Business School Educators and Authentic Assessment: A Phenomenological Case Study

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College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Business School Educators and Authentic Assessment: A Phenomenological Case Study

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College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Professional Leadership, Inquiry, and Transformation

Floralba Arbelo-Marrero, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee
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Abstract

Newly hired college graduates who have earned their degree in business are underprepared in demonstrable foundational and functional professional competencies required for success in the workplace. The basic business skills necessary to be learned through studies at institutions of higher education are forcing schools to consider if changing the way learning is assessed would create a more valuable post-graduation employee. This phenomenological case study was designed to discover if business school educators at institutions of higher learning recognize the value of using authentic assessment practices as preparation for graduates seeking future employment in a business setting. The study was conducted at a single institution located in the Northeast region of the United States. A combination of 16 members of the administrative team, subject matter experts, and faculty were invited to participate in the study. Data included one-on-one interviews and an open-ended question questionnaire. The four main themes identified include current assessment practices, the understanding of authentic assessment, curriculum creation at the institution, and how student skill validation is currently conducted in the classroom. The outcomes resulting from this research study help to identify further research opportunities including expanding to a larger, more diverse population of participants. Additionally, implementing the same study procedures but across different disciplines would uncover if the phenomenon was global to an institution or specific only to the business school.

Keywords: authentic assessment, core business skills, interactive feedback, performance standard, professional competence, rubric
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends who traveled this long road with me. Specifically, first, my best friend and husband, Michael, who loves me beyond comprehension and has provided continual understanding, support, and patience throughout all of my educational adventures. Second, my big sister, Michele, who has been in my corner since day one and has encouraged me along the way as only she can. You are both my heroes!
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Employers within business industries express growing dissatisfaction with the lack of basic knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) of collegiate business program students seeking post-graduate employment (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012). According to Amar, Johnson, and McLaughlin (2018), the traditional teacher-centric academic model of theory-driven lectures and subsequent traditional testing do not allow a student to practice and apply practical knowledge relating to real-world scenarios. The main question researchers must now face is whether changing the way learning is assessed would create a more valuable post-graduation employee?

Authentic assessment of student learning adds value to the educational experience as students are provided the opportunity to apply critical thinking skills to real-world scenarios and applied work constructs to meaningful assignments (Williams, 2017). By definition, authentic student learning assessment cannot be administered using traditional classroom evaluative pedagogy defined as multiple-choice, true-false, matching, and fill-in-the blank assessments (Koh, Tan, & Ng, 2012). The element of performance assessment is not present in conventional testing as the information required to complete the work is merely a regurgitation of text material or lecture content and not applied practice. Instead, authentic assessment is derived through observations of the student conducting or creating the final work product which is then assessed by specified criteria listed in a rubric to measure real learning (Alquraan, 2012; Koh, et al, 2012).
Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

**Background.** The literature is replete with evidence indicating the lack of foundational business skills taught at institutes of higher learning resulting in recent graduates seeking employment only to discover the lack of learned professional competencies (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Sulphey, 2015). A review of previous research found relevant themes and connections relating to the lack of student preparedness for the business workplace and provided possible solutions, thereby positioning the student to be better qualified for a job and career post-graduation. To a large extent, the majority of business leaders have expressed a great dissatisfaction with the performance of recent graduates of institutional business programs as the seek to obtain employment post-graduation (Baird & Parayitam, 2017).

**Context.** The results of the literature review conducted for this study indicated the need for a teaching and learning method improvement in institutions of higher learning to more adequately prepare the individuals for future work outside of the classroom. The traditional teacher-centric methods were no longer sufficient for education that is transferable to the workplace upon graduation. Studies suggest the use of authentic assessment pedagogy such as scenario-based activities for demonstration of business KSAs as a movement towards curriculum improvement (Hayati, Bentri & Rahmi, 2017; Koh et al., 2011; Tam, 2014).

**History.** There are more than 30 articles reviewed and synthesized in this study, which organizes data from instructors, students, and workplace representatives, as discussed further in Chapter 2. The common themes identified in the literature are: (a) lack of preparedness of graduates based on employers anticipated requirements for a new hire, and (b) use of traditional learning and assessment strategies in school is insufficient to gain mastery of basic functional business skills required in the workplace (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird
Accordingly, there is a crucial need to research how authentic assessment through demonstration of learning can increase student knowledge and performance allowing the individual to be a more productive workplace contributor. According to the literature, there is a distinct gap between current skills taught in institutions of higher learning and skills required of the post-graduate new hire (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Baird & Parayitam, 2017). The skill set and sharp professional competencies needed to propel the learner into an organization is vital to future success in the workplace (Manevska et al., 2018).

Previous research indicates there is a statistically significant correlation between current assessment methods and lack of ability to perform in a real-world position once schooling is complete (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Baird & Parayitam, 2017). Sulphey (2015) reported the student does not realize the lack of preparation for future employment and relies on the institution to sufficiently prepare each learner for successful employability upon completion of the intended degree program. Additional research indicates instructors show a stronger propensity to administer traditional assessments as the method of teaching is more familiar to implement and requires less individual attention to students as well as reduced time requirements for grading and creation of formative materials (Alquraan, 2012; Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012).

**Conceptual framework for the problem.** Wiggins (1990) established the authentic assessment theory to directly examine student performance by the learner’s demonstration of intellectual tasks. Stemming from the constructivist stance of cognitive science, most notably found in the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner, learning is not the result of development, but it is development. To learn, the student must raise questions, generate hypotheses, and then test
and defend for viability (Fosnot, 2005). Therefore, authentic assessments require the learner to effectively demonstrate learned KSAs, which are measured against performance standards, as noted in the rubrics for each assignment or project (Wiggins, 1990).

Performance standards in authentic assessment, when clearly stated in specific and measurable terminology within the rubric, safeguards against the undermining of rigorous content through lower expectations and reduced standards. The indicated performance standard should answer the question, “How well must the student perform” to earn the highest mark (Wiggins, 1998, p. 127). The articulated performance standard must allow for the student to critically solve problems or distinctly express understanding of a concept through writing or demonstration. When used as intended, the standards do not fulfill the single role of monitoring student learning. Instead, the standard’s purpose is to clarify and set intellectual gauges of assessment proven through performance mastery by the student (Wiggins, 1989). The standards which are designed to measure exemplary task performance should be set high enough to fully assess a replicated challenge students will face in a real-world environment (Wiggins, 1997).

**Statement of Problem**

Newly hired college graduates who have earned their degree in business are underprepared in demonstrable foundational and functional professional competencies in the workplace. The American business industry has a keen interest to hire graduates from business programs offered at institutions of higher learning who are able to demonstrate necessary business function skills, knowledge, and abilities learned in school and are transferable to the workplace (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012; Suvedi, Ghimire & Millenbah, 2016). Shifting the focus of learning from a teacher-centric to a student-centric classroom requires instructors to
teach while concurrently developing learning materials and formative assessments which are meaningful, productive, and will provide for the demonstration of KSAs transferrable to the workplace rendering the graduate fully prepared to perform assigned tasks and duties when hired into a business environment (Amar et al., 2018; Hahn & Gangeness, 2019; Pellegrino, 2014). The use of authentic assessment pedagogy through demonstrated application of KSAs would better prepare students for careers in business; however, research shows that business faculty report a reluctance in using the authentic testing method in the classroom (Pellegrino, 2014; Williams, 2017). Instructor perception indicates the method of teaching presents authentic instruction and assessment as more rigorous and time consuming for the instructor in contrast to traditional pedagogy (Hayati et al., 2017).

**Purpose of the Study**

This phenomenological case study was designed to discover if business school educators at institutions of higher learning recognize the value of using authentic assessment practices as preparation for graduates seeking future employment in a business setting. Through the lens of the authentic assessment theory, it is not known if the value of the authentic learning and assessment method contribute to the collegiate student’s successful academic experience is recognized by those who create or approve the content and curriculum delivered in the business program courses.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions will construct the study’s foundation:

RQ 1: How do business program professors describe their current instructional and assessment practices in educating collegiate business students?
RQ 2: How are business programs using course assessments to measure the demonstrable business skill level of their students?

RQ 3: How do business program professors describe their curricular and assessment practices in the context of validating students’ skills for the job market?

**Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

**Rationale.** The rationale for this study is to gain an understanding of the use of authentic assessment theory to support the development of professional competencies in business and growth of KSAs of post-graduate students allowing each to be more fully prepared to perform essential job duties upon hiring. Previous research indicates the lack of demonstrable KSAs as the graduates enter the workforce. The gap in the literature points to the implementation of authentic assessment as a means to offer a more robust learning opportunity for the student.

**Relevance.** The study intends to fill a gap in the research regarding the implementation of authentic assessment in the classroom to prepare students for real-world application of KSAs in the workplace. Research in response to the methodology will be relevant to administrators and course developers within institutions of higher learning. Research in sampling will be relevant to the institution of study from which the data were obtained.

**Significance of the study.** The concluding results of this study may provide business educators with best practices in the authentic assessment pedagogy as a means to provide a more robust and beneficial learning experience for the college student resulting in better preparation for employment upon graduation. The students will graduate with demonstrable business proficiencies. The employers will hire recent graduates who are better prepared to enter the workplace with the KSAs necessary to be a value-added employee upon hiring.
Definition of Terms

The following key terms are found throughout this study.

*Authentic assessment:* This term is a true test of purposeful and adaptive performance requiring a thoughtful response; students have the opportunity to grow through meaningful assignments and instructor feedback (Wiggins, 1998; Williams, 2017).

*Core business skills:* This term includes but is not limited to critical thinking, problem solving, oral, writing, interpersonal communication innovation, and creativity (Baird & Parayitam, 2017).

*Criteria:* This term is defined as the conditions that any task must meet to be considered successful (Wiggins, 1998).

*Employability skills:* This term is defined as those skills employers desire to see when hiring individuals to work within an organization. These skills can include communication, problem solving, organizing projects, and processing information (Suvedi, Ghimire, & Millenbah, 2016).

*Interactive instructor feedback:* This term provides details of criterion which was or was not met, enabling the student to self-adjust (Wiggins, 1998).

*Learning outcomes:* This term is defined as the statement of goals desired for the student to learn or achieve (Wiggins, 1998).

*Performance standard:* This term points to and describes a specified degree of exemplary performance based on concrete criteria (Wiggins, 1998).

*Professional competence:* This term is defined as the capability of an individual to perform jobs and tasks within an occupation with realistic complexity (Gulikers, Runhaar & Mulder, 2018).
**Real-world scenarios:** This term is defined as the cases incorporated into the pedagogical design to expose the learner to authentic experiences faced in the business environment (Amar, Johnson & McLaughlin, 2018).

**Rubric:** This term is defined as a set of scoring guidelines for evaluating students’ work (Wiggins, 1998).

**Assumptions, Delimitations and Limitations**

**Assumptions.** At the onset of this study several assumptions were made. First, the honesty and transparency of the participants who agreed to engage in the study and their perception and experience with the phenomenon was naturally assumed. This was followed secondly by the assumption that the participants would not adapt their remarks in effort to provide a response they may have assumed was being sought for by the researcher. Finally, it was assumed that all participants who agreed to participate in the study would honor the commitment and engage fully and completely through the end of the study.

**Delimitations.** This study is purposely delimited to one institution of higher learning located in the Northeastern region of the United States. However, the participants’ related experiences provide a rich awareness into the thought processes of assessment. Additionally, the data provide keen insight into hiring characteristics to seek in future faculty hiring opportunities.

**Limitations.** Similar to any study involving participants, possible limitations to the research design would, foremost, be the prompt and complete engagement in the interview or questionnaire process by the participants. A truncation of potential emerging themes and data saturation may occur as the sample size is small and limited to one location. A lower rate of return may occur should participants leave the study prior to the completion of the interview, questionnaire, or transcription verification review. Another study limitation may include my
professional bias as it relates to my extensive history in higher education and background in assessment in the institute of higher learning setting, although great care will be taken to bracket my thoughts and ideals (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Other limitations may include poorly developed, incorrect, or no response to the questions or the lack of honesty in the answers provided by the participants (McMillan, 2016). Further limitations may include reticence of the institutional administrative team who may, at any juncture, suggest the project is interfering with work flow or is otherwise deemed unnecessary and attempts to gather further data are thwarted.

Additionally, the small sample size of participants may limit findings. A more extensive quantitative study may better serve to allow the results to become transferrable to other institutional settings. A final limitation may surface as the individuals who participate in the study are either colleagues or indirect reports to the researcher within the organizational hierarchy of the institution and may feel a sense of pressure to respond in a manner inconsistent with experience but rather that which is presumed to be the desired response.

**Summary**

The aim of the qualitative phenomenological case study is to examine if college business majors are authentically taught and assessed and whether business school educators place value on these practices to prepare students for employment in business post-graduation. Shifting the focus away from the “sage-on-the-stage” teacher-centric classroom to a student-centric learning environment is pivotal to the success of the pedagogy even though the transition meets with resistance from some of the instructors who are committed to the traditional teaching and testing techniques.

The literature provides the foundation for the lack of student preparedness for the business workplace due to the current pedagogical models in use, including traditional
assessment practices, while indicating the need for authentic learning experiences and assessments to better prepare the higher education graduate for future employment. The amount of research and literature available indicates many employers are seeking to discover the reason(s) attributing to the student’s lack of professional competencies upon graduating with a business degree. There is a strong dissatisfaction from employers who recognize the lack of KSAs of potential candidates at even the most basic functionality level required in the workplace (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012; Suvedi, Ghimire & Millenbah, 2016).

A review of the literature provided a focus on the concepts of authentic learning and assessment of the competencies during a student’s tenure in school. Articles spanning the last seven years show a correlation between the administration of traditional assessments and the lack of student ability to perform essential professional competencies in the workplace. Research of peer-reviewed material provided considerations and validity for authentic teaching, learning, and assessment in the higher education classroom. The literature has shown instructors are less likely to implement the authentic pedagogy due to the additional time and effort required to teach and grade effectively (Alquraan, 2012; Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012).

Additionally, data have shown the learners are unsuspecting of the professional competencies required upon hiring into a business position but have failed to have been learned throughout the years of formal education (Sulphey, 2015). Research supports the theory students innocently hold in which the course materials and learning opportunities provided in the degree program would groom the graduates to be desirable candidates upon graduation. However, students soon realize the earned degree did not adequately prepare the individual for immediate and active employment (Sulphey, 2015). A common theme is present in the literature indicating
a need for the implementation of authentic teaching and assessment practices are vital to the future success of the graduate of higher education preparing the learner for a successful career in business (Bhagra & Sharna, 2018; Hahn & Gangeness, 2019; Pelligrin, 2014).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Business industry employers in the United States expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of KSAs shown by recent business graduates entering the workforce (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012). The academic model of theory driven lectures and subsequent traditional testing do not provide the student the opportunity to demonstrate practical knowledge relating to real-world business scenarios (Amar, Johnson, & McLaughlin, 2018). The current traditional testing methods in education do not authentically assess learning that aligns with the demand of the business employer expectations of demonstrable business skills and professional competence needed to be performed immediately upon hiring. The use of a traditional assessment in the classroom is no longer adequate to determine student learning as the test merely measures a student’s basic comprehension and short-term recall of recently provided information. However, the authentic assessment tool is a powerful resource for promoting and measuring student learning requiring the student to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information in line with the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Alquraan, 2012). The concepts enveloped in real-world scenarios are critical for the student to apply demonstrated knowledge, skills, or ability during an assessment.

Rahman and Majumder (2014) assert that assessment design should consider the purpose of the assessment and fit of the assessment tool to the learning opportunity for a more accurate appraisal of the level of student comprehension. Wiggins and McTighe (2011) suggest the practice of an authentic assessment should demonstrate student understanding, which, in itself, is not a fact, but instead, the knowledge is a logical thought process based on the culmination of
facts the individual has previously learned. Additionally, Miller’s Assessment Pyramid places traditional assessments within the lower cognition range indicating the student “knows” subject matter and thereby only tested for basic knowledge (Miller, 2000; Rahman & Majumder, 2014). Past studies showed students disengage from the traditional assessment process when the questions are taken from a preconstructed test bank (Ghosh, Bowles, Ranmuthugala, & Brooks, 2017) as the assessments do not challenge or motivate the student to engage in learning. Alternatively, authentic assessment extends to the higher cognition level of the pyramid to the “knows how” and the behavior levels of “shows how” and “does” demonstrating the transferability and mastery of the assessed content (Miller, 2000; Rahman & Majumder, 2014; Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Studies showed students presented with authentic assessments are more engaged as the opportunity to learn and grow through self-reflection, meaningful assignments, and feedback provided in the experience (Williams, 2017).

**Study Topic**

Institutions of higher learning are slow to adopt the theory and practices of authentic assessment relating to the needs of the contemporary workplace (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015). In a recent study, 97.8% of instructors indicated using traditional assessment practices of multiple-choice responses, true-false, and short answer question styles more often in testing situations (Yilmaz, 2017). A shift in the student evaluation paradigm to move to the authentic assessment medium is necessary. In the new setting, the focus is removed from the instructor teaching to a test as the onus is placed on the student to acquire the knowledge needed to demonstrate mastery of the subject matter (Tam, 2014). Administration of mostly one-way communication teaching style in the typical college classroom perpetuates the use of traditional assessments. Assessment studies show that the conventional approach focuses on the teacher’s
information delivery directly correlates to the outcome of the student nominal knowledge requirements (Koh et al., 2012). The standard approach used by instructors teaching business courses follows the pattern of introducing functional structures, such as marketing and human resources, while overlooking the process centric focus within each functional area. Coupling the shift in focus of teaching content with diagnostic testing, instructors can generate a feedback loop on student learning allowing for further instructional experiences necessary to provide additional paths of learning followed by the application of concepts demonstrated in authentic assessment opportunities (Perrotta & Whitelock, 2017; Seethamraju, 2012). A further assessment study indicated most teachers assumed authentic assessments were more challenging to teach to and opted for a more straightforward method of testing (Hayati, Bentri & Rahmi, 2017).

Limitations to the approach of traditional test formulation methods should be taken into consideration as students do not have the option to set personal goals or standards nor question the clarity of a test question (Perrotta & Whitelock, 2017). Additionally, Perrotta and Whitelock indicated that stronger assessment practices would result in precise performance data allowing for refinements in the course content and teaching methods. Assessments reflecting the stronger practices are performance based allowing the student to think critically on a higher level, solve problems, (VanTassel-Baska, 2013) and demonstrate learning through a submitted process or product (Alquraan, 2012). The authentic assessment moves the student away from acts of memorizing and regurgitating information for a test (Koh et al., 2012) to requiring demonstration of skill or performance mastery of the subject matter (Hayati et al., 2017).

**Significance**

Sulphey (2015) stated that students hold the idea that graduating with a business degree provides a direct pathway of hiring into the career of choice. The misconception of the student
lies in the belief that formal college education with a concentration in business provides the skills necessary to secure a much-desired job after graduation. Sulphey identified the substantial gap between the business skills acquired while in college and those required to secure post-graduation employment. Noticeably, the gap has widened over time. Bhagra and Sharma (2018) asserted a post-graduate business student could be hired with a foundational knowledge base; however, with the lack of employability skills, career advancement is deemed unlikely. However, Baird, and Parayitam (2017) indicate a shift in hiring practices has occurred, creating a significant need for building the employability skills of the prospective candidate while enrolled in an institution of higher learning. Employers now seek to hire business graduates with transferable KSAs to reduce the organization’s financial burden of training expenses (Bhagra & Sharma, 2018).

Studies indicate business students who have recently earned a degree are entering the workforce with insufficiently developed skills, especially in communication, process management, interpersonal skills, and higher-level thinking when applied in real-world settings (Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012; Seethamraju, 2012; Sulphey, 2015). Campbell and Kresyman (2015) indicated industry and educational leaders are not currently aligning the needs of the workplace with the skills being taught to sufficiently prepare students for a successful career post-graduation. Future employability centers on two concepts: the student’s capability to be equipped through education to perform a job and the ability of the student to retain the position because of the same skills (Bhagra & Sharma, 2018).

