th>WES Final Evaluation (instructor)</th>
<th>WES Final Evaluation (WIL)</th>
<th>Average Final Score</th>
<th>Change in midterm/final scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P00251575</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<td>53.3</td>
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<td>53.6</td>
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<td>54.4</td>
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<td>-0.45</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00284013</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Post-Intervention Survey.** Upon completion of the study, student participants completed a post-intervention Likert scale survey consisting of fourteen items that were divided into three parts (see Appendix I). Part one included five items used to assess student-participants’ opinions on the importance of incorporating WES with a WIL component into the curriculum at GACC (see Figure 4.6). Students responded on a scale of one (very unimportant) to five (very important). All 10 student participants (100%) indicated that, in their opinion, it is important or very important that WES be integrated into the academic curriculum at GACC (mean = 4.5).

Furthermore, nine students (90%) felt it to be important or very important that WES become part of the college’s general competencies for student learning outcomes (\(M = 4.5\)). Nine students (90%) also found it to be important or very important that
instructors at GACC add a WIL component to their classes whenever possible ($M = 4.3$). What is more, nine (90%) students found it to be important or very important that students be objectively and regularly evaluated and assessed on their WES during their academic career at GACC ($M = 4.3$), and all 10 students (100%) agreed that it is important or very important that students routinely be able to reflect on their WES ($M = 4.7$).

**Figure 4.6** Results from Part One of the WES Post-Intervention Survey: Importance of Study

Part two of the survey included eight items used to assess student-participants’ opinions on the effectiveness of the study and, specifically, the WIL component (see Figure 4.7). Students responded on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). On the first item, eight students (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that their demonstration and mastery of WES improved as a result of participating in this study while two students (20%) gave a “neutral” response ($M = 4.3$). However, all 10 students
(100%) agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge and awareness of WES improved as a result of participating in this study ($M = 4.7$). Moreover, nine students (90%) affirmed the WIL component was beneficial to their understanding and application of WES ($M = 4.3$), and all 10 students (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that the WIL component provided practical, real-world opportunities in which students could implement what they learned in class and use WES ($M = 4.7$).

**Figure 4.7** Results from Part Two of the Post-Intervention Survey: Effectiveness of Study
Reinforcing the importance of WIL in teaching WES in a general education course, all 10 students (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that the WES evaluations from their supervisors were helpful in identifying their strengths and weaknesses with WES ($M = 4.6$). Nine students (90%) agreed it was easy to find a WIL and fulfill the 12 required WIL hours ($M = 4.6$), eight students (80%) enjoyed participating in the WIL ($M = 4.5$), and seven students (70%) disagreed or strongly disagreed ($M = 2.1$) that their understanding and mastery of WES would have improved just as much without a WIL component (see Figure 4.7).

Part three of the survey was an open response asking student-participants to offer any further comments or suggestions. The comments were overwhelmingly positive, and students provided constructive feedback for future studies on WES in general education courses (see Table 4.4). More than half of the students (60%) commented that they enjoyed the study and felt their being able to participate in it was a great opportunity.

Table 4.4 Results from Part 3 of the Post-Intervention Survey: Open Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other comments (open-response)</th>
<th>Reoccurring Themes in Students' Feedback</th>
<th># of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Great opportunity to practice real-life work skills in class and with a supervisor who could provide feedback.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoyed the study and thought it was a great opportunity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helped identify areas of improvement and how to improve those skills. I saw improvement in my WES skills.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoyed the course-related WIL experience.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss WIL experience more in class</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Add more WIL opportunities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am appreciative of having the opportunity to participate in a WES program which dualed in the classroom rather than having a separate workshop.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I believe that WES should be a class that is offered in PTC.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some reoccurring themes in students’ feedback on the survey included real-life
application of skills and help in identifying areas of improvement with WES as well as how to improve those skills. Other themes that emerged were the desire to discuss WIL experiences more in class (10%) and offering more WIL experiences (10%). Interestingly, one student (10%) appreciated the integration of WES into the classroom versus having a separate workshop on WES while another student (10%) felt the college should offer a course just for WES.

**Results of the Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data for this study was collected from three main sources: two reflection assignments, a semi-structured group interview, and my own practitioner-researcher journal containing observations and field notes. Pursuant to Efron and Ravid (2013),

the goal of qualitative data analysis is to bring meaning and order to the mass of collected data by looking for reoccurring themes, categories, and patterns … to discover significant connections and relationships among parts in order to build a coherent interpretation. (p. 166)

Therefore, analysis of the raw data involved transcribing and sorting data. After multiple readings in which I made annotations, I was able to detect codes as they emerged from the data. Codes were then organized into categories which arose from themes in the data. Finally, using code-weaving, categories and themes were examined together for reoccurring patterns.

**Reflection Assignments.** The two reflection assignments (see Appendix J) were informal writing activities that allowed student participants to reflect on their learning experiences, share personal thoughts and perspectives, and engage in meta-cognition.
These assignments helped student participants engage in the reflection observation (RO) phase of Kolb’s (1984) theory, reflecting on concrete experiences in the WIL and classroom environments while simultaneously contemplating strategies and theories so as to develop an abstract conceptualization (AC) of their learning. During the second week of class (pre-intervention), student participants were asked to reflect on the following: the importance of WES, their current knowledge of and understanding of WES, essential WES needed to be successful in their WIL, the WES they would they like to focus on most during the study and why, their initial reaction to the study, and any worries or concerns they have about the study.

Initial coding of the students’ first reflection assignment presented five distinct categories based on the prompts given in the assignment: current knowledge of WES; initial reaction to study; anticipated uses of WES in WIL; certain WES to focus on; and worries or concerns about the study. A second reading of the data using in vivo coding revealed specific themes or patterns within each category. For example, when reflecting upon their current knowledge and understanding of WES in vivo and pattern coding brought to light six major themes that were coded as: success, marketability, productivity, teamwork, workplace environment, and personal character (see Table 4.5). Three students (30%) were aware of the fact that having good soft skills contributes to an individual’s success in the workplace, and four students (40%) understood that superior soft skills makes an employee more desirable and looks good on a resume. More than half the students (60%) knew WES was directly related to increased productivity and quality of work while also contributing to a healthy workplace environment that
encourages teamwork and collaboration. Finally, two students (20%) understood that 
WES is linked to personal character.

Table 4.5 *Reflection 1: Coding of Emerging Themes about Current Knowledge and 
Understanding of WES*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Employees more successful</th>
<th>Employees more marketable</th>
<th>Increase productivity &amp; quality of work</th>
<th>Improves teamwork &amp; collaboration</th>
<th>Improves workplace environment</th>
<th>Strengthens character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P00251575</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00281509</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00282773</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00284242</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
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<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00271164</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00280269</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00284013</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six additional themes emerged as students reflected on their initial reaction to the 
WES study. All six themes represented positive experiences students hoped to gain from 
the study and were coded as opportunities for: improving WES; identifying personal 
strengths and weaknesses with WES; building confidence in WES; having exposure to 
different professions; adding to their resume; and learning new skills that employers look 
for in an employee (see Table 4.6). Fifty percent (50%) of students viewed the study as 
an opportunity to improve their WES and learn skills that employers are looking for in an 
employee. One student (10%) felt the study would help them better identify their
When asked to reflect on which WES students would need in order to be successful in their WIL, only two students (20%) said they would need to use all six WES. Seven students (70%) mentioned attendance as a skill they would need for their WIL component, eight students (80%) indicated they would use communication skills for their WIL component, and six students (60%) stated time management and productivity/quality of work would be needed for their WIL. Five students (50%) cited
teamwork and collaboration skills as important for success in their WIL, and only three students (30%) listed professionalism as an essential skill for their WIL (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7  Reflection 1: Coding of Emerging Themes about Anticipated Used of WES in WIL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Teamwork</th>
<th>Time Management</th>
<th>Productivity &amp; Quality of Work</th>
<th>Professionalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P00251575</td>
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<td>●</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four over-arching themes and eight sub-themes emerged while reading students’ reflections on which WES they would like to focus on and why (see Table 4.8). The four main themes were coded as: attendance, time management, communication and teamwork. Two students (20%) wished to focus on attendance during the study, and only one student (10%) expressed a desire to focus on teamwork during the study, citing both sub-themes of preferring to work independently and assuming all responsibilities and duties for the team. However, six students (60%) mentioned time management as a skill they wanted to focus on during the study. Three sub-themes emerged as students explained why they chose time management. These three sub-themes were coded as: late
(20%), procrastination (20%), and misuse of time (20%). Similarly, six students (60%) wanted to focus on communication skills. Three sub-themes of communication explain their choice: anxiety (20%), lack of communication (20%), and inability to prioritize urgent communications (20%).

Table 4.8 Reflection 1: Coding of Emerging Themes about Focusing on Certain WES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Time Management</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Teamwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Late</td>
<td>Procrastinate</td>
<td>Missuse of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>●</td>
<td></td>
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<td>●</td>
<td></td>
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<td>●</td>
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<td>●</td>
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<td>●</td>
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<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to reflect on any worries or concerns they may have regarding the study, the students’ responses exposed five themes: ineffective study; no room for growth; stressful; lack of effort, and no concerns (see Table 4.9). Two students (20%) admitted they would like to enhance their WES but were concerned that the study would be ineffective, and, therefore, they would not see any improvement. Another student
(10%) had received excellent customer service training at his/her current place of employment and felt there was really no more room for growth or improvement. This student was concerned that he/she would not learn anything from the study. Four students (40%) worried that the study might add stress to their already busy lives, especially having to keep up with the WES assignments and/or being periodically evaluated by their supervisor. One student (10%) was concerned that he/she would not make the study a priority and, therefore, not put a lot of effort into it. Three students (40%) stated that they had no worries or concerns about the study.

Table 4.9  *Reflection 1: Coding of Emerging Themes about Worries or Concerns about Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Ineffective study</th>
<th>No room for growth</th>
<th>May be stressful</th>
<th>Lack of effort put into it</th>
<th>No concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P00251575</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>P00282773</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>P00280269</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>P00284013</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At midterm, students were given a copy of their midterm WES rubric scores from both me and their WIL supervisor. The students were asked to review their scores and complete the second reflection assignment (see Appendix D). For the first reading cycle,
I used initial coding of the raw data and divided students’ reflections into two main categories: those who were surprised by their scores and those who were not (see Table 4.10). Interestingly, six students (60%) were surprised by their scores and the dissimilarities among their initial self assessment WES score, the instructor midterm WES score, and the WIL supervisor midterm WES score. Two students (20%) were surprised with some skill scores but not with others, and two students (20%) were not surprised at all by their scores, saying all three scores were basically the same. These two students credited the similarities to their scores as being “honest” and “accurate”.

