THE INFLUENCE OF A TRANSITION FRAMEWORK ON COLLEGE-LEVEL PREPARATION STRATEGIES USED IN UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOLS:

A CASE STUDY

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The Influence of A Transition Framework On College-Level Preparation Strategies Used In University Business Schools: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century ushered in changes regarding how people conduct business across the globe and what businesses need from their employees. The extent to which business schools are responding to these changes remains unknown. This qualitative multiple-case study explored the perceptions of business school deans and instructors regarding college-level strategies in their business schools that prepare undergraduate students for the demands of the workplace. The researcher also explored the extent to which elements of Schlossberg’s 4S analytical framework (situation, self, support, strategy) influenced college students’ preparation strategies at two Connecticut private business schools. Primary data sources for the study included semi-structured interviews. A convenience sample of 16 participants (4 business school deans and 12 business instructors) participated in the study. Interview transcription and analysis revealed clusters of concomitant themes salient to the research study using Schlossberg’s 4S analytical framework to organize the data. Findings from the study revealed that university leaders and educators examined factors that establish best practices aligned to 21st century business practices and needs. The four elements of Schlossberg’s analytical framework influenced business schools’ preparation strategies.

Keywords: 21st century workforce, business school, college-level preparation, higher education, systems-thinking, and transition.
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BHEF: Business Higher Education Forum

BUPS: Bentley University Preparedness Study

GAO: Government Accountability Office

MGI: McKinsey Global Institute

NACE: National Association of Colleges and Employers

NEBHE: New England Board of Higher Education

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation Development

SCANS: Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills

SHRM: Society for Human Resources Management

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United States continues to experience a “pandemic of work life un-readiness” (Levine, 2005, p. b11). Consequently, there is an urgency to prepare workers with profession-relevant content, technical knowledge, and real-world experiences relevant to modern business practices to ensure career success. As the 21st century began, the economic environment changed from an Industrial Age of production and manufacturing to a Knowledge Age of information and technology (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). This economic change resulted in the transformation of business practices, workplace requirements, and workforce skills. Workers must master core content knowledge in key emerging fields.

According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), 21st century skills include expert thinking (critical thinking and problem-solving), complex communicating (communication and collaboration), applied imagination, and inventing (creativity and innovation). The Knowledge Age requires a new mix of skills (e.g., the use of technology and the ability to quickly acquire and apply new knowledge). Employees engage in continuous learning, display professionalism, have a strong work ethic, and possess knowledge of new cross-disciplinary fields (e.g., data science, risk management, social and mobile platforms, and cyber security). Employers in the Knowledge Age demand a steady supply of well-trained workers who use digital tools to apply knowledge and skills to their daily work (Business Higher Education Forum [BHEF], 2013; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; U.S. Department of Labor, 2004). Therefore, business practitioners pushed institutions of higher education to prepare students with profession-related content relevant to business practices and the demands of the 21st century workplace.

Drawing on a wide range of data and historical trends, the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE, 2015) indicated that 21st century workforce requirements revealed a
significant gap between academic achievement and workforce readiness. Business practitioners suggested that traditional undergraduates were unprepared for the 21st century workforce and that college-level preparation did not adequately equip business students with the ability to deal with problems in a complex global marketplace (Bentley University Preparedness Study [BUPS], 2013; Mingers, 2015). The Spelling Commission, created by Secretary of Education Margaret Spelling (2006), explained, “Employers report repeatedly that many new graduates they hire are not prepared to work, lacking the critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving skills needed in today’s workplaces” (p. 19). Similarly, 400 executives of major corporations collectively answered no to the question, “Are students graduating from school really ready to work?” (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 7).

During the U.S. unemployment crisis in the first decade of the 21st century, a vast gap in qualified employees for factory, oil field, and white-collar positions emerged. Companies searched for applicants with scientific knowledge, communication skills, and technological acumen that many high school and college graduates lack (Senge, 2012). The McKinsey Global Institute (MGI, 2012) reported that by 2020, employers worldwide could face a shortage of 85 million high- and medium-skilled workers. This is a potential shortage of 38 to 40 million (13%) highly-skilled workers and a potential shortage of nearly 45 million (15%) medium-skilled workers.

Cappelli (2014) operationally defined the skills gap as a widespread shortage in the skills of future employees that a specific labor market demands. The gap is due to the failure of the education system to provide students with necessary skills. There are two opposing views regarding the skills gap. First, it is possible that the 21st century economic environment triggered changes in business practices and workforce skills that left many students poorly prepared for the
labor market of today; second, the national graduation rates may have resulted in a shortage of well-trained science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workers (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Graham and McKenzie (1995), Perrone and Vickers (2003), and Saks and Ashforth (1997) blamed the skills gap for students’ difficulties transitioning from the university to the workplace. The move from higher education to employment is a major transition that involves challenges that extend beyond securing employment. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that college graduates tend to be well prepared in their academic and content areas but not in areas related to the workplace. Another challenge in the transition from the university to the workplace is tighter budgets due to economic constraints. Trilling and Fadel (2009) explained that when money is limited, companies need highly competent employees who are ready to hit the ground running without extra training and development costs. In 1991, money spent in the United States on engines and machines for agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing, transportation, and energy production (Industrial Age goods) exceeded for the first time the amount spent on ICT (e.g., computers, servers, printers, software, phones, and networking devices and systems); Knowledge Age expenditures exceeded Industrial Age spending by $5 billion ($112 billion versus $107 billion) (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The 21st century skills gap cost businesses an estimated $200 billion a year worldwide as they struggle to find and hire highly skilled talent or provide employees with costly training programs (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

In response to the demands of the 21st century workplace and the documented skills gap, countries across the globe increased their investments in education as an economic imperative (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). In the United States, political leaders focused on raising higher education attainment rates to ensure future economic competitiveness
and to grow the middle class. Former President Obama worked with Republican and Democratic governors to increase the number of degrees and other postsecondary credentials that community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities awarded. Leaders at the state and federal level joined influential foundations in calling for growth in the number of people with high-value postsecondary credentials. States shifted the basis for public higher education funding from how many students enrolled to how many students graduated. The Obama administration introduced this college completion agenda as a critical strategy to prepare the U.S. workforce to fill current and projected job openings (BHEF, 2014). This aggressive agenda reflected the fact that the United States slipped to 12th place in developed countries among young adults attaining postsecondary education (Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities, 2014).

Elevating post-secondary graduation rates was necessary to address the skills gap (i.e., the shortage of medium- and high-skilled workers). The present research investigated the preparation strategies that business schools use. According to Graham and McKenzie (1995), Perrone and Vickers (2003), and Saks and Ashforth (1997), higher education should continuously re-examine the strengths and limitations of strategies that prepare undergraduates to meet the needs of employers within a changing economy and consider interventions that are not only disciplinary but also applicable to the business school curriculum. Schools must deliver a rigorous and relevant curriculum that relates coursework to prospective works (Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

The present study relies on a systems framework to create new knowledge, develop new skills, and contribute directly to economic growth and productivity. The researcher employed a multiple-case study approach (Yin, 2013) to explore the perceptions of business school deans and instructors at two private university business schools in Connecticut. The goal was to
understand the schools’ preparation strategies that prepare undergraduate students for the demands of the workplace.

**Statement of the Problem**

The need for this study arose from a review of the literature that demonstrated institutions of higher education fail to graduate students with the skills and competencies that businesses need (Gallup Lumina Foundation [GLF], 2014). These concerns revealed a potential misalignment between college-level preparation in business schools and business practices. To understand business leaders’ concerns, chief academic officers shared their opinions via a survey and reported a significant gap between the opinions of business leaders and those of higher education administrators (GLF, 2014). Most business leaders (89%) strongly agreed that recent graduates did not have the skills or competencies businesses needed; nonetheless, 96% of chief academic officers at institutions of higher education said their institution was *very* or *somewhat* effective at preparing students for the workplace (GLF, 2014). There is a disparity between the perceptions of leaders in higher education and those in the business community.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2014) found that 51% of business decision-makers gave the education community a C or lower on how well they were preparing students with skills relevant to the workplace. Bentley University (2014) spearheaded the Prepared-U-Project to determine how key stakeholders (e.g., business decision-makers, corporate recruiters, and higher education administrators) can successfully prepare college graduates for the workplace. The Prepared-U-Project fielded more than 3,100 responses from the stakeholders to encourage them to work together to close the skills gap and ensure college students are better prepared to enter the workforce. Another study, the Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce (2009), stated that new workers lack basic and applied skills. Drawing from
responses of 217 employers about their training of newly hired graduates of 2- and 4-year colleges, researchers revealed that employer-sponsored readiness training often failed to correct these deficiencies. Almost half of the respondents to the Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce study said they had to provide readiness training for new hires and most rated their programs as only moderately or somewhat successful. Klein (2009) stated, “It is a losing strategy for employers to try to fill the workforce readiness gap on the job as graduates need to be involved much sooner” (p. 8). Hence, the problem the researcher examined in this case study was the potential misalignment of college-level preparation in business schools and job skills that the business community expects from college graduates.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to explore the perceptions of business school deans and instructors at two private business schools in Connecticut regarding college-level preparation strategies that prepare undergraduate students for the demands of the 21st century workplace.

Systems Theoretical Framework

Systems-thinking approach to college-level preparation. “A system is a whole whose elements are inter-related because they continually affect each other over time operating towards a common purpose” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 97). Systems-thinking requires keeping the whole in mind while working on the various parts. Lewis Thomas, the award-winning medical essayist, stated, “If you want to fix something you are first obliged to understand the whole system” (as cited in Stroh, 2015, p. 14). Senge (2012) declared that every educational practice and every student’s life is a system; within every educational institution, there are different critical

Burke (2008) and Evans (1996) discussed Von Bertalanffy’s use of the biological science of living organisms to develop a body of knowledge around systems theory. Von Bertalanffy (1972) posited that organisms interact with the outside environment to live. For example, they take food into their subsystems (organs and cells) and release carbon dioxide and other byproducts as output into the environment. Therefore, living organisms have self-regulatory functions that promote growth. The interrelationship, interaction, and interdependence between the organism and its environment define the characteristics of open systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1972).

**Systems-thinking from a micro level.** Academic and business practitioners who study institutions of higher education refer to systems-thinking from a micro level as subsystems operating within the larger environment of the university system. This is like a micro approach to the mechanical metaphor because it is like a machine with interacting parts and subsystems that are dependent on continual interaction with the environment (Burke, 2008; Katz & Kahn 1978). Environmental factors (e.g., economy, business practices, market demands, workforce skills, and workplace competencies) of the macro economy require an integrated effort from different subsystems within the university setting to engage in interdisciplinary curriculum planning, advising of students, and college-level preparation.

In the present study, the researcher introduced a systems-thinking approach to college-level preparation from a micro level based on literature that suggested employees must receive interdisciplinary training. The Business Higher Education Forum (2013) explained that employees should be professionals with knowledge of cross-disciplinary fields (e.g., data
science, risk management, social and mobile platforms, and cyber security). Business leaders want business schools (a subsystem of universities) to deliver a curriculum that incorporates subject areas outside of the silo of the business domain that includes links between disciplines and business processes (Buttermore, 2011).

**Systems-thinking from a macro level.** The researcher introduced systems-thinking from a macro perspective to college-level preparation to show that colleges and universities operate within a larger (macro) environment outside of the university (micro) system and that there is an interdependence between business schools, business communities, and the U.S. economy. The researcher likened this macro approach to the biological metaphor, which includes a concept of systems as living and evolving organisms that interact, interrelate, and interdepend on the environment to receive new energy or new resources. New energy is an open systems justification for improvement. For example, medical or spiritual intervention is necessary to cure illnesses (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Likewise, colleges and universities must use outside information, energy, resources, and feedback (e.g., changes in the economy, business practices, workplace requirements, and work force skills) to improve their product (education) and to overcome entropy (Razik & Swanson, 2010). If the organization does not interact with its environment to receive new energy or new resources, then they may experience entropy.

According to Katz and Kahn (1978), the universal law of entropy holds that all organizations move toward disorganization or death. However, an open system can continue to thrive by importing more energy from the environment than it expends, achieving negative entropy. For example, a failing company might revitalize itself by bringing in a new chief executive who improves energic inputs. For this multiple-case study, the larger macro environment exerts pressures (new energy) on colleges and universities to attain another level of
growth. Katz and Kahn (1978) indicated that when an organization needs to attain to another level of growth, it must control more and more of its environment and may need to expand the original system, which may change the organization. This growth expands the context of college-level preparation strategies to better prepare students for the workplace. As the 21st century economic environment changes, if universities use external information and feedback to improve education, they will thrive and experience low or positive entropy. An example of entropy is the 2008 gap in academic achievement between students in the United States and their counterparts in other countries that deprived the U.S. economy of as much as $2.3 trillion in economic output (MGI, 2009).

Razik and Swanson (2010) indicated that institutions of education are often dependent on the management science of the Industrial Age; educators may be unaware of the role that systems theory could play in how they function. Administrators seek methods to design and implement interventions that support the transition from university to the workplace. A systems perspective may empower administrators to emerge as visionaries and problem-solvers instead of managers (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Current literature supports that reform of U.S. institutions of education offers a rich setting for the use of systems theory. Therefore, understanding systems-thinking may greatly enhance the effectiveness of school leadership (Razik & Swanson, 2010).

**Schlossberg’s 4S analytical framework.** The researcher utilized Schlossberg’s 4S analytical framework as a systems-thinking approach to college-level preparation within a constructivist change process (Bridges, 1980; Bussolari & Goodell, 2009; Schlossberg, Goodman, & Anderson, 2012). A systems-thinking approach calls for administrators and faculty to respond to changes in society and the economic environment of the 21st century and translate
those economic changes into institutional policies that align andragogical strategies with the demands of the times. Scholars from within university subsystems worked together across disciplines, sub-disciplines, and professions to bring together synthesized perspectives to the curriculum (Davis, 1995, p. 5). The move from higher education to employment deserves attention because it is a major transition in students’ lives.

**Transition theory.** Transition theory was relevant to this multiple-case study for three reasons. First, business students must become business practitioners when they transition from the university and move into the workplace. Second, business education must focus on knowledge and practical skills related to and utilized by the business community. Finally, business organizations are consumers of business schools and depend on them to prepare the workforce they need (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004). According to Bussolari and Goodell (2009), the process of transition occurs in phases (i.e., leaving behind the old and moving onto the new through an emergent growth process). Individuals in transition reconcile the paradox of holding on to both the comfortable and the uncomfortable to fully self-organize. The transition from the university to the workplace requires adjustment from a familiar situation to an unknown environment and a new relationship with the workplace. Undergraduates must be ready and able to adjust to these changes.

Lipman-Blueme (1976), Moos and Tsu (1976), Hopson (1981), and Brammer (1991) all studied some element of transition. In this case study, the researcher utilized the work of Schlossberg (Schlossberg 1984; Schlossberg et al., 2012) and Bridges (1980, 2004) because they include a holistic perspective and focus on life events in change and transition processes. Schlossberg (2012) categorized three phases of transition: “moving in, moving through, and moving out” (p. 56). Bridges (1980) categorized the phases of transition as the “ending,
beginning, and neutral zone” (p. 184). Both authors considered transition a process that includes movement through a beginning, middle, and end that extends from the time something ends or moves into something new to when the experience is complete and integrated into an individual’s life (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined transition as any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, roles, or rules (p. 27). Bridges (1980) viewed transition as the natural process of disorientation and reorientation that marks turning points along the path of growth (p. 5). According to Bridges (1980), “transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with a new situation” (p. 3). For this multiple-case study, the researcher operationally defined transition as the process that takes place when students disengage from their role as undergraduates and undergo a metamorphosis to create new roles as workers. Using Schlossberg’s and Bridges’ definitions of transition, the process of graduating from college is a significant life transition because it results in a change of roles, responsibilities, or rules as graduates move into the workplace. Schlossberg’s (1984) and Bridges’ (1980) theories provide insight into the impact that moving from postsecondary education to the workplace has on recent graduates. These are theories of adult development, but are relevant to postsecondary students because the process of transitioning from the university to the workplace involves challenges that extend beyond securing employment.

Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory is an analytical framework of the systematic transition that adults experience and the suggested means by which they can cope and adjust to different phases of the transition cycle. This transition framework offers four interrelated factors: (a) situation; (b) self; (c) support; and (d) strategies (see Figure 1). These factors influence graduates’ effectiveness in coping with transition.
The situation factor of the present study is college graduation. The self-factor is the graduate (i.e., the personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources of the individual). Personal and demographic characteristics include socioeconomic status, gender, and age. Psychological resources are coping, ego development, outlook, self-efficacy, commitment, and values (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The support factor is “resources or services available to support the individual in transition” (e.g., relationships, family units, networks of friends, institutions, and communities) (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 114). The strategies factor is how the graduate copes with transition.

Bridges (1980) described a transition as an internal process in response to a shift or a change in life. Transition has three overlapping phases: an ending, a new beginning, and a neutral zone. Individuals intuitively feel they begin at the beginning (e.g., a new job, new baby, or new relationship). Bridges (1980) suggested that every beginning and every transition starts

\[ \text{Figure 1. Diagram showing Schlossberg’s 4S analytical framework. Adapted from Schlossberg et. al (2012).} \]
with an ending; endings are the first phase of a transition. For example, the ending of undergraduate study leads to the beginning of a transition to the workplace.

The ending is a period of breaking away from an old identity. Endings involve “disengagement, misidentification, disenchantment, and disorientation” (Bridges, 1980, p. 92). Bridges (1980) emphasized that not everyone dealing with an ending goes through each of the phases in sequence nor does a person necessarily go through all three phases. However, in one way or another, people disengage by separating from old roles and routines. According to Bridges (1980), the beginning is a time to make new commitments and take on a new identity (i.e., be the new person that the new situation demands). New beginnings require the purpose, the picture, the plan, and a part to play. The purpose is identification and understanding of the reason for the new beginning. The picture is the outcome. The plan is the individual’s practical strategy, the steps and schedule of activity the individual needs to follow to make the transition (Bridges, 1980).

