BEYOND ACCREDITATION: WHAT DEFINES A

QUALITY FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION

PROGRAM? AN INVESTIGATION OF THE

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL

CORRELATES AND PROGRAM QUALITY IN

FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION

By

JOHN BRADLEY FRITCH

Bachelor of Arts, Economics
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas
1993

Master of Education, Educational Administration
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, Oklahoma
2006

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Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Stephen P. Wanger

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Jesse Perez Mendez

Dr. Janice Miller

Dr. David Yellin

Outside Committee Member

Dr. Sheryl A. Tucker

Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This research is dedicated to the purpose of ascertaining what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. The investigation employs the use of an online questionnaire, which was used to collect data from the population of department chairs, or the equivalent position, of funeral service programs in the United States. The survey sought to determine what educational elements are consistently associated with a quality funeral service program beyond basic accreditation standards. The data were analyzed using descriptive indices and standard multiple regression to examine the data for statistical significance. The first chapter presents the related background of the study, a formal statement of the research problem, explains the professional significance of the research, and provides an overview of the methodology utilized in this study. Additionally, delimitations associated with the research are presented and definitions are provided for key terms that appear unique to this study.

Background of the Study

In the 1900s a cultural movement led to the establishment of the modern funeral home. The public began to require the assistance of professional funeral directors to assist with the care of the dead body and this ultimately led to the full service funeral industry we know in modern America. Entrepreneurs realized the potential profitability of the profession, which led to an increasing number of people seeking the opportunity to practice as a professional in the industry. This created a need for a training ground for individuals interested in pursuing a career in funeral

service and formal funeral service education was born (Kastenbaum, 2007; Laderman, 2003). The American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE), recognized by the United States Department of Education and the Council on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation, serves as the accrediting agency for all programs in the United States that teach funeral service or mortuary science education (Bigelow, 1997). The ABFSE is accountable for determining a universal curriculum and each school must go through a comprehensive assessment every seven years to secure and maintain accreditation (Bigelow, 1997). The accreditation process includes three major components: a self-study, an on-site visit conducted by a visiting committee selected by the committee on accreditation, and committee on accreditation action which is based on a detailed review of all documentation. Areas of interest include curriculum, instruction, degree granting certification and the requirement of the National Board Licensure Examination (abfse.org 2008). The accrediting agency does not provide any type of program ranking system and all schools must meet the same accreditation standards. Today, 56 programs are accredited by the ABFSE and of these programs 12 schools are devoted entirely to funeral service education; the remaining schools are largely community college associate degree programs, with seven schools offering a baccalaureate degree (Habenstein & Lamers, 2010). Each program is unique and all programs implement different matriculation and graduation requirements as well as offer different levels of degrees, yet all face identical accreditation standards. Although programs hail from distinctly unique educational institutions, each offering vastly different educational expectations and requirements, the standards remain the same. Profound differences exist in the quality, breadth, and depth of education received from these institutions, which necessitates the need for an examination of critical educational elements that correlate with program quality.

Investigators are constantly searching for methods to improve higher education. Research, seeking to determine program factors associated with program quality, is a common theme in the higher education landscape, however no research has focused on program quality in funeral service

education. Aspects synonymous with program quality have been discovered and evaluated in

numerous disciplines resulting in diverse findings, with many opinions concurring and dissenting

with respect to the improvement of educational theory regarding educational elements associated with

program quality (Conrad & Blackburn, 1985; Young, Blackburn & Conrad, 1987; Geiger & Feller,

1995; Schmitz, 1993; Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009; Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006). The focus of the

existing literature rests with graduate, undergraduate, specific programs and departments across the

nation that have earned the reputation as elite institutions, yet no funeral service education programs

have been evaluated. It would be beneficial to examine the relationship between established

educational elements related to program quality from existing literature as well as additional factors

unique to funeral service education to determine if a connection exists between these factors and the

quality of education each program offers, working to determine what defines a quality funeral service

program beyond basic accreditation.

Problem Statement

With more than 21,000 funeral homes employing in excess of 100,000 people nationwide,

funeral service has developed into a significant economic force (Kastenbaum, 2008; Laderman, 2003;

nfda.org, 2009), creating a great need for trained professionals. The governing board of funeral

service education in the United States is the ABFSE, (abfse.org, 2008; Bigelow, 1997) for which

accreditation standards are designed to ensure that the basic and necessary academic components

required to be a funeral service professional are consistently offered to every student. Despite the

efforts of the ABFSE to secure that funeral service education institutions offer a fundamentally strong

curricula, identical accreditation standards are set for programs regardless of individual institution

requirements or the degrees that are offered (abfse.org, 2008; Bigelow, 1997). This dilemma exists

because no meaningful information currently exists on what differentiates programs that meet basic

accreditation standards, consequently, determining the relationship between critical educational

correlates and program quality is a crucial step to better understand funeral service education. This

lack of research prevents the necessary evaluation and adaptation of funeral service education institutions; it would therefore be beneficial to investigate a population of funeral service department chairs, examining critical elements of funeral service education and their relationship to program quality.

Professional Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation. The investigation focuses on elements of funeral service education that have direct impact on the quality of education received by each graduate; the research sought to determine the relationship between critical educational correlates and program quality. The need for this research is supported by the literature related to the topic, which indicates that all programs are subject to identical accreditation standards but no meaningful ranking system exists in funeral service education (Bigelow, 1997). The absence of this knowledge eliminates opportunities for students seeking a funeral service education institution the opportunity to compare institutions, creates a failure to inform future employers of the quality of education each newly licensed funeral director received, and without a meaningful way to determine quality programs, each institution is denied the opportunity to improve through an examination of the successes and shortcomings of competing programs. This research has a direct impact on funeral service education students, faculty, and the funeral service industry as a whole as it may indirectly impact the service any grieving family may receive in a time of great loss, the loss of a loved one. Additionally, past research has not been conclusive on elements that define a quality program in higher education (Dill & Soo, 2005; Keith, 1999; Young, Blackburn, & Conrad, 1987) and no research has been identified that directly asks this question as related to funeral service education. Furthermore, this study uses a census approach to data collection in search of the most complete data available, thus enriching the breadth, depth and the ability to generalize across funeral service education programs. A study of this magnitude can have a profound and reaching impact on funeral service education and the funeral service industry as

a whole. In addition, this research may serve to address the gap in the scholarly research in funeral service education, allowing students, funeral home operators and competing institutions the opportunity to access knowledge that is currently unavailable. Prospective students interested in funeral service education will have a resource to evaluate competing institutions and understand the strengths, weaknesses, and benefits programs offer, allowing the ability to make a more informed decision with respect to the program that will best fulfill personal needs and professional goals. This investigation may also offer potential employers information allowing them to rank the quality of education received by each potential employee. Finally, the study may enable competing institutions the ability to learn from each other and therefore improve funeral service education by allowing institutions to graduate more qualified professionals, thereby improving the industry as a whole.

An Overview of the Methodology

Although the methods of data collection and analysis employed for this research are explained in detail in Chapter Three, this is an appropriate time to introduce the methods. The foundation of this quantitative study are data collected from funeral service educators with respect to the importance of educational correlates and program quality in funeral service education. The data were collected from funeral service programs across the United States utilizing an online, self-report instrument developed by the researcher. These data were analyzed statistically using standard multiple regression—searching to determine the predictive value of the data collected—and the statistical significances were evaluated using the omnibus F-test and the accompanying exact p-value (Pedhazur, 1982).

The Delimitations of the Study

Central to this research is program quality, a common topic in higher education, yet this study specifically focuses on a limited aspect of higher education, namely, funeral service education. With only 56 accredited programs in the United States the sample size for this study is necessarily limited.

Although the current study has the ability to build onto the current knowledge base with respect to program quality in higher education, the generalizability is less than ideal as the project centers around the limited field of funeral service education. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the unique nature of funeral service education in that the focus of this research necessitated the investigator to cross institutional types in search for elements that define quality in funeral service education beyond accreditation, collecting data from professional schools, associate degree granting community colleges, and four year degree granting institutions. It was assumed that chairs of the funeral service programs across the nation were interested in the study and were willing to participate in the research. In addition, this study utilized an online survey to collect data and information was self-reported, so it was assumed that self-reported data was honestly and accurately reported. It is also important to note that although the data provided an opportunity to ascertain educational elements associated with quality at the time the data were collected, this did not insure that these elements did not or will not change over the course of time.

Definitions of Key Terms

Although the majority of the terms and language used throughout this research reside in the common vernacular, certain items dictate specific clarification in order to insure that a common understanding prevails.

American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE): the accrediting agency for all campus-based college and university academic programs in the United States that teach funeral service or mortuary science education. The responsibility of this board is limited to accreditation functions related to funeral service and mortuary science programs, which may differ from responsibilities of other accrediting agencies. The ABFSE is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (Bigelow, 1996).

Funeral Service Industry: The industry dedicated to the service of the public through guiding people through the grieving process, arrangements of funeral and memorial services, and the final disposition of the dead (Kastenbaum, 2008; Laderman, 2003). Additionally, this industry is a profession practiced by men and women who are required to meet certain educational, societal, and governmental standards (absfe.org).

Funeral Service Education / Mortuary Science: These two terms are used interchangeably to represent the institutions and programs dedicated to preparing students for a career in the funeral service industry (Habenstein & Lamers, 2010).

The aforementioned terms are central to this study and require a formal statement of definition.

This first chapter served to introduce the fundamental aspects of this research by providing the background to the problem and a formal statement of the research problem supporting the need for this exploratory research. Additionally, the professional significance of the study was presented as well an overview of the methodology that was employed in this investigation. The final two segments of this chapter offered delimitations associated with the research and key terms were formally defined. The next chapter provides a review of the literature related to the research, including an examination of literature directly related to funeral service education, accreditation studies, and literature that focuses on higher education program quality.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Fundamental to the investigation of what defines a quality funeral service program beyond basic accreditation is an examination of the literature in areas that directly impact the study, including literature regarding funeral service education, accreditation, and program quality determination. Higher education has been the subject of an immense amount of research, however, limited research has been conducted concerning funeral service education, with no prior research focusing on program quality in funeral service education. Consequently, limited literature was discovered regarding funeral service education. A larger body of literature exists in the areas of accreditation and higher education quality. Key segments of the literature in these fields serve as the foundation for this study.

This chapter presents the search process employed to discover the literature, followed by an examination of empirical studies in three areas. The review first examines studies related to funeral service education. The review then examines accreditation, considering both the development and a current assessment of accreditation, as well as both supportive and critical discoveries. The triad of literature concludes with a review of studies directly related to considerations that contribute to quality educational programs, looking to discern the essential elements of program quality.

Search Process

In order to expand on limited books and peer reviewed articles, the following review was compiled utilizing a consistent approach. A collection of Boolean descriptors (e.g., funeral service education, accreditation standards, program quality, etc.) was developed over time and used in the search of appropriate literature in ERIC. Article abstracts were initially analyzed and the full text of appropriate literature was located and studied. The reference page of significant literature was also investigated and noteworthy literature became part of the collection of literature, located via ERIC or JSTOR databases. Digital Dissertations / Dissertation Abstracts was also identified as a source to discover appropriate literature for the current study, resulting in a few studies that contributed to this review. In an effort to locate additional literature directly related to funeral service education, a relationship was developed with the editors of *The Journal of Funeral Service Education* resulting in the discovery of several important articles from their archives. The journey of the search process also took the researcher to Kansas City, the location of the Morgue Database, which is dedicated to the literature of funeral service; unfortunately, the literature found in this database was insignificant with respect to the overall literature reviewed for this study because the majority of the works were opinion pieces that had been published in funeral service trade journals, as opposed to peer reviewed empirical research.

Funeral Service Education Studies

The funeral service education literature uncovered for this review, upon examination, centered on funeral service students or issues related to accreditation and instruction. With respect to students, the literature focuses on characteristics, values, and basic demographic aspects related to educational and professional success in funeral service. Other literature focused on accreditation and instruction, including a direct investigation of the ABFSE and members of

the accreditation site visit team.   Additionally, studies investigated specific aspects of instruction and professional preparedness related to funeral service education.

Funeral Service Students.

An investigation into what inspires a student to enter mortuary science education and the potential impact of the curriculum in socializing these people, allowing them to be able to work around the dead, death and the grieving, was the focus of an ethnographic study conducted at an institution of mortuary science (Cahill, 1999). Emerging into the culture of a mortuary science program revealed that often the rest of the campus considered the future funeral directors outcasts. Socializing with members of the college outside of the mortuary program usually was terminated when it was realized that someone was an aspiring funeral director. Cahill (1999) also discovered that the classroom and lab environments were unique for this major and a distinctive vocabulary existed among the group; speaking of dead bodies as "cases" and referring to the embalming lab as "the morgue" are two examples of such rhetoric. The fundamental interest of the study investigated if the environment is significant in socializing students to prepare them for a lifetime career dealing with the dead, death and the grieving. The study found that students not capable of dealing with these considerations do not last long in the program as they often struggle with every aspect of the curriculum and the practice involved with funeral service. The author concluded that although the mortuary science experience is significant in the preparation of students for a career in funeral service, including certain aspects of normalizing and socializing death and the uncomfortable aspects associated with these realities, this experience in and of itself is not the only acting element with respect to professional socialization in the field of funeral service. The majority of students that are successful in this program have had some level of exposure or experience with death and dying. Possibly the son or daughter of a funeral director, living near a mortuary, or even the loss of someone close familiarized these students with death at a personal level. This experience, coupled with the mortuary science curriculum and work

experience, allows these individuals to possess the emotional capital required for a successful career in funeral service (Cahill, 1999).

Shaw and Duys (2005) also contributed to the knowledge base regarding funeral service education students. The focus of their study was to ascertain the dominant work values of mortuary science students and if any similarities or differences exist with respect to these values when gender, age, family work history, and ethnicity are considered. Utilizing a questionnaire with a Likert-type scale, data were collected from 116 mortuary science students from three programs in the Midwest region of the United States. Evaluating the data with regression analysis, it was discovered that the work values most significant to mortuary students were economic security, achievement, personal development, ability utilization, and economic rewards. It was further realized that differences did exist involving race. African American students were more driven by advancement and personal development, and were less driven by social interaction and social relations as compared to Anglo Americans, of which creativity was unimportant (Shaw & Duys, 2005). Shaw and Duys concluded that the racial difference may reflect the level of prestige a race holds for the funeral profession and the low score related to creativity may inhibit a successful career in funeral service as contemporary families expect funeral directors to be creative in celebrating the lives of loved ones.

The National Board Exam (NBE) serves as one of the final steps in achieving licensure in numerous states and the ABFSE maintains records of the successes and failures of every student because schools of mortuary science must maintain a minimum first time pass rate of 60% or a program may be put on probation, and if scores do not improve lose accreditation status (abfse.org, 2011; Bigelow, 1997; Habenstein & Lamers 2010; Poston, 1987). Poston (1987) investigated if certain demographic variables can serve to predict the performance of mortuary science students on the NBE. Data were collected from a pool of graduates from a Midwestern school of mortuary science over a five year period, N=107. The variables considered consisted of

age, ACT Natural Science score, ACT Math score, ACT Composite score, final grade point average in mortuary science and funeral service courses, experience in funeral service prior to entering mortuary school, high school class rank, and gender. Utilizing multiple regression and correlational analysis, certain variables were discovered to serve as predictors for performance on the NBE. Significant relationships exist between GPA, ACT scores, high school rank and success on the NBE. No significant relationship was found between prior experience in funeral service, age, gender, and success on the NBE (Poston, 1987). This research showed that prior academic success may serve as a predictor of future academic success. As NBE scores are critical for obtaining and maintaining program accreditation, the knowledge of the relationship between these variables and NBE scores can assist educators in assisting students that may be at risk of not succeeding on the NBE.

Funeral Service Education Accreditation and Instruction.

Frade (1997) investigated contemporary and future trends in mortuary education.

Specifically, the purpose of the research was the exploration of educational enhancements in the context of current and long-range perspectives in student education within the curriculum at one funeral service program in the Midwest. Educational enhancements, both internal and external, and trends were examined with the central element being technological support in the new global environment. Frade also found that it is critical to ensure that all students have adequate access to appropriate educational technologies. These tools may aid in the student learning process, research, and publication process. Survival in an ever-changing educational environment was cited as a need for the enhancements and trends proposed in the study. As the student population in mortuary science grows more diverse it will be necessary for educators in this field to challenge students with a creative vision (Frade, 1997).