Table 4.10  Reflection 2: Coding of categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Surprised</th>
<th>Not surprised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P00251575</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00281509</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00282773</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00284242</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00263097</td>
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<tr>
<td>P00206600</td>
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<td>P00280269</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P00284013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second reading, I used in vivo coding to see if any patterns or themes would emerge from the raw data. In doing so, five themes appeared and were coded as:
confidence, use of time, engage in class, communicate more, and get to know others (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11  *Reflection 2: Coding of themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Confidence</th>
<th>Use of time</th>
<th>Engage more in class</th>
<th>Communicate more</th>
<th>Get to know others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P00251575</td>
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<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
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<td>P00281509</td>
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A lack of confidence in WES abilities was cited as the main reason students were surprised by their midterm WES scores. In fact, of the six students (60%) who commented on their lack of confidence in WES, five (50%) were in the “surprised” category and the other student (10%) was in both the “surprised” and “not surprised” categories. Curiously, these students were *pleasantly* surprised. Realizing that they had scored themselves much more harshly on their initial self-assessment than their supervisors or I did for midterm, many students admitted that they are “harder on themselves” or “beat themselves up” when it comes to evaluating their own WES abilities. A few students presumed that their instructor and supervisor “went easier” on
them, and another student found that the higher midterm scores helped boost his/her confidence in areas where it had been lacking.

The remaining four themes emerged as students developed a plan for improvement for WES (see Table 4.11). Five students (50%) focused on time management and how best to use their time. Strategies mentioned were: prioritizing tasks, multitasking, better scheduling, setting time limits, and waking up earlier. Four students (40%) strategized ways to improve their attendance, productivity, and quality of work by engaging more in class. Engagement strategies included were: preparedness, asking questions, responding to questions, and coming to class. Six students (60%) planned to improve their communication skills by simply communicating with others more often and more effectively. Approaches for enhancing communication skills were: practice self discipline in sending notifications to me and their supervisor and reduce anxiety by sending emails (versus face-to-face communication) and/or rehearsing communications beforehand. Only three (30%) students expressed interest in improving their participation and teamwork skills. They planned to do so by initiating interactions and actively becoming acquainted with colleagues in the classroom and the WIL environment.

**Semi-structured group interview.** Similar to the reflection assignments, I used an inductive coding method to analyze the raw data collected from the interview. Once the eight student participants who participated in the interview validated the transcript of the data, I conducted my first reading of the transcript using the initial coding method. This process revealed four distinct categories based on the interview questions: overall
opinion of WIL; overall opinion of WES activities; WES evaluation; and suggestion for future WES and WIL initiatives (see Figure 4.8).

A second reading of the data involved using in vivo coding to expose specific themes or patterns within each category (see Figure 4.8). Overall, the student participants perceived the WIL component to be very beneficial because it provided opportunities for practical application of WES. Furthermore, it presented students with real-world consequences (see Figure 4.9). Especially interesting were the number of student participants who interacted with the Hispanic community and/or culture in their WIL environment.

Figure 4.8. Four categories and themes from the semi-structured group interview.

Figure 4.9. Quote from student about real-world consequences.
As previously mentioned, two students (20%) elected to fulfill their WIL requirement with a pre-arranged organization that has ties to the Hispanic community, culture or language. However, an additional two students (20%) were able to make connections to the Spanish course content by having some form of interaction with the Hispanic community and culture at their current place of employment (see Figure 4.10). When asked if future WIL components should be strictly linked to the course content,

“\textit{At my work we recently got a resident who speaks mostly Spanish. This class actually helped me learn some Spanish and I kind of helped her.}”

\textit{Figure 4.10} Quote from student about how WIL supplemented course content.

seven out of eight students (87.5%) said ‘no’. Reasons for this response included: time, other responsibilities (job, family, school), travel limitations, desire to experience other careers of interest, and the still valuable experience of learning other practical, real-world skills, even if they do not pertain to Spanish. When asked if they would have been able to participate in the study had the WIL been restricted to working exclusively with the Hispanic community and culture, 60% of students of students responded ‘no’.

Likewise, students found the in-class WES activities to be very helpful and practical. Students viewed the in-class activities as being excellent resources and thought they offered great tips and suggestions. Noteworthy were the mixed reviews in regards to class WES discussions and WES reflection assignments. Four students (50%) felt as if they really benefited from the reflection exercises and expressed a desire to have more than two reflection assignments during the study (see Figure 4.11). The other four students (50%) preferred class discussions on WES in lieu of writing exercises as a form
of reflection. These students explained that class discussions presented multiple scenarios, perspectives, and solutions.

“*I thought [reflections] made you look more closely at what you were doing. It gave me more insight and made you look at it (i.e. WES) in a different light.”*

Figure 4.11 Quote from a student about WES reflection assignments.

When asked if students felt the classroom was a ‘safe’ place to discuss WES as opposed to in the workplace, all eight (100%) students agreed it was (see Figure 4.12).

“Yes, because you don’t want to look incompetent in front of your supervisor. That’s embarrassing.”

Figure 4.12 Quote from student about feeling more comfortable discussing WES in class than at work.

The third category explored the students’ opinions and perceptions of the WES evaluation using the WES rubric. While most students agreed the WES evaluation was beneficial in that it helped build confidence and provided alternative perspectives, some students were unsure of as to how their supervisors came up with the score. Two students explained that their supervisor was not always present and, therefore, could not observe all the students’ employability skills at all times. Another student remarked that the WIL supervisor may have been at a disadvantage. The fact that the WIL supervisor was not privy to class discussions and activities may have hindered his/her ability to discern exactly how well a student was implementing what was learned in class. Even so, all students agreed the advantages of the WES scores outweighed any disadvantages.

The final theme that emerged from the interview data were the suggestions and feedback students had about the study. First, to help better understand WES scores from
the WIL supervisor, students suggested there be more horizontal alignment of WES learning objectives between the instructor and the supervisor, and WIL supervisors should include more constructive feedback in the form of comments. Eight supervisors left comments on the midterm WES evaluation, all of which included positive, but somewhat generic, feedback. Conversely, one of the eight supervisors provided additional constructive feedback by specifically addressing the student’s weaknesses and outlining the WIL expectations. Remarkably, the student (P00263097) who received this constructive, comprehensive, and specific feedback experienced significant gains in the posttest and final WES scores.

Second, more reflection opportunities should be provided in the form of reflection assignments and/or class discussions. In the interview, students expressly requested more in-class discussions involving students’ individual experiences in their WIL environment. Third, participants stated there was a notable division between the WES content and Spanish content. Students recommended that there be more integration of the WES assignments within the discipline subject matter. This feedback was exceptionally constructive and has immense value for future WES studies and the WES initiative at the college.

**Researcher journal.** In an effort to continuously engage in self-reflection and avoid researcher bias, I kept a journal throughout the study. Furthermore, the journal served as a record of my field notes and any reflective notes about what I observed during the study. Journal entries reveal some anxiety on my part over the chaos at the beginning of the semester. Explaining the study to students, retrieving signed letters of consent, procuring contact information for WIL supervisors, and making contact with those
supervisors was a little bumpy as both the students, the supervisors, and I were a little uncertain about what we were getting into and how it all would work out.

Shortly after this, I had students take the WES pre-test online and complete their initial WES self-assessment using the WES rubric. It seemed a bit overwhelming for students to have to complete WES requirements and become acquainted with the SPA 101 course all in the first 2-3 weeks of class. In fact, I quickly noticed that some of the WES activities and instruments took a little longer than I had anticipated and realized we would not be able to cover all six WES skills in one semester. In one entry posted four weeks into the semester, I used the phrase “I feel rushed” two times.

Luckily, results from the pretest enabled me to reduce the WES curriculum to four main skills: attendance, time management, communication and teamwork. Even still, covering four skills in one semester in addition to the regular course content was much too overwhelming for me, as the instructor. In fact, in some entries I lament the fact that I had to forego or “cut” certain Spanish language activities I enjoy using in order to be able to cover all the WES content. My closing thought for the above-mentioned entry was “it would be much easier to focus on one or two WES skills in one semester”. I would make the same comment again in an entry posted almost a month later.

Still within the first month of classes, I posted my apprehensions that students would be resistant to or overwhelmed (like me) by the study. Or, perhaps they think it is just a waste of time. A few days later these apprehensions were allayed after reading students’ enthusiastic and committed responses to the study in their first reflection assignment. By midterm, my field notes captured some improvement in my students’ mastery and application of WES. Specifically, I commented on how much the level of
communication had improved between me and my students. Students were notifying me more via email about upcoming absences, questions, or scheduling appointments. Not only did students start to demonstrate more effective communication skills, their emails started to include a subject line, a salutation, proper grammar, and a closing. In class, more students began arriving on time and were keenly aware of due dates.

Overall, my final entries indicate a level of satisfaction and pride in the fact that the intervention seemed to be well received by both the students and WIL supervisors. Once contact had been made and the objectives explained, working with the ‘ad hoc’ WIL component was easy and enjoyable for all stakeholders involved. I do wish more WIL supervisors would have provided concrete, constructive feedback when possible, especially for those students who made a “9” on attendance and really wanted/expected a “10”.

My final impressions were that ‘ad hoc’ forms of WIL are a feasible and effective way to achieve a few, broad learning objectives. My overall observations indicate instructors, students, and supervisors should expect things to be a little chaotic at the beginning until all placements have been established, contact has been made, and objectives have been explained. Afterwards, as students and supervisors get a better idea of the broad learning objectives to be assessed, stakeholders become more enthusiastic and committed to the initiative. However, instructors, students, and supervisors should be flexible with time frames and keep open communication between all parties.

Merging of Results and Interpretation of Findings

The fore-mentioned results from both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study were then analyzed and interpreted within the context of each other.
Specifically, results from the qualitative data analysis were used to discern meaning from the results of the quantitative data. Consequently, a more comprehensive interpretation of the findings could be made. The first interpretation will discuss the impact of the intervention on student participants’ knowledge and understanding of WES. The second interpretation will discuss the impact of the intervention on student participants’ mastery and demonstration of WES.

**Knowledge and understanding of WES.** Quantitative data from the pre-and posttests demonstrate a significant gain in students’ actual knowledge and awareness of WES as a result of the intervention. Quantitative data from the post-intervention survey enhance this finding by revealing students also perceived this gain in knowledge. As mentioned in chapter two, Knight and Yorke (2003) relate employability and the ability to transfer knowledge to a well-developed metacognition. The fact that all 10 student participants (100%) perceived their own learning suggests the intervention also helped them become “knowing students” that “know what they are learning and why” (Knight & Yorke, 2003).

