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Impact of Cheerleading on Postsecondary Career and College Readiness in a Rural
Community

By
Rikki Baldwin

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2018

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Rikki Baldwin under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my father, the late John Martin Kilgore Jr., and my late uncle Willie Clyde Thomas for their constant belief of achieving my hopes and dreams!!! I love and miss you both!

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for helping direct my path. Without his mercy, none of this would be possible. I would like to thank my husband Cedric for his countless sacrifices in this journey and constant support. For this I am forever grateful and appreciative of all you have done. I love you. To my children Amari, Malia, and CJ; everything I have worked hard for was in preparation for your path and destiny to greatness. I hope this inspires you to shoot for the moon; and if you miss, you will be among the stars. I love you. To my mom, thank you for instilling a sense of pride and self-worth in completing tasks. It is from your example that I have been motivated to accomplish this task. I thank you for your selfless love and support on this journey. I love you. To my extended family, Monica, Meika, and others, I would not have had the time to complete this task if it were not for your support. I love all of you!

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support in this process. I would like to thank all the cheerleaders that I have had the privilege to coach as they have been the inspiration for my study. I love and thank you all.

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Abstract

Impact of Cheerleading on Postsecondary Career and College Readiness in a Rural Community. Baldwin, Rikki, 2018: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, Extracurricular/Cheerleading/ Soft Skills/College and Career Readiness

High schools were being held accountable for not properly preparing students for college or the workforce. Preparation for high school students is not limited to their academic experiences but rather soft skills gained through involvement with extracurricular activities. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of cheerleading on the qualities needed for college and career preparation. This study analyzed the responses of former cheerleaders from a rural high school in North Carolina. This qualitative study utilized a descriptive survey that included O'Neil, Lee, Wang, Mulkey's (1999) Teamwork Questionnaire followed by two focus groups. Overall, the researcher concluded through the data analysis that cheerleading had an impact on career and college readiness after high school. The researcher identified leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork soft skills as themes cheerleaders felt they obtained through their participation in cheerleading. The researcher found that survey findings from this research supported previous literature that soft skills enhanced through participation in cheerleading are applicable for postsecondary experiences such as college and the workplace.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Students are more likely than ever before to attend college immediately after high school (Snyder & Schafer, 1996) and to receive bachelors or advanced college degrees (Rasinski, Ingels, Rock, Pollack, & Wu, 1993). Even with these improvements, research has revealed high school students have difficulty making school-to-work transitions (Klerman & Karoly, 1995; Veum & Weiss, 1993), and this is partially related to a lack of direction and focus (Haggstrom, Blaschke, & Shavelson, 1991). High school educators are faulted for graduating students who are not well-rounded nor ready for the next level, which is usually college or the workforce (Wilkinson, 2007).

Transition can be seen as the movement from the known to the unknown, and that can be from secondary to postsecondary school. “It is a passage between the old and the new, before the full adoption of new norms and patterns of behavior and after the onset of separation from the old ones” (Tinto, 1993, p. 8). The new norms or patterns in American high schools do not focus solely on traditional academic studies but establish new norms and patterns of behavior by gaining opportunities to get involved in numerous extracurricular activities, including sports (McDonald & Farrell, 2012).

According to the National Federation of State High Schools Associations (NFHS), interscholastic sports and performing arts activities promote citizenship and leadership in over 11 million students who participate. The NFHS estimated that 55.5% of all high school students play at least one sport at some point during ninth through 12th grade. They argued these types of activity instill “a sense of pride in school and community, teach lifelong lessons and skills of teamwork and self-discipline and facilitate the physical and emotional development of today’s youth” (National Federation

of State High School Associations, 2017, p. 1). Activities for older teens may need to be more “instrumental,” focusing on specific skills, providing information, guiding decision-making, and generally supporting the transition to adulthood (Watson, 2013).

Researchers such as Tinto (1987) and Astin (1993, 1977) acknowledged that cocurricular activities provide opportunities that enhance and support the undergraduate experience.

They did not, however, explore whether students use the skills learned in these experiences when they are performing similar functions in the classroom setting (Reed, 2001).

Problem Statement

College readiness is defined as the academic preparation students need to succeed without remediation for college-level courses (Conley, 2007). A high school diploma does not necessarily signify college and career readiness. Too few students graduate academically prepared for postsecondary success, as demonstrated by performance on college readiness assessments and/or completion of a rigorous core high school curriculum. Worse, indicators of student access to and performance in high school courses that would better prepare them for college and career are often not tracked by states (North Carolina State Report, 2017).

Remediation by Institution Type and Subject Area

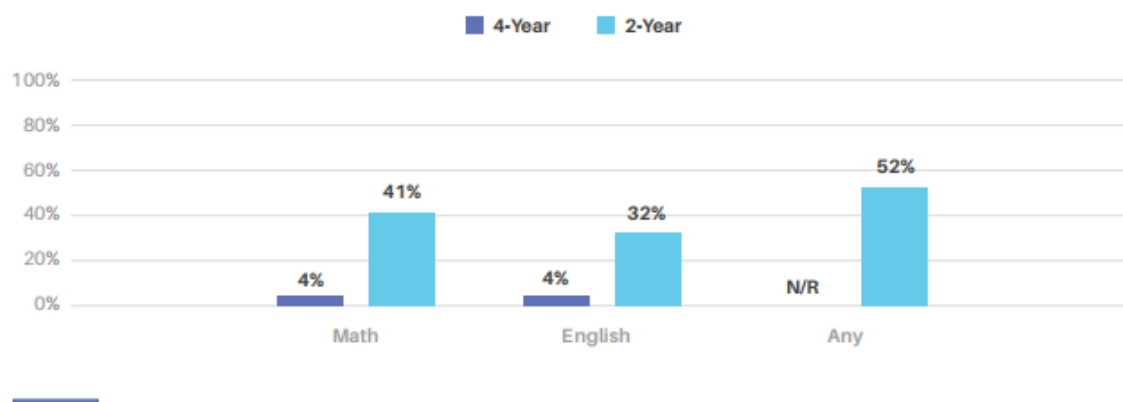


Figure 1. Remediation by Institution Type and Subject Area.

According to Figure 1, North Carolina reports the percentage of the state's class of 2012 high school graduates enrolled as first-time students at the state's 2- and 4-year institutions who enroll in any remedial courses. The state does not report data on math and English remediation needs. Four percent of students in 4-year universities take a remedial math, and 4% take a remedial English. The category "any" includes other remedial subjects outside of math and English. The percentages are much higher for students who attend 2-year institutions (North Carolina State Report, 2017).

High school graduates may be completing the educational requirements to receive a high school diploma; however, they do not meet the entrance standards necessary to place out of remedial courses at the postsecondary level (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). According to Tinto (1987), student successful academic and social integration into college life is an important factor in student retention. Too few students who start college ultimately earn a degree. Figure 2 reports the percentage of the state's high school graduates who enroll in a postsecondary institution and complete at least 1 year of

postsecondary education in a designated amount of time or return to postsecondary education for a consecutive year (North Carolina State Report, 2017).

High School Graduates, Class of 2012

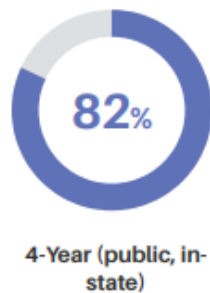


Figure 2. Percentage of North Carolina's High School Graduates Who Enroll in a Postsecondary Institution.

North Carolina reports the percentage of high school graduates enrolling as first-time freshmen at a University of North Carolina institution and returning for a second year of postsecondary studies. This excludes any students enrolled in the state's 2-year public institutions of higher education, private, and out-of-state institutions (North Carolina State Report, 2017).

Statistics indicate many students are not preparing adequately for postsecondary education. The United States Department of Education has discovered that only half of all students who enter high school ever enlist in a postsecondary establishment, and seven of 10 secondary school graduates have not finished coursework necessary for college (as cited in American College Testing [ACT], 2006; Wilkinson, 2007). According to Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools (Achieve, Inc. & National Governors Association [NGA], 2005), citizens pay an estimated \$1-2 billion each year to provide remedial education to students at state-funded universities and community colleges. It

also reported that deficits in basic skills cost businesses, colleges, and underprepared students as much as \$16 billion annually in remedial costs and lost productivity (Williamson, 2010). Roueche and Roueche (1999) reported that approximately 50% of all first-time community college students do not have college level academic skills which creates educational difficulties when transitioning from high school to college, because they lack sufficient academic preparation and social skills needed to successfully integrate into a postsecondary program of study (Walker, 2011). There were significant gaps in equity and opportunity when these statistics were separated out by factors such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Minorities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds had a much lower rate of matriculation. These data suggested that not only are high school students inadequately prepared for postsecondary success but also that a gap existed between the quality and level of preparation for students based on ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Fitterer, Chapman, & Young, 2016). These statistics indicate a lack of student preparation for the changing society of the 21st century and reinforce concerns about high school academic preparation and its effect on college success (Wilkinson, 2007).

The federal government has pressured states and schools to implement college readiness policies (even in the lower grades) in an effort to ensure that all students have the academic preparation needed to succeed in college. This intensified call for college readiness began in 1983, when the National Commission on Excellence in Education presented President Reagan with the report, *A Nation at Risk* (Leibbrandt, 2016). Federal policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB; enacted in 2002) and subsequent waivers from NCLB and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; signed into law in 2015)

continue to push for academic college readiness standards for all students beginning as early as the primary grades (Leibbrandt, 2016). If these targets are not met, schools might face reduced funding or even closure (Swail & Williams, 2005).

In 2009, President Obama implemented Race to the Top, a competitive grant program geared toward supporting states that had adopted practices that were pushing the thinking on education on career and college ready standards (ACT, 2010). In 2012, President Obama also reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the new goal of creating alignment between academic assessments and college and career readiness standards (ACT, 2010). While all of the other federal reforms sought to raise standards, none of them required the states to connect K-12 standards to the standards of postsecondary institutions. According to President Obama, the development of college and career readiness standards was important, because “four of every ten new college students, including half of those at two-year institutions, take remedial courses, and many employers comment on the inadequate preparation of high school graduates” (Career and College Readiness, 2017, p. 1). Lack of preparation has led to a federal push for creating high school graduates who have all of the necessary skills to compete in college and the workforce.