The neutral zone is a moratorium from “the conventional activity of everyday existence” (Bridges, 1980, p. 114). For undergraduate students, the neutral zone is the time between graduation and moving into the workplace. Bridges (1980) believed the neutral zone may be a time to assess and reestablish goals, “where one is between two ways of doing and being, having lost the old and not yet having found a way to live with the new” (p. 195). Managing and planning the three-phase process must be done for the transition to be effective.

Like Bridges, Schlossberg et al. (1995) viewed transition a process with three major phases. Freno (2003) described the phases as the shift from disequilibrium to a new state of equilibrium. For college graduates entering the workforce, transition requires a reformulation of goals or reconstructing of purpose as the graduate reaches one set of goals (finishing a degree).
The new graduate moves on and gives up a routine, but has not yet moved into a new set of activities, a new environment, or a new relationship (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Graduating forces students to face the task of making new decisions, redefining their purpose, and establishing new relationships with others in a new environment. A positive outcome for the individual is not a guarantee even though a transition provides opportunities for growth and development.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) argued that transitions are more likely to be beneficial if the 4S (situation, self, support, and strategies) are present at the time of the transition. Graduates’ effectiveness in coping with transition into the workplace depends on what the 4S represent: an asset (e.g., quality of college-level preparation) or a liability (e.g., lack of experience related to the workplace environment). The accumulation and interaction of these assets and liabilities explain why different graduates react differently to the same type of transition.

**Transition summary.** In the present study, the researcher defined transition as the process that takes place when students disengage from their role as undergraduates and undergo a change to create new roles as workers. Schlossberg’s (1984) and Bridges’ (1980) theories of transition provide insight into the impact of moving from postsecondary education to the workplace. These are adult development theories, but the work is relevant to postsecondary students because the process of transitioning from a university to a workplace involves challenges that mirror those of other developmental processes.

Systems-thinking requires looking at the whole in terms of parts and understanding the interrelations and interactions between the parts as the whole comes together. Transition involves phases or parts, and Schlossberg’s (1984) theory served as an appropriate framework to examine how the phases or parts interacted as students transitioned from university into the world of business. Using a systems lens, the researcher investigated the potential misalignment between
college-level preparation in business schools and the business community’s expectation of the workforce skills that college graduates should possess.

**Research Questions**

Overarching Research Question. To what extent do the four components of Schlossberg’s 4S model (situation, self, support, and strategy) influence the development of college-level preparation strategies used to prepare undergraduate students to meet the demands of the workplace?

Research Question 1. How do business school deans and instructors perceive how situational factors such as changes in workforce skills, business practices, and economic conditions impact college-level preparation strategies used to prepare students for their transition to the workplace?

Research Question 2. How do business school deans and instructors perceive how students’ personal and demographic characteristics play a role in college-level preparation strategies used to prepare students for the transition to the workplace?

Research Question 3. How do business school deans and instructors describe how they support students in their transition to the workplace?

Research Question 4. How do business school deans and instructors describe how they prepare students for their transition to the workplace?

**Significance of the Study**

Empirically based research highlighting college-level preparation strategies of business schools that prepare undergraduate students for the workplace is scant. This study is significant because it connected transition theory with business school practices, explicated how economic forces affect college-level preparation strategies, and revealed an interdependence between
higher education, the business community, and the U.S. economy. Findings are most relevant to business school deans, instructors, and future business students. The findings may inform best practices in business school settings and future research, allowing for enhanced alignment between college-level preparation strategies and business practices.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the United States, the demands of the 21st century changed the process by which higher education prepares students for the workplace. Technology and globalization reshaped economies around the world and changed business practices, which affected the type of skills and competencies required of students as they transition into the work environment. Atkinson and Nager (2014), Friedman (2006), and Sculley (1989) concurred that economic changes led to a shift from the Industrial Age of manufacturing and mass production to the Knowledge Age of technological production of goods and services. Business leaders need education systems to prepare knowledge workers and innovators to be successful in the 21st knowledge economy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of business school deans and instructors regarding preparation strategies in business schools that prepare undergraduate students for the workplace.

In the present study, the four elements of Schlossberg’s (1984) 4S analytical framework (situation, self, strategy, and support) framed and organized the review of the literature. This framework provided the understanding of factors that influence how college students prepare to transition into the workplace. The first section is represented by situational factors that directly affect college-level preparation (e.g., changes in the economy, changes in business practices, workforce skills, and business leaders’ concerns). The second section is represented by the self-factors (i.e., the influence of combining psychological attendant behaviors, career and life skills, and psychological resources during the transition from the university into the workplace). The third section includes strategy factors (e.g., preparation strategies business schools use to prepare students for the demands of the workplace). The researcher explored how business schools prepared students to transition from the university to the workplace and the extent to which their
preparation strategies aligned with the demands of the 21st century workplace. The fourth section explores support services that institutions of higher education provide to aid in the transition to the workplace. The review of the literature concludes with a summary of these four sections.

**Situational Factors**

**Changes in the economy.** Changes in the economy resulted from the emergence of the new economy also known as the *flat world*, a phenomenon described by Friedman (2006) as hyper-competition or a convergence of multiple new players on a global playing field developing new processes, methods of collaboration, and competing for economic dominance. These new players access the same technology, information, and market resources as works in the United States. Prior to the flat world economy, the United States was unchallenged at the top of the world’s economic hierarchy and maintained technological hegemony. This dominance resulted from large shares of electronic, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automobiles, machine tools, and steel industries. U.S. dominance ended in the early 1980s when Germany and Japan emerged as new players and challenged America’s lead. Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan followed in the 1990s, and more recently India and China in the 2000s.

In the flat world, the United States is no longer the incontestable innovative leader. India and China reduced corporate taxes, expanded research, developed funding, gave tax incentives, and established national innovation policies to develop new products and services (Atkinson & Nager, 2014). This caused America’s once exclusive expertise to be available to many industrialized nations. The United States must innovate, develop new ideas, and compete with players in this new economy.
Changes in workforce skills used in business practices. The demands of the new economy increased competitive challenges to America’s businesses, economy, and workforce. Innovation and the ability to develop and use technology transformed business practices, invention of new products, and types of services (Landefeld & Fraumeni, 2001). Multinational corporations such as Microsoft, Sony, Citigroup, General Motors, Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, and Xerox execute financial transaction across the globe. These organizations assume that employees possess the skills to manage those transactions with global competence, understand them in different languages, and operate on the same mathematical axis (Hutchison & Wiggan, 2009).

A collaborative approach to work became the new business model. Employees work in teams across multiple locations and coordinate projects using digital devices (e.g., cell phones, voice over internet protocol communications, teleconferencing, web conferencing, laptops, personal digital assistants, databases, spreadsheets, contact management software, e-mail, online collaboration spaces, and social networking tools) (Modestino, 2010). Consequently, in this new economy, workers need postsecondary degrees, certificates, training, and technical proficiency to work, invent new products, and provide 21st century services.

Changes in business practices workforce skills. With the emergence of the new economy, employers needed workers with more sophisticated core interdisciplinary skills (see Figure 2). Employers require career and life skills (self-factor), learning, innovation, information, media, technological acumen (see Appendix I), and STEM competencies. In the aftermath of the 2008 recession when joblessness was high, low-skilled workers struggled to find employment (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).
Shortage of medium and high-skilled workers. Employers face a growing shortage of high-skilled workers who will raise productivity and drive GDP growth. Carnevale et al. (2013) and MGI (2012) predicted that there would be demand for 1.5 million more workers with a college education than the available supply by the year 2020. As a result, employers worldwide could face a shortage of 85 million medium- and high-skilled workers (i.e., a projected shortage of about 40 million medium-skilled workers and 38-40 million high-skilled workers). The BHEF (2014) stated that the number of job openings in the United States grew to nearly 4 million with many positions unfilled for long periods because employers claimed they could not find employees with the necessary skills and degrees. For example, 1.5% of 25 to 34-year-olds in 2011 earned a college degree in a science-related field, putting the United States in the bottom third of Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) countries.
**Shortage of STEM-skilled workers.** STEM skills are in demand; economic projections suggested a need for approximately 1 million more STEM professionals if the United States wants to retain its historical dominance in science/technology, innovation, global competitiveness, and national security (President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, 2014). The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine (2007) reported a need for improvements in kindergarten through 12th grade science and mathematics education and increased enrollment in higher education. A 2012 report by the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee highlighted that the STEM workforce was falling short of demand in STEM occupations due to low STEM retention rates, declined enrollment of U.S. citizens in science and engineering graduate schools, and lower percentages of STEM graduates than those of other developed countries. According to the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (2014), the United States must increase its yearly production of undergraduate STEM degrees by 34% to match the professional demand.

Some experts debated whether there is a STEM crisis or a STEM surplus. The literature revealed shortages among data scientists, skilled programmers, software developers, petroleum engineers, and others in skilled trades. A 2011 survey of manufacturers found that 600,000 jobs remained unfilled because of a lack of qualified candidates for technical positions requiring STEM skills (e.g., machinists, operators, craftworkers, distributors, and technicians). However, there were no shortages of scientists and engineers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). There is a surplus of people with PhDs in biochemical and electrical engineers. As society relies further on technology for economic development and prosperity, the vitality of the STEM workforce will continue to be an essential concern.
Changes in workforce skills affect business education. According to MGI (2012) and Schlottmann (2010), the competitiveness of corporations depends on a well-educated workforce and requires higher education system to make this a reality. King (2015) on the other hand, found that institutions of higher education lagged when changes occurred in the economy that affected business practices. The speed of technological innovation and industry demands moved faster than higher education’s ability to adapt. Higher education systems continued to focus on traditional lectures and exams, leaving students without the ability to deal with problems relevant to a complex global marketplace (King, 2015). This lag suggests a potential misalignment between business education and business practices (BUPS, 2013; MGI, 2009; Mingers, 2015; NEBHE, 2015).

In the early part of the 21st century, researcher suggested two paradigms regarding strategies business schools should utilize to prepare students for the workplace. The dominant paradigm is that business schools must integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines rather than delivering curriculum on a discipline-by-discipline basis to meet the needs of the global community (Currie & Knights, 2003; Godfrey, Illes, & Berry, 2005). Currie and Knight (2003) and Godfrey et al. (2005) suggested that implementing a holistic and integrated business curriculum for undergraduates would allow them to examine connections between key functional areas of an organization, develop systems-thinking competencies, and have appropriate information to make informed decisions.

The second paradigm added that because business schools operate in a macro community with exogenous factors (e.g., economic, political, social, and legal constraints), business programs should include curriculum that reflects these external factors (Steiner & Watson, 2006; Wilson, 2008). Steiner and Watson (2006) and Wilson (2008) suggested business programs
should prepare effective moral leaders with strong citizenship skills, a sense of social responsibility, and a readiness to take on key social issues. These views align with the work of Dewey (1894) in the field of education who related the purpose of schooling to the notion of democracy; students learn and practice citizenship, social development, and cultivate democracy. Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011) explained that Dewey also advocated for student-centered education, connecting the classroom to the real world, differentiation, and integration of content areas.

**Business leaders’ concerns.** The debate regarding workforce readiness began before the 21st century; many business practitioners noted a mismatch between the skills graduates possessed and those employers desired and that the college classroom and workplace environments differed in structure and feedback (Chao, 2005; Evers & Rush, 1996; Gardner & Lambert, 1993; Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Holton, 1998; Lent & Worthington, 1999; Wood, 2004). Higher education and the business community are distinct in purpose, activity, rules, and hierarchy. Likewise, Levine (2005) argued that over-programming, over-reliance on peer approval, and over-involvement of parents influenced graduates’ abilities to work independently, have original thoughts, take initiative, or identify with older colleagues and supervisors in the work environment. Holton (1998) and Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) stated that employers expect new graduates to quickly learn new skills, fit appropriately into the workplace culture, become accepted as members of the organization, build effective working relationships, earn respect and credibility, and learn to accomplish tasks within the organization. Graduates expect to receive regular guidance and feedback from supervisors; nevertheless, new graduates described their work as routine and restricted.
Situational factors summary. Exogenous factors of the new economy influence future workforce preparation for students. In the new economy, technology transformed business practices, which require new core interdisciplinary skills and depend on universities to reform the way they deliver 21st century workforce training. The literature revealed that the competitive global job market requires graduates have relevant workforce skills and degrees that align with 21st century business practices.

Self-Factor

Introduction. Schlossberg et al. (2012) asserted that the self-factor consisted of psychological resources, assets, liabilities, and deficits that an individual in transition draws from to adapt to the transition. The self-factor includes psychological resources (i.e., self-efficacy, commitment, values/ethics, ego, and outlook) and personal and demographic characteristics (i.e., socioeconomic status, gender, and age). Psychological resources significantly affect students’ transitions from the university to the workplace therefore, college-level preparation with a focus on attendant behaviors are more consistent with the demands of professional life (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990; Marsh & Bishop, 2014; Steiner & Watson, 2006; Wilson, 2008).

Aggarwal (2008) and Trilling and Fadel (2009) noted that college strategies should combine psychological resources and career and life skills (see Table 1). Employers desire employees who can adapt, apply themselves to learn new knowledge, and compete. Table 1 presents a summary of a combination of career and life skills and their attendant psychological behaviors.
### Table 1

*Alignment Between Psychological Resources and Career and Life Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career and Life Skills</th>
<th>Psychological Assets and Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership, productivity, self-direction, and accountability</td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability and flexibility</td>
<td>Outlook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity and accountability</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and responsibility</td>
<td>Values/ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-direction and initiative</td>
<td>Ego-development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The influence of psychological behaviors and career/life skills. Trilling and Fadel (2009) explain that in 2003, six high school students from Malaysia, Singapore, the Netherlands, Egypt, and the United States collaborated online to create a website regarding the SARS virus. This global team researched the topic, interviewed experts, transcribed the data, designed the website, and programmed the website interface. The geographic dispersion of the team and the vastly different time zones they lived in made the use of online collaboration to plan, schedule, communicate, and coordinate essential (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The presence of a combination of career, life skills, and psychological resources was effective during the SARS project.

Aggarwal (2008) asserted that in the 21st century, technology transformed the performance of traditional tasks, the nature of products and services and the geographical location where work occurs (i.e., often away from hierarchical management).

During the collaborated online effort to create the SARS website, students worked on a global team (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Global leaders worked in teams located in different geographical locations on various projects with varying levels of responsibility that included
team coordination. Each team member was responsible for part of the work, individual leadership, team collaboration (dividing the work among the team), and project completion. This demonstrated how a project-based model of work operates in the knowledge work economy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Students made ethical decisions regarding who to inform first, how to communicate information about preventing spread of the disease and how the website could help people better understand the disease better without causing more fear (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Ethics as a psychological resource was evident in the SARS project and is relevant to college-level preparation because of the ethical failures (e.g., subprime mortgages, Enron audit failure, and Wells Fargo fake bank account scandal) the business community experienced in the 21st century. Ethics is the moral behavior of individuals based on established and expressed standards of a group or organization, a collection of individual values. In organizations, values are an intrinsic part of cultural behavior; ethics is a prerequisite to conduct any business (Schnebel & Bienert, 2004). Ethics protect a person’s individual rights and needs against the needs of others (Ciulla 2004).

The students demonstrated commitment, adaptability, flexibility, productivity, and accountability (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The six members of the team worked from different time zones; exchanged thousands of messages; used software web tools to create and share their work; and constantly added, edited, and modified each other’s work. This demonstrates productivity, commitment, and accountability. The students adjusted to the new work circumstances. Their ability to adapt to new ways of problem-solving resulted in creative solutions and innovation that helped meet the 21st century demand for fresh ideas and approaches.
The students also demonstrated self-direction, motivation, independence, and initiative. According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), they asked for technical help at the start of the project and occasionally during the project, but mostly relied on each other to solve problems and find solutions. Self-efficacy is a psychological resource that was pervasive in the students’ work. As described by Bandura (1977, 1997), self-efficacy is a person’s belief about whether he or she can perform and successfully accomplish specific tasks. Self-efficacy influences the tasks employees choose to learn and the goals they set for themselves. Self-efficacy also affects employees’ levels of effort and persistence when learning different tasks. It is important that students prepare for the 21st century workplace and develop deeper levels of initiative and self-direction as they progress through postsecondary education. The SARS project demonstrated social and cross-cultural interaction. The diverse work team members from different geographical locations connected via technology. This work model is the norm for 21st century work life. The ability to work effectively and creatively with team members regardless of differences in culture, style, and geographical location is essential in the 21st century workplace.

**The influence of psychological resources on transition.** Recent graduates often feel anxious as they approach the impending transition of moving into the workplace. Psychological resources are factors graduates use to adapt to new work environments as they disengage from their role as undergraduates. Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) found that psychological resources increased coping strategies for two women with multiple sclerosis, a painful and psychologically difficult experience. One of the women had ample assets to balance the deficit in her physical well-being. She had a tenured position at a university, a supportive family, close friends, and colleagues who rallied around her, and a coping personality. The other woman recently had a double mastectomy, her physical stamina and self-esteem were low, and she was recently
divorced. Additionally, this disability threatened her economic survival by making it impossible for her to continue her work as a carpenter (a job that required physical stamina). At this point, her psychological liabilities outweighed her assets, making her life especially difficult (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990).

Schlossberg’s 4S model did not assess these women’s condition in terms of health or sickness, but was useful to examine the ratio of their assets to liabilities and allowed for changes in the ratio as each woman’s situation changed (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990). Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) investigated why different individuals react differently to the same type of transition (e.g., differences in individuals’ unique distributions of assets and liabilities). In the current study, college preparation, graduates’ psychological resources, career, and life skills influenced how graduates transitioned and adapted to the work environment.

**Self-factor summary.** In sum, the 21st century workplace demands multiple characteristics of the self-factor, which should be part of college-level preparation to improve students’ transition from the university to new work environments by decreasing anxiety. College-level preparation should ensure that graduates have the psychological assets and resources to successfully transition and be effective business leaders.