The WES pre/posttests were identical online assessments used to measure students’ understanding and awareness of WES (see Appendix A). Any change in scores from the pretest and posttest were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention in regards to students’ knowledge, understanding, and awareness of WES after being exposed to the WES curriculum and participating in their WIL assignment. Overall, 90% of student participants saw an improvement on their scores from the WES pretest to the WES posttest ($M = 3.07$), and one student’s (10%) score remained the same. The p-value of 0.0048 indicates this increase in scores was of statistical significance. A Cohen
$D$ of 1.17 also indicates the intervention had a large effect on students’ knowledge of WES. Findings from the pre-and posttests are substantiated by student responses in part two of the post-intervention survey. On the first item of part two of the survey, all 10 student participants (100%) agreed that their knowledge and understanding of WES improved as a result of participating in the study. Therefore, not only did students actually improve their knowledge and understanding of WES, they also were acutely aware of this gain in knowledge.

The most frequently missed questions on the pretest highlighted students’ weakest skills and, thus, dictated the development of the WES curriculum for the study. Posttest results show improvement on seven out of the nine frequently missed questions from the pretest. Questions #15, 23, 36, 38, and 45 saw significant improvement while questions #16 and #26 showed slight improvement. There was no change in the number of incorrect answers for question #32 on both the pretest and posttest. Surprisingly, more students answered question #3 incorrectly on the posttest than on the pretest. Further analysis of the data from pre-and posttest scores within the context of the frequently missed questions supports target effectiveness of the intervention. Meaning, while the intervention was effective in increasing students’ general knowledge of WES it was also highly effective in enhancing students’ knowledge of WES in the areas where students were most lacking.

The nine most frequently missed questions on the pretest were items that assessed: attendance (Q#1), time management (Q#15; Q#16; Q#36), communication (Q#26; Q#32), teamwork (Q#38; Q#46), and the importance of WES in general (Q#23). Interestingly, students listed these same skills in the first reflection assignment as skills
they wanted to focus on in the study. In fact, two students wanted to focus on attendance (20%); six students on time management (60%); six students on communication (60%), and one student on teamwork (10%).

Additionally, data from the first reflection assignment show that students anticipated communication (80%), attendance (70%), and time management (60%) to be the top three skills needed in order to be successful in their WIL. Teamwork (50%) was anticipated as being the fifth most needed skill. This suggests students elected to focus on attendance, time management, communication, and teamwork over the course of the study because they recognized these as areas of weakness and needing improvement (as evidenced by the most frequently missed questions on the pretest), and/or because they perceived these skills to be essential for success in their WIL.

Of note, 50% of students anticipated they would need good teamwork skills in order to be successful in their WIL, making it the fifth most anticipated skill needed. What is more, 50% of students missed the teamwork questions #38 and #45 on the pretest. Yet, surprisingly, only 10% of students listed teamwork as a skill they wanted to address during the study. This points to student participants as having selected certain skills to address based on anticipated needs for their WIL and not because they recognized their own areas of weakness.

**Mastery and demonstration of WES.** In regards to students’ midterm and final WES scores the study revealed mixed results. While the difference in students’ midterm and final WES scores were too small to be of any statistical significance, student responses from part two of the post-intervention survey revealed 80% of student participants agreed or strongly agreed their mastery and demonstration of WES had
improved as a result of their participation in the study. However, analysis of the qualitative data from the reflection assignment #2 and the semi-structured group interview indicate student perception is strongly linked to increase in knowledge and confidence. In other words, even though the study did not have any effect on students’ actual demonstration of WES, because students had more knowledge of WES (as evidence by pretest/posttest scores) and felt more confident in their WES abilities (as demonstrated in the semi-structured group interview), they perceived their abilities as having actually improved as well.

Students’ average final WES scores were compared with their average midterm WES scores to determine any change in the student participants’ demonstrated mastery of WES and assess the effectiveness of the intervention on the students’ application of WES. Five students’ (50%) average final WES score was higher than their average WES score at midterm, indicating improvement in their mastery and demonstration of WES in a period of approximately eight weeks ($M = 1.4$). Conversely, over the same period of time, five students’ (50%) average final WES score was lower than their average midterm WES score ($M = -1.31$). Overall, the results of the study point to a small but positive average change ($M = 0.045$) between students’ midterm and final WES scores. However, a $t$ value of 0.0634480 and a p-value of 0.95 indicate this difference between midterm and final WES scores is too small to be of any statistical significance. Furthermore, a Cohen’s $D$ score of 0.02 suggests that the effect of the intervention on students’ application of WES was very small. Yet, ironically, student responses from part two of the post-intervention survey revealed 80% of student participants agreed or
strongly agreed that their mastery and demonstration of WES had improved as a result of their participation in the study.

In order to explain students’ perceived improvement in their mastery of WES despite the statistically insignificant change in students’ actual demonstration of WES, results must be considered within the context of the analyzed data collected from the second reflection assignment, the post-intervention survey, the semi-structured group interview, and feedback from a WIL supervisor on the WES final evaluation score.

Upon review of students’ initial self-assessment WES score, it was discovered that 80% of students scored themselves lower than their WIL supervisor and instructor did at midterm. Twenty percent of students had an initial self-assessment WES score that was very similar to or the same as their WES midterm scores. Curiously, in the second reflection assignment, 70% of students noted their pleasant surprise (or shock) at receiving higher than expected midterm scores from their WIL supervisor and instructor. In an attempt to justify such high scores, students frequently used expressions such as my instructor and supervisor went “easier on me”. Others recognized that they had been overly “hard on myself” and do not have to “beat myself up”. Another student initially believed his/her WES to be “terrible” but admitted the high midterm scores made him/her more “confident”.

Analyzing students’ initial self-assessment WES scores within the context of their responses from the second reflection assignment suggests that the majority of the student participants had exceedingly low confidence in their WES abilities at the beginning of the study. Analyzed and coded data from the semi-structured interview conducted at the end of the study confirm this finding. During the interview, students reported the WES
evaluations helped increase their confidence over time. One student was quoted as saying, “It was eye-opening because you realize, oh, I’m not as bad at that as I think. I just have to build the confidence up in it.”

One possible reason as to why 50% of student-participants experienced a decline in their final WES score may be a result of WIL supervisors having more time and opportunity to truly get to know and evaluate the student. This may be particularly true for students who were new to the WIL environment. As evidence, three weeks after hiring a student-participant, one WIL supervisor gave the student 60 out 60 (100% exceeds) for her midterm WES score. However, at the end of the semester, eight weeks later and eleven weeks after hiring the student, the supervisor gave the student 53.3 out of 60 (88.8% Meets) citing emerging issues with attendance, time management and communication.

Lastly, patterns in the data from the post-intervention survey and the semi-structured group interview showed that students repeatedly mentioned the benefit of learning about their own strengths and weaknesses in regards to employability skills. This suggest that while 50% of the student-participants may not have actually demonstrated improvement, the fact that most students developed a self-awareness of their skills and an understanding of which skills they need to improve is proof of actual demonstrated growth in meta-cognitive thought. Perhaps, subconsciously, students mistook this meta-cognitive thought for mastery of the WES skills and, hence, perceived improved mastery of the skills.

Interesting, all students perceived an improvement in their communication skills in their WIL as a result of the intervention. In fact, the word “communication” was
mentioned six different times during the 27 minute long interview. Moreover, student responses indicate growth in interpersonal and teamwork skills. Instances of interpersonal and/or teamwork skills appeared six times throughout the interview as well. This data indicates that students perceived more improvement in mastery and application of certain WES than others, particularly in the areas of communication and teamwork/participation.

Conclusion

At the outset of this study, my hypothesis was that active learning experiences, even brief, unconventional experiences, could be meaningful, effective and practical if they met four essential criteria; that the experience: (a) incorporate the four elements of Kolb’s ELT (1984); (b) work towards one of the main objectives of experiential learning (Cherrington & Van Ments, 1994); (c) have clearly stated WES learning outcomes that are general in nature; and (d) be framed by a process that is structured in preparation, collaboration, reflection that is valuable and continuous, and evaluation that is appropriate. All things considered, the results of this study corroborate my theory.

First, through the use of more non-traditional and flexible ‘ad hoc’ forms of WIL, I was able to eliminate some of the more common obstacles students encounter with experiential learning. Time constraints and transportation logistics were the two most common obstacles encountered by students when participating in experiential learning (Burke & Bush, 2013; Kretchmar, 2001). In like manner, 40% of the student participants in the current study mentioned time constraints and transportation as major concerns. Nevertheless, data from the post-intervention survey and the semi-structured group
interview indicate the intervention was effective in overcoming these concerns and obstacles.

Students’ initial concerns about the study were reported in the first reflection assignment and mirrored the student concerns exposed in the research. Sources of stress that were mentioned included: time constraints, transportation issues, other responsibilities, not being able to keep up with the additional WES assignments, and being evaluated by a WIL supervisor.

Responses from part two of the post-intervention survey confirm 90% of student participants agreed or strongly agreed that fulfilling the 12 hours of WIL was feasible even with their current responsibilities. Eighty percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they found participating in the WIL component to be an enjoyable experience. In the open response portion of the survey, six students (60%) made comments to the effect that they enjoyed the study and thought it was a great experience. Moreover, data from the semi-structured group interview proved that not restricting the WIL to course content and allowing students the flexibility of participating in non-traditional, ‘ad hoc’ forms of WIL (e.g. babysitting, volunteer high school coach, college club officer, current part-time employment) enabled more students to participate in the study and grow from the experience. Hence, the intervention was able to effectively overcome the typical obstacles that often make students resistant to experiential learning and increase student accessibility to WIL opportunities (Burke & Bush, 2013; Harvey, 2005; Kretchmar, 2001).

Second, findings from the study support that these alternative forms of WIL were exceedingly meaningful and effective. In total, 90% of student participants had
significant actual improvement in their knowledge and understanding of WES. In fact, 100% of student participants found their WIL provided practical opportunities to use WES and that the WES evaluations from their WIL supervisors were helpful in determining their individual strengths and weaknesses with WES. As such, 90% of students attributed much of this gain in WES knowledge to their participation in a WIL experience.

Research has demonstrated that work-integrated learning (WIL) and active involvement on the part of employers in curriculum design are the most effective and preferred strategies for teaching employability skills (Harvey, 2005; Jackson, 2015; Mason et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2016; Tymon, 2013). Similarly, data from the post-intervention survey and the semi-structured group interview support the research regarding the importance of WIL in teaching employability skills.