Faced with such sanctions, schools have an even harder time preparing students for all aspects of academic preparation (Leibbrandt, 2016). Colleges require that students have mastered particular subjects in high school to meet admissions requirements (at selective 4-year colleges and universities) and to meet course prerequisites to enroll in college-level coursework (at community colleges). At the point that students do not meet the academic requirements for college admission, they could be denied admission to

college or required to spend time and money completing remedial coursework before enrolling in courses that count towards a degree. Furthermore, high achieving students who are on track to graduate high school and planning to enroll in college, without clear signals from their high school as to whether they are also on track to apply to and succeed in college, could suddenly find themselves without college acceptances or in remedial courses (Leibbrandt, 2016).

Academic preparation cannot only be measured by high school GPAs and college entrance exams; but rather, academic preparation should also include aspects of cognitive strategies (problem-solving, research, interpretation, communication, and precision and accuracy) and academic behaviors (time management, self-direction, and study skills; Conley, 2007). Even if students meet particular GPA and college entrance exam cut scores, without these cognitive strategies and academic behaviors, students will likely be ill prepared for college (Conley, 2007).

Students must also be prepared for the workforce because of increasing competition and more complex market skills and education requirements. According to Kirst and Venezia (2004), “Approximately 70% of students enter postsecondary education after high school and the other 30% need high-level skills and knowledge to succeed in the labor market and to be able to participate fully in our society” (p. 3). Setting high standards for students is what secondary schools will have to do to face the challenge of preparing students to be successful at the postsecondary level (Walker, 2011). Public high schools have become the main focus of blame and discourse concerning workforce preparation, since they are the main provider for the workforce (Strange, 2002). The school-to-work movement is rooted in the debates over the purpose

of public schooling when the United States entered the industrial era during the late 19th and early 20th century (Kantor & Tyack, 1982). Traditionalists believed the public educational system was not properly preparing youth to meet the needs of an industrial economy and sought to design an educational system that reflected the corporate work environment. The traditionalists believed that vocational education would cure social ills such as poverty, unemployment, and national declines that were plaguing the country (Tyack, 1974). According to most scholars, the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report was responsible for reigniting the debate on the purpose of schooling and preparing students for the workforce. The report found that schools were threatening the nation's economic well-being because they were producing mediocre students (Strange, 2002).

In addition, the military has expressed the same sentiments by stating that nearly one fourth of the students who try to join the U.S. Army fail its entrance exam, which contributes to the grim picture of an education system that produces graduates who cannot answer basic math, science, and reading questions (Press, 2010).

Percentage Ineligible

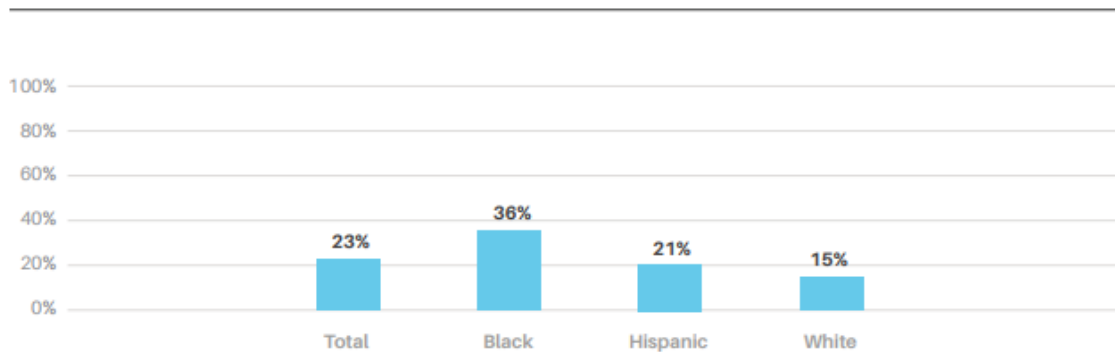


Figure 3. Percent Ineligible for U.S. Army by Race.

The enlistment examination for the U.S. Armed Forces reveals the percentage of

students who seek to enter the military but are not eligible to enter or are not prepared for higher level education, training, and advancement opportunities offered by the U.S. Armed Forces (North Carolina State Report, 2017).

The military exam results are also worrisome because the test is given to a limited pool of people, and Pentagon data show that 75% of those aged 17 to 24 do not even qualify to take the test because they are physically unfit, have a criminal record, or did not graduate high school. The study examined the scores of nearly 350,000 high school graduates, ages 17 to 20, who took the ASVAB exam between 2004 and 2009; approximately half of the applicants went on to join the Army. Recruits must score at least a 31 of 99 on the first stage of the 3-hour test to get into the Army. The Marines, Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard recruits need higher scores. The study shows wide disparities in scores among White and minority students, similar to racial gaps on other standardized tests. Nearly 40% of Black students and 30% of Hispanics do not pass, compared with 16% of Whites. The average score for Blacks is 38, and for Hispanics it is 44, compared to Whites' average score of 55 (Press, 2010).

By 2020, 65% of all jobs and 92% of traditional STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) jobs will require postsecondary education and training. College and career ready graduates should be able to enter and succeed in entry-level postsecondary courses without the need for remediation and specifically should have the skills and dispositions necessary to be successful in charting their postsecondary path (Career and College Readiness, 2017). Currently, North Carolina's job market shows that STEM jobs are more likely than non-STEM jobs to require a bachelor's degree or more. Jobs in the STEM field are increasingly important to every state's economy (North

Carolina State Report, 2017).

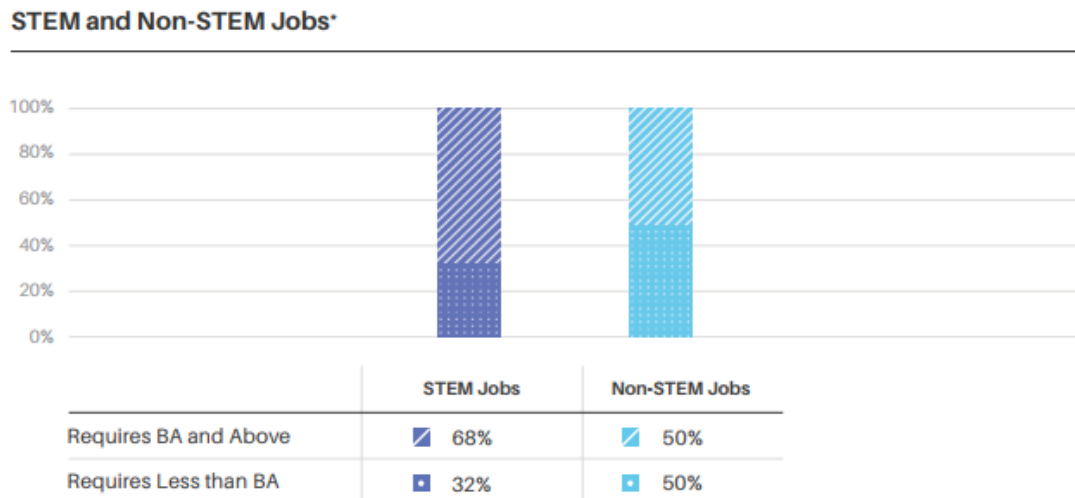


Figure 4. North Carolina's Stem and Non-Stem Jobs by Degree.

The STEM job market continues to grow, with a rigorous K-12 education that has strong academic foundations and experiences that position postsecondary students with successful transitions to the additional education and training needed for their selected career path (North Carolina State Report, 2017).

The difficult transition into the workforce, including the military, and preparation for STEM jobs has caused educational, political, and business leaders to readdress the purpose of schooling, but more importantly, to take a closer look at the connection between school and work. Research conducted in this area found there were few connections with the workforce being made to help students make the transition into the workforce. The research has also shown that a majority of high schools have a curriculum that is fragmented and does little to engage, motivate, or challenge students. It is disconnected from the world of work and provides students with very little meaningful interaction with adults (Olson, 1997). The School-To-Work Opportunities

Act called for high schools to integrate workforce preparation skills into the academic curriculum. Workforce preparation skills will help students find school more relevant to their lives so they will be prepared to take their place in the information/global economy (Strange, 2002). Basic education in a traditionalist curriculum places emphasis on educating students in the core subject areas rather than athletic activities or learning that occurs outside of the classroom. Experiences for students in American high schools include not only academic studies but also opportunities to get involved in numerous extracurricular activities (McDonald & Farrell, 2012). The problem is high school educators are faulted for not preparing well-rounded students to transition to adulthood (Wilkinson, 2007).

Purpose Statement

To address the issue of high school seniors not being academically ready for college, the State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC) in conjunction with the State Board of Education (SBOE) were required to develop a program that introduces college developmental math, reading, and English curriculum in the high school senior year. High school seniors who are not career and college ready by the end of their junior year have opportunities for college remediation prior to high school graduation through cooperation with community college partners (Career and College Ready Graduate Alignment Partnership, 2017).

Some leaders argue that college ready and career ready do not mean the same thing. Although some use it interchangeably, others have more distinct definitions. The Achieve Center noticed a difference between the two but found enough overlap of skills to not warrant a purposeful separation; however, the Association for Career and

Technical Education contended that “college ready” is too often only associated with academic skills which is just one component of “career readiness.” Regardless of the different views, the framework has been used to identify college and career ready individuals. The components of college and career readiness are academic and content knowledge, cognitive and higher order thinking strategies, social and emotional intelligences, college and career preparedness, and employability and life skills (Phang, 2014).

Although a strong background in traditional *hard* skills like writing, mathematics, and science will always have its place in academic and career worlds, an increasing number of employers desire prospective employees with *soft* skills. Soft skills include leadership, confidence, communication, discipline, independence, and commitment (Benefits of Extra-Curricular Activities for High School Students, 2017). Developing soft skills will help prepare students for college and entering the workforce. Soft skills are important because they include the ability to adapt to different circumstances that will be used in multiple disciplines and careers. According to Holmes (2014), the top five skills students will need are collaboration, communication and interpersonal skills, problem-solving, time management, and leadership.

