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The Search for Quality Correlates in Funeral Service Education

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Abstract

This study sought to determine what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation. The study examined opinions of funeral service education chairs (*N*=45, representing 80% of the population) who are leaders of funeral service programs accredited by the American Board of Funeral Service Education. Participants completed a self-report online survey which assessed their perspectives regarding the importance of a collection of educational correlates related to funeral service program quality. Survey responses were statistically analyzed using standard multiple regression. The results indicated that 89% of program quality variance may be predicted by the set of predictors utilized in the study. These results, coupled with semipartial correlations, facilitated the development of the Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model. The results highlight critical elements of funeral service education program quality and add to the body of empirical research aiding those charged with assessing program quality in higher education.

The Search for Quality Correlates in Funeral Service Education

With more than 21,000 funeral homes employing in excess of 100,000 people nationwide, funeral service has developed into a significant economic force (Kastenbaum, 2008; Laderman, 2003; nfda.org, 2009), creating a great need for trained professionals. The governing board of funeral service education in the United States is the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE), (abfse.org, 2008; Bigelow, 1997) for which accreditation standards are designed to ensure that the basic and necessary academic components required to be a funeral service professional are consistently offered to every student. Despite the efforts of the ABFSE to secure that funeral service education institutions offer a fundamentally strong curricula, identical accreditation standards are set for all 56 accredited programs regardless of individual institution requirements or the degrees that are offered (abfse.org, 2008; Bigelow, 1997). This truth provided motivation for this study. Fritch & Williams (2011) indicated that although programs represent various levels of educational institutions offering diverse requirements and degrees the accreditation requirements remain the same. In order to more fully understand various elements of quality in funeral service education, it would be beneficial to investigate the relationship between a collection of educational correlates and program quality in funeral service education.

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

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

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

familiarized these students with death at a personal level. This experience, coupled with the mortuary science curriculum and work experience, allows these individuals to possess the emotional capital required for a successful career in funeral service (Cahill, 1999).

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

The National Board Exam (NBE) serves as one of the final steps in achieving licensure in numerous states and the ABFSE maintains records of the successes and failures of every student because schools of mortuary science must maintain a minimum first time pass rate of 60% or a program may be put on probation, and if scores do not improve lose accreditation status (abfse.org, 2011; Bigelow, 1997; Habenstein & Lamers 2010; Poston, 1987). Poston (1987)

investigated if certain demographic variables can serve to predict the performance of mortuary science students on the NBE. Data were collected from a pool of graduates from a Midwestern school of mortuary science over a five year period, *N*=107. The variables considered consisted of age, ACT Natural Science score, ACT Math score, ACT Composite score, final grade point average in mortuary science and funeral service courses, experience in funeral service prior to entering mortuary school, high school class rank, and gender. Utilizing multiple regression and correlational analysis, certain variables were discovered to serve as predictors for performance on the NBE. Significant relationships exist between GPA, ACT scores, high school rank and success on the NBE. No significant relationship was found between prior experience in funeral service, age, gender, and success on the NBE (Poston, 1987). This research showed that prior academic success may serve as a predictor of future academic success. As NBE scores are critical for obtaining and maintaining program accreditation, the knowledge of the relationship between these variables and NBE scores can assist educators in assisting students that may be at risk of not succeeding on the NBE.

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

in mortuary science grows more diverse it will be necessary for educators in this field to challenge students with a creative vision (Frade, 1997).

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

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

operators regarding the importance of a baccalaureate degree in mortuary science. Broomfield concluded that the majority of funeral home operators do not believe that a baccalaureate degree is necessary in mortuary science. He further determined that Illinois funeral directors do not believe a baccalaureate degree should be required for licensure nor would they offer a higher wage for employees with a baccalaureate degree (Broomfield, 2000).

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

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

- Scholarship: A national scholarship program is available to both undergraduate students and to graduate faculty members.
- Curriculum: Responsible for insuring that the common curriculum taught at every accredited program is current, relevant, and accurate.
- National Board Exam Liaison: A responsibility exists to communicate between the ABFSE and the Conference of Funeral service Examining Board (CFSEB); this board handles the testing functions as mandated by the United States Department of Education.
- Accreditation: Responsible for accrediting all academic programs in funeral service.
- College and University Council: This organization reviews recommended motions for new or altered policies and procedures and also serves as the only national voice for funeral service educators in the United States.

Additionally, Bigelow explained: that each accredited program must undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once each 7 years, that contrary to widespread speculation the board does not provide any ranking of the programs, all programs are required to meet all standards, and

accreditation serves to assure the consumer that students will receive adequate, fair, and relevant instructions in all accredited programs.

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

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

A primary step necessary to unearth educational elements associated with quality institutions and programs is to grasp a clear understanding of the definition of quality. The search for this understanding is common in the literature (Bogue, 1998; Dew, 2009; Freed, 2005; Grunig, 1997; Odden, 1990; Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009; Tam, 2001), resulting in various perspectives on the same issue. Quality as endurance (stand the test of time), luxury (luxury items are of high quality), conformance (reduction of quality to specified characteristics), continuous improvement (encouraged innovation), and value added (education should add value to the student) is the Dew (2009) approach to this challenge, who asserted that it is possible to frame the issue of quality in higher education through these lenses. He argued that in order to engage in a conversation about quality in higher education one must first frame this discussion so all parties engaged in the conversation are referencing the same reality. The existence of numerous definitions and beliefs when considering higher education quality necessitates communication among constituents. This includes understanding the systemic nature of quality, vital role of leadership, understanding a systems role in the community, data collection, knowledge management, faculty development, and overall process improvement (Dew, 2009).

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

issue in higher education. The concept of the ethical professor and a variety of accountability measures are additional gauges of quality in higher education.

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

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

- Ask new questions and be concerned about the answers; assist the students in understanding the learning process.
- Create a learner-center environment. The learning process should be collaborative.
- Through continuous feedback develop more self-awareness.