Responses from part two of the survey show 90% of student participants agreed or strongly agreed that the WIL component was beneficial to their understanding and application of WES. In addition, 100% of student participants agreed or strongly agreed that WIL offered practical opportunities in which to implement WES. Likewise, 100% of student participants agreed or strongly agreed that WES evaluations from WIL supervisors were helpful in identifying their strengths and weaknesses in WES. When asked if their understanding and application of WES would have improved just as much without the WIL component, 70% of student participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. In fact, 90% of student participants responded that it was important or very important that instructors include a WIL component in their class when possible.
Correspondingly, remarks made in the open response section of the survey attest to the vital role WIL plays in teaching WES. Six of the student participants (60%) mentioned WIL in their responses. Three students (30%) made comments to the effect that the study was a great opportunity to practice real-life skills in class and with a supervisor who could provide feedback. Another student (10%) stated the course-related WIL was a positive and valuable experience. Two students (20%) requested additional WIL opportunities and that the WIL experience be discussed more in class, suggesting a desire to engage more in the WIL experience.

Finally, despite the fact that the intervention had very little effect on students’ mastery and demonstration of WES, the ‘ad hoc’ and non-traditional WIL had a significantly positive effect on students’ confidence, meta-cognition, and ability to transfer WES knowledge and skills to other environments and situations. As evidenced in the data from the semi-structured group interview, because the WIL component provided occasions for practical application of WES in real-world settings with real-world consequences, feedback from a real-world supervisor via the WES rubric evaluation was seen by the students as being more authentic. As such, student participants valued the WIL experience as helpful in identifying their strengths and weaknesses in WES, and WES scores from WIL supervisors were more instrumental in building students’ confidence in WES. Furthermore, the application of skills outside of the classroom helped connect theory and practice to develop students’ ability to transfer knowledge, thus enhancing students’ meta-cognition and further contributing to them becoming a ‘knowing student’ (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Kolb 1984).
Knight and Yorke (2003) relate employability and the ability to transfer knowledge to a well-developed meta-cognition. Accordingly, the intervention was successful in developing critical understanding, meta-cognition, malleable self-theories, and an internal locus of control in regards to WES. Therefore, in summation, ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL in general education courses have a positive and demonstrated impact on students’ knowledge of WES and in cultivating “knowing students” who know what they are learning, how they are learning, why they are learning, and how to transfer that learning when needed (Knight and Yorke, 2003).
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

“If we teach today as we taught yesterday, then we rob our children of tomorrow”.

-John Dewey

Introduction

This chapter offers a discussion of the overall findings of the study. This discussion comprises implications of the study as well as recommendations for future research. However, to orient the reader in the following discussion, the chapter will first present a summary of the study along with a brief outline of the purpose and objectives of the study.

Summary of the Study

This study addressed the gap in employability skills among recent college graduates. As such, the proposed intervention sought to integrate work ethic skills (WES) into the general education curriculum in a practical, efficient, and effective way to develop and enhance students’ professional skills. In doing so, the study simultaneously focused on rectifying the perceived devaluation of the liberal arts by demonstrating the practical value of a general education curriculum.

Demonstrated research supports work-integrated learning (WIL), if done properly, to be the most effective method for students to learn, practice, and apply professional and academic skills. Problematic is the fact that general education courses have tenuous WIL connections because they are not “job specific. Hence, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory was applied as the theoretical framework for creating effective and
meaningful learning experiences via ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013). Moreover, the study sought to discover how these ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) impacted students’ WES.

This was an authentic study derived from an immediate and local concern regarding students’ gap in employability skills, a call for action to develop these skills among students, and an urgent need to demonstrate the practicality of the liberal arts with the core objective of empowering educators to evoke practical and necessary change within their own curriculum (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). As such, the investigation was one of action research.

In keeping with the objectives of action research, the study assumed an exploratory stance to investigate the effectiveness and feasibility of using Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory with ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL (Harvey, 2005; Tymon, 2013) to teach WES in a general education course. To accomplish this, I elected to use a concurrent Quan + Qual mixed methods design in which the quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed separately. Data from both the quantitative and qualitative strands were then compared using a combined data analysis (see Figure 3.2), merging quantitative and qualitative results for a more holistic interpretation and understanding of the study’s findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This allowed me to capitalize on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods and offer multiple perspectives, obtain more robust evidence, and provide real-life, contextual understanding of numerical data (Ivankova, 2015).

Results from the study revealed that, through the use of non-traditional and flexible ‘ad hoc’ forms of WIL, I was able to eliminate some of the more common
obstacles students encounter with experiential learning. In fact, 40% of the student participants in the current study mentioned time constraints and transportation as major concerns. Nevertheless, outcomes showed that students found the ‘ad hoc’ and ‘casual’ forms of WIL to be feasible, enjoyable, and beneficial. Furthermore, using these unconventional forms of WIL allowed more students to participate in the study.

What is more, findings proved these alternative forms of WIL were exceedingly meaningful and effective. In total, 90% of student participants had significant improvement in their knowledge and understanding of WES. In fact, 100% of student participants found their WIL provided practical opportunities to use WES and that the WES evaluations from their WIL supervisors were helpful in determining their individual strengths and weaknesses with WES. As such, 90% of students attributed much of this gain in their knowledge of WES to their participation in a WIL experience.

Finally, despite the fact that the intervention had very little effect on students’ actual WES performance, the ‘ad hoc’ and non-traditional WIL had a significantly positive effect on students’ perceptions, confidence, meta-cognition, and ability to transfer WES knowledge and skills to other environments and situations. Because the WIL component provided occasions for practical application of WES in real-world settings with real-world consequences, feedback from a real-world supervisor via the WES rubric evaluation was seen by the students as being more authentic. As such, student participants valued the WIL experience as helpful in identifying their strengths and weaknesses in WES, and WES scores from WIL supervisors were more instrumental in building students’ confidence in WES. Furthermore, the application of skills outside of the classroom helped connect theory and practice to develop students’ ability to
transfer knowledge, thus enhancing students’ meta-cognition and further contributing to them becoming a ‘knowing student’ (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Kolb 1984).

**Objectives of Study**

Three overarching objectives dictated the development, design, and implementation of the current study. The first objective was to offer a blueprint for GACC liberal arts faculty to provide a more comprehensive education through positive cultural change toward collaboration, self-awareness, social intelligence, and socio-political relevance through experiential learning. This transformation meets the goals outlined in the GACC 2015-2018 and 2019-2021 Strategic Plans (Green Acres, 2016a) and aligns with the college’s mission.

The second objective was to provide a feasible and effective solution to the 2014 DACUM (Green Acres, 2014) by establishing relationships and creating partnerships between the college and the local community/employers in order to meet the 21st century needs of students, the community, and local industry.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, the third objective of the study was to provide evidence that a liberal arts education and employability skills are not mutually exclusive, demonstrating that liberal arts programs can make practical contributions to the world of work without compromising the ethical, social, and political philosophies of these courses (Dowling et al., 2015; Hjelde, 2015; MacKay, 2010).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The first two suggestions for future research stem from topics that were discussed in the current study but were not explicitly addressed within the scope of the research question and data collection. Alternative forms of WIL and the practicality of the liberal
arts and faculty resistance to experiential learning were explored as part of the conceptual framework and contextual backdrop to the problem of practice in the current study. However, ancillary findings from this study as well as the magnitude of their influence on experiential learning in the liberal arts suggest that future studies on these topics are imperative.

The third suggested topic for future research addresses the perceptions and opinions of the WIL supervisors as participants and stakeholders in the study. Albeit an equally important topic, feedback from the WIL supervisors as to the effectiveness of the study was outside the scope of this study due to time constraints and resources.

The last two potential research opportunities stem directly from the findings of the current study. Results of the intervention on students’ performance of WES were mixed, and future research is needed to determine if student perceptions, WIL feedback, and alignment of objectives has any substantial impact on students’ actual demonstration of WES.

‘Ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL and the purpose of a general education.

As previously discussed, the purpose of a liberal education is to build “general intelligence” and civic responsibility (Casement, 1999; Fox, 2016). The liberal arts courses are inherently centered on communication, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, and social justice. As such, the liberal arts courses are natural settings for reflecting and acting upon WIL experiences through journaling and class discussions to become agents of change (Knight & Yorke, 2003). Although not directly addressed by the research question, findings from this study substantiate this theory and warrant further investigation.
For instance, as noted in the analyzed data from the semi-structured group interview, the word “communication” was mentioned six different times during the 27 minute long interview. Instances of interpersonal and/or teamwork skills appeared six times throughout the interview as well. Additionally, during the interview, 37.5% of students stated that the WES reflection assignments made them “look more closely at what you [sic] were doing” and “think harder, making your dig deeper as to what you are thinking about”. As a result, students were able to develop and use critical thinking skills.

Also noteworthy is, despite the fact that WIL placements were not required to have a connection with the Spanish course content, 40% of student participants were able to relate their WIL experience to the target language and/or Hispanic cultures. What is more, responses from the semi-structured group interview revealed 30% of those students learned of specific social injustices affecting the Latino community as a result of their WIL experience.

One of these students (10%) participated in a pre-arranged WIL experience affiliated with the Spanish language and/or Hispanic community. As a volunteer teacher’s aide in a local ESOL classroom, the student experienced first-hand the language and cultural barriers in education facing children of illegal immigrants and how the local community addresses (or does not address) those barriers. The other two students (20%) used their current place of employment as an ‘ad hoc’ WIL placement. Of these two students, one student was able to transfer cultural knowledge learned in class to the WIL environment when filling out legal documents for Hispanic customers. This student experienced first-hand how legislative policies at the state and federal level have a large
impact on illegal immigrants for even the smallest of things, including the purchase of a used car. The other student used language skills learned in class to communicate with a Hispanic resident who spoke very little English. This student saw the consequences of an organization not having a prepared plan of action for interacting with Spanish-speaking customers.

Ultimately, these findings suggest that casual and flexible forms of WIL can, indeed, reinforce and provide opportunities to apply the “general intelligence” objectives of the liberal arts in a practical and authentic manner. By the same token, the findings indicate links can be made between casual and flexible forms of WIL and the course content. Furthermore, results from the study show ‘ad hoc’ and ‘casual’ forms of WIL expose students to social injustices in the local community.

By and large, these outcomes support Knight and Yorke’s (2003) argument that WES and WIL are not mutually exclusive to quality learning but that they actually share a symbiotic relationship. However, further action research is needed to confirm the direct impact ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL have on students achieving general education course outcomes. The future of the liberal arts depends on research of this nature to prove its worth and utility. Furthermore, future research on this topic may help redesign the general education curriculum to meet the needs of the 21st century student and society.

**WIL and faculty resistance.** As noted, many faculty are resistant to experiential learning because they find it to be “complex, messy, and challenging” (Glazier et al., 2017, p. 234), forcing them to step outside of their comfort zone by forfeiting some control in the classroom (Freeland, 2019). Finally, some faculty have no incentive to
incorporate experiential learning into their curriculum due to: lack of time; being overworked; and believing social and emotional intelligences cannot be taught or learned.