In addition to these skills, there has been an increase in project-based work, and the pace of technological change call into question how we best prepare students for college and career readiness and lifelong learning. The growing inequities lead us to reframe the preparation of young people for a new economy that promotes equity and deeper learning outcomes. Project-based learning (PBL) is one way we can support deeper learning outcomes. Envision Education has tried to implement a variety of

strategies to enhance college and career readiness preparation such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication. Through PBL in its classrooms, Envision Education has research to show that PBL works. With a diverse population of students, primarily from low-income communities, they are achieving amazing results: 100% of 2016 graduates are going to either 2-year or 4-year colleges, with almost 80% accepted to 4-year institutions. Most importantly, Envision Schools track graduates and state that 85% of those who enroll in college reenroll in their second year. This means that the Envision persistence rate, which is the single best indicator of students successfully graduating from college, beats the national average by 25% (Lathram, Lenz, & Tom, 2016).

Military schools are trying to address the issue of gaining quality graduates with success rates of sending approximately 98% of their graduates to college and university, with only a very small percentage enlisting directly after high school. They offer high standard academics, advanced placement and honors courses, foreign languages, leadership education training courses, and arts programs that make their students prime candidates for the top higher education institutions around the world. The school environment is designed to give young adults the opportunity to develop leadership skills and character that help students succeed in the highly competitive college admission environment (Military Schools are about College Preparation, not Enlistment, 2017).

For those not fortunate enough to attend military schools, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) are put into place in public high schools to help prepare students for their future. Citizenship, leadership, character, and community service are the core tenets of high school JROTC programs. In a JROTC class, life skills are

emphasized and students can build soft skills such as leadership, self-confidence, and discipline – qualities that are necessary to thrive in any career and can prepare students for post-high school success (Pannoni, 2014).

Although this research has shown success in project-based learning and military recruitment, another way for students to develop skills for college and the workforce include seeking leadership opportunities in high school. This could mean, among other things, acting as captain of an athletic team, becoming involved in student government, or leading an extracurricular group (Holmes, 2014). Supporters of public education believe in order for high schools to have an influence on students' scholarly development and identity, students need a balanced program that provides physical activity and academic, social, and emotional support within a tailored curriculum and cohesively constructed learning environment. Experiences for students in American high schools include not only academic studies but also opportunities to get involved in numerous extracurricular activities (McDonald & Farrell, 2012).

Cadwallader, Garza, and Wagner (2003) defined extracurricular activities as the activities in which the students participate after the regular school day has ended. These activities may include high school athletics, school clubs, marching band, chorus, orchestra, and student leadership organizations. There is a difference between extracurricular activities and cocurricular activities. Cocurricular activities are those that occur during the normal class time (Frame, 2007). Most students who participate in high school band, chorus, and orchestra spend countless hours outside of the normal class day participating; those activities are therefore classified as extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities are those supervised by a teacher or coach and are engaged in

voluntarily by students as opposed to being mandated by school, district, or state regulations (Powelson, 2015). Participation in extracurricular activities, including sports, has shown increased commitment to school and school values, which leads indirectly to increased academic success (Holloway, 1999/2000). Although continued research shows students are not prepared for college or the workforce, extracurricular activities have given students the edge in obtaining the skills to prepare for the future outside of high school (The Extracurricular Edge: What your students should know about out-of-school activities, 2017).

Students who participate in a wide range of activities are often referred to as well-rounded students due to the skills learned through these activities (Fullarton, 2002). Well-rounded students' physical, social, and emotional development can be enhanced by participation in extracurricular activities (KSHSAA, 2013). Well-rounded students acquire personal traits such as strong character, honesty, and moral responsibility; tend to have good manners; are driven by a sense of purpose; and are dedicated to hard work (Bugwadia, 2013). Students learn respect, teamwork, loyalty, compassion, tolerance, courtesy, fairness, integrity, humility, courage, responsibility, honesty, ethics, poise, and pride through their extracurricular involvement (Kanaby, 1996). The most strongly emphasized extracurricular activity is sports such as football, baseball, volleyball, basketball, track, swimming, soccer, and cheerleading (Powelson, 2015). The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of cheerleading on the qualities needed for college and career preparation (Bangser, 2008).

Research Question

How does the experience of cheerleading contribute to college and career

readiness? This is a qualitative study which utilized a descriptive survey followed by a focus group. The participants took a survey first; and after the survey, they were invited to participate in a focus group with open-ended questions.

Significance of the Study

Studies have shown that students who participate in extracurricular activities not only surpass their peers academically but also better learn the life skills necessary for success after high school (Whitney, 2017). The significance of the study related to the effectiveness of cheerleading for high school students, especially in high poverty rural communities where the program may be one of the few resources for youth, especially girls (Hanson, 1993). It explored ways in which a sense of belonging is developed through cheerleading and how adults and youth work together to develop cultural and spatial practices that contribute to sense of belonging and preparation for the future after high school. This study did not evaluate the effectiveness of cheerleading programs; rather, it described and interpreted the practices of a particular program and the impact of involvement on its participants.

Setting of the Study

This study was addressed through surveys and interviews of graduated high school cheerleaders from a rural community in North Carolina. The county has a total population of 27,638 with five municipalities, and children less than 18 years of age make up 25.5% of the total population. Rural, heavily forested, and very hilly, the county has been designated as a “low wealth” county by the state. The high school from which the cheerleaders graduated has a total of 536 students of which 57% of students are Caucasian, 27% are African-American, 9% are Hispanic or Latino, 5% are Asian, and 2%

are two races. Many students come from homes where the annual income is at the poverty level or below. Student gender distribution at the high school is equitable; with 51% of the student body comprised of males, and 49% are females. Due to the low wealth, 50.5% of students receive free lunch; in order for students to qualify for free lunch, the child's family income must be under \$15,171 in 2015 (below 130% of the poverty line). Seven point two percent of students receive reduced lunch; in order for students to qualify for reduce lunch, their annual family income must be under \$21,590 in 2015 (185% of the poverty line).

Limitations and Delimitations

The population of this study was limited to one county in North Carolina. The focus of this study included only one of the two high schools within the school district. As such, the findings will not necessarily transfer to other high schools due to the vast makeup of school demographics. The study did not focus on all previous high school cheerleaders, rather on those who have graduated in the past 9 years. Participation was also a limitation due to the ability to find and contact former cheerleaders.

Definition of Key Terms

Prior to the conclusion of this study, the researcher identified key terms crucial for the understanding of the reader. These terms are identified and defined below.

College readiness. Defined as the academic preparation students need to succeed without remediation for college level courses (Conley, 2007).

Career ready. Defined as the career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental coursework (Conley, 2012).

STEM. An educational program developed to prepare primary and secondary

students for college and graduate study in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM; Career and College Readiness, 2017).

Hard skills. Specific, teachable abilities that can be defined and measured, like writing, mathematics, and science (Benefits of Extra-Curricular Activities for High School Students, 2017).

Soft skills. More personality-oriented interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, flexibility, patience, persuasion, and time management. It also includes qualities such as leadership, confidence, communication, discipline, independence, and commitment (Benefits of Extra-Curricular Activities for High School Students, 2017; Holmes, 2014).

Extracurricular activities. Activities in high school that occur outside the normal class day and are supervised by a teacher or coach and engaged in voluntarily by students as opposed to being mandated by school, district, or state regulations (Powelson, 2015).

Cocurricular activities. Those that occur during the normal class time (Frame, 2007).

Chapter Summary

This study sought to address if there are other factors besides academics to determine if high school students are prepared for college or the workforce. Involvement in extracurricular activities leads to high school students being prepared for their future. The goal of the study was to enable school personnel to not only understand the sociocultural influences of cheerleading but to identify other factors that prepare students for college and careers (Bangser, 2008).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The importance of all students being college and career ready is one of the most discussed issues in policy circles and secondary schools (Tribble, 2009). The debate has turned into how U.S. secondary and postsecondary schools are organized and educate students. Throughout most of the 20th century, college readiness and career readiness was called job training and took the form of vocational education (Conley & McGaughy, 2012). Figure 5 shows that the pathway for student employment was separated between vocational and college-bound students in high schools during the 20th century (Tyack, 1974).

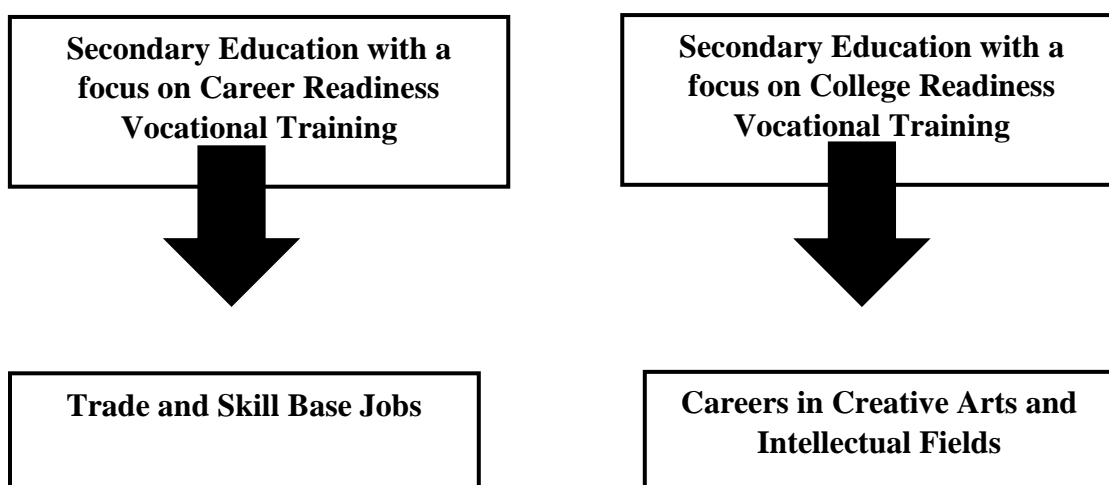


Figure 5. Pathways for Student Employment 1920-1970.

This model shows the separation of career and college preparation that was strongly rooted in high schools throughout the 20th century (Tyack, 1974).

Throughout the later 20th century and into the 21st century, the economy started changing, and new categories of occupations have emerged. The skills needed to be successful in this new economy were fundamentally different from those required by the

old economy (Carnevale, 1991). Of increasing importance were foundational academic knowledge and skills; communication capabilities; technology proficiency; problem-solving strategies; and flexibility, initiative, and adaptability. This dramatically shifting set of expectations signaled the absence of the distinction between college and vocation as the fundamental organizer for secondary education. During the 1990s, states adopted education standards that defined what students need to know and be able to do, but these standards were silent on what constituted college readiness and career readiness or the relationship between the two (Conley & McGaughy, 2012).