- Develop trusting relationships with students through conversation and other communication.
- Allow communication to create a sense of community in the educational institution.
- Be aware of your value system and work to understand others; share these with others to develop a common understanding of the educational institution.
- Utilizing feedback, require students and faculty to reflect on both successes and failures in an effort to improve the organization.
- Work to make connections to the world outside of the educational arena. This will aid in making learning more applicable to the students.
- Design challenging assignments and provide students with an opportunity to achieve these lofty goals.
- Realize that teaching is a service and implement service-learning into the curriculum, and
- Faculty need to understand the importance of asking the right questions. Strive to make students think critically by asking challenging questions.

The importance of the application of these characteristics rests in the belief that students need to focus on skills that will be required in the workplace. As evidenced in these characteristics, students will not necessarily need to know the answer to specific questions but attain an understanding of how to ask insightful questions. If these characteristics are missing from the educational institution students will not be adequately prepared to address the challenges of the workplace and life in general (Freed, 2005).

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

Volkwein and Sweitzer (2006) investigated elements of higher education that have been identified as contributing to reputation and prestige related to research universities and liberal arts colleges. Studies that contribute to the data bank in this study include information from publications such as *U.S. News and World Report*, the Institute for Scientific Information Web Knowledge, as well as four college guidebooks such as *Barron's* and the *Princeton Review*. The existing literature that served as foundational elements for this study found that size, selectivity,

percentage of faculty possessing Ph.D.s, faculty publication, average cost of tuition, room, and board, as well as retention and graduation rates are associated with institutional reputation and prestige. The sample for this study consisted of 447 liberal arts and research institutions and the purpose was to test the existing indicator claims of reputation and prestige as realized through past research. Results of regression analysis concluded that institutional control, age, size, and resources are foundational elements with respect to enrollment levels and that strong faculty, students and academic outcomes work together to enhance institutional reputation and prestige at research universities and liberal arts colleges (Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006).

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

Regression analysis revealed that the indicators of reputation and prestige for these programs were very similar to the results at the undergraduate level found by Grunig (1997) and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

strongest indicator), age, tenure status, origin of highest degree, teaching workload, as well as proportion of advanced degree programs and library size, are all correlated with departmental quality at regional colleges and universities. These findings are consistent with studies of nationally highly ranked institutions but the relationship between the variables in the regional schools are not as strong, revealing that at the regional level departmental quality correlates are more diverse and multidimensional (Conrad & Blackburn, 1985).

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

The continual search for elements that correlate with departmental and program quality and prestige in higher education was brought into question when Keith (1999) studied the institutional context of departmental prestige in American higher education. The focus of the study was the comparison between university characteristics and attributes bestowed upon

specific departments within the university. Investigating data from three previous studies that examined the perceived quality of faculty in departments granting research doctorates, selected faculty were mailed a list of competing departments and were requested to judge the departments; no evaluator was permitted to comment on their respective department. The survey instrument included variables such as prestige ratings, scholarly publications, citations per faculty, departmental publications, faculty size, graduate student enrollment, proportion of highly rated departments, research universities, and institutional control. Analyzing the data with factor analysis, regression analysis, and a two-way analysis of variance, significant results were obtained. Keith discovered that specific departments within universities had comparable ratings to one another and that university's reputations influenced individual department ratings. Additionally, he found that over a 25-year period 38% of departmental ratings did not change and 45% note miniscule changes, justifying the finding that university reputations are quite stable over time. The implications of this research are significant in that "this study shows that departmental ratings are primarily tied to institutional reputations" (Keith, 1999, p. 431). Keith advised that future research needs to address the purpose of teaching, research, and scholarship needs, and he calls for attention to the educational-economic connection and the necessity to track career patterns of graduates associated with different institutions (Keith, 1999).

The literature examined here divulges an intense interest in what defines quality in higher education. This, culminated with the reality that limited empirical studies have been discovered in the field of funeral service education, supports the need for additional research directly related to this field. Specifically, the fact that no research directly investigating what defines quality in funeral service education has been identified, further supports the investigation of this topic. This exploratory research seeks to advance the search for quality in higher education and expand

this study to a new discipline, funeral service education. The central research question of the study is what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation.

Method and Results

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

The central focus of this research, funeral service education, presents unique parameters with respect to location and number of programs. Currently there are 56 accredited funeral service programs in the United States (Habenstein & Lamers, 2010), limiting the research population, which necessitated a census study. The fundamental problem addressed in this study—a lack of understanding of the effectiveness of funeral service institutions in the preparation of students for a career as funeral practitioners—was best addressed through the collection of data from accredited funeral service education programs across the country. An attempt was made to obtain data from all 56 accredited programs in the country to address the research question. As these programs indeed span the entire country, an online survey was used to collect data nationwide. Necessary contact information was obtained from the ABFSE which allowed the researcher to contact potential subjects with an email letter inviting them to participate in the study and subsequent correspondence included information necessary to locate and participate in the online survey. A month and a half period was used to collect data in an attempt to obtain a high response rate.

The small population size related to funeral service education indicated above, which suggested the benefits of a census study, highlighted the importance of locating experts in the field and securing these individuals as subjects for the study (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). As this research sought to understand what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation it was important to identify individuals not only with an expertise in funeral service education, but also with a working knowledge of accreditation with respect to funeral service education. The leadership position in funeral service education programs is uniquely qualified to speak to educational issues associated with funeral service education, as this position typically teaches, offers leadership with respect to instruction and curriculum issues and also serves as the contact person for respective programs with the ABFSE regarding accreditation issues. Leaders at funeral service / mortuary science programs such as Southern Illinois University, University of Minnesota, and St. Louis Community College at Forest Park were identified as potential participants. These individuals were selected because of their unique knowledge related to funeral service education. Due to the small population it was necessary to reach out to the leadership at all accredited funeral service programs so that the findings of this research would possibly generalize across the entire landscape of funeral service education and add to the knowledge base with respect to quality in higher education, especially when considering the case of exceeding basic accreditation standards.