**Strategies Factor**

The strategies factor includes internal and external components. The internal component includes things people do to avoid harm and coping strategies. For example, individuals in transition may use psychological resources to adapt to their transition (Perlin & Schooler, 1978; Schlossberg et al., 2012). The external component refers to strategies that institutions, communities, families, and friends use to assist individuals in transition. The present study focused on university business schools as intuitions that support students’ transitions into the
workplace. This section includes an overview of education and workforce readiness reforms. The researcher outlines views of higher education and workforce readiness and provides a historical perspective of workforce readiness reforms. The researcher examined business school workforce readiness strategies including curricula, capstone projects, and service learning opportunities that business schools use to prepare students for the workplace.

**Education and workforce readiness reforms.** Education researchers share a common language about higher education’s responsibility regarding workforce readiness but exhibit diverse views. Becker (1964), Schultz (1961), and The Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP, YEAR) suggested colleges and universities demonstrate that they adequately prepare students for the labor market, a global economy, citizenship, and social responsibility. Razik and Swanson (2010) explained that a direct correlation between the economic success of a nation and its educated citizenry should be a strategy and not a coincident. Higher education should equip students with work-related skills and classroom learning that promote high levels of work role identification (Ng & Feldman, 2007; Raelin, 2008). Educational goals evolved throughout the agrarian, industrial, and knowledge ages (see Table 2).
Table 2

*Evolution of Society’s Educational Goals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal for Education</th>
<th>Agrarian Age</th>
<th>Industrial Age</th>
<th>Knowledge Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to work and society</td>
<td>Grow food for family and others</td>
<td>Serve society through a specialized profession</td>
<td>Contribute to information and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create tools and crafts for basic needs</td>
<td>Apply engineering and science to contribute to industrial progress</td>
<td>Innovate new services to meet needs and solve problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in the local cottage economy</td>
<td>Contribute one piece to a long chain of production and distribution</td>
<td>Participate in the global economy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the Agrarian Age, agriculture (i.e., growing food for more than an individual household) was work of 41% of the American workforce; rural farmers were 50% of the U.S. population, children worked in the fields next to their parents, and education beyond farming skills was not a priority (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). As industrialization emerged, the population shifted from farm to city and work moved from fields to factories. Education was necessary to train as many factory and trade workers as possible. Standardization, uniformity, and mass production were important. The Knowledge Age demanded technological acumen, higher levels of knowledge and applied skills (e.g., expert thinking and complex communication) rather than manual skills. Business leaders moved repetitive and procedural functions to countries where the
cost of labor was low and those countries automated those tasks (BHEF, 2013; Duderstadt, 1999; Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

This method of providing services suggested an urgent need for universities to provide specialized life-long learning skills to supply the demands of America’s businesses. Business leaders needed a workforce of lifelong learners who think critically, solve complex problems, work collaboratively, and communicate effectively. Marsh and Bishop (2014) emphasized that business education that develops students’ 21st century competencies and their attendant behaviors is more consistent with the demands of professionals in the workplace.

**A historical perspective of workforce readiness reforms.** Between the 1800s and 2008, colleges and universities experienced four major reforms in workforce readiness strategies. In the mid-1800s, universities developed civic and religious leaders. Colleges established a Christian brotherhood to preserve religious and cultural integrity and inculcated students to be Christian (Wilhite & Silver, 2005). There was no common language or standards for andragogy and many seminaries utilized a curriculum of religious doctrine. Students had no input in their courses of study, the texts they read, or the worldviews to which they subscribed (Cremin, 1970; Wilhite & Silver, 2005).

The first reforms came with the Morrill Federal Land Grant College Act of 1862 that expanded higher education beyond elite leadership roles to provide mass education from public colleges. Universities trained students to enter government, maintain a free press, fight corruption, and reshape the morality of society. Faculty became mentors who were responsible for the intellectual, moral, spiritual, and career guidance of students (Herr, Rayman, & Garis, 1993; Wilhite & Silver, 2005).
The second reform was in the early 1900s when higher education experienced an accelerated transformation in career guidance during the baby boom period. There was a demand for specialized education, vocational guidance, and the creation of career placement centers (Vinson, Reardon, & Bertoch, 2011). Post-World War II (1940s and 1950s) employers increased the demand for technicians with agricultural backgrounds and abilities to plan cities, build railroads, and bridges. As these positions grew, career placement centers provided job placement for veterans graduating from college (Casella, 1990; Kretovicks, Honaker, & Kraning, 1999).

The third reform occurred in the 1970s and 1980s when higher education shifted to counseling, career planning, and job search preparation. Placing the responsibility of educational outcomes on the student forced them to perform career development and job searches (Casella, 1990; Kretovicks et al., 1999). The dot-com era of the 1990s and 2000s placed pressure on colleges to reengage career centers to promote student-employer relationships through networking, career events, and recruiting activities (Dey & Real, 2010).

The aftermath of the economic downturn in 2008 ushered in the fourth reform. Career services and professional development became significant elements of the student experience. Career services provided students with connections to experiential learning, internships, employment opportunities, and mentoring. Career centers offered career counseling, resume assistance, and career fairs to encourage students as they approached graduation. The centers built connections through partnerships with employers, developed career communities of learners, and established networks to engage students and alumni for a lifetime (Cruzvergara & Dey, 2014). Colleges and universities evolved from their colonial roots to prepare students for the Knowledge Age society.
Modern business school workforce readiness strategies. In response to the demands of the 21st century, university business schools adapted business education models to meet changing societal and economic demands; they offer business education with scientific rigor, societal relevance, and skills for the business environment. Holland (2009) suggested that many schools struggle to deliver an integrated approach that allows business students to assimilate into the workplace upon graduation. Issues include school curriculum, capstone projects, and service learning strategies that business schools use to prepare students for the workplace.

Views of the curriculum. In the 1920s and 1930s, undergraduate business programs relied on an andragogic model that ascribed to the concepts of specialization and division of labor referred to as the I-shaped model. In this model, business schools organized the curriculum by functional specialty (e.g., accounting, finance, marketing, and management). In this model, thinking outside of silo of a specific discipline was challenging for students (Bajada & Trayler, 2013; Curington, 2002; Porter & McKibben, 1988). In addition to functional areas, the curricula included student competencies, assessments, course objectives, and extracurricular activities. A limitation of this I-shaped model was that curricula did not explain the process organizations followed to achieve their goals; therefore, students were unable to understand the links between disciplines when they transitioned to the workplace, an interdisciplinary operational environment (Buttermore, 2011). Business leaders in the 1990s were unsatisfied with the preparation of business students and critiqued the business curriculum’s effectiveness in preparing students for the demands of the 21st century workplace. They called for business educators to deliver a curriculum that was current and offered programs to meet the needs of constituents.

In 1992, The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) mandated standard revisions for MBA programs to use an integrated curriculum approach. Many business
schools revised their MBA curricula and revised undergraduate business programs. Currie and
Knights, (2003), Carnevale and Desrochers (2003), and Weber and Englehart (2011) argued that
workforce preparation was an important element of business education but educators designed,
organized, taught, and delivered the curriculum from a disciplinary approach. The curriculum
lacked systems skills, scope, and purpose and focused on results without balancing the
humanistic needs of the stakeholders. Educators did not address extrinsic factors that businesses
deal with every day, gave limited attention to ethics and social responsibility to safeguard the
future against financial crisis, and taught competencies that did not align with the workplace.

In 2002, a management education task force from the AASCB indicated a need for
business programs to offer innovative programs that adopt action learning and application of
technology as strategies to improve the curriculum. The AASCB (2002) recommended an
interdisciplinary T-shaped model. This T-shaped model included workers who specialize in at
least one area, possess system-thinking competencies, the ability to function across disciplines,
and know how organizations functions from the bottom to top to address challenges. Workers
should understand information from multiple sources, advance professional relationships across
different organizations, contribute innovatively to organizational practices, and communicate
across social, cultural, economic and scientific disciplines (AASCB, 2002). Employers require
workers with skills beyond a single discipline (Demirkan & Spohrer, 2015).

In 2011, the AASCB utilized Standard 15 to address the business management
curriculum. In Standard 15, business educators ensure that students receive appropriate content
in their respective programs (AASCB, 2015). Gundersen et al. (2011) declared that because the
standard did not require business schools to follow a systematic process with external
monitoring, the curriculum did not change. Instead, various business schools introduced a capstone course towards the end of business students’ studies.

**Views of the capstone.** At the end of the senior year, business students concluded courses in liberal arts, science, general business, and major-specific courses and completed a capstone experience (Sanyal, 2003). The goal of the capstone is to integrate the knowledge and skills students acquired from course work and apply them to a real-world case study or project. Students utilize 21st century skills and competencies to analyze an underperforming company’s financial issues, human resources (HR), marketing, management, and operational information to create a large-scale organizational improvement plan. They gather information about the company or industry through a triangulation of data sources (e.g., interviewing industry leaders, reviewing news stories about the company or industry, and using technology obtain key financial information) (Bailey, Oliver, & Townsend, 2007). The goal is to train students to be innovative problem-solvers and researchers, which aligns to 21st century business practices.

Usry, White, and Olivo (2009) found that students who participated in capstone projects demonstrated stronger understanding of multiple disciplines and interaction between disciplines. However, Bailey et al. (2007) noted that the capstone experience occurring at the end of the student’s academic program rather than throughout the curriculum is less helpful because the experience is limited to one semester. Educators should re-examine the extent to which business students benefit from capstone experiences and to what extent those skills prepare students to immediately contribute to the workplace.

**Views of service learning.** Service learning is another strategy to provide students with experiential learning defined by Ash, Clayton, and Atkinson (2005) as a collaborative teaching and learning strategy designed to promote academic enrichment, personal growth, and
community engagement. Service learning pairs a student with an agency or organization with specific needs related to academic materials. The student performs community service tasks and converges the theoretical component of the course and the service learning experience in a reflective process to enhance their learning (Madsen, 2004). Service learning benefits community organizations and the students who gain real-world experience.

Because of this benefit, many educational institutions adopted community service programs. Service learning helps students connect theory and practice (Hinck & Brandell, 2000). Boyer (1990) wrote that only by engaging students in the learning process (the scholarship of engagement) could instructors ensure students’ retention of course concepts and application of knowledge and skills. Faculty must become reflective practitioners who move between theory and practice to bring the daily problems of real people in real neighborhoods into the classroom. Boyer’s (1990) view mirrors the work of Dewey (1894), a strong proponent of providing experience and reflective opportunities for students. Dewey (1938) indicated that education should be “based on the philosophy of experience” (p. 29) and should “emphasize the freedom of the learner” (p. 22). Dewey (1938) taught that all principles are abstract and that they “become concrete only in the consequences, which result from their application” (p. 20). Service learning provides opportunities for students to develop skills related to citizenship, leadership, conflict resolution, teamwork, interaction, time management, networking, cultural awareness, and diversity (Madsen, 2004). Students try harder on service learning projects than on other school assignments because they see the practitioners as potential employers and feel motivated to present their knowledge, skills, and abilities (Madsen, 2004).

Barriers to service learning include organizational resistance, lack of an institutional infrastructure to support service learning, and undetermined relevance of service learning to
business education. For service learning programs to successful, faculty and administrators must
develop working relationships with consultants or board members of community agencies.
Academic service learning as an andragogic preparation strategy is consistent with what business
leaders need and provides student with workplace assimilation skills.

**Strategies factor summary.** Reform in higher education workforce readiness strategies
is not a new phenomenon exclusive to the new economy. Preparing students for the demands of
the 21st century workplace is a responsibility of the higher education system. The literature
suggested a re-examination of curricular content and delivery (e.g., changing from an I-shaped
andragogic disciplinary model of specialization and divisions of labor to a T-shaped
interdisciplinary curriculum model of interdisciplinary skills training). Students need
specialization in at least one area and must develop an understanding of systems-thinking to
function as adaptive innovators, cross the boundaries between disciplines, and solve real-world
problems using a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. Experiential learning is a desirable
strategy that enables retention of academic materials as the student assimilates into the
workplace and applies knowledge to real-world situations.

**Support Factor**

Schlossberg et al. (2012) explained that support factors such as internal (i.e.,
psychological resources) and external (i.e., families, relationships, communities, and institutions)
resources are available to students as they transition from the university to the workplace. The
support factor includes resources and services that support the student in transition as they
emotional burdens. In this multiple-case study, the researcher examined business schools’
support services and the extent to which those services influenced students’ transitions into the
The researcher focused on transition support services such as experiential learning (e.g., internship) and academic support services (e.g., advising).

**Transition support services. Internship.** Student support services in postsecondary institutions help students integrate into the campus environment, create conditions for positive learning experiences, and assist with workplace transitions (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013). According to Esters and Retallic (2013), academic institutions have a responsibility to provide opportunities inside and outside the classroom that expose students to learning experiences that develop a strong and productive sense of self. Colleges and universities emphasize programs that allow students to gain work experience and are beginning to define success by more than just academic learning. These programs include co-op jobs, internships, apprenticeships, and other methods that integrate real-world experience into classrooms. Internships are an experiential and work-based learning experience.

As described by Hergert (2009) and Moghaddam (2011), internships that expose students to real-world work experiences are now a ubiquitous aspect of university curricula. Some business programs require an internship for graduation, and some offer academic credit for internship programs. Universities and colleges use internships to provide business students with practical work experience, prepare them for future careers, increase their employable skills through work-related learning experiences, and help them connect their academic studies to business practices. Internship programs prepare students for real-life challenges after graduation, provide them with 21st century skills, help them make good career choices, and provide opportunities to learn specific job-related skills not taught in traditional business programs.

Hergert (2009) explained that students who participated in an internship had greater job stability in their early careers, higher job satisfaction, and an easier transition from the university
to the workplace. There is little research available regarding the specific role internships play in teaching business practices. Learning theory highlighted the importance of teaching students how to apply knowledge and concepts they acquired through previous course work. However, business schools may fail to teach students how to apply knowledge and concepts they acquire in class. Candy and Crebert (1991) found that business students were well versed in theories and knowledge but lacked the ability to solve real business problems. Business programs were too narrow and disconnected from the real world. This may be due to a perceived disconnect between the theoretical bias of business schools and the pragmatic needs of the business community.

Case studies and simulations are useful techniques for student learning, but students need real-world, hands-on experience to apply what they learn in the classroom to the work environment (Candy & Crebert, 1991). Internships transform the business world into a laboratory for students to understand how coursework relates to the practice of business. This argument validates the need for graduates to have experiential learning as a workplace assimilation strategy.

**Academic support services.** Academic advising and support services offer an instructional component of college-level preparation. Academic advising is integral to fulfilling the teaching and learning mission of higher education; through academic advising, students learn to become members of the higher education community, become educated citizens of a democratic society and global community, and think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students and future professionals. Academic advising engages students beyond their own worldviews while acknowledging their individual characteristics and motivations as they move in, through and out of the institution (NACADA, 2006). Knot (2014) stated that
academic advising links students’ personal goals with institutional resources; faculty-student contact may significantly affect student motivation, involvement, and retention.

According to Gordon (2005), academic advisors recognize that many college students equate their academic major with future career possibilities. Academic advisors are not career counselors, but they frequently assist students in gathering and processing academic information related to career exploration and planning. As noted by NACADA (2006), the need to integrate academic and career information is vital as students enter a technological, complex, and evolving workplace. Students must take advantage of opportunities in college to develop knowledge and skills that are essential to compete in a knowledge-based economy. Academic advisors help students understand how their educational decisions affect their future careers. Unfortunately, some advisors do not engage in career advising because they do not view it as their responsibility or feel they lack the background and training to do so. This may put students at a disadvantage if they do not receive occupational information that is critical to make informed decisions (NACADA, 2006).

Most colleges and universities expanded their advising centers from a single-purpose faculty activity to a comprehensive academic, career, and personal development service performed by staff. To enhance undergraduate students’ success and improve academic outcomes, colleges and universities expanded their programmatic intervention by creating centralized units of professional advisors who serve specific student groups to increase retention (Grites, 1979; Knot, 2014; Light, 2001; Tuttle, 2000). Knot (2014) noted that when students work with academic advisors, they are likely to return to campus in their second year and maintaining higher GPAs than students who do not use advising services. As the demands of the changing global economy and business community exert pressure to reform on institutions of
higher education, the evolution of transition services (e.g., academic advising) may benefit college-level preparation strategies.

**Support factor summary.** College and university educators increasingly recognize the importance of support in the form of experiential learning, academic advising, and career development. Many academic departments in postsecondary institutions provide services that help students take advantage of nontraditional learning opportunities. Nevertheless, there are numerous opportunities for growth as business schools continue to progress.

**Literature Review Summary**

Exogenous factors impelled by changes in the economy and business community influenced the way higher education departments prepare students for the demands of the 21st century workplace. Universities responded by updating institutional and academic policies. Higher education systems must re-examine preparation strategies to ensure alignment of those strategies with economic shifts. The review of the literature confirmed that there is urgency for higher education to engage students in rigorous and relevant curriculum that replaces the traditional I-shaped model with a T-shaped interdisciplinary curriculum that focuses on real-world problems using a variety of disciplinary perspectives (Bajada & Trayler, 2013). Institutions of higher education must prepare students to meet industry demands.

In preparing students for a competitive global job marketplace, the self- and support factor domains are necessary because the 21st century workplace demands student’s transition from the university using adaptable skills in their new work environment. Recent graduates often experience anxiety as they approach graduation. College-level preparation that includes the self-factor may provide graduates with psychological assets to be effective business leaders. For students to effectively transition from the university to the workplace they require transition
supports as students may not independently connect classroom learning to business practices (Hergert, 2009).

The success of students’ transitions into the workplace ultimately depends on college-level preparation. Without situation, self, strategies, and support, Schlossberg (1984) suggested that college-level preparation may not achieve its full potential as a viable transition strategy. In this chapter, the researcher described four factors of workforce readiness and transition in the 21st century: (a) a need for work-based learning; (b) a curriculum that ascribes to the T-shaped model of interdisciplinarity; (c) higher education workforce readiness reforms; and (d) relevance of workforce competencies and their attendant behaviors.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This research study was a multiple-case study in which the researcher explored the perceptions of business school deans and instructors at two private universities in Connecticut regarding college-level preparation strategies that prepare undergraduate students for the workplace. A multiple-case design was ideal because the results are compelling and robust (Yin, 2013). The researcher employed a social constructivist epistemology to co-construct meaning with participants throughout the data collection process. This approach was appropriate for qualitative exploratory research and enabled participants to describe their views of college-level preparation strategies at business schools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2010).