The first set of standards specific for college readiness was created in 2003, and over 400 faculty members from U.S. leading universities identified what entry-level courses students would need in order to succeed at their institutions (Conley & McGaughy, 2012). Following that, the American Diploma Project defined college and career readiness with input from postsecondary faculty, economists, and members of the business community. A few years later, ACT published an influential study that claimed that college and career readiness were the same. ACT researchers studied job requirements which they then cross-referenced against an ACT job skills assessment system (ACT, 2006). They then compared the findings with ACT's college readiness standards (ACT, 2011) and concluded that the readiness requirements for both college and career were substantively comparable. The findings were accepted in many colleges and by employers, as it was seen as a way to solve the problem of how to educate students because career and college readiness shared similar elements. The elements they share most consistently are the skills all students need to be ready for a variety of postsecondary learning environments. Figure 6 illustrates the new change in which

secondary students were taught skills for college and career training to be prepared for the workplace, career and technical education, and college and university.

Three Pathways for Secondary Education Students

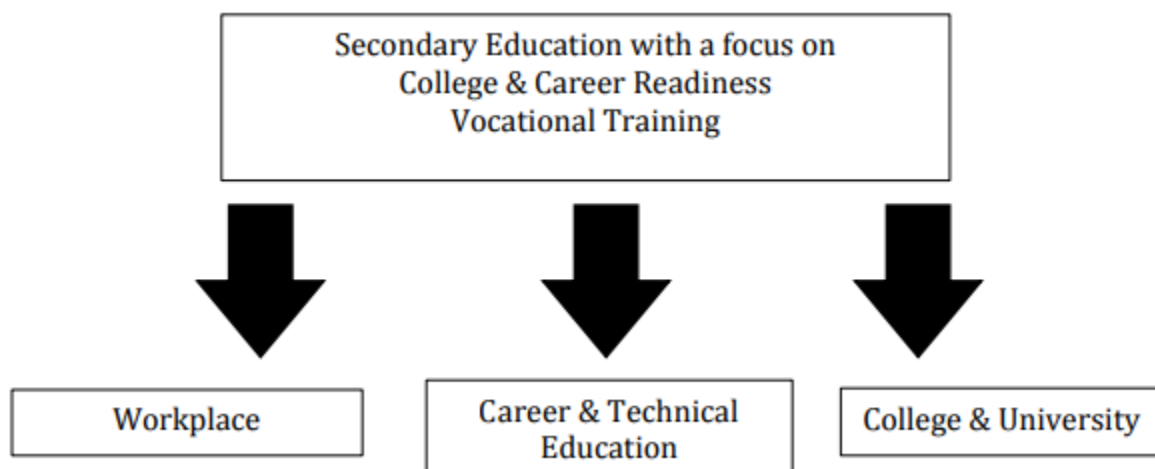


Figure 6. Pathway for Secondary Education Students through Career and College Readiness (Stewart, 2017).

Pucel (1998) stated that in the past, high schools have divided students into three basic program areas: a college preparatory program, a vocational program, and a general education program. The college prep track was intended to prepare students for higher education in college. The vocational track required fewer academic subjects but focused more on the concrete skills of specific occupations. The general education track prepared the students with no specific focus for life in general (Pucel, 1998). Regardless of the pathway for secondary education students, a variety of academic skills and technical knowledge are needed to be successful in the workplace/and or college (Robinson, 2012). These skills are not exactly the same, but they share similar skills all students need to be ready for a variety of postsecondary learning environments. These include study skills, time management skills, persistence, and ownership of learning (Conley & McGaughy,

2012). Nationally, high school reform is increasing with a focus on the role of career and technical education in preparing all students for success in both postsecondary education and the workforce (Stewart, 2017).

Employability Skills

Employability skills are technical and nontechnical competences that are fundamental requirements for employment in the current competitive job market (Williams, 2015). Employability skills are defined as “transferable core skill groups that represent essential functional and enabling knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by the 21st century workplace” (Overtoom, 2000, p. 2). Employability skills may be taught in schools or in the employment setting. Teaching employability skills increases student awareness of values, attitudes, and worker responsibility. Parents, supervisors, coaches, trainers, and teachers should be role models for in-school youth (Tribble, 2009). Ideally, classrooms should replicate the features of a workplace setting (Robinson, 2012); but if this cannot be done, class field trips to workplaces or speakers such as professionals in the business world can enhance student perceptions of what it takes to be employable (Tribble, 2009).

Heimler (2010) found that while graduates reported that work ethic and career advancement had a weak relationship, faculty and human resource managers agreed that work ethic is a preferred skill for job performance. Like Heimler, Harris and Rogers (2008) contended that work ethic, among other competencies, is a desired attribute that engineering technology students possess before pursuing postsecondary education. Heimler also posited that it was necessary for students to develop a proper work ethic from an early age, as this skill was difficult to modify in older years. Figure 7 shows an

array of skills that are deemed relevant for successful employment opportunities (Williams, 2015).

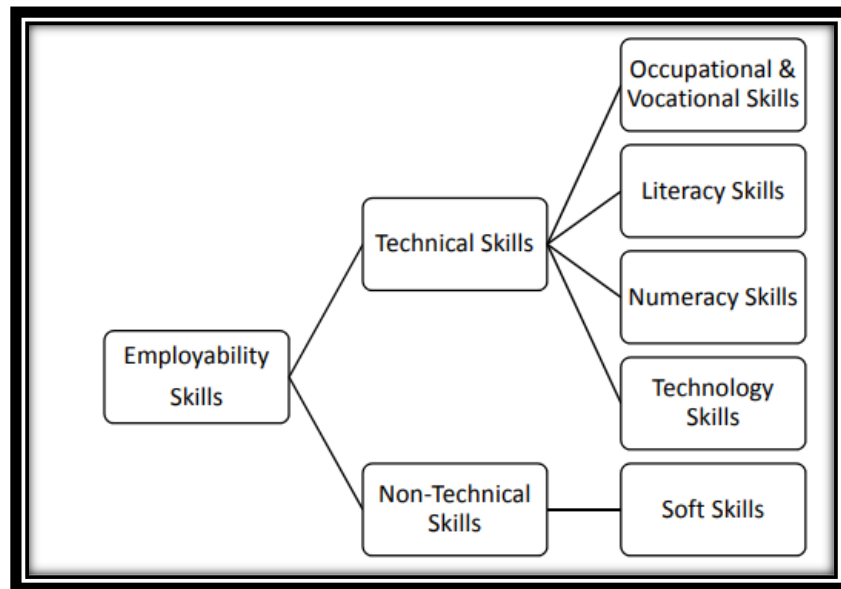


Figure 7. Relevant Employability Skills.

The figure above illustrates the categories of employability skills. Employability skills include technical and nontechnical skills. Nontechnical skills are also referred to as soft skills (Williams, 2015).

Employability skills encompass a wide array of skills that include technical and nontechnical competencies (Williams, 2015). Keller, Parker, and Chan (2011) defined technical skills as a classification of attributes and skills in which attributes speak to non-skill-related behaviors and attitudes, while skills refer to the ability to carry out a technical task. The technical skills are occupational or vocational, technology, literacy, and numeracy skills. Technical skills are known as occupationally specific skills that workers must possess in order to function in specific occupations that are needed (Guy, Sitlington, Larsen, Frank, 2008; Omar, Bakar, & Rashid, 2012). Basic literacy and

numeracy skills are defined as the ability to read, write, speak, listen, and perform basic mathematic procedures (SCANS, 1991). Hargis (2011) defined technical skills as hard skills or tasks directly needed to successfully complete a job. Williams's (2015) study categorized nontechnical skills as soft skills.

Work ethic is comprised of a combination of hard skills (the technical skills needed to obtain a job) and soft skills (the personality traits and career attributes needed to keep the job and develop a career over time; Stewart, 2017). To ensure students are successful in college and/or the workplace, they need to establish characteristics such as a good work ethic, dependability, and positive attitudes (Tribble, 2009). Good work attitudes, values, and habits are important to both workers and employers (Brauchle & Azam, 2004). The current research indicated that colleges were starting to realize that sending students into the working world without soft skills is a disservice (Cox, Cekic, & Adams, 2010). There is a disparity in the perceptions of students and employers regarding the type of skills relevant for employment; students assume that acquisition of vocational skills defines readiness for the workforce, while employers are seeking to recruit employees who have well-rounded and highly competent vocational and nontechnical skills. The inconsistency of perceptions lies with the value placed on the nontechnical/soft skills. Many graduates have been rejected for available jobs because of the unacceptable standards of their employability skills (Williams, 2015). To compete in the workplace of today, students must learn the high level technical skills or soft skills that are expected for positions in their field as well as the employability skills that will allow them to keep these positions or advance to better ones (Echternacht & Wen, 1997).

Overview of Soft Skills

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2016), soft skills refer to behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to work effectively in their environment to achieve their goals. These skills are broadly applicable and complement other skills such as technical, vocational, and academic skills and are important for workforce success and human capital development (Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, & Moore, 2015; Robles, 2012). Soft skills are not defined as skills in the traditional sense, rather they refer to character traits that enhance a person's interactions, job performance, and career prospects (Parsons, 2008). Robles (2012) noted the greatest feature of soft skills is that the application of these skills is not limited to one's profession. Soft skills are continually developed through practical application during one's approach toward everyday life and the workplace (Arkansas Department of Education, 2007; Magazine, 2003). Unlike hard skills, which are about a person's skill set and ability to perform a certain type of task or activity, soft skills are interpersonal and broadly applicable (Parsons, 2008).

Soft skills are not the core skills that qualify someone to do particular technical function but the additional skills that a person can add to those to be more successful in a particular job or career (Keller et al., 2011). One component of soft skills is people skills, which is also referred to in literature as interpersonal skills (Stewart, 2017). People skills are the attributes that characterize a person's relationships with others (Robles, 2012). Personal attributes might include one's personality, likeability, time management, prowess, and organizational skills (Parsons, 2008). The combination of interpersonal (people) skills and personal (career) attributes make up the operational definition of soft

skills (Robles, 2012). A growing evidence base shows that these skills rival academic or technical skills in their ability to predict employment and earnings, among other outcomes (Kautz, Heckman, Diris, ter Weel, Borghans, 2014).