**Problem Statement**

The American business industry desires to hire business students who are able to demonstrate necessary business function skills, knowledge, and abilities transferable to the
workplace when seeking employment post-graduation (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012; Suvedi, Ghimire & Millenbah, 2016). Corporations now require employees to be a value-added component of the business upon hiring in contrast to the previous practice of hiring recent graduates and then subsequently providing on-the-job training (Bhagra & Sharma, 2018, Seethamraju, 2012). Surveys have shown that business managers and executives were unimpressed with the skills business graduates demonstrated at the beginning of their employment. Most notable of the skills absent among recent graduates were problem solving, critical thinking, organizational skills, and ability to work with others (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013). Critics of higher education curriculum state concepts taught decades ago are still being taught in the classroom and do not take into account those skills needed in today’s workplace (Amar, Johnson, & McLaughlin, 2018; Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Hahn & Gangeness, 2019; Seethamraju, 2012).

Institutions of higher learning offering degrees in business are tasked to develop program curricula that are intended to prepare students for future employment. Traditional instructor-centric pedagogy requires students to regurgitate information to complete a quiz or assignment (Filer, 2018; Ghosh et al., 2017). Shifting the focus of learning to a student-centric classroom requires instructors to teach while concurrently develop learning materials and assessments which are meaningful and will provide for the KSAs transferrable to the workplace rendering the graduate fully prepared to perform assigned tasks and duties in a business environment (Amar et al., 2018; Hahn & Gangeness, 2019; Pellegrino, 2014). Although the use of authentic assessment through demonstrated application of KSAs would better prepare students for careers in business (Pellegrino, 2014; Williams, 2017), research shows that faculty report the avoidance of use of the
authentic testing method in the classroom. Avoidance stems from the required shift in teaching style, the feeling of being insufficiently skilled to measure student competencies, and it is perceived to be more challenging to teach and test to the authentic assessment pedagogy (Gulikers, et al., 2018; Hayati et al., 2017; Litchfield & Dempsey, 2015). Additional research indicates the need to transition from a teacher-centric classroom, where the tendency of the instructor is to construct curriculum that mirrors the test material, to a student-centric learning environment in which the learner demonstrates higher-order thinking skills and problem solving capabilities (Koh et al., 2011; Perrotta & Whitelock, 2017).

Continued use of outdated course materials adds to the unpreparedness of business students for industry challenges. In many instances, the alignment of business program curricula to workforce needs such as interpersonal communication skills, the ability to think critically, problem solving skills, and basic math computations do not match (Bhra & Sharma, 2018; Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Hahn & Gangeness, 2019; Sulphey, 2015). Current course content reflects poorly designed traditional assessment methods such as multiple choice or fill-in-the blank responses, creating student disinterest in learning as the ability to memorize and regurgitate course material is sufficient to pass such assessments. (Ghosh et al., 2017). The unwillingness of instructors to shift to the different teaching and learning paradigm negates the opportunity to assess the student’s KSAs authentically thereby perpetuating the growing number of graduates unable to obtain a position due to lack of basic, but essential, transferable learned professional competence (Ghosh et al., 2017; Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012).

Bechtold, Hoffman, Brodersen, and Tung (2018) supported challenging faculty to consider and experiment with authentic assessment activities that may more accurately demonstrate the application of knowledge and skill rather than simple retention of information.
Yilmaz (2017) articulated the assessment of student knowledge through detailed essay and application styled questions would provide a more valuable learning experience for the learner. The demonstrated learning opportunity would thereby nullify the lesser value of traditional multiple-choice and true/false questioning. Walters, Silva, and Nikolai (2017) agreed that more creative assessment design and using the assessment as more than a tool for measurement could stimulate the student’s motivation to learn.

**Organization of Chapter 2**

Presented in Chapter 2 are three distinct sections of work: introduction, body, and summary. The introduction includes the study topic of authentic assessment, the context of the study, the significance of the study, the problem statement, and an outline of the organization of the chapter. The body of Chapter 2 includes the conceptual framework followed by a detailed review of earlier literature relating to lack and need for authentic assessment in the business classroom. The next section describes the methodological issues, followed by a report of the literature findings. The concluding section includes synthesis and critique of the research findings followed by a summary of Chapter 2.

**Conceptual Framework**

The authentic assessment theory is the theoretical framework for this research.
Figure 1. Authentic assessment theory.

Wiggins (1990) established the authentic assessment theory to examine student performance by direct demonstration of intellectual tasks. Stemming from the constructivist stance of cognitive science, most notably found in the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner, learning is not the result of development, but it is development. To learn, the student must raise questions, generate hypotheses, and then test and defend for viability (Fosnot, 2005). Therefore, authentic assessments require the learner to effectively demonstrate learned KSAs measured against performance standards (Wiggins, 1990).

Performance standards in authentic assessment, when clearly stated in specific and measurable terminology, safeguards against the undermining of rigorous content through lower expectations and standards. The indicated performance standard should answer the question, “How well must the student perform” (Wiggins, 1998, p. 127). The articulated performance standard must allow the student to solve problems critically or express a distinct understanding of a concept. When used as intended, the standards do not fulfill the single role of monitoring
student learning; instead, the standards function to clarify and set intellectual standards
demonstrated through performance mastery by the student (Wiggins, 1989). The standards
designed to measure exemplary task performance should be set high enough to replicate the
challenges students will face in a real-world environment (Wiggins, 1997).

Criteria. Explicitly stated criteria define the characteristics of the successful completion
of identified educational outcomes (Wiggins, 1998). Accurately described criterion performs as a
bridge between the broader academic objective and the features of the individual exercise.
Increasingly sophisticated standards allow for performance assessment in a truly authentic
manner moving the testing away from contrived problems and artificial cues which preclude the
use of student judgement in responses, thereby negating the purpose of true learning assessment
(Wiggins, 1989).

Authentic task. An authentic task is realistic, requires the use of knowledge and skills,
and requires the student to apply the learned information to a particular exercise (Wiggins,
1998). Elements of authentic tasks include:

- Submitting a quality deliverable including justification;
- Requiring excellence in the performance in core tasks;
- Demonstration of real-world knowledge in simulations or real-world experiences;
- Allowing for the integration of innovative judgement or knowledge in the deliverable
  preparation;
- Opportunities for diagnostic feedback to improve student learning; and
- An iterative nature to allow for mastery of the subject matter. (Wiggins, 1998)

The execution of an intelligently designed authentic task will require the student to show
initiative, problem articulation, and research skills (Wiggins, 1989).
Rubric. Rubrics outline the scoring guidelines used in assessing student work. A rubric holds the scale of point values to be awarded based on a quality continuum. The higher the point value more often indicates the observation of better performance applied against the standard. Descriptors of criteria included in the rubric allow for less bias in instructor scoring. Indicators support descriptors through examples or suggested points of observations (Wiggins, 1998).

According to Archbald and Newmann (1988), assessment practices producing meaningful, significant, and worthwhile results that are transferable beyond graduation indicate authentic measurements of learning. Authentic assessments should not only subject the learner to a demonstration of a set of tasks but require the student to craft thorough and justifiable written responses, presentations, or work products (Wiggins, 1990). Wiggins (1993) further supported the theory stating the use of authentic assessments allows for the manifestation of applying knowledge wisely, fluently and flexibly in a variety of contexts. The two-fold characteristic of the authentic assessment framework includes (a) deliberate design, and (b) useful and robust feedback. Additionally, authentic assessments are to be designed to demonstrate the intellectual output of the student as if placed in a professional setting and need to be characterized by active inquiry, involvement, and further exploration (Wiggins, 1998).

There is a gap in the literature relative to the use of the authentic assessment in the business classroom as a means to stimulate and assess a student’s authentic learning experience, which is subsequently transferable to the workplace. Bechtold et al. (2018) supported research challenging faculty to consider and experiment with authentic assessment activities that may more accurately demonstrate the application of knowledge and skill rather than simple retention of information. Yilmaz (2017) surmised detailed application essay questions served as a motivation to student learning, thereby nullifying the value of traditional multiple-choice and
true/false questioning which merely assesses performance at the lower cognitive levels. Walters et al. (2017) argued more creative assessment design and using the assessment as more than a tool for measurement can stimulate the student’s motivation to learn. The basis of the authentic assessment theory will contribute to a body of literature recognizing the testing method as a means to stimulate and assess a student’s transferable learning experience to a career in business.

**Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

An authentic assessment is a process in which questions presented to students require demonstrated evidence of understanding in the response (Alquraan, 2012; Jimaa, 2011). Current literature reflects a gap in demonstrable business skills possessed by higher education graduates as they enter the world of business. Students are not adequately prepared to function in a real-world business environment as a result of traditional learning and assessment practices in which the learner regurgitates textbook or lecture content (Koh et al., 2012). The results described in the literature review share one common factor: students are not authentically taught nor assessed in KSAs, thereby reducing the learner’s marketable attributes when seeking employment post-graduation (Ahmad, & Pesch, 2017; Baird & Parayitam, 2017).

Therefore, to properly prepare degree seeking students for successful careers, assessment methods currently used require closer examination to determine if there is a demonstration of KSAs or if mere recitation of textbook and lecture material takes place (Koh et al., 2012; VanTassel-Baska, 2013). Assessments may be structured in a variety of styles, such as essays, presentations, reports, problem-solving and research exercises, to provide for the highest-level of problem-solving opportunities (Jimaa, 2011). Putting practical knowledge to demonstrated use will develop the skills necessary to position the student for hiring upon graduation (Maenvska, Danquah, Afful, Smerdova, & Manev, 2018).
**Paradigm shift from traditional to authentic assessment.** The early 1990s saw a fundamental shift in assessment methods from traditional to alternative testing formats (Gomez, Graue & Block, 1991; Perrotta & Whitelock, 2017). The change from passive to engaged learning continues into the 21st century (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Koh et al., 2012). Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, and McKeachie (1991) conducted a study of student learning through traditional testing requiring fact-based responses to a recent lecture with low levels of critical thinking. Results revealed that students retained two-thirds of lecture material presented at the beginning of the talk, yet the learners retained only approximately one-fifth of the content presented in the remaining 10 minutes of the lecture. However, advocates of the shift to authentic assessment asserted learning activities that combined instructor lectures and participative activities required of the student increased the student’s higher-order thinking skills (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Sternberg, 1994).

The paradigm shift to reform assessment methods continued to challenge the status quo of traditional objective style testing (Anderson, 1998; Hayati et al., 2017). Those in favor of more rigorous assessment practices began to focus on performance-based efforts by the learners (Amar et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Hayati et al., 2017; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012). However, the emphasis on the move away from teacher-centric classrooms to more of a student-centric learning environment found instructors dismayed at the increased responsibility and rigor of preparing students for authentic assessment. Research showed that collegiate instructors found it easier to teach “to the test” when administering traditional assessments in foundational business courses. The new era of evaluation challenges the instructor to provide real-world scenarios for the student response. Additionally, interactive instructor feedback and
detailed grading requirements add to the faculty engagement with the students (Alquraan, 2012; Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012).

**Student preparedness and employer dissatisfaction.** The continued shift toward authentic assessment stems from employer dissatisfaction with the lack of skills demonstrated by recent graduates of business schools. Ahmad’s (2017) research showed strong employer concern about the lack of professional competence of recent college graduates seeking entry-level positions. A survey presented to a variety of industry employers asked the respondents to list the most expected skills business organizations require of recent college graduates. The 77 public and private industry human resource professionals responding to the survey indicated employers find a deficit in the new employee’s capabilities in basic business KSAs required to be successful in the workplace. Employers rated verbal and written communication skills the highest in desired employee attributes. However, the same respondents named ranked verbal and communication skills as the top skills needing improvement. Ranking lowest on the list were the traits of developing creative solutions, thinking analytically, and the ability to plan and manage a project. Skills, including the utilization of technology, the ability to acquire learning, analytical thinking, and organizational skills, ranked at the lower end of the spectrum as areas in which the graduates needed to improve.

The Campbell and Kresyman (2015) exploratory case study found that institutions of higher learning have been remiss in teaching the needed skill sets required in today’s workplace. Although having earned a degree in business, the current college graduates are entering the workforce without the qualifying competencies necessary to start the job. Additionally, college students are graduating with success in academic achievement but are not able to display the required abilities to perform the work to meet workplace needs. Responses to a survey revealed
how employers, faculty, and administrators perceived the status of 21st century skills required of graduates. The researchers found a striking result in which only 10% of the survey participants believed students could “think outside the box” (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015, p. 17). The applicability of students to apply critical thinking skills outside of the classroom rated 40% at “good” with 5% rated as “really good” (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015, p. 17). Information literacy survey results indicated 31% felt the learner could read material adequately, however, only 16% were able to understand and apply the recently read information (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015, p. 17). Further responses showed that writing skills needed moderate to severe improvement, while critical thinking skills and interpersonal relational activities required mild to modest improvement. Campbell and Kresyman (2015) concluded the institution’s instructors were inadequately teaching those skills necessary to prepare students for the workforce.

Sulphey (2015) suggested that students believed upon starting formal education; the subsequent learning experiences would adequately prepare the individual with the skills and abilities required to secure employment after graduation. However, many studies have shown that graduates are leaving the institutions of higher learning with a shortfall in needed skill sets and competencies required by employers. Fundamental aptitudes asked for by employers are the skills which are transferable from the classroom to the real-world. The abilities include knowledge, skills, dependability, responsibility, and a positive work attitude. Added skills desired by employers are the student’s propensity to be teachable as well as an inclination to resolve problems. The lack of proper training is not new to the 21st century but continues to be a concern for employers hiring recent graduates. The chief complaint of the employers is not the lack of technical skills but the non-technical skills. According to Bok (as cited in Sulphey, 2015) 35% of industry executives agreed students were entering the workforce replete with the skills
necessary to complete the required work. The lack of essential business aptitudes caused employers to place the blame on grade inflation and the tolerance for late work submissions thereby causing a decrease in student self-discipline skills. Other factors contributing to the incompetence of graduates included irrelevant material provided in the courses and “overtly politicized version of management education” (p. 63).

Sulphey (2015) indicated the outcome of a quantitative study measuring a student’s self-perceived skills in business revealed a large gap between the skills students learn while in school and those required upon starting employment after graduation. The research showed that students do not realize the curriculum for the degree program is deficient in focused and specific instruction to meet a future employer’s business skills requirements. Additionally, once the realization of the deficit becomes apparent, the opportunity for the learner to receive such education post-graduation is often difficult. Employers are reluctant to hire new employees who will require an investment of resources to administer remedial training, thereby compounding the concern.

Baird and Parayitam (2017) emphasized that the broader business community shows a gross dissatisfaction with institutions of higher learning that offer business programs are not providing authentic learning opportunities and assessments of core business skills to students. The quantitative correlational research study showed that essential business core competencies and skills are indispensable and relate directly to hiring decisions. A survey administered to 1,000 employers from five regional chambers of commerce, each with 50 or more employees located in the northeastern region of the United States yielded a 5.2% response rate. However, 50 surveys were completed correctly, resulting in a final optional return rate of $N = 50$ or 5.0% (p. 155). Analytical skills presented as the overarching attribute most desired by the employers.
Multiple regression analyses performed on the survey responses registered analytical skills as the only significant regression coefficient ($\beta = -.348, p < .05$), which confirmed the results from ANOVA (p. 158) and which employers deem as a critical skill of high importance sought during the hiring process. Interpretation of the result shows the employer’s dissatisfaction with the graduate’s analytical skills.

Additionally, other areas of employer dissatisfaction included written communication, verbal communication, listening, and interviewing skills. Furthermore, the employers expressed critical concern over the lack of real-world experiences, creativity in problem-solving, phone etiquette, and punctuality displayed by the recent graduates. The students are found lacking confidence, inability to work in a team environment, initiative, emotional intelligence, and demonstrate lower end interpersonal communication abilities in both the oral and written form. Finally, the employers expressed further concern noting the evident overall absence of practical experience before entering the workforce.

Bhagra and Sharma (2018) presented an overview of the changing paradigm of essential skills required for positive employment. With the passing of the loyalty of an employee to remain in a job at one location for a significant length of time, employers are no longer interested in investing the resources in grooming and growing employees. Corporations now seek to employ individuals who, by using their previously learned KSAs, will immediately contribute to the overall success of the business. Employers assert these employability skills are both teachable in school followed by transferability to the workplace. Survey results showed the three top-ranking skills regarded as necessary for the 21st century graduate are (1) integrity, (2) adaptability, and (3) professionalism. Mid-range skills required are (7) critical thinking, (8) problem-solving skills, and (9) communication and interpersonal skills. The lowest skills
required are (14) professional values and ethics, (15) digital competencies, and (16) customer focus. Bhagra and Sharma concluded the study analysis suggesting an emphasis on teaching core skills coupled with a willingness by the student to learn would result in the facilitation of professional growth for future graduates.

Employer dissatisfaction of the KSAs of new graduates has served as an impetus of institutions of higher learning to shift the teaching pedagogy to one of authentic assessment of student demonstrated learning. Surveys and studies indicate employers continue to find a deficiency in the business acumen of graduates who have begun recent employment with the organizations (Ahmad, 2017; Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Sulphey, 2015). In turn, as students began to seek employment post-graduation, a study showed the learners recognized the shortfall in their educational experience (Sulphey, 2015). Those skills most notably deficit included analytical thinking, utilization of technology and organizational skills (Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Campbell & Kresyman, 2015).

**Review of Methodological Issues**

The review of methodological issues is constructed to demonstrate how past research methods were utilized to explore the connections between (a) anticipated skill requirements of employers, (b) lack of skills in higher education business graduates, (c) use of traditional assessment methods to ascertain learning, and (d) need for the use of authentic assessment methods to demonstrate learning. The purpose of the studies was to investigate if current student preparation through traditional learning and assessment practices was adequate to produce a well-qualified employable candidate upon graduation from an institute of higher learning with a concentration in business administration. Addressed in the collection of research studies in this section is a review of the literature between the years of 2012 through 2019 relating to the
authentic assessment of student learning through demonstration of KSAs. Reviewing both qualitative and quantitative studies served as a guide in the choice of the proper method of analysis to implement in this current study. Findings from this present study will reveal the opportunity for further research drawn from the practical insights discovered in the results of the study as well as the addition of new content to the literature.

There are many articles in the literature addressing the issue of the lack of proper KSAs of new graduates upon entering the workforce. While there is an abundance of research stating there is a lack of demonstrable skills (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Amar et al., 2018; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012), only a few studies focused on successful methods such as scenarios and portfolio development to prepare the learners for future success. Most of the instruments used in the research were surveys in which the respondents rated the preparedness of prospective employees.

**Quantitative methodology.** Zellars (2016) administered a quantitative research study to determine whether scenario planning played a significant role in the business school curriculum. One hundred and thirty principal department faculty members of top-rated U.S. business schools received a Phase I pilot survey. Phase II of the study used the results of the Phase I pilot survey to assess and refine the research question. A random sampling of 15 faculty members from top-rated schools formed the second group of respondents for the Phase II survey. Zellars presented the smaller cadre of the survey to gather information on the practices of scenario planning used as a concept for learning within each respective school’s curriculum.

Additionally, Zellars rationalized the selection of the diverse group of instructors included from the various departments could conceivably represent each department in the “scenario planning process at the organization level” (p. 22). When analyzing the responses, the
strategy for data analysis was descriptive statistics. The low response rate of the subjects supplied the first limitation of the study. The limitation precluded the opportunity to collect multiple viewpoints from a larger population. A second limitation of the investigation stemmed from a narrow survey population, overall. Resulting from the responses of Phase I and Phase II of the study, Zellars determined scenario planning did not play a significant role in business courses. However, some classes did incorporate an element of planning in the curriculum. Zellars further concluded as businesses face uncertain times, a focused study of scenarios will provide the tools needed for the graduate to manage uncertainty in the workplace productively. Additionally, scenario exploration offers the learner the opportunity to develop skills necessary support corporate leaders in critical decisions making.