To maximize the amount of data collected from this small and unique population listwise deletion was utilized during the regression analysis. This resulted in 45 of the 56 chairs in the population participating in the study, or 80% of the population.

An analysis of the demographic information was performed after the final subjects were determined. The data included both personal information and information about the institutions

the participants represented. The data revealed a wide range of participants with regard to age. This range included: six participants between the ages of 31-40, 21 participants between the ages of 41and 50, 12 participants between the ages 51 and 60, and six participants between the ages of 61 and 70. An overwhelming majority of participants were licensed funeral directors and embalmers, with only one reporting that they were not a licensed embalmer and two reporting that they were not licensed funeral directors. The number of years teaching funeral service varied across categories; 12 subjects teaching six to ten years was the highest recurring response. Two significant elements were discovered with respect to the personal information. These included the reality that this sample population is male dominated and that the majority of the participants hold a master's degree as the highest academic degree earned. Figure 1 highlights the disparity in gender among the subjects and figure 2 exhibits the highest degree earned among the subjects.

Figure 1. Gender Disparity Among Funeral Service Education Chairs

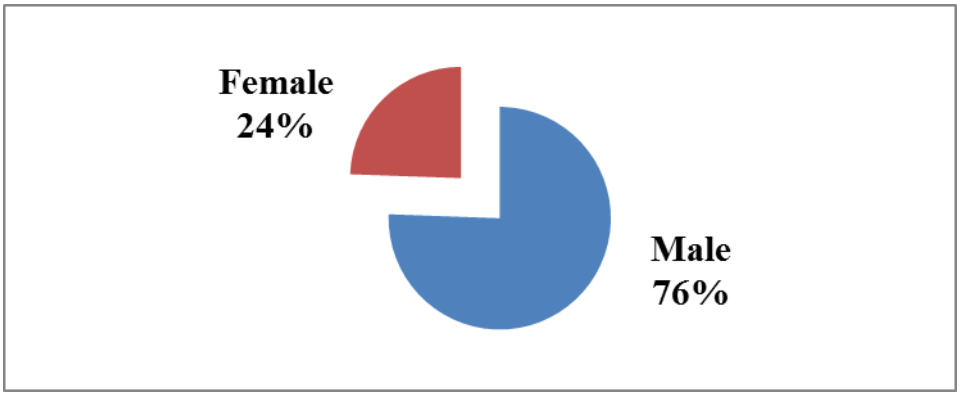
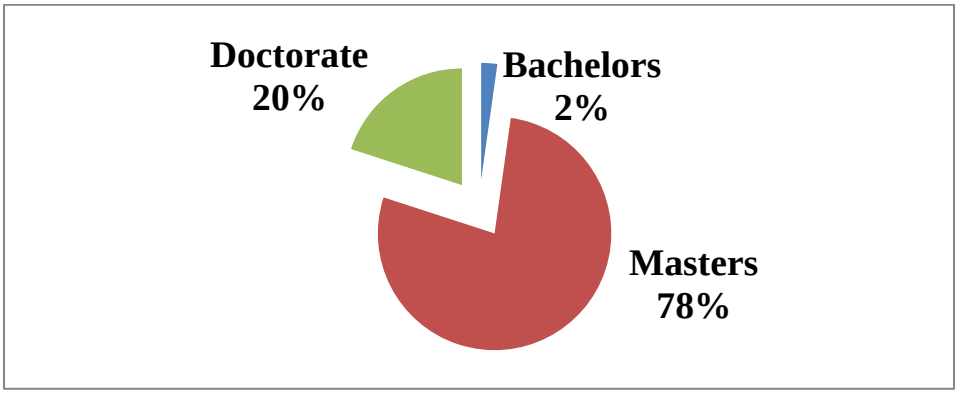
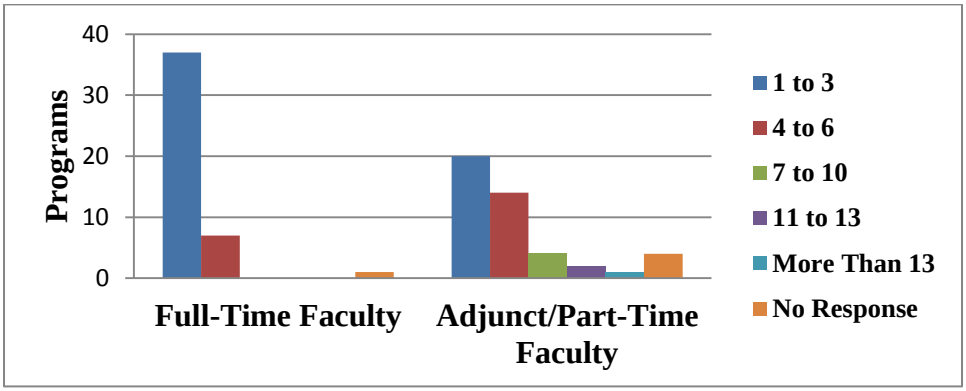


Figure 2. Highest Academic Degree Earned by Funeral Service Education Chair Participants