Identifying ways to evaluate and improve funeral service education through effective instruction is valuable for improving the overall educational experience in funeral service education (Carter, 1999). The theory underlying this research was that a definition of effective teaching in a school of funeral service education can be determined by analysis of specific practices used in effective teaching and those employed in ineffective teaching. A list of behaviors was derived from the opinions of chairpersons and supervisors and distributed to students and instructors. Practices common for effective and ineffective teaching in funeral service education were thus developed. Carter found that effective instructors listen to questions, problems, and viewpoints both patiently and sympathetically, and the effective instructor demands courtesy from all students. Associated with the ineffective instructor was making negative comments, skipping steps in developing theory, exhibiting no interest in student problems, and blaming students for poor work while never questioning one's own presentation of material. Explaining topics, reviewing test and paper responses, allowing time for questions and the logical development of subject matter are the cornerstone elements of effective instructors in funeral service education (Carter, 1999).

Utilizing frequencies and percentages Broomfield (2000) examined attitudes and opinions of funeral home operators regarding the importance of a baccalaureate degree in mortuary science. It is maintained that the baccalaureate degree offers additional training that is not standard with the associate degree in funeral service. The subjects for this study came from 75 randomly selected funeral homes in the state of Illinois, resulting in 50 questionnaires for data analysis. The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of Illinois funeral home operators regarding the importance of a baccalaureate degree in mortuary science. Broomfield concluded that the majority of funeral home operators do not believe that a baccalaureate degree is necessary in mortuary science. He further determined that Illinois funeral directors do not

believe a baccalaureate degree should be required for licensure nor would they offer a higher wage for employees with a baccalaureate degree (Broomfield, 2000).

Considering the contemporary struggle with accountability in higher education it would be beneficial to inquire if a program is adequately preparing students to enter the work force. Focusing on recently licensed funeral directors' opinions regarding their perceptions of the level of professional preparedness offered from the funeral service curriculum, Taggart (1989) examined these opinions relative to certain personal variables. Employing a survey instrument with a five point Likert scale, the relationship between professional preparedness in 10 areas significant to funeral service (e.g., removing the deceased, preparing the body for embalming, arranging for the funeral, etc.) and five personal variables (class rank, prior work experience, age, educational level, and employment status) was examined. These variables were explored to determine preparedness using information from 447 recent graduates. Taggart found that three of the personal variables explained more than half of the variation realized in the study. The perceptions of educational preparation were highly influenced by individuals' backgrounds, class rank and age. Taggart (1989) concluded that if ratings are to be used as a tool to gauge professional training it is important to remember that these data are highly subjective in that ratings on ability may be related as much to personal experience as to their real preparation. A graduate's status within the funeral home of employment, rank in their graduating class, and age have a significant influence on individual opinion regarding professional preparedness.

Two studies focused exclusively on elements of the ABFSE, considering both the history and central elements of the board and also considering specifically the external evaluation team (Bigelow, 1997; Reinhard, 2010). Presenting the historical development of the ABFSE, Bigelow (1997) offered the process that was required for the ABFSE to become the sole accrediting agency for funeral service education. The 5 major divisions of the board are offered:

- Scholarship: A national scholarship program is available to both undergraduate students and to graduate faculty members.

- Curriculum: Responsible for insuring that the common curriculum taught at every accredited program is current, relevant, and accurate.

- National Board Exam Liaison: A responsibility exists to communicate between the ABFSE and the Conference of Funeral service Examining Board (CFSEB); this board handles the testing functions as mandated by the United States Department of Education.

- Accreditation: Responsible for accrediting all academic programs in funeral service.

- College and University Council: This organization reviews recommended motions for new or altered policies and procedures and also serves as the only national voice for funeral service educators in the United States.

Additionally, Bigelow explained: that each accredited program must undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once each 7 years, that contrary to widespread speculation the board does not provide any ranking of the programs, all programs are required to meet all standards, and accreditation serves to assure the consumer that students will receive adequate, fair, and relevant instructions in all accredited programs.

The literature related to the ABFSE is expanded through research that examines who serves on the ABFSE external site teams, their reasons for involvement, perceptions of important site visit resources, and team members' perceptions of training (Reinhard, 2010). Using surveys and interviews, this mixed method study utilized all 39 external mortuary science evaluators who participated in site visits during 1999 to 2007. Significant findings included the discovery that team members were mostly white males between the ages 61-70 and they came from the Southeast and Central parts of the United States, revealing a lack of gender, age, and geographical diversity. It was also determined that training for team members was limited and inconsistent,

which may lead to inconsistencies with respect to meeting accreditation standards. Reinhard recommends more diversity and training with respect to the ABFSE external site visit teams and also expresses that more research in funeral service education is needed as the empirical knowledge foundation is limited.

Accreditation Studies

The literature explored with respect to accreditation for the current study was found to be dichotomous in nature, either supporting or being critical of the institution of accreditation. The literature supportive of accreditation commonly offers a definition, history and purpose of accreditation, while clearly emphasizing the positive impact that accreditation has had on the educational process (although at times acknowledging a need for change and in certain cases specifically addressing situations unique to individual programs or particular educational sectors). The literature critical in nature centers on issues of power, control and at times declares that accreditation is part of the problem with respect to the educational process. It is common for this literature to make the case that accreditation standards desire to do harm to the self-regulation structure of higher education in the United States.

In Support of Accreditation.

Numerous sources define, explain the purpose, and proclaim the importance of accreditation in developing and maintaining a strong educational system. Program accreditors declare specific purposes of accreditation, academicians argue the unique role that the accreditation process plays in educational practice, while other investigators focus on the accreditation of specific educational areas. Two important sections of literature warrant review: general accreditation studies and those specific to certain educational situations. Each division of literature presents insights into accreditation and offers differing perspectives, but is united in the support of accreditation.

General accreditation investigation.

It is common practice to put forward a brief history of accreditation in the United States when arguing the positive implications associated with this practice (abfse.org; Baker, 2002; Brittingham, 2009; Crow, 2009; Eaton, 2010; Volkwein, Lattuca, Harper, & Domingo, 2007). The importance and implications for understanding the establishment and development of accreditation are valuable for grasping the contemporary position of accreditation in higher education as well as the future challenges and opportunities. Brittingham (2009) presented an investigation that sought to explain the current status of accreditation in the United States; twelve points serve as evidence for the development of accreditation in the United States.

- American accreditation is unique in the world. The reality of a nongovernmental system under the operation of mostly volunteers relying on self-assessment is uniquely American.

- The structures of the U.S. government and decisions made provided the conditions in which accreditation developed. The U.S. Constitution declares that matters not described in the Constitution are left to be decided by the states and the people; this led the early development of higher education to be free of governmental control which led to the creation of a diverse system. Further, no minimum standards were initially agreed upon for the initial development of accreditation. Additionally, judicial decisions supported the independence of education from government control. In 1819 the U.S. Supreme Court prevented the state of New Hampshire from taking control of Dartmouth, securing the independence of the institution. Congress has also denied legislation that would establish a national university.

- Accreditation is a reflection of American values. Established as membership organizations financed by dues and fees, accreditation agencies reflect independence.

The reality of self-regulation and freedom from governmental control mirrors the values that helped to establish the entire higher education institution in the United States.

- As higher education became progressively more important accreditation developed. As access and expansion of higher education emerged accreditation developed to support an atmosphere that would allow higher education to thrive.

- Accreditation advanced as the needs of higher education developed, initially identifying which institutions were legitimate and later addressing the diversity of institutions. Between 1950 and 1965, accrediting organizations created much of the fundamental aspects associated with accreditation today, including a mission-based approach, standards, a self-study prepared by the institution, a site visit by a team of peers who produce a report, and a commission decision evaluating the periodic review.

- Accreditation standards changed from quantitative to qualitative in nature, from prescriptive to mission centered, and from minimal to aspiring. The trend is for accreditation to focus on effectiveness and outcomes. No longer only concerned with elements such as library size, the present-day concern is with the assessment of student learning.

- As a social invention, accreditation evolves to address modern-day circumstances in higher education. Accreditation adjusts to the societal changes that impact higher education. Addressing accreditation differences between two- and four-year institutions or responding to new demands for accountability, accreditation agencies must be prepared to evolve to meet the current demands on higher education.

- With respect to quality assurance, accreditation focuses on the future. United States accreditation has a heavy focus on quality improvement. To succeed as an accredited institution an understanding exists that this level of excellence will continue well into the future, a cornerstone of continual assessment.

- Many of the benefits of accreditation are never recognized. For example, the cost effectiveness of accreditation is typically overlooked as well as the benefit of professional development associated with accreditation. Additionally, self-regulation, when successful is highly successful in assuring quality educational environments. Accreditation also has the ability to gather numerous institutions under a single tent.

- Although certain aspects of regional accreditation are not completely logical, benefits do exist. This concerns the geographical nature of accreditation. Some regions make sense and others are less reasonable. It is also true that regional differences interfere with higher education as regional accreditors vary somewhat with respect to terminology and processes, but it is also true that regional accreditation provides a laboratory for experimentation on educational issues. Educational leaders are provided the opportunity to influence the educational processes as a result of the accreditation system.

- The relationship with the federal government is evolving. As accreditation serves as a gatekeeper for federal student money it is believed that the government is entitled to a healthy system to make sure that the institutions these students attend meet certain standards and provide a quality education. As the relationship between federal money and accreditation grows so must the relationship between accreditation and the federal government.

- Colleges and universities are members of the accrediting associations and can influence the accreditation process through membership participation. The system of accreditation allows for institutional leaders to participate in the development of the very system that will serve to accredit institutions. The ability to contribute in this fashion is consistent with the self-regulation tradition of higher education.

Accreditation, inspired by the freedoms provided higher education, has developed to reflect American culture and represents the greatness of the academy. Accreditation has long provided a

safeguard between government and higher education, serving to preserve institutional autonomy, and at the same time providing student access to financial aid. The ability to evolve with the changes in culture and education served the institution of accreditation well and in the ever-changing educational climate accreditation can assess its current status and prepare for the future (Brittingham, 2009).

Numerous definitions exist for accreditation but the majority center on the purpose and function of accreditation. Within funeral service education, the ABFSE declares that accreditation is a process in which programs voluntarily submit to peer evaluation against an established set of standards. The goals of this process include the development and improvement of funeral service education, providing standards to be met by all programs, establishing and maintaining a proper curriculum to make sure all students are offered an appropriate education, providing programs with the necessary information to maintain accreditation standards, and providing opportunities for students to evaluate programs and institutions to foster interinstitutional relationships. According to the ABFSE, the accreditation of funeral service education programs is intended to help insure that students consistently receive a universal education that provides the educational foundation necessary to be a successful funeral practitioner (abfse.org, 2011).

After presenting accreditation as a process of external quality review used by higher education to ensure quality assurance and quality improvement, Eaton (2009) presented the organizational information with respect to accreditation, including types of accreditation, funding issues, review processes, and values and beliefs associated with accreditation; the focus of the investigation, however, centered around the roles of accreditation. Eaton determined that accreditation caries out four major roles:

- Quality assurance to students and the public

- To provide access to federal and state funds such as student aid and other federal programs

- To engender private sector confidence in higher education, and

- To exercise an important role in easing the transfer of courses and programs among colleges and universities.

The successful implementation of these fundamental roles through institutional self-study, peer review and accreditation review support accreditation as the appropriate tool to scrutinize higher education institutions in the United States (Eaton, 2009). Baker (2002) agreed with the importance of self-regulation, peer review and the goal of quality assurance, and presented four crucial elements that should be associated with accredited institutions. Beyond the acknowledgement that accreditation is the oldest and best known seal of collegiate quality with a cornerstone in self-regulation, Baker suggested that the public should be confident of four elements of institutions that have been recognized as accredited institutions:

- The institution has clearly defined appropriate educational objectives

- The institution operates under conditions through which institutional objectives can reasonably be achieved

- The institution is substantially accomplishing its objectives, and

- The institution is reasonably organized, staffed, and supported to continue to be successful.

The practice of continuously examining the standards for evaluating institutional quality and improvement, and the evolution of these standards, serves to maintain the support of the public when it concerns matters of institutional quality and effectiveness. This confidence is also enhanced by the requirement of institutions to make relevant assessments of the elements required to maintain an accredited institution (Baker, 2002).

Crow (2009) weighed in on the accreditation issue initially by acknowledging that by the first decade of the twenty-first century the dissatisfaction with accreditation lay with an apparent failure to hold colleges and universities accountable for student learning performance. Crow set a goal to present a plan to win back the confidence of the public, accepting that certain changes were required. The eight step plan is not intended to be exhaustive nor is the intent to prioritize the steps in the plan. The plan consists of the following items:

- Institutional accreditation needs more coordination to allow a consistent national voice on such items as national footprint institutions, quality in distance education, mobility of achieved learning and defining a qualifications framework for the nation.

- All accrediting agencies will have to raise the shroud of secrecy. It is necessary to have a more transparent process with respect to the knowledge each agency has regarding the accreditation process, institutions, and educational procedures.

- Accreditors need to define their basic purpose beyond serving as a buffer against bureaucratic control.

- Accreditors should re-examine what constitutes credible peer review in the contemporary educational environment. The complexities of higher education require the consideration of extensive training and the utilization of experts in accreditation.

- The possibility of threatening peer review through greater participation of larger groups of stakeholders such as students, policy makers, and employers must be investigated. Peer review is historically an essential element of the accreditation process and if this component is compromised the entire concept of accreditation may suffer.

- Agencies need to generate more high-return opportunities for interaction with colleges and universities. The current perception of the agencies is intertwined with compliance. Relationships should be fostered that focus on quality improvement beyond compliance concerns.

- New mechanisms should be discovered to finance the accreditation operation. As demands increase on these agencies it is not sustainable to simply rely on dues and fees for operations. Positive opportunities to generate funds and minimize expenses include workshops, collaborations and effective partnerships.

- It may be necessary for accrediting commissions to redefine the extent of the endeavor, specifically addressing if the intention is to accredit entire institutions or certain educational offerings within institutions.

In order to implement a plan of this nature, certain elements of the contemporary higher education landscape must be addressed. These issues include a need to address national issues (especially the impact of decentralization on higher education), quality assurance, student mobility, a national qualifications framework, a strategy to unify the incongruent credentials that exist in higher education, and meeting national goals as opposed to meeting institutional goals (Crow, 2009). Additionally, Crow declared that a new role is emerging with respect to accreditation. It will be necessary to provide ongoing attention to the relevance of the accreditation processes and standards and demonstrate that accreditors are competent when making decisions regarding acceptable standards. Furthermore, continual validation of the importance and relevance of peer review will be required, as well as the ability to examine long held perceptions about the accreditation process. In concluding Crow argues that accreditation is and may continue to be a positive and productive force in higher education as long as the leaders have an inclination to make this happen.

Specific accreditation investigation.

Utilizing a cross-sectional survey design, Miller, Birch, and Cottrell (2010) sought to determine the current status and future plans for accreditation approval of professional preparation programs in community health education. This research was deemed necessary because the Council for Education in Public Health addressed master's programs accreditation,

yet no quality assurance process spoke to undergraduate community health programs. This was consistent with Clark (2009) who found that accreditation is important to health educators when seeking to determine if a unified accreditation system benefits school health education programs. Miller et al. concluded that the majority of undergraduate community health education programs plan to move forward when accreditation becomes available. The results further indicated that the universities surveyed were supportive of accreditation and that the profession is moving in the direction of quality assurance through accreditation. Additional potential advantages associated with accreditation pointed out in this research include supporting employers in locating capable health education professionals and providing distinctive institutional categories for prospective students. The authors recommended that undergraduate community health education programs begin to align themselves with the accreditation standards as the benefits outweigh the costs and it is anticipated that accreditation will become a standard element of undergraduate community health education (Miller et al., 2010). It was found that many health educators believe accreditation is significant to the profession and can assist in the improvement of professional preparation programs, but the variety of preparation programs make a single approach to accreditation in this field challenging (Clark, 2009). A new approach should be considered with respect to the accreditation of preparation programs, beginning with the consolidation of processes for public community health education preparation programs as this can serve as a starting point for coordinated accreditation methods in health education preparation programs. In order to make positive strides with respect to accreditation in health education preparation programs it is essential that the profession clearly identify long range goals, identify critical benchmarks with a timeline for accomplishment, and allocate appropriate personnel to assist with the completion of the benchmarks. These steps will be critical in an effort to develop a unified accreditation system for community health education programs (Clark, 2009).