Sulphey (2015) used the human capital theory as the framework for the study to discover the self-perception of employability skills among college students pursuing a degree in business. Sulphey conducted a quantitative nonexperimental study using a structured questionnaire consisting of 47 items basing each response on a five-point Likert scale. Distribution of the questionnaire to learners, faculty, and employers in the business industry allowed for a triangular approach, which was said to have added “significant value to the existing literature on employability” (p. 65). Additionally, Sulphey (2015) studied the gender connection of the overall employability of recent graduates. The results of the t-test based on gender showed significant difference in scoring between female and male students. The resulting t-value was 2.104 (at 0.05 level). The mean and standard deviation in the female respondents (185.47 and 16.63, respectively) was lower than their counterparts (189.35 and 17.38, respectively), demonstrating males hold a higher opportunity for employability (p. 68). Sulphey suggested the inconsistency
of definition in the terms “employability skills measurement” and “theory” as a weakness in the literature (p. 60).

The unification of the employer notion of the necessary skills required for employment are the core business proficiencies that are transferable from the classroom to the real-world is considered a literature strength. Sulphey concluded that employers more highly desire a demonstration of core competencies over specific job-related skills. Additionally, the necessary skills were not just desired characteristics of the employee but are requirements for hiring consideration. Further study recommendations encouraged deploying classroom programs based on employer’s needs followed by periodic evaluation and studies to determine if the gap of expectation in newly graduated students has diminished in terms of knowledge, skill, and ability in the workplace.

**Qualitative methodology.** Desai, Berger, and Higgs (2016) explored implications in higher order thinking beyond the classroom and into the real-world of business. The critical thinking theory provided the framework for the study to determine if there was a consistent opinion on the concept of higher order thinking within the ranks of business faculty members and if comparable pedagogical processes were used to teach critical thinking in the classroom. Desai et al. conducted the qualitative study to determine the skill sets employers wanted improved upon in the school and which, post-graduation, the student can transfer to the workplace. In 2010, the Wall Street Journal conducted an informal survey in which 479 college recruiters responded asserting critical thinking and problem-solving skills as the attributes most desired by future employers. The results from the informal study supported the concerns raised by the Business Roundtable, echoing the inability of businesses to find qualified candidates to hire. Noted by the Roundtable’s Director of Public Policy, Susan Traiman, competencies found
most lacking included analytic skills, communication skills, and a strong work ethic. The claims prompted the Desai et al. investigation into business faculty’s understanding of critical thinking as well as discover if pedagogical methods were comparably applied to instruct ways of higher order thinking across the classrooms.

Thirty-two members of faculty from five higher-education institutions responded to an open-ended question survey. The purpose of formatting the study in the open style was to prevent response limitations due to a selection of a predetermined response. Using both the relational and content processes of content analysis, data from the qualitative study revealed disagreement between faculty as to the perception and teaching methodology of critical thinking.

The findings from the Desai study resulted from the lack of consistency in the standard for teaching, assessing, and measuring the critical thinking skills of business students. The limitations to the study are subject to further data collection from students and employers to obtain a total view of the state of critical thinking training currently in institutions of higher learning. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that three recommendations are made to merge the varied conceptions of the characteristics of critical-thinking and the pedagogical approach used in the institute of higher learning. The suggestions are (a) design business curricula based on an established theory of critical thinking, (b) business school instructors should research literature in other professions in relation to approaches to teaching and assessing higher order thinking, and (c) tools used for assessment should be reviewed for applicability to real-world business, testing reliability and cost associated with assessment.

Maellaro and Whittington (2012) examined the gap that exists between student skills learned in class and those desired by hiring managers to succeed in the workplace. The framework of 28 microskills provided the foundation for the study identifying the manageable
and learnable behavioral elements necessary for student success in business. The qualitative research conducted by Maellaro and Whittington proposed to identify hiring managers preferring employee competencies relating to interpersonal skills. The conjoint analysis method used in the study applied a sense of familiarity between the choices made by consumers in purchasing and the decisions made by employers when considering candidates for a position. A two-phase field study first identified interpersonal attributes regarded as most important by the hiring managers. Secondly, a different group of managers rated newly created hypothetical candidates using the combination of the skills from the first study. The conjoint analysis analyzed the managers' choices in candidates. The results showed that the favored candidates demonstrated a high score in four areas of the attributes of interpersonal skills over those candidates exhibiting only three characteristics. Similarly, those candidates showing strength in three areas showed as preferred over the candidates demonstrating only two, and so on. The weighted attributes also provided for situations in which a candidate is superior in two attributes but average in one which outweighs the candidate superior in one attribute but average in two attributes. Ultimately, findings of the study showed the ideal candidate would possess “superior communication skills, above average influence skills, above average intellectually-oriented skills, and adequate empathy” (p. 74). To this end, the researchers concluded business practitioners and school administrators should come together to discuss the gaps between the curriculum and the anticipated skill sets needed for the graduate to enter the workplace successfully.

**Synthesis and Critique**

**Synthesis of the research.** The literature provided the background to the lack of necessary business skills taught at institutes of higher learning resulting in graduates seeking employment discovering the lack of qualifications although a conferred degree is present.
(Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Sulphey, 2015). A study of previous research found relevant themes and connections relating to the lack of student preparedness for the business workplace and provided possible solutions to implement to develop the learner for a job and career post-graduation. The results indicated the need for a teaching and learning method improvement in institutions of higher learning to more adequately prepare the individuals for work outside of the classroom. Several studies suggested the use of scenario-based assessments and demonstration of KSAs as a movement towards curriculum improvement (Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2011; Tam, 2014).

There are more than 20 articles reviewed and synthesized, which organizes data from instructors, students, and workplace representatives discussed in Chapter 2. The common themes identified in the literature are: (a) lack of preparedness of graduates based on employers anticipated requirements for a new hire, and (b) use of traditional learning and assessment strategies in school is insufficient to gain mastery of basic functional skills required in the workplace. Accordingly, there is a crucial need to research how authentic assessment through demonstration of learning can increase student knowledge and performance allowing the individual to be a more immediate, productive workplace contributor.

According to the literature, there is a distinct gap between current skills taught in institutions of higher learning and skills required of the post-graduate new hire. The skill set and sharp business acumen needed to propel the learner into an organization is vital to future success in the workplace (Manevska et al., 2018). Earlier research indicates there is a statistically significant correlation between current assessment methods and lack of ability to perform in a real-world position once schooling is complete. Sulphey (2015) reported the student does not realize the lack of preparation while trusting the institution to properly prepare each learner for
successful employability upon completion of the degree program. Additional research indicates instructors are more apt to utilize the traditional assessment methods as these practices are more comfortable to teach and require less attention provided to students individually as well as shortened grading time requirements (Alquraan, 2012; Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012).

**Critique of the research.** There is an agreement within the literature showing higher-education students are not adequately prepared with the proper KSAs to initially work productively in a workplace position post-graduation. A theme recognized through the literature review regarding assessment centers around the current use of traditional assessment (Gomez et al., 1991; Koh et al., 2012; VanTassel-Baska, 2013), which does not adequately assess for demonstrable abilities required for a workplace scenario. However, researchers do agree that the use of a more comprehensive, authentic assessment tool will provide the needed opportunity to objectively assess the capabilities of the future graduate (Alquraan, 2012; Jimaa, 2011). The authentic assessment creates real-life scenario applications prompting the student to use the education and skills learned to solve issues like those found in the workplace. Other themes recognized in the literature include aligning employer expectations with current course outcomes and the teachers’ perceptions relating to the assumed difficulty of teaching using the authentic assessment model.

Students require an alternative to the traditional assessment method to prepare for a workplace position post-graduation properly. The significant obstacles learners face are (a) lack of instructor willingness to teach to the more complex authentic assessment model, (b) incongruence between employer expectations and course outcomes, and (c) poor traditional assessment opportunities which do not provide an accurate picture of student preparedness for the workplace (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Hayati, Bentri & Rahmi, 2017; Tam, 2014).
Furthermore, students do not realize the curriculum currently in place is not thoroughly preparing for future success. The students trust the institution will provide a well-rounded education on the assumption the earned degree will be a reliable pathway to a future career (Sulphey, 2015).

Ahmad and Pesch (2017) conducted a quantitative study between three groups (employers, graduate students, and undergraduate students) using MANOVA to check the differences among the three groups for the dependent variables of a survey relating to skills important for a learner to possess post-graduation. Wilk’s Lamda (λ) was .080, \( p = 0.000 \). This result indicated a significant difference when the dependent variables from the skills important to possess survey when the responses were considered jointly (p. 7). This finding was consistent with Pillai’s Trace which was found at 0.21, \( p = 0.000 \) also considered highly significant (p. 7).

Similarly, using MANOVA, data collected from a survey between the same three groups relating to skills needing improvement also resulted in a significant difference between the groups. Wilks’ Lamda (\( \lambda \)) was 0.67, \( p = 0.000 \). Skills employers believed more important than students showed a mean rating difference, which was statistically significant (\( p = \leq 0.05 \); p. 7). The skills included honesty, strong work ethic, analytical thinking, flexibility and being detail oriented. The researchers’ conclusion from the study showed students lack the fundamental skills employers require. Additionally, the students do not realize the importance of having these skills.

Recommendations for further research can focus on tightening the expectation gap between the employers and the skills of the post-graduate student.

Campbell and Kresyman (2015) sought to explore employers’ beliefs of skills necessary for post-graduate students entering the workplace. Using a qualitative exploratory case study, the researchers conducted semistructured interviews with employers and administrators from hiring worksites and faculty members of one school located in the Southwest United States. Using
coding and analysis practices identified themes. The results of the study showed the research site was deficient in incorporating necessary fundamental skills necessary for new hires into the curriculum. The researchers indicated further studies in this area would be prudent to glean the employer/administrator perceptions which identify the skills deficiency in graduates. Suggesting the use of a new quantitative survey, employer/administrator responses to closed-ended questions can provide an additional opportunity to define the gaps between perceptions and skills. Data triangulation and observation notes of academic meetings could also supply further insight into the disparity of expectations and workplace competence.

Sulphey (2015) studied the patterns of self-perceived employability KSAs among post-graduate students. The quantitative research specifically targeted the widening gap between the skills learned at institutions of higher learning and those employers require. Additionally, the researcher looked to find a relationship between the demographics of the participants and the perceived employability skills. A group of 347 higher education business students was selected using the multi-stage random sampling technique. The youngest respondent was 19 years old, with the eldest being 34 years old resulting in 22 years old as the median age of the subjects. The study results showed 78 of the respondents did not comprehend the question(s), thereby supplying “data not provided” particulars. The overarching findings of the study indicated the lack of necessary skills, including: (a) critical thinking, (b) management, (c) literacy, and (d) numeracy as attributes of the post-graduate students. Noting the lack of previous studies on the effect gender has on future employability, the researcher performed a t-test showing a significant difference (at 0.05 level) between the scores of female and male learners. Sulphey found the results to be consistent with earlier studies by Krahn et al. (2002, as cited in Sulphey, 2015) in which males have better employability opportunities than females. The researcher has noted the
survey questions in which the respondents did not provide input created an unbalanced sample and were not considered for the final study on employability and year of study in school. Future suggested research in which a broader scope coupled with employer inputs would provide a more generalized view of the pattern of employability of students.

Studies to determine employer expectations, student perception, faculty willingness to teach, and assessment methods address the compounded phenomenon of authentic student preparedness. Steps are needed to rectify the KSAs shortfall in the graduating population of higher education students. The most frequent assessment tool used to measure expectations, abilities, and perceptions is the standard survey with either open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, or Likert scale responses.

Summary

Chapter 2 provided the literature background on the lack of student preparedness for the workplace due to the use of current pedagogical models of traditional assessment while indicating the need for authentic learning experiences and assessment to prepare the higher education graduate for future employment. There is a plenitude of researchers investigating the reason(s) attributed to a student’s lack of ability to present fundamental skills upon post-graduation hiring. There is dissatisfaction from business industry employers recognizing the post-graduate new hires have a lack of KSAs to function at the most basic level in a workplace setting. The literature review focused on the concept of authentic learning and assessment of these skills during a student’s tenure at an institution of higher education. Literature spanning the last seven years established a link between the use of traditional assessments and the lack of student ability to perform necessary skills at work. Peer-review articles present elements to consider implementing for authentic teaching, learning, and assessment in the higher education
classroom. First, research has shown instructors are less likely to utilize authentic pedagogy due to the additional time and effort required to teach effectively in this manner (Alquraan, 2012; Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012). Secondly, data have shown students are unaware of the skills they lack upon graduation. Research supports the misperception that students hold in which the curriculum provided would adequately prepare each student for the workplace and become disenchanted when work cannot is quickly obtained post-graduation (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015). A common theme has emerged from the literature that further research is needed to support the implementation of authentic assessment pedagogy is vital to the success of the higher education graduate, preparing the learner for a successful experience in the workplace.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to Research Methodology

College graduates do not demonstrate fully developed business KSAs when seeking post-graduation employment in the workplace. Employers show concern for the lack of professional competence in recent graduates seeking entry-level positions (Ahmad, 2017; Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Sulphey, 2015). Business professionals also indicate a dissatisfaction with the lack of instruction from an institution of higher learning relating to the core business skills most often absent from the position-seeking candidates (Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Sulphey, 2015).

Studies have consistently supported the employer-recognized lack of student preparedness in business KSAs upon graduation from institutions of higher learning (Ahmad, 2017; Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Sulphey, 2015); concurrently, researchers indicate the stated general dissatisfaction of employers noticing the poor instruction from institution of higher learning relating to the core business skills missing from the position-seeking candidates (Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Sulphey, 2015). Therefore, it was essential to examine the current teaching practices and use of traditional learning assessments and the paradigm-shift to authentic assessment pedagogy to prepare students in college programs for post-graduation employment.

Although employers suggested the lack of foundational business skills stems from poor preparation in the classroom, the pedagogical approaches to authentic assessment in higher education have not yet been thoroughly examined. Based on such reasoning, importance on the appropriate methodological research method was determined to allow for examination of the perceived value and use of authentic assessment by the business instructors to allow for
demonstration of learning by the students. Creswell and Poth (2018) described qualitative research as assumptions and the use of theoretical frameworks to inform research problems in which individuals or groups of individuals ascribe to a human or social issue. Mertler (2019) added that qualitative research methods use the inductive approach, which develops general conclusions from a limited number of experiences or observations. This study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological case study design to systematically collect various data from the participants to explain the phenomena of unpreparedness in skills, knowledge, and abilities. The use of this research methodology exposed the current underlying perceptions that can be nurtured to influence future behavior and teaching methods for business employment preparedness in the classroom (McMillan, 2016). An examination took place as to whether the students of the targeted school engage in authentic assessment for KSAs associated with the learning outcomes as defined within the programs.

Chapter 3 presented the steps taken to conduct qualitative research. The series of open-ended questions presented in this chapter were distributed to each participant through a semistructured interview and questionnaire. The purpose and design of the study were addressed followed by the research population and sampling method. Instrumentation and data collection procedures were identified. Identification of attributes and data analysis procedures were also discussed. The chapter presents possible limitations of the research design. Validation of the research results was reflected through an analysis of credibility and dependability. Expected findings are divulged and substantiated. Finally, any potential ethical issues were addressed followed by a closing summary of the chapter content.
Research Questions

Three open-ended questions guided this phenomenological case study. The initial research questions provided the basis for the query, and the collection methods helped to gather data to develop codes and themes that emerged from the participant’s responses. Specifically, the research questions determined if and how instructors are using authentic assessment in the classroom and the impact testing has on the demonstrable business KSAs of the students post-graduation. The questions were designed to be open-ended (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) guided by the study’s literature review and conceptual framework, which in turn cultivated exploration and discovery of the essence of the central phenomenon (McMillan, 2016).

The study’s foundation was constructed by the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do business program professors describe their current instructional and assessment practices in educating collegiate business students?

RQ 2: How are business programs using course assessments to measure the demonstrable business skill level of their students?

RQ 3: How do business program professors describe their curricular and assessment practices in the context of validating students’ skills for the job market?

The design of the research questions narrows down the purpose statement allowing for a fuller exploration of the study topic (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Purpose and Design of the Study

This phenomenological case study was designed to discover if business school educators at institutions of higher learning recognize the value of using authentic assessment practices as preparation for graduates seeking future employment in a business setting. Through the lens of authentic assessment, it was not known whether the value of authentic assessment pedagogy is
recognized in course development and how the practice contributes to the collegiate student learner's successful academic experience. The rationale for this study was to gain an understanding of the use of authentic assessment to support the development of KSAs of post-graduate students allowing each to be more fully prepared to perform essential job duties upon hiring. The intention of the study was to fill a gap in the research about implementing authentic assessment in the classroom to prepare students for real-world application of KSAs in the workplace.

The decision to use the phenomenological case study approach stemmed from the interest in a philosophical discussion on instructor perception of the academic viewpoint of authentic assessment and to garner an in-depth understanding about the innocently perpetrated and unrecognized situation of ill-prepared graduates entering the workforce (Creswell, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Yin (2018) supports the decision to use the case study method for research as the “how and why” questions presented to allow for the explanation of a contemporary circumstance (p. 8). Additionally, the relevancy of using a case study method is a more practical approach as the questions posed “will require extensive and ‘in-depth’ description” of the phenomenon (p. 2). Yin also indicated the case study approach inherently tries to expose a decision or decisions revealing why these choices were made, how they were subsequently implemented, and to what end. The combination of the characteristics of a case study as described should render a clearer understanding of the current assessment methods used currently by instructors in the classroom while also revealing the reasons behind abstaining from the use of authentic assessment practices.

Ongoing assessment approaches and pedagogical methods prompted the investigative approach to recognize the influence of these factors on the lack of student preparedness in
workplace acumen. The literature is replete with the expressed need for suitably educated students who seek work post-graduation in a business environment (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2019; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012). Previous studies showed a correlational relationship between the lack of learned fundamental business skills, knowledge, and abilities and the disenchantment of the hiring managers seeking to employ new graduates into business positions (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Sulphey, 2015). Further research demonstrated instructor and institution hesitation in utilizing the authentic assessment theory due to the perceived difficulty in the paradigm-shift, thereby resulting in an overwhelming number of under-prepared students seeking employment post-graduation (Ghosh et al., 2017; Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012). Accordingly, this study was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the underpinnings of the lack of use of authentic assessment in the college classroom. The use of authentic assessment is supported throughout the literature as a challenge to faculty and institutions to provide valuable and transferrable learning opportunities for the students (Bechtold et al., 2018; Yilmaz, 2017).

**Qualitative phenomenological case study.** The use of a phenomenological case study approach served as the design of the study. The strategy worked well in gaining a clearer understanding of current assessment methods used in the classroom as well as the perception of the authentic assessment theory as a new pedagogical approach to teaching. The use of the cross-sectional method of inquiry allowed for collecting extensive narratives from instructors in current classroom assessment practices, institutional focus on priority ranking of assessment within the school, and perceptions of the use of authentic assessment as a more robust alternative to evaluate learning (Creswell, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; McMillan, 2016; Mertens, 2020).
Open-ended questioning provided clarity to currently used assessment practices in the classroom and what obstacles prevent authentic assessment implementation. The qualitative approach examined and explored the central phenomenon in the subjects’ natural setting without leading, manipulating, or controlling responses, thereby developing a composite description of the experience as may be experienced by all individuals in similar environments (Creswell, 2013; McMillan, 2016).

The use of the traditional case study method would not allow for the lived experiences within the phenomenon being studied to become evident through investigation. Although this study was bound and thereby allowing it to be a case study, there was not a particular case that invoked the investigative nature of the phenomenon. Similarly, the use of the ethnographic approach would not satisfactorily answer the research question as it was not focused on the participant’s core values and beliefs but rather lived experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2013).