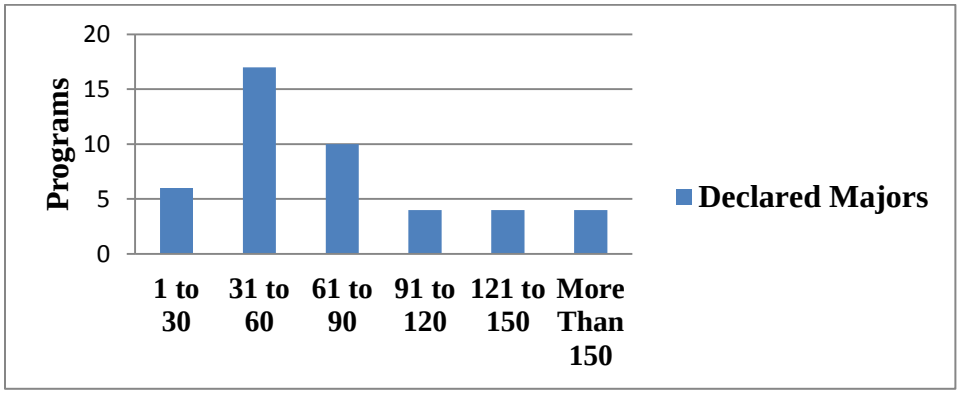
The institutional demographic information revealed similarities and differences consistent with the diverse institutions in funeral service education. The majority of programs employed one to three full-time faculty members and relied heavily on adjunct instructors. 20 programs counted on the assistance of one to three adjuncts, and one program reported using more than 13 adjunct instructors. Program faculty and instructor data are presented in figure 3.

Figure 3. Funeral Service Education Faculty Numbers



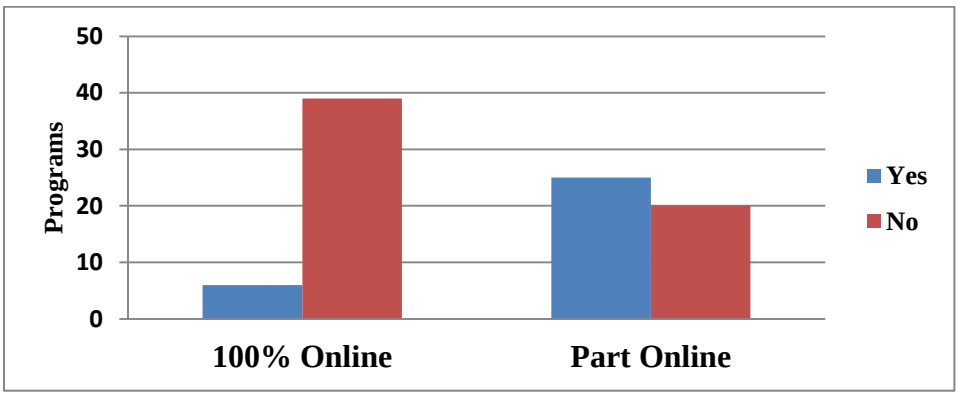
The size of the programs also varied with regard to the number of declared majors and these details are presented in figure 4.

Figure 4. Funeral Service Education Program Size Represented by Number of Declared Majors



The majority of programs offered some instruction online and six offered the program entirely online as revealed in figure 5.

Figure 5. Funeral Service Education Offered Online: A Comparison of 100% Online Instruction Versus Offering Some Instruction Online



Although a large amount of the institutional information was anticipated, the data revealed that a majority of programs offer an associates degree as the highest level of funeral service degree available, and the community college is the most common setting for funeral service programs. Figure 6 reports the degrees offered in funeral service education, while figure 7 emphasizes the types of institutions that offer the degrees.

Figure 6. Degrees Offered in Various Funeral Service Education Institutions

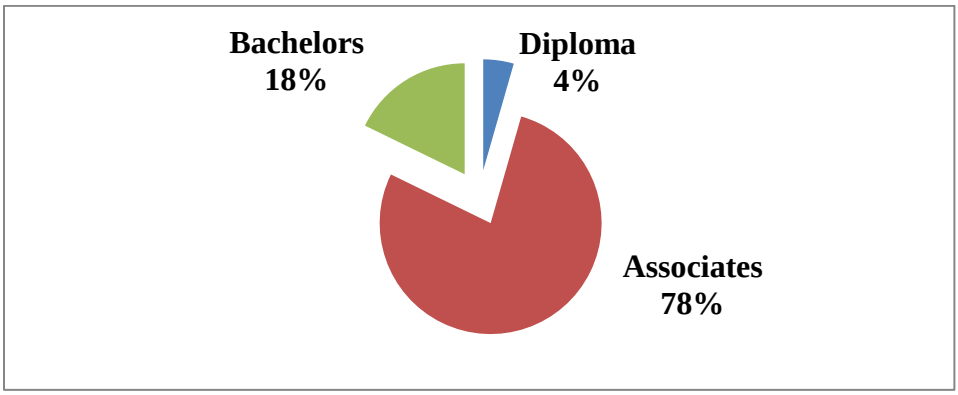
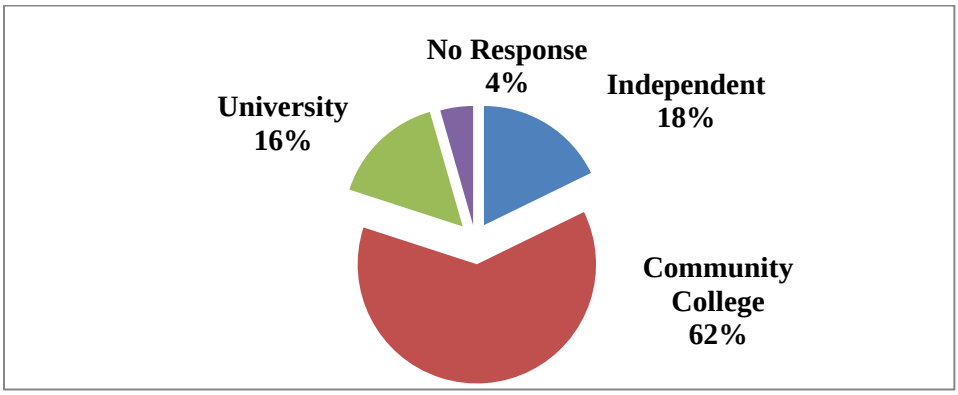


Figure 7. Type of Institution Housing Funeral Service Education Programs



The statistical evaluation of the data consisted of a three step process: (1) examining the final reliability of the scaled items, (2) evaluating the assumptions associated with regression, and (3) the actual regression analysis. When calculating the internal consistency to evaluate the reliability of the scaled items, two participants' data were excluded due to incomplete data files, resulting in 43 valid cases for the reliability assessment. Cronbach's alpha calculated for the scaled items showed the reliability coefficient, $\alpha = .894$, indicating good internal consistency in the measurement of the importance items (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Statistical analysis did not suggest excluding any scaled items; the exclusion of any items would not have improved the reliability index.