Demands and responsibilities are mounting on the accrediting bodies in the United States. An increasing sector of constituents insists that student learning outcomes are the ultimate test to ascertain program quality. The appropriateness of accreditation as a quality assurance instrument would be less controversial if an abundant amount of knowledge existed in support of accreditation as such a mechanism, but systematic studies of the influence of accreditation on both changes in educational programs and student learning are unavailable (Volkwein, Lattuca, Harper, & Domingo, 2007). In a study of the impact of an outcomes-based accreditation model on educational processes and student learning, Volkwein et al. (2007) assessed the impact of new accreditation criteria for undergraduate engineering programs. A disconnect exists between the educational skills desired by the engineering industry and current student skill sets. The intention of the accreditation criteria is to restructure the curricula, instructional practices and assessment practices in engineering programs; furthermore it became required to define program objectives, ensure accountability, and implement a system of continuous improvement which better addresses the needs of industry. Responses on surveys collected from graduating seniors, alumni, faculty, and chairs of 147 engineering programs served as the data to interpret if the new accreditation standards have the desired impact on engineering programs. Volkwein et al. (2007) found that the new standards were influential in fostering desired change in engineering programs. It was established that programs improved curriculum topics and focused more on learning strategies. Furthermore, faculties are more engaged in assessment activities, professional development, and graduates embrace a more collaborative learning environment. Although limited research has been conducted directly evaluating the connection between accreditation and changes in educational programs and student learning, in this case, necessary changes made to programs via accreditation had a positive impact on program quality (Volkwein et al., 2007).

Critical of Accreditation.

A common theme in the literature critical of accreditation is the struggle for power and control. At the heart of the issue is a fear of bureaucratic control of higher education, a loss of institutional autonomy. This literature also weighs in on specific problems associated with the accreditation system that impacts institutions, programs, and the higher education system as a whole.

Power and control.

Many concerns spin around the literature critical of accreditation, including that most accreditation reviews are kept private and those released focus on processes not critical items such as learning and costs (Bennett, 2010; Harvey, 2004). At the center of these arguments is the fear that higher education institutions may lose the long history of self-autonomy. Institutional autonomy has been a significant feature of American higher education and it is feared that accreditation agencies may desire to control higher education and derail self-autonomy (Dill, Massy, William, Williams, & Cook, 1996; Harvey, 2004; Neal, 2008).

In assessing accreditation and academic quality assurance, Dill, Massy, William, & Cook (1996) reviewed recent arguments for manipulating the structure of self-regulation in higher education. Fundamental to this problem was that the inadequacy of collegial mechanisms of educational quality assurance has not been debated with respect to modern arguments. In addition, in order to maintain higher education autonomy the academy must make a commitment to improving internal mechanisms of quality assurance. Without renewed dedication to address this situation the powers associated with accreditation standards may intrude on higher education autonomy. Dill et al. (1996) made a luminous argument when the discussion turned to the importance of teaching excellence and quality assurance. Peer review is common and accepted in research, yet faculty demand independence when the discussion turns to teaching excellence and

the student learning associated with instruction. The concluding argument was that the deterioration of internal means of academic accountability is real and if the academy does not address these shortcomings the risk of losing institutional autonomy likewise is real.

Also acknowledging a threat to sovereignty, Neal (2008) presented many shortcomings with accreditation, including the assertion that accrediting agencies are not very good about penalizing institutions for poor quality and that there is an inherent interest in accreditation review teams to go easy on institutions. It is in the interest of a review team to go easy as they are cognizant of the fact that one day their own institution will undergo the scrutiny of a similar team. Additionally, Neal indicated that simply being an accredited program does not lend an institution or program to be innately superior to non-accredited programs, and it stands to reason that when the people who decide what constitutes quality will also one day be judged by these standards that the bar will be set quite low. He concluded that essentially accreditors operate a monopoly of sorts leading to cartel-like behavior, a problem that should be addressed and competition encouraged. Accreditors should apply consistent standards that are consequential to student learning and educational quality and not concern the agencies in areas not significantly associated with educational quality or student learning.

Asserting that certain characteristics, taken for granted, serve to legitimize accreditation, Harvey (2004) argued that accreditation is neither neutral nor benign. Analyzing the views of people who have been involved with accreditation in the United States, Britain, and Canada, the mission of this study was to uncover realities with respect to accreditation. He suggested that even though accreditation involves compliance and accountability, the chief function is to retain area control. He emphasized that accreditation has three nuances:

- Accreditation is a process applied to applicant organizations

- Accreditation is the label that institutions or programs may acquire as a result of the accreditation procedures, and

- Accreditation is a conceptual notion of a formal authorizing power enacted through official decisions regarding the accreditation process; this concept gives accreditation its legitimacy.

These nuances support the observation that accreditation is utilized as a marketing tool in higher education and the belief that an external guiding hand (accreditation) that knows what is best and that academia should conform to these standards. A central concern is the perceived infringement of practitioners into the academic realm with specific requirements related to course content, teaching and learning approaches, and assessment methods. Harvey concluded that accreditation is a struggle for power and it is not a benevolent process. The data continually noted references to jumping through hoops and the tail wagging the dog when referencing the accreditation process. Accreditation is essentially about a transfer of power from educators to managers and bureaucrats (Harvey, 2004).

Davis and Ringsted (2006) investigated how accreditation standards contribute to medical education quality. They declare that the fundamental purpose of medical education accreditation is to improve the overall quality of healthcare; acknowledging this reality, most schools embrace the accreditation process as it is believed to be a catalyst for positive change, yet it is asserted that there are no data linking quality of physician practice to accreditation and that there is limited evidence of direct linkages between accreditation and patient outcomes. Additionally, they asserted that success rates on certification exams remain a strong indicator of quality programs in the accreditation process, yet the link between success on certification examinations and quality of care is contentious (Davis & Ringsted, 2006). The standards required to obtain and maintain accreditation are numerous, but relating these standards to outcomes can be quite problematic. With respect to medical education, standards in many ways have become a numbers game, time

on task, and number of patients visited, but no direct data support these as improving overall healthcare. The question beckons, is the goal to assure accreditation or improve healthcare? Different programs are as unique as different people and no two will attain proficiency in the exact same fashion. They concluded that medical education standards need to be based on data that reflect faithfulness to continual improvement in overall healthcare (Davis & Ringsted, 2006).

Program Quality Studies

Uncovering literature focused on program quality exposed a triad of recurring themes. Significant literature dealt specifically with approaches to frame quality in higher education, exploring different ways to define quality and the characteristics associated with quality in higher education. A second theme revealed the importance of previous studies that provide indicators of institutional prestige and reputation in the development of additional research, and the appropriateness of these indicators. The final theme realized was research that directly sought to determine elements that are associated with quality educational programs or institutions.

The Framing and Defining of Quality.

A primary step necessary to unearth educational elements associated with quality institutions and programs is to grasp a clear understanding of the definition of quality. The search for this understanding is common in the literature (Bogue, 1998; Dew, 2009; Freed, 2005; Grunig, 1997; Odden, 1990; Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009; Tam, 2001), resulting in various perspectives on the same issue. Quality as endurance (stand the test of time), luxury (luxury items are of high quality), conformance (reduction of quality to specified characteristics), continuous improvement (encouraged innovation), and value added (education should add value to the student) is the Dew (2009) approach to this challenge, who asserted that it is possible to frame the issue of quality in higher education through these lenses. He argued that in order to engage in a conversation about quality in higher education one must first frame this discussion so

all parties engaged in the conversation are referencing the same reality. The existence of numerous definitions and beliefs when considering higher education quality necessitates communication among constituents. This includes understanding the systemic nature of quality, vital role of leadership, understanding a systems role in the community, data collection, knowledge management, faculty development, and overall process improvement (Dew, 2009).

 Partially concurring on the traditional elements associated with quality, Bogue (1998) offered theories and definitions of quality including conforming to specifications, fit for use, achieving a mission, improving continuously and considering multiple factors. Bogue further offered three theories of quality in higher education, including limited supply, quality within mission, and the theory of value added. The contemporary issue of accountability is present in this understanding of quality; the ability to assess both student and program performance should be part of any quality investigation. Bogue (1998) concluded that the discussion of the definition of quality initiates a conversation about the purpose of quality.   Quality is a moral and ethical issue in higher education. The concept of the ethical professor and a variety of accountability measures are additional gauges of quality in higher education.

Tam (2001) explored measuring quality and performance in higher education. Central to her presentation is an understanding that quality means something different to different people. She further argued that the complex nature of evaluating quality makes focusing primarily on inputs and outputs questionable. Consistent with other studies, she presented a variety of systems that have been utilized in the evaluation and definition of quality, including quality control, quality assurance, quality audit, quality assessment, and indicator systems. At the heart of the presentation is the necessity of the inclusion of elements central to the students' experience when evaluating quality. If an evaluation fails to address elements associated with student learning and the general level of intellectual and emotional progress being made throughout the years in the educational institution, it is incomplete (Tam, 2001).

Various studies associated aspects of a total quality environment when defining or explaining frameworks of quality in higher education. With a focus to create educational institutions that mirror the world that students will encounter, a more extensive presentation of a total quality environment was developed by Freed (2005). This model consists of 11 characteristics associated with total quality environment:

- Ask new questions and be concerned about the answers; assist the students in understanding the learning process

- Create a learner-center environment. The learning process should be collaborative

- Through continuous feedback develop more self-awareness

- Develop trusting relationships with students through conversation and other communication

- Allow communication to create a sense of community in the educational institution

- Be aware of your value system and work to understand others; share these with others to develop a common understanding of the educational institution

- Utilizing feedback, require students and faculty to reflect on both successes and failures in an effort to improve the organization

- Work to make connections to the world outside of the educational arena. This will aid in making learning more applicable to the students

- Design challenging assignments and provide students with an opportunity to achieve these lofty goals

- Realize that teaching is a service and implement service-learning into the curriculum, and

- Faculty need to understand the importance of asking the right questions. Strive to make students think critically by asking challenging questions.

The importance of the application of these characteristics rests in the belief that students need to focus on skills that will be required in the workplace. As evidenced in these characteristics,

students will not necessarily need to know the answer to specific questions but attain an understanding of how to ask insightful questions. If these characteristics are missing from the educational institution students will not be adequately prepared to address the challenges of the workplace and life in general (Freed, 2005).

Indicators and their Appropriateness.

Investigating the literature concerning higher education quality one quickly realizes the significance of previous research related to measurements of higher education reputation in the development of additional studies (Bogue, 1998; Dill & Soo, 2005; Grunig, 1997; Schmitz, 1993; Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009; Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006). The importance and potential impact of educational indicators are more than trivial. These items can influence policy makers, resources allocation, admissions and staffing decisions. Schmitz (1993), concerned with the accuracy and validity of educational indicators, sought to discover to what extent educational indicators are valid and if indicators commonly used in a national perspective are appropriate from a regional standpoint. Two sets of data compiled by *U.S. News and World Report* serve as the data analyzed. He confirmed that entrance test scores serve well in predicting reputation in all institutions and that retention and graduation serve in a lesser capacity in this role. He further noted that interactions exist between selected indicators and institutional categories, creating limitations to these findings. Research, student assessment, and faculty and administrator development are all regularly accepted as indicators of higher education quality, but if these educational indicators are going to influence public policy it is critically important that additional research be conducted in order to ascertain a more definite definition of quality and more relevant indicators of exceptional educational processes (Schmitz, 1993).

Volkwein and Sweitzer (2006) investigated elements of higher education that have been identified as contributing to reputation and prestige related to research universities and liberal arts

colleges. Studies that contribute to the data bank in this study include information from publications such as *U.S. News and World Report*, the Institute for Scientific Information Web Knowledge, as well as four college guidebooks such as Barron's and the Princeton Review. The existing literature that served as foundational elements for this study found that size, selectivity, percentage of faculty possessing Ph.D.s, faculty publication, average cost of tuition, room, and board, as well as retention and graduation rates are associated with institutional reputation and prestige. The sample for this study consisted of 447 liberal arts and research institutions and the purpose was to test the existing indicator claims of reputation and prestige as realized through past research. Results of regression analysis concluded that institutional control, age, size, and resources are foundational elements with respect to enrollment levels and that strong faculty, students and academic outcomes work together to enhance institutional reputation and prestige at research universities and liberal arts colleges (Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006).

Continuing the investigation of higher education reputation and prestige, these authors searched for elements associated with prestige among individual graduate and professional schools. Sweitzer and Volkwein (2009) examined the peer assessment ratings developed in the 2008 *U.S. News and World Report* regarding schools of business, education, engineering, law, and medicine. Although studies inquiring about reputation and prestige at the undergraduate and graduate levels existed, studies that examine correlates of prestige for individual programs and professional schools were short in supply. Beyond identification of correlates of reputation and prestige in these specific programs, Sweitzer and Volkwein also wanted to determine if the same correlates hold true in these programs as they do for undergraduate and graduate levels in general. Validity problems associated with ratings in higher education were offered, including doubts with respect to using ratings to measure quality and the very issue of differing opinions about what actually constitutes quality. This study included data from 49 business schools, 50 schools of education, 50 schools of engineering, 92 schools of law, and 51 schools of medicine.

Regression analysis revealed that the indicators of reputation and prestige for these programs were very similar to the results at the undergraduate level found by Grunig (1997) and at the graduate level indicated by the *U.S. News and World Report* data, which indicated that reputation and prestige are influenced by enrollment size, admissions test scores, and faculty publications. Although the exact level of relationship between each indicator and specific program varied, these indicators were consistently associated with reputation and prestige at the undergraduate, graduate, and across various disciplines (Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009).

With an interest in the direct implications of increased research on institutional reputation and prestige, Grunig (1997) examined the relationship between undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs at research universities. The impact of reputation on different programs and levels of education as influenced by research were of special interest in this study. Reputational ratings from *U.S. News and World Report* and the National Research Council served as variables in the study. The comparative analysis revealed that among undergraduate programs, both public and private, the difference in ratings is largely due to institutional size and admissions selectivity. Results further indicated that the amount of research performed by an institution has a substantial impact on the ratings received by undergraduate programs. Implementing education that has an important effect is essential in the contemporary higher education arena. Competition for resources is increasing and governmental support is diminishing. Central to attracting funds and improving educational reputation and prestige is increased dedication to institutional research (Grunig, 1997).

Grasping the international interest in indicators and increasing demand for data on higher education quality, Dill and Soo (2005) conducted a comparative analysis of predictors. In search of a consensus regarding the measurement of higher education quality and examining the implications of different ranking systems, Dill and Soo compared systems in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Notwithstanding differences in rating systems, they

found that a common approach to evaluating quality in higher education is emerging. Indicators such as selectivity, quality of faculty, and research were considered important measures across systems. They further discovered that the definition of academic quality is converging across rating systems, consisting of input measures such as selectivity of admissions, quality of faculty, and financial resources available to the institution. Additionally, the importance of governmental policy, and the impact determinants of quality may contribute to this policy, entered the equation with respect to the overall educational quality rating of an institution (Dill & Soo, 2005).

The Search for Elements of Quality.

Acknowledging the inherently controversial nature associated with rating academic quality, Geiger and Feller (1995) investigated the importance of academic research in ascertaining academic quality. Inspecting growth and dispersion of funds for academic research in the 1980s, the fundamental argument in this study centered around the accumulation of institutional assets through dispersions related to research. The link between quality faculty, research funding and institutional capabilities served to enhance institutional quality. The quantity of full professors combined with programs that graduate a large number of doctoral students enhance academic quality, it is argued. The connection between quality and research benefits institutions of higher education, providing incentive for all institutions to pursue faculty accomplished in research and publication (Geiger & Feller, 1995).

The search for correlates of quality and prestige in higher education is not just a contemporary issue. Hagstrom (1971) examined correlates of program prestige by analyzing the quality ratings of 125 departments in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. The study utilized a survey instrument to gather data, the collection of career data for sampled people via the American Men of Science, and information regarding participant publication records through the Science Citation Index. Linear multiple regression analysis revealed significant results with

respect to departmental prestige. Hagstrom found that department size, accounting for nearly one-third of variance associated with departmental prestige, is found to be significant when considering department prestige. The average production of research publications coupled with average citations were found to account for more than half of the variance with respect to departmental quality. Research opportunities, faculty background, student characteristics, and faculty awards and offices held were also found to be significantly correlated with quality programs. Hagstrom further noted that quality programs typically have higher morale and better interpersonal communication, providing additional support for the importance of achieving a quality program (1971).