A variety of inquiry methods were employed, allowing for the in-depth perception of practices and behaviors of both institutional leadership and instructors relating to the use of authentic assessment as a measurement of learning. The phenomenological aspect of the case study was designed to encourage and challenge participants to provide robust responses in both written and verbal detail relating to personal lived experiences with assessment. The use of the phenomenological method proved valuable, as the answers presented by the subjects about work experiences provided a clearer understanding of individual experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2013). An added value of the phenomenological research method included the use of the three-interview series in which the subject’s lived experiences were investigated in the first interview, the second interview honed in on the study topic of authentic assessment via a
questionnaire, with the final engagement encouraging participants to reflect on the accurate meaning of their transcribed experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Additionally, the phenomenological approach allowed for an expansion of what is learned from the responses rather than setting limits on what is studied opposing what is generally shown more often in a quantitative study approach (McMillan, 2016). Further, the study approach required the practice of bracketing by the researcher, thereby allowing the focus to remain solely on the experiences of the study participants (Creswell, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Finally, the study method allowed for the discovery of the obstacles preventing the paradigm-shift to the more advanced authentic assessment pedagogical practices (McMillan, 2012).

The empirical study was appropriate through the minimization of the influence of subjectivity and bias of the researcher as it focused on the stated objective to scrutinize current assessment practices and avoidance of authentic assessment practices (McMillan, 2012). Subjects were interviewed through both verbal and written instruments revealing lived experiences with assessment practices. Private telephone or web conferences were conducted, a written response type questionnaire was disseminated and returned, an opportunity was provided for a random selection of participants to review transcribed conversations for accuracy, and a review of journal notes also proved to be invaluable to the study. An examination and combination of a wide array of source data utilized in research spawned more in-depth questions with the results of those questions sparking additional queries, and the cycle of research progress continues thereby building on classic and current research studies assisting in the refinement of the research area (Adams & Lawrence, 2019). Additionally, employing the data collection circle approach suggested by Creswell (2013) allowed participants and the researcher to develop a rapport with one another, thereby providing multiple points of entry with the subjects as
necessary so that by permitting such flexibility to the process contributed to the rendering of useful data input.

Obtaining specific descriptions from participants directly associated with the phenomenon provided detailed accounts for the study through the results of the interview and questionnaire responses. The interactions with the participants included 60-minute interviews conducted through telephone or web conferencing. A questionnaire of five items was disseminated after the initial meetings as open-end questions encouraged substantive responses. The participants completed the survey and returned it via a secure program, Qualtrics. An opportunity was provided for a random selection of participants to review the transcription notes from the interview for accuracy. The data were coded multiple times manually to substantiate the researcher’s first and second cycle coding to uncover patterns and themes contributing to the understanding and current avoidance of implementing authentic assessment practices in the classroom. The practice of the phenomenological study method allowed for the expression of the subject’s experiences resulting in a complete understanding of the topical phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

**Research Population and Sampling Method**

**Participant selection and sampling.** The source of evidence in the empirical study was a derivative of the data collected from participants and journal gathered for the analysis of the results. The careful selection of the participants using purposeful sampling methods was based on academic characteristics including highest degree held, length of service at the institution, position within the institution, past behaviors observed indirectly in the classroom, professional traits, and work performance was needed to determine how the elements could potentially influence the findings as they directly related to the institution set as the focus of the study.
(McMillan, 2016). The sampling method used was clear of bias and maximized external validity of the study. Attention was given to select the sample population through the purposeful sampling strategy.

Purposeful sampling provides the opportunity to investigate each participant in the representative population individually extracting pointed responses and detail-rich information stemming from personal experience related to the authentic assessment phenomenon (McMillan, 2016). The representative population was selected from the staff and faculty roster of an institution of higher education in the northeastern region of the United States. Subject matter experts in business, professors of business, and institutional administrative staff with over two years of practical experience were recruited to engage in the study. Anticipating willing engagement in the research, 12 faculty participants who directly report to the Business Program Chair, five subject matter experts, and five members of the institution’s academic administrative staff comprised the study population. An initial email was sent inviting each individual to participate, with those responding in the affirmative receiving a subsequent telephone call to confirm full participation throughout the length of the study. The first 10 business program faculty respondents, three subject matter experts in business and three academic administrative staff respondents’ input were used to gather data for analysis. The remaining two participants from each population were considered “stand-by” in the event an individual from the demographic discontinued participation in the study. Examination of each of the selected participants reviewed knowledge based on academic credentials, length of educational experience, highest level of education, and ability to provide meaningful reflection to assist in the investigative process through the means of web conferencing and a written response to the questionnaire.
The research site institution serves a student population seeking degrees from the associate level to doctorate. Founded in the early 1900s as a finance institute with over a century of training students. Offering 17 programs and six certifications, students from all levels of society and across the globe can participate in classes. The institution’s academic leadership hierarchy includes the President, Provost, Assistant Provost, Dean, Program Chair, Assistant Program Chair, and faculty. Faculty are required to have substantiated credit hours of 18 or more in the area they are assigned to instruct students. A minimum of a master’s degree is required to teach at the associate and bachelor level while a terminal degree in the subject area is necessary to teach in the master’s and doctorate programs. Subject matter experts are identified and selected from current faculty who are either have previously or are currently teaching the course in question as well as having obtained the proper academic or professional credentialing to earn the title of subject matter expert. Should the need arise for a subject matter expert for a class and no faculty member is qualified, a search through academic venues ensues until a suitable match is found.

Permission from the Provost of the institution allowed the study to be conducted within the institution’s staff census to develop the study’s participant pool. No further approvals or reviews were required to engage with members of the institutional staff. Once approval from the Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board (IRB) had been obtained, electronic correspondence was drafted and sent to each active and stand-by participant to describe the intended study, offer an invitation to take part, and instructions for agreeing to contribute to the research. The electronic correspondence also indicated the need for an expeditious response, the intended duration of the study, and all ethical protocols that were in place. All electronic
communication has been printed for a hard copy and filed in a secure location in a fire-proof safe.

The computer system used was private and secure with all original files being saved to an external hard drive which is housed in a secure, fire-proof safe. Additionally, a backup copy of all study-related computer files has been stored on floppy disks which are also secured in a fire-proof safe. A master list of all materials and information gathered has been placed with the secured hard copies and disks relating to the study and stored under lock and key in a fireproof safe, which shall remain with the researcher’s primary office location (Creswell, 2013). Confidentiality has been encouraged amongst the participants within the confines of the brick-and-mortar school and electronic communication to prevent sway or bias through contact.

Participants were not made purposefully aware of others taking part in the study. In the event a mass email distribution was required for fast dissemination to the group of participants, each participant's email address was be entered in the blind copy (bcc) field to demonstrate adherence to the protocol of confidentiality.

**Instrumentation**

Once permission was granted by the Provost of the study’s institution, the instrumentation review and data collection began to proceed. The primary data source was the one-on-one conversations as semistructured interviews taking place between the researcher and each participant individually either in teleconference or web conference, each being captured by video conferencing software, which provided for immediate transcription of the interview needed as documentation (Creswell, 2013). The semistructured format was chosen as the style allowed for more flexibility in questioning, than would the structured interviews. Using the semistructured technique also potentially allowed for the opportunity to ask additional questions
which could lead to new thought processes or further information which may not have already come to mind in the initial development of the instrument (Adams & Lawrence, 2019; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; McMillan, 2016). The element of social desirability (Adams & Lawrence, 2019) did not interfere with the line of questioning as the respondents were answering with mostly personal fact, not preference.

Specific interview methods often come with added benefits to the research process (Creswell, 2019; McMillian, 2016; Yin, 2018). Using the video conferencing method, this format allowed for nonverbal cues to be observed, adding a layer of information. Therefore, the option to interview via traditional telephone communication would have only been used as a last resort as this platform prohibits witnessing nonverbal cues. One participant encountered technical difficulties in which the researcher was unable to see the research on the screen; however, the participant’s image was seen on the researcher’s monitor and therefore captured electronically. The decision to proceed in this manner averted having to use the telephone as a means of communication. Interviews also allowed for immediate clarification of an unclear response as well as produced follow-on questions to probe deeper into the response as necessary (Adams & Lawrence, 2019). The interviews were conducted using a 10-item instrument (see Appendix A). The questions were developed from current literature related to assessment practices, desired KSAs as identified by employers, and student capabilities (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Ghosh et al., 2017; Hayati, et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012). The interviews were set using a scheduling application and took place over two weeks in October 2019.

Additionally, a secondary source questionnaire was available via Qualtrics to the same participants identified in the interview process (see Appendix B). The instrument was designed
to delve deeper into the individual thoughts and experiences of the individuals in their capacity as it related to authentic assessment in academia. The questionnaire was constructed using five open-ended questions once again, allowing for a free flow of participant thought and not a guided or manipulative trajectory derived from bias from the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The instrument was field tested by two individuals each holding a Doctor of Philosophy and each having strong knowledge in business administration. The individuals were asked to scrutinize for clarity, meaning and to provide an informed opinion regarding the questionnaire overall (Mertens, 2015). Each responded in their capacity as academics the questions were of high quality and measured for intended data. Concurrently, continued additions to and review of journal notes, as an additional primary data source, took place during the interviews.

**Data Collection**

Collected data for this study included the results of one-on-one interviews, questionnaires, and a review of journal notes as these elements became available. All source data were collected through the study’s selected institution of higher learning. The Provost of the college granted permission for the interview time spent with the study’s participants (see Appendix C). The participants each received electronic correspondence describing the intentions of the study, an invitation to contribute as a participant, and further instructions if it is agreeable to contribute to the research. Through guided and purposeful methods, the data collection procedures utilized the core open-ended research questions method in both the interviews and questionnaire, allowing the opportunity of a conversation rather than cued responses in the query of the participants.

**One-on-one interviews.** One-on-one semistructured interviews took place through a web conference as this provided recording capability for later playback and automated transcription
purposes (Creswell, 2013). The decision to use web conferencing in which a visual observation of the participant allowed the added level of nonverbal information gathering through observational measures (Adams & Lawrence, 2019). Using the semistructured format presented a more conversational atmosphere averting the use of guided questions seeking a standard response. Facilitating the conversation in this semistructured style also provided the opportunity to ask the participants additional items not already considered in the creation of the first instrument (Adams & Lawrence, 2019; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; McMillan, 2016). The element of social desirability (Adams & Lawrence, 2019) did not interfere with the line of questioning as the respondents answered with mostly personal fact, not preference. One-on-one interviews also introduced the opportunity for immediate clarification of unclear feedback as well as produce follow-on questions to gain clarity of the reply (Adams & Lawrence, 2019).

**Questionnaire.** A written questionnaire constructed in Qualtrics pertained to authentic assessment, which ultimately proved essential to addressing the research problem. By completing the questionnaire after the one-on-one interviews, this allowed each participant to address further topics discussed from the individual conversations that could prove additionally beneficial to the overall study. The instrument was kept as short as possible while still extracting needed information to contribute to the research. The instructions for completion were straightforward and specific to accommodate any participant who may be unfamiliar with this style of questioning or in using the Qualtrics program. The questions were designed to be clear and straightforward in nature and avoided the use of ambiguous language.

Additionally, the constructed question stems did not provide clues nor provided queuing to the participant to respond in a desirable or preferred way, thus manipulating the results of the study. As necessary, some question stems were re-constructed to check for consistency of
response and spread throughout the questionnaire (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). A pilot test was conducted to determine the validity of the questionnaire prior to its dissemination to the participant group (Yin, 2018). Finally, the appearance of the questionnaire was made attractive and professional, appearing to not only demonstrate the seriousness of the research but also for the demonstration of respect of the participants in their professional position of expertise (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

Identification of Attributes

**Authentic assessment.** Critical aspects of the study centered around the purpose and function of authentic assessment pedagogy (Bechtold et al., 2018; Rahman & Majumder, 2014; Walters et al., 2017; Yilmaz, 2017). Embracing the paradigm-shift away from traditional assessment in which students are required to regurgitate textbook information, instructors of higher education courses previously indicated trepidation in moving away from tried-and-true methods of testing citing lack of understanding in the assessment process and the additional training required to develop and deliver the more robust testing instruments. Moreover, the extra amount of time required of the instructor to accurately grade the student submissions played a significant role in the lack of willingness to move forward to provide a complete learning experience for the student (Alquraan, 2012; Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012). The research questions were designed to reveal more details of the hesitancy and resistance of moving toward a more authentic assessment experience.

**Higher education business program.** Numerous institutions of higher learning offer business programs described in course catalogs as preparation for a job in the world of business post-graduation. Programs range from general business to specializations in management, international trade, marketing, accounting, and quality systems management (Boston College
Carroll School of Management website, 2019; Colorado State University Academic Programs website, 2019; The University of Alabama 2019-20 Academic Catalog website, n.d.). While the programs appear to offer the educational opportunity to learn the many facets of the business world, it is not clear whether students are taught and subsequently assessed for authentic learning, thus requiring a demonstration of the tasks mastered. The curriculum available to the student is rich; however, evidence shows the course assessment tools are not designed to truly recognize if learning has indeed taken place through the use of authentic assessment (Alquraan, 2012; Jimaa, 2011).

**Work skills.** Employers of business personnel set forth expectations of minimal professional competence with the anticipation of performance upon the new-hire’s first day of work (Ahmad, 2017). The work skills in which employers anticipate the recent graduates have developed some level of mastery and should demonstrate upon hiring as having been learned throughout the recent completion of a business program from an institute of higher learning. Employers anticipated the evidence of developed fundamental business skills and not to be obtained through on-the-job training (Sulphey, 2015).

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis is more than just the possible approaches to analyzing text. Considering Creswell’s Data Analysis Spiral (2019), the elements of data collection, analysis, and report writing are interrelated and often are performed concurrently during the period of the research project. The initial step in the spiral required converting the various forms of data, such as transcribing the initial verbal interview into consistent formats for ease of use in future steps in the analysis process. The preliminary organization of the data in this manner enabled a more expeditious method of information identification and location as the analysis proceeded to evolve
as interpretations and development of visual representations of the data took place at the final stage of the spiral. The practice of reading the data multiple times in an attempt to understand the overarching sense of the transcribed and written responses before the deconstruction of the content into smaller parts for reading and memoing followed by the two-cycle coding practice. Care was taken to recognize the distinct processes were all interrelated and were often performed simultaneously (Creswell, 2016). At the conclusion of the interviews, two randomly selected participants were asked to engage in the practice of member checking transcripts which were subsequently emailed to the personal address provided to ensure the accuracy of transcription (McMillan, 2016). A colleague was asked to review the coding and analysis to provide an alternative perspective as necessary. An audit trail in the form of a journal was also established to provide verification of research activities and to add information to the literature for others who may wish to conduct a similar study in the future (Leedy & Omrod, 2019).

**Reading and memoing.** The initially organized data provided the pathway to the analysis of the information allowing for a continuation of evolvement as a broader sense of the entire database began to come into focus. The initial immersion into the details of the information allowed for the data source to be viewed as a whole before the deconstruction of the content into logical parts took place. During the immersion, memos written in the margins reflected short phrases, key concepts, or ideas that sparked while reading the content. These memos served as more than descriptive data summaries but also as an attempt to synthesize the data into higher analytical meaning. This practice assisted significantly in the total exploration of the content of the database. Additionally, the efforts spent memoing later provided an audit trail for future retrieval and examination to validate strategy for the documentation of thought processes and for clarity in understanding overall (Saldaña, 2016).
**First cycle coding.** Coding is the practice of symbolically assigning an attribute to a word or short phrase to a portion of language or visual data (Saldaña, 2016). The first cycle coding of the first data set took place directly following the transcription of the one-on-one interviews. Additionally, the first cycle coding of each of the journal notes and returned questionnaires also took place promptly upon possession of the documents. The process of the first cycle coding divided the data into one of the seven subcategories of methods, which was theming. To discover a clear understanding of the relationship between authentic assessment and student preparedness post-graduation, detailed notes, transcribed interviews, questionnaire results, and journal notes were coded systematically and then examined for emerging themes in the conversations, responses, and documents. Organizing the thematic data from the interviews and questionnaires was crucial to categorize as viewpoints, explanations, understanding, feelings, hesitancies, and aversions to moving toward an authentic assessment classroom environment. Recording and transcribing the conversations proved to be a critical factor in the phenomenological case study’s analysis of data. Clarity, understanding, and accuracy of information retrieved and transcribed during the course of the interviews and through the documentation obtained were easier to revisit as a review of the data allowed for repetition and in perpetuity in this format (Saldaña, 2016).

**Second cycle coding.** The second cycle of coding required logically linking facts from the first cycle coding that initially appear unrelated to one another. The results of the first cycle coding, coupled with second cycle codes allowed for data organization by the basis of themes, categories, theories and/or concepts. Familiarity with the coding processes, the practice of second cycle coding would define the major components of the final write up of the data as it related to the stated research questions. A review of the data ensured the themes fully supported...
the information across the different mediums. As final construction began of the basis of the theory introducing the phenomena and sense was made of the collected data, conclusions then started to form as they would collectively contribute in response to the initial research questions posed at the beginning of the study (Saldaña, 2016).

**Electronic coding.** In an attempt to electronically check for manual coding oversights, consideration of the use of the Atlas.ti program took place. The codes and subsequent themes identified by the researcher’s manual exercise were to be supported by the electronic coding results. Intended for use as a confirmation of the manually coded data, Atlas.ti proved to be a redundancy of effort, highly time consuming, and therefore rejected in conjunction with manual coding procedures.

**Limitations of the Research Design**

Possible limitations to the research design were foremost the dependency on the participants to complete the interview and questionnaire process. As the intended sample size was small, and the study as designed as a single case, abatement of data saturation could occur. Additionally, a truncation of potential themes may become evident as they related to the stated research questions. Furthermore, if the participants decide to leave the study in mid-progress, there will be a lower rate of return on the requested information. A third possible limitation may include poorly developed, incorrect, or a lack of response to a question due to misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the question’s intent. A final potential limitation concerning the participants was the honesty level in with genuine experience and not what may be considered preferred in the academic setting (McMillan, 2016). Substantiation of honesty is not confirmable in this study; the participants appeared willing to share information that could ultimately be
incorporated into the classroom settings to increase the value of the learning experience for each student of the studied institution.

Another study limitation may have included the researcher’s professional bias as it relates to a background in assessment in the institute of higher learning setting (Leedy & Omrod, 2019). More specifically, in the experience in academia as a ranking member of an administrative team at the collegiate level as a Program Director. Often exposed to the visible results of poorly designed assessment practices and the impact on demonstrable KSAs of the recent graduates, the researcher implemented bracketing to prevent such bias from influencing the overall data outcomes. Bracketing also assisted in preventing bias as the researcher, in previous work experience, was administratively positioned to be in contact with external business personnel who hired the recent graduates. Predetermined thoughts held by the researcher were bracketed allowing greater insight into the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2019). Engagement of the services of a trusted colleague to conduct a peer debriefing to review the data and themes to identify researcher bias that could have been present took place at the conclusion of the analysis of the data (McMillan, 2016). It was determined bias did not influence the study results.

Reticence stemming from the institution of higher learning’s administrative team was possibly anticipated but did not come to pass. As the whole of the institution’s academic and administrative team were engaged in a physical move of the school’s location as well as enormous changes in staff positions and responsibilities, all while meeting the requirements of the accrediting agency and new owner of the school, it was feared as the study progressed and thus further permissions to gather information or conduct additional research may have met with resistance as other administrative personnel were made aware of the further research attempts and time taken away from the institutional needs could present pressure to stop the data
gathering procedures already in progress. Fortunately, this limitation was never an issue as all research was performed outside the set core working hours of the institution. Maintaining an open channel of communication with the Provost also prevented any appearance of interference of workflow as the status of the project was updated routinely with a projected end date, thereby alleviating the concern of constant interruption of work for an undetermined period. A further limitation as it relates to the institution is the core faculty asked to participate may limit findings, and a quantitative study may have to be conducted with a larger group allowing the results to be transferrable to other institutional settings.