More specifically, skills like written and oral communication are frequently described as soft skills in discussions about the competitive job market. According to Mason (2012), today's job applicant needs to have proficient soft skills in the written and oral communication area to secure job interviews through cover letter and resume writing. Beyond the applicant phase, any employee in today's global and technological society needs to have proficient soft skills in oral and public speaking, flexibility, adaptability, emotional intelligence, leadership, teamwork, and even self-actualization based on data obtained through surveys and interviews with current working engineers (Pace, 2011; Preston, 1998; Reindl, 2006; Watson, 2013). Watson's (2013) research categorized soft skills into three: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and leadership. Figure 8 represents all of the basic soft skills mentioned through Watson's research and unspecialized to any particular discipline.

Category	Skill	Definition
Interpersonal	Speaking	The ability to speak clearly and with ease in public and intimate settings.
	Listening	The ability to fully carryout the listening process (hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding) during conversations with others.
	Perceiving	The ability to accurately form perceptions (select, organize, and interpret and stimulus) and perception checking.
	Confrontation	The ability to approach a disagreement in a proper way, such as with a collaborative or compromising conflict-management technique.
	Persuasion	The ability to present both sides of an issue in an information way that sways people to take one side with one side of the issue over another.
	Negotiation	The ability to ability to understand the both sides of an issue and communicate calmly and clearly with those on the opposing side of the issue to compromise without damaging the relationship.
	Presentation	The ability to put on a public presentation that was clear, informative, and holds the attention of the audience.
	Interviewing	The ability to communicate clearly and well during a job interview.
	Networking	The ability to utilize contacts and acquaintances in a professional setting.
Intrapersonal	Self-Awareness	Being fully aware of one's own triggers, i.e. What makes one angry, sad, frustrated, motivated, etc.
	Self-Control	The ability to control emotions.
	Self-Confidence	Believing in one's self and the abilities and communicating that belief to others.
	Resilience	The ability to move on from and learn from mistakes.
	Patience	The ability to take one's time and work steadily rather than rushing and compromising quality.
	Persistence and Perseverance	The ability to keep trying regardless of difficult obstacles that may stand in one's way.
	Political Skills	The ability to manipulate office politics in their favor.
Leadership	Self-Promotion	The ability to highlight one's positive attributes without appearing boastful.
	Hold Attention	The ability to command, and keep, the attention of others.
	Conduct Meetings	The ability to conduct a successful meeting with others.
	Deal with a variety of personality types	The ability to work with a variety of different personality types, including difficult ones.
	Adaptability/Flexibility	The ability to think on one's feet and change plans as necessary.
	Mentoring/Coaching	The ability to inspire and motivate others.

Note. (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Balaji & Somashekar, 2009; Heckman, 2012; Lear, 2011; Hsin & Xie, 2012; Watson, 2013).

Figure 8. Characteristics of Essential Soft Skills.

Academic testing has traditionally been based on the cognitive ability of students. Kyllonin (2013) stated in his article that the 21st century is the era in which society recognizes the importance of soft skills and the role education plays in developing those soft skills. “Non-cognitive factors include soft skills such as motivation, work ethic, teamwork, organization, cultural awareness, and effective communication), determine success in school and in the workplace” (Kyllonin, 2013, p. 22). “It is often said that hard skills will enable individuals to obtain an interview, but soft skills enable individuals to secure a job” (Attakorn, Tayut, Pisitthawat, & Kanokorn, 2014, p. 1010).

Soft skills are not inherited. It may appear that individuals are born with soft skills; however, an individual’s socioeconomic (home and educational) backgrounds aids in hindering or fostering the development and practice of soft skills. Some individuals have limited exposure to soft skills, and are therefore unaware of the relevance of soft skills. Soft skills are learned or developed through adequate exposure and consistent reinforcement of the importance of these skills in everyday life situations through personal and professional settings. (Williams, 2015, p. 205)

Soft skills are becoming more of a public goal for creating a strong workforce (Brungardt, 2009). Dr. Anthony Carnevale, former chief economist of the American Society for Training and Development, discussed the dangers to U.S. society if workforce development issues were not addressed in a more intentional way (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990). Carnevale et al. (1990) thought that soft skills of teamwork, critical thinking, and communication would take on new importance regardless of the job context. Recent studies indicate that employers consistently rate skills such as leadership,

teamwork, and communication as deficient (Brungardt, 2009).

Leadership Soft Skills

“Leadership is empowering a group of people to successfully achieve a common goal. In order to do that, you’ve got to tap their full potential” (McFarland, Senn, & Childress, 1993, p. 285). According to Brungardt (2009), leadership involves a relational process that requires working with others to accomplish a goal or to promote positive change. Rost and Barker (2000) defined leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p. 102). Kouzes and Posner (1987) defined leadership as the “act of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (p. 30). In all definitions, leadership is action that involves leaders cooperating with others to achieve common goals (Reed, 2001). Questions arise such as, “What skills need to be enhanced to function at ‘full potential’”; “What are the individual skills necessary to function at a high level in a team environment”; and “Where can college students gain knowledge and experience in these needed skills” (Brungardt, 2009)? Education for leadership concentrates on the soft skills that factor in human interaction required to achieve positive outcomes from the leadership process (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Reed, 2001).

Theories on Leadership

Many authors on leadership identify specific skills that are useful or necessary for leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2017) identified five fundamental practices for leadership shown in Figure 9 (pp. 8-9).



Figure 9. Kouzes and Posner’s Five Fundamental Practices for Leadership.

These practices are most identified by leaders because they show leadership. Although many types of people with different personalities develop different leadership styles, Kouzes and Posner (2017) suggested that these five elements can help anyone become an effective leader and help guide them through the leadership process.

The first practice for theory is modeling the way. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017), one must model the behavior one expects others to follow to be an effective leader. In order to do this, leaders must clarify values and set the example. Leaders “set the example by behaving in ways that are consistent with shared values” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 241). Becoming an exemplary leader requires one to fully comprehend the deeply held values—the beliefs, standards, ethics, and ideals. One has to freely and honestly choose those principles one will use to guide one’s decisions and actions. One has to express one’s authentic self, genuinely communicating one’s beliefs in ways that uniquely represent oneself (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 48).

When leaders do not understand their own personal leadership philosophy, their

communication and actions can be confusing. Furthermore, if their leadership philosophy is not clear, that person's team will not know what values and beliefs should guide their actions when encountering daily challenges. This confusion will lead to low levels of team commitment, as people aren't able to either identify with or support the leader's values. (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 49)

A value is an enduring belief, which scholars routinely divide into two categories: means and ends. Kouzes and Posner's (2017) context on leadership refers to here-and-now beliefs about how one should accomplish things. Clarifying one's values, finding their voice, and affirming shared values lead to commitment. Commitment is strongest when based on alignment with personal values. People who are clearest about their personal values are better prepared to make choices based on principle (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Modeling the way begins with not just the clarification of values but affirming those values that everyone will make a difference to uphold for positive work attitude and performance (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Kouzes and Posner's (2017) second fundamental practice for leadership is inspiring a shared vision. This can be accomplished by envisioning the future by imagining exciting possibilities as well as enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations. In order to be a leader, one has to be able to imagine a positive future and envision greater opportunities to come. They develop an ideal and unique image of the future for the common good. A leader brainstorms the potential direction a group can pursue. This follows the African proverb, "For tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today" (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 97). A vision does not just belong to the leader, rather it should be a shared vision with the people who are

impacted. Shared visions attract more people, sustain higher levels of motivation, and withstand more challenges. Leaders make a commitment to envision the future by mastering the two essentials of imagining the possibilities and finding a common purpose (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Kouzes and Posner (2017) asserted that leader practices must reflect mutuality, and this concept continually aligns with Brungardt's (2009) and Rost and Barker's (2000) concept of leadership (Reed, 2001).

The third practice for leadership is challenging the process. Leaders challenge the process by searching for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve. They also seize the opportunity by experimenting and taking risks by consistently generating small wins and learning from experience (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Leaders also take risks, experiment, make mistakes, and learn from those mistakes (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). When one searches for new opportunities, it means one is admitting that change is needed. Change is good; and without taking risks, change never occurs (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). By challenging the process, leaders take the risks necessary to change the status quo but also accept the "inevitable disappointments of mistakes and failures as learning opportunities" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 318). Purpose is a tremendously powerful source of motivation, and people cannot persevere for very long without it (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Exemplary leaders challenge for meaning's sake and with a drive to take actions for the better. Leaders challenge, usually with great passion, because they want people to live better lives; but to be fully engaged in the challenge, people need to know why. Meaningfulness thrives when people understand the purpose of their organization and the work they do (Sinek, 2009).

The fourth practice for leadership is enabling others to act. Enabling others to act fosters collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. It also strengthens others by increasing self-determination and developing competence (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 194). This is accomplished by the leader seeking individuals and creating roles for them to grow personally and benefit for the group. In this practice, the leader must commit to building collaborative teams and building support for those teams (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 318). A group must work cohesively towards a common goal in order to establish effective communication and collaboration. “Collaboration is a critical competency for achieving and sustaining high performance. As organizations become increasingly diverse and globally dispersed, collaborative skills are essential to navigating the conflicting interests and natural tensions that arise” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 197).