To overcome these obstacles, the current study allowed for flexible forms of WIL, required a feasible number of hours in the WIL environment, and evaluated and assessed students on broad but clearly stated learning objectives (Coker & Porter, 2015; Nutting, 2013). Granted, prior to the start of the study, I invested some time in establishing pre-arranged WIL placements specifically related to the course content. The purpose of this was to have some WIL placements available if students were either a.) not involved in any activity that could be used as a WIL or b.) wanted their WIL experience to have a connection with the course content. However, based on the research and because I knew most students would use their current activities and/or employment for their WIL, I only arranged for five course-related WIL placements that could accommodate one to two students each. Therefore, the time spent contacting organizations, explaining the study, and organizing the WIL placement was minimal.

As noted in the data from my researcher-practitioner journal, implementing and evaluating students on all six WES skills was, at times, overwhelming, and took away from class time needed to cover the course content. In my journal, I suggested that, in the future, instructors limit the WIL experience to having just one or two broad objectives. Future action research is needed to determine if these strategies help mitigate faculty resistance. Suggested is having various faculty implement the same intervention as in the current study but with a reduced number of learning objectives in order to collect feedback from instructors regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of ‘ad hoc’ and ‘casual’ forms of WIL to supplement and enhance broad course learning objectives.
**Reactions and responses from WIL supervisors.** Not within the scope of this study were the reactions and responses of the WIL supervisors as to the effectiveness of the study. In chapter 1, it was acknowledged that what constitutes employability skills can be highly subjective and multifaceted. It was further noted that employability skills can be understood and defined from three different perspectives: that of the student, the educational institution, and the employer (Harvey, 2005; Knight & Yorke, 2003; Oria, 2012; Tymon, 2013). Through the WES rubric and the analyzed data from the first reflection assignment, readers of this study have a clear understanding of how GACC and the student participants understand and define WES. Missing, however, is the perspective of the employer.

As an interested stakeholder in the current problem of practice, more research is needed to understand the opinions and attitudes of the WIL supervisors. Specifically, further research should be done to determine supervisors’ opinion of the WES rubric in terms of ease of use, clarity, and relevance. Also essential is an investigation on how WIL supervisors evaluated students and if they needed more knowledge/explanation of the objectives. Findings from this research could result in improvements in the WES rubric, enhancing the WES evaluation process for supervisors, and strengthening partnerships within the community.

**Feedback and alignment of WES objectives with WIL.** As mentioned in chapter two, occasionally students in work-integrated placements are unsure of the standards to which they are being held and, therefore, feel inadequate and isolated. Data from the semi-structured group interview exposed some students’ uncertainty as to exactly how their WIL supervisor was evaluating them using the WES rubric. Open and
continuous communication between instructor, student, and supervisor is essential to resolving issues such as these.

Moreover, research cited in chapter 2 emphasized the fact that placement supervisors should be made aware of the student’s learning objectives and provide constructive feedback and guidance to the learner (Smith et al., 2016; Eyler, 2009; Harvey, 2005; Jackson, 2015; Kretchmar, 2001). As such, I contacted WIL instructors at three separate points during the semester via email to outline the objectives of the study, explain the WES rubric, provide examples of how to use the WES rubric to evaluate students on their employability skills, and answer any questions. Nevertheless, student responses in the semi-structured group interview indicated these aspects of the current study need improvement. Specifically, in the interview, students recommended there be an even stronger alignment of objectives between what is being learned in class and that which is being evaluated in the WIL environment. Additionally, my own observations and field notes made throughout the study support the need for WIL supervisors to provide more specific and constructive feedback with their WES evaluations.

Again, future action research is recommended to determine if a stronger alignment of objectives and more constructive feedback from the WIL supervisor will eliminate uncertainty on the part of the student and help focus their improvement efforts. Whereas the current study had very limited impact on students’ actual mastery and demonstration of WES, perhaps a study with a stronger alignment of objectives and practical feedback from WIL supervisors would have a more significant impact on students’ mastery and demonstration of WES.
**Perceptions and reality.** Changes in students’ midterm and final WES evaluation scores in the current study indicate the intervention had little impact on students’ actual mastery and application of WES. Yet, on the post-intervention survey, 80% of participants in the current study agreed (30%) or strongly agreed (50%) that their demonstration (i.e. use or implementation) of WES improved as a result of their participation in the study. In other words, students’ perceived an improvement in their mastery and demonstration of WES, but the WES evaluation scores did not reflect any significant improvement.

Of interest, data from the second reflection assignment and the semi-structured group interview revealed the majority of student participants (70%) initially lacked confidence in their WES and that, by the end of the intervention, students felt more confident in their employability skills. A comparison of students’ initial self-assessment WES scores with their midterm and final scores confirm this lack of confidence. From these findings arise three important questions. One, did students not experience any substantial change in their midterm and final WES evaluation scores because students already demonstrated good WES from the onset but just lacked the confidence in their abilities? Or, did the students perceive growth in their WES mastery because they indeed experienced actual growth that was not captured on the WES evaluations? Lastly, do increased confidence and perceived growth in WES eventually lead to actual demonstrated growth in WES?

Future action research is needed to investigate and answer these questions. Findings from this research could potential identify the effects confidence and perceptions have on students’ performance of WES.
Implications of the Study and Plan of Action

Overall findings from the study suggest that ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL are a viable alternative for teaching WES in general education courses. Additionally, the findings support ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL in general education courses are more successful when they include few but broad learning objectives. Finally, ‘ad hoc’ and ‘casual’ forms of WIL exemplify the practicality of a liberal arts education and have the potential to advance the social objectives of the liberal arts. As such, general education faculty should implement a WIL component when possible.

Moving forward from the study, I plan to collaborate with other faculty at the college in order to map select WES throughout the Arts and Science curriculum, provide professional development based on my findings from the study, share my findings at conferences, and offer training and resources to other faculty members who would like to incorporate WIL into their course curriculum. As noted in my researcher’s journal, covering all six WES skills in one course proved difficult and was overwhelming. Instead, mapping one or two skills into high-enrollment courses will ensure students are exposed to all six WES skills without making the curriculum too taxing for faculty. Furthermore, in the near future, I intend to offer professional development workshops based on my findings at the college and various conferences. These professional development opportunities are essential to demonstrating to faculty and administration the feasibility and effectiveness of WIL in general education courses. Lastly, in an effort to facilitate other faculty members’ willingness to incorporate WIL into their curriculum, I aim to offer assistance and support to faculty through training workshops and providing relevant resources and materials.
Conclusion

As an answer to the proposed research question, overall findings from the study suggest that ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL, structured within the framework of Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory and Fink’s (2013) taxonomy of significant learning, had a positive impact on students’ knowledge of WES, internal locus of control, personal perceptions, meta-cognition, and transferring of skills. Therefore, the outcomes met all three objectives for the study.

First, non-traditional forms of WIL are a viable alternative for teaching WES in general education courses. As such, the current study serves as a guideline for GACC liberal arts faculty to offer a more comprehensive education through collaboration, self-awareness, social intelligence, and socio-political relevance through experiential learning.

Second, the ‘ad hoc’ and ‘casual’ forms of WIL had a positive impact on students’ knowledge of WES, personal perceptions, meta-cognition, and transferring of skills. Therefore, these non-traditional forms of WIL in general education courses provide a feasible solution to the 2014 DACUM (Green Acres, 2014).

Finally, incidental findings suggest that ‘ad hoc’ or ‘casual’ forms of WIL in general education courses can foster civic and democratic causes as well as mitigate some elements of faculty resistance to experiential learning. Consequently, ‘ad hoc’ and ‘casual’ forms of WIL have the capacity to revitalize the liberal arts and highlight the practicality of a general education.
References


doi:10.5193/JEE34.2.164


http://workforcesolutions.stlcc.edu/2013/time-soft-skill-deficiencies-college-graduates/


Appendix A

Letter for Institutional Consent

January 8, 2019

Dear Dr. ________: 

My name is Jennifer Lopes, and I am currently enrolled in the Doctorate of Education in Curriculum and Instruction program at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina. I am presently in the process of writing my dissertation and will be conducting a research study this semester on incorporating work ethic skills (i.e. employability skills) into the general education curriculum.

In particular, I am interested in developing an effective and efficient way to teach and assess work ethic skills (WES) in a general education course. In doing so, the study will focus on how work-integrated learning, especially unorthodox or ‘ad hoc’ forms of work-integrated learning, impact students’ WES in general education courses.

With your consent, I would like to conduct my study with my Spanish students at Green Acres Community College.

This research will take approximately 15 weeks (i.e. the duration of one semester). During this time students will be required to take two online assessments (identical pre/post tests) consisting of 50 multiple-select questions; participate in 12 hours of documented work-integrated learning; submit two reflection assignments (approximately 1-2 pages in length); complete a post-study survey, and be evaluated and scored on their employability skills at three separate times use the college’s WES rubric. The first evaluation will consist of students completing a self-assessment of their work ethic skills. The second and third evaluations will be performed by me and their work-integrated learning placement supervisor. Students will also be required to participate in a semi-structured group interview at the conclusion of the study. The interview will take place during class time and will be video-recorded.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. However, if students feel uncomfortable with any part of the study at any time, they have the right to terminate participation without consequence.

Students at Green Acres Community College may find participation in this study enjoyable and beneficial, as participants will have an opportunity to enhance their work ethic skills; gain valuable workplace experiences that can be included on resumes and job applications; network with potential employers; develop new insights and understanding about certain professions; and earn a “WES Exceeds” or a “WES Meets” digital badge that can be shared with potential employers as a way to demonstrate mastery of WES skills and gain a competitive advantage in the workforce.
Several steps will be taken to protect student anonymity and identity. While the interview will be video-recorded, the video will be destroyed once the interview has been transcribed. The transcribed interview will NOT include names, and any identifying information from the interview will be removed. The typed interview will be kept in a confidential file on my office computer which is password protected. Quantitative data will be converted into descriptive statistics while qualitative data will be coded for emergent themes and patterns. No individual names or identifying characteristics will be associated with data analysis and reporting.

Student participation in this research is completely voluntary, and students may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If a student should decide to withdraw, any information from that student will be removed from the study. Failure to complete 12 hours of work-integrated learning will disqualify a student from the study.

Students who decide not to participate in the study will still take the online pre/post test assessments, complete the two reflection assignments, and will be evaluated and scored three separate times on their mastery of WES using the WES rubric: the first evaluation being a self-assessment and the second and third evaluations will be performed by me based on WES in the class/classroom. Non-participants will not participate in the group interview nor will they have the opportunity to receive a “WES Exceeds” or “WES Meets” badge at the end of the semester.