A final imitation that may occur in the process of this study comes from the core faculty of the institution who will be approached to engage in the research process. The participants who choose to agree to participate in the study are either colleagues or indirect reports to me in the organizational hierarchy of the institution. Participants will be reassured participation will in no way reflect on the working relationship the individual has with the institution. However, the study as may provide insight into the thought processes of assessment of current faculty and provide insight into hiring characteristics to seek in further faculty hiring opportunities.

**Research Validation**

The triangulation of data to be obtained through interviews, questionnaires, and member checking indicated clear themes of the use and perception of the authentic assessment pedagogy in the higher educational classroom (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The use of triangulation allowed for the transference of the findings to other institutions with the same demographic makeup of the administration, subject matter experts, and faculty. Triangulation also demonstrated the study’s findings are credible (McMillan, 2016).
The practice of peer debriefing at the conclusion of the research provides an external check of the research process (Creswell, 2016). The debriefing allowed the individual not affiliated with the study the opportunity to give the stamp of credibility, stating congruency between the data and the results. Attention to a possible refinement of the hypothesis as a negative case analysis would uncover evidence that does not easily fit within an already identified theme or code. The use of rich, thick descriptions allowed for a deeper engagement with the participants as lived experiences were discussed. The resulting stories of the participants identified as rich as the details provided were abundant and demonstrated the interconnectivity of information. The practice of member checking was employed to solicit two randomly selected participants’ input after the review of the findings and interpretations concluded. The use of this practice allowed for a judgement of accuracy and credibility of the account as transcribed and interpreted into the research findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; McMillan, 2016). Finally, to validate the reliability of the responses to multiple coder sets, two highly-educated individuals not related to the institution of study nor were involved in the study as a participant were recruited to review and assess all questions and protocols used in the phenomenological case study (Creswell, 2013).

**Expected Findings**

It was highly anticipated that the answers to the initial research questions and from the one-on-one interviews and questionnaires provided to the study participants would be found. An expectation to uncover the lack of knowledge and willingness of instructors to engage in the use of authentic assessment practices to assess true learning in the classroom was hoped for by the researcher. Moreover, it was anticipated the study would contribute to the research and lessen the gap relating to the use of such practices as a means to provide a more robust and beneficial
learning experience for the college student resulting in better preparation for employment upon graduation.

**Ethical Issues**

Consideration took place to potential ethical issues before the onset of the study. Care was taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants and the institution to prevent possible repercussions in the workplace from responses made. All electronic correspondence was addressed to a personal email address not affiliated with the institution. The addresses were received through a secure email. An effort was made to remain honest and transparent with the intent of the study so as not to mislead the participants during questioning nor fabricating data to manipulate a conclusion. Finally, the presentation of the invitation to engage as a participant in the study was solicited purely voluntarily and not in any way related to continued employment with the institution (Booth, Colomb, Williams, Bizup, & FitzGerald, 2016; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The original or copy of any document collected from a participant was stored in a fireproof safe under lock and key and will remain so for a period of three years after the study, followed by its destruction by incineration.

**Conflict of interest assessment.** The potential for conflict of interest of the participants was made clear at the onset of the study. All doubts of impartiality and objectivity of the responses were removed through the means of transparency of the decisions made to conduct the research and to those who were selected to participate. It was requested that a participant feels obligated to announce any potential conflict of interest, which could have occurred or may have visibly emerge during the course of the study (Henriikka, 2017). No conflicts of interest presented.
**Researcher’s position.** Imperative to the validity of the study, the researcher’s transparency remained apparent through all phases of the study. Therefore, bracketing methods were employed throughout the research and analysis phases to remove any researcher bias that may have occurred. A clear statement to the participants indicated the information provided would be used solely and in its entirety without the inclusion of the researcher’s thoughts and opinions. A continued sense professionalism traditionally found between a researcher and research participants remained at the conclusion of the study and published findings (Booth et al., 2016).

**Summary**

The objective of the qualitative phenomenological case study is to examine whether college business majors are authentically taught and assessed and whether business school educators place value on these practices to prepare students for employment in business post-graduation. Chapter 3 presented the steps used to conduct the intended research. Several initial open-ended questions were devised and broken down into items distributed to each participant through an interview and questionnaire exchange. The purpose and design of the study were addressed followed by the research population and sampling method. Instrumentation and data collection procedures were identified in addition to the interviews and questionnaire described above, and also the inclusion of journal notes relating to the study. Identification of attributes and data analysis procedures were also discussed. The chapter presented possible limitations of the research design. Validation of the research results were reflected through an analysis of credibility and dependability. Expected findings were shared and determined. Finally, potential ethical issues identified were to be addressed after the study; however, no ethical concerns
presented. The information and data gathered in Chapter 3 served to provide the basis for the data analysis and results in the following Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

This phenomenological case study was designed to discover if business school educators at institutions of higher learning recognize the value of using authentic assessment practices as preparation for graduates seeking future employment in a business setting. It is not known if the value of the authentic learning and assessment method contribute to the collegiate student’s successful academic experience is recognized by those who create or approve the content and curriculum delivered in the business program courses.

The following three research questions propelled the research:

RQ 1: How do business program professors describe their current instructional and assessment practices in educating collegiate business students?

RQ 2: How are business programs using course assessments to measure the demonstrable business skill level of their students?

RQ 3: How do business program professors describe their curricular and assessment practices in the context of validating students’ skills for the job market?

Chapter 4 includes in-depth discussion showing the analysis performed aligning with the grounded theory methodology and the direct connection to the research questions. The research study utilized the phenomenological case study approach while employing grounded theory methodology to attempt to answer these questions. Using this method allowed the researcher to create the research instruments used to collect and examine the data to possible theories the driving research questions. While performing these actions, the investigator gathered, analyzed, and organized the information received from the study’s participants to create a rich, thick, and detailed description of the experiences of collegiate instructors with authentic assessment
pedagogy. The researcher reviewed participant’s responses seeking common keywords and phrases in the dialog relating to the authentic assessment.

Chapter 4 details the procedure employed to analyze the 16 transcripts, 16 open-ended questionnaires, and the research journal. The process followed typical qualitative protocol as described by Saldaña (2016) to assign codes and uncover themes identified in this section. Three stages of detailed analysis were conducted: (a) first cycle coding, (b) second cycle coding, and (c) theming. At each juncture of investigation, comparisons were in continuous use to further refine the data to such an extent that themes began clearly emerging from analysis. The researcher wrote copious notes during each interview while staying highly aware of personal bias and applied bracketing principles to ensure the participants' views were accurately received. A web conferencing program provided instant transcripts of the interviews which allowed the researcher to begin manual coding, memoing, and journaling practices quickly to identify emergent codes, subthemes and themes from the participant interviews. Questionnaires were delivered through Qualtrics and easily compiled into a report exported to Excel for manual coding efforts. Research journal entries spanning the duration of the research phase were also manually coded. The data collected from the 16 participants selected through purposeful sampling methods provided input which resulted in the saturation of the phenomenon for the one institution. Chapter 4 presents an explanation of the sample group, research methodology, data analysis, and concluding results followed by a summary of the findings of the study. The content of Chapter 4 also includes tables, figures, and graphics to visually present pertinent information of the study as well as key passages from the one-on-one interviews and questionnaires used to further support the key themes and results. The review of Chapter 4 provides a transition to
Chapter 5 in which the implication of the research, a discussion of the researcher’s findings, a summary of the chapter, and the conclusion are presented.

**Description of the Sample**

The study took place at an institution of higher education in the northeastern region of the United States which employs over 100 instructors (full-time and adjunct) and approximately 40 staff members. The researcher drew upon the experiences of a representative population of subject matter experts in business, professors of business, and institutional administrative staff with a minimum of two years of practical experience in the collegiate business classroom.

Sixteen participants were selected to participate in this study. The total years of experience in academia varied among the sample population. Three participants with over 30 years of experience represented 19% of the sample size. Six participants indicating 20–30 years of academic experience represented approximately 38% of the sample size. Six participants stating 10–19 years of experience in academic comprised approximately 38% of the sample size. The remaining participant who stated 2–9 years of academic work reflected > 1% of the sample size.

Nineteen percent of the sample population indicated the length of service at the research site was between 15 and more than 30 years. The remaining pool of 13 participants, 81% of the sample population, had been employed at the institution between 2 and 14 years. Therefore, the combined years in academia averaged 20.4 years of experience in higher education, and the combined years of service at the institution of study averaged about 9.3 years. Appendix C presents a graphic display on sample size years of academic experience and years of service.

As the study institution and participants were to remain nameless, each participant was assigned a “P” number to protect their identity. The sample was comprised of 12 faculty participants who directly report to the Business Program Chair, five subject matter experts, and
five members of the institution’s academic administrative staff which comprised the study population. An initial email was sent inviting each individual to participate with those who responded in the affirmative received a subsequent email to a personal email address to confirm full participation throughout the length of the study. The first 10 business program faculty members, three subject matter experts in business, and three academic administrative staff to respond were deemed as “primary” as active participants to gather data for analysis. The remaining two participants from each population were considered “stand-by” in the event an individual from the initial demographic group left the study.

Each of the selected participants were first examined by the researcher for selection by reviewing posted biographies in the classroom and personal interaction with the researcher for knowledge based on academic credentials, length of academic experience within the study institution, and ability to provide meaningful reflection to assist in the investigative process through the means of web conferencing and a written response to the questionnaire. All participants have earned a master’s degree (seven participants) or terminal degree (nine participants), and each has experience in the business environment as well as in academia. Three participants have over 30 years of experience in academia. One participant attributed 32 years of association with the institution of study. The least amount of years of experience in academia held by one participant is nine years. The least amount of years of experience within the study institution stems from two participants who each noted two years of service with the school. The average number of years the 16 primary participants indicated as engaged with academia is 20.43 years, with the average number of years associated with the research institution as 9.37 years.
Research Methodology and Analysis

The intent of the study was to identify and understand more fully if collegiate business educators at institutions of higher learning recognize the value of using authentic assessment practices as preparation for graduates seeking future employment in a business setting. Using a phenomenological case study approach and through the lens of Wiggins’ (1990) authentic assessment theory, the researcher collected data through the means of one-on-one interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and reflective journaling throughout the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The live one-on-one interviews were conducted in 30 minutes to one hour conferences over the GoToMeeting program in which the participant could be seen allowing the researcher to observe nonverbal cues during the interview process. The open-ended questionnaires were provided through the Qualtrics program allowing for secure transmission of the recorded responses.

Once collected, the data were analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of the authentic assessment phenomenon, specifically the use of the pedagogy by those who teach or create business curriculum for the collegiate classroom. Current literature does not adequately address instructor’s exposure to or utilization of authentic assessment for learning in the college classroom. As Hayati, et al. (2017) noted, “many thought that the assessment system was quite complex, and as a result they faced challenges in the implementation” (p. 54). Moreover, Perrotta (2017) stated the learner-centered approach needs to separate from the idea of learning as a conduit of knowledge from an instructor to a student but rather towards a more self-regulated learning process taken on by the learner allowing for the demonstration of high quality work. Therefore, the researcher employed the methods of the phenomenological case study approach to investigate the participants’ experiences with authentic assessment with a keen interest in
recognizing whether the authentic assessment theory is understood and applied in the collegiate classroom.

**Data analysis.** The analysis of data began following the steps of the data analysis spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in which graphically displays the actions taken from the initial interviews to the identification of themes from the data. The left-most arrow indicates the phases in the research and analysis processes. The accompanying bulleted items show the actions taken during each stage as it occurred.

![Diagram of data analysis process]

*Figure 2. Process of data analysis.*

Initially, once a completed read-through of the transcripts concluded, auditing of the printed scripts for correctness occurred as the audio file replayed. Corrections to the scripts preceded the second read-through of the transcripts with the edited material, adding clarity, accuracy, and cohesiveness to the storyline.
Similarly, two read-throughs of the open-ended questionnaires occurred. The first read-through provided the researcher with an overall sense of the content. The second read-through allowed for more clarity of the responses as well as an understanding of the comments made by each participant.

**First cycle coding.** The process of coding a phenomenological case study is an arduous process when performed correctly and completely (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The first and second cycle coding process and subsequent theming for the study lasted approximately two weeks. The coding process began as the researcher dissected and analyzed the data for meaning. During the initial data analysis phase, the researcher employed attribute coding. Defined by Saldaña (2016), attribute coding is considered a grammatical coding method but should not be confused with grammar as it is not associated with language but rather logging essential information regarding characteristics of demographics and data of each participant for future use as necessary. The first cycle coding was conducted manually by the researcher with the data evaluated for placement within either predefined codes as listed in the research journal or new codes as necessary employing the deductive coding method (Saldaña, 2016; Yi, 2018). Following attribute coding, the researcher employed deductive coding and In Vivo for the first cycle coding. Several of the predefined codes were associated with identified keywords listed in Chapter 1 including (a) authentic assessment; (b) learning outcomes; and (c) rubrics. The remaining codes emerged through the review of the transcripts and questionnaires.

A second method employed during the first cycle coding was In Vivo coding. Saldaña (2016) described In Vivo coding as a means for the researcher to attune one’s self to a participant's perspective and action. In Vivo coding is also referred to by Saldaña (2016) as verbatim coding, the process allowed codes to emerge as stated by the participants. A notable
attribute of In Vivo coding is not only the appropriateness for virtually all qualitative studies but, moreover, the simplicity in using the words of the participants to create codes by the novice researcher (Saldaña, 2016).

**Second cycle coding.** Saldaña (2016) stated the primary goal of second cycle coding is the development of an organization of the data based on themes, concepts, or theories. The first cycle coding’s purpose was to summarize segments of data. Second cycle coding required the researcher to group the segment summaries into a fewer number of categories. Therefore, codes extracted from the first cycle coding process were reorganized to develop a more select list of codes that subsequently created a second set of codes. The pattern coding process identified similarly coded data providing the researcher the opportunity to assign meaning to those selected codes, and thus themes and subthemes emerged (Saldaña, 2016). During second cycle coding, pattern coding methods were applied to the transcripts and questionnaires while concurrently using descriptive coding for journal notes which provided a detailed inventory of contained information. All data sources were again manually coded, and although the thought of uploading each transcript into Atlas.ti was entertained, the researcher relied on personal effort and concluding findings as more accurate and therefore chose not to employ software tools in the analysis process.

**Other analysis methods.** Creswell and Poth (2018) described analyzing text and create other data forms as a demanding task in itself, but as the researcher decided the format in which to graphically represent the data an additional level of complexity emerged. Combining the cycle coding steps as described by Saldaña (2016) for the verbiage analysis from the one-on-one interviews and open-ended questionnaires, and further memoing and coding of the research journal must all be organized allowing an ultimate interpretation to evolve from the entirety of
the data. The steps taken in the process began with the read-throughs, coding, theming, and subsequently culminating into an interpretation of the data.

The data analysis spiral more clearly defines the process of analysis; however, the items are not meant to be conducted in lock-step fashion but are merely interrelated and often occur simultaneously with one another (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As noted, the data collection provided the foundation for the research process. The researcher then began to manage and organize all data simultaneously, reading and memoing in the margins ideas which emerged during the review of the content. Additionally, engaging the cycle coding processes resulted in themes allowing further development of the assessment of the interpretation of information. The last step prior accounting for the findings was creating representations and graphics thereby demonstrating the data visually.

**Summary of the Findings**

The foundational research question driving this qualitative study sought to identify the value collegiate business educators attributed to authentic assessment for learning as a preparation for graduates seeking future employment in a business setting. The 16 participants involved in the study provided rich detail from the individual experiences with this phenomenon. This resulted in the following four major themes and 10 subthemes as noted in Table 1.
Table 1

Summary of Major Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Practices</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement of Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor Autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Assessment</td>
<td>Instructor Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rubrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Creation</td>
<td>Influence in Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill Validation</td>
<td>Application of Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Readiness of Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrated KSAs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research question 1. How do business program professors describe their current instructional and assessment practices in educating collegiate business students? Each participant responded during the one-on-one interview and the open-ended questionnaire with individualized instructional and assessment methodologies. Assessment practices emerged as the overarching theme with three subthemes of feedback, engagement of students by the instructor, and the use of rubrics. Table 2 provides a summary of the major and subthemes associated with Research Question 1.

Table 2

Research Question 1 Major Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Practices</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement of Students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Instructor Autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authentic Assessment</td>
<td>Instructor Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rubrics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research question 2. How are business programs using course assessments to measure the demonstrable business skill level of their students? Each participant responded in the one-on-one interview and the open-ended questionnaire with individualized instructional and assessment methodologies. Curriculum creation emerged as the overarching theme with two subthemes of influence in development and quality. Table 3 provides a summary of the major and subthemes associated with Research Question 2.

Table 3

Research Question 2 Major Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Creation</td>
<td>Influence in Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research question 3. How do business program professors describe their curricular and assessment practices in the context of validating students’ skills for the job market? Each participant responded during the one-on-one interview and the open-ended questionnaire with individualized instructional and assessment methodologies. Skill validation emerged as the overarching theme with three subthemes of application of learning, the readiness of student, and demonstrated KSAs. Table 4 provides a summary of the major and subthemes associated with Research Question 3.

Table 4

Research Question 3 Major Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill Validation</td>
<td>Application of Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Readiness of Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrated KSAs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presentation of Data and Results

The thick and rich descriptions of the participant's lived experiences involving the elements of authentic assessment were expressed in one-on-one verbal interviews and written open-ended prompts delivered as a Qualtrics questionnaire. The joint responses of the participants and the individualized description of the authentic assessment phenomenon provided detailed information and insight into assessment practices, authentic assessment, curriculum creation, and skill validation. Figure 3 graphically displays the hierarchy of the phenomenological major themes and subthemes.

Figure 3. Hierarchy of major themes and subthemes.
**Assessment practices.** The major theme of assessment practices is a term in which the description of the participant's actions in the classroom is used in assessing student learning (Wiggins, 1990). The first major theme recognized was individual assessment practices of instructors teaching collegiate business students. The data showed that participants were unaware of the pedagogy of authentic assessment for learning. As the study participants discussed assessment, I noted that they seemed to touch on certain components of the authentic assessment theory such as: (a) feedback, (b) engagement of student, and (c) instructor autonomy. Three participants, P4, P13, and P16 suggested indirectly that assessment of learning is the action in which a student’s output is measured in such a way that demonstration of the skill required which indicated learning had taken place. Nine participants, P1, P3, P5, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12, and P14, did not refer to authentic assessment as anything having to do with observing demonstrated knowledge, skills, or abilities.

However, three participants, P2, P6, and P9, clearly captured the principle of authentic assessment for learning when sharing strategies for assessing student output. One participant ardently revealed strong support for student learning in this manner.

I’ll often find when I assess college work that the students will give me textbook answers which suggests to me they are not comfortable with practical application. They can’t think critically about the topic . . . I’m interested in what you know but I’m interested in how you can apply what you know. I want to know the definitions, but I’m really interested in how you might use this. (P15)

Another participant revealed the assessment strategy was assigned by the institutional protocols for instructor grading, which closely aligns with Wiggins’ (1990) authentic assessment theory although the participant did not acknowledge of the theory the stated response.
The curriculum I typically will work from are well engineered so that the material I am attempting to teach is well-defined and clearly presented . . . outcomes for example, that we’re trying to focus on in the curriculum on a weekly basis. So I’ll work very closely from that pattern of the curriculum that’s provided and then the outcomes that are trying to be measured in the graded work with the evaluative work from that curriculum. (P8)

Several participants did not understand the concept of authentic assessment for student learning but instead applied it to the evaluation of the institution’s performance as it related to the student population. One participant explained it as follows:

Okay, so for assessment practices, my feeling is multi-methods assessment is essential so I live in fear of having singular measures or a few measures that create assumptions that are not grounded in what the reality is. (P7)

Similarly, another participant responded from the perspective of the institution and not the student as an individual learner. “We have a comprehensive approach to assessment that starts at the level of the core activity in the course and connects all the way through to the program goals for each program” (P10).