When leaders create a climate of trust, you create an environment that allows people to contribute freely and to innovate (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The concern one shows for others is one of the clearest and most unambiguous signals of your trustworthiness. When others know the leader put their interests ahead of his/her own, they will not hesitate to trust the leader (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, & Hackman, 2010). Exemplary leaders know that empathy is critical and one needs to see the world through others’ eyes and make sure alternative viewpoints are considered (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Another aspect of inspiring others is to create an environment which strengthens and empowers others. Leaders understand that people who feel inspired to take action are capable of accomplishing amazing goals and will work without complaint. Leaders must plant this golden seed by empowering others and

telling them they believe in them. When individuals know someone believes in them, they become more willing to work toward achieving a goal (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

The last of the five practices for leadership is encouraging the heart. Kouzes and Posner (2017) suggested encouraging the heart by recognizing contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence and celebrating the values and victories by creating a spirit of community (p. 246). To recognize contributions, one needs to expect the best by believing in a person's ability to make extraordinary things happen (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 249). Exemplary leaders elicit high performance because they firmly believe in the abilities of their constituents to achieve even the most challenging goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 250). When a leader personalizes recognition and draws attention to the successes of an individual in the group, that individual will continue to work hard, and in turn, others will gain invaluable knowledge in this type of positive environment. When a leader creates a community where accomplishments are celebrated, people feel inspired to work hard. The heart is the biggest driving force in motivating a group (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), "the creative use of rewards is another defining characteristic of leaders" (p. 278). Leaders expect superior performance and commitment from followers and recognize superior performance in many ways. Leaders are not dependent on formal reward systems but use praise, special assignments, and personal notes to recognize accomplishment. By delegating tasks which are important and valued by the follower, the leader recognizes the abilities and values of the follower. Exemplary leaders elicit high performance because they firmly believe in the abilities of their constituents to achieve even the most challenging goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Reed's (2001) study showed that certain practices of the Kouzes and Posner model are stressed more than others. The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership skills students believe they learned in cocurricular activities, to determine how those skills are used in the classroom, and to discover whether those skills enhance the academic experience for students. The central practices of "Inspiring a Shared Vision," "Enabling Others to Act," and "Modeling the Way" were more frequently discussed than the practices of "Challenging the Process" or "Encouraging the Heart" (Reed, 2001). Reed's research suggested that leadership in the classroom was a major part of their academic experience. The connection between the out-of-class leader experience and the academic experience was strong. This supports the contention of Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996) that "out-of-class experiences appear to be far more influential in students' academic and intellectual development than many faculty members as well as academic and student affairs administrators think" (p. 157). "The leadership experiences these students had in their cocurricular lives directly influenced what they did to succeed in the academic world to the benefit of their own academic experience and that of their fellow students" (Reed, 2001, p. 135).

Student Leadership

There is a connection between successful student leadership and postacademic success (Reed, 2001). A number of studies on student involvement in leadership activities indicated that involvement plays a key role and has positive effects on student development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, Russo, & Kadel, 1994). Traditionally, activities-related and academic-related pursuits take place on school property. Pursuits that are organized have a structure and a leader. For

example, academic clubs tend to have a faculty sponsor and elected officers. Academic implies that the activity is centered on an academic subject area or areas. According to Hutchens's (2018) research, the secondary school context presents an opportunity in which leadership abilities are refined and sharpened and then transferred to higher education and, ultimately, the workforce.

Leadership education has grown drastically at the collegiate level because employers felt leadership programs would increase student proficiency in soft skills. Brungardt's (2009) study concluded that the bachelor's degree in Organizational Leadership does make limited significant changes in graduates' soft skill proficiency in the workplace, as compared with graduates who receive just the leadership certificate. These changes were measured according to the graduate's self-reported perceptions (Brungardt, 2009).

Studies indicate that the leadership roles of students positively influence and add to the overall and unique experiences students have during their college years and contribute to their lives after they have completed their higher education (May, 2009). Employers and graduate schools have relied heavily on colleges to provide opportunities for students to develop leadership and management skills prior to transitioning to the workplace or graduate study. The results of Reed's (2001) study demonstrate that student leaders learned the practices of inspiring, enabling, and modeling outside of the classroom and also reported these same practices more often in classroom practice.

Leadership development through student involvement has been a long-time goal of higher education and, as such, colleges and universities have oftentimes developed both formal and informal programs and activities that support leadership development

opportunities for students. Student involvement is defined by Astin (1985, 1993, 1999) as the level of engagement students devote to college experience within curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular related activities. The student involvement theory designed by Astin (1985, 1993, 1997) argued that student learning and development are affected by involvement in extracurricular and cocurricular activities (May, 2009).

The research on student leadership revealed that while there has not been systematic research on the effectiveness of leadership programs, there is strong evidence that leadership is evident on college campuses, affects a variety of developmental factors, and has not been directly connected to the classroom by research in any significant way (Reed, 2001). Student leadership development at colleges and universities has been a primary concern of student affair practitioners for many years (Horowitz, 1987). Leadership training programs, seminars, summer institutes, and even bachelor's degrees have been created as ways to enhance the leadership abilities of college students. All of this training and development is focused on improving the student's ability to lead in the cocurricular world and be prepared after college (Reed, 2001).

College student leadership is the connection between successful student leadership and postacademic success. Students are routinely encouraged to become active in student organizations, residence halls, community service, and organized athletics as a way to build leadership skills and enhance their marketability in a competitive world (Reed, 2001). Although these programs focus on developing leadership abilities within the curricular world of the student, having cocurricular opportunities helps in the overall achievement in college (Astin, 1997, 1985). The evidence of whether leadership is actually exhibited in the classroom is minimal (Reed,

2001). Research on the impact and outcomes of such participation and involvement in leadership programs and student governance has for the most part centered on managerial skill development, “such as leadership, decision making, planning, organizing, and teamwork” (Kuh & Lund, 1994, p. 8). Emotional intelligence skills are essential characteristics for effective leadership. These skills include intrapersonal, interpersonal, empathy, social skills, maturity, business acumen, and integrity (Love, 2014). The skills necessary for leaders to be successful in the workplace establish a “back to basics” mentality that focuses on interpersonal skills with an emphasis on effective communication (Pace, 2011).

Interpersonal Soft Skills

To gain a basic understanding of communication, a person would need to understand both intrapersonal and interpersonal communication skills. Intrapersonal skills include self-reasoning, self-awareness, self-control, self-confidence, resilience, patience, political skills, self-promotion, persistence, and perseverance (Watson, 2013). Intrapersonal skills focus on self-reflection, and this reflection helps sustain change. Self-awareness of a leader is positively associated with performance, and individuals holding leadership positions need to understand themselves more intimately to become better leaders (Johnson, 2016). Self-awareness is an important element to understanding the self. Self-awareness is vital to personal development as it allows individuals to choose how they respond to feelings and adjust their actions making them more aware. As individuals start to improve self-awareness, they gain new insights into weaknesses, strengths, desires, and personal and professional driving forces (Wales, 2003). The outcome of the self-reflection process is a full understanding of what motivates people,

and that understanding enhances interpersonal skills and relationships (Johnson, 2016). Intrapersonal skills are vital in understanding how these skills impact interpersonal skills (Watson, 2013).

Scholars and practitioners refer to interpersonal skills, people skills, soft skills, and relationship skills in very general terms. They equate leadership skills with interpersonal skills, and occasionally they refer interpersonal skills and communication skills interchangeably in their studies (Maellaro, 2008). Interpersonal communication skills include understanding the communication process, the listening process, perception formation, creativity, emotional intelligence, conflict management, and adaptability. Interpersonal job skills are skills used for working and interacting with others at work and include speaking, listening, perceiving, confrontation, persuasion, negotiation, presentation, interviewing, and networking (Watson, 2013). Interpersonal interactions can be viewed as a form of social exchange that is reciprocal in nature (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). Individual philosophies based on beliefs, attitudes, and value systems interact with unsatisfied needs (such as the need for love, recognition, esteem, and so forth) in any given situation to drive interpersonal behavior (Maellaro, 2008). Individuals engage in interpersonal interactions because they seek the achievement of a particular objective or the fulfillment of some personal need or needs; therefore, the behavior that individuals employ during interactions is purposeful rather than by chance or unintentional (Hargie & Dickson, 2004).

The Wheel of Positive Interaction (Figure 10) focuses some of the important emotional intelligence variables needed for academic and career success. The Wheel of Positive Interaction was created to illustrate Nelson and Low's (2003, 2011) intrapersonal

and interpersonal emotional intelligence skills. It shows some essential skills and characteristics of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence that reflect self-esteem and self-valued actions to produce positive interactions to facilitate healthy relationships (Nelson & Low, 2003, 2011).



Figure 10. The Wheel of Positive Interaction.

The circular shape represents the continual motion of engagement with self and others. The Wheel of Positive Interaction is a continual motion of engagement that Nelson and Low's (2003, 2011) Emotional Learning System offers a sequential process to creating a self-valued directional approach for life success (Love, 2014).

Interpersonal communication skills are critical for transmitting feelings, thoughts,

and information to others, and they are generally the basis for how individuals are initially perceived by others (Klein, 2009). Although interpersonal skills promote soft skills, soft skills are not synonymous with interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills pave the way for soft skills, especially communication. Soft skills are synonymous with communication skills as they are the cornerstone of soft skills and a subset of soft skills. People often emphasize that those who are good at communicating with others, both in written and unwritten forms, are experts in soft skills (Rao, 2012). The most influential interpersonal skill, as seen in Peterson's (1998) and Watson's (2013) studies, is communication.

Overview of Communication Skills

Peterson (1998) used many researchers to define communication. Kreitner (1995) and Robbins and Coulter (1996) provided the simplest definition of communication as "the transfer of information and understanding the meaning from one person to another" (Peterson, 1998, p. 44). Katherine Miller defined communication as "human behavior encompassing five critical features: communication involves two or more people; communication is a process; communication is transactional; communication is symbolic; and communication is intentional" (Peterson, 1998, p. 44). Communication is not only a social process but a learned skill that aids decision-making. Effective communication defines problems, generates and evaluates alternatives, implements decisions, and evaluates results. Communication is compounded, made more difficult, by the concept of perception. Perception is defined as "a set of processes by which an individual becomes aware of and interprets information about the environment" (Peterson, 1998, p. 45). Despite what is said or written, or how it is said or written, people interpret, selectively

screen, and translate the message as they hear, read, or see it. Watson's (2013) study has roots in the communication theories of rhetoric, emotional intelligence, and leadership.

The communication theory of rhetoric places importance on the communication-specific soft skills required to properly communicate. The theory suggests that to be successful, a person needs to possess communication-specific soft skills that are broken down into five categories. The five categories, which are known in communication theory as canons, are invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Invention refers to a person's ability to develop content in conversation, speak with substance, and use words powerfully. Arrangement refers to the ability to organize properly in oral and written communication. Style refers to the ability to adapt communication to properly fit a given situation and be able to adapt to different situations successfully. Memory refers to a person's ability to commit the information he or she needs to communicate to memory and not rely on computer programs or written communication to convey a message. Last, delivery refers to the actual ability of a person to deliver or communicate a message (D'Angelo, 1975; Maellaro, 2008; Rose, 1994).