Continuing the investigation of correlates of departmental quality in higher education, Conrad and Blackburn (1985) suggested that "Program quality or excellence is both timeless and a timely issue in American higher education. What constitutes quality, how to identify it, and how to foster it are questions that have concerned educators since the colonial colleges" (p. 279). This claim leads to an examination of correlates of departmental quality at the masters and doctoral level, specifically in regional colleges and universities. Conrad and Blackburn investigated five departments: biology, chemistry, education, history, and mathematics at 22 regional colleges and universities. In order to measure the dependent variable, department quality, teams of external evaluators were developed to evaluate the programs. To quantify the results of the evaluations a 5-point scale was used in the evaluation process and scores ranged from high praise to a recommendation of closure. Five major categories were part of the evaluation; these consisted of faculty, students, program, facilities, and support. In total, 164 independent variables within these five categories became part of the study. Using the analytic tools established in the Hagstrom (1971) study, results revealed that scholarly productivity (the strongest indicator), age, tenure status, origin of highest degree, teaching workload, as well as proportion of advanced degree programs and library size, are all correlated with departmental

quality at regional colleges and universities. These findings are consistent with studies of nationally highly ranked institutions but the relationship between the variables in the regional schools are not as strong, revealing that at the regional level departmental quality correlates are more diverse and multidimensional (Conrad & Blackburn, 1985).

In a study that replicated the work of Conrad and Blackburn, Young, Blackburn and Conrad (1987) expanded the sampled programs in the analysis of program quality in regional universities. The sample doubled the number of departments and increased the number of institutions and programs investigated. The study examined program reviews, considering, the impression of the importance of elements of faculty, student body, facilities, program, and support. Even with the increased sample in this study the same variables were determined to have the greatest predictive value when measuring program quality. Scholarly productivity by faculty was again the greatest predictor of program quality, but the relationship is not as strong indicating that "traditional indicators of quality may be valid, but they carry a different weight at regional institutions" (Young, Blackburn, & Conrad, 1987, p. 322). In conclusion, Young, Blackburn, and Conrad suggested that additional research needs to be conducted to further the understanding of the fundamental problem of defining program quality and ascertaining correlates of quality in various educational areas, including regional institutions.

The continual search for elements that correlate with departmental and program quality and prestige in higher education was brought into question when Keith (1999) studied the institutional context of departmental prestige in American higher education. The focus of the study was the comparison between university characteristics and attributes bestowed upon specific departments within the university. Investigating data from three previous studies that examined the perceived quality of faculty in departments granting research doctorates, selected faculty were mailed a list of competing departments and were requested to judge the departments; no evaluator was permitted to comment on their respective department. The survey instrument

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included variables such as prestige ratings, scholarly publications, citations per faculty, departmental publications, faculty size, graduate student enrollment, proportion of highly rated departments, research universities, and institutional control. Analyzing the data with factor analysis, regression analysis, and a two-way analysis of variance, significant results were obtained. Keith discovered that specific departments within universities had comparable ratings to one another and that university's reputations influenced individual department ratings. Additionally, he found that over a 25-year period 38% of departmental ratings did not change and 45% note miniscule changes, justifying the finding that university reputations are quite stable over time. The implications of this research are significant in that "this study shows that departmental ratings are primarily tied to institutional reputations" (Keith, 1999, p. 431). Keith advised that future research needs to address the purpose of teaching, research, and scholarship needs, and he calls for attention to the educational-economic connection and the necessity to track career patterns of graduates associated with different institutions (Keith, 1999).

Summary

This chapter surveyed the literature related to the study, which seeks to determine what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. This included an introduction to the line of inquiry, information pertaining to the search process, and the presentation of the literature itself. The review highlighted three corpora that relate to the determinants of what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. These three areas—funeral service education literature, studies related to accreditation, and those pertaining to ascertaining quality in higher education—were evaluated. Although the literature spanned a considerable spectrum in higher education and at times was contradictive in nature, certain conclusions may be drawn from the studies presented in this review.

The literature directly related to funeral service education was limited, yet several pieces were discovered that examined different aspects of funeral service education. Issues related to students, accreditation, and instruction, as well as literature investigating specific aspects of instruction and professional preparedness in funeral service education, have been identified by researchers. Certain conclusions that are noteworthy include the reality that funeral service is a unique field, often ostracized from other areas of the campus, as indicated by Cahill (1999), yet in many aspects the concerns and challenges are similar to other educational fields. Personal motivations to enter a funeral service education program may differ, as presented by Shaw & Duys (2005), but aspects related to the importance of strong instruction, the utilization of technology, which degree to pursue, and the challenges of accreditation are common across the higher education landscape.

The search for accreditation studies resulted in a bifurcation of the literature, those studies supportive of accreditation and others that are critical. Collectively, these investigations attempt to define accreditation and provide support for the necessity of the institution of accreditation. Understanding that accreditation is a process in which programs voluntarily submit to peer evaluation against an established set of standards, as indicated by abfse.org (2011), the studies view accreditation as significant in the establishment and development of the American higher education system. The literature supportive of accreditation collectively makes an argument that it is through accreditation standards that higher education will be able to make the necessary changes demanded of contemporary society, although at times the literature acknowledges a need for change and in certain cases specifically addresses situations unique to individual programs or particular educational sectors. The literature critical of accreditation centers on issues of power and control, and at times declares that accreditation is part of the problem with respect to the educational process. At the center of this literature is concern about the autonomous history of the academy. It is common for these critical pieces to acknowledge

the significant role accreditation has played in higher education, but question the motives of accreditation in contemporary higher education.

The final corpora involved literature that attempts to define quality in higher education. Recurring themes in this literature were the constant search for a universal definition for quality, appropriate means to frame quality, and what characteristics are commonly associated with quality in higher education. Although definitions and characteristics were found to converge, no universal understanding of quality has been determined. Even though researchers investigate the findings of the existing literature in search for a common understanding of quality, findings remain unique. Although each study was able to ascertain certain elements associated with quality, the definition of quality was not universally agreed upon, as much of the research involved differing levels of institutions, programs, and departments. Beyond a general agreement that higher education quality involves issues regarding faculty, students, facilities, specific program information, and support, few specific elements are agreed upon. Even the reality of specific department's reputation and quality is questioned when Keith (1999) found that departmental ratings are directly tied to institutional reputation.

The literature explored in this chapter assesses three considerations for a study that examines what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation: funeral service education, accreditation, and program quality. The limited empirical research found with respect to funeral service education indicates that the current study charters a relatively new area in higher education studies. This research also hopefully adds both to the knowledge base associated with accreditation studies and the research directly related to quality in contemporary higher education.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter serves to introduce the methods used to formulate the study, with particular attention to the collection and analysis of data. The chapter begins with a succinct overview of the study and then presents a more developed exploration of the model that was used in the search of what defines a quality (a construct of funeral service education program's ability to prepare students for a successful career as funeral practitioners) funeral service program beyond basic accreditation. Following this general perspective is information about the research context, subjects, instrument development, procedures used for the study and information about the data analysis.

The General Perspective

This exploratory research sought to ascertain what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation. Elements commonly associated with quality in higher education were identified in the previous chapter and were utilized in the evaluation of quality with respect to funeral service education. This quantitative research employed standard multiple regression to analyze the data collected via an online self-report survey instrument developed by the researcher, seeking to uncover predictive qualities of the educational elements analyzed.

The Research Context

The central focus of this research, funeral service education, presents unique parameters with

respect to location and number of programs. Currently there are 56 accredited funeral service

programs in the United States (Habenstein & Lamers, 2010), limiting the research population,

which necessitated a census study. The fundamental problem addressed in this study—a lack of

understanding of the effectiveness of funeral service institutions in the preparation of students for

a career as funeral practitioners—was best addressed through the collection of data from

accredited funeral service education programs across the country. An attempt was made to obtain

data from all 56 accredited programs in the country to address the research question. As these

programs indeed span the entire country, an online survey was used to collect data nationwide.

Necessary contact information was obtained from the ABFSE which allowed the researcher to

contact potential subjects with an email letter inviting them to participate in the study and

subsequent correspondence included information necessary to locate and participate in the online

survey. A month and a half period was used to collect data in an attempt to obtain a high

response rate.

The Research Participants

The small population size related to funeral service education indicated above, which

suggested the benefits of a census study, highlighted the importance of locating experts in the

field and securing these individuals as subjects for the study (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). As

this research sought to understand what defines a quality funeral service program beyond

accreditation it was important to identify individuals not only with an expertise in funeral service

education, but also with a working knowledge of accreditation with respect to funeral service

education. The leadership position in funeral service education programs is uniquely qualified to

speak to educational issues associated with funeral service education, as this position typically

teaches, offers leadership with respect to instruction and curriculum issues and also serves as the contact person for respective programs with the ABFSE regarding accreditation issues. Leaders at funeral service / mortuary science programs such as The Dallas Institute, Southern Illinois University, University of Minnesota, and St. Louis Community College at Forest Park were identified as potential participants. These individuals were selected because of their unique knowledge related to funeral service education. Due to the small population it was necessary to reach out to the leadership at all accredited funeral service programs so that the findings of this research would potentially be generalizable across the entire landscape of funeral service education and add to the knowledge base with respect to quality in higher education, especially when considering the case of exceeding basic accreditation standards.

Instrument Development

When the decision was made to research what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation it became necessary to locate a research instrument appropriate for assessing data relevant to the fundamental question of the investigation. Analytical techniques would be tailored to the instrument. During the search for empirical studies in the area of funeral service education, limited literature surfaced and it was determined that in order to locate a suitable instrument for this study it would be necessary to look beyond the available peer-reviewed literature. *Mental Measurements Yearbook* with *Tests in Print* was searched but no appropriate instrument was found. The search for a suitable instrument then led to *Digital Dissertations* / *Dissertation Abstracts*, where a number of related studies were revealed, but again no instrument was found that could be utilized to answer the central question of the current study. It became apparent that a new instrument must be created and that it would be appropriate to begin with an instrument that was developed to address a similar question. The starting point for developing the new instrument was the modification of an expert survey (Li, 2007) located in D*igital Dissertation* and implemented to measure characteristics of quality

online Chinese language teaching and learning in higher education. The remainder of this section presents the three elements central to the development of the research instrument, including information about the criterion variable, demographic items, and scaled items on the instrument. The section concludes with the arguments for requiring pilot studies in the development of the instrument.

Criterion Variable.

Central to the development of this instrument was the determination of the criterion variable, the variable to be predicted in a regression study (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The criterion in the study was regressed against the predictors (regress *y* on *x*) to determine the predictive qualities associated with each predictor (Pedhazur, 1982). The focal question of the study—what defines a quality funeral service program beyond basic accreditation—provided a foundation for the establishment of the criterion. The development of the criterion for this study evolved through the pilot process, and was formally identified during the second pilot study. A scaled item was added at the conclusion of the demographic section of the instrument which served as the criterion for this study. The item, "A funeral service educational program which goes beyond the American Board of Funeral Service Education requirements is a quality program" was placed in this position so it was not influenced by other scaled items in the importance section of the survey. To determine the level of agreement with this statement, the anchors for the criterion were set as strongly agree to strongly disagree (Vagias, 2006). This provided the necessary structure to evaluate data with standard multiple regression.

Demographic Section.

As indicated in the first chapter, funeral service educational offerings across the United States vary considerably. Degree options, institutional types, and expected time to complete a program are examples of these differences. The demographic section of the instrument included

numerous items as a result of the diverse nature of funeral service programs. For example, requesting information about institutional type, size and course offerings resulted from the literature that explains the various institutional types in the funeral service arena (abfse.org, 2008; Bigelow, 1997; Habenstein & Lamers, 2010). This information enhanced the analysis of the data. Additionally, personal information was added to the demographic section of the survey to further understand if age, sex, education, experience, and funeral service licensure had a significant impact on the data collected in the study.

Scaled Items.

The section of the instrument that assessed importance consisted of 7-point scale items, allowing subjects to respond to various descriptive items included on the survey. The modified scale was expanded from 5-point to 7-point to provide for greater variability and reliability (Rhodes, 2010). Based on the review of the literature, educational elements commonly associated with quality were identified and included in the survey. Such elements included the importance of scholarly research (Conrad and Blackburn, 1985; Geiger & Feller, 1995; Hagstrom, 1971; Young, Blackburn and Conrad, 1987), as well as library size, tenure status, and the importance of faculty with terminal degrees (Conrad and Blackburn, 1985; Young, Blackburn and Conrad, 1987). Additional items specific to funeral service education were included in the scaled section of the instrument. These items collectively comprised the instrument used for the study.

The Need for a Pilot Study.

The need to develop an instrument for this study necessitated the implementation of pilot studies in order to evaluate the reliability and validity of the scaled items of the survey. This process provided information about deficiencies and suggestions to improve the instrument (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The pilot studies further allowed for the evaluation of the ability of respondents to understand instructions and questions fundamental to the development of an

effective measurement tool (Creswell, 2005). Both demographic and scaled items were included in the pilot studies. When feedback was received from subjects and internal consistency reliability determined, appropriate revisions were made to further improve the instrument. The goal was to produce a highly valid and reliable measurement tool for the study.

Procedures

The implementation of the research required deliberate steps to obtain quality data from the participating subjects. This research, utilizing a web based survey, had nuances that were expected and appropriate methods were employed to reduce errors associated with coverage, measurement and non-response. This research adhered to a tailored design method in an effort to address these concerns (Dillman, 2007). Specific procedures were observed in an effort to support the data collection process with a foundation in the Dillman principle. These steps included:

- Informational letter drafted which accompanied the instruments used in the pilot studies (see Appendix A)
- Initial instrument developed (see Appendix B)
- Pilot testing of instrument and appropriate revisions made to the instrument
- A second pilot testing of the revised instrument
- List of potential subjects for the study obtained (ABFSE)
- Pre-survey communication with all potential subjects utilizing multiple methods (telephone and email) inviting them to participate in the study
- Five days after the pre-survey communication additional electronic communication was sent to all potential subjects with web link to the online survey instrument
- First reminder sent via electronic communication to all participants two weeks after the link to the research study was sent. The link to the survey was embedded in this email

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- Second reminder sent via electronic communication to all participants four weeks after the link to the research study was sent. The link to the survey was embedded in this email, and

Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of three key elements: fine-tuning the measurement tool, the actual data analysis, and the reporting methods that were utilized. This section describes these elements of the project.

Final Instrument Development and Data Analysis.

The final instrument was developed after the second pilot test was completed, the reliability and content validity were reassessed, and the construct validity evaluated. Appropriate revisions were made to the instrument and the document was converted to an online survey format to collect data. As a quantitative study using an online survey instrument, a critical element in the process was making sense of and organizing the data. As responses to the survey were received they were entered into a codebook created for this study on PASW Statistics 18, Release Version 18.0.0 (Ó SPSS, Inc., 2009, Chicago, IL, www.spss.com). These entries were periodically spot checked to reduce data entry errors. These data were analyzed using descriptive indices and standard multiple regression. This regression technique sought to uncover predictive values associated with the importance section of the survey, the criterion was regressed against the list of predictors (regress *y* on *x*) to determine the R squared value which reports the strength of prediction, and the prediction equation was developed. The equation and R squared were tested for statistical significance with the omnibus F-test and accompanying exact p-value. Additionally, prior to running standard multiple regression the assumptions associated with this

technique were evaluated to support the use of regression as a statistical technique for this research. The results of the analysis are presented in the following chapter.

Data Reporting.

Multiple methods were used in the presentation of the data, including both written and graphic formats. Figures and tables were used to enhance the data presented in the written form in an effort to present the data in an effective and all-inclusive manner.

Summary

This chapter presented the methods used in an effort to determine what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. In addition to the general research perspective, context, and participants, this chapter introduced the development of an online self-report instrument that was used to collect the data for this study as well as the procedures necessary for the implementation of the research. The chapter also indicated that standard multiple regression statistically evaluated the data in search of predictive qualities associated with quality in funeral service education. The results of this study are presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study employed an online instrument to gather data from funeral service education

leaders across the United States. These data, evaluated utilizing standard multiple regression,

provided items that predict elements associated with quality in funeral service education. This

chapter presents the findings of the study, including the results of pilot studies to evaluate the data

collection instrument and the final development of the online instrument. Additionally, this

chapter describes the actual data collection process and analysis, including a final reliability

assessment, and the examination of the demographic and scaled items. The chapter concludes

with a brief summary of the data collection and analysis process.

Pilot Results

Two studies were undertaken to determine the reliability and validity of the instrument,

which included both demographic and scaled items. Central to the effective instrument was to

remain connected to the fundamental purpose of the instrument. In this case the focus was to

develop an instrument that identified educational elements consistent with quality in funeral

service educational programs.

Establishing that the instrument produces accurate results was the focus of the instrument

reliability. It was necessary to provide support that the measurement from the instrument

revealed consistent results. The pilot studies employed Cronbach's alpha to determine a

reliability coefficient in order to establish internal consistency reliability for the importance

section of the instrument. Additionally, it was necessary to establish content validity. Content validity was considered to ensure that the information obtained by the instrument actually reflected information about the intended purpose of the instrument (Hopkins, Stanley, & Hopkins, 1990). This was critical in order to secure interest and active participation from research participants. When funeral service education leaders across the country were invited to participate in this study, as experts in the field, it was necessary for these professionals to grasp the connection between the content of the instrument and the purpose of the study, namely, to determine what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. This required the determination that sufficient representation of elements potentially associated with program quality were presented in the instrument.