Some participants provided personal insight regarding assessment practices that focused on the teacher-centric aspect of feedback provided to the student, which, through the coding cycles, emerged as another subtheme.

**Subtheme: Feedback.** All the participants were questioned and about their assessment feedback practices in the college classroom. P4, P5, and P12 expressly indicated instructor feedback was a primary element of assessment of the student learning process. “So, I try to provide feedback when they are missing the point” (P4). “I probably provide a lot [a lot] of detailed feedback and it gets tough sometimes because I’m busy, too, but I think I owe it to them
to provide them with feedback” (P5). “Sometimes I give class feedback as well as individual feedback if I notice a bunch of patterns” (P12).

Additionally, participants indicated instructor interaction in discussion forums allowed for observation through the written word of the student’s grasp of core concepts and ability to demonstrate authentic learning through writing as well as provide feedback through communication between the instructor and the student in the forum exchange. One participant elaborated on the discussion forum activity.

Noticing how well they are doing in class . . . would consist of primarily their discussions and discussion posts how long they are engaged in the topic, how well they’re emphasizing and getting into exactly what the topic should be. (P1)

Seven participants distinctly indicated that the discussion forum was an ideal place to provide student feedback in an attempt to keep the learners on track with the topic or outcome related to the forum. P11 suggested the instructor role in the discussion forum should be as follows: “I can go through and look to make sure that students are responding. Just to get the students critical thinking going and to ensure that they are participating in the right direction of those outcomes.”

P12 plainly expressed a personal method employed in the forum to advance student learning “I try to add the thing that I think will interest them . . . that I can tie into by a good link or Youtube video. I need to start adding podcasts.”

P1 emphasized that the discussion forum was idyllic as a platform for instructor feedback and the exchange of information between the teacher and the learner.
For me primarily it is discussion questions that show how well they’re talking through the issues and responding directly to myself and what others are doing. How long they are engaged in the topic and applying it? That’s how we assess how well they’re doing. (P1)

P11 provided insight into the importance of consistency in availability and assessment feedback for all members of faculty as it related to student success in their academic career.

**Subtheme: Engagement of student.** Preparing the student for assessment prompted participants to divulge individual practices of preparing students for assessment of learning stating it worked best when the instructor engaged in discussion board activities with the students, posted class announcements, provided copious feedback in the grading process, and other teaching methods. Whereas several responses were rich in detail as to how the preparation would take place, other responses were minimal. “The methods I most utilize in preparing my students for an exam is providing them with as much feedback on all of their coursework leading up to the exam” (P16). “I use announcements to point out how to prepare, what not to do” (P13). “I send out a sample question and answer” (P10). “None, other than a general note about the upcoming exam” (P15).

I encourage my students to take good notes and utilize flashcards or mind-mapping to help them retain information. I also ask them to identify what type of learner they are so they can tailor their study strategies to their learning strength. I want my students to have a good working knowledge of the course information so they can utilize the theories and concepts in their personal and/or professional life. (P14)

Participants indicated there was little room to manipulate the curriculum to focus on the assessed elements; however, several individuals strongly supported the course outcomes as
reliable guides to direct the student towards engagement in those concepts that would be of most benefit from a learning standpoint.

P5 spoke at length regarding student engagement in the participant’s assigned courses. It is very important to establish, you know, that level of interaction, because they don’t have face-to-face and a lot of them, are so busy, you know, I can see you know they are struggling to keep up with the amount of courses they have and are, you know, they have busy lives with their families and, you know, they almost all work full time pretty much so I feel like I have to make myself available. So what I always try to do is if they respond to me, it usually pops up on my phone, and I try to get right back to them . . . so, keeping the level of engagement up as much as possible. (P5)

Additionally, P1 and P11 stated before an assignment, the expectation of the student output allowed the student to be fully prepared to functionally demonstrate learning based on crucial reviewable points during the formal assessment process. “Well, one of the most important things in any class are the course outcomes and to ensure the students are learning what the outcomes have been outlined to assess this” (P11).

What I see is expected from them based upon discussion questions, their assignments, due dates, and feedback and so forth. So, I like to expand upon that with my direct audio and video lectures. I want to include what’s expected of them, some details about the assignment and expand upon that. (P1)

Several participants indicated the reference of the course and weekly outcomes as a means to guide the student in knowing which elements to concentrate focus on to complete the assignments entirely and properly.
Subtheme: Instructor autonomy. As the participants pondered the question regarding instructor autonomy in the classroom, overwhelmingly the response indicated there was limited to no opportunity to diverge from the course design or grading protocols while working in a classroom. One participant addressed instructor autonomy in the classroom at length. Indicating there is minimal autonomy at the institution for instructional and evaluative practices, the participant stated classroom performance stems from what the institution clearly stated as their expectations of the instructors.

I have some personal preferences or habits that I employ but I really try to do my best to teach from the curriculum strictly making sure I am not expanding the curriculum. The curriculum that I typically work from is well engineered so the material I am attempting to teach from is well defined and clearly presented. So, I don’t have a lot of, I guess, creativity in my approach. And I try not to drift off and into areas that are, you know, maybe purely supplemental. So, I mean I teach from the curriculum, I evaluate from the curriculum, and I’m very content with that. (P8)

Continuing with the subtheme of instructor autonomy, P3 stated: “my practices are prescribed by the institution I work for.” The instructor did not elaborate beyond this statement other than to indicate the preset availability of the assessment piece found in each course structure. P16 also expressed some dissatisfaction with the lack of instructor autonomy; “it is so black and white and sometimes there needs to be, in my personal opinion, a little bit of flexibility.”

Conversely, there were several participants who indicated a slight opportunity for autonomy in the classroom. P2 reported using initiative to “override the rubric a bit and look at
the overall object of the course” when situations indicated dissonance between the objectives of an assignment and the rubric criteria.

When each participant was asked if there were any further thoughts on current instructional and assessment practices in the classroom, most were satisfied with their previously recorded responses. However, P1 indicated the wish for a virtual meeting place where feedback on assessment could be discussed in real-time with the student. P9 shared the desire for more time to spend on teaching proper. The participant expressed the time frame for the course was short and the material presented made the class very active. P11 reiterated the need to keep the classroom material current allowing the student to take relevant information with them to the workplace upon graduation.

**Authentic assessment.** The second major theme to emerge was authentic assessment. As the participants engaged in conversation during the one-on-one interviews or in a written response to the questionnaire suggesting a connection to the elements attributed to Wiggins' (1990) theory of authentic assessment, no response ever alluded to or included the theory as a structural foundation to pedogeological methods in the classroom. Several participants embraced some aspects of the authentic assessment theory, thus creating sufficient codes to be combined to create a major theme; however, further discussion by the same participants did not indicate an understanding of the processes and importance of the theory as noted below.

**Subtheme: Instructor understanding.** The coding process uncovered over numerous codes within this subtheme. One particular code, “theory attribute” seemed to reference authentic assessment theory; yet, no direct correlation was made to the premise in any dialog whether written or verbal. However, the code “assessment” repeatedly demonstrated a teacher-centric
view of assessment as opposed to assessing the student output for authentic learning (Wiggins, 1998).

When directly questioned to define authentic assessment, the responses varied widely among the participants. Each participant’s stated interpretation of the term “authentic assessment of learning” is outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

**Participants’ Stated Definition of the Term Authentic Assessment of Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Stated Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Pure, real, true. Not overly subjective in regard to a process. Feedback that is consistent and pure in regard to what different people are seeing if we’re all to do it and end up being pretty darn similar to one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Authentic assessment assumes that there is some model for behaviors and outcomes that we seek in our graduates in terms of their proficiency in a particular field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>It means to me that we’re creating something that can be referred to and analyzed and used as a benchmark to move forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>How well the students grasp and understand the information and how applicable that is to their life, and it has to be, I think, if you’re going for a business degree, you should really be able to leave with your degree and really be able to step into and have, I mean, you are always learning on the job but you really need that basic set of business knowledge so that you can apply at least the concepts, you know, because every organization has a different culture but at least when you have that background, that yes, I am going into ABS company and it can happen. They’re going in there with some good background knowledge that they can build on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Well, I think it means that number one, you really, you know, you are looking at the outcome, and the assignment, and what the rubric says and it should match. One thing I think is making sure did they really meet the requirements of the outcome, or is this just a summary of the topic? So, I think making sure you’re getting down to the outcome in really making sure that you’re assessing, you know, what they’re supposed to be accomplishing not just well is this just a well written paper? It looks good. It sounds good, but did it really cover those areas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Let me say it means more than just finding out if somebody knows something. It really deals with are they able to use the information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant | Stated Definition
--- | ---
P7 | What are we trying to accomplish as a university as a college? I love working with accreditation because it’s peer review, and I feel like it can be assessment, but I think sometimes people think that you have to have these very rigid methods in order to meet the needs of the creditors and others. So I think the more you can take the question back to the big picture and always ask yourself are the assignments that I’m assessing are they really getting back to the big picture?
P8 | The assessment for learning, well to me, the authenticity rather than work as well as what defines authenticity and learning, you know, but to me, it’s that congruence between the assessment in the curriculum, you know, like let’s not waste our time and making errors, in those outcomes, in those assessments, you know, because these are working adults whose time is limited to know what we need to know. I like to see a congruence between the outcomes and the assessment and if that’s in place, and I think we’re authentic in what we’re doing, and I think my students would agree.
P9 | Authentic is something that you really want to understand what the student learned and to be able to apply it.
P10 | I guess the easiest way to say it is its assessment that can be well documented.
P11 | I suppose going into the course in the nitty-gritty and just reviewing and looking at student postings and assignments. It’s authenticating that the student is learning their outcome.
P12 | Something that is not arbitrary. It is clear, and it’s individual, you know, you take into account everything that matters about this student, you know where they’re from you know what educational level is or wants to be. So, I think authentic assessment is it’s really looking at the student. It’s a unique individual and assessing how the program and courses work or don’t work with that person.
P13 | I’d say additional ways of assessing learning. Examples would be portfolios, group work, projects, presentations.
P14 | It’s the validity of the fact that what we’re actually assessing is what we’re either teaching or what we’ve set out for the student to experience in the course.
P15 | I find that for the assessment really to have an impact being authentic, there has to be some sort of relationship. I’m not so sure that people will accept, trust, follow, believe you that you have high integrity if they don’t really have a relationship. I try not to be overly academic. I try to be more approachable. So how do I integrate authenticity into assessment? I step down off the pedestal.
P16 | My understanding of it is that there are more than like one way for us to assess what our students have learned, as you know I have said several times. I don’t want necessarily a workshop but skills-based demonstration.

**Subtheme: Rubrics.** P2, P12, and P16 responded to the assessment of student work performed by instructors followed an institutional protocol in the use of a rubric for consistent grading purposes within each classroom of learners. Listed in each rubric, the prescribed course outcomes are recognized as the criteria by which to assess demonstrated learning. The criterion
for each of the correlated outcomes is distinctly stated reflecting those characteristics by which the instructor should measure demonstrated authentic learning. P2 stated “things go rather smoothly when the rubrics are in sync with the course objectives.”

Some participants, P 12, P14, and P15, indicated the use of rubrics in providing assessment did not show a clear connection between the rubric and the demonstration of learning without the individuals correlating the use of the rubric as a hand-in-hand concept typically associated with the authentic assessment theory. However, other participants stated the benefit of the rubric as a means to help guide and assess student output. “I think having rubrics are definitely a good tool to help guide. It’s very difficult to grade specific to that because it is so black and white” (P16).

The assessment side has evolved from a rather traditional grading system of, you know, you go in and grade and do that despite the fact we have rubrics, but we have fine-tuned those rubrics to reflect the outcomes for each of the assignments. (P6)

**Curriculum Creation.** There is an institutional requirement that each participant teach a certain number of courses each year. This allowed the individual responses provided to stem from authentic experience. Having the obligation to teach the courses, participants were further examined as to the participant's influence on the design and development of the curriculum and how each instructor played a role in preparing the students for the assessment of learning. Overwhelmingly the responses indicated the Business Program Chair readily accepted suggestions, corrections, possible additions, and overall feedback to the course curriculum as a whole. While P2 described the classroom as being “handed to me,” the participant was quick to add the courses “were well packaged with the expectation of implementing them using my own teaching style.”
**Subtheme: Influence in curriculum development.** However, P2 was in the minority, stating personal influence in the development of the curriculum was “not very much.” Overall, the participants emphasized the freedom and encouragement to submit ideas or corrections to course content. P5 observed how quickly curriculum became outdated and although the exerted effort to update a course is painstaking, it must be done rapidly and often in specific classes to remain current with real-world situations. P5 continued stating if elements in the curriculum were either not right or needed in an assigned course which the participant had not developed personally, the instructors each felt responsible in making suggestions or comments noting those remarks are only shared with the Program Chair as a matter of routine and without the participant implementing those changes sans permission. P1, P4, P6, P8, P10, P11, P12, P14, and P16 each stated they had a fair to strong degree of influence in the curriculum development’s iterative process. One participant indicated a high level of influence in course material whether as a subject matter expert or directly through end of course feedback.

> It depends. I have built a couple of courses, and I’ve worked directly with the course developer and the Program Chair. So, in some instances I have quite a lot of influence. Our Program Chair is very good, and she always encourages us to let her know if there needs to be something updated or changed or input or anything that will improve the course. (P4)

> Another participant stated the direct influence on the curriculum centered around providing current information regularly into the classroom. “So even in the discussion boards, I have gone back and updated it, my discussion questions, will be relevant to today’s environment” (P11).
The participant with notably the least amount of years of experience in academia shared a perspective of both positive and negative involvement with contributory statements regarding curriculum.

The school has been fantastic with asking instructors to provide feedback on courses—the things that we think work and the things we don’t think work, you know updates for course materials if we’ve come across something that we feel would be a benefit for the students or even in the content of the class making those recommendations generally, you know as far from my experience in the school has been extremely receptive. (P16)

The participant continued to share frustrations in the process, as well. “I know sometimes from a teaching perspective; it is frustrating when they don’t change it quite as quickly as we would like them to” (P16).

**Subtheme: Quality of curriculum.** When asked how the participant perceived how the current curriculum taught in class was preparing the student for a career beyond graduation, 13 of the 16 participants indicated the curriculum currently in use the classrooms aligned well with career and job demands in the business environment. P14 substantiated this claim by indicating the reported feedback of satisfaction from those students who apply learned KSAs from recent course work to their current job. P5 also referred to student feedback sharing how specific readings, lectures, and discussions have helped [students] in the workplace. On the contrary, three participants, P1, P3, and P 13 expressed the curriculum was not preparatory for the student to demonstrate and apply learned KSAs in the workplace. “I feel that the curriculum in the course I am currently teaching is not setting students up for success upon graduation. There is a lot to cover in a short time” (P1). “I think the preparation is good but not as good as it could be” (P3). “Not very. The application of knowledge is not a focus in the outcomes” (P13).
**Skill Validation.** To align with authentic assessment theology, properly prepared students for the workplace post-graduation requires observable application and demonstration of skills learned throughout one’s educational career. Participants were prompted to describe the current curricular and assessment practices in the context of validating students’ skills for the job indicating the student’s readiness to perform adequately as a business professional. The line of questioning channeled thoughts on how an instructor could further prepare the student for the workplace without substantially changing the curriculum currently in place. The participants were also asked to identify specific methods used in the course work to directly measure KSAs, which could be transferred by the student to the workplace.

**Subtheme: Readiness of student.** Participants engaged wholeheartedly in discussions regarding student readiness for the workplace post-graduation. P4 expressed the practice of observing the level of student understanding when concepts are applied and connected to life and the workplace. One participant indicated opening dialog with the student provoking thoughts of how to use those newly learned skills into a current job held by the learner. “How does this apply, and what you know, what are some of the things that you can improve and things like that. The current job that you are in, how would you apply this skill” (P5).

Another participant shared a method used with a student that provided security from the negative effects of failure while turning those mistakes into learning opportunities. “College is an important place where they can safely make mistakes but the current the mistake, so I make students go through uncomfortable scenarios helping to prepare them for the workplace” (P7).

P8 observed the curriculum offered within the institution of study provided the learners with the skills to challenge the status quo. “In their profession, in these conversations that require
some sort of academic foundation and construct they can feel empowered to have an intellectual input into these kinds of things” (P8).

A single participant detected, with a sense of dismay, that an introductory course often taught by this instructor had no impact on the student in the job market.

I don’t think we have that in this class. You know, my hope is that this course helps students be aware of all the different types of information and to be available to evaluate it, and then when they apply that knowledge in future classes, they will be able to take that into the job market. (P9)

Another participant shared the perception of the courses as designed does not really validate student skills necessary for success at the workplace.

“I would like to say that I do that very well, but I don’t think any of our courses do that really. I would think it is important to do that though” (P10).

Additionally, a different participant offered this perception of student preparation with the following observation:

If academia were to move towards a scholar practitioner [course design], then I think they would be better served in that the graduates would be more successful in their careers. A concern I think I would have is that you know, we get students that pass through, and they’re an “A” student, but they’re not “A” employees. (P15)

**Subtheme: Demonstrated KSAs.** Participants were thoughtful as they responded to the line of questioning related to how KSAs were measured in the classroom and how they applied to transferability to the workplace post-graduation. P13 indicated measuring performance was done well in teams work and goal-setting groups. One instructor, P4 further indicated receiving student reports stating it was never a consideration that current learning applied to the workplace.
Conversely, another participant expressed that merely classroom discussions did not adequately prepare students for real-world situations. The instructor went on to say: “Put in some scenarios, case studies, into the course work, . . . that would better prepare students for the workplace which may be lacking now” (P1).

Another participant focused on the writing aspect and the transferability of this particular skill to the workplace.

Writing skills, you know, not just papers, but if you were doing this report and trying to bring it in the business place, and presentations for business. Sometimes you get a presentation, and there are 250 words on one page. (P5)

P7 shared embedded course elements in the classroom provided not only exciting assignments but practical applicability for the students to demonstrate their KSAs to resolve work issues.

Have students go out into their worlds, I have asked students to go out and examine a problem and then bring it back to the class. Some students brought videos, interviews, and they brought images. They have gone out and taken photographs. This meant their world was coming into the classroom. It elicited much discussion among the different students, and it also helped other students. So that’s my approach to getting students to take a whole lot of complicated information and synthesize it with a tangible backdrop. (P7)

However, one participant pondered the question on which elements were in place to measure student output and then replied, “I don’t think we have that in this class” (P9). This statement was inconsistent with the other participants, whom each demonstrated on some level that the measurements were taken in the classroom. Conversely, one participant indicated all
student output in the course would provide the opportunity to measure student KSAs but also commented “those things could be even more improved and sharpened to tie into their work” (P12).

P15 centered the response to the lack of KSAs as a reflection of the use of test bank questions created and provided by the publishers to align with the text content and question. Often designed to be responded to verbatim from the text, lower level thinking questions as described in Bloom’s taxonomy include knowledge and comprehension but not application, analysis, synthesis, nor evaluation of which the latter four characteristics align with the authentic assessment theory. Indicating the measurement is critical thinking and practical application for assignments; the participant stated, “the question is not textbook answers because textbook answers don’t help in the real world.” As the participant further discussed the grading of student output for observed application these additional thoughts were shared:

I read for content and critical thinking, so I look at the content—do they even know the terminology? They know the topic, but I look for critical thinking if they give me the textbook answer. [If it is a textbook answer] I know if I meet him tomorrow and ask him that question, he wouldn’t know how to answer it or apply it. (P15)

Conclusion

Chapter 4 contains a description of findings of the data from which the researcher sought to identify an instructor recognition of the value of using authentic assessment practices as preparation for graduates seeking future employment in a business setting. While exhibiting consistency of practice aligned with case study methodology, a total of 16 participants engaged in a one-on-one web conferencing interview with the researcher for this study. The questions posed in both the individual interviews and subsequent open-ended questionnaires were designed
mainly to explore the basis of the research to determine if the lived experiences of collegiate business professors and the value of using authentic assessment practices sufficiently prepared college graduates for employment post-graduation. The cadre of participants included members of faculty, school administrators, and subject matter experts each of which had previously or are currently teaching in the collegiate business program within the institution of study.