The study of communication-specific soft skills can also be understood from the standpoint of emotional intelligence theory. Emotional intelligence theory suggests that success is based on the ability of a person to identify and understand both their own emotions and the emotions of others (Harms & Credé, 2010). Salovey and Mayer (1990) described the emotional intelligence theory as, "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action" (p. 189). Emotional intelligence has five specific areas: self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Love,

2014). Specifically, this theory places importance on a person's ability to be both self-aware and socially aware and then to regulate their behavior accordingly, both personally and socially. This ability is also suggested to be important in leadership theory, as good leaders need to be in control of their own emotions and aware of the emotions of others so they can communicate with them properly (Harms & Credé, 2010; Mayer, 2003).

Nelson and Lowe (2003, 2011) identified effective communication essential to developing meaningful relationships. According to their research, three key intelligence skills were used to identify interpersonal intelligence: "effective assertive communication, emotional self-control, and understanding and appreciating the differences in others" (Nelson & Low, 2003, 2011, p. 42).

Gardner's (1983) study revealed seven new intelligences that have been widely used in various studies to incorporate in the school curriculum (Love, 2014; Nelson & Low, 2003, 2011). Gardner's multiple intelligences included interpersonal intelligence as one of the seven categories. Interpersonal intelligence is having the capacity to understand others and exhibit social competencies to communicate effectively to establish power relationships. His explanation for intrapersonal intelligence is one's ability to create a genuine self-value reflection process to be most productive in various arenas (Gardner, 1983). Understanding emotions during a critical stressful situation is paramount in identifying the proper interpersonal communication skill to use to ensure a positive outcome both professionally and socially (Love, 2014).

Communication skills refer to the ability to actively listen and to communicate in verbal, oral, and nonverbal forms (Klein, 2009; Williams, 2015). Verbal communication refers to the use of words to send messages. Oral communication refers to the spoken

words or sounds. Nonverbal communication represents all forms of communication that do not include words. That is, communication via eye contact, facial expressions, nodding, and body positioning (Anderson & Bolt, 2013). Communication skills also include written or visual forms (Klein, 2009; Williams, 2015). Written communication involves either printed, handwritten, or electronic (soft copy) formats of letters, memoranda, text messages, and emails; while visual includes posters, pictures, diagrams, or symbols. These media are very important tools in communicating information within the workplace. As it relates to written communication, two of the most important tools used in job seeking endeavors are the application letter and résumé. The application letter and the résumé help the applicant communicate to the employer what he/she has to offer to the organization. The employer examines the application letter and résumé to determine whether the applicant has the requisite skills the employer needs (Williams, 2015).

Klein's (2009) research focused on five specific categories of interpersonal communication skills such as active listening, oral communication, written communication, assertive communication, and nonverbal communication. Anderson and Bolt (2013) noted that communication involves informal and formal channels. Informal channels include those outside of the structured lines of authority and occur among individuals at all levels. Informal communication also deals with gossip, which usually targets the personal lives of individuals by providing inappropriate or negative information about others with the intent to hurt others (Anderson & Bolt, 2013). Formal communication channels occur within the formal lines of authority. Formal communication includes horizontal and vertical channels. Horizontal channels include

communication across same or close levels of authority, and vertical channels focus on up or down (top-down or down-up) levels of authority as outlined on the organization chart (Anderson & Bolt, 2013).

Employers and Communication Skills

Communication skill is a necessary skill for effective performance in modern work environments. Williams (2015) believed that in a global competitive market with its technological advancements, management skills, and diverse cultures, employees must be fully equipped with excellent communication, problem-solving, and critical-thinking skills. Although the importance of communication skills is readily apparent in all work organizations, it has been argued that new hires and current employees are plagued by poorly developed communication skills (Cassady & Watson, 1994). The employers are expecting that new recruits possess soft skills prior to their employment (Williams, 2015). The communication skills to which employers are most commonly referring are oral or written communication skills; however, interpersonal communication skills may be expanded to include active listening, nonverbal communication, and assertive communication (Klein, 2009).

Several research studies, such as Williams (2015) and Mitchell, Skinner, and White (2010), have ranked communication skills as the most important soft skill employees need to possess to function effectively in their jobs. Employers, in particular, consider communication skills as the highest ranked soft skill they expect from potential employees. During job interviews, employers evaluate potential recruits' ability to share information; relate or interact with others (peers, superiors, and customers); listen attentively; process information; write an error-free application letter and résumé; follow

instructions; and use understandable, appropriate language. Employers want to recruit employees who are “conscious of their nonverbal cues, for example, eye contact, posture, facial expressions and hand signals” (Williams, 2015, p. 210).

The purpose of Mitchell et al.’s (2010) study was to determine Alabama business educator perceptions and the importance of soft skills for success in the 21st century workforce. Business educators were surveyed to assess the importance of specific soft skills and how those skills affected success in the workforce. Mitchell et al.’s research concluded that business educators identified general communication and ethics as the most important soft skills for success in the 21st century workforce. Also, written communication and time management/organization skills were rated as more important than business etiquette, diversity, customer service, problem-solving/critical-thinking skills, oral communication skills, and leadership skills (Mitchell et al., 2010).

Communication skills are important in virtually every field of endeavor, from teaching elementary school students to effectively arguing cases as a prosecuting attorney. They are also as important to athletic coaches as they are to the hard working employees at one’s favorite restaurant (Klein, 2009). Ju, Zhang, and Pacha (2012) emphasized the need for schools to provide adequate training for students in basic literacy skills, mathematics, and communication skills. Studies by Fogle (2011) and Griffin (2012) reported that employers feel that business graduates lacked soft skills, including communication skills. Westray (2008) revealed in his study that communication was deemed the most deficient skill. Westray stated that many employer criticisms are leveled against community colleges for the inability to keep pace with the key soft skills of teamwork, problem-solving, critical-thinking, and communication skills.

Student and employer views differ in the value placed on interpersonal skills. In Williams's (2015) research, employers believed that interpersonal skills belong in the top five most important soft skills ranking it fourth, while students ranked interpersonal skills seventh. On the other hand, according to the students, interpersonal skills are important but not as important as the other higher ranked skills. In contrast, the interviewees in Watson's (2013) study talked about the difficult experience of learning communication-specific soft skills through making mistakes. The interviewees discussed how the process of learning communication-specific soft skills on the job during their first years of employment added stress, especially from adjusting from college to the working world. The process of learning communication-specific soft skills on the job was something that all of the interviewees were in agreement about as being a negative experience – they all felt that they had to go through what some termed as a learning curve to figure out the soft skill aspects of their jobs. None of them mentioned any workplace training or seeking out any outside education or training. The interviewees seemed to view these communication-specific soft skills as an obstacle that they have had to learn to overcome during an already hectic and stressful time in their careers. To most, these skills seem to represent extra work that they should not have to be doing or a distraction away from their true passion of design or technical skill. This makes the case for incorporating communication-specific soft skills specifically geared toward use in the engineering field into the collegiate curriculum even stronger because it seems that what they do not learn in college, they are learning the hard way in the real world (Watson, 2013).

One recommendation from Williams's (2015) study was the need for educational institutions to incorporate and emphasize soft skill training and development in their

curriculum and, therefore, expect that the learning institutions take responsibility for facilitating student development of such skills. Alabama business educators consider soft skills to be important components of the business/marketing education curriculum. Professional development for business educators should be designed to assist with the effective integration of soft skills into curriculum. They believe that the geographical location of the school should be considered. The school should be in a location that will impact the surrounding areas. This way, educators who work in the county might be persuaded about the importance of implementing a curriculum directly related to the integration of soft skills in the workforce. Business leaders understood that the lack of value placed on soft skills is a direct relation to a lack of understanding on how to integrate soft skills into a business education curriculum (Mitchell et al., 2010).

Industry leaders across the world are insisting that educational institutions incorporate training in the development of personal attributes of emotional intelligence into business curriculum to prepare college graduates for the hiring process and future promotions. Developing an understanding of emotions is vital for a graduate becoming employed and acquiring future leadership opportunities (Abraham, 2006). A potential correlation was found in Côté, Lopes, Salovey, and Miner's (2010) study that understanding emotions and leadership emerges to effectively engage and lead others. Leaders from various industries argue that emotional intelligence abilities and soft nontechnical skills are significant factors that predict employee business effectiveness (Love, 2014). The purpose of Love's study was to provide information to educators on how to improve the skills of students entering the workforce. This study is valuable to business educators because it identified the most important workforce skills (Love,

2014). Furthermore, this information may allow educators to more effectively include employability skills in their courses (Mitchell et al., 2010). Employers are challenged and concerned by the number of advanced-degree recipients who lack expected levels of communication and interpersonal skills to produce quality outcomes. Some researchers indicated that emotional intelligence should be integrated into academic curriculums at an early stage of development and that the elements of emotional intelligence should be taught in schools, because it will provide a strategy for the students to manage feelings and handle disruptive emotions in a positive manner while cultivating relationships (Love, 2014).

Institutions of higher education should integrate emotional intelligence in course curricula to assist students in becoming sustainable and competitive graduates. The incorporation of intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, and teamwork were viewed as critical skills employers seek when hiring graduates according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) survey. The NACE report noted that employers expressed that teamwork and collaboration were critical skills for the work environment, thus making teamwork the number one skill employers valued in a new hire for that year (Job Outlook, 2012). Love's (2014) study concluded that participants understood the importance of communicating clearly and honestly as it helped them work more effectively in teams.

Teamwork Soft Skills

Corporate and higher education employers report seeking college graduates with demonstrated abilities to lead teams in all aspects of business and operations (Reed, 2001). Lacking communication, leadership, and group work skills is still a problem for

contemporary students; however, focus revolves around the lack of social skills being a problem (Love, 2014; Watson, 2013). Employees need to develop their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to enhance relationships to increase team performance (Goleman, 1998; Love, 2014; Smigla & Pastoria, 2000). According to Watson's (2013) study, there was a clear consensus among engineering faculty, professionals, and students that soft skills were missing in the traditional educational model. Watson also addressed individual skills necessary to function at a high level in a team environment. The responsibility in organizations is decentralized and soft skills, like teamwork, have become more desirable in recent years (Brungardt, 2009).