The researcher explored participants’ perceptions of college-level preparation strategies through the lens of Schlossberg’s (1984) 4S conceptual framework (situation, self, support, and strategies). This conceptual framework gave the researcher a structure for making sense of the perceptions of administrators and educators about the college-level preparation processes. Schlossberg’s theoretical framework helped the researcher illustrate changes in economic conditions and business community practices and show their impact on college-level preparation strategies. A transition theory also served as a lens through which the researcher identified and informed best practices for business schools preparing students to meet the demands of the 21st century workplace.

Selection Criteria for Participants

The researcher selected participants using convenience sampling with specific selection criteria. Convenience sampling involves including participants who are easily assessable and willing to join in the study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The main criterion for inclusion was to be currently holding the position of a business school
administrator (e.g., dean, assistant dean) or business school instructor because of their leadership and administrative responsibilities to the overall operation of the business school. Business school instructors have decision-making, instruction, and counseling skills and engage in partnerships with businesses. Business school deans and instructors in this study had at least 5 years of administrative and teaching experience, curriculum development, and business content knowledge.

Study Participants

**Business school deans.** The four deans who participated in this study had at least 5 years of leadership and administrative experience with responsibility managing the overall operations of their respective university business school. The researcher submitted an e-mail invitation and request to visit each business school (see Appendix A). The researcher obtained consent from prospective participants (see Appendix D) after receiving approval to visit the site.

**Business school instructors.** Twelve instructors from two institutions participated in this study. The instructors were tenured and non-tenured instructors with at least 5 years of teaching experience in accounting, business law, business strategy, economics, health management, management, marketing, organizational behavior, sports management, or sales management. The researcher compared one urban and one suburban university in Connecticut, both accredited through the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) to increase the diversity of the sample. The schools offered rigorous academic programs and provided students with a career-focused education and technical competencies. Both universities sought to create a culture that engaged students in experiential learning, real-world experience, and an integrated global business perspective. They valued sustainability, social responsibility, new knowledge creation, quality, and integrity. The goal of University A (the urban university) was for students
to demonstrate fundamental business concepts and analytical and technical knowledge. The goal of University B (the suburban university) was for business students to engage in a study of business that reflected the 500-year-old Catholic tradition of academic rigor and personal reflection to understand larger ethical, moral, and global contexts of their life and work.

**Recruitment of participants.** The researcher requested permission from the business school administrators (deans) at two universities in Connecticut by submitting a request for site email (see Appendix A) in February and May 2016 to request permission to use their schools of business as a research site. The researcher received approval from the deans in May 2016 and July 2016 and then e-mailed all instructors in each business school with an introductory letter inviting them to participate in the research (see Appendix B). The deans from both universities also e-mailed instructors and invited them to participate in this study. The researcher emailed informed consent letters (see Appendices C and D) to participants prior to interviews. The consent letter outlined the research, purpose of the study, assurance of anonymity and confidentiality, and explained that not participating would not result in any type of penalty. Documents submitted to participants included the researcher’s contact information.

**Participant demographics.** Table 3 shows a summary of participants’ demographic information. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to maintain anonymity: A for participants from University A and B for participants from University B, D1 for the deans, D2 for the associate deans, and the numbers 1 to 6 for instructors. Participants reported the business subject area they taught, whether they were tenured, and years of experience. Of the participants from University A, six were male and two were female. Five were non-tenured and three tenured. Seven of them had over 10 years of experience and one had 5 years of experience. Of the
Participants from University B, five were male and three were female. All eight participants were tenured and all participants had over 15 years of experience teaching.

Table 3

Participants’ Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
<th>Business subject</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A-D1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-D2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-D1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-D2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>31 years</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>33 years</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Sports management</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Marketing and sales management</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Health management</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Organizational behavior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Business law</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>Business strategy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>52 years</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Organizational behavior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33 years</td>
<td>Organizational behavior and leadership</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24 years</td>
<td>Business strategy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Deans from University B had more years of experience than the deans from University A. The four deans were all tenured men, had between 12 and 31 years of teaching experience, had over 5 years of experience as deans, and three of the four deans taught in a business endorsement area. Of the instructors at both universities, 58% were male 42% were female, 11 of the 12 had between 10 and 30 years of teaching experience, and one teacher had 5 years of teaching experience. Fifty-eight percent of the instructors were tenured, forty two percent did not have tenured status, and all instructors taught in one of the following business management subject areas: Sports management, health management, sales management, or general management.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

**Interview protocol.** The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the instructors and deans. The interview protocol and background (see Appendix E) ensured the researcher asked each participant the same questions to accurately explore answers to the research questions (Vogt, 2012). The researcher recorded responses and transferred the data to a password secure computer for transcription and analysis. Interview questions reflected Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory to facilitate data analysis processes. Interviews occurred between August and October 2016. The researcher emailed participants the interview protocol (see Appendices F and G) prior to meeting with each participant to inform participants about the background of the study, the conceptual definition of Schlossberg’s 4S framework, and to provide a guide for the interview process and a timeline for data collection.

**Data organization and analysis.** Qualitative research analysis involves preparing and organizing data into text (e.g., phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) and themes through the process of coding; the researcher then presents the codes as figures, tables, or bracketed text (Creswell, 2013). In the present study, the researcher transcribed data verbatim into text, resulting in several
pages of transcripts. The researcher created two documents (one for each university), diligently transcribing interview responses to accurately reflect each participant’s verbiage. The researcher grouped the data results under the corresponding interview protocol research question (Yin, 2013). The preferred analytic strategy, chosen by the researcher, relied on the theoretical proposition of Schlossberg’s 4S framework that provided the qualitative thematic coding method (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013). Given that this research used Schlossberg’s 4S model as the organizing and analytical framework, the researcher coded data under the themes: (a) situation; (b) self; (c) support; and (d) strategy.

Situation refers to situational factors that directly affect college-level preparation (e.g., changes in the economy, changes in business practices, workplace skills and competencies, and business leaders’ concerns). The self-factor examined the psychological resources and attendant behaviors students possess during the transition from university to the workplace. The support factors explored the support services that institutions of higher education provide to aid in the transition to the workplace. The strategies factor explored how business schools prepared students to transition from the university to the workplace and the extent to which their preparation strategies aligned with the demands of the 21st century workplace.

The interview protocol consisted of nine questions. The first five demographic questions were for descriptive purposes only, not for analysis. Question six through nine measured the elements of Schlossberg’s 4S. The researcher aligned the research questions and interview questions to provide an understanding of factors that influence how college students prepare to transition into the workplace. See Table 4 for alignment.
Table 4

Alignment of Interview Questions with Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overarching Research Question:</strong> To what extent are each of the four components of Schlossberg’s 4S model (situation, self, support, and strategy) perceived by business school deans and instructors as present during the development and implementation of college-level preparation strategies used to prepare undergraduate students to meet the demands of the workplace?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation:</strong> How do business school deans and instructors describe how situational factors such as changes in workforce skills, business practices, and economic conditions are integrated into college-level preparation strategies used to prepare students for their transition to the workplace?</td>
<td>1. In what ways, would you say changes in the economy and business community are reflected in how this business school and you as an instructor you prepare students for the workplace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) What workforce skills and competencies are integrated in your business school’s college-level preparation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) In what ways, would you say this business school and you as an instructor collaborate with business community leaders to keep updated on changes in economic conditions that impact business practices and needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self:</strong> How do business school deans and instructors describe how students’ personal and demographic characteristics play a role in college-level preparation strategies used to prepare students for their transition to the workplace?</td>
<td>2. In what ways, would you say students’ personal and demographic characteristics play a role in the development and implementation of college-level preparation strategies used by this business school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support:</strong> How do business school deans and instructors describe how they support students for their transition to the workplace?</td>
<td>3. In what ways, would you say this business school and you as an instructor support student in their transition to the workplace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> How do business school deans and instructors describe how they prepare students for their transition to the workplace?</td>
<td>4. What preparation strategies would you say this business school and you as an instructor use to prepare students for the workplace?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher grouped situational factors across three areas outlined in the literature. This includes changes in the economy, changes in business practices, and changes in workforce skills used in business practice. Responses from participants appear under interview question 1 (see Table 4) for each of these categories for Universities A and B. This analysis provided an understanding of the extent to which administrators and faculty respond to changes in society and the economic environment of the 21st century and translate those economic changes into institutional policies that align andragogical strategies with the demands of the times. The researcher repeated the same process for the self-factor in college-level preparation, specifically psychological resources (i.e., ego development, outlook, self-efficacy, commitment, and values). Individual participant’s responses appear in Table 4 under interview question 2 from University A and B to reveal similarities and differences that either corroborate or conflict with the theoretical framework that suggests psychological resources are factors graduates use to adapt to new work environments as they disengage from their role as undergraduates. The researcher replicated the same approach to the support and strategies factors, organizing participant responses under interview question 3 and 4. The researcher then coded for themes, similarities, and differences and compared findings to the literature.

**Step 1: Organize and prepare data for analysis.** The researcher transcribed the raw interview data into text using Microsoft Word and created folders and files for each university. The researcher created two documents (one for University A and one for University B). In each Word document, the researcher used the elements of Schlossberg’s 4S framework (situation, self, support, and strategies) as labels. The researcher grouped the interview question that aligned with each label and all participants (using their pseudonym) whose responses fit the question
under that label together. The researcher then formed a description from the data and used that description to inform the results and analysis in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Step 2: Get immersed in the data.** The researcher listened to the recordings, transcribed the data verbatim, and read and re-read the transcripts to get a sense of the material before breaking it into parts and organizing the codes. This process forced the researcher to become intimate with the material (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Wolcott, 1994).

**Step 3: Code the data.** According to Creswell (2013), the process of coding involves aggregating data into small categories of information, building detailed descriptions, developing themes, and providing interpretation of participants’ views within the context of the setting. Charmaz (2006) explained that coding for actions and processes helps researchers define connections between data. Coding involves asking analytic questions regarding what the data suggest and from whose point of view. Such questions foster data analysis and allow the researcher to crystallize significant points in the research (Charmaz, 2006).

In the present study, as a first step in the analysis process, the researcher assembled data using the 4S theoretical framework. The 4S had specific definitions that the researcher integrated into the interview protocol. For example, situational factors examined factors that directly affect college-level preparation. As such, the researcher looked for themes in the participants’ responses that demonstrated those situational factors. The researcher then organized participant responses into chunks of text and highlighted quotations before bringing meaning to the information. The assembled data was identified as belonging to each theme defined by Schlossberg’s 4Cs. The researcher identified eight emergent themes in the interview data that corroborated with two emergent themes in the literature. This helped the researcher make sense of the data.
**Step 4: Interpret the data.** As indicated by Creswell (2013) and Patton (2002), interpretation involves making sense of the data, making sense of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, and making inferences. Creswell (2013) explained that interpretation in qualitative research involves abstracting beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data, allowing the researcher to connect his/her interpretation to the research literature. In the present study, the researcher read through the data several times for patterns, themes, and various descriptors related to the 4S framework. The meaning of the data arose from the researcher’s personal interpretation coached by the literature and Schlossberg’s 4S framework.

**Step 5: Present the data.** Narrative report writing and using direct quotations provided better understanding of the preparation strategies participants used to prepare students for the demands of the workplace. Direct quotations reflect a depth of emotion, the ways respondents organized their world, their thoughts about what was happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions (Patton, 1990). The researcher used a cross-analytic strategy to compare the results for the two universities and presented the findings in a narrative form.

**Validity and Credibility**

Qualitative investigators believe that findings should be congruous with reality for the findings to be credible. The integrity of qualitative research depends on validity and credibility. Validity is the accuracy or truthfulness of the findings and credibility is the truthfulness of the inquiry’s findings (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). According to Yin (2013) and Creswell (2013), validity in a qualitative case study refers to the extent to which the case study demonstrates credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The
researcher established credibility via rich data collection, participant validation/member checks, triangulation, and comparison by using a multiple-case case study design.

**Thick data.** The researcher used data from semi-structured interviews with business school administrators and instructors. For this case study, the researcher verified validity by collecting thick data via the interview protocol (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013). Each participant responded to all four constructs as defined by the theoretical framework. The researcher verified transferability of the case by using thick data collection that provided data regarding perceived inferences and explanations (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013). The interview protocol offered a consistent line of inquiry about the four elements of Schlossberg’s 4S framework and solicited participants’ perceptions of college-level preparation strategies. Data were detailed and varied and therefore provided a full and revealing picture of the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2013).

The researcher informed participants of the purpose of the study, who would likely benefit from the results, the potential risks associated with participation, and an overview of the theoretical framework. Each interviewee signed a confidentiality agreement. The researcher demonstrated respect for the sites by sending an official request for use of each site to the leadership (deans) at those sites. Finally, the researcher endeavored to transcribe and report the data using the true language of the participants to convey their honest and clear perceptions of college-level preparations in business schools that prepare undergraduates for the workplace and shared copies of the findings with participants. Confirmability and dependability were established through the quality of the research process (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013). The researcher noted ethical considerations that influenced the confirmability and dependability of a case study, such as the need for institutional review board (IRB) approval.
The replicability of the research design improves the reliability of the study (Yin, 2013). The researcher utilized a step-by-step process to collect the data, including use of a semi-structured interview protocol. The researcher checked transcripts to ensure they did not contain obvious mistakes from transcription and that there was no drift in the definition of codes by constantly comparing data with the code definitions (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013).

**Triangulation**

Data triangulation is use of multiple sources of evidence to develop a convergence of evidence in case studies, a process of corroborating facts related to the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2013). For this multiple-case study, the researcher employed a data triangulation approach that involved validation of the data through cross verification from two cases and from administrators and teachers (Patton, 2002). The researcher analyzed the perspectives of business school deans and instructors to create a rich picture of preparation strategies at the two business schools. The credibility of the findings increased because similar results emerged from both sites.

The researcher employed member checking to ensure accuracy of the findings. The researcher asked each participant to review and critique the emergent themes derived from the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy, while providing reciprocity to participants for their willingness to provide information and for participating in the study. Four of the 16 participants responded with no changes to their data. Tables 4 and 5 include details from the data collection process and the alignment of interview questions with the research questions.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

Findings from this study reflect the narrative responses from face-to-face semi-structured interviews regarding the nature and scope of strategies participants used in business schools to prepare students for the demands of the workplace. The researcher organized participant responses in data sets within eight major themes: (a) translating external factors into academic policies; (b) keeping updated with economic trends; (c) blending approaches to college-level preparation; (d) a systems approach to college-level preparation; (e) workplace assimilation; (f) attendant behaviors integration; (g) uniform preparation strategies across universities; and (h) identifying college-level preparation gaps. The researcher answered the overarching research question by presenting a summary of the influence of Schlossberg’s (1984) 4S analytical framework on college-level preparation strategies and comparing the findings with evidence in the current literature.

Emergent Themes

Translating external factors into academic policies. Situational factors (e.g., changes in the economy, business practices, and workplace competencies) influence college-level preparation based on the emerging global economic environment. The deans and instructors at Universities A and B reported that these changes challenged them to change the way their business schools prepare students for the demands of the workplace. Both universities implemented co-curricular strategies that included entrepreneurship programs, nonprofit initiatives, and a professional development series. University A implemented a Shared Life Client Experience (SLICE), which is a community service initiative that provided students with opportunities to work with business leaders. The deans from both universities indicated that they
implemented other community service initiatives to translate external factors into academic policies in college-level preparation strategies.

**The SLICE initiative.** The SLICE program allowed students to apply academic knowledge to an internship experience. The objective was to put students in the field to work with companies to solve real-life business problems. The students work in teams with other students and business leaders. Students from University A solved a fundamental management problem at a local company. The recent owners of the business tried to merge a West Coast operation with their East Coast infrastructure, and the students helped them solve HR problem while developing teamwork, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills. The associate dean stated that the business community needs employees who work together on complex real-world problems. As described by the associate dean, “The SLICE experience is motivating for the students and equally motivating to employers and the business community because it’s real and it gives students the experience of working on a real-world problem” (A-D2). The dean reported,

> When students help business leaders to solve their business problem that’s a win for them. The companies are pleased, our students get the experience they need from working on real-life problems in real time that they don’t typically get from a textbook or lecture, and the employer gets the opportunity to see the students in a different environment as opposed to just looking at a resume. Many of the team members are offered a job by the company in which they have solved their problem. Hence, it leads to the target of getting employment in the field they are trained in. (A-D1)

University A had different versions of the SLICE initiative. For example, the hospitality department had a similar project in its capstone course and many of the hospitality students who
participated in SLICE graduated with jobs in the hospitality industry. The economics department also had a version of SLICE; students worked with a client to produce an economic report. The dean explained, “We had a most recent graduate who received a very nice job” (A-D1).

The two deans explained that the SLICE initiative takes time to impact student outcomes. Based on the evidence from the interview data regarding the four co-curricular strategies, including the SLICE initiative, University A appeared to be owned by the deans. Only two instructors mentioned the strategies in response to the interview questions. This supported the associate dean’s statement, “We are working on the buy-in from the faculty since they own the curriculum” (A-D2). A-D1 indicated that the goal was for every student in the college of business to participate in one SLICE initiative. A-D2 concurred with the dean and stated,

We want to make SLICE a requirement in every major in the college of business and so from an administrative perspective, we are working on the buy-in of the faculty since they own the curriculum. We must convince faculty of the merit of SLICE. Once we have convinced them, each department would offer a SLICE opportunity, and each major must ensure that each student has at least one SLICE experience. We are also looking to create a college-level SLICE where our best and brightest students would be peer-ed up with our high-profile clients, so we can communicate to potential students who are thinking about college to see high profile success.

Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. In response to the business community’s demand for more interdisciplinary learning, both universities implemented an entrepreneurship initiative. University A created the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation to serve as a co-curricular activity for students from the business and engineering schools. Students developed
skills for the 21st century workplace. Entrepreneurship was a major initiative at University B around 2008 because most undergraduate students wanted to own their own business or pursue other entrepreneurial ventures, according to instructors B1 and B2. Companies laid off students’ parents following the 2008 economic downturn. In response, University B brought in entrepreneurs from the local community who pitched their ideas to the students. Students selected a group venture and the teacher designed the course around that venture with local entrepreneurs. The local entrepreneurs benefitted, and the students interacted with entrepreneurs within real-world business operations. This strategy was different from the traditional approach of placing students with big companies. According to B2,

   In 2008, the economy went through a major disruption, and it influenced the way I prepare students and the courses I teach. For example, the traditional career path has changed radically. Thus, within our courses more entrepreneurial skills are now required. Strategic planning courses have also changed. We still talk about strategic planning within the traditional business firm, but we also talk about it in the entrepreneurial context because that’s where students are going.

One instructor conveyed that he engaged with local entrepreneurs, team taught a technology entrepreneurship course, and built working relationships between himself and the local community so that students from the university would have ongoing opportunities.

   **Non-profit institute.** The business community values service. Organizations ask employees to engage in service as part of what they do for the organization and as part of their social responsibility. “Organizations are saying it’s more than just generating value for their customers, it’s also about creating value in the community in which they reside” (A-D2). University A implemented a service initiative, the Non-Profit Institute, in a response to the needs
of the business community. The objective of the Non-Profit Institute was to introduce services and train students in response to the needs of the business community. Like SLICE, the Non-Profit Institute provided undergraduate students with an opportunity to go into the field and work with nonprofit organizations, typically led by social entrepreneurs. “It’s motivating for our students because it gives them the opportunity to connect with the community, work on real-life problems, and learn to communicate” (A-D2).

**Knowledge of current economic trends.** Researchers assessed how universities kept up to date with 21st century changes, how they positioned themselves to respond to those changes, and how they aligned college-level preparation to meet the changes relevant to preparation strategies in business schools. All participants conveyed that they collaborated with the business community to some degree. From a leadership perspective, advisory boards were the deans’ primary means of connecting with business leaders. Both deans described connecting with their alumni base and collaborating for endowments.

**Deans’ collaboration strategies.** Interview data revealed that the deans from both universities collaborated with business community leaders by meeting with advisory boards, connecting with their alumni base, and creating endowments. According to the A-D2, 50% of the dean’s responsibility was external to the college.

When you have the assistant or associate deans then the dean can take some of the internal administrative responsibilities and put them off on the associate dean so that he/she can focus more on the outside. To the degree to which the institution provides the means for the dean to go external, he/she can be successful in interfacing with the community. (A-D2)
Advisory boards. A-D2 explained that the dean has several advisory boards that the provost and administration made possible by having an assistant and an associate dean. “So we have a college advisory board to help guide what we do” (A-D1). The associate dean stated that the dean had a board for the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Nonprofit Institute, and the college of business, a separate board for larger business issues, and a primary board that reviewed growth. The dean collaborated with the business community by necessity because that was how he obtained resources for the university. The dean concurred with the associate dean and said,

It becomes necessary to provide the students with what they need, because if you don’t provide what student’s need, they will not come. For multiple reasons, we must provide the skills for students to be employable and for them to be employable we must listen. If we are not listening, we are not going to be successful. (A-D1)

The associate dean from University B relayed that the advisory board was the primary connection to the outside community. The dean was constantly in contact with the advisory board, which met three times per year with the dean, associate dean, and other constituents on campus. “We talk about the current state of affairs from what they are seeing out in the industry versus what we are seeing in academia. We have an advisory board made up of business leaders” (B-D2).

Alumni base. The dean from University A reported that 50% of his job was talking with very successful alumni of the university and business leaders. “We have over 1,600 executive alums as well as very successful business folks around the country, and we bring them back to the university to motivate current students who thinks I’m here but don’t know if I can do it” (A-D1). Similarly, B-D1 stated,
This is something I have been focused on as dean. One of the ways we use to get to business leaders is through alumni who have risen in organizations. It is in our interest to connect students to our business leader alumni. We have an advisory board of business leaders and business alumni who advise me on trends in business. We do a junior career night where we bring in business leaders from the community to talk directly to students, and we do visits to Wall Street. We take students to Wall Street to visit firms where they get to see what firms look like. Thus, we increase that kind of interaction between schools and the business community.

*Raising endowments.* A-D2 reported, “A good part of the dean’s external function is raising money; however, you just don’t go out and ask for money.” A-D1 answered,

Endowment in [University A] did not exist in 2004 and are now approaching 100 million dollars. This is through development efforts of bringing alums back, sharing our story, and vision for the future of [University A], that we are a high touch teaching institution that is charged with changing the lives of our students.

A-D2 explained,

The way you get money is to convince business community leaders that we are producing a product that is going to be useful to them and that we are listening to their wants and needs. The dean convinces business leaders that he is listening through personal relationships and one-on-one meetings.

A-D1 indicated that contributions from individuals who have thousands of places to give their money but choose University A is evidence that something is happening. The associate dean closed the conversation with “It all starts with the dean. The dean must be out there, must be
listening, and effectively lead the faculty to amend their curriculum so that it is relevant to our students and to our community” (A-D2).

Instructors’ collaboration strategies. Findings from the interviews revealed that instructors consulted others in their fields to stay abreast of new developments, expose students to business contacts, and invite business leaders to speak with students on campus. Three instructors reported that they were members of the chamber of commerce and other professional organizations, such as Associations for Accountants and CPA’s and the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM). Three other instructors reported that they collaborated with business leaders outside of the university setting (e.g., attending conferences, connecting with businesses in Connecticut, and consulting). Four instructors noted that they brought industry executives as guest speakers to meet and talk with students. Two instructors discussed programs provided by the universities.

Participants asked business community leaders what workforce skills students were lacking. For example, B-D1 reported, “When you ask employers what skills they want they always talk about soft skills first.” As stated by the associate dean from University A, “We listen to this shortcoming business leaders have talked about for 10 years. The dean convinces business leaders that he is listening through personal relationships and one-on-one meetings” (A-D2). According to A-D1, this was evidenced by the $100 million in endowments University A received.

Blended approach to college-level preparation. The deans from University A and B communicated their awareness of the economic challenges that impact their business schools in the 21st century. In response to those situational factors, the deans described a two-prong blended learning approach to college-level preparation strategies: a community service
component and an academic component. The community service element provided students with opportunities to work with a real-world client to solve an actual problem. The academic element provided students with the theoretical foundations of business.

The community service approach included experiential learning across the curriculum (e.g., students working in the field with business leaders on skill-based projects). This approach reflected situational factors and required intense collaboration with business leaders as project sponsors. The vocational element of the curriculum counted towards credit in place of lectures and exams. It integrated experiential learning throughout the four years of undergraduate learning.

The academic approach included cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary training. As recommended by the literature, employees must be equipped with knowledge in new cross-disciplinary fields (e.g., data science, risk management, social and mobile platforms, and cyber security). This is where the concept of systems-thinking is most applicable. The academic approach should reflect situational factors (e.g., changes in the economic environment, business community, and workforce skills).

**Systems approach to college-level preparation.** Business leaders want business schools to deliver a curriculum that incorporates subject areas outside of the business domain and to include other schools or subsystems within the university system. The associate dean from University A stated,

The Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation is the interdisciplinary learning that business leaders expressed that they wanted more interdisciplinary learning. We are creating this center to create co-curricular and curricular vehicles for students to engage in what exist between the business school and the school of engineering. So, that’s our
response to the business community who are looking for more interdisciplinary work. (A-D2)

This cross-disciplinary approach to college-level preparation was also evident at University B. “We put students through a business foundation, plus a very broad liberal arts education” (B-D1). Instructor B3 explained,

We used to have single majors for example, marketing, finance and management majors. At minimum, what we are seeing is students with double majors and three minors. We also saw students getting a much broader base education in terms of the number of majors. Students are building portfolios of skills to get themselves the maximum opportunity for employment. So, I think the way students are approaching the job market is much more a risk averse one.

Participants recognized that a cross-disciplinary approach to education preparation was tantamount to 21st century success. The systems-thinking approach in the schools’ college-level preparation reflected the interdependence of business schools, business communities, and the U.S. economy. Business schools operate in systems: the micro-community of the university and the macro-community of the U.S. economy. A change in one system can cause a change in the other system. The participants’ responses reflected changes in the economy, business community, and workforce requirements that exerted pressure on higher education to revamp curricula to better prepare students. If higher education underperforms, it affects the macro-community. Researchers in organizational change and development advocate for systems-thinking (e.g., the report from MGI [2012] that indicated that by 2020 employers worldwide could face a shortage of 85 million medium- and high-skilled workers). This underscores the
need for higher education to re-examine the alignment between university preparation and the demands of the 21st century workplace.

**Workforce assimilation.** The 21st century workforce requires three components: First, career and life skills (e.g., adaptability and flexibility, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility). Second, learning and innovation skills (e.g., critical thinking and problem-solving [expert thinking], communication and collaboration [complex communicating], and creativity and innovation [applied imagination and invention]. Finally, information, media, and technology skills (i.e., digital literacy skills). The data revealed integration of learning and innovation skills in the curriculum at both universities in curricular and co-curricular activities.

University B used a gigantic puzzle to construct complex structures in teams as students honed expert thinking, complex communication, applied imagination, and invention skills. Fifty percent of faculty at University A articulated that at least one learning and innovation skill was present in their teaching strategies. Four instructors and the associate dean reported embedding communication skills in the university curriculum and one third of the participants indicated that communication was important. One third of the respondents said creativity, time management, troubleshooting, and emotional intelligence were important and 12% of the participants integrated teamwork/collaboration with critical thinking and analytical skills. Analytical thinking, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, collaboration, communication, presentation, decision-making, and research were the top workforce skills that University B participants discussed during interview responses.

Neither university provided the researcher with any information about how they integrated information literacy into their college-level preparation strategies. Trilling and Fadel
(2009) argued that 21st century graduates should be able to efficiently access information, critically evaluate information, accurately use information to solve problems, and manage the flow of information from a variety of sources. Media literacy skills provide a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms so that graduates understand the role of media in society. Flexibility, adaptability, initiative, self-direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, productivity, and accountability are some of the essential performance qualities in the 21st century, according to employee performance evaluations. These skills should be part of college-level preparation strategies.

Flexibility and adaptability are essential skills for learning, work, and citizenship in the 21st century. The rapid pace of technology forces employees to quickly adapt to new ways of communicating, learning, working, and living. Initiative and self-direction skills are essential for managing goals and time. Productive workers are always in demand in business and education environments. Setting and meeting goals and prioritizing work are crucial skills. Leadership and responsibility require the use of interpersonal and problem-solving skills to influence and guide others toward a goal. Effective leaders leverage the strength of others to accomplish a common goal, inspire others to reach their best via example of selflessness, and demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior when using influence and power.

**Attendant behaviors integration in college-level preparation.** The self-factor is an important domain to help graduates cope with the challenges of the new environment of the workplace. The self-factor personal/demographic characteristics include socioeconomic status, gender, and age (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Psychological resources include self-efficacy, commitment, values/ethics, ego development, outlook, assets, liabilities, and resources. Psychological resources are relevant to 21st century workplace because career and life
skills include adaptability, flexibility, initiative, self-direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, productivity, accountability, leadership, and responsibility. Graduates require training in a combination of psychological resources and career and life skills. Data analysis revealed that University B had a strong self-factor. There was a distinct difference in the way the two universities interpreted and integrated self-factors into their college-level preparation strategies. Instructors at both schools communicated that the self-factor influenced the curriculum based on the ways that deans defined and interpreted it.

**Personal and demographic characteristics.** The deans at University A employed a human capital approach to coach students through their academic and transition process. Instructors employed diverse methods of assessment to ensure successful teaching and learning and that other academic supports were in place to help students succeed. Four of six instructors communicated that they responded to students’ different learning styles by providing multiple methods of assessments and content delivery. One participant explained, “Personal characteristics play a big factor in my class; therefore, I assess students across a range of activities in almost every lesson I prepare” (A4). “I don’t know who I am going to have until they show up, I use a variety of ways for students to show me what they know, and I deliver the content and assess students in different ways” (A6). Another participant shared, “I look at least three different ways for delivering the same content to the demographic audience I have” (A6). “Taking the diversity in mind, I make it mandatory for students to talk about their learning styles and themselves” (A6). Two instructors identified the resources provided by University A. A4 reported, “We have a lot of resources here at the university that we can call on for various students such as the writing centers.”
University B’s business school had slightly more male students than females (55% males and 45% females). The socioeconomic status of the students was predominantly middle to upper class and students were internally motivated. As a Catholic university, the psychological resources of the students were critical to the core values of leaders and instructors; part of their mission was to prepare students to integrate into the larger society as good citizens with a moral compass (values/ethics). Participants from University B viewed the self-factor as part of their core values as a Catholic university. The deans and instructors said they viewed each student as a whole person and focused on each student’s self-efficacy, outlook, commitment, and values. Schlossberg’s 4S framework helped participants understand how the self-factor could be a viable framework for college-level preparation strategies that maximize the assets and resources students possess as they transition into the workplace.

**Psychological resources.** Participants from University B emphasized the importance of psychological resources in their responses regarding college-level preparation. B-D1 explained that the university’s core values center around treating students as whole people. As such, faculty and administrators did not want to deposit information into students’ heads. Instead, they wanted to treat them as unique individuals. According to instructor B1,

The fact that this business school is Catholic plays a big part as how things are framed for the students. Every year, the dean and faculty all meet to talk about ways to prepare our students better, and we talk about the self directly, and we frame it in terms of the whole person. The idea is to prepare students for the outside world, and we think ethics are a big piece of it. We are looking at the whole person, and we want them to do what is fair and just in the world. We want them to have ethics to be a part of their education. And how do we do in our curriculum? Of course, it’s in the law class, but we want to make sure
that all the classes as part of our objective for the business school. This is done through case studies and reflection papers exercise, where students are presented with an ethical dilemma exercise that teaches them the ethical lenses and they must figure out the answer to the scenario.

Participants interpretations of the self-factor and how it influenced their university’s college-level preparation strategies were different. A-D1 believed students’ outcomes were not dependent upon their personal and demographic characteristics. The instructors at University A described instructional accommodations for students with diverse learning styles. Conversely, there was a strong presence of the self-factor domain at University B. Participants communicated that the students’ personal and demographic characteristics (even psychological resources) influenced their college-level preparation strategies.

**Uniform university preparation.** Strategies and support factors were similar and pervasive at both universities. University A employed seven overarching preparation strategies. University B employed five strategies to prepare students for the demands of the workplace. The strategies included professional development, mentoring, advising, internships, interaction with business leaders, and ethical training. These strategies were also the support factors that the universities employed.

**Shared culture of support factors.** Both universities invested in human capital to support students in the business school. Such support was strategic, organized, fully supported by the deans, and was the most important of the 4Ss to University A and B. The support factor was the main infrastructure for college-level preparation strategies. Mentoring, advising, internship, and professional development were support factors that participants frequently mentioned. All 12 instructors reported mentoring and advising students.
Mentoring and advising. Faculty mentoring and advising was a significant source of support for students. According to the A-D2, students worked with the same faculty member for four years. These faculty advisors served as mentors and handled problems ranging from students’ difficulties learning course materials to mental health issues. All the instructors from both universities indicated that they supported students in their transition to the workplace through mentoring and advising. Instructor B6 stated,

Because I teach seniors, I get a lot of them who come to me and want to talk about jobs and job opportunities. We have career planning but often they bring their resumes to me and we go through and we tweak them, talk about where they are headed and careers.

Instructor B5 echoed this sentiment,

…well, undergraduates are very scared. For their whole life, they have been involved in the school environment, and now they are transitioning. They do not understand what they need to do so, many of them take the career planning class to gain that kind of preparation.

Internships. Internships were another way to support students in their transition to the workplace. According to B-D1, “One of the ways we support our students in their transition is to provide them with experiential learning that is done through our robust internship program.” At University B, 98% of students participated in an internship at a company and most students completed at least two internships. The B-D2 explained,

At University B, we have our own defined director of internship and professional development that is appropriately compensated by University B giving him/her the necessary resources to be able to reach out to the local community and make connections
with local, regional businesses and businesses in New York City because that’s where many of our students look for work.

The associate dean communicated that it was very common at the undergraduate level for students to get internships while they complete their degree. “We expect and encourage students to do internships while taking classes and enable students to take internships for academic credits that can count for up to two of their elective courses or two classes” (B-D2). He further explained that every business student has access to the internship and professional development center and does not have to go to the university’s career planning center for help. “We have the person right here for them specifically to engage them in activities and create workshops to help them develop professionally” (B-D2).

At University A, students completed an internship or experiential learning opportunity before the end of their program. A2 and A4 reported that they assisted with the internship process by exposing students to networking events and writing letters of recommendation for students.

**Shared culture of strategies factors.** The strategy factor refers to the things people do to avoid harm and the strategies individuals use to cope with life transitions (Anderson et al., 2012; Perlin & Schooler, 1978). This study explored the institutional strategies that University A and B employed to provide students with the psychological resources to transition into the workplace with appropriate 21st century workforce skills. An analysis of the data showed that both University A and B provided similar college-level preparation strategies to help students obtain experiential learning relevant to the workplace.

A-D2 indicated that University A’s preparation strategies entailed academics, an academic capstone project, and a second capstone to encapsulate business issues. This includes
SLICE, service learning, and the Non-Profit Institute. Four of six instructors named entrepreneurship, professional enrichment programs, and high touch teaching as preparation strategies at University A. University B focused on academics through cross-disciplinary training. B-D1 reported that the business school’s main academic enterprise includes a broad liberal arts education and a professional development series (e.g., resume writing, Excel, and presentation skills training). University B focused on ethical training that developed men and women who will not seek to be successful only for themselves but in service for others, who will be morally sound and socially just. Instructors at University B taught a combination of business fundamentals and professional development courses to ensure students had all the elements to start a career.