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

Standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to answer the central research question of the study, what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. Descriptive indices (means and standard deviation) for the scaled items on the instrument were also calculated (see Table 1). The criterion was regressed against the list of predictors (regress y on x) to determine the R squared value which reports the strength of prediction, and allows for

the creation of a prediction equation, which can be used to make future predictions with respect to program quality in funeral service education. This equation was developed (see Table 2). The prediction equation was developed using the unstandardized b-weights in an effort to generalize beyond the sample of the study. The regression analysis revealed R square = .893, indicating that approximately 89% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors [$F_{39,3} = .639$; $p = .787$], leaving only 11% unaccounted for in this model. However, the adjusted R square value = -.504, indicated a large amount of fluctuation among the predictors due to sample size. The omnibus F test found the R square value and the subsequent prediction equation to be statistically non-significant, a result expected by the researcher as a consequence of the small sample size and the large number of predictors used in the model.

Discussion

We turn now to a discussion of the results of this study. For the purpose of this discussion the presentation consists of two items: General Observations and the proposal of a Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model.

As indicated in the introduction, limited research literature exists in the field of funeral service education. Most publications related to this discipline are opinion in nature and published in trade journals rather than peer-reviewed journals. This research study discovered a potential factor influencing the lack of research. Only 20% of the respondents in this study hold doctoral degrees. This is potentially significant considering that the data collection process resulted in an 86% response rate from the population. The fact that 80% of the funeral service education chairs that responded have not been formally trained to conduct research likely contributes to the lack of research that exists in the field of funeral service education. Conversely, this fact also indicates that vast opportunities exist in this field with regard to

prospective future studies and the development of theory, both of which could impact the practice involved in funeral service education.

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

In addition, the lack of evolvement of funeral service education as a discipline within higher education is indicated through the data collection process when the demographic information is analyzed. 78% of the programs represented in the study offer an associate's degree as the highest funeral service degree and only 18% of the institutions offer a bachelor's degree as the highest funeral service degree, revealing the lack of evolvement of funeral service education within the higher education landscape. Further evidence is the fact that 62% of the institutions represented are housed in a community college and only 16% are associated with a university. These realities indicate that the setting and degree opportunities in funeral service education fundamentally limit the amount of knowledge required to complete a program. The very nature of this truth limits students both educationally and professionally. Only with evolved educational requirements will funeral service education begin to realize the possibilities and knowledge associated with the academy.

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

Upon completion of standard multiple regression, a funeral service education quality prediction equation was developed. The equation assigned a coefficient to each importance item analyzed in the survey instrument, allowing for the numeric evaluation of quality. This enables the prediction of quality by ranking how a specific program values each importance item. For example, ten may be used as the base number in order to assign a value to each item, representing that a program would expend the highest level of resources on this particular item and decrease the base number in areas that would not be valued as highly by the program. Upon assigning each item a numeric value (1-10) one could solve the equation and the resulting numeric value would represent the Funeral Service Program Quality numerically; this value can be manipulated through the value assignment with respect to each predictor. In sum, this model allows funeral service program directors the ability to evaluate how they rank with respect to program quality regarding the set of predictors established in the study. Furthermore, this model provides program directors the ability to assess areas which, with further investment, may improve the overall quality of the program (see Table 3). This table presents a visual presentation of this model, including each importance item and the value associated from the regression prediction equation. The equation utilizes the unstandardized b-weights in an attempt

to generalize beyond the sample of the study, but the scales remain attached, not allowing for direct comparison across samples.

To further advance this model and improve the practical application, the squared semipartial correlation values for the importance items were calculated (see table 4). This calculation provides the unique contribution of each importance item in accounting for variance in program quality when the other predictors are controlled. The item with the greatest unique contribution to program quality, "The program provides students with an opportunity to achieve lofty goals," represents nearly 12% unique variance in program quality as indicated by the squared semipartial value. Additional items indicating substantial unique variance include, "The program conducts mock funeral arrangements and services as part of the professional training," with almost an 8% unique variance, and "Full-time faculty members are on tenure track or have obtained tenure" and "Faculty members publish research results in funeral service journals," both indicating nearly 7% unique variance as calculated by the squared semipartial. The cumulative unique variance discovered through this process is almost 83%, further supporting the value of this exploratory research. These correlations, consistent with the results of the regression analysis fail to reach statistical significance due to the small sample size coupled with the large number of predictors. For organization and ease of critical evaluation the importance items are grouped into five categories for the model enhancement. The five quality categories are: curriculum, facilities, faculty, program administration, and students. The model enhancement, presented in Table 4, shows the unique contribution of each predictor as indicated by the squared semipartial correlation values; the items representing the greatest unique variance are in bold font for immediate identification.

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

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

reasonable solution in an effort to increase the potential subject pool. Different opinions exist on the required number of subjects for a regression study of this nature; some experts recommend 15 subjects per predictor or a minimum of 400, which would require a significant increase in the number of subjects for the instrument as it is designed (Osborne, 2000).

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

Central to the implications of this study is the development of a Funeral Service Education Quality Model. This tool will hopefully serve in future evaluations of program quality in higher education and in particular, be beneficial within funeral service education. The importance of understanding program quality in higher education, and the vast resources that have been dedicated to the search for a better understanding of this educational consideration, highlight the need for continuing research. The model resulting from this study will hopefully support subsequent efforts to expand this research and ultimately contribute to a better understanding of program quality in higher education.