Work-integrated learning placements, pre- and posttest scores, reflection assignments, the post-study survey, the semi-structured group interview, and WES scores will not affect students’ grades in the course.

The results from this study may be presented in writing in academic journals read by faculty, curriculum developers and designers, and instructional specialists to help them better understand how to effective teach and assess work ethic skills in general education courses. The results may also be presented in person at conferences or professional development workshops to groups of instructors, administrators, curriculum developers, and instructional specialists. At no time, however, will students’ names be used or any identifying information revealed. If you wish to receive a copy of the results from this study, you may contact me at the telephone or email address given below.

If you require more information about this study, or would like to speak with me personally, please call me at 864-941-8732 or email me at jlopes@email.sc.edu. If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research study, you may also contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lopes
Graduate Student
Ed.D Curriculum & Instruction
College of Education
University of South Carolina Columbia
Appendix A Continued

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on incorporating work ethic skills (i.e. employability skills) into the general education curriculum at Green Acres Community College and consent to allowing the research to conduct his/her study at this institution.

______________________________________________________
(Printed Name)

______________________________________________________
(Signature)

______________________________________________________
(Date)

______________________________________________________
(Institution)
Appendix B

Letter of Consent- Student Participant

January 16, 2019

Dear Potential Research Participant:

My name is Jennifer Lopes, and I am currently enrolled in the Doctorate of Education in Curriculum and Instruction program at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina. I am presently in the process of writing my dissertation and will be conducting a research study this semester on incorporating work ethic skills (i.e. employability skills) into the general education curriculum at Green Acres Community College.

You are invited to participate in this research study. In particular, I am interested in developing an effective and efficient way to teach and assess work ethic skills (WES) in a general education course. In doing so, the study will focus on how work-integrated learning, especially unorthodox or ‘ad hoc’ forms of work-integrated learning, impact students’ WES in general education courses.

This research will take approximately 15 weeks (i.e. the duration of one semester). During this time you will be required to take two online assessments (identical pre/post tests) consisting of 50 multiple-select questions; participate in 12 hours of documented work-integrated learning; submit two reflection assignments (approximately 1-2 pages in length); and be evaluated and scored on your employability skills at three separate times use the college’s WES rubric. The first evaluation will be a self-assessment of your work ethic skills. The second and third evaluations will be performed by me and your work-integrated learning placement supervisor. You will also be required to participate in a semi-structured group interview at the conclusion of the study. The interview will take place during class time and will be video recorded and transcribed.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. However, if you feel uncomfortable with any part of the study at any time, you have the right to terminate participation without consequence.

You may find participation in this study enjoyable and beneficial, as participants will have an opportunity to enhance their work ethic skills; gain valuable workplace experiences that can be included on resumes and job applications; network with potential employers; develop new insights and understanding about certain professions; and earn a “WES Exceeds” or a “WES Meets” digital badge that can be shared with potential employers as a way to demonstrate mastery of WES skills and gain a competitive advantage in the workforce.

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity. While the interview will be video recorded, the video will be destroyed once the interview has been transcribed. The transcribed interview will NOT include names, and any identifying information from the interview will be removed. The typed interview will be kept in a confidential file on my office
computer which is password protected. Quantitative data will be converted into descriptive statistics while qualitative data will be coded for emergent themes and patterns. No individual names or identifying characteristics will be associated with data analysis and reporting.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you do this, any information from you will be removed from the study. Failure to complete 12 hours of work-integrated learning will disqualify you from the study.

Students who decide not to participate in the study will still take the online pre/post test assessments, complete the two reflection assignments, and will be evaluated and scored three separate times on their mastery of WES using the WES rubric: the first evaluation being a self-assessment and the second and third evaluations will be performed by me based on WES in the class/classroom. Non-participants will not participate in the group interview nor will they have the opportunity to receive a “WES Exceeds” or “WES Meets” badge at the end of the semester.

Work-integrated learning placements, pre-and posttest scores, reflection assignments, the post-study survey, the group interview, and WES scores will not affect students’ grades in the course.

The results from this study may be presented in writing in academic journals read by faculty, curriculum developers and designers, and instructional specialists to help them better understand how to effective teach and assess work ethic skills in general education courses. The results may also be presented in person at conferences or professional development workshops to groups of instructors, administrators, curriculum developers, and instructional specialists. At no time, however, will your name be used or any identifying information revealed. If you wish to receive a copy of the results from this study, you may contact me at the telephone or email address given below.

If you require more information about this study, or would like to speak with me personally, please call me at 864-941-8732 or email me at jlopes@email.sc.edu. If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research study, you may also contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lopes
Graduate Student
Ed.D Curriculum & Instruction
College of Education
University of South Carolina Columbia

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on incorporating work ethic skills (i.e. employability skills) into the general education curriculum at Green Acres Community College and consent to participate in this study.

______________________________________________________  (Printed Name)
______________________________________________________  (Signature)
______________________________________________________  (Date)
Appendix C

Invitation to Participate – Current Supervisor

1/31/2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Jennifer Lopes, and I am currently enrolled in the Doctorate of Education in Curriculum and Instruction program at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina. I am presently in the process of writing my dissertation and will be conducting a research study during the spring 2019 semester on incorporating work ethic skills (i.e. employability skills) into the general education curriculum at Green Acres Community College.

You are invited to participate in this research study. In particular, I am interested in developing an effective, efficient, and meaningful way to teach and assess work ethic skills (WES) in a general education course. In doing so, the study will focus on how work-integrated learning, especially unorthodox forms of work-integrated learning, impact students’ WES in general education courses.

This research will take approximately 15 weeks (i.e. the duration of one semester). During this time students will be required to participate in 12 hours of documented work-integrated learning. For students who are not currently employed; do not already work with a local non-profit organization; or are not actively involved in extra-curricular activities; I will offer work-integrated learning placement opportunities at local organizations whose work is closely related to my course content.

Twice during the study you will be required to observe and evaluate the student-participant’s work ethic skills. Specifically, using the college’s Work Ethic Skills (WES) Rubric, you will evaluate and score the student’s mastery of and ability to demonstrate 6 fundamental employability skills: attendance, time management, professionalism, communication, teamwork, and productivity and quality of work. These evaluations and scores will be shared with both me and the student-participant.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. However, if you feel uncomfortable with any part of the study at any time, you have the right to terminate participation without consequence.

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity and that of your organization. Quantitative data will be converted into descriptive statistics while qualitative data will coded for emergent themes and patterns. No individual names or identifying characteristics will be associated with data analysis and reporting, and no organizations will be mentioned by name or referred to using identifying characteristics.
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study by terminating the placement arrangement at any time for any reason. If you do this, any information from you and/or your organization will be removed from the study and destroyed.

Work-integrated learning placements and WES scores will not affect students’ grades in the course.

The results from this study may be presented in writing in academic journals read by faculty, curriculum developers and designers, and instructional specialists to help them better understand how to effective teach and assess work ethic skills in general education courses. The results may also be presented in person at conferences or professional development workshops to groups of instructors, administrators, curriculum developers, and instructional specialists. At no time, however, will your name, nor the name of your organization, be used or any identifying information revealed. If you wish to receive a copy of the results from this study, you may contact me at the telephone or email address given below.

If you require more information about this study, or would like to speak with me personally, please call me at 864-941-8732 or email me at jlopes@email.sc.edu. If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research study, you may also contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lopes  
Graduate Student  
Ed.D Curriculum & Instruction  
College of Education  
University of South Carolina Columbia

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on incorporating work ethic skills (i.e. employability skills) into the general education curriculum at Green Acres Community College and consent to participate in this study.

______________________________________________________  (Printed Name)

______________________________________________________  (Signature)

______________________________________________________  (Date)
Appendix D

Invitation to Participate – Placement Supervisor

Date: __________________

Dear ____________________:

My name is Jennifer Lopes, and I am currently enrolled in the Doctorate of Education in Curriculum and Instruction program at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina. I am presently in the process of writing my dissertation and will be conducting a research study during the spring 2019 semester on incorporating work ethic skills (i.e. employability skills) into the general education curriculum at Green Acres Community College.

You are invited to participate in this research study. In particular, I am interested in developing an effective, efficient, and meaningful way to teach and assess work ethic skills (WES) in a general education course. In doing so, the study will focus on how work-integrated learning, especially unorthodox forms of work-integrated learning, impact students’ WES in general education courses.

This research will take approximately 15 weeks (i.e. the duration of one semester). During this time students will be required to participate in 12 hours of documented work-integrated learning. For students who are not currently employed; do not already work with a local non-profit organization; or are not actively involved in extra-curricular activities; I would like to be able to offer work-integrated learning placement opportunities at local organizations whose work is closely related to my course content.

Being that I teach Spanish, a possible work-integrated learning placement at your organization would provide student-participants in the study an opportunity to work with the local Hispanic community; gain a better understanding of the needs of the Hispanic community; develop cultural sensitivity; and increase exposure to different world perspectives.

Prior to the study, I ask that we schedule a phone conference to discuss any rules and regulations of the placement and establish the student-participant’s duties and responsibilities while at the placement. Twice during the study you will be required to observe and evaluate the student-participant’s work ethic skills. Specifically, using the college’s Work Ethic Skills (WES) Rubric, you will evaluate and score the student’s mastery of and ability to demonstrate 6 fundamental employability skills: attendance, time management, professionalism, communication, teamwork, and productivity and quality of work. These evaluations and scores will be shared with both me and the student-participant.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. However, if you feel uncomfortable with any part of the study at any time, you have the right to terminate participation without consequence.
Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity and that of your organization. Quantitative data will be converted into descriptive statistics while qualitative data will coded for emergent themes and patterns. No individual names or identifying characteristics will be associated with data analysis and reporting, and no organizations will be mentioned by name or referred to using identifying characteristics.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study by terminating the placement arrangement at any time for any reason. If you do this, any information from you and/or your organization will be removed from the study and destroyed.

Work-integrated learning placements and WES scores will not affect students’ grades in the course.

The results from this study may be presented in writing in academic journals read by faculty, curriculum developers and designers, and instructional specialists to help them better understand how to effective teach and assess work ethic skills in general education courses. The results may also be presented in person at conferences or professional development workshops to groups of instructors, administrators, curriculum developers, and instructional specialists. At no time, however, will your name, nor the name of your organization, be used or any identifying information revealed. If you wish to receive a copy of the results from this study, you may contact me at the telephone or email address given below.