The first pilot study began when the instrument was presented in person by the researcher to a collection of funeral service professionals at the Oklahoma Funeral Directors Association Convention on April 4, 2011 in Catoosa, Oklahoma, where a funeral service executive proclaimed, "It is about time the school quit relying on the industry to train students" with respect to the content of the survey instrument. To expand the sample population to 30, data were also collected from funeral directors around metro Oklahoma City, as they were available to participate, and a collection of funeral service students in their final year of study at a local funeral service education institution in Edmond, Oklahoma. All pilot participants were selected because they have knowledge of funeral service education and were available to participate. As indicated above, these data served to provide information about the reliability and validity of the initial instrument, and to garner suggestions to add or delete categories, or to clarify existing items.

With respect to the demographic section, two revisions were instituted as a result of the first pilot study. It was suggested to include a "Not Applicable" category to many of the demographic items to provide consistency in data collection if the instrument was used to collect

data from subjects other than funeral service educators. It was also found that in order to be consistent in data entry it was necessary to switch the order in which "Male" and "Female" were listed on the instrument. This change served to prevent data entry errors, as it made this category consistent with other items that have two options.

Data analysis revealed considerably more suggestions with respect to the scaled importance survey. PASW Statistics 18, Release Version 18.0.0 (Ó SPSS, Inc., 2009, Chicago,IL, www.spss.com) was used to evaluate the internal consistency reliability of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the first pilot to provide a reliability coefficient of the importance items ($\alpha = .849$). The reliability index indicated good internal consistency in the measurement of the importance items. Standard multiple regression was executed on the first pilot importance survey, resulting in R squared = .586. This value indicated that approximately 60% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors, leaving 40% unaccounted for. This indicated that other items should be addressed, as suggested by experts in the field from the first pilot study.

Two subjects reported problems understanding item 14, "student population maintains full enrollment," but statistical analysis indicated that if this item was deleted from the study the overall reliability in measurement would decrease from .848 to .837. This finding resulted in the retention of the item on the instrument to allow for further evaluation of the item in the second pilot study. One subject reported difficulty understanding item 13, "students show strong academic ability, as witnessed in classroom performance." Statistical analysis indicated that the overall reliability would be reduced from .848 to .841 if this item were deleted. This, coupled with the fact that only one subject reported difficulty, resulted in this item being retained. Statistical analysis also indicated that two items should be eliminated from the instrument as a result of a moderate reliability increase as a result of their deletion. When item #8, "The program is offered 100% online" was eliminated, alpha increased to .853 from .848, and when item #9,

"The program offers a funeral director only option" was eliminated, the alpha value increased to .855 from .848. Six suggestions written on the pilot instruments indicated a potential relationship to program quality. Three subjects indicated the importance of including a category about programs offering comparative religious traditions with respect to funeral customs and two subjects expressed interest in including a statement reflecting that the program conducts mock funerals as part of the educational training. One participant suggested including cremation training, requiring faculty to participate in funeral service continuing education, the importance of the chairperson of the program being a licensed funeral director and embalmer, and the importance of the program requiring an ethics in funeral service course. Utilizing the expertise of the sample population, the suggested items were included in the measurement tool that was used to collect data in the second pilot study. This was appropriate, as numerous criteria were employed in this instrument in the search of elements that are significant in defining a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation. These new items were further evaluated in the second pilot.

These procedures served in the evaluation for appropriate adjustments to the initial survey instrument. Upon completion of the revisions to the survey a second pilot was conducted utilizing funeral service educators, members of the Oklahoma Funeral Board, funeral service executives and newly licensed funeral directors that recently graduated from an accredited funeral service program, for a total sample population of 30. . Again, these participants were selected due to knowledge of the subject area and availability. This pilot served to reassess reliability and content validity as well as to determine construct validity. The results were evaluated in a similar fashion and a final instrument was designed and converted to an online format for the actual collection of data from the chairs of the funeral service programs across the United States.

In addition to the statistical analysis via Cronbach's alpha, the second pilot revealed several insightful comments with respect to language and content of the survey, resulting in revisions of

the instrument. The only change that was implemented in the demographic section of the instrument was that the "Not Applicable" option included in the second pilot was removed because the final instrument only evaluated funeral service educators, which eliminated the need for this possibility.

Once again, data analysis suggested several revisions concerning the scaled items. Cronbach's alpha calculated for the scaled items in the second pilot showed an increase in the reliability coefficient from $\alpha = .849$ to .866, indicating an improvement in the reliability of the instrument as a result of the revisions made to the initial instrument. The second pilot reliability index indicated good internal consistency in the measurement of the importance items. Statistical analysis did not suggest excluding any scaled items as the reliability index would not be moderately improved by the exclusion of any items. These findings resulted in all items being retained on the instrument, notwithstanding revisions to certain items as suggested by the experts and additional items added as suggested for inclusion by experts or through further review of related literature.   Standard multiple regression was executed on the second pilot importance survey, resulting in R squared = .978. This value indicated that approximately 98% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors, leaving only 2% unaccounted for, providing further support for the revisions instituted as a result of the first pilot study in which approximately 60% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the original set of predictors.

Seven subjects reported trouble understanding the language of Item 9, "student population maintains full enrollment"; one subject simply inquired, "what does this mean" and another suggested, "this may need to be defined." These comments resulted in further assistance of two experts in funeral service education to clarify the item and thus retain it, as the statistical analysis indicated the overall reliability would decrease to .862 from .866 if the item were excluded. After consultation with two experts, the item "program maintains near capacity student enrollment,"

was retained on the final instrument. Two subjects related concerns with item 14, "the program offers a course that focuses on comparative religious traditions with respect to funeral customs." One expert commented that the "population is becoming more diverse and the second expert indicated, "instead of a course in comparative religions, I would suggest a contemporary issues class." To account for these concerns the item was clarified to read "the program offers training that focuses on comparative religious and secular traditions with respect to funeral customs." The new language more fully related the purpose of the item and allowed it to be retained; exclusion of the item would have reduced the overall reliability coefficient to .864 from .866.

One subject indicated that item 5, "faculty members obtain tenure," should only concern full-time faculty members, and a different subject suggested this item should read, "have opportunity for tenure." Using these suggestions revisions were made and the item included the following language, "full-time faculty members are on tenure track or have obtained tenure." One subject expressed concern with the language of item 7, "faculty members have recent work experience in the funeral profession outside of the educational institution." This subject expressed, "what's recent?" The item was changed to express more fully the meaning of the term "recent" to read "faculty members have work experience in the funeral profession outside of the educational institution in the past five years." It was important to make this language adjustment to further support retaining this item because the exclusion of the item would have resulted in a reduction of the overall reliability from .866 to .860. One subject believed that item 19, "there is adequate space to accommodate the student population," was unclear with respect to what space was being considered in the item, while a different subject suggested the inclusion of an item to gauge adequate space to accommodate arrangement and service simulations. To clarify the purpose of the item and complement other items in the survey, the language of the item was revised to read "there is adequate space to conduct mock funeral arrangements and services for the student population."   One final suggestion was made by a subject who indicated that it would be

appropriate to include an item inquiring if the program has a practicing attorney in the field of funeral service teaching the law courses. This was taken under consideration and the following item was included in the instrument, "faculty members that teach mortuary law courses have a Juris Doctorate degree and have experience practicing law related to funeral service."

The pilot studies also served the important function of assuring construct validity, which reflects the degree to which an instrument gauges its intended construct (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The evaluation of construct validity includes the development of survey items based on theory, examination of the instrument by experts to judge whether the elements represented on the instrument are typical when representing the construct (in this case a quality funeral service education program) evaluation of the results, and appropriate item addition, deletion, and revision (Gay et al., 2007; Hopkins, Stanley & Hopkins, 1990). The review of the literature acknowledged certain educational components related to quality and many of these items were included on the survey, some of these included the importance of scholarly research (Conrad and Blackburn, 1985; Geiger and Feller, 1995; Hagstrom, 1971; Young, Blackburn and Conrad, 1987), library size, tenure status, and the importance of faculty with terminal degrees (Conrad and Blackburn, 1985; Young, Blackburn and Conrad, 1987). During the second pilot study seven additional items developed from theory were added to the importance section of the survey as a result of further evaluation of literature; these items were evaluated by the final eight participants of the second pilot study. The foundation of these seven items was a total quality environment model developed by Freed (2005), with items related to the learner-centered environment, continuous feedback, communication, and service-learning among others included in the importance section of the instrument as a result of the model. The development of the criterion for this study evolved through the pilot process, and was formally identified and added to the final eight surveys of the second pilot study. A scaled item was added at the conclusion of the demographic section of the instrument which served as the criterion for this study. The item, "A funeral service educational

program which goes beyond the American Board of Funeral Service Education requirements is a quality program" and was placed in this position so it would not be influenced by other scaled items in the importance section of the survey. To determine the level of agreement with this statement, the anchors for the criterion were set as "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" (Vagias, 2006). The establishment of the criterion provided the necessary structure to evaluate data with standard multiple regression. Cronbach's alpha was again utilized to determine a reliability coefficient (α = .996), indicating strong internal consistency for the seven newly added scaled items in the importance section and the scaled criterion value. The item-total statistics did not reveal any significant increase in alpha by deleting any of the items, which supported the retention of all items on the instrument. Standard multiple regression was executed on these seven items utilizing the new criterion resulting in R Squared = .990, indicating that 99% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors.

Additional items specific to funeral service education were also included in the scaled section of the instrument to assess areas of importance in funeral service education. In a letter accompanying the pilot studies (see Appendix A), experts were informed of the purpose of the study and encouraged to identify any items they believed were not appropriate to measure quality in funeral service education as well as to communicate any items they believed important to be measured that were absent from the instrument. Their feedback was utilized to make appropriate changes to the instrument. This process, which included two sample populations of experts, *n=30*, indicated that the instrument measured the intended construct, quality in funeral service education beyond basic accreditation.

The section of the instrument that assesses importance, as well as the criterion variable, consisted of 7-point scale items, allowing subjects to respond to various descriptive items included on the survey. The original scale was expanded to 7-point to provide for greater variability and reliability (Rhodes, 2010). To ascertain the level of importance of each item the

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anchors for the importance section of the instrument were set from "extremely important" to "not at all important" (Vagias, 2006). Central to the development of this instrument was the determination of the criterion variable, the variable that was predicted in the regression study (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The criterion of the study was regressed against the predictors to determine the predictive qualities associated with each item (Pedhazur, 1982). The focal question of the study—what defines a quality funeral service program beyond basic accreditation—provided a foundation for the establishment of the criterion.

The two pilot studies provided the opportunity to evaluate the items selected for the survey, both those items that were developed from theory and those specific to funeral service education. Through both statistical and expert analysis the items were examined with respect to the construct of the study, the relationship between the items and quality in funeral service education. This relationship was evaluated for each item and elements were retained, excluded, added, and others retained with revisions per the feedback from the pilot studies. The remaining items collectively comprised the items that the instrument (see Appendix B) employed for the study.

Final Online Instrument Development

Utilizing Microsoft Office Frontpage, a website administration tool, the survey was converted to an online instrument, http://frontpage.okstate.edu/coe/johnfritch, implementing practical strategies of a tailored design method (Dillman, 2007). The Dillman strategies integrated consisted of: numbering the scaled items to keep the participants following the instrument, presenting questions in a similar fashion to a traditional paper self-report questionnaire, appropriate use of color so as not to impact the readability and to maintain the navigational flow and measurement properties of all items, not requiring respondents to answer each question prior to being allowed to answer succeeding questions, and taking great care to

make sure participants consistently understood the meaning assigned to each radio button. Upon completion of the online instrument all radio buttons were tested to determine successful implementation and the accuracy of the value associated with each button. One error was found when it was discovered that the criterion value, located at the conclusion of the demographic section, only contained six options as opposed to the desired seven. This error was corrected and retested. The test revealed that all radio buttons were successfully employed into the survey and that they were assigning values accurately. The final instrument was then attached to the Institution Review Board (IRB) application for evaluation and approval. The research study protocol application #ED11122 was approved by the Oklahoma State University IRB on July 1, 2011 and expires June 30, 2012.

Data Collection

The process of collecting data began July 5, 2011 when the IBR approved email solicitation was sent to 32 of the 56 funeral service education program chairs. The remaining 24 chairs were sent the email solicitation (see Appendix D) on July 6, 2011 inquiring if they would consider participating in the research study. Consistent with Dillman (2007), each potential subject was contacted independently; in an effort to make the solicitation more personal no mass emails were utilized. By July 7, 2011, 15 subjects replied to the email requesting the link to the research study and the link was sent to these subjects. In an effort to enhance the response rate for the study, the executive director of the ABFSE was contacted on July 7, 2011 and requested that she send out correspondence to the program chairs encouraging participation in the study. The executive director agreed to this request and expressed interest in the study, requesting receipt of an executive summary of the research study upon completion. Appreciation for the support of this research was communicated and it was agreed to provide an executive summary of the research study results to the ABFSE. On the morning of July 8, 2011, the response log of the survey revealed that seven participants had completed the online instrument. On July 12, 2011,

16 surveys had been submitted by subjects who received the link to the research study. One week after the initial email solicitations, consistent with the data collection plan, the process of contacting potential subjects that had not yet replied to the email via the telephone was undertaken. This process continued until July 14, 2011.

Varied success was experienced; at times potential subjects were available to speak and other times an administrative assistant was reached or a voice mail system was encountered. When the opportunity to speak to the potential subjects presented itself, the telephone solicitation script (see Appendix E) was utilized. On two occasions it was learned that the subjects had received the link from the ABFSE and had already participated in the study. It is important to note that when speaking with potential subjects the most common concern was how long the instrument would take to complete. Upon notification that the commitment would be only 10-12 minutes, all agreed to participate. By July 14, 21 subjects had completed the online instrument.

Continuing with the data collection plan, attempts were made to contact via telephone all potential subjects that had not responded to the initial email. This process was completed on July 19. Various results were again encountered, including voice mail, administrative assistants and speaking directly with potential subjects. The IRB approved telephone script was utilized and subjects were invited to participate in the research study. All potential subjects received information about the research study by July 21, 2011. At the end of this day 36 subjects had completed the online instrument, resulting in a 64.3% response rate after 15 days of data collection.

Ten days after all potential subjects had received information about the study, a reminder email (see Appendix F) was sent to all subjects/potential subjects. On July 31, the population of funeral service education chairs received correspondence reminding them about the opportunity to participate in the research study. This correspondence included a note of appreciation for the

subjects who had completed the online instrument, along with a reminder of the anonymous nature of the data collection (which prevented access to the knowledge of those who had completed the study and required the entire population to receive the correspondence). Over the next five days six additional subjects completed the online survey, bringing the total number of completed surveys to 43, a response rate of 76.7%.

Consistent with the data collection plan, the final email was sent on August 14, 2011, reminding potential subjects of the opportunity to participate in the study. The final email was not sent to all members of the population because email confirmation from a number of subjects was received acknowledging that they had completed the survey and wanted to be removed from the list for further solicitation. To honor these requests, further emails were only sent to those potential subjects that had not confirmed participation. Throughout the data collection process it was determined that if subjects were going to complete the instrument they would do so within a few days of receiving the solicitation or reminder. Consistent with this reality it was decided to conclude data collection five days after the final email reminder was sent to potential subjects. On Friday, August 19, 2011, 48 funeral service education chairs had participated in the study, representing an 85.6% response rate. These data were entered into a codebook for statistical analysis.

Analysis

Initial evaluation of these data revealed that three participants, #s 6, 46, and 48 failed to respond to five or more of the scaled items on the survey. To maintain credible data these participants were eliminated from the study. Two other participants, #s 22, and 29, failed to respond to two or fewer scaled items. To maximize the amount of data collected from this small and unique population these participants remained in the study and listwise deletion was utilized

during the regression analysis. This resulted in 45 of the 56 chairs in the population participating in the study, or 80% of the population.

Demographic Information.

An analysis of the demographic information was performed after the final subjects were determined. The data included both personal information and information about the institutions the participants represented. The data revealed a wide range of participants with regard to age. This range included: six participants between the ages of 31-40, 21 participants between the ages of 41and 50, 12 participants between the ages 51 and 60, and six participants between the ages of 61 and 70. An overwhelming majority of participants were licensed funeral directors and embalmers, with only one reporting that they were not a licensed embalmer and two reporting that they were not licensed funeral directors. The number of years teaching funeral service varied across categories; 12 subjects teaching six to ten years was the highest recurring response. Two significant elements were discovered with respect to the personal information. These included the reality that this sample population is male dominated and that the majority of the participants hold a master's degree as the highest academic degree earned. Figure 4.1 highlights the disparity in gender among the subjects and figure 4.2 exhibits the highest degree earned among the subjects.