B-D2 shared that University B instructors taught business fundamentals through a Catholic lens because the university’s mission was to ethically serve the greater good. This strategy was evident in University B’s integration of the self-factor as a preparation imperative. The mission of University B was,

…to prepare ethical business leaders, to bring students to the business world, and to bring the business world to our students in a variety of venues, such as taking students on field trips, bringing in business leaders as guest speakers, company sponsored student projects, case studies, and current events. (B3)

Instructor B2 stated,

As an institution, we provide real-world experience for students that includes internships and working with business community leaders. We bring in business people to work on assignments with students and I utilize my connections as conduits to send the students out to interact with individuals from the business community.
Identifying college-level preparation gaps. The participants’ responses revealed that there were indications of gaps in college-level preparation strategies. Deans controlled certain initiatives and only two instructors mentioned two of the four strategies in response to the interview questions. This indicated a lack of shared culture regarding preparation strategies at University A. The two deans at University A explained that the SLICE initiative was implemented over the past 14 months, suggesting that it was a new program. “We are working on the buy-in from the faculty since they own the curriculum” (A-D2). According to the associate dean, instructors in other colleges at University A were not fully involved with this initiative. A-D2 stated, “I was hoping other colleges would buy in as well so that we can work on business and entrepreneurial ideas.”

In response to the question regarding ways situational factors appear in college-level preparation strategies, only A1 mentioned the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation as a preparation strategy. When the researcher asked about ways in which instructors supported students, they discussed mentoring and advising, not the strategies the deans frequently mentioned (e.g., professional enrichment programs, academic center for excellence, and an undergraduate director).

Cross-Case Analysis

Comparative results. In this section, the researcher describes the results of the cross-case analysis, comparing the results for University A with those of University B. The researcher found similarities and differences in participants’ perceptions of college-level preparation at both business schools. The data converged to support the literature and theoretical framework and presented general explanations that fit each of the individual cases (Yin, 2013). Tables 6 through 9 present the comparative results of the findings related to the four elements of Schlossberg’s
(1984) analytical framework (situation, self, support, and strategies) for University A and B. The researcher utilized Schlossberg’s theoretical elements to explore business school deans’ and instructors’ experiences with these elements that influence preparation strategies as they prepare undergraduates for the workplace of the 21st century.

**Situational factors for university A and B.** Table 6 includes participants’ perceptions of situational factors.

Table 5

*Perceptions of Situational Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presence of situational factors as evidenced by 21st century demands</th>
<th>University A Perceptions of deans and instructors</th>
<th>University B Perceptions of deans and instructors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes in the economy:</td>
<td>Tools used to keep up to date:</td>
<td>Tools used to keep up to date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift from the Industrial Age to the Information, Data, and Knowledge Age.</td>
<td>Current events, case studies, assignments, and business guest speakers</td>
<td>Current events, debates, and business guest speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in the business practices:</td>
<td>Preparation strategies:</td>
<td>Preparation strategies:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive, global in nature, technology-intense, and information driven</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship, SLICE initiative, Non-Profit Institute, and students working with business leaders to solve business problems</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship initiative, professional development series, integrate Excel and business analytics into the curriculum, and students working with business leaders to solve business problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in workforce skills and workplace competencies:</td>
<td>Skills embedded in the curriculum</td>
<td>Skills embedded in the curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning and innovation skills:  
Thinking critically, solving complex problems, working collaboratively, communicating effectively, and continuously learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical thinking</th>
<th>Teamwork/collaboration</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Problem-solving</th>
<th>Analytical thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Information, media, and technology skills:  

| No data reported | No data reported |

Information and media; literacy; and information, communication, and technologies (ICT) literacy

| No data reported | No data reported |

Career and life skills:

Flexibility, adaptability, initiative, self-direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, productivity, accountability, leadership, and responsibility

| Ways to collaborate to keep updated on changes in the economy and workforce skills: Advisory Boards Chamber of Commerce Consulting in the field Alumni base Meeting with business leaders | Ways to collaborate to keep updated on changes in the economy and workforce skills: Advisory Boards Alumni base Consulting in the field Interacting with business leaders |

The researcher measured the situation factor across three areas: (a) changes in the economy; (b) changes in business community practices and (c) changes in workplace requirements and workforce skills. For each situation factor, the deans and instructors from University A and University B showed pervasive similarities and minute difference in their responses.

**Changes in the economy.** Regarding changes in the economy, the common element among instructors was the utilization of current events in class. Instructors introduced current
events to describe the business environment. An example was the fraud case against Wells Fargo Bank. This was relevant to marketing, sales, and ethics within the business world. It was a marketing and sales issue because workers created customer accounts that did not exist to meet sales quotas the company imposed. It was an ethics issue because the workers and bank engaged in unethical business practices. Instructors introduced current events to demonstrate what students could encounter in the workplace (e.g., mergers and acquisitions). For example, “One day a hospital and physician are one thing, the next day something else, and the next time they merge with a pharmaceutical company. The dynamics of the economy in health care literally creates courses in healthcare administration” (A5).

**Changes in business practices.** University A and University B participants mentioned entrepreneurship and students working with business leaders on real-world business problems in response to changing business practices. The deans from University A explicitly stated that entrepreneurship was their way of responding to changes in business practices. Instructors at University B noticed an entrepreneurship trend among undergraduate students. More students expressed interest in entrepreneurial ventures and owning their own business because they were concerned about the economy and unsure about the availability and longevity of jobs at large companies. Instructors at University B reported that following the economic downturn of 2008, entrepreneurship became a major initiative at the school. Participants at both schools mentioned students working with business community leaders to solve business problems; this was a *win-win* situation for business community leaders and students. A-D1 explained,

> The companies were pleased because the students solved a business problem and the students obtain the experience they need, and the training gained from the business
environment working on a real-life problem in real time and that helps them enhance skills that they would not receive from a classwork or lecture.

B-D1 explained that the school strategy was to bring students to the business community and to bring the business community to the students. For example, business leaders worked with University B students on company sponsored projects, took students on field trips, and brought business leaders to campus as guest speakers.

**Changes in workplace requirements and workforce skills.** As indicated in the literature, 21st century businesses demand several workforce skills and workplace competencies (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). These include critical learning and innovation skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving (expert thinking), communication and collaboration (complex communicating), and creativity and innovation (applied imagination and invention). Information, media, and technology skills consisting of information and media literacy and ICT literacy are also critical as are career and life skills (e.g., flexibility, adaptability, initiative, self-direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, productivity, accountability, leadership, and responsibility). In the case of workforce skills and workplace competencies, both universities aligned with critical learning and innovation skills that the 21st century workplace requires.

**Self-factors for university A and B.** Table 7 shows the differences in perceptions of the self-factor between University A and University B. As indicated by University B administrators and instructors, the self-factor was an important part of school culture and was evident in the curriculum and student preparation for the workplace. University A viewed the self-factor as pertaining to students as individual learners and designed curriculum to accommodate different learning styles. The deans and instructors from University A communicated that they may not
know the types of students they would have until they showed up in class. Instructors used a variety of ways to ensure students knew what they needed to learn.

Table 6

*Perceptions of Self-Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presence of the self-factors as evidenced by Schlossberg’s 4S analytical framework</th>
<th>University A</th>
<th>University B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As interpreted by deans and instructors (perceptions)</td>
<td>As interpreted by deans and instructors (perceptions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>No data reported</td>
<td>Students primarily from middle- to upper-class families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic characteristics:</strong></td>
<td>No data reported</td>
<td>55% Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>45% Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60% Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological resources:</strong></td>
<td>No data reported</td>
<td>Integrate ethics into the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlook</td>
<td></td>
<td>Administrators spend time talking about values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Roman Catholic background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Support factors for university A and B.** As shown in Table 8, support factors were pervasive at University A and University B. Both universities had similar institutional supports available for students and invested in human capital to support business school students. For University A, there was an undergraduate director. University B had an internship and professional development director who only served undergraduate business students. Internships, advising, mentoring, and professional development were exclusive resources to support students
throughout their years at University A and University B and as they transitioned into the workplace.

Table 7

Perceptions of Support Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presence of support factors as evidenced by Schlossberg’s 4S analytical framework</th>
<th>University A Perceptions of deans and instructors</th>
<th>University B Perceptions of deans and instructors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support systems function mainly to help the individual in transition mobilize (Caplan, 1976).</td>
<td>Institutional support available to students</td>
<td>Institutional support available to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The support factor asks what resources or services are available to support the individual in transition (Anderson et al., 2012).</td>
<td>Undergraduate director exclusive to University A business school students</td>
<td>Internship director exclusive to University B business school students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For this multiple-case study, the researcher used the support factor to examine the resources and services provided by University A and B to support students in their transition to the workplace.</td>
<td>Professional enrichment program</td>
<td>Professional development series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentoring and advising</td>
<td>Mentoring and advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic center for excellence</td>
<td>Internship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategy factors for University A and B. For the strategies domain, University A and University B provided a similar variety of college-level preparation strategies to enable students to obtain experiential learning relevant to the workplace. A-D1 proudly explained the motivation for being a High Touch teaching institution. “That motivation is for every student in the business
school to participate in one SLICE. What that means is our students will form teams and work with a company to help solve a problem at that company” (A-D1). The program aligned with University B’s strategy in which students worked with business leaders on real-life projects. Embedded in SLICE is the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation and the Non-Profit Institute. These strategies translate into a blended vocational approach to college-level preparation that includes experiential learning, professional development, and core academic content. University B also implemented a blended learning vocational approach. “So, in terms of career preparation the main academic enterprise puts students through a business foundation, plus a very broad liberal arts education in addition to a professional development series” (B-D1). This approach involves cross-disciplinary preparation.

Table 8

*Perceptions of Strategies Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presence of strategies factors as evidenced by the literature</th>
<th>University A Perceptions of deans and instructors</th>
<th>University B Perceptions of deans and instructors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anderson et al. (2012) described the strategies domain as the strategy individuals use to cope with and adapt to transition. Perlin and Schooler (1978) referred to coping as the things people do to avoid being harmed by life strains.</td>
<td>Strategies employed Shared Client Life Experience (SLICE)</td>
<td>Strategies employed Students working with business community leaders on business projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entrepreneurship and Innovation Center</td>
<td>Academic foundations and professional development (blended approach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Profit Institute</td>
<td>High Touch Teaching Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethical standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
preparation strategies used by business schools to prepare students for the demands of the workplace.

There were many similarities in the strategies at both universities. University B took a slightly different approach to preparation strategies. As a Christian university, the leaders believed having a moral compass was an important value to teach students. As such, ethical standards became a strategic differentiator for University B.

**Overarching Research Question**

The overarching research question for this study asked the following: To what extent do each of the four components of Schlossberg’s 4S analytical framework (situation, self, support, and strategy) influence the development of college-level preparation strategies used to prepare undergraduate students to meet the demands of the workplace?

To answer this question, the researcher compared participants’ responses regarding their college-level preparation strategies to elements of Schlossberg’s (1984) 4S analytical framework. Data revealed that situational factors influenced college-level preparation strategies at University A and B. The deans and instructors acknowledged that changes in the economy, changes to business practices, and changes in workforce competencies prompted administrators to implement co-curricular activities to better prepare students for the demands of the 21st century workplace. B-D1 stated,

I think conditions in business have changed. As you know, they have gotten much more competitive. Companies are more specific on the kind of skills they want to hire for, so
we move toward providing some more concrete skills in addition to academic classes to prepare students for the workplace.

The associate dean from University A relayed:

In the last few years what has become clear is that the business community is looking for the ability of our students to work together on complex real-world problems. Theoretical environments of the classroom are useful to build foundation, but what they want is that students work together and on real-life problems. So, the dean and I have created a program called SLICE- Shared Life Client Experience. (A-D2)

The responses from participants at University B demonstrated that self-factors influenced their preparation strategies. Instructor B1 stated:

We do talk about the self a lot, because it fits into the Catholic philosophy. As a business school, the fact that it’s Catholic takes a big part as how things are framed for the students. Every year in the business school we do strategies and retreats. The dean and faculty all meet to talk about ways to prepare our students better, and we talk about the self directly and we frame it in terms of the whole person. So, the idea is to prepare students for the outside world and we think ethics are a big piece of it. We are looking at the whole person and we want them to do what is fair and just in the world.

The support factor significantly influenced University A and B. Both universities invested resources in the form of human capital and funding to provide exclusive support for business school students. When the researcher asked how they supported students in their transition to the workplace, A-D2 reported:

The school of business funds an organization outside of our colleges (an academic center for excellence) whose leader is focused on helping students. It’s an organization on
campus outside of our colleges where they have professional tutors to help students who are having trouble with core business classes accounting, business, economics, English, and statistics. They also help students with writing problems.

A-D1 added:

We support students through experiential learning opportunities, so they get a job or career of their choosing. We infuse through every class that we are teachers first and our goal is to ensure that we have high touch quality teachers in every classroom. That students know that their faculty member is in their corner to help them through the process. We focus on students and hire people that support the vision, and we are constantly trying to bring the businesses into the university.

According to B-D:

We support students by offering programs and promoting internships. Over 98% of our students do internships. Most of them do at least two internships, so they already have real-work experience so that the transition is somewhat less dramatic because they’ve already have an intensive interview sometime during the summer and during the year. We have seminars for managing your money after you are in the workforce, salary negotiation those types of seminars prior to transition into the workplace. In addition to the internship, academically we set up curricula that speak to the most important and relevant business issues that firms are facing.

The strategies factor was the most important preparation factor because it is a plan of action to achieve the overall goal (i.e., preparing students for the workplace). As the researcher co-constructed meaning with participants, the researcher concluded that the strategies factor significantly influenced participants at University A and University B. Both universities provided
a variety of college-level preparation strategies that enabled students to obtain experiential learning that was relevant to the workplace. A-D1 explained:

Our college-level strategy is through curriculum and capstone that pulls everything together. We are adding a second capstone adding the issues business leaders are telling us, SLICE, and service learning- Non-Profit Institute. We focus on students’ outcomes and develop the competencies throughout the program that will lead to employment success.

B-D1 stated, “Our strategies are to teach business fundamentals, combined with career development support to provide students with the elements needed to get started in a career.” An analysis of the findings showed Schlossberg’s 4S analytical framework provided a common language for discussing, identifying gaps, and developing new college-level preparation strategies. The influence of the four elements was apparent from the participants’ descriptions of college-level preparation strategies. The researcher noted that even though the 4S analytical framework was new to the participants, they easily communicated ways they could organize college-level preparation using the 4Ss.

This chapter contained a description of the data analysis and interview responses from 4 deans and 12 Business instructors. Analysis of the data revealed eight main themes. The first and most dominant theme was *translating external/situational factors into academic policies*. The results of the study showed that situational factors such as changes in the economy, changes to business practices, and changes in workforce skills influence college-level preparation in response to the evolving global marketplace. Other themes included keeping up to date on economic changes and trends, blending approaches to college-level preparation, applying a systems-thinking approach to align college-level preparation with the needs of the 21st century,
the influence of the self-factor on student transition, sharing a culture of university-wide support and strategies, and addressing gaps in college-level preparation strategies.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Major Findings and Implications For Action

Most past studies of workplace readiness and transitions highlighted skills deficits of recent graduates. This resulted in a paucity of research on preparation strategies that colleges and universities use to prepare students for the demands of the 21st century workplace. To situate this research in the scholarly literature regarding workforce readiness, the researcher examined the process by which undergraduate business students prepare for the demands of the workplace. The researcher identified two emergent themes from the literature and eight themes from the interview data from business school deans and instructors who participated in this study.

The first emergent theme found in the literature was an affirmation of the widening skills gap of recent graduates. This skills gap suggests a misalignment between university preparation and workplace demands. The second emergent theme was that re-examination of college-level preparation strategies should be continuous due to changing work environments. The eight themes that emerged from the coded transcriptions included: workforce skills integration; keeping updated with economic trends; translating external factors into academic policies; uniform preparation across universities; attendant behaviors on college-level preparation; systems approach to college level preparation; blended approach to college level preparation; and identifying workforce gaps. Interview data confirmed that college-level preparation is multidimensional. The eight themes fit into four dimensions defined as: workforce skills (i.e., technological and soft skills and degree relevance); workplace assimilation; attendant behaviors; and community service (i.e., social responsibility and citizenship). The findings of this study reflect participants’ responses, which aligned with business leaders’ concerns (see Table 10).
Emergent Concerns from Literature and Responses from Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging concerns from the literature</th>
<th>Emerging themes from the data collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The widening skills gap is a potential source of:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misalignment between business school education and business practices</td>
<td>Workforce skills integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological and soft skills and degree relevance</td>
<td>Keeping updated with economic trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community service</td>
<td>Translating external factors into academic policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties associated with transition from university to the workplace</td>
<td>Attendant behaviors integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace assimilation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendant behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-examination of college-preparation needs to be continuous</td>
<td>Uniform preparation strategies across universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Systems approach to college-level preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blended approach to college-level preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying college-level preparation gaps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Misalignment between business school education and business practice.** The data revealed details from deans and instructors that allowed the researcher to reflect on the misalignment of college-level strategies and workforce needs. Analysis of the coded transcripts revealed a misalignment due to changes in the economic environment that contributed to a widening skills gap. Academic leaders responded by keeping up to date with economic trends and translating external factors into academic policies. For example, A-D2 stated, “We listen to this shortcoming business leaders have talked about for 10 years.” Similarly, B-D1 explained:

I think conditions in business have changed. As you know, they have gotten much more competitive. Companies are more specific on the kind of skills they want to hire for, so
we move toward providing some more concrete skills, in addition to the academic classes.

The data revealed that technological and soft skills, degree relevance, and community service were common in preparation strategies; however, there were opportunities for improvement regarding workplace assimilation and attendant behaviors.

**Technological and soft skills.** Technological changes demand that employees possess higher levels of expert thinking, complex communication skills, imagination, creativity, and innovation. They must continually invent new and better products and services for the global marketplace. The researcher found evidence of gaps between technological and soft skills of 21st century workplace and the skills within the curriculum at Universities A and B. For example, 31% of the participants indicated that communication was most important, 27% stated that integrated teamwork/collaboration was most important, and 19% reported that critical thinking and analytical skills were most important for graduates to possess. Analytical thinking, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, collaboration, communication, presentation, decision-making, and research were the top workforce skills that participants discussed. The interview data revealed that universities could embed skills such as adaptability, flexibility, self-direction, productivity, accountability, information, media, and technology in different programs.