In keeping with the premise of a case study and the phenomenological research, the researcher read, reviewed, and analyzed the collected evidence multiple times. Subsequently, through memoing and the process of first and second cycle coding allowed for themes to emerge from the analysis. Through a constant comparison of the data through each coding cycle, more focused codes evolved through combining numerous earlier codes that showed similarity which later evolved into four major themes and 10 subthemes. The four themes that emerged from the study contributing to the perceptions of the participants were as follows: (a) current assessment practices, (b) recognizing authentic assessment, (c) contribution to curriculum creation, and (d) skill validation of students for learning.

There were very few stated differences between the participants concerning each theme whether the curriculum was robust enough for the student to have the opportunity to learn rather than memorize textbook information as well as presenting quality assignments that required demonstrated output by the student which allowed the instructor to authentically assess for learning. While the data demonstrated evidence, based on the perception of the participants, that the institution overall is working towards standardizing the authentic assessment practices, the research also showed it has full infiltration into each of the individual classrooms has not taken place. Chapter 5 will summarize the critical analysis of the investigation and include further discussion on the previously identified four themes.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This phenomenological case study was designed to discover if business school educators at institutions of higher learning recognize the value of using authentic assessment practices as preparation for graduates seeking future employment in a business setting. A theory which explained the lack of use of authentic assessment in the classroom did not appear to exist in the literature. A systematic interpretation of the transcripts and questionnaires collected allowed for the exploration of the phenomenon for an extraction of codes and subsequent themes unique as only found in an interview type setting and which provided a conceptual link (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The in-depth study of authentic assessment use in the business college classroom as described by the participants responsible for the creation and use of the curriculum presented a limited case study focused on a single institution of higher learning located in the northeastern section of the United States (McMillan, 2016). The researcher employed purposeful sampling methods to select the 16 participants to engage in the study. The representative participant pool presented sufficient characteristic traits similar to those of peers which allowed for a proper representation of the population as a whole (McMillan, 2016). The use of different data sources allowed the researcher to determine reliability and validity of the data results. The technique of triangulation was used to recognize cross validation among different methods of data collection from different times and places including one-on-one interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and member checking (McMillan, 2016). One-on-one interviews allowed the semistructured conversation to flow which allowed for clarification of both questions and responses as necessary. In each instance, a positive rapport was quickly established between the researcher
and the participant which allowed a more casual, free-flowing conversation rather than presenting the ambience of an interrogation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). An open-ended questionnaire provided to each participant the opportunity to further discuss authentic assessment in the collegiate classroom. The style of questioning enabled expanding and capturing of the participant’s responses as lived experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The last step in the triangulation process for validation of the data used the techniques of member checking. The researcher double-checked with select respondents for the accuracy of transcription and provided an additional feedback opportunity for validation of the interpretation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

As such, Chapter 5 includes a detailed discussion and possible continued research opportunities which would further answer the stated research questions of this study:

RQ 1: How do business program professors describe their current instructional and assessment practices in educating collegiate business students?

RQ 2: How are business programs using course assessments to measure the demonstrable business skill level of their students?

RQ 3: How do business program professors describe their curricular and assessment practices in the context of validating students’ skills for the job market?

Additionally, the theory of authentic assessment as recognized by academically associated participants is multifaceted and is composed of four themes: (a) current assessment practices, (b) recognition of authentic assessment, (c) contribution to curriculum creation, and (d) skill validation of students for learning. Individual factors are associated with current practices in the collegiate classroom, some relate to the participants’ recognition, understanding, and contribution of the concept of authentic assessment, as well as the combination of all factors preparing the graduate for transferring skills learned in school to the workplace post-graduation.
This final chapter includes an analysis of the findings relating to authentic assessment of student learning in the collegiate business classroom. Additionally, there is discussion regarding current assessment practices, faculty, administrators, and subject matter experts understanding of the authentic assessment theory, contributions of the same individuals to course curriculum, and identifiable skills validation of the students in preparation for work in the business world post-graduation. The chapter concludes with an examination of the limitations of this study, areas for potential future research as well as a concluding summary.

**Summary of the Results**

Employers within business industries express growing dissatisfaction with the lack of basic KSAs of collegiate business program students seeking post-graduate employment (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012). According to Amar, Johnson, and McLaughlin (2018), the traditional teacher-centric academic model of theory driven lectures and subsequent traditional testing do not allow a student to practice and apply practical knowledge relating to real-world scenarios.

Previous studies that focused on the understanding, acceptance, and adaptation of Wiggins’s (1990) authentic assessment theory indicated institutions of higher learning were slow to adapt to the theory and the practices and thereby not addressing the needs of the contemporary workplace. As Yilmaz (2017) noted, 97.8% of instructors continued using the traditional assessment practices, including multiple-choice responses, short answer style questions and choosing between true or false statements in testing situations. Tam (2014) indicated the focus in the new authentic assessment setting removes the impetus to learning from the instructor teaching to the test to an environment where the student is responsible for acquiring the
knowledge needed to demonstrate subject matter mastery. Therefore, this researcher sought to understand the view of the participants’ lived experiences with assessment in the collegiate business classroom.

Participants’ responses to inquiry through one-on-one interviews followed by an open-ended questionnaire provided descriptive and rich detailed data used to understand the instructors’ lived experiences with the phenomenon. An initial detailed analysis of data produced overarching emergent codes which were then reanalyzed through a second coding cycle. The action of the reanalysis allowed for a consolidation of the second set of codes that ultimately enabled themes to emerge stemming from the information provided. An additional review of the themes provided the foundational structure used in the retelling of the lived experiences of the participants. Overall, the portrayal of the phenomenon include descriptive detail about the current assessment practices utilized within the classrooms of the institution, the understanding and use of the authentic assessment theory, and the involvement of the participants in the creation of the curriculum and the methods used to validate the business students transferable skills to be used in a post-graduate working position. Combined, the findings from these themes provided responses to the three research questions as noted earlier. The following sections in Chapter 5 provide the data and concluding theories as presented in Chapter 4 in response to the research questions.

**Discussion of the Study Results**

Qualitative research methods are assumptive and use theoretical frameworks to inform research problems in which individuals or groups of individuals ascribe to a human or social issue and use the inductive approach, which develops general conclusions from a limited number of experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2019). The use of the phenomenological case
study approach revealed the results of the data collected from the participants, which sought to explain student unpreparedness in KSAs upon graduating from college with a conferred degree in business and seeking employment in the workplace. As it relates to this research study, the evidence presents that participants held limited knowledge of the Wiggins (1990) theory of authentic assessment. Without the practice of authentic assessment to validate student preparedness for employment as research indicated, graduates were not prepared to fully function in the workplace much to the dismay of the hiring entities which aligned with the focal point of this study.

In preparation to reply to this question, the researcher had to determine initially how the faculty, administration, and subject matter experts described the current instructional and assessment practices in educating collegiate business students from the individual perspective. Following this, the researcher sought to find the answer to how business programs are designed at the institution of study to use course assessments to measure the demonstrable and transferable business skill levels of the student. Finally, the researcher desired to know how business programs professors described their current curricular and assessment practices in the context of validating students’ skills in preparation for a job post-graduation. The data obtained during the collection phase of the research responded to the three research questions.

**RQ 1. How do business program professors describe their current instructional and assessment practices in educating collegiate business students?** The early 1990s saw a fundamental shift in assessment methods moving from the traditional testing methods to alternative testing formats (Gomez, Graue, & Block, 1991; Perrotta & Whitelock, 2017). Traditional testing methods included multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and true/false styles of questioning. The alternative testing methods are shifting towards more application of knowledge
as the questions require critical thinking of concepts learned and not a regurgitation of information found in the text or from a lecture. However, as the 21st century continues to see a change from passive to engaged learning by the students in K–12 environments, institutions of higher learning are slow to adopt the theory and practices of authentic assessment which substantiates the claim that institutions are not aligning with the needs of the contemporary workplace as learners are still graduating without the KSAs to fully function in a business environment (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Koh, et al., 2012). However, the 16 participants in the study stated a slight deviation from traditional testing to the more authentic structure could be seen in the manner students were now being assessed as evidenced throughout the curriculum found within the institution as a whole. As a result of the slight change in assessment structure, rubrics were now being utilized in each course to validly measure the student output as it related to the correlated outcomes. Additionally, critical thinking was a key focus of the instructors during the assessment grading process. No longer could an answer key provide the correct response. The instructor had to know the material as well as the learner to provide the feedback to teach or support the student. A participant touched upon reading a student’s work for content and critical thinking during the evaluation process. The same participant provided the crux to the assessment spectrum by stating “textbook answers don’t help in the real world” (P15).

As each participant had taught or is currently teaching in the business classroom, the data showed an overwhelming majority of the participants were unaware of the pedagogy of authentic assessment for learning theory. Variations to the principles of the theory were stated, including the use of rubrics to measure learning in relation to outcomes; however, no connections were made by any participant as to the actual use of the theory to measure authentic learning as demonstrated by the student. However, when directly asked, participants used critical thinking
skills to unequivocally define assessment of learning as the action taken by an instructor in measuring the student output in such a manner that reflected the skill set required to indicate student learning by demonstration or explanation. For example, two participants clearly indicated their understanding of the use of authentic assessment practices in the classroom. One provided a personal example the application of authentically assessing student work by the instructor whereas the second stated demonstrated learning was a fundamental part of the classroom construct. P15 recognized the student who will provide only textbook answers is not comfortable with demonstrating practical application. P8 indicated the curriculum was “so well engineered” that the work to be graded was measured clearly against the stated outcomes for each particular course.

Despite this appearance of a new understanding and application of the authentic assessment pedagogy into the classroom, several participants who demonstrated confidence in their responses regarding assessment only proved it was very evident that some instructors understood the term authentic assessment to be the manner in which the institution assessed its own performance as related to the success of the student population in the classroom and to student retention. Additionally, participants associated the term authentic assessment with their own feedback practices. This association gave ranking between the values of either superficial or substantive, which, in the opinion of the participants, translated to authentic or substantive.

Participants shared individual teaching methods used to prepare students for assessment in the classroom. P16 indicated providing extensive feedback on all coursework leading up to an exam was done for all the students to be better prepared for assessment. However, three participants clearly did not associate the methodology of authentic assessment relating to their individual actions on preparation for evaluation by sharing: (a) I used announcements to point
out how to prepare, what not to do, (b) I send out a sample question and answer, and (c) None, other than a general note about the upcoming exam (P10, P13, P15). It was overwhelmingly stressed the observance of the movement to tie course outcomes to course success as a guide to direct students to the highest learning benefit opportunity. P11 stated this most distinctly by asserting the most essential thing in any class is the course outcomes and the students are learning what the outcomes are that have been defined to assess learning.

The participant population was in agreement that there is little autonomy for instructors in instructional and evaluative practices in the classroom. P3, P8, and P16 indicated that instructor classroom performance stems from the stated expectations the institution has of the instructors. P8 continued the response as an indication of wanting to use preferred personal teaching preferences and habits but tried hard to avoid implementing these into the classroom and thereby expanding the curriculum without approval. P16 was a bit more dismissive of the instructor rigor, but expressing a desire for a bit more flexibility as opposed to the “black and white” expectations of the faculty at outlined by the institution.

However, P2 indicated the use of autonomy by overriding the rubric criteria where dissonance was determined between the assignment and intended correlating criterion. Seldom was such initiative expressed during the interviews and responses from the questionnaires. The evidence showed that the instructors are well versed in the expectations of their role within the confines of the institution.

The second major theme, authentic assessment, emerged and although the conversation did not directly correlate Wiggins’ (1990) authentic assessment theory, participants innocently embraced some aspects of the theory. However, as further discussed by the same participants no one indicated an understanding of the processes and importance of the theory as it applied to
direct assessment of student learning through demonstration of KSAs. The one-on-one web conferencing interviews between the research and the participants or in the written responses to the open-ended questionnaire seldom identified a connection to the characteristics attributed to Wiggins’ (1990) theory of authentic assessment. The data showed the theory, as a structural foundation to pedogeological methods in the classroom, and based on the lived experiences of the participants teaching at the institution of study, were not intertwined thereby allowing a less than substantive learning opportunity for the collegiate student preparing to enter the world of business post-graduation.

The code “assessment” repeatedly demonstrated a teacher-centric view of assessment as opposed to assessing the student output for authentic learning (Wiggins, 1998). As outlined in the previous chapter, the participants’ varied responses demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the theory of authentic assessment and the attributes attached to the pedagogy. Each participant’s stated interpretation of the term “authentic assessment of learning” demonstrated a modest understanding of the concept based on one’s own understanding of each of the terms but not as a descriptive phrase. Additionally, not one participant engaged in either written or verbal feedback with an exhibition by stated and direct authentic assessment classroom example or strong indication of familiarity with the process as a formal theory of educational excellence.

An instructor protocol in the required use of a rubric for consistent grading purposes within each classroom of learners is in place at the institution of study for each graded assignment or activity to be provided by the student. The prescribed course outcomes within each rubric are recognized as the criteria by which to assess demonstrated learning of the student. The rubric is designed in such a way to base the assessment of learning in relation to evidence of application of a particularly listed outcome in addition to standard formatting, spelling, and
timelines as it relates to the student output. The criterion for each of the correlated outcomes is distinctly stated reflecting those characteristics by which the instructor should measure demonstrated authentic learning. Participants stated the benefit of the rubric as a means to help guide and assess student output but did not correlate the use of the rubric as a hand-in-hand concept typically associated with the authentic assessment theory.

**RQ 2. How are business programs using course assessments to measure the demonstrable business skill level of their students?** Business entities have implied that institutions of higher learning are not teaching transferable skills to the student to use once they are employed post-graduation. Research has shown employer concern with the lack of demonstrable competencies of recent college graduates seeking entry-level positions within business organizations (Ahmad, 2017). Baird and Parayitam (2017) emphasized that institutions of higher learning are not providing authentic learning and assessment of core business skills to students. The participants engaged in this study indicated the use of the institution required rubric when assessing student output, although a distinct connection between the rubric and a demonstration of learning was not recognized. However, several participants indicated the rubric provided a clear means by which to assess the student’s work product. P16 noted while the rubrics were a good tool to have for instructors to use when evaluating work, the rigidity of the criteria made it more difficult to grade.

Consequently, as each participant previously met the institutional requirement to instruct a certain number of courses in any given academic year thereby giving credence to the individual responses, the replies to this particular research question provided the insight that although the Program Director was very accepting of recommendations for changes, additions, or deletions to current curriculum, as an instructor, there was very little room for curriculum creation
contributions resulting in little leeway for personal influence on the design and development of
the content used in the classroom. Unless a participant was hired as the subject matter expert and
therefore expected to create the curriculum, no available options allow the instructors to
manipulate the material to fit individual teaching styles. However, P2 was the only participant
who felt that although the course was “handed to me” as an instructor there was an implied
expectation of teaching the class using “my own style.” No other participant reflected the same
sentiment for such autonomy in the classroom.

The resulting impact of the lack of autonomy flowing between assessment practices and
authentic assessment theory resulted in participants indicating the limited level of course
assessments as a means to measure the demonstrable business skills of the students. P1 stated the
curriculum currently used in one particular class was not setting the students up for success upon
graduation. P13 added the application of knowledge is not a focus of the outcomes, as stated. P3
shared the sentiment that although the preparation of the curriculum was good, it was not as good
as it could be. On the contrary, however, 13 of the 16 participants stated in response to a question
of the quality of the curriculum that majority felt the class materials were indeed preparing the
learner for a career beyond graduation and the coursework aligned well with future job and
career demands, however, no clear indication was given regarding the course content measuring
transferable knowledge, skills, or abilities of the students.

RQ 3. How do business program professors describe their curricular and
assessment practices in the context of validating students’ skills for the job market?

Wiggins (1998) indicated that the measurable performance standard should answer the question
of how well a student must perform to meet the set standard. Explicitly stated criteria by which a
skill is measured defines the characteristics of successful completion of identified educational
outcomes. Therefore, an authentic task is to be judged as realistic, requires the use of knowledge and skills and requires application of learned information. Archbald and Newmann (1988) stated further that assessment practices producing meaningful, significant, and beneficial results, which are transferable to a working position post-graduation, indicated authentic measurements of learning. Wiggins (1993) also stated the use of authentic assessment allows for the manifestation of applying knowledge wisely, fluently, and flexibly in a variety of contexts. Furthermore, authentic assessments are to be designed to demonstration the intellectual output of the student as if placed in a professional setting resulting in the application of inquiring, involvement, and further exploration (Wiggins, 1998).

P5 indicated through the opening of a dialog provoking critical thinking by the learner, the instructor validated the authentic learning through the application of knowledge as demonstrated by the student when responding to queries such as how does this apply, what are some things you can improve on, in your current position how would you apply this skill? P7 shared a technique of providing student security through the validation of the learning process by allowing the student to make mistakes in uncomfortable but safe scenarios thereby preparing them for the future workplace. The same participant went on to state the use of practical applicability of the student knowledge presented the opportunity to validate through demonstration the learned KSAs to resolve realistic work issues. The institution of practical applicability came through the students being sent out to investigate a real situation, bringing it back to the classroom and discussing it to a resolution with the entire group of learners. P15 shared the personal practice of validating the students’ skills through the observation of critical thinking in written assessments.
Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

The current literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the findings of this study agree there is a disconnect between the hiring company’s expectations of a recent graduate and that which is not demonstrated upon hiring. The disconnect lies with the post-graduates’ assumed KSAs when entering the workforce and the reality of the lack of preparation and learning of these same attributes while a student attends school. The following discussion aligns the data discovered in the literature review and connects the same to the stated participants' experiences.

Sulphey (2015) holds the idea that students who graduated with a degree in business from an institution of higher learning expect they are fully prepared to ease into the career of choice. Several other studies indicate business students who have recently earned a degree are entering the workforce with insufficiently developed transferable KSAs most noted in communication, process management, interpersonal relations, and higher-level thinking when applied in real-world settings (Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012; Seethamraju, 2012; Sulphey, 2015). The participants in this study responded with many examples concurring with the literature. P1 indicated the design of the course currently being taught does not set the students up for learning transferable work skills post-graduation. P13 stated the application of knowledge is not a focus of the posted course outcomes. P10 touted that while the personal observations and validations of student skills performed very well as an instructor, the participant offered the courses themselves were not designed to do so. Stated in other words, P10 implied the course work did not give the opportunity for a student to demonstrate knowledge, skill, and abilities thereby precluding the opportunity for the instructors to authentically assess the professional competencies of the students.
Participants provided insight through the interviews and questionnaires relating to their individual assessment practices of student knowledge in the collegiate classroom. Koh et al.’s. (2012) study showed the conventional approach to classroom instruction and information delivery directly correlated to the nominal knowledge requirement of the student. Yilmaz (2017) indicated 97.8% of instructors surveyed in a recent study indicated the use of the traditional assessment methods including multiple choice and true/false type questioning. Participants in this study each reflected a minimal comprehension of the authentic assessment theory in which learning is observed through demonstration and mastery of a concept as applied in response to a work requirement. Additionally, as instructors, the participants indicated very little autonomy to structure the classroom in such a way to promote authentic learning and assessment but each were required to follow the set protocol for teaching as directed by the institution. Whereas one respondent indicated the curriculum is “well engineered” (P8), another indicated the questions asked of the students allowed a textbook answer to be a sufficient response (P15).