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Table 1

Descriptive Indices

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

Table 2

Regression Prediction Equation

Program Quality = 5.815 + .474i1 - .204i2 + .719i3 + .828i4 - 1.151i5 - .162i6 - .209i7 + .045i8 - .131i9 - .401i10 + .363i11 - .649i12 - .329i13 - 1.014i14 + .682i15 - .328i16 + .766i17 - .516i18 + .058i19 + .335i20 - .700i21 + 1.098i22 - .629i23 - .253i24 + 2.138i25 - 1.044i26 - .557i27 + 4.777i28 - 4.991i29 - .029i30 + .742i31 – 2.000i32 + 1.178i33 - .882i34 + 1.592i35 + .641i36 + .258i37 + .551i38 – 1.126i39

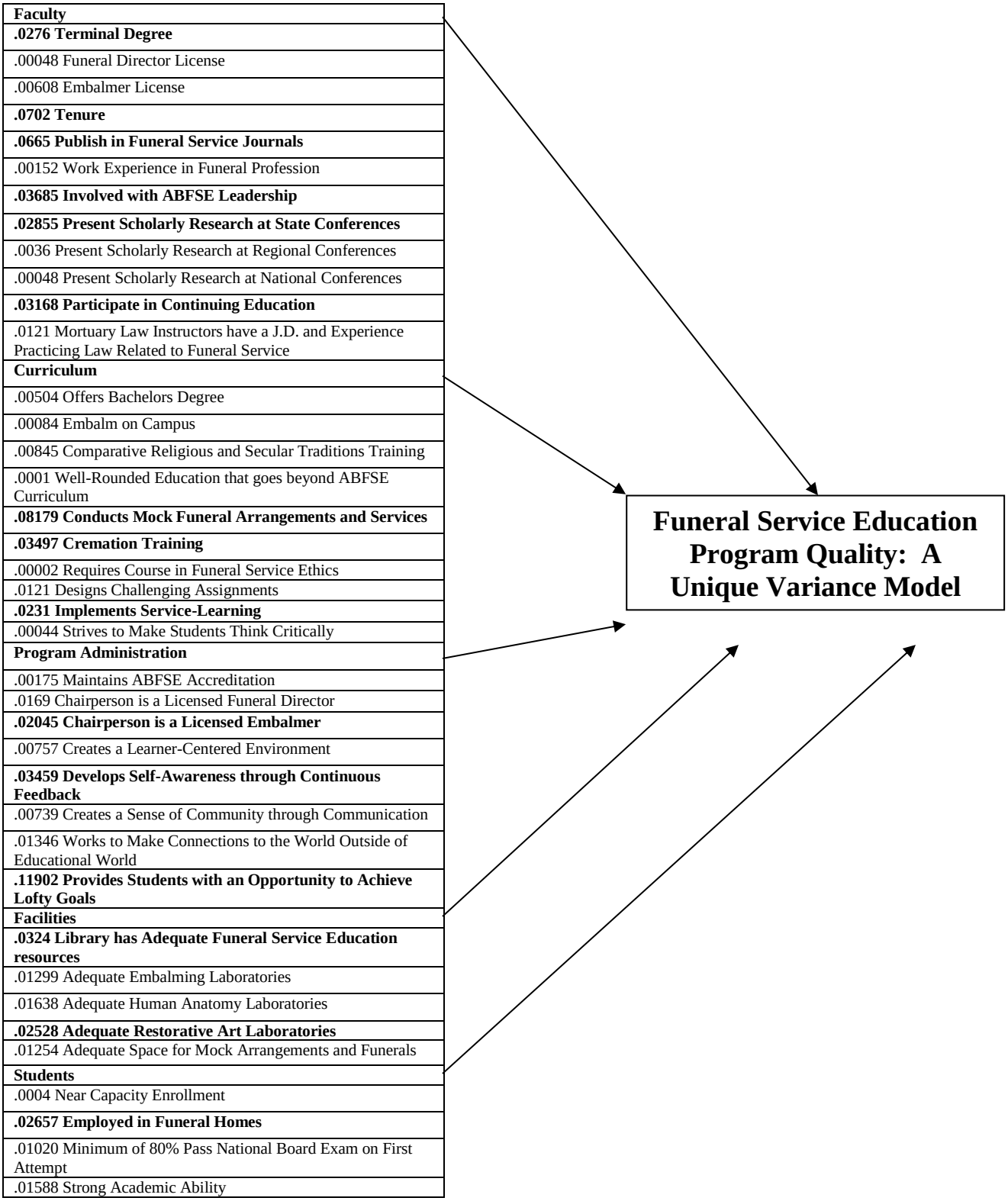
Table 3

Funeral Service Program Quality Model derived from the Prediction Equation

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

Table 4

Funeral Service Program Quality Model: Utilizing Squared Semipartial Values



From Concept to Implementation: The Development of a Reliable and Valid Instrument to Evaluate Quality in Funeral Service Education

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Abstract

This paper presents the development of a valid and reliable research instrument to measure program quality in funeral service education. The progression of the instrument includes addressing the critical elements of the criterion variable, demographic items, and the scaled items that measure the importance of a collection of educational correlates. In order to adequately evaluate the reliability and validity of the instrument two pilot studies were conducted, each with $n = 30$. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine internal consistency reliability and the scaled items used to measure importance were included as a result of a review of the literature, from theory, expert suggestions, and certain items were included as they are specific to funeral service education. Ultimately, a reliable and valid instrument that may be used to measure quality in funeral service education is presented. This instrument adds to the highly researched field of program quality in higher education.