**Degree relevance.** Part of the growing concern among business leaders was the potential shortage of medium- and high-level workers to meet the STEM demands of the 21st century. The researcher did not include degree relevance in the interview questions but determined that the study of 21st century workplace requirements warrants further research regarding their influence on college-level preparation strategies.
Community service. Business programs should prepare effective moral leaders who act ethically as citizens and have strong senses of social responsibility (Steiner & Watson, 2006; Wilson, 2008). Results revealed that University A and B leaders promoted community service through service learning such as SLICE, The Non-Profit Institute, the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and programs through which students worked with local business leaders and entrepreneurs. A-D2 stated:

The business community values service. Organizations are getting their employees to engage in service as part of what they do for the organization and as part of their social responsibility. Organizations are saying it’s more than just generating value for their customers, it’s also about creating value in the community in which they reside. Therefore, University A implemented a service initiative in a response to what the business community wanted. The objective of the Non-Profit Institute was to introduce services and train students in response to the needs of the business community.

Current literature suggested that community service skills are desirable to business leaders. Therefore, an integration of those skills into college-level preparation should be a priority for business schools. Students only spend four years in college and a lifetime on the job as productive citizens.

Workplace assimilation. Workplace assimilation requires that business students have deep knowledge in one specialized area and the ability to collaborate across multiple disciplines. The T-shaped model prepares business students to assimilate into the workplace upon graduation and integrates multidimensional components of college-level preparation that are necessary in the 21st century. However, participants did not communicate that their schools adopted a T-
shaped strategy; therefore, they should reexamine their strategies to meet employers’ demands for interdisciplinary skills and systems-thinking competencies. College A dean 2 stated:

The center for entrepreneurship and innovation is our response to the business community who are looking for more interdisciplinary work. We are also creating co-curricular and curricular vehicles for students to engage in what exist between the business school and the school of engineering.

The dean informed the researcher that in term of career preparation, “We put students through a business foundation, plus a very broad liberal arts education” (A-D2). Instructor B3 corroborated stating:

We used to have single majors for example, marketing, finance and management majors. At minimum, what we are seeing is students with double majors and three minors. We also saw students getting a much broader base education in terms of the number of majors. Students are building portfolios of skills to get themselves the maximum opportunity for employment. So, I think the way students are approaching the job market is much more a risk averse one.

These responses revealed that participants recognized that an interdisciplinary and systems approach to workplace preparation is tantamount to 21st century success. Nevertheless, the researcher ascertained that workplace assimilation and attendant behaviors are works in progress and need more rigor in execution. This concept was not a common language that instructor participants shared but was common for the deans. For example, A-D2 stated, “We are working on the buy-in from faculty since they own the curriculum and I was hoping other colleges would buy-in as well so that we can work on business and entrepreneurial ideas.”

Similarly, an instructor from University B mentioned that students pursued broader education by
combining majors and minors, suggesting students were taking the lead and the strategy was not an academic policy. Workplace assimilation is critical to a successful transition into the workplace and requires a strategic and intentional approach to integrate it into college-level preparation strategies.

**Attendant behaviors.** Attendant behaviors are the most common performance qualities on employee performance evaluations. Students who lack 21st century workforce skills, workplace assimilation, community service, and attendant behaviors may experience challenges when they transition from the university to the workplace. Therefore, college-level preparation that focuses on developing students’ attendant behaviors is more consistent with the demands of professional environments (Marsh & Bishop, 2014). When attendant behaviors are present, graduates adapt to the transition from university to the workplace. The researcher found that attendant behaviors were not pervasive within business school strategies and are an area for future growth.

**Re-examination of college-level preparation strategies.** Business schools should consider exploring a strategy that combines technological and soft skills, degree relevance, workplace assimilation, community service, and attendant behaviors. Institutions of higher education operate in a larger macro-environment outside of the micro sub-systems of universities and constantly receive feedback from the environment. An imbalance in one area can be problematic for the other (e.g., U.S. economy operations in the global market place).

**Discussion**

With the emergence of a global economy, the process by which higher education prepares students for the 21st workplace changed. Interview data mirrored findings in the literature. Business schools offer business education with scientific rigor, societal relevance, and workplace skills. Nevertheless, a gap between business school education and business practices remains.
Holland (2009) contended that delivering an integrated approach in which business students assimilate into the workplace upon graduation continues to be a challenge for universities. To close this gap, the researcher suggested a T-shaped model as an overall strategy that focuses on workplace assimilation, attendant behaviors, and workforce skills. This chapter included reflections on workplace preparation practices at University A and B business schools, preparation practices that business leaders desire, major findings, how those findings converge with the literature, and interpretations drawn from the results in Chapter 4.

Conclusions

Conclusions from the present study revealed a disparity in perceptions between business leaders and chief academic officers/deans and instructors at business schools. GLF (2014) reported that 89% of business leaders noted that business graduates lack the skills and competencies businesses needs to meet the demands of the workplace; 96% of chief academic officers indicated that their institutions prepared students for the demands of the workplace. To gain an understanding of this disparity, the researcher solicited the views of local business school deans and instructors regarding how they prepared students to transition into the 21st century workplace. The researcher utilized Schlossberg’s (1984) 4S analytical framework to understand how deans and instructors understood those preparation strategies.

Implications. Findings from the interview data converged with the literature and revealed four factors of workforce readiness and transition. The first was an increased demand for work-based learning. A review of the literature revealed that business leaders felt college graduates were unprepared for workplace assimilation and real-world experience. Academic leaders from the two participating universities demonstrated that work-based learning and community service were priorities in their preparation strategies. Both universities implemented
an entrepreneurship and nonprofit community service initiative as a requirement for graduates. These initiatives provided students with opportunities to work with business leaders in the field and apply academic knowledge they learned at the university to a real-world context. One university also brought in entrepreneurs from the local community to work with students on critical course work and real-world business operations.

The researcher concluded that the increased demand for work-based learning in the 21st century calls for a role reversal between curricular and co-curricular activities. The implementation of student-operated organization on university campuses, a learning cycle for traditional undergraduate business students, and work-based learning that includes theoretical instruction in the classroom may promote more effective student learning. These findings validate King’s (2015) position that higher education systems continue to focus on traditional lectures and exams and students lack the ability to deal with problems that are relevant to the complex global marketplace.

Second, analysis of the interview data revealed that University B’s business school requires students to complete business and liberal arts courses, professional development, and vocational initiatives. University B added cross-disciplinary training, business analytics, a professional development series, and Excel training to the curriculum. University A took a different approach. Dean 2 stated:

The Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation is the interdisciplinary learning that business leaders expressed that they wanted more interdisciplinary learning. We are creating this center to create co-curricular and curricular vehicles for students to engage in what exist between the business school and the school of engineering. So that’s our response to the business community who are looking for more interdisciplinary work.
Students spend a semester in a student-run organization on campus to learn workplace assimilation and the theoretical components of their discipline. The T-shaped preparation model is a useful example of the two-prong blended learning approach (work-based and instructional learning) described by the deans from both universities. This approach may help business schools close the skills gap the researcher identified in the literature.

Third, the data revealed a need for workforce competencies including career and life skills. Psychological resources significantly affect students’ transitions from the university to the workplace (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990; Marsh & Bishop, 2014; Steiner & Watson, 2006; Wilson, 2008). The interview data revealed that University B had a strong self-factor. The dean at University A believed student outcomes were not dependent upon their personal and demographic characteristics. Interview data revealed that the self-factor and attendant behaviors should be present in college-level preparation programs.

Fourth, higher education workforce readiness reforms are necessary. Holland (2009) and King (2015) concurred that college-level strategies should help business students assimilate into the workplace upon graduation. The speed of technological innovation and industry demands move faster than higher education’s ability to adapt. University A dean 2 indicated:

We are working on the buy-in from the faculty since they own the curriculum.

We must convince faculty of the merit of SLICE. Once we have convinced them, each department would offer a SLICE opportunity, and each major must ensure that each student has at least one SLICE experience.

Instructors across University A were not fully involved in SLICE. A-D2 stated, “I was hoping other colleges would buy in as well so that we can work on business and entrepreneurial ideas.”
The researcher concluded that workforce readiness reforms are an ongoing process for higher education since the 1800s. The 21st century workforce requires a shift in instructional strategies to respond to Knowledge Age industry demands. Interview data suggested that deans and instructors in higher education are aware of these needs and responded by attending to industry demands. However, there are still many opportunities for improvement. For example, at University A, the SLICE work-based learning initiative was only familiar to deans. This suggests that leaders may have visions for applicable business training programs but buy-in from other stakeholders (e.g., instructors) is still lacking.

The interview data confirmed that Schlossberg’s (1984) 4S analytical framework could be a viable approach to organize and analyze college-level preparation. Interviews with faculty at the two universities confirmed that the 4Ss improved understanding of change processes within university settings. Students do not always connect theory and practice as they transition into the workplace. Schlossberg’s (1984) 4S theory is flexible and applicable to traditional and nontraditional students who transition to the workplace but does not include a way to measure what constitutes a successful transition. The lack of theory-to-practice (as required by the 4S model) in most college-level preparation strategies is the reason students fail to transition to the workplace.

Future Research

Results from the interviews in this study revealed that deans and instructors at business schools agreed with the perceptions of business leaders, as revealed by past researchers, regarding students’ lack of preparation for the workplace. There is a gap in workforce readiness preparation; however, the gap is not as wide as it was in the past because academic leaders are more aware of the need to establish best practices aligned to the 21st century workplace.
Findings from the current study offer insights for business school deans, instructors, educational researchers, and policymakers.

The researcher found this study experience personally transformational, informative, and impactful. It was interesting to discover that findings from the interview data converged with past literature regarding the disparity in perceptions of business and academic leaders regarding workplace readiness. The researcher was surprised to learn that workplace assimilation, attendant behaviors, and interdisciplinary training were key factors that increased the skills gap.
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*Division of State Development, 1996 South Carolina Industrial Directory.*


APPENDIX A: Request for Site Email

Dear (name):

I am a doctoral student at the University of Bridgeport. As part of my dissertation entitled, Exploring the Influence of a Transition Framework on College-Level Preparation Strategies Used in University Business Schools, I am conducting a research study exploring preparation strategies used in business schools.

Your name was chosen because you are the dean of (________) business school at (________) university, and I would like to solicit the views from a business school administrator. I am inviting you to participate in the study and would appreciate your permission to use (________) School of Business as a research site. I am also interested in soliciting the views of professors and associate deans from the business school. This study is scheduled to be completed between March and May of 2017.

Should you grant permission, you will be asked to sign and return to me via email a consent letter that will explain the research study in more detail. Upon receipt of the signed consent letter, I will be in touch with you to arrange a mutually agreeable time to talk. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

Though this study is an integral aspect of the completion of my doctoral degree, I hope it will also be useful to you. I will provide you with a copy of the final document if you wish. The conclusions from this study may have the potential to shape future college-level preparation strategies and inform best practices in business schools.

If you would like to participate, please contact me via email: snlawrence02@msn.com or at (203)-243-4102 by February 29, 2016. Kindly consider my request, and I look forward to
hearing from you. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the University of Bridgeport Institutional Review Board at (203) 392-5243.

Sincerely,

Shalane Lawrence
Doctoral Candidate
University of Bridgeport
126 Park Avenue
Bridgeport, CT 06604
APPENDIX B: Instructor Initial Contact E-mail

Dear (name):

I am a doctoral student at the University of Bridgeport. As part of my dissertation entitled, *Exploring the Influence of a Transition Framework on College-Level Preparation Strategies Used in University Business Schools*, I am conducting a research study exploring preparation strategies used in business schools.

Your name was chosen because you are a professor at (__________) school of business at (__________) university, teaching business courses for at least 1 year. I am inviting you to participate in the study. Should you accept this request, you will be asked to sign and return to me via email a consent letter that will explain the research study in more details. Upon receipt of the signed consent letter, I will be in touch with you to arrange a mutually agreeable time to talk. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

Though this study is an integral aspect of the completion of my doctoral degree, I hope it will also be useful to you. I will provide you with a copy of the final document, so should you wish. The conclusions from this study may have the potential to shape future college-level preparation strategies and inform best practices in business schools.

If you would like to participate, please contact me via email: snlawrence02@msn.com or at (203)-243-4102, by March 2, 2016. To arrange a mutually agreeable time to talk, kindly consider my request and I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions regarding your right as a research participant you may contact the University of Bridgeport Institutional Review Board at (203) 392-5243.

Sincerely,
Shalane Lawrence
Doctoral Candidate
University of Bridgeport
126 Park Avenue
Bridgeport, CT 06604
APPENDIX C: Administrator Informed Consent Letter

My name is Shalane Lawrence. I am a doctoral student at the University of Bridgeport. I am currently conducting research for my dissertation entitled, Exploring the Influence of a Transition Framework on College-Level Preparation Strategies Used in University Business Schools. I plan to conduct the research between March 2016 and August 2016, and I am inviting you to participate in this study.

This research will explore strategies used in business schools to prepare undergraduate students for the workplace. You are eligible to participate in this study because of your decision-making responsibilities regarding college-level instruction at your business schools, your ability to change policies surrounding student preparation, and your involvement in the instruction of business students. Should you choose not to participate in this study, your decision will not be held against you. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision about whether to participate.

I am available to discuss any aspects of the study with you that you do not understand. However, once you understand the study, I will need to be granted permission for the research site as soon as possible in order to move forward with my research. Before I move forward with conducting interviews, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Kindly consider my request and I look forward to hearing from you.

Research Study: Exploring the Influence of a Transition Framework on College-Level Preparation Strategies Used in University Business Schools: A Qualitative Case Study.

Purpose of the Study: The main purpose of this qualitative case study will be to explore the perceptions of business school administrators and instructors regarding college-level
preparation strategies used in business schools to prepare undergraduate students for the workplace.

**Data Collection:** Data collected from participants will be recorded with a recorder and transferred to the researcher’s computer for transcription purposes. Data will be stored in folders on the researcher’s computer with password protection that is accessible only to the researcher only. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study, and a coding procedure will be used to analyse the data. Before the phase of data collection, participants will be asked to signed an informed consent giving me permission to collect data. Participants will agree on a time and place for data collection process, and the selected site will also be given a pseudonyms throughout the study.

**Benefits:** Findings will be relevant to business and higher education leaders and future business students. Findings will inform best practices in business school settings and future research, allowing for enhanced alignment between college-level preparation strategies and business community practices.

**Potential Risks and Inconveniences:** Participants will have to use their personal time after school to participate in their interview.

Steps taken to minimize risks and inconveniences:

- Every effort will be made to have participants meet at a time convenient to them.
- Data collected from participants will be record and transcribed and kept by the researcher.
- Pseudonyms names will be used throughout the study, and a coding procedure will be used to analyze the data.
- After the research is completed the recorded information will be converted on to a computerized folder and will only be accessible by the researcher using a password.
Before the phase of data collection, participants will be asked to signed an informed consent form giving me permission to collect data.

**Confidentiality:** Any and all information obtained from you will be confidential. Your privacy will be protected at all times. Records will be kept for 3 years and then destroyed following the successful completion of the dissertation defense. You will not be identified individually in any way as a result of your participation in this research. However, the data collected may be used as part of publications and papers related to this study.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:** You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or during this study. You may also contact Shalane Lawrence at 203-243-4102 or at snlawrence02@msn.com. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or want to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Bridgeport Institutional Review Board at (203) 392-5243.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this research without any negative consequences. If you begin to participate in this research, you may at any time and for any reason, discontinue your participation without any negative consequences. Simply let the researcher know.

**Costs/Compensations:** There are no expected costs to you for participating in this study. The researcher will come to you at your school. There is also no compensation for participating in this study.

**Consent:** If you consent to participate in this study, you agree and understand that your participation in this study is voluntary. Your signature certifies that you have read and
I understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep. Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

**Participant Signature:** I confirm that Shalane Lawrence has explained to me the purpose of this research study and the potential risks as well as benefits that I may experience. I have read or had read to me this consent form and I understand the parameters of this research study. Therefore, I give my consent to be engaged as a participant in this research study.

_________________________________________  _______________________________
Signature of Participant                      Date

I hereby give consent to the researcher to record to this interview

_________________________________________  _______________________________
Signature of Participant                      Date

**Investigator’s Signature:** I have explained the purpose of this research, potential risks, and benefits to the best of my ability. To the best of my knowledge, the information contained in this consent form is true and accurate.

_________________________________________  _______________________________
Signature of Investigator                     Date
Shalane Lawrence, Doctoral Candidate

University of Bridgeport

126 Park Avenue

Bridgeport, CT 06604

(203)-243-4102
APPENDIX D: Business School Instructor Informed Consent Letter

My name is Shalane Lawrence. I am a doctoral student at the University of Bridgeport. I am currently conducting research for my dissertation entitled, *Exploring the Influence of a Transition Framework on College-Level Preparation Strategies Used in University Business Schools*. I plan to conduct the research between March 2016 and August 2016, and I am inviting you to participate in this study.

This research will explore strategies used in business schools to prepare undergraduate students for the workplace. You are eligible to participate in this study because of your involvement in the instruction and advisement of business students. Should you choose not to participate in this study, your decision will not be held against you. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision about whether to participate.

I am available to discuss any aspects of the study with you that you do not understand. However, once you understand the study, I will need to be granted permission for the research site as soon as possible in order to move forward with my research. Before I move forward with conducting interviews, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Kindly consider my request and I look forward to hearing from you.

**Research Study:** Exploring the Influence of a Transition Framework on College-Level Preparation Strategies Used in University Business Schools: A Qualitative Case Study.

**Purpose of the Study:** The main purpose of this qualitative case study will be to explore the perceptions of business school administrators and instructors regarding college-level preparation strategies used in business schools to prepare undergraduate students for the workplace.
**Data Collection:** Data collected from participants will be recorded with a recorder and transferred to the researcher’s computer for transcription purposes. Data will be stored in folders on the researcher’s computer with password protection that is accessible only to the researcher only. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study, and a coding procedure will be used to analyze the data. Before the phase of data collection, participants will be asked to signed an informed consent giving me permission to collect data. Participants will agree on a time and place for data collection process, and the selected site will also be given a pseudonyms throughout the study.