If you require more information about this study, or would like to speak with me personally, please call me at 864-941-8732 or email me at jlopes@email.sc.edu. If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research study, you may also contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lopes  
Graduate Student  
Ed.D Curriculum & Instruction  
College of Education  
University of South Carolina Columbia


I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on incorporating work ethic skills (i.e. employability skills) into the general education curriculum at Green Acres Community College and consent to participate in this study.

__________________________________________________________________________  (Printed Name)

__________________________________________________________________________  (Signature)

__________________________________________________________________________  (Date)
Appendix E

WES Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Work Ethic Skills (WES) Assessment Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EXCEEDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance: Work attendance (demonstrates self-management)</td>
<td>Attends 100% of work/class; notifies supervisor prior to absence due to extraordinary circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management: Punctual attendance; turns in work on time; is able to meet deadlines</td>
<td>Student arrives/leaves on time; submits all work on time (i.e. no late work); meets all deadlines; and demonstrates self-responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism: Behavior, attitude, personal presentation/appearance</td>
<td>Always demonstrates a positive attitude; self-control; good personal presentation; appropriate language use; and embraces new ideas, skills and assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication: Listening; oral &amp; written; making sure messages are received; prioritize urgent communications</td>
<td>Always uses clear, organized language; effectively exchanges ideas and information (i.e. ensures that the message is received AND understood); is able to prioritize urgent communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity &amp; Quality of Work: Exhibits strong work ethic; preparedness; quality of work; follows safety procedures &amp; rules</td>
<td>Always prepared; gives best effort; produces excellent to exceptional work; maximizes work/class time; always follows safety procedures and rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation/Teamwork: Working with others; diversity; collaboration.</td>
<td>Always collaborates well with others &amp; respects cultural diversity; is cooperative; appropriately handles criticism; different viewpoints, conflicts and complaints; works well in a team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E Continued

### WORK ETHIC SKILLS EVALUATION FORM

**INSTRUCTOR/SUPERVISOR (NAME & POSITION/TITLE):**

**STUDENT & PI/EMPLOYEE (NAME & POSITION):**

**NAME OF ORGANIZATION & PHONE #/EMAIL:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE:</th>
<th>Midterm</th>
<th>End of Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 - 10 EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 - 8.9 MEETS EXPECTATIONS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>0 - 7.4 NEEDS IMPROVEMENT</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS</th>
<th>MEETS EXPECTATIONS</th>
<th>NEEDS IMPROVEMENT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
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<td>Professionalism</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Productivity &amp; Quality of Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation/Teamwork</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

**SUBTOTAL (total numbers in each column)**

**TOTAL SCORE:** (add all subtotals together and divide by 60 to get total % score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Midterm</th>
<th>End of Semester</th>
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</table>

**Explanation of Work Ethic Skills Score (WES):**

- **Exceeds expectations:** (90 - 100%)
  - Work ethic performance is exemplary. Student has consistently demonstrated characteristics that will stand out in the work environment.
- **Meets Expectations:** (76% - 89%)
  - All work ethic standards are met. The quality of the student’s work ethic performance is that of a good employee in the normal work environment.
- **Needs Improvement:** (0 - 74%)
  - Some standards were not met. Additional training in employability skills is recommended in order for student to be successful in the work environment.

**SUPERVISOR’S NOTES:**

**STUDENT COMMENTS:**

**STUDENT’S SIGNATURE:**

**DATE:**

---

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Appendix F

WES Pre/Posttests

Question 1 (1 point)
Poor attendance only affects you and no one else.

☐ True
☐ False

Question 2 (1 point)
Which of the following are considered good attendance skills? Select all that apply.

☐ a) Notifying the supervisor in advance of your absence or possible tardiness.
☐ b) Ready to start work on time
☐ c) Arriving no more than 5 minutes late.
☐ d) Sticking to work schedules
☐ e) Taking a lot of leave time.
☐ f) Leaving the workday early if job duties are complete.

Question 3 (1 point)
Poor attendance in the workplace affects.... (check all that apply)

☐ a) Productivity
☐ b) Number of vacation/leave days
☐ c) Employee morale
☐ d) Professional reputation
☐ e) Professional growth
☐ f) Benefits (Medical / Retirement)
Appendix F Continued

**Question 4 (1 point)**

School attendance habits have very little to do with workplace attendance habits.

- True
- False

**Question 5 (1 point)**

**Choose the correct answer:** Good attendance and punctuality (being on time) shows...

- you always know the time.
- you are a perfectionist.
- you hate being late.
- you respect your commitments and others.

**Question 6 (1 point)**

**Choose the best answer:** You have a family emergency and will not be able to make it to work today. You ...

- wait until the following work day to explain the whole situation to your supervisor.
- notify your supervisor immediately that you will be absent.
- tell your co-worker to let your boss know you will be out today.
- notify your supervisor as soon as your shift starts.
Appendix F Continued

Question 7 (1 point)

Choose the best answer: There was an car accident on the way to work and traffic is at a standstill. Even though you left the house with plenty of time to get to work, you probably are going to arrive 5 minutes late. You...

- decide being 5 minutes late is really no big deal and do not bother to call work.
- immediately call your work to notify them of the situation and that you will be 5 minutes late.
- figure once you get to work and explain what happened your boss will surely understand.
- figure if you are already 5 minutes late you might as well stop for some coffee and donuts. Two dozen glazed donuts and an exciting narration of the accident will compensate for being late.

Question 8 (1 point)

Choose the best answer: Your work day/shift is from 7:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. It is currently 2:30 p.m. and you have completed all your duties and responsibilities for the day. You...

- ask your boss if you can clock out early and take advantage of a free afternoon.
- take care of personal business such as paying bills, making personal phone calls, or scheduling doctor’s appointments.
- start on a new project or ask co-workers if there is anything you can do to help them with their projects.
- take out your phone and get on social media for the last hour and half of your shift.

Question 9 (1 point)

Poor attendance in the workplace can lead to high turnover in employees.

- True
- False
Appendix F Continued

Question 10 (1 point)
Choose the best answer: Good time management means...
- you are late but you call ahead to notify your supervisor you will be late.
- you arrive on time.
- you arrive 5 - 10 minutes early.
- you are no more than 5 minutes late.

Question 11 (1 point)
Poor attendance is almost never a factor when an employee is fired or terminated from a job.
- True
- False

Question 12 (1 point)
It is acceptable to have multiple or prolonged periods of absences from work when...
- you have unreliable transportation
- there are problems with the family (childcare, divorce, aging parent, etc)
- death of an extended family member or friend
- you have scheduling conflicts
- none of the above

Question 13 (1 point)
Good time management skills help INCREASE....
- productivity
- stress
- procrastination
- negativity
Appendix F Continued

**Question 14** (1 point)
Having good time management skills can actually allow for more free time to relax, spend time with friends and family, and participate in leisure activities.

- True
- False

**Question 15** (1 point)
Which one of the following is NOT an essential characteristic of good goal setting?

- Attainable
- Realistic
- Professional
- Specific
- Timely
- Measurable

**Question 16** (1 point)
If you have prioritized your schedule, set goals, and implemented good time management skills you can never be too busy.

- True
- False

**Question 17** (1 point)
A benefit of good time management skills is ...

- success and advancement opportunities in the organization
- more professional development opportunities
- an exceptional and respected professional reputation
- all of the above
Appendix F Continued

**Question 18** (1 point)
Which strategies should you use in order to have good time management? (*choose all possible answers*)

- a) Procrastinate when possible.
- b) Prioritize tasks.
- c) Look over your schedule at the beginning of the week and plan your time.
- d) Mark important dates and deadlines in your calendar.
- e) Do not take breaks.
- f) Push back deadlines to give yourself more time.
- g) Keep your schedule busy so there is no room for distractions.
- h) Set goals.
- i) Multitask!
- j) Make a “to-do” list.

**Question 19** (1 point)
WES is an important initiative at Piedmont Technical College designed to enhance students’ professionalism skills. WES stands for ...

- Work Ethic Skills
- Work Enhancement Strategies
- Workplace Employability Skills
- What Effects Success

**Question 20** (1 point)
Piedmont Technical College defines WES as skills that characterize positive interpersonal relationships, complement technical skills, and influence success in the workplace.

- True
- False
Appendix F Continued

Question 21 (1 point)
The WES initiative at Piedmont Technical College focuses on 6 fundamental employability skills necessary for success in the workplace. These 6 skills are: (choose all that apply)

- A) Productivity & Quality of Work
- B) Critical Thinking
- C) Problem-Solving
- D) Attendance
- E) Communication
- F) Professionalism
- G) Time Management
- H) Participation & Teamwork

Question 22 (1 point)
Approximately 77% of employers surveyed said Work Ethic Skills are just as important as technical skills, if not more so, for success in the workplace.

- True
- False

Question 23 (1 point)
Only 15% of job success comes from having well-developed soft (employability/professionalism) skills and people skills, and 85% of job success comes from hard (technical) skills and content knowledge.

- True
- False
Appendix F Continued

**Question 24 (1 point)**

Match each WES skill with the appropriate definition.

- The imparting or exchanging of information or ideas through speech, writing, behavior or some other medium.
- The effective and efficient use of resources, along with taking pride in one's work, to meet or exceed the standards set forth by the organization.
- The action or state of going regularly to or being present at a place or event.
- The willingness and ease of a group of people to actively work together to achieve a common goal.
- An individual's conduct, goals, and qualities at work.
- The practice of using the time that you have available in an efficient and productive way so as to accomplish goals.

1. Attendance
2. Time Management
3. Professionalism
4. Communication
5. Productivity & Quality of Work
6. Participation & Teamwork

**Question 25 (1 point)**

As long as you do your job well, professionalism doesn't matter.

- True
- False
Question 26 (1 point)
The three necessary elements of communication are...

- verbal, non-verbal, and interpersonal
- sender, receiver, and channel
- informative, persuasive, and extemporaneous
- message, channel, and feedback

Question 27 (1 point)
Effective communication occurs when the message or information has been sent to the intended recipient.

- True
- False

Question 28 (1 point)
Charlie is working on a group project for class. He texts the members of his group with some ideas for the project and the day, time, & location for the group to meet and work together. At this point can Charlie safely assume his message was clearly communicated to the group?

- Yes
- No

Question 29 (1 point)
Brandon is taking classes at the local community college and will need to make some changes in his work schedule. When requesting a new schedule at work, Brandon should...

- call his supervisor
- meet with his supervisor in person
- email his supervisor
- text his supervisor
Appendix F Continued

Question 30 (1 point)
Ty wakes up with a sore throat and a fever and decides to take a sick day. Ty should ________ his supervisor to let him know that he won’t be in today due to illness.

- text
- meet
- email
- call

Question 31 (1 point)
People with excellent communication skills are ________.

- unfocused
- stressed out
- good listeners
- wordy

Question 32 (1 point)
Good communicators ...