From Concept to Implementation: The Development of a Reliable and Valid Instrument to Evaluate Quality in Funeral Service Education

When the decision was made to research what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation it became necessary to locate a research instrument appropriate for assessing data relevant to the fundamental question of the investigation. Analytical techniques would be tailored to the instrument. During the search for empirical studies in the area of funeral service education, limited literature surfaced and it was determined that in order to locate a suitable instrument for a study of this nature it would be necessary to look beyond the available peer-reviewed literature. *Mental Measurements Yearbook* with *Tests in Print* was searched but no appropriate instrument was found. The search for a suitable instrument then led to *Digital Dissertations* / *Dissertation Abstracts*, where a number of related studies were revealed, but again no instrument was found that could be utilized to answer the central question. It became apparent that a new instrument must be created and that it would be appropriate to begin with an instrument that was developed to address a similar question. The starting point for developing the new instrument was the modification of an expert survey (Li, 2007) located in D*igital Dissertations* and implemented to measure characteristics of quality online Chinese language teaching and learning in higher education. The first section of this paper presents the three elements central to the development of the research instrument, including information about the criterion variable, demographic items, and scaled items on the instrument. Following this examination the arguments for requiring pilot studies as well as the development of the instrument are presented.

Central to the development of this instrument was the determination of the criterion variable, the variable to be predicted in a regression study (Gay, Mills &Airasian, 2009). The

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

Funeral service educational offerings across the United States vary considerably. Degree options, institutional types, and expected time to complete a program are examples of these differences. The demographic section of the instrument includes numerous items as a result of the diverse nature of funeral service programs. For example, requesting information about institutional type, size and course offerings resulted from the literature and reveals the various institutional types in the funeral service arena (abfse.org, 2008; Bigelow, 1997; Habenstein & Lamers, 2010). This information may enhance the analysis of data collected. Additionally, personal information was added to the demographic section of the survey to examine if age, sex, education, experience, and funeral service licensure have an impact on data collected.

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

Instrument development necessitated the implementation of pilot studies in order to evaluate the reliability and validity of the scaled items of the survey. This process provided information about deficiencies and suggestions to improve the instrument (Gay, Mills, &Airasian, 2009). The pilot studies further allowed for the evaluation of the ability of respondents to understand instructions and questions fundamental to the development of an effective measurement tool (Creswell, 2005). Both demographic and scaled items were included in the pilot studies. When feedback was received from subjects and internal consistency reliability determined, appropriate revisions were made to further improve the instrument. The goal was to produce a highly valid and reliable measurement tool to ascertain quality in funeral service education.

Two studies were undertaken to determine the reliability and validity of the instrument, which included both demographic and scaled items. Central to the effective instrument is to

remain connected to the fundamental purpose of the instrument. In this case the focus was to develop an instrument that identified educational elements consistent with quality in funeral service educational programs. Establishing that the instrument produces accurate results is the focus of the instrument reliability. It was necessary to provide support that the measurement from the instrument revealed consistent results. The pilot studies employed Cronbach's alpha to determine a reliability coefficient in order to establish internal consistency reliability for the importance section of the instrument. Additionally, it was necessary to establish content validity. Content validity was considered to ensure that the information obtained by the instrument actually reflected information about the intended purpose of the instrument (Hopkins, Stanley, & Hopkins, 1990). This was critical in order to secure interest and active participation from research participants. When participants are invited to participate in a study utilizing this instrument, it is necessary for these professionals to grasp the connection between the content of the instrument and the purpose for collecting the data, namely, to determine what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. This required the determination that sufficient representation of elements potentially associated with program quality are presented in the instrument.

The first pilot study began when the instrument was presented in person by the researcher to a collection of funeral service professionals at the Oklahoma Funeral Directors Association Convention on April 4, 2011 in Catoosa, Oklahoma, where a funeral service executive proclaimed, "It is about time the school quit relying on the industry to train students" with respect to the content of the survey instrument. To expand the sample population to 30, data were also collected from funeral directors around metropolitan Oklahoma City, as they were available to participate, and a collection of funeral service students in their final year of study at

a local funeral service education institution in Edmond, Oklahoma. All pilot participants were selected because they have knowledge of funeral service education and were available to participate. As indicated above, these data served to provide information about the reliability and validity of the initial instrument, and to garner suggestions to add or delete categories, or to clarify existing items.

With respect to the demographic section, two revisions were instituted as a result of the first pilot study. It was suggested to include a "Not Applicable" category to many of the demographic items to provide consistency in data collection if the instrument was used to collect data from subjects other than funeral service educators. It was also found that in order to be consistent in data entry it was necessary to switch the order in which "Male" and "Female" were listed on the instrument. This change served to prevent data entry errors, as it made this category consistent with other items that have two options.

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

Two subjects reported problems understanding item 14, "student population maintains full enrollment," but statistical analysis indicated that if this item was deleted from the study the overall reliability in measurement would decrease from .848 to .837. This finding resulted in the retention of the item on the instrument to allow for further evaluation of the item in the second pilot study. One subject reported difficulty understanding item 13, "students show strong academic ability, as witnessed in classroom performance." Statistical analysis indicated that the overall reliability would be reduced from .848 to .841 if this item were deleted. This, coupled with the fact that only one subject reported difficulty, resulted in this item being retained. Statistical analysis also indicated that two items should be eliminated from the instrument as a result of a moderate reliability increase as a result of their deletion. When item #8, "The program is offered 100% online" was eliminated, alpha increased to .853 from .848, and when item #9, "The program offers a funeral director only option" was eliminated, the alpha value increased to .855 from .848. Six suggestions written on the pilot instruments indicated a potential relationship to program quality. Three subjects indicated the importance of including a category about programs offering comparative religious traditions with respect to funeral customs and two subjects expressed interest in including a statement reflecting that the program conducts mock funerals as part of the educational training. One participant suggested including cremation training, requiring faculty to participate in funeral service continuing education, the importance of the chairperson of the program being a licensed funeral director and embalmer, and the importance of the program requiring an ethics in funeral service course. Utilizing the expertise of the sample population, the suggested items were included in the measurement tool that was used to collect data in the second pilot study. This was appropriate, as numerous criteria were employed in this instrument in the search of elements that are significant in defining

a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation. These new items were further evaluated in the second pilot.