Moreover, P9 responded, “I don’t think we have that in this class” referring to whether there were the elements in place for the student to demonstrate and apply practical KSAs and whether the instructor, therefore, would have the opportunity to assess learning authentically. P15 offered a solution to provide the lack of transferable skills in business students through the movement towards a more scholarly practitioner course design. Alquraan (2012) and VanTassel-Baska, (2013) support this theory as they stated that assessments reflecting the stronger practices of performance and demonstrated learning through a submitted product allowed the student to think on a critically higher level in problem solving. P1 recommended the institution’s course designers should include scenarios and case studies into the curriculum, which would better prepare students for the workplace as the KSAs to confront and resolve standard work issues
were notably missing. P7 appeared to unknowingly refer to the very premise of the authentic assessment theory when stating there should be course elements embedded into the classroom’s assigned activities which are not only interesting but applicable allowing for the instructor assessment of student capabilities through the demonstration of the developed professional competencies learned in the classroom to resolve real-world work issues. The literature supports this statement suggesting as authentic assessment moves the student away from acts of memorizing information for a test thereby requiring a demonstration of skill or performance mastery of the subject matter (Hayati et al., 2017; Koh et al., 2012). To move from memorization to application requires a transition from the teacher-centric to the student-centric classroom design in which assessment practices focus on the performance-based efforts of the learner (Amar et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Hayati et al., 2017; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012).

However, traditional teacher-centric pedagogical methods can still be found in the collegiate classroom, some of which do not include current skill requirements needed by businesses in today’s workplace (Amar, et al., 2018; Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Hahn & Gangeness, 2019; Seethamraju, 2012). This same teacher-centric pedagogy requires students to simply regurgitate information to complete a quiz or assignment but does not allow the opportunity for demonstration of knowledge, skill, or ability using critical thinking skills and application (Filer, 2018; Ghosh et al., 2017). Shifting the focus away from the teacher-centric institution to the student-centric learning environment requires the efforts of the instructor to provide feedback and direction to the student in the new classroom context in which higher-order thinking skills and problem solving capabilities are demonstrated (Koh et al., 201; Perrotta & Whitelock, 2017).
Overwhelmingly the participants in this study indicated feedback was a primary element in assessment of the student learning process. P5 indicated an obligation as the instructor to provide the student with copious feedback. P12 stated feedback was provided both individually and to the class as a whole if a concept was not understood. However, this is an oxymoronic situation as traditional testing methods are static in acceptable responses although instructors showed understanding of the importance of feedback of the student’s work product. Therefore, the participants emphasized instructor autonomy in the classroom for teaching and providing feedback as well as encouraging student engagement as the critical steps to moving the students towards a successful collegiate education and post-graduation employment position.

However, the study participants indicated there was very limited to no opportunity to implement instructor autonomy in teaching or in the overall course design. P3 indicated the teaching and assessment practices are prescribed by the institution. P16 described the lack of autonomy as “black and white” and stated an opinion that a little flexibility is needed to work in the classroom. Therefore, as Campbell and Kresyman (2015) indicated the results from their study showed institutions of higher learning have been remiss in teaching the needed skills of today’s workplace, findings of this study showed that if an instructor had the desire to move beyond the prescribed curriculum to teach these skills, there was not an opportunity to do so. Without this capability to move beyond the curriculum parameters as an instructor or perform a complete overhaul of the curriculum at the institution to move to an authentic learning and assessment environment, some participants, as instructors, may never become aware of the critical need students have to graduate with demonstrable skills for the workplace as the courses are delivered to the instructors ready to teach only what is included in the classroom.
Bok (as cited in Sulphey, 2015) stated 35% of industry executives agreed that students were entering the workforce without the needed skills to complete their assigned duties of the job. Baird and Parayitam (2017) indicated the business community is greatly dissatisfied with institutions of higher learning which offer business programs are not aligning themselves with the core business skill needs of the workplace and thereby insinuating the schools are not providing authentic learning and assessment opportunities in the classroom. P6 indicated an understanding of authentic assessment was more than just finding out if a student knew material, instead the assessment practice should identify if the student could apply that same information. P14 asserted the classroom process should assess the validity of both the teaching and what the students are expected to learn. From this perspective, participants revealed through the interview and questionnaire their lack of contribution to the course creation process. P2 described the course as “being handed to me.” While overwhelming the respondents indicated the opportunity to submit feedback to the Program Chair for suggestions, corrections, or additions needed to the curriculum, there was no clear indication that these comments ever came to pass in the classroom. Although P16 stated the school “has been fantastic with asking instructors to provide feedback,” and felt the school has been extremely receptive, no comment was made that there was evidence of a course change based on the feedback provided.

Incidentally, the participants were asked their feeling of the quality of the curriculum as it relates to the preparation of the student to enter the workforce after graduation. Thirteen of the 16 respondents felt the curriculum aligned well overall with the business environment demands. However, P1 clearly stated the course that is currently being taught by this instructor was not setting the student up for graduation. P3 felt the preparation was more valued as “good” but not as good as it could be. Finally, P13 felt the curriculum was not very good as the application of
knowledge is not a focus of the course outcomes in this instructor’s perception. This more aligns with the literature in which several studies indicate a concern for lack of ability to perform in the workplace upon graduation (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Bhagra & Sharma, 2018).

As has been shown in the correlation of the literature review and the findings of this study, there is a stated concern for the lack of demonstrable skills of post-graduate business students entering the workforce. Equally as concerning is the lack of alignment with the needs of the business industry and the KSAs that are not always being taught or assessed in the classroom based on the participants’ responses. The appearance of no instructor knowledge of the authentic assessment theory to measure learning indicates a gap in the processes of the institution not only in the curriculum output but in the KSAs of the curriculum designers who are charged with the curriculum creation overall.

As business industry leaders seek alignment between education and the workplace this objective can be met when student knowledge is authentically assessed (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015). The future employability of a graduate entering the work force rests on two distinct concepts: (a) the student’s demonstration of KSAs and (b) the student remaining in a work position as a result of these same professional competencies. The findings of this study show when instructors are assessing student output for learning; learners often provided rote textbook answers, which suggested the uncomfortableness with real world application. However, it was noted that authentic assessment of student output showed not only the current knowledge of the learner but also the level it can be applied in a future career. The idea of a solid education is that the participant should be able to leave with the degree in hand and be able to apply the concepts learned and demonstration in class within the organization. Moreover, the student will be
entering the workforce with good background knowledge they can build on. The data showed a distinct necessity of the instructor to do more than merely find out if a learner knows something but rather the teacher should assess if the student can apply the information to function correctly in the workplace. The act of authentic assessment is authenticating that the student is learning the stated outcomes.

Participants in the study suggested that the experiences in the course should reflect anticipated events in the workplace, thereby validating student learning through either what the instructor has taught the student or what elements have been set forth for the student to experience in the classroom. Interactive discussions with instructors stirred student thoughts through conversation in which the instructor required responses that applied learned reasoning and skills to situations commonly found in the workplace. The study results supported the process of applying employer anticipated professional competencies to classroom scenarios allowing for the freedom of the student to learn through experience and that the learner feels safe although the action or process may prove to be incomplete, unacceptable, or replete with errors. However, two respondents agreed with the perception of the business employers by stating the current courses taught by the instructors had no impact on securing work post-graduation as the current courses did not validate the students’ professional competencies required for successful engagement in the workplace.

Previous studies asserted these same findings of the lack of professional competencies upon a new graduate beginning employment with an organization (Baird & Parayitam, 2017; Campbell & Kresyman, 2015; Sulphey, 2015). Many participants who engaged in this study acknowledged the lack of authentic assessment opportunities in the current curriculum design. However, there was a dichotomy expressed by other participants who felt the course materials
were well designed and thoroughly prepared the student for work in the business world beyond graduation. Employer dissatisfaction included the areas of written and verbal communication as well as listening skills. Bhagra and Sharma (2018) pointed out that with the passing of loyalty of an employee remaining with an organization for a significant and extended period of time, organizations are no longer willing to invest corporate dollars in the training of incoming employees. Companies now seek to hire individuals who can immediately begin work demonstrating foundational KSAs when first employed. Purposefully, these same businesses seek to hire individuals that will directly contribute to the success of the company. Employers assert these skills are and should be taught in school to allow for transference to the workplace postgraduation.

**Theory**

This section of Chapter 5 focuses on the implications of the results of the study as applied to practice, policy, change as related to the overall theory of authentic assessment of learning. The findings of this one phenomenological case study which focused on the lived experiences of instructors, administrators, and subject matter experts and their awareness of the authentic assessment theory and its protocols cannot abruptly change the entire educational processes of one institution. However, the study results can certainly have an impact regarding future course creation processes and instigate further continuing education offerings for those individuals involved with course creation at the institution.

**Implications of the results for practice.** This phenomenological case study can be useful in its conveyable findings which are easily implemented in not only the institution of study but other schools in higher education. For example, Desai, Berger, and Higgs (2016) conducted research investigating the use of higher order thinking beyond the classroom and into
the real-world of business. The results of the study indicated that based on the findings three suggestions were offered to merge critical thinking and authentic assessment into the business college classroom. The suggested elements were to (a) design business curricula based on an established theory of critical thinking; (b) those that develop courses should spend time researching literature relating to other professions to expose different approaches to teaching and assessing students for higher order thinking, and (c) to review the tools used for assessment to ensure applicability to real-world business settings as students demonstrated their learned KSAs (Desai, et al., 2016). This study suggested the participants themselves overwhelming were not aware of the theory of authentic assessment and the accompanying pedagogy as well as the essential role this practice holds in determining if authentic learning has taken place as often the KSAs are not tested in ways which allow the student to demonstrate full functionality in these areas. This translates into a learning opportunity for instructors, administrators, and subject matter experts to become knowledgeable in authentic assessment precepts and embed them into courses designed to prepare the student for successful employment upon graduation.

The concept of authentic assessment is a forward-thinking and engaging pedagogy allowing the student to not only learn, but demonstrate learning of KSAs of professional competencies that are needed for securing and holding a position in the world of business. Instructors play a vital role in authentic assessment as they are required to engage with the student, teach the competencies necessary for success followed by an evaluation of those competencies in use through demonstration of application to a work product.

**Implications for policy.** The findings in this research can easily be used as new policy for course and curriculum creation within an institution of higher learning. Creating a course to assess learning is not synonymous with creating a course with traditional teaching and testing
methodology. Policy for course creation needs to reflect a clear expectation of work products from the students are demonstrated results of learning of KSAs of those competencies required to be known upon hiring into a place of business post-graduation. Simply graduating with a degree in business does not indicate the student “knows” business. Institutions must move towards a curriculum that assesses demonstrable actions of the students indicating true learning has taken place. Bhagra and Sharma (2018) clearly show companies are no longer willing to spend the time nor expenses incurred training newly hired employees in foundation business competencies. Graduates who apply for positions stating a conferred degree in business are assumed to know foundational skills which allow them to be a value-added asset to the company on day one of employment.

Further findings of this study support the idea that institutions must better align with the expectations of the job requirements anticipated by the hiring firm. Schools of higher learning and industry leaders must create and sustain relationships that allow for communication of the needs of the business allowing the curriculum to be adjusted to continually address those competencies required by the business organization. This relationship is a critical factor that not only connects the business and the institution but also can create a pipeline of prospective employees from the graduate pool each year.

**Implications for change.** The types of change recognized for students to truly one of being taught in such a manner that learning can be demonstrated for assessment purposes, thereby avoiding the pitfall of textbook answers regurgitated on traditional tests in the classroom (Koh et al., 2012). The need for change is evident as several participants indicated rubric designs were too restrictive to assess the student fully for demonstrable skills. Rubrics appeared to be one of a select few elements of the theory of authentic assessment currently utilized in the classroom,
with the other being a few instances of case studies and scenarios used in some courses as described by the participants. The findings of this study imply there is a greater need to embrace the theory of authentic assessment to adequately prepare the business graduate student to engage fully in the workplace upon being hired. The workplace is no longer demonstrating patience or tolerance of new employees who do not know the fundamental job requirements that are consistent across the business spectrum. The abundance of literature stating the noticeable lack of demonstrable skills of newly hired graduates confirms the issue managers face and unwillingness to hire less-than-ready individuals seeking employees from the post-graduate pool (Ahmad & Pesch, 2017; Amar et al., 2018; Anderson & Reid, 2013; Maellaro & Whittington, 2012). The institution of study must change the curriculum and assessment practices to better align with the needs and expectations of the business world.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

As the researcher of this study continues to agree the phenomenological case study approach was the correct method to use in this study, the qualitative research methods are not intended to capture hard facts but impressions and perceptions from the lived experiences of the study’s participant pool. Additional credibility could be given to this research study if a mixed-methods research approach were used to in which the qualitative interview coupled with a statistical analysis of the use or lack thereof of authentic assessment in the classroom and the impact it has on not only learned information but transferability to the workplace upon graduation.

Future research on an expanded population could provide a different perspective or more fully support the view provided by the participants of the single institution used in this study. As this study employed the responses of 16 participants, increasing the sample size and adding the
demographic of faculty, administrators, and subject matter experts from other institutions across the United States (e.g. junior colleges, state schools) may provide evidence in the value of using authentic assessment in the classroom. Often, these institutions generally offer “blue collar” classes in which authentic assessment is necessary for certification in specific areas such as HVAC or automotive repair.

Another qualitative study that may prove beneficial would be a study across different disciplines within the institution. Moving away from the business program and expanding to other areas such as computer information systems or healthcare administration. Both programs are offered at the institution of research for this study and may prove the use of authentic assessment pedagogy would benefit students in these areas to take learned KSAs to those workplaces for which they are preparing.

From a demographic perspective, this study lacked diversity in the participant pool. According to Data USA (2019), a collective of individuals and institutions engaged in reporting analytics from the U.S. government, 3.7% of postsecondary instructors hold doctorate degrees in business. Although this study focused on business degrees thereby requiring a much higher percentage of the participants having terminal degrees in this area, the other programs which held much higher percentages could prove to be invaluable as to the use of authentic assessment in those programs (i.e., terminal degrees in biology at 11.8%). While the gender across the United States is within 0.8% of equality the gender split in this study was a perfect but unintentional 50% male with 50% female using the purposeful selection method.

Campbell and Kresyman (2015) also support that additional research in this field is necessary. Engaging in research involving the perceptions of the stakeholders as to the cause of the post-graduate student’s skill deficiencies as well as what those deficiencies are defined as in
the workplace. A quantitative survey is suggested to allow the researchers to collect and analyze the different levels of responses to close-ended queries based on demographic grouping and thereby eliminating stakeholder bias. Another recommendation to explore would include a study of assessment tools that should be scrutinized to determine relevancy and applicability to business education. Additionally, the researchers recommended reviewing other forms of assessment in other disciplines, which may serve a practical purpose in preparing the student for demonstration of learning to be transferred to the workplace post-graduation.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 concluded this study by having discussed the results of the phenomenological case study and having conveyed the lived experiences of the 16 participants each of which represented the role of faculty, administrator, or subject matter expert in the College of Business of an institution located in the northeastern part of the United States. As the participants provided insights and responses to three overarching research questions and 10 sub questions in the one-on-one interviews and subsequent five questions in an open-ended questionnaire, the individuals provided rich and thick descriptions which provided high-quality content in answer to the queries of each format. After a lengthy analysis of the collected material, the researcher was able to formulate an explanation of the phenomenon structured around four themes: (a) current assessment practices, (b) recognizing authentic assessment, (c) contribution to curriculum creation and (d) skill validation of students for learning. The four themes provided insight into the lack of authentic assessment pedagogy as a standard in the collegiate business classroom and thereby neglecting to offer a robust learning opportunity for preparation of fully prepared post-graduate candidates seeking employment in the business arena. The participants in this study felt at some level assessment for learning was taking place, but it was overwhelmingly evident the
authentic assessment pedagogy was not recognized by the individuals at face-value, nor were the precepts of the theory engaged fully in the classroom.

Moreover, the experiences revealed with the phenomenon did not align with the methods of authentic assessment, which would then align with the expectations of business leaders in hiring fully prepared employees. Further research with individuals in other institutions across the country may shed light on this as an epidemic act of academic negligence or reveal if this phenomenon exists only in the individual school of study. Results of further studies may also show if this phenomenon exists across the spectrum of collegiate programs in other disciplines or if is lies only in the discipline of business. Suggestions for further research may provide such detail and, as such, allow for improvement and changes to one or many institutions as the results may show.

Overall, the research has shown that there is a disconnect between employer expectations and the lack of proper pedagogy in preparing students for work beyond the classroom. This study suggests a change in the manner in which assessment of students’ learned information moves from regurgitation of textbook information to the outright application of KSAs will better prepare the individuals for performance in a work situation in which transferable skills learned in the classroom create a valuable employee for the business entity. Until the time that such changes are made, students will continue to believe they are well prepared to function in the world of business while the employers continue to feel frustration with hiring new graduates who do not have the basic skills necessary to be a value-added asset to the company.

As this researcher traversed the long but steady path known as the doctoral dissertation process, there was much learned from the participants as to what the theory of authentic assessment means to them and how it did or did not align with Wiggins’ (1990) theory of
authentic assessment precepts. While it was evident each participant had the desire to prepare the individual students for success in the workplace post-graduation, the evidence showed that although there were positive aspects to the courses as currently designed, there was much missing that would truly prepare the student for success in the working world. The stories and anecdotes shared during the one-on-one interviews demonstrated the willingness of the participants to help in any way to better prepare and assess the students for demonstrable KSAs required for success in hiring and remaining employed. It will take the openness and willingness of administrators to allow for reconstruction of curriculum to embrace authentic learning and assessment within each classroom. If professional competency needs are not addressed, there is a disservice paid to the student and to the company who hires the learner as the assumption is made that with the degree comes knowledge, skill, and ability to be put to use immediately. It is my sincere hope that the findings as expressed in this study will assist in promoting change in higher education to better align employer expectations with competencies taught in class. It is also hoped that courses can be redesigned to remove the traditional rote testing protocols and replace them with assignments that allow for demonstration of learning by application and critical thinking. This researcher realizes that this process will take a lot of time and a lot of work, but one institution at a time, one class at a time, and one assignment at a time will ultimately result in the best prepared graduates who will take the business world by storm.
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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How do you describe your instructional and assessment practices in educating collegiate business students?
   a. How are your courses created?
   b. What influence do you have in the development of the curriculum and assessments in your courses?
   c. How do you instruct students to prepare them for assessment of learning?
   d. What additional thoughts would you like to share about your current instructional and assessment practices in the collegiate classroom?

2. How do you feel are colleges using course assessments to measure the demonstrable business skill level of their students?
   a. As courses build on one another, what evidence do you see in your classroom of preparedness from earlier courses for students to succeed in your business course?
   b. What elements do you feel are missing in the classroom to better prepare the student for a future career in business?
   c. What would you like to see incorporated into the classroom to further measure transferable skill levels of students?
   d. What would like to share further about your feelings on course assessments measuring demonstrable business skills of students?

3. How do you describe your curricular and assessment practices in the context of validating students’ skills for the job market?
   a. What specific methods are used in your courses to directly measure KSAs of students which can be directly transferred to the workplace?
b. How would you describe and label the current learning assessment styles in your particular course?

c. Without substantial change to the curriculum in place, how can you further prepare the students for the workplace?

4. Is there anything else you would like to share about your current experience in assessment for learning?
Appendix B: Open-Ended Questions

1. What methods do you employ in current preparation of students for upcoming examinations?

2. Based on the curriculum currently in the course(s) you are teaching, how well do you feel it is preparing the student for success in the workplace upon graduation?

3. What additional teaching or testing elements do you feel would enhance the learning opportunity for the students?

4. How would these ideally be implemented in your classroom(s)?

5. Reflecting on your own post-secondary education and any related teaching positions at other institutions, how would you describe the level of assessment at this school as it pertains to the readiness of the student upon graduation?
Appendix C: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of Academic Integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.
Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Tina Lynn Callaway

Digital Signature

Tina Lynn Callaway

Name (Typed)

January 8, 2020

Date