- knows the message sent is always the message received
- know their audience
- give lots of details, possibilities, and background information
- avoid using gestures or other non-verbals

Question 33 (1 point)
Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of a good team member?

- confrontational
- good listener
- reliable
- adaptable
Appendix F Continued

Question 34 (1 point)
Working with diverse people means it is impossible to have shared visions, values, and goals in common.

☐ True
☐ False

Question 35 (1 point)
A healthy team environment will include all of the following EXCEPT:

☐ mutual respect for one another
☐ balanced and shared roles among team members
☐ a common sense of purpose and goals
☐ identical opinions and beliefs on all issues

Question 36 (1 point)
Which of the following is an example of SMART goal setting?

☐ Go to college and get a job.
☐ Have a minimum 3.0 GPA this semester.
☐ Graduate and find a job that pays $150,000 a year.
☐ Pass all my classes.

Question 37 (1 point)
Diversity in the workplace is important for all the following reasons EXCEPT:

☐ Offers different perspectives
☐ Offers various experiences
☐ Perpetuates stereotypes
☐ Enhances creativity and problem-solving
Appendix F Continued

Question 38 (1 point)
Lisa’s teammates are upset because she refuses to participate in the project and will not pull her weight at work. What is the most appropriate resolution for the situation? Lisa’s co-workers should...

☐ Give Lisa’s duties and responsibilities to others in the group.

☐ Go immediately to the supervisor and ask him/her to handle the situation.

☐ Speak to Lisa directly about the issue.

☐ Ignore the situation.

Question 39 (1 point)
In regards to professional emails, it is most important to:

☐ use all capital letters and emoji icons for emphasis

☐ respond immediately

☐ scan the email quickly for important details

☐ use correct grammar and punctuation

Question 40 (1 point)
Which of the following would be an appropriate email address for a resume or job application?

☐ John_Dalton@hotmail.com

☐ youdoyoubooo@gmail.com

☐ mygreeneyes52@yahoo.com

☐ loco4spanish@gmail.com

Question 41 (1 point)
Which of the following websites would be appropriate to view during work hours?

☐ Instagram

☐ Twitter

☐ Facebook

☐ Work email
Appendix F Continued

**Question 42** (1 point)

Martin receives his work schedule for the week and realizes he is scheduled to work for an evening that he already has plans. What would be the best option for Martin to solve this scheduling conflict?

- Attempt to switch shifts with another employee and confirm the switch with his boss.
- Not show up for work.
- Call in sick.
- Quit.

**Question 43** (1 point)

Tiana has an interview at a local law firm for a receptionist position. What would be the most appropriate attire for her to wear to the interview?

- Mini skirt and casual blouse.
- Jeans and a T-shirt.
- Shorts and flip-flops.
- Nice pants and formal blouse.

**Question 44** (1 point)

According to OSHA requirements, wearing safety glasses is required at all times at your workplace. You have been an employee with the company for several years and are confident in your ability to use the machines at work. You feel as if wearing safety glasses is distracting and unnecessary in certain aspects of your job. You should:

- Wear the safety glasses only when handling dangerous equipment.
- Ask your boss to change the policy.
- Wear the safety glasses when others are at your workplace.
- Wear the safety glasses at all times at your workplace.
Appendix F Continued

Question 45 (1 point)
In filling out an application for a job, you notice it states to "use black or blue ink only". You only brought a pencil with you to complete the application. When you ask to borrow a pen, the receptionist hands you a red ink pen. How should you best handle the situation?

- Take the application home to complete in black or blue ink.
- Type the application to look more professional
- Print your application in pencil in case you make mistakes.
- Write a note on the application explaining that you did not have a pen with you at the time you filled it out.

Question 46 (1 point)
Kendall must lead a group of co-workers to organize an marketing event for the company's new product. Kendall makes a list of all the tasks that need to be done and asks for volunteers. The same two co-workers volunteer for most of the tasks, leaving several co-workers with nothing to do. How should Kendall fix this problem?

- Ignore those co-workers who do not want to participate.
- Ask the rest of the co-workers to help out those who volunteered.
- Remind the team repeatedly that this is a group effort.
- Designate specific tasks to co-workers instead of asking for volunteers.

Question 47 (1 point)
Nelson's boss, Maurice, asks to meet with him at the beginning of the work day. Maurice informs Nelson that there are several areas of his work performance that need improvement. Maurice offers Nelson specific examples with strategies for how to improve in a respectful and constructive manner. Nelson is still very upset about the meeting. What should he do?

- File a formal complaint against Maurice.
- Ask for the remainder of the day off so as not to let his anger get the best of him at work.
- Thank Maurice and mention some areas of concern in Maurice's performance as well.
- Develop a plan to implement Maurice's constructive criticism and strategies in his work.
Appendix F Continued

Question 48 (1 point)
You have been assigned to lead a presentation on workplace safety. You are unfamiliar with the computer software program your boss asked you to use for the presentation. How should you best handle the situation?

- Use a different software program that you are more familiar with.
- Ask your boss for someone else to do the presentation.
- Locate resources about the program and research how to use it.
- Use someone else’s presentation and pretend it is yours.

Question 49 (1 point)
The following are all ways to keep a positive attitude in the workplace EXCEPT:

- Be appreciative
- Avoid negative work attitudes
- Volunteer your time
- Don’t use your vacation time

Question 50 (1 point)
A positive attitude in the workplace improves:

- teamwork & moral
- attendance & productivity
- creativity & problem-solving
- communications
- all of the above
Appendix G

WES “Exceeds” Badge and Certificate

GREEN ACRES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WORK ETHIC SKILLS (WES)

THIS CERTIFICATE IS AWARDED TO:

For completion of the WES study

April 29th, 2019

Jennifer Lopes
Chair of the WES Committee

Work ethic performance is exemplary. The student has consistently demonstrated characteristics that will stand out in the work environment.
Appendix H

WES “Meets” Badge and Certificate

GREEN ACRES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WORK ETHIC SKILLS (WES)

THIS CERTIFICATE IS AWARDED TO:

For completion of the WES study

April 29th, 2019

Jennifer Lopes
Chair of the WES Committee

Meets

All work ethic standards are met. The quality of the student’s work ethic performance is that of a good employee in the normal work environment.
Appendix I

WES Study: Post-intervention Survey

Question 1

Now that you have been exposed to the Work Ethic Skills (WES) initiative at Piedmont Technical College and have a better understanding of the WES, how important are the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Very Unimportant</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Incorporate WES into the academic curriculum.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Make WES part of the college’s student learning objectives (to be assessed but not necessarily graded).</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Add a Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) component to classes when possible.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Students be objectively and regularly evaluated on their WES skills during their academic career.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Opportunities should be given to students to reflect on their WES (awareness and demonstration of these skills).</td>
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Question 2

Please rate your response to the following statement:

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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>By participating in this study, I feel that my demonstration (using or implementing) of WES skills has improved.</td>
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Question 3

Please rate your response to the following statement:

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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>By participating in this study, I feel that my understanding (awareness and knowledge) of WES skills has improved.</td>
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Appendix I Continued

Question 4
Please rate your response to the following statements about the effectiveness of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in this study:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The 12 hour Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) component of the study was</td>
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<td></td>
<td>beneficial to my understanding and application of WES.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The 12 hours of WIL provided practical, real-world opportunities to use</td>
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<td>my WES skills and implement what I learned in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>My understanding and use of WES would have improved just as much</td>
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<td>without the WIL component (i.e. with just classroom activities and</td>
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<td>discussions).</td>
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Question 5
Please rate your response to the following statement:

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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The WES evaluations from my WIL supervisor were helpful in identifying</td>
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<td></td>
<td>my strengths and areas where I could improve in WES.</td>
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Question 6
Please rate your response to the following statements:

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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It was easy to find a WIL placement and complete the 12 hours of WIL.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>I enjoyed participating in a WIL activity.</td>
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Question 7
What other comments and suggestions do you have concerning the WES study?
Appendix J

WES Reflection Assignment #1

Please write a short reflection (maximum 1 page typed) about your initial reaction to the study. To help guide your thoughts, please consider the following questions and address them in your reflection:

- What is your current understanding of "WES" (Work Ethic Skills) or "employability skills"? How would you define "employability skills" and why are they important? (Hint: look at the WES Rubric_Faculty_2018.pdf)
- How do you anticipate you will need or use these skills during your 12 hours (minimum) of WIL (work integrated learning)? Give some examples.
  - EX: do you communicate a lot in your WIL placement? Do you work in groups or teams? Does attendance and punctuality matter? Will you need to follow certain rules or safety procedures? etc.
- What are some worries, concerns or apprehensions you may have about the study?
- What do you hope to gain or learn from the study? Is there any particular area of employability skills or WES that you would like to focus on this semester? Why so?
Appendix J Continued

WES Reflection Assignment #2

Over the next two weeks, you will receive a WES evaluation from both me and your WIL supervisor. I will also provide you with a copy of your initial self-assessment WES evaluation that you completed at the beginning of the semester.

For this 2nd reflection assignment, please do the following:

- Compare your initial WES self-assessment score with your midterm WES assessment scores from me and your WIL supervisor.
- Discuss any differences or discrepancies between your self-assessment and the WES assessments from me and your WIL supervisor.
  - What were some of the differences or discrepancies?
    - Were your strengths and weaknesses on your self-assessment the same or different from your strengths and weaknesses reported on the WES assessments by me and your WIL supervisor?
    - Were any of these differences or discrepancies surprising/interesting to you? Why? How so?
- Write a plan for improvement using S.M.A.R.T
  - Looking at all three WES evaluations (your initial self-assessment and the 2 midterm assessments from me and your WIL supervisor), choose two areas or skills that you would like to focus on and improve. What are these two skills?
  - Develop a plan for developing, practicing and implementing these skills using S.M.A.R.T both in your classes (i.e. at school) and in your WIL (work-integrated learning).
Appendix K

Semi-Structured Group Interview Questions

Post-intervention Structured Group Interview Questions:

1. What is your overall opinion of the WIL component for the course?
2. How was the WIL component beneficial?
3. Were there any disadvantages to the WIL component? If so, what were they?
4. What did you learn from the WIL component?
5. How did the WIL component supplement course content and learning objectives?
6. What effect did the WIL component have on your WES?
7. What is your overall opinion of the WES in-class activities (pre-posttests, surveys, activities, discussions, handouts, etc)?
8. What changes would you make to WES in-class activities for future classes?
9. What suggestions or recommendations do you have for incorporating a WIL component in future classes?
10. Discuss any changes in your awareness and mastery of WES from the beginning of the semester to now. To what do you attribute these changes?
11. Please discuss any additional comments or suggestions.