Figure 4.1. Gender Disparity Among Funeral Service Education Chairs
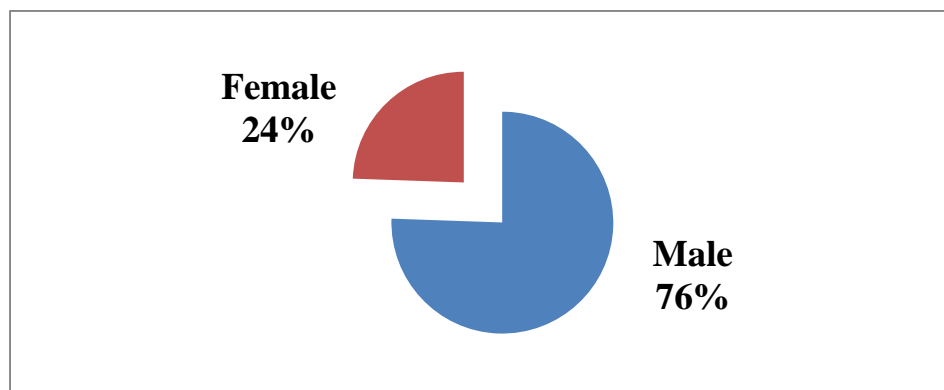
Figure 4.2. Highest Academic Degree Earned by Funeral Service Education Chair Participants
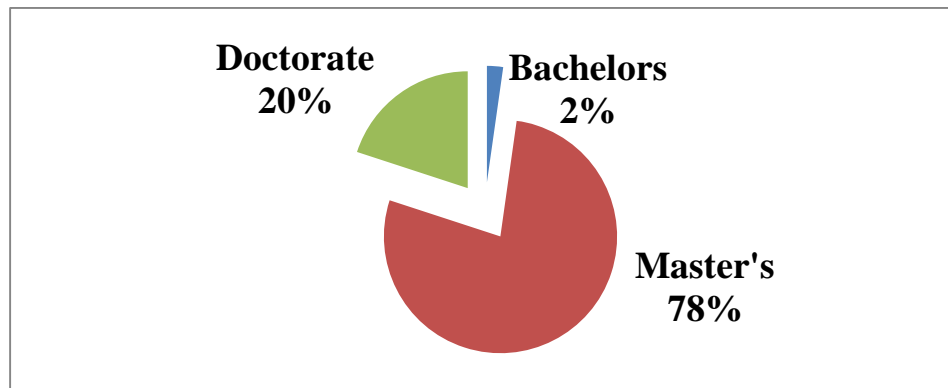
The institutional demographic information revealed similarities and differences consistent with the diverse institutions in funeral service education. The majority of programs employed one to three full-time faculty members and relied heavily on adjunct instructors. 20 programs counted on the assistance of one to three adjuncts, and one program reported using more than 13 adjunct instructors. Program faculty and instructor data are presented in figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Funeral Service Education Faculty Numbers
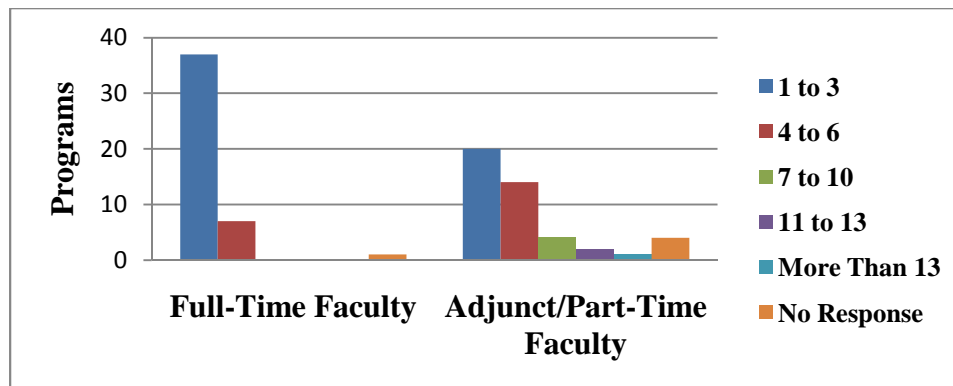
The size of the programs also varied with regard to the number of declared majors and these details are presented in figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4. Funeral Service Education Program Size Represented by Number of Declared Majors
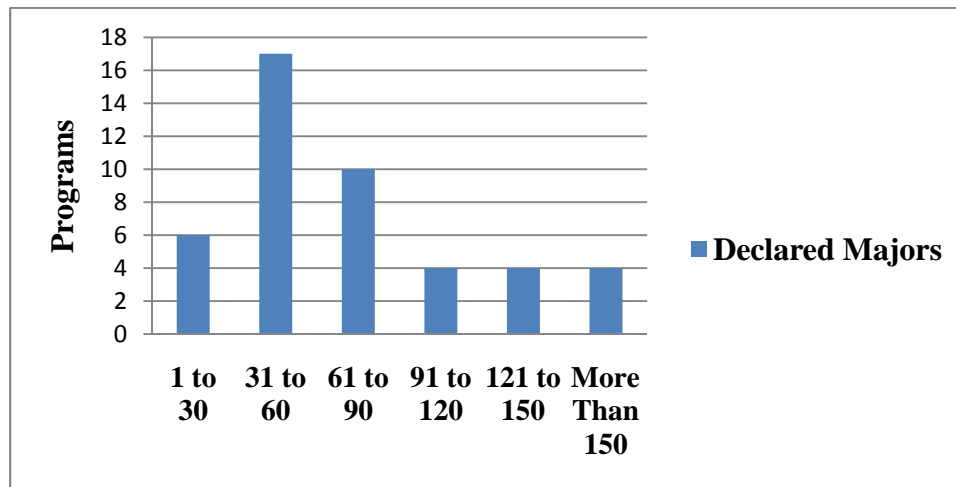
The majority of programs offered some instruction online and six offered the program entirely online as revealed in figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5. Funeral service Education Offered Online: A Comparison of 100% Online Instruction Versus Offering Some Instruction Online
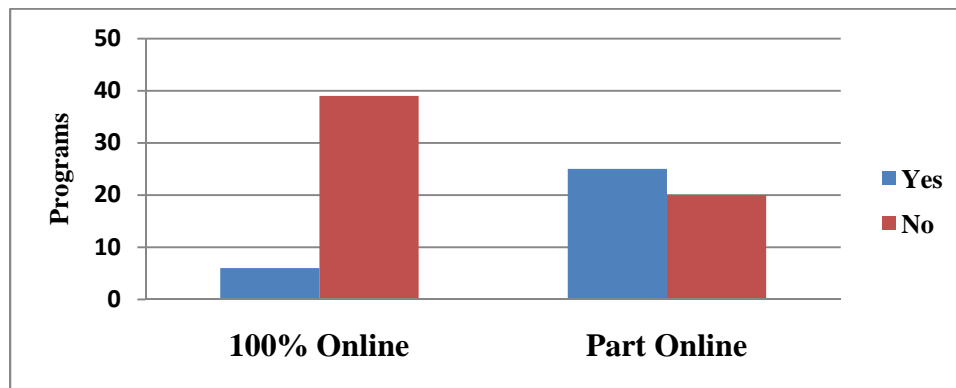
Although a large amount of the institutional information was anticipated, the data revealed that a majority of programs offer an associates degree as the highest level of funeral service degree available, and the community college is the most common setting for funeral service programs. Figure 4.6 reports the degrees offered in funeral service education, while figure 4.7 emphasizes the types of institutions that offer the degrees.

Figure 4.6. Degrees Offered in Various Funeral Service Education Institutions
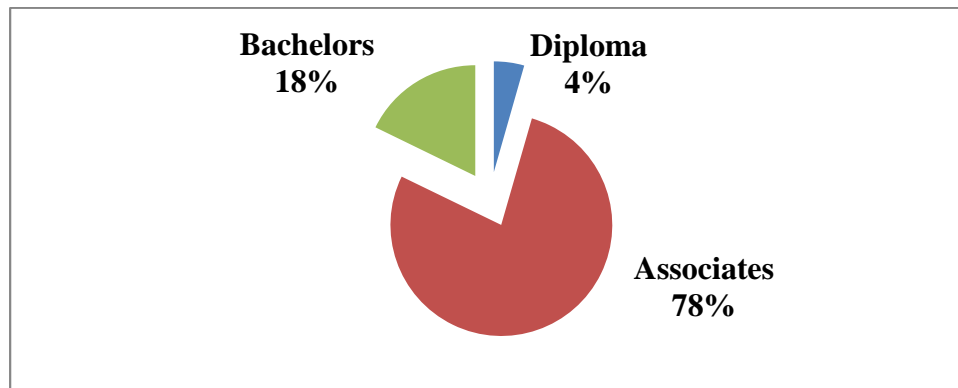
Figure 4.7. Type of Institution Housing Funeral Service Education Programs
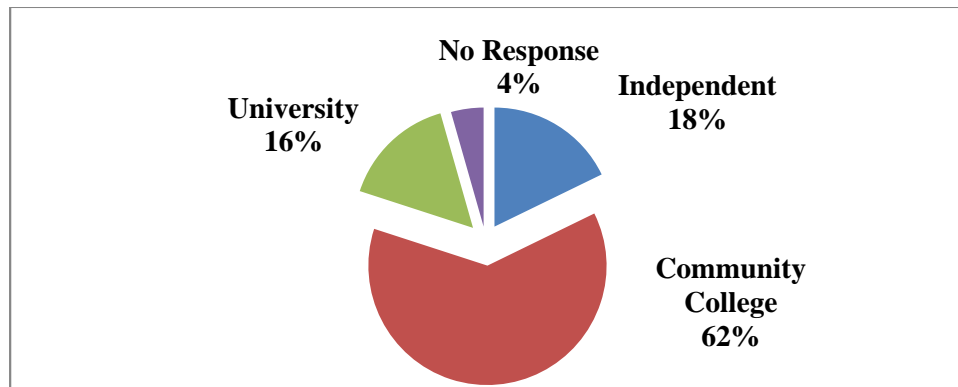
Scaled Items Statistical Results.

The statistical evaluation of the data consisted of a three step process: (1) examining the final reliability of the scaled items, (2) evaluating the assumptions associated with regression, and (3) the actual regression analysis. When calculating the internal consistency to evaluate the reliability of the scaled items, two participants' data were excluded due to incomplete data files, resulting in 43 valid cases for the reliability assessment. Cronbach's alpha calculated for the scaled items showed the reliability coefficient, $\alpha = .894$, indicating good internal consistency in the measurement of the importance items (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Statistical analysis did

not suggest excluding any scaled items; the exclusion of any items would not have improved the reliability index.

Prior to calculating the statistics it was obligatory to inspect the assumptions associated with regression. As presented by Pedhazur (1982), five assumptions are associated with regression analysis. These include: fixed independent variables, independent variables are measured without error, model specifications are based on a review of the literature, residuals are uncorrelated as evidenced by a spherical shape in a scatter plot when one compares predicted values versus residuals, and linearity when one compares predicted values versus the dependent variable in a scatter plot. The current study examined these assumptions and the findings supported regression as an appropriate statistical tool. The independent variables were fixed, allowing other researchers to use the particular variables. The internal consistency on the final instrument indicated a good reliability of measure. The development of the online instrument was strongly influenced through a review of related literature focused on funeral service education, accreditation, and quality academic programs. A scatter plot comparing predicted versus residual values was completed on PASW Statistics 18 and revealed a spherical shape; the errors were normally distributed. The final assumption, linearity, was evaluated as well utilizing a scatter plot developed on PASW Statistics 18. When this scatter plot, comparing predicted values versus the dependent variable, was complete, a general linearity was witnessed in the graph. The evaluation of the material in the current study concerning the assumptions of linear regression supported this technique as an evaluative tool for these data.

Standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to answer the central research question of the study, what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. Descriptive indices (means and standard deviation) for the scaled items on the instrument were also calculated and are presented in Table 4.1. The criterion was regressed against the list of predictors (regress y on x) to determine the R squared value which reports the strength of

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prediction, and allows for the creation of a prediction equation, which can be used to make future

predictions with respect to program quality in funeral service education. This equation was

developed and is presented in Table 4.2. The prediction equation was developed using the

unstandardized b-weights in an effort to generalize beyond the sample of the study. The

regression analysis revealed R square = .893, indicating that approximately 89% of the variance

in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors [$F_{39,3}$ = .639; p = .787], leaving

only 11% unaccounted for in this model. However, the adjusted R square value = -.504,

indicated a large amount of fluctuation among the predictors due to sample size. The omnibus F

test found the R square value and the subsequent prediction equation to be statistically non-

significant, a result expected by the researcher as a consequence of the small sample size and the

large number of predictors used in the model.

Table 4.1. The Descriptive Statistics

Scaled Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Dependent Variable	6.0000	1.48003
Predictor 1	4.7907	1.78029
Predictor 2	6.4884	1.00882
Predictor 3	6.4884	.96046
Predictor 4	4.3488	2.22415
Predictor 5	3.6047	1.73397
Predictor 6	5.6744	1.59942
Predictor 7	3.2093	2.12197
Predictor 8	3.7674	1.60115
Predictor 9	5.0000	2.09307
Predictor 10	4.5814	1.80255
Predictor 11	5.0233	1.50378
Predictor 12	5.9302	.91014
Predictor 13	5.8372	.99834
Predictor 14	6.0698	.98550
Predictor 15	5.2326	2.07980
Predictor 16	4.7674	1.87512
Predictor 17	5.9535	1.49529
Predictor 18	5.7209	1.45284
Predictor 19	6.2326	1.10921
Predictor 20	6.7442	.65803
Predictor 21	5.0930	1.32403
Predictor 22	4.4186	1.88013
Predictor 23	4.2558	1.97717
Predictor 24	4.1628	1.95095
Predictor 25	5.7442	1.34683
Predictor 26	5.8140	1.36723
Predictor 27	6.2558	1.32904
Predictor 28	6.6744	.60635
Predictor 29	6.6977	.55784
Predictor 30	6.3953	1.19800
Predictor 31	6.3721	.65550
Predictor 32	6.3488	.65041
Predictor 33	6.2791	.76612
Predictor 34	6.2791	.70121
Predictor 35	6.3256	.83726
Predictor 36	5.8605	1.28325
Predictor 37	6.5581	.62877
Predictor 38	3.5814	1.93012
Predictor 39	5.7907	1.18639

Table 4.2. Predicting Quality in Funeral Service Education:
A Prediction Equation

Program Quality = 5.815 + .474i1 - .204i2 + .719i3 + .828i4 - 1.151i5 - .162i6 - .209i7 + .045i8 -

.131i9 - .401i10 + .363i11 - .649i12 - .329i13 - 1.014i14 + .682i15 - .328i16 + .766i17 - .516i18

+ .058i19 + .335i20 - .700i21 + 1.098i22 - .629i23 - .253i24 + 2.138i25 - 1.044i26 - .557i27 +

4.777i28 - 4.991i29 - .029i30 + .742i31 – 2.000i32 + 1.178i33 - .882i34 + 1.592i35 + .641i36 +

.258i37 + .551i38 – 1.126i39

Summary

This chapter presented the overall data collection and data analysis of the study that
sought to discover what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation.
The development of the measurement instrument through two pilot studies, along with the
necessary steps to utilize the mechanism online, was presented. Following the details of the
development of the instrument, the data collection and analysis were explained. The
demographic and scaled items were reported. The data indicated that approximately 89% of the
variance in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors presented in this study,
leaving only 11% unaccounted for in this model. Analysis of these findings follows in Chapter
five.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Chapter Five, the final chapter of this study, examines the meanings of the research. To establish

the context for the examination, the chapter begins by restating the research problem and

reviewing the methods employed. The results are then summarized and connections are made to

the literature, after which the results are discussed. Included in the discussion are general

observations, the development of the instrument associated with this study, and the proposal of a

Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model.

Statement of the Problem

The primary focus of this dissertation was the determination of quality in funeral service

education. Although funeral service education programs across the United States vary across

many criteria—including the type of degree offered, the type of institution housing the program,

and the length of time to complete the program—no model or ranking system was discovered to

evaluate funeral service education programs. However, every program is subject to the same

accreditation standards. Consequently, the central research question of the study was: "What

defines a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation?"