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

In addition to the statistical analysis via Cronbach's alpha, the second pilot revealed several insightful comments with respect to language and content of the survey, resulting in revisions of the instrument. The only change that was implemented in the demographic section of the instrument was that the "Not Applicable" option included in the second pilot was removed because the final instrument is set to evaluate funeral service educators, which eliminated the need for this possibility.

Once again, data analysis suggested several revisions concerning the scaled items. Cronbach's alpha calculated for the scaled items in the second pilot showed an increase in the reliability coefficient from $\alpha = .849$ to .866, indicating an improvement in the reliability of the instrument as a result of the revisions made to the initial instrument. The second pilot reliability index indicated good internal consistency in the measurement of the importance items. Statistical analysis did not suggest excluding any scaled items as the reliability index would not be moderately improved by the exclusion of any items. These findings resulted in all items

being retained on the instrument, notwithstanding revisions to certain items as suggested by the experts and additional items added as suggested for inclusion by experts or through further review of related literature. Standard multiple regression was executed on the second pilot importance survey, resulting in R squared = .978. This value indicated that approximately 98% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors, leaving only 2% unaccounted for, providing further support for the revisions instituted as a result of the first pilot study in which approximately 60% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the original set of predictors.

The second pilot study revealed seven subjects reported trouble understanding the language of Item 9, "student population maintains full enrollment"; one subject simply inquired, "what does this mean" and another suggested, "this may need to be defined." These comments resulted in further assistance of two experts in funeral service education to clarify the item and thus retain it, as the statistical analysis indicated the overall reliability would decrease to .862 from .866 if the item were excluded. After consultation with two experts, the item "program maintains near capacity student enrollment," was retained on the final instrument. Two subjects related concerns with item 14, "the program offers a course that focuses on comparative religious traditions with respect to funeral customs." One expert commented that the "population is becoming more diverse and the second expert indicated, "instead of a course in comparative religions, I would suggest a contemporary issues class." To account for these concerns the item was clarified to read "the program offers training that focuses on comparative religious and secular traditions with respect to funeral customs." The new language more fully related the purpose of the item and allowed it to be retained; exclusion of the item would have reduced the overall reliability coefficient to .864 from .866.

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

The pilot studies also served the important function of assuring construct validity, which reflects the degree to which an instrument gauges its intended construct (Gay, Mills &Airasian,

2009). The evaluation of construct validity includes the development of survey items based on theory, examination of the instrument by experts to judge whether the elements represented on the instrument are typical when representing the construct (in this case a quality funeral service education program) evaluation of the results, and appropriate item addition, deletion, and revision (Gay et al., 2007; Hopkins, Stanley & Hopkins, 1990). The review of the literature acknowledged certain educational components related to quality and many of these items were included on the survey. During the second pilot study seven additional items developed from theory were added to the importance section of the survey as a result of further evaluation of literature; these items were evaluated by the final eight participants of the second pilot study. The foundation of these seven items was a total quality environment model developed by Freed (2005), with items related to the learner-centered environment, continuous feedback, communication, and service-learning among others included in the importance section of the instrument as a result of the model. Cronbach's alpha was again utilized to determine a reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .996$), indicating strong internal consistency for the seven newly added scaled items in the importance section and the scaled criterion value. The item-total statistics did not reveal any significant increase in alpha by deleting any of the items, which supported the retention of all items on the instrument. Standard multiple regression was executed on these seven items utilizing the new criterion resulting in R Squared = .990, indicating that 99% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors.

Additional items specific to funeral service education were also included in the scaled section of the instrument to assess areas of importance in funeral service education. These procedures, coupled with expert feedback on the pilot studies are evidence that the instrument is of valid construct.This process, which included two sample populations of experts, *n=30*,

indicated that the instrument measured the intended construct, quality in funeral service education beyond basic accreditation.

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

The instrument includes 39 scaled items and each item ranks importance with respect to program quality as perceived by participants. In order to collect individual subject and institutional data, the measurement instrument also includes a demographic section.

Care was taken during the developmental stages of the survey to create a valid and reliable instrument. This was critically important not only to aid in the process of credible research but also for the instrument to become part of the evaluative process when considering program quality in higher education.

Ultimately, the painstaking steps required to develop the instrument resulted in a mechanism to evaluate program quality in funeral service education, an instrument that was previously unavailable. The instrument offers future researchers the opportunity not only to investigate quality in funeral service education but also to further develop the educational literature regarding program quality in higher education. This development, thus contributes to the literature with respect to program quality in higher education, expands the literature into a

new discipline, and leaves an evaluated instrument to aid further studies in the search for a better understanding of what educational elements are associated with quality in higher education.

The importance of understanding program quality in higher education, and the vast resources that have been dedicated to the search for a better understanding of this educational consideration, highlight the need for continuing research. This research instrument can support subsequent efforts to expand the evaluation of program quality in funeral service education, and ultimately contribute to a better understanding of what defines program quality in higher education.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Program Quality in Funeral Service Education: An Expert Survey

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

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

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

Thank you very much for your time and support.

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

Personal Information:

Age

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

Sex

Male Female

Highest degree earned

Certificate Diploma Baccalaureate Masters Doctorate

Licensed funeral director

Yes No

Licensed embalmer

Yes No

Years teaching funeral service education

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 more than 30

Institutional Information:

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

Diploma Certificate Associates Degree Bachelors Degree

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

Independent Funeral Service School Community College Comprehensive University

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

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

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

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

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

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

Is the program offered 100% online?

Yes No

Is at least one course offered online?

Yes No

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Strongly Agree----------Strongly Disagree

Importance Survey

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

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

2. Faculty members have a current funeral director license.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important----------Not at all Important

3. Faculty members have a current embalmer license.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

8. The program maintains near capacity student enrollment.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

15. There are adequate laboratories for embalming on campus.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

31. The program creates a learner-centered environment.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

35. The program designs challenging assignments.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Extremely Important ----------Not at all Important

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