**Benefits:** Findings will be relevant to business and higher education leaders and future business students. Findings will inform best practices in business school settings and future research, allowing for enhanced alignment between college-level preparation strategies and business community practices.

**Potential Risks and Inconveniences:** Participants will have to use their personal time after school to participate in their interview.

Steps taken to minimize Risks and Inconveniences:

- Every effort will be made to have participants meet at a time convenient to them.
- Data collected from participants will be record and transcribed and kept by the researcher.
- Pseudonyms names will be used throughout the study, and a coding procedure will be used to analyze the data.
- After the research is completed the recorded information will be converted on to a computerized folder and will only be accessible by the researcher using a password.
- Before the phase of data collection, participants will be asked to signed an informed consent form giving me permission to collect data.
**Confidentiality:** Any and all information obtained from you will be confidential. Your privacy will be protected at all times. Records will be kept for 3 years and then destroyed following the successful completion of the dissertation defense. You will not be identified individually in any way as a result of your participation in this research. However, the data collected may be used as part of publications and papers related to this study.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:** You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or during this study. You may also contact Shalane Lawrence at 203-243-4102 or at smlawrence02@msn.com. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or want to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Bridgeport Institutional Review Board at (203) 392-5243.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this research without any negative consequences. If you begin to participate in this research, you may at any time and for any reason, discontinue your participation without any negative consequences. Simply let the researcher know.

**Costs/Compensations:** There are no expected costs to you for participating in this study. The researcher will come to you at your school. There is also no compensation for participating in this study.

**Consent:** If you consent to participate in this study, you agree and understand that your participation in this study is voluntary. Your signature certifies that you have read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep. Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.
**Participant Signature:** I confirm that Shalane Lawrence has explained to me the purpose of this research study and the potential risks as well as benefits that I may experience. I have read or had read to me this consent form and I understand the parameters of this research study. Therefore, I give my consent to be engaged as a participant in this research study.

Signature of Participant

Date

I hereby give consent to the researcher to record to this interview

Signature of Participant

Date

**Investigator’s Signature:** I have explained the purpose of this research, potential risks, and benefits to the best of my ability. To the best of my knowledge, the information contained in this consent form is true and accurate.

Signature of Investigator

Date
Shalane Lawrence, Doctoral Candidate

University of Bridgeport

126 Park Avenue

Bridgeport, CT 06604

(203)-243-4102
APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol and Background

Purpose of the Protocol: For participants to:

a) Be informed of the background of the study.
b) Know the conceptual definitions of Schlossberg’s 4S model.
c) Provide a guide for the interview process for business school administrators and instructors.

Participants’ Expectations:

- Volunteers will be invited to participate in an interview protocol around questions directly related to the research questions. The interview time will not exceed 60 mins.
- Business School administrators and instructors having at least 1 year of experience working in the higher education setting will be eligible for participation in the study.
- Every effort will be made to have participants meet at a time and place convenient to them.
- Data collected from participants will be recorded, transcribed, and be kept by the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used for all the participants throughout the study.
- A minimum of 16 volunteers are needed to participate and a maximum of 25. A minimum of 1 academic dean and 7 instructors and a maximum of 2 academic deans and 11 instructors per institution.

Timeline for Data Collection:
May 2016 through September 2016.

Title of the Study: Exploring the Influence of a Transition Framework on College-Level Preparation Strategies Used in Business Schools.
Purpose of the Study:

The main purpose of this qualitative case study will be to explore the perceptions of business school administrators and instructors at two private universities in Connecticut, regarding college-level preparation strategies used in business schools to prepare undergraduate students for the demands of the workplace.

*Figure 3. Schlossberg’s 4S conceptual transition model.*

**The situation factor:** Asks what is happening (Anderson et al., 2012). For this case study, graduation is the situation that is happening. It is an anticipated transition where graduates move out of university and move into the workplace. Anticipated transitions are comprised of those normative gains and losses or major alterations of roles that predictably occur in the course
of the life cycle (Perlin & Lieberman, 1979, p. 220). Anticipated transitions happen expectedly and include events, such as marrying, graduating, starting a first job, or retiring. This type of transition includes separation from the old norms and assuming new rules, roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. Thus, for traditional undergraduate business students with limited to no working experience moving out of college and into the workplace, the transition will entail some degree of stress.

**The self-factor:** The self-factor asks who this happening to (Anderson et al., 2012). In this case study the business student is the one who is graduating. The self-factor includes socio-economic conditions, demographic characteristics and personal strength brought to a transition. In addition to the situation, the self-factor examines what the individual brings to the transition.

**The support factor:** According to Anderson et al. (2012), the support factor asks what resources or services are available to support the individual in transition and refers to extrinsic forces that provide support during the transition (p. 83). Anderson et al. (2012) also put forward the notion that social support is the key to coping with stress. From an extrinsic perspective, Schlossberg (1981) agreed that institutional support systems (as in pre-transition environment/institutions or communities of which the individual is a part of) are relevant to successful adaptation to a transition. Hartel, Schwartz, Blude, and Gardner (1994) argued that the soon to be college graduate faces anxiety as they approach the impending transition. Additionally, Hartel et al. (1994) posit that to best prepare seniors for life following college with reduced anxiety during their transition, seniors need help making decisions, planning for their careers, gaining communication skills, understanding the business world, preparing for graduate or professional school, learning the financial implications of the real world, and understanding the skills needed for citizenship. Walls (2002) concurred that seniors should to be prepared to
learn about a wide range of life topics, such as figuring out how to adapt to the first year on the job. Unfortunately, little research exists documenting what universities do to ease this transition process.

**The strategies factor:** The strategies factor asks how a person copes with a transition because individuals navigate transitions in different ways (Anderson et al., 2012). By coping, Perlin and Schooler (1978), refer to the things people do to avoid being harmed. In context, the strategies factor refers to intrinsic strategies the individual uses to cope with and adapt to a transition. Nonetheless, for this case study the researcher focused on the strategies factors from an extrinsic standpoint (i.e., what higher education employs to facilitate a smooth crossover from university to the workplace). The literature posits that in the field of business education, researchers have discussed competency approaches as a way to prepare graduates for employment in the business community.

**Research Questions:**

(Interview questions will be crafted around the research questions)

The following research question will be addressed in this case study

**Overarching Research Question:**

To what extent each of the four components of Schlossberg’s 4S model (situation, self, support and strategy) influenced the development of college-level preparation strategies used to prepare undergraduate students to meet the demands of the workplace?

**Sub Questions:**

1) How do business school administrators and instructors describe how situational factors such as changes in workforce skills, business practices, and economic conditions are integrated in
college-level preparation strategies used to prepare students for the transition to the workplace?

2) How do business school administrators and instructors describe how student’s personal and demographic characteristics play a role in college-level preparation strategies used to prepare students for the transition to the workplace?

3) How do business school administrators and instructors describe how they support students in their transition to the workplace?

4) How do business school administrators and instructors describe how they prepare students for the transition to the workplace?
APPENDIX F: Business School Administrator Interview Protocol

The following interview guide will be used with participants during this qualitative case study.

Background questions will be used for descriptive purposes only and not for analysis

Demographics Questions

Pseudo Name ___________________________ Date ______________

Gender: ___________ Position Title _______________ Tenured___________

(Ans. if you also teach)

Institution of Employment ___________________________________________

How many years have you been a Business School Administrator __________________

Business subject endorsement area ___________________________________

Questions related to the Research Questions

The Situation Factor:

1) In what ways, would you say changes in the economy and business community are reflected in how this business school prepare students for the workplace?

   a) What workforce skills and competencies are integrated in college-level preparation?
b) In what ways, would you say this business school collaborate with business community leaders in order to keep updated with changes in economic conditions that impact business practice and needs?

The Self-Factor

2) In what ways, would you say student’s personal and demographic characteristics play a role in the development and implementation of college-level preparation strategies used by this business school?

a) What are the strengths and challenges this business school face preparing students for the transition to the workplace?

The Support Factor

3) In what ways, would you say this business school support student in their transition to the workplace?

The Strategies Factor:

4) What preparation strategies would you say this business school use to prepare students for the workplace?

a) How are these preparation strategies aligned to business community practice?
APPENDIX G: Business School Instructor Interview Protocol

The following interview guide will be used with participants during this qualitative case study.

Background questions will be used for descriptive purposes only and not for analysis.

Demographics Questions

Pseudo Name ___________________________  Date_________________________

Gender: ______________  Position Title ___________________  Tenured______________

Institution of Employment ________________________________________________

How many years have you been a business school instructor? ________________

Business subject endorsement area _________________________________________

Questions related to the Research Questions

The Situation Factor:

1) In what ways, would you say changes in the economy and business community are reflected in how as an instructor you prepare students for the workplace?

   a) What workforce skills and competencies are integrated in college-level preparation?
b) In what ways, would you say as an instructor you collaborate with business community leaders in order to keep updated with changes in economic conditions that impact business practice and needs?

The Self-Factor

2) In what ways, would you say student’s personal and demographic characteristics play a role in the development and implementation of college-level preparation strategies used by you as an instructor?

a) What are the strengths and challenges you face when preparing students for the transition to the workplace?

The Support Factor

3) In what ways, would you say you as an instructor support student in their transition to the workplace?

The Strategies Factor:

4) What preparation strategies would you say as an instructor you use to prepare students for the workplace?

a) How are these preparation strategies aligned to business community practice?
APPENDIX H: Definition of Terms

The following definitions are important to understanding this research study.

**Business School:** A business school is an institution for training in management and marketing. Business schools include study of issues such as environmental policy, corporate responsibility, business ethics, and internationalism. A master’s in business administration (MBA) is a highly prized degree in many professions. Business schools are a huge international business. The global executive education market is worth $12 billion; for example, enrollment in the nine-week advanced management program at Harvard Business School costs in excess of $40,000 (CapstonePress, 2003). Over the last 50 years, business schools created a formidable industry.

**College-Level Preparation:** College-level preparation is academic, technical, and vocational instruction for career preparation. Most community colleges offer a variety of flexible programs that are nontraditional in style and content (e.g., part-time study, evening sessions, instruction by television, or weekend workshops) (Junior College, 2014).

**Higher Education (HE):** HE is study beyond the level of secondary education, but not technical/vocational schools. Institutions of higher education include colleges, universities, and professional schools in fields such as law, theology, medicine, business, music, and art. They also include teacher-training schools, community colleges, and institutes of technology. At the end of a prescribed course of study, students earn a degree, diploma, or certificate.

**Systems-thinking:** Systems-thinking is a powerful practice for finding leverage to achieve constructive change. A system is any perceived structure whose elements hang together because they continually affect each other over time. The word system derives from the Greek verb *sunistanai*, which means to cause to stand together. The nature of a system includes the
perception with which an observer views it. Examples of systems include biological organisms (including human bodies), the atmosphere, diseases, ecological niches, political entities, industries, factories, families, teams, and all organizations (Senge et al., 2012).

**Transition:** A transition is any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, roles, or assumptions (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

**Workforce:** A workforce is the total number of employees that an organization, industry, or country employs to produce goods and services. Workforce is the people currently in employment in an economy and people currently unemployed but actively seeking work. This includes men in the population (aged between 16 and 64 years old) and women in the population (aged 16 to 59 years old). The workforce includes employees, self-employed people, unpaid family workers, and people in government training and employment programs that together with the unemployed equals a country’s total economically active.
APPENDIX I: 21st Century Knowledge and Skills Definitions

Learning and Innovation Skills

Learning and innovation skills include: critical thinking and problem-solving (expert thinking), communication and collaboration (complex communicating), and creativity and innovation (applied imagining and inventing). According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), these skills are the keys to unlocking a lifetime of learning and creative work. Beyond meeting the demands of 21st century work, these skills help employees become self-reliant lifelong learners and form the basis for the ability to ask and answer important questions, critically review what others say about a subject, pose and solve problems, communicate and work with others in learning, and create new knowledge and innovation that helps build a better world (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Critical thinking skills. The Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1991) described critical thinking skills as the ability to generate new ideas, make decisions, solve problems, organize and process information in various forms, and know how to learn and reason. Critical thinking also includes the ability to recognize and define problems, identify arguments and issues from various perspectives, gather information to generate alternate solutions, and exercise good judgment when making decisions. Critical thinking includes the ability to make ethical decisions and the self-discipline to act on these decisions (Bok, 2006). Trilling and Fadel (2006) noted that critical thinking and problem-solving are basics of 21st century learning. Mastering content must come before an attempt to put it to good use. Applying critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity to content knowledge increases motivation and improves learning outcomes.
**Problem-solving skills.** Problem-solving skills include the ability to recognize and define problems, identify and implement solutions, and evaluate results (Carnevale, Gainer, Meltzer, & Holland, 1988). According to NACE (2014), problem-solving involves exercising sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems. Individual obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data in this process and may demonstrate originality and inventiveness. Trilling and Fadel (2006) agreed that people can learn to problem-solve through a variety of inquiry tasks and develop this skill most effectively through meaningful learning projects driven by engaging questions that challenge learners and allow them to hone this skill over time.

**Collaboration and teamwork skills.** The 21st century employee must work within a team structure to negotiate and manage conflict (NACE, 2014). Trilling and Fadel (2006) provided an example of the utilization of collaboration and teamwork skills; in 2003, high school students from Malaysia, Singapore, The Netherlands, Egypt, and the United States collaborated online to create a website to address the deadly outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus. This global team researched the topic, interviewed experts, transcribed the data, designed the website, and programmed the website interface. The geographic dispersion of the team and the vastly different time zones they lived in made the use of online collaboration to plan, schedule, communicate, and coordinate essential (Trilling & Fadel, 2006). This is a true example of the advanced levels of teamwork and collaboration that the 21st century Knowledge Age requires.

**Communication skills.** Communication skills are top priority for both securing and retaining employment (NACE, 2006; North & Worth, 1998). New graduates often lack effective oral and written communication skills, as was apparent in applications and interviews (NACE,
Oral and written communication skills are in high demand and employers consistently recommend that students receive extensive training in self-expression, public speaking, and effectual writing. NACE (2014) defined communication as articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively written or expressed verbally to persons inside and outside of a given organization. Individuals with public speaking skills express ideas to others and clearly and effectively write/edit memos, letters, and complex technical reports. Trilling and Fadel (2006) explained that education always included the basics of good communicating (e.g., correct speech, fluent reading, and clear writing) but digital tools and the demands of the Knowledge Age calls for a much wider and deeper personal portfolio of communication and collaboration skills.

**STEM competencies.** Spelling (2006) argued that innovation and competitiveness require new types of employees with either expert or enabled competencies in emerging fields and traditional STEM fields. Employees need not be scientists in the traditional sense with years of postgraduate work. Rather, they must be sufficiently trained in STEM to apply their knowledge to solve the most pressing problems and fuel the innovation engine (Spelling, 2006).

**Systems-thinking competencies.** Systems-thinking skills include the ability to understand social, organizational, and technological systems; monitor and correct performance; and design or improve systems (SCANS, 1991). According to Senge (1993), systems-thinking is the ability to understand (and sometimes predict) interactions and relationships in complex, dynamic systems. Systems-thinking skills involve how actions influence others given the wider distribution of power and authority in modern organizations. Employers need workers who can understand how their organization works, how their performance relates to the performance of co-workers and the performance of the organization, and how the organization relates to the community it serves (Carnevale et al., 1988).
Creativity and innovation. Considering the 21st century demands to continuously innovate new services, better processes, and improved products for the world’s global economy, creativity and innovation are very high on the list of necessary 21st century skills. Trilling and Fadel (2006) mentioned that many believe the Knowledge Age is quickly giving way to an Innovation Age with a focus on the ability to solve problems in new ways (e.g., the greening of energy use) to invent new technologies (e.g., bio-technology and nanotechnology) and to discover new branches of knowledge and invent entirely new industries. Robinson (2001) indicated that creativity and innovation benefit from learning environments that foster questioning, patience, openness to fresh ideas, and learning from mistakes and failures.

Information, Media, and Technology Skills

Information, media, and communication technologies literacy are continually evolving and are essential to managing the ever-expanding toolkit of the 21st century worker. These 21st century literacies power the learning of many other skills.

Information literacy. Whether at work, in school, at home, or in the community, there are increasing demands on the ability to access information efficiently, evaluate information critically and competently, and use information accurately and creatively. Many online resources are available for building information literacy skills. For example, there are publications and information literacy guides that clearly explain how to assess the credibility of online information using corroborating evidence from multiple reliable sources. Accessing, evaluating, applying, and managing information and appropriately using information sources are skills that define 21st century information literacy.

Media literacy. Surrounded by digital media and media choices, 21st century students must understand how to best apply the media resources available for learning and use media
creation tools to create compelling and effective products (e.g., videos, audio podcasts, and websites). Trilling and Fadel (2006) affirmed that media literacy skills provide a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms. This builds upon an understanding of the role of media in society and develops essential skills of inquiry and self-expression.

**ICT literacy.** ICT literacy is a quintessential tool of the 21st century (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). It entails the use of technology as a tool to research, organize, evaluate, and communicate information using computers, media players, GPS, or other devices to appropriately access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information to successfully function in a knowledge economy.
APPENDIX J: IRB Approval Letter

August 16, 2016

Ms. Shalane N. Lawrence
School of Education
University of Bridgeport

Dear Ms. Lawrence:

On August 16, 2016 a designated IRB member approved the following human subject research via expedited review:

Type of Review: Initial
Project Title: Exploring College-Level Preparation Strategies Used in Business Schools: A Qualitative Case Study
Investigator: Shalane N. Lawrence
IRB ID: 2016-08-01
Funding Agency: N/A
Grant Title: N/A
Grant ID: N/A
IND or IDE: N/A

Before August 16, 2017 or within 30 days of study close, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a completed “UB HRP-212 FORM: Continuing Review Progress Report” and required attachments to request continuing approval or study closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of August 16, 2017, this research expires on that date.

In conducting this research you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual.

Sincerely,

Christine Hempowicz, Ed.D.
IRB Administrator

CC: Thomas Christ, Ph.D.