Review of the Methodology

Standard multiple regression was employed to address this research question. The

limited funeral service education population necessitated a census study, resulting in an attempt to

collect data from all funeral service program chairs across the United States. This required an

online survey instrument which was developed by the researcher. The instrument included 39

items and each item ranked importance with respect to program quality as perceived by

participants. In order to collect individual subject and institutional data, the measurement

instrument also included a demographic section. Upon receipt, these data were transferred into a

codebook for statistical analysis via standard multiple regression. The methodology process is

explained in full in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Summary of the Results

The fundamental query of the research is the determination of program quality beyond

accreditation in funeral service education. The study addresses the primary research question

through the discovery that 89% of funeral service education program quality variance is predicted

by the set of educational elements used in the study. Additional support for this finding is the

consideration that the results came from a sample representing 80% of the total population. This

finding leaves only 11% of program variance unaccounted for in the model. The ability to

estimate funeral service education program quality is represented via the prediction equation

developed as part of the regression analysis. The exact mathematical representation of this

prediction equation is presented in Table 5.1. The table advances the equation offered in Chapter

Four through the addition of the exact verbiage used to describe the predictors on the survey

instrument. This equation demonstrates, with mathematical exactness, how 89% of variance in

funeral service education program quality may be predicted.

The demographic data also reveal certain characteristics—reported extensively in

Chapter Four—associated with the participating subjects and the institutions they represent. The

subjects represent a broad range in age, and the majority indicate that they are licensed funeral

directors and embalmers. The years experience teaching funeral service education also varies,

Table 5.1. Predicting Quality in Funeral Service Education:

A Prediction Equation

Program Quality = 5.815 + .474Faculty members have a terminal degree - .204Faculty members have a current funeral director license + .719Faculty members have a current embalmer license + .828Full-time faculty members are on tenure track or have obtained tenure - 1.151Faculty members publish research results in funeral service journals - .162Faculty members have work experience in the funeral profession outside of the educational institution in the past five years - .209The program offers a bachelors degree in funeral service + .045The program maintains near capacity student enrollment - .131The program includes an embalming lab in which students embalm on campus - .401Studetns are employed in funeral homes while attending classes + .363A minimum of 80% of students pass the national board examination on the first attempt - .649Studetns show strong academic ability, as witnessed in classroom performance - .329The program offers training that focuses on comparative religious and secular traditions with respect to funeral customs - 1.014The library has adequate resources for funeral service education + .682There are adequate laboratories for embalming on campus - .328There are adequate laboratories for human dissection on campus + .766There are adequate laboratories for restorative art on campus - .516There is adequate space to conduct mock funeral arrangements and services for the student population + .058The education is well-rounded and goes beyond the required American Board of Funeral Service Education curriculum + .335The program maintains accreditation by the American Board of Funeral Service Education - .700Program faculty are involved in leadership roles with the American Board of Funeral Service Education + 1.098Faculty members participate in scholarly research and present results at state conferences - .629Faculty members participate in scholarly research and present results at regional conferences - .253Faculty members participate in scholarly research and present results at national conferences + 2.138The program conducts mock funeral arrangements and services as part of the professional training - 1.044The program requires training in the practice of cremation as part of the curriculum - .557The program requires faculty to participate in funeral service continuing education + 4.777The chairperson of the program is a licensed funeral director - 4.991The chairperson of the program is a licensed embalmer - .029The program requires a course in funeral service ethics + .742The program creates a learner-centered environment – 2.000The program develops self-awareness through continuous feedback + 1.178The program creates a sense of community in the educational institution through communication - .882The program works to make connections to the world outside of the educational world + 1.592The program designs challenging assignments + .641The program implements service-learning into the curriculum + .258The program strives to make students think critically by asking challenging questions + .551Faculty members that teach mortuary law courses have a Juris Doctorate degree and experience practicing law related to funeral service – 1.126The program provides students with an opportunity to achieve lofty goals

with the most frequent range of experience falling in the six to ten years of experience selected by

12 subjects. The demographic data also indicate that 76% of the subjects are male, 24% are

female, and only 20% of the respondents hold a doctoral degree. With respect to the institutional

data, most of the programs employ one to three full-time faculty members and most utilize part-

time instructors. The size of programs, as indicated by the number of declared majors, also is

quite diverse. Six programs report having between 1 and 30 declared majors, seventeen programs

indicate they have between 31 and 60 declared majors, and four programs indicate they have 150

or more declared majors. In addition, the majority of programs offer at least one course online

while only six programs offer the entire program via distance education. The fact that only 18%

of the programs offer a bachelor degree, while 78% offer an associate degree, corresponds well

with the reality that the majority of the programs, 63%, are housed within a community college

while only 16% of the programs are offered by a university.

Relationship of the Study to Previous Research

The literature reveals that although the research into funeral service education is limited in

nature, the research with respect to program quality in higher education is extensive. The search

for an understanding of quality in higher education is common within the literature (Bogue, 1998;

Dew, 2009; Freed, 2005; Grunig, 1997; Odden, 1990; Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009; Tam, 2001),

as is discovering indicators of quality education (Dill & Soo, 2005; Grunig,1997) and the search

for specific items associated with quality in higher education (Hagstrom,1971). The result is

multiple perspectives on the issue and an inability to arrive at a consensus regarding the definition

of quality in higher education. This study concurs that elements such as faculty members with

terminal degrees, published research, and tenure, are components of a quality higher education

program. The addition of new correlates specific to funeral service education, however,

necessitates a reevaluation of the relative importance of each item and potentially different

applications to practice. This is true for all predictors used in this study. Although similarities

exist with predictors found within the literature devoted to quality in higher education, this study, for the first time, evaluates these elements as related to funeral service education. Consequently, this study not only advances the literature concerning program quality in higher education, but also, through the realization of 89% of variance in program quality from a set of predictors, opens the debate with regard to program quality in funeral service education. The study hopefully provides a foundation upon which to build subsequent research regarding quality in funeral service education. Specific recommendations for prospective future research are offered later in this chapter.

Through the development of a survey instrument and the application of quantitative methods, this study attempts to expand the body of program quality literature presented in Chapter Two. The ability to develop and present a model (proposed later in this chapter) to predict program quality in funeral service education not only further supports the connection between the study and the existing literature but also ongoing development of the literature devoted to the field of funeral service education. The review of funeral service education literature discovered limited scholarly works, revealing a need to further investigate this discipline. Perhaps the extension into funeral service education will aid in a greater understanding of the considerations that contribute to program quality in higher education.

Discussion of the Results

We turn now to a discussion of the results of this study. For the purpose of this discussion the presentation is organized into three areas: General Observations, Instrument Development, and the proposal of a Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model.

General Observations.

As indicated in the preceding discussion, limited research literature exists in the field of funeral service education. Most publications related to this discipline are opinion in nature and

published in trade journals rather than peer-reviewed journals. This research study discovered a potential factor influencing the lack of research. Only 20% of the respondents in this study hold doctoral degrees. This is potentially significant considering that the data collection process resulted in an 86% response rate from the population. The fact that 80% of the funeral service education chairs that responded have not been formally trained to conduct research likely contributes to the lack of research that exists in the field of funeral service education. Conversely, this fact also indicates that vast opportunities exist in this field with regard to prospective future studies and the development of theory, both of which could impact the practice involved in funeral service education.

An additional connection to previous research relates to the lack of gender diversity that exists in funeral service education. Reinhard (2010) indicates that a lack of gender diversity exists with respect to the ABFSE accreditation site visit teams. This study confirms the situation regarding gender diversity in that a high percentage of the population responded and 76% of the respondents are male. This gives reason for concern because 53% of current funeral service students nationwide are female (abfse.org), indicating a change in the demographic makeup of the funeral industry. This disparity should be addressed from a research standpoint if the academy is to be forward thinking and work to represent the diversity of the funeral service industry.

In addition, the lack of evolvement of funeral service education as a discipline within higher education is indicated through the data collection process when the demographic information is analyzed. 78% of the programs represented in the study offer an associate's degree as the highest funeral service degree and only 18% of the institutions offer a bachelor's degree as the highest funeral service degree, revealing the lack of evolvement of funeral service education within the higher education landscape. Further evidence is the fact that 62% of the institutions represented are housed in a community college and only 16% are associated with a university. These trends indicate that the setting and degree opportunities in funeral service education

fundamentally limit the amount of knowledge required to complete a program. The very nature of this reality limits students both educationally and professionally. Only with evolved educational requirements will funeral service education begin to realize the possibilities and knowledge associated with the academy.

Instrument Development.

Care was taken during the developmental stages of the survey to create a valid and reliable instrument. This was critically important not only to aid in the process of credible research but also for the instrument to become part of the evaluative process when considering program quality in higher education. This section provides the fundamental strategy used to create the survey instrument; the complete instrument development process is detailed in Chapter Four.

One of the first elements in the development of the study was to identify and articulate the formal research question. Once the central research parameters were established it was necessary to map out an appropriate research strategy, including locating an instrument that would be appropriate to research the question, what defines a quality funeral service program beyond basic accreditation. It became apparent during the search for applicable literature that limited research existed in the field of funeral service education; this reality further complicated the process to locate a suitable instrument. After the search was determined to be futile in this and related areas it quickly became evident that it was necessary to search beyond the existing literature. *Mental Measurements Yearbook* with *Tests in Print* was searched as well as *Digital Dissertations / Dissertation Abstracts*, where related studies were revealed, but no proper instrument identified. It became obvious that in order appropriately to address the research question the development a new instrument was necessary.

Critical to an appropriate instrument is the determination of the criterion variable. A scaled item at the conclusion of the demographic section of the instrument served as the criterion for the study. To determine the level of agreement with this statement, the anchors for the criterion were set as strongly agree to strongly disagree (Vagias, 2006). Demographic items were also included as part of the instrument. The section of the instrument that assessed importance consisted of 7-point scale items, allowing subjects to respond to various descriptive items included on the survey. The scale was expanded to 7-point to provide for greater variability and reliability (Rhodes, 2010). Items included on the instrument were based on the review of the literature which provided educational elements commonly associated with quality. Items related to faculty, facilities, students, curriculum and administration were identified (Conrad and Blackburn, 1985; Geiger and Feller, 1995; Hagstrom, 1971; Young, Blackburn and Conrad, 1987), and included on the instrument along with other items specific to funeral service education. To evaluate the validity and reliability of the scaled items of the instrument it was necessary to conduct two pilot studies. These studies also provided participants the ability to comment on the clarity of the instrument. Both demographic and scaled items were included in the pilot studies. When feedback was received from subjects and internal consistency reliability was determined, appropriate revisions were made to improve the instrument. The pilot studies employed Cronbach's alpha to determine a reliability coefficient in order to establish internal consistency reliability for the importance section of the instrument. It was also necessary to establish content validity to ensure that the information obtained by the instrument revealed information about the intended purpose of the instrument (Hopkins, Stanley, & Hopkins, 1990). Additionally, the pilot studies also served to evaluate construct validity to determine the degree to which the instrument judged its proposed construct (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). In order to evaluate construct validity, instrument items were developed based on theory and then evaluated by experts to ascertain if the items actually represented the construct, quality in funeral service

education. Results from the pilot studies were evaluated and appropriate changes made to the instrument. Two sample populations of experts, *n=30,* served as the pilot studies.

Ultimately, the painstaking steps required to develop the instrument (see Appendix B) resulted in a mechanism to evaluate program quality in funeral service education, an instrument that was not available prior to this study. The instrument offers future researchers the opportunity not only to investigate quality in funeral service education but also further develop the educational literature regarding program quality in higher education. This study thus contributed to the literature with respect to program quality in higher education, expanded the literature into a new discipline, and leaves an evaluated instrument to aid further studies in the search for a better understanding of what educational elements are associated with quality in higher education.

Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model.

The results of standard multiple regression indicate that it is possible to predict 89% of variance in program quality in funeral service education. This analysis facilitates the creation of a Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model, which is proposed in the following paragraphs. The model is initially based on the prediction equation developed from the regression analysis; it is then enhanced through the calculation of the squared semipartial correlations associated with the importance items.

Chapter Three presents the development of the survey instrument, explaining that the instrument includes 39 scaled items associated with quality in higher education and specifically associated with funeral service education. When respondents completed the survey they indicated the level of importance of each item. These data are the centerpiece for the Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model presented here.

Upon completion of standard multiple regression, a funeral service education quality prediction equation was developed. The equation assigned a coefficient to each importance item

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analyzed in the survey instrument, allowing for the numeric evaluation of quality. This enables the prediction of quality by ranking how a specific program values each importance item. For example, ten may be used as the base number in order to assign a value to each item, representing that a program would expend the highest level of resources on this particular item and decrease the base number in areas that would not be valued as highly by the program. Upon assigning each item a numeric value (1-10) one could solve the equation and the resulting numeric value would represent the Funeral Service Program Quality numerically; this value can be manipulated through the value assignment with respect to each predictor. In sum, this model allows funeral service program directors the ability to evaluate how they rank with respect to program quality regarding the set of predictors established in the study. Furthermore, this model provides program directors the ability to assess areas which, with further investment, may improve the overall quality of the program. Figure 5.1 presents a visual presentation of this model, including each importance item and the value associated from the regression prediction equation. The equation utilizes the unstandardized b-weights in an attempt to generalize beyond the sample of the study, but the scales remain attached, not allowing for direct comparison across samples.

To further advance this model and improve the practical application, the squared semipartial correlation values for the importance items were calculated and are presented in Figure 5.2. This calculation provides the unique contribution of each importance item in accounting for variance in program quality when the other predictors are controlled. The item with the greatest unique contribution to program quality, "The program provides students with an opportunity to achieve lofty goals," represents nearly 12% unique variance in program quality as indicated by the squared semipartial value. Additional items indicating substantial unique variance include, "The program conducts mock funeral arrangements and services as part of the professional training," with almost an 8% unique variance, and "Full-time faculty members are on tenure track or have obtained tenure" and "Faculty members publish research results in funeral

service journals," both indicating nearly 7% unique variance as calculated by the squared semipartial. The cumulative unique variance discovered through this process is almost 83%, further supporting the value of this exploratory research. These correlations, consistent with the results of the regression analysis fail to reach statistical significance due to the small sample size coupled with the large number of predictors. For organization and ease of critical evaluation the importance items are grouped into five categories for the model enhancement. The five quality categories are: curriculum, facilities, faculty, program administration, and students. The model enhancement, presented in Figure 5.2, shows the unique contribution of each predictor as indicated by the squared semipartial correlation values; the items representing the greatest unique variance are in bold font for immediate identification.

Figure 5.1. Funeral Service Education Quality Model (As Presented by the Prediction Equation)

Figure 5.2. Funeral Service Education Quality Model Enhancement *

Faculty
.0276 Terminal Degree
.00048 Funeral Director License
.00608 Embalmer License
.0702 Tenure
.0665 Publish in Funeral Service Journals
.00152 Work Experience in Funeral Profession
.03685 Involved with ABFSE Leadership
.02855 Present Scholarly Research at State Conferences
.0036 Present Scholarly Research at Regional Conferences
.00048 Present Scholarly Research at National Conferences
.03168 Participate in Continuing Education
.0121 Mortuary Law Instructors have a J.D. and Experience Practicing Law Related to Funeral Service
Curriculum
.00504 Offers Bachelors Degree
.00084 Embalm on Campus
.00845 Comparative Religious and Secular Traditions Training
.0001 Well-Rounded Education that goes beyond ABFSE Curriculum
.08179 Conducts Mock Funeral Arrangements and Services
.03497 Cremation Training
.00002 Requires Course in Funeral Service Ethics
.0121 Designs Challenging Assignments
.0231 Implements Service-Learning
.00044 Strives to Make Students Think Critically
Program Administration
.00175 Maintains ABFSE Accreditation
.0169 Chairperson is a Licensed Funeral Director
.02045 Chairperson is a Licensed Embalmer
.00757 Creates a Learner-Centered Environment
.03459 Develops Self-Awareness through Continuous Feedback
.00739 Creates a Sense of Community through Communication
.01346 Works to Make Connections to the World Outside of Educational World
.11902 Provides Students with an Opportunity to Achieve Lofty Goals
Facilities
.0324 Library has Adequate Funeral Service Education resources
.01299 Adequate Embalming Laboratories
.01638 Adequate Human Anatomy Laboratories
.02528 Adequate Restorative Art Laboratories
.01254 Adequate Space for Mock Arrangements and Funerals
Students
.0004 Near Capacity Enrollment
.02657 Employed in Funeral Homes
.01020 Minimum of 80% Pass National Board Exam on First Attempt
.01588 Strong Academic Ability

Funeral Service Education Program Quality: A Unique Variance Model

* The Squared Semipartial Correlation Values Reveal the Unique Variance of Each Predictor

This study thus proposes a model to ascertain what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation. With this model funeral service programs have a method to assess the importance of predictors of quality in funeral service education, a model to which 80% of the population of program chairs contributed. Programs now have, for example, a method to determine the importance of tenure, chairs having a funeral director license and publishing research results in funeral service journals, as related to funeral service education program quality. The Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model potentially facilitates opportunities to improve and enhance overall quality in funeral service education. It offers funeral service educators a new method to examine program quality and assess possible areas of improvement through the examination of the regression prediction equation and the squared semipartial correlations. Consequently, this study not only contributes to the existing literature that examines program quality in higher education but also expands the literature to a new discipline, funeral service education.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although it was determined that 89% of variance in funeral service program quality can be predicted, the lack of statistical significance, although anticipated, was disappointing (Pedhazur, 1982). Although results were not found to be statistically significant this exploratory research hopefully provides a stable foundation upon which to build further research regarding what defines quality in funeral service education, as the lack of statistical significance is a direct result of the limited sample size. Additional research, involving a larger population might aid in the discovery of statistical significance. To expand this research beyond program chairs, possibly including all funeral service education instructors as the sample, is a reasonable next step to achieve statistical significance. This field will perpetually struggle with respect to a lack of numbers, but expanding the sample to include all funeral service instructors provides a reasonable solution in an effort to increase the potential subject pool. Different opinions exist on the

required number of subjects for a regression study of this nature; some experts recommend 15 subjects per predictor or a minimum of 400, which would require a significant increase in the number of subjects for the instrument as it is designed (Osborne, 2000).

Additionally, it would be valuable to extend this research to practitioners in the field of funeral service. This group is vitally important because they have a vested interest in the quality of funeral service education graduates. It is critical to understand the needs of this group and determine how they define and identify quality in funeral service education. Extension of this research to professionals in the funeral service industry will allow for a comparison between the manner in which educators evaluate quality in funeral service education and how the same question is addressed by current professionals in the industry. This research would provide the opportunity to discover any disconnections that exist between these two distinct populations, working to unify these groups and ultimately improving the funeral service industry through quality education.

The current research is a quantitative study and the statistical analysis is based in standard multiple regression. These parameters necessitated the development of a survey instrument and allowed for the development of a Funeral Service Education Quality Model. Although these hopefully are noteworthy contributions and serve to further the knowledge base concerning program quality in higher education, specifically funeral service education, the possible benefits of utilizing qualitative methods in future research to expand the results of the study should be acknowledged. The understanding of what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation could be enhanced through the triangulation of data in future studies. Potential future qualitative studies could investigate multiple funeral service education programs utilizing personal interviews, direct observation of programs, and document analysis in the search for emerging themes that indicate program quality.

Additionally, the different methods of instruction (online versus traditional instruction) and funeral service program affiliation (independent versus public post-secondary institution) presented in the study may also warrant consideration in future investigations searching for predictors of program quality in funeral service education. The current study provides that six programs offer instruction 100% online and that of the programs represented in the study eight are considered independent programs and 35 are affiliated with a pubic post-secondary institution at some level. As the funeral service program quality dialogue advances it may be worthwhile to research potential relationships between these considerations and program quality in funeral service education.

Finally, the anonymous nature of the data collection led to frustrations when dealing with subjects. In an effort to maximize the response rate, multiple attempts and methods were used to make contact with potential subjects. Without the knowledge of which subjects had participated in the study it was not possible to discontinue solicitation of individuals who had already participated in the research study. Ultimately, numerous subjects requested that they be removed from the list for further correspondence as they had already participated in the study, indicating frustration in the process. In future research it would be beneficial to identify which potential subjects had actually participated in the study to eliminate unnecessarily burdening prospective respondents. This should be done in a way that maintains anonymity while ensuring that respondents do not receive subsequent solicitations once they participate.

Conclusion

Central to the implications of this study is the development of a Funeral Service Education Quality Model and the creation of a survey instrument to collect data. These tools will hopefully serve in future evaluations of program quality in higher education and in particular, be beneficial within funeral service education. The importance of understanding program quality in

higher education, and the vast resources that have been dedicated to the search for a better understanding of this educational consideration, highlight the need for continuing research. The model and the instrument resulting from this study will hopefully support subsequent efforts to expand this research and ultimately contribute to a better understanding of program quality in higher education.

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APPPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter Soliciting Participation in Pilot Study

April 4, 2011

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this pilot study. You have been identified as an expert in the field of funeral service education and as such your unique perspective will assist in the development of the overall study and specifically the instrument that will ultimately be used to gather data for the study. Your participation will be critical in evaluating the reliability and validity of the instrument.

As you complete the attached survey please keep in mind the overall purpose of the study, to identify what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. Investigators are constantly searching for methods to improve higher education and research seeking to determine factors associated with program quality is a common theme in the higher education landscape, yet funeral service education has not been evaluated. It is important that all elements that are potentially critical to a quality funeral service program are represented in this survey. Please indicate any potential elements not included in the survey and possible reasoning for exclusion of exiting items. The current survey has been developed using educational correlates developed from existing empirical research focusing on higher education quality and additional elements have been added that directly relate to funeral service education.

Again, thank you for your participation in this pilot study and I look forward to evaluating the results of this pilot.

Respectfully,

John Fritch

Survey Instrument which was converted to the Online Instrument

Program Quality in Funeral Service Education: An Expert Survey

You have been identified as an expert in funeral service education. Your participation in this survey will be in support of a doctoral research study about what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation.

It will take 10 – 12 minutes of your time to complete this survey, which contains demographic information plus 40 scaled items. Please rate the importance of each characteristic in terms of a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation.

Your response to this survey is very important in contributing to the field of funeral service education, and your responses will remain anonymous at all times.

Thank you very much for your time and support.

Demographic Information: Please circle the most appropriate answer for each item.

Personal Information

Age
20-30   31-40   41-50   51-60   61-70   71-80

Sex
Male   Female

Highest degree earned
Certificate   Diploma   Baccalaureate   Masters   Doctorate

Licensed funeral director
Yes   No

Licensed embalmer
Yes   No

Years teaching funeral service education
0-5   6-10   11-15   16-20   21-25   26-30   more than 30

Institutional Information:

Which of the following best describes the type of funeral service degree offered; if more than one degree is offered please indicate the highest level of degree offered.

Diploma   Certificate   Associates Degree   Bachelors Degree

Which of the following best describes the type of Institution which houses the program?

Independent Funeral Service School   Community College   Comprehensive University

Number of full-time faculty in the funeral service/mortuary science department.

1-3   4-6   7-10   11-13   more than 13

Number of adjunct/part-time instructors in the funeral service / mortuary science department.

1-3   4-6   7-10   11-13   more than 13

Number of declared funeral service/mortuary science majors in the program.

1-30   31-60   61-90   91-120   121-150   more than 150

Is the program offered 100% online?

Yes   No

Is at least one course offered online?

Yes   No

A funeral service educational program which goes beyond the American Board of Funeral Service Education requirements is a quality program

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Strongly Agree--Strongly Disagree

Importance Survey

Please rate the <u>importance</u> of each of the following in funeral service education.

1. Faculty members have a terminal degree (PhD, EdD, JD…).

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

2. Faculty members have a current funeral director license.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important--Not at all Important

3. Faculty members have a current embalmer license.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important--Not at all Important

4. Full-time faculty members are on tenure track or have obtained tenure.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important--Not at all Important

5. Faculty members publish research results in funeral service journals.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

6. Faculty members have work experience in the funeral profession outside of the educational institution in the past five years.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

7. The program offers a bachelors degree in funeral service.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

8. The program maintains near capacity student enrollment.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

9. The program includes an embalming lab in which students embalm on campus.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

10. Students are employed in funeral homes while attending classes.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

11. A minimum of 80% of students pass the national board examination on the first attempt.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

12. Students show strong academic ability, as witnessed in classroom performance.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

13. The program offers training that focuses on comparative religious and secular traditions with respect to funeral customs.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

14. The library has adequate resources for funeral service education.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

15. There are adequate laboratories for embalming on campus.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

16. There are adequate laboratories for human anatomy and dissection on campus.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

17. There are adequate laboratories for restorative art on campus.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

18. There is adequate space to conduct mock funeral arrangements and services for the student population.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

19. The education is well-rounded and goes beyond the required American Board of Funeral Service Education curriculum.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

20. The program maintains accreditation by the American Board of Funeral Service Education.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

21. Program faculty are involved in leadership roles with the American Board of Funeral Service Education.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

22. Faculty members participate in scholarly research and present results at state conferences.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

23. Faculty members participate in scholarly research and present results at regional conferences.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

24. Faculty members participate in scholarly research and present results at national conferences.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

25. The program conducts mock funeral arrangements and services as part of the professional training.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

26. The program requires training in the practice of cremation as part of the curriculum.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

27. The program requires faculty to participate in funeral service continuing education.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

28. The chairperson of the program is a licensed funeral director.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

29. The chairperson of the program is a licensed embalmer.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

30. The program requires a course in funeral service ethics.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

31. The program creates a learner-centered environment.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

32. The program develops self-awareness through continuous feedback.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

33. The program creates a sense of community in the educational institution through communication.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

34. The program works to make connections to the world outside of the educational world.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

35. The program designs challenging assignments.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

36. The program implements service-learning into the curriculum.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ---Not at all Important

37. The program strives to make students think critically by asking challenging questions.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

38. Faculty members that teach mortuary law courses have a Juris Doctorate degree and experience practicing law related to funeral service.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

39. The program provides students with an opportunity to achieve lofty goals.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important --Not at all Important

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Beyond Accreditation: What Defines a Quality Funeral Service Education Program? An Investigation of the Relationship between Educational Correlates and Program Quality in Funeral Service Education

Investigator: John B. Fritch, currently a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University

Purpose: To ascertain the relationship between established educational correlates and program quality in funeral service education.

Procedures: Participants will be asked to:
- Complete an online survey lasting approximately 10-12 minutes

Results of the survey will be available to the researcher and will subsequently be organized for data analysis. The survey includes both demographic and scaled items; one scaled item rates the level of agreement with respect to program quality as related to a funeral service program going beyond the requirements of the American Board of Funeral Service Education, and the remaining scaled items rate the importance of educational elements as related to quality in funeral service education. All responses are anonymous and NO raw data will identify any participants.

All interactions and conversations with the researcher are confidential.

Risks of Participation: There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily university life.

Benefits: Participants, as leaders in funeral service education, are expected to directly benefit from reflecting on the relationship between educational correlates and program quality. This research study directly impacts funeral service education on multiple levels. Students will have a better gauge to compare institutional quality, employers will have an improved understanding of the quality each newly licensed director received, and competing educational institutions will have the opportunity to improve program quality through the examination of the shortcomings and successes of competing programs.

Confidentiality: All participation is anonymous and the confidentiality of your participation in the research study and all materials associated with your participation will be protected.

The records of this study will be kept private and all participation is anonymous. The identification of all participants will be protected. Any written results will discuss group findings and as participation is anonymous no information will be able to identify you. Raw data may be kept up to 5 years. Only the researcher and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by university research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

Contacts: If you have any questions about this research, please contact John Fritch, University of Central Oklahoma, Coyner Health Sciences Building 164, Edmond, OK 74034, 405-974-5197 or jfritch@uco.edu or Dr. Stephen P. Wanger, Oklahoma State University, 309 Willard, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078, 405-744-7758 or steve.wanger@okstate.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the Oklahoma state University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, Dr. Shelia Kennison at 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Participant Rights: Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may discontinue your participation and your related activities at any time without reprisal or penalty.

By continuing to and completing the survey, you are giving your consent to participate.

Appendix D

Email Solicitation Script

My name is John Fritch and I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University. I am employed at the University of Central Oklahoma in the funeral service department.

I am conducting a research study on what defines a quality funeral service program beyond basic accreditation. The study is expected to contribute to our knowledge concerning program quality in higher education and specifically in the field of funeral service education.

For the purpose of this study, I am interested in leaders in funeral service education completing an online survey which includes demographic information and 40 scaled items.

You will receive a link to the study via email and then complete the survey instrument online. The survey should take 10-12 minutes to complete. The foundation of the survey instrument is literature pertaining to funeral service education, accreditation in higher education, and program quality. If you wish to discuss the results of the study, the researcher will provide you this opportunity when the research findings are completed.

If you are willing to consider participation, I will email you a link to the study, which includes a consent form which further outlines the study procedures and what would be required of you. [if yes, email the link; if no, thank the person for their time and consideration]

Appendix E

Telephone Solicitation Script

My name is John Fritch and I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University. I am employed at the University of Central Oklahoma in the funeral service department.

I am conducting a research study on what defines a quality funeral service program beyond basic accreditation. The study is expected to contribute to our knowledge concerning program quality in higher education and specifically in the field of funeral service education.

For the purpose of this study, I am interested in leaders in funeral service education completing an online survey which includes demographic information and 40 scaled items.

You will receive a link to the study via email and then complete the survey instrument online. The survey should take 10-12 minutes to complete. The foundation of the survey instrument is literature pertaining to funeral service education, accreditation in higher education, and program quality. If you wish to discuss the results of the study, the researcher will provide you this opportunity when the research findings are completed.

If you are willing to consider participation, I will email you a link to the study, which includes a consent form which further outlines the study procedures and what would be required of you. [if yes, email the link; if no, thank the person for their time and consideration]

Appendix F

Email Reminder

Due to the anonymous nature of this research study I have no way to know any information about the participants in the study. If you have already completed the online survey instrument associated with this research, please know how much I appreciate the fact you took time to complete the survey, thank you very much. If you have not yet had the opportunity to complete the survey I would like to invite you to click on the link below and complete the online instrument, for the purpose of this study, I am interested in leaders in funeral service education completing the online survey which includes demographic information and 40 scaled items. The survey should take 10-12 minutes to complete. The foundation of the survey instrument is literature pertaining to funeral service education, accreditation in higher education, and program quality. If you wish to discuss the results of this research study, the researcher will provide you this opportunity when the research findings are completed. Here is the link to the study:

http://frontpage.okstate.edu/coe/johnfritch/

Thank you so much for your participation.

Respectfully,

John Fritch

Appendix G

IRB Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Friday, July 01, 2011
IRB Application No	ED11122
Proposal Title:	Beyond Accreditation: What Defines a Quality Funeral Service Education Program? An Investigation of the Relationship Between Educational Correlates and Program Quality in Funeral Service Education
Reviewed and Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 6/30/2012

Principal
Investigator(s):
John B. Fritch   Stephen P. Wanger
5712 N. Florida   309 Willard
Okla. City, OK 73118   Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia N. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

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VITA

John Bradley Fritch

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: BEYOND ACCREDITATION: WHAT DEFINES A QUALITY FUNERAL
SERVICE EDUCATION PROGRAM? AN INVESTIGATION OF THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL CORRELATES AND
PROGRAM QUALITY IN FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION

Major Field: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Education:

> Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational
> Leadership and Policy Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater,
> Oklahoma in December, 2011.

> Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Educational
> Administration at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in
> 2006.

> Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Funeral Service at
> the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 1996.

> Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Economics at the
> University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas in 1993.

Experience:

> Chair, Department of Funeral Service at the University of central Oklahoma.

> Teaching Assignments include Embalming, Restorative Art, Practicum in
> Embalming and Funeral Directing, Psychology of Grief, and Board
> Review.

Professional Memberships:

> Oklahoma Funeral Directors Association

> University of Central Oklahoma Department of Funeral Service Advisory Board

Name: John Bradley Fritch   Date of Degree: December, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: BEYOND ACCREDITATION: WHAT DEFINES A QUALITY
                FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION PROGRAM? AN
                INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
                EDUCATIONAL CORRELATES AND PROGRAM QUALITY IN
                FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION

Pages in Study: 107   Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies

Scope and Method of Study: This study sought to determine what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation. The study examined the opinions of funeral service education chairs (N=45, representing 80% of the population) who are leaders of funeral service education programs accredited by the American Board of Funeral Service Education. Participants completed a self-report online survey which assessed their perspectives regarding the importance of a collection of educational correlates related to funeral service program quality. Survey responses were statistically analyzed using standard multiple regression.

Findings and Conclusions: The results indicated that 89% of program quality variance may be predicted by the set of predictors utilized in the study. These results, coupled with the semipartial correlations, facilitated the development of the Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model. This study also resulted in the creation of a survey instrument related to program quality in higher education. The results highlight critical elements of funeral service education program quality and add to the body of empirical research aiding those charged with assessing program quality in higher education.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Stephen P. Wanger