Teamwork Definitions

A team is typically defined as “two or more people who interact and coordinate their work to accomplish a shared task or goal” (Brungardt, 2009, p. 37). Harris and Harris (1996) defined teamwork as “a work group or unit with a common purpose through which members develop mutual relationships for achieving goal and tasks” (p. 23). Cohen and Bailey (1997) defined a team as a collection of people who are interdependent in their tasks, share responsibility for results, view themselves and are viewed by others as an intact social entity, and manage their relationships across organizational boundaries. Teams are widely utilized because of the knowledge transfer that occurs to solve problems and improve performance (Tannenbaum, Salas, & Conn-Bowers, 1996). According to Tannenbaum et al. (1996), a team is a “distinguishable set of two or more persons who interact dynamically, interdependently and adaptively toward a common and valued goal/objective/mission who have been assigned specific roles or functions to perform and who have a limited life-span of membership” (p. 504).

According to Brungardt (2009), an individual's performance within a team is equally as important as the overall team performance. Individual skills are necessary to be effective within the team. Effective teams have individuals who provide individual teamwork skills needed to be prepared for the task. They know how to coordinate their activities, communicate with other team members, and respond effectively to changing conditions (O'Neil, Chung, & Brown, 1997).

Teamwork Theories

Lewin's (2008) Field Theory on human behavior is the interaction between the person and their immediate environment. The notion of field refers to all aspects of individuals in relationship with their surroundings and conditions (Lewin, 2008). Lewin (2008) summarized that in order to predict the psychological behavior, one has to understand the psychological actions, emotions, and expressions. They must understand the momentary structure and state of the person in their psychological environment (Lewin, 1935). These particular behaviors must be understood to balance between the individual, the coworkers, and the organization; therefore, one must understand their own leadership style (Lewin, 1935; Shull, 2002). O'Neil, Lee, Wang, and Mulkey (1999) adopted six categories describing individual work skills necessary to be effective in the team process. These six categories are adaptability, coordination, decision-making, interpersonal, leadership, and communication. Adaptability refers recognizing problems and having the appropriate response. Coordination refers to organizing team activities so they may complete the tasks on time. Decision-making means using all available information to make a decision. Interpersonal describes the extent to which individuals interacted and cooperated with other team members. Leadership describes providing

direction for the team; and communication means the overall transmission of clear and accurate information (O'Neil et al., 1997).

Nine studies listed in Figure 11 display the main workplace soft skill needs. At the bottom of Figure 11, Brungardt (2009) has included a chart which shows the alignment of teamwork skills and soft skills according to the work. Teamwork was not considered as a specific need in the first four studies covering the period from 1990-2004; however, with the group of five studies all published in 2006, the five research groups made a consistent inclusion of teamwork and communication as highly rated soft skills in most recent years (Brungardt, 2009).

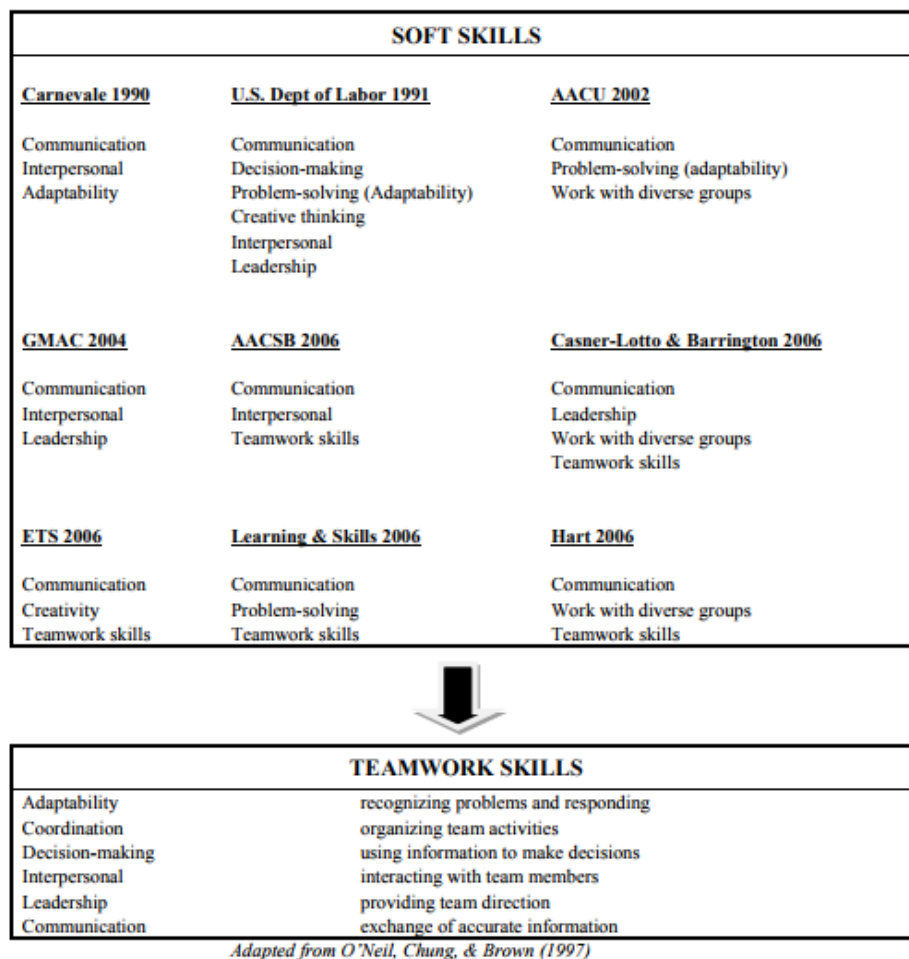


Figure 11. Alignment of Teamwork and Soft Skills.

Team members who learn these six techniques when formulating a problem can be identified as those who display the characteristics of Lewin's (1935) momentary state of the person. When individuals actively listen to the team member, they become part of the interacting environment, giving the researcher a larger perspective when predicting changes in the psychological behavior of individuals and teams (Shull, 2002). These six categories in O'Neil et al.'s (1997) design align with the desired skill set commonly referred to as soft skills (Shull, 2002). Teamwork literature, especially in the last 2 decades has been aligned with literature on soft skills needed in the workplace; several

similarities emerged. Most common similarities between O'Neil et al.'s (1997) list and soft skills are leadership skills, interpersonal skills, and teamwork (Brungardt, 2009).

Each team member brings his or her distinct ability and life experience to each situation in which the team interacts with other team members in the psychological environment in Lewin's (1935) model. This connects with the systems theory, in which systems is defined as "any whole with interacting parts" (Shull, 2002, p. 4). Systems theory has been used in a variety of interpersonal contexts. In the organizational field, a work team can be viewed as a social system that is self-managing and open because of the team's extended freedom (Shull, 2002). Open systems are informal and are continually reevaluated in the course of their interactions, while closed systems are more mechanical and simple and they are less influenced by the environment (Miller, 1978). In open work teams, individuals working within a team structure continuously exchange information with each other and are influenced by the quality of information that is shared between the team members in the interaction. Shull's (2002) research showed the impact of training team members in talking and listening skills and measuring the effect of each team member on the team as a unit when formulating a work-related problem. Owen's (1996) research showed that trust is an important issue when working with teams in organizations. Owen argued that trust comes first from increasing self-awareness in each team member. This correlates emotional intelligence theory and Lewin's (1935) field theory that building trust will help boost team members' self-esteem and have assertive communication (Harms & Credé, 2010; Owen, 1996; Shull, 2002). The participants in Reed's (2001) research strongly suggested that students heavily trained in leadership abilities regarding team activities were expected to exhibit inspiring behaviors.

Leadership theory suggests that in order to be a good leader, a person must understand how to socially influence those they are leading by correctly recognizing their emotions. For example, if team members are feeling discouraged, a good leader is able to recognize the emotion and ensure that it does not become debilitating (Harms & Credé, 2010; Watson, 2013). A good leader has to have a high emotional intelligence quotient so they can facilitate positive change and move their team past negative emotions to positive emotions, like motivation and excitement. Team performance suffers when members do not align with common values. Individuals easily lose touch with one another and work according to their personal standards, resulting in uneven motivation and commitment toward common work goals (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Bandura's (1977) research on the Social Learning Theory developed an understanding of human behavior. It focused on modeling activities as a guide for target behavior. A team member's behavior is determined by the member's environment and also by his or her beliefs and perceptions (Bandura, 1977). Team members are trained in active listening skills, and behavioral rehearsal techniques are used so team members can self-disclose and actively listen to each other. These factors are said to produce desired behaviors by training team members in skills that can change the way people interact together. Training can be delivered through presentation, modeling, and behavioral rehearsal, which are processes thought to enhance learning in individuals (Bandura, 1986). This process enables the individual and team to retain and utilize skills needed to identify all the information related to formulating and solving problems in organizational settings (Shull, 2002). Once people are clear about the leader's values, their own values, and shared values, they know what the team's expectations are and feel that they can

count on others. Consequently, they can work more productively, be more innovative, manage higher levels of challenge, and better handle often conflicting work/life balance issues (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Employers and Teamwork Skills

Teamwork has become a vital role in the modern workplace (Ghosh, Shuck, & Petrosko, 2012). Teams increase work quality and productivity by removing the middle management layers and taking responsibility for product quality and their performances (Liu & Härtel, 2013). At the center of this modern workforce organizational shift, there is a need for employees to obtain essential team skills and competencies that are necessary to effectively participate in a team (Nadal, Mañas, Bernadó, & Mora, 2015). Organizational leaders understand the underlying soft skills that are required for a worker to function within a team (Nadal, Mañas, Bernadó, & Mora, 2015).

Shull's (2002) study focused on using the Collaborative Teams Skills Training (CTS) which was a program designed for employers to help their employees learn how to work on a work team using the systems theory approach. CTS was designed by Miller and Miller (1994) to teach individuals in a team setting how to talk and listen more productively in order to increase the team's effectiveness in formulating problems, working through conflicts, and problem-solving. The CTS program was split into four modules: talking, listening, problem formulation, and problem-solving skills (Miller & Miller, 1994; Shull, 2002).

The first module trains to use six talking skills such as speaking for oneself, describing sensory data, expressing thoughts, sharing feelings, disclosing wants, and stating actions related to a specific work issue. The next module is listening, where

participants are taught the next five listening skills: attending to another, acknowledging their experience, inviting more information, summarizing what they have heard, and asking more questions at the appropriate time. The third module trains team members to map a work-related issue in a collaborative environment by accomplishing organizational missions. The last module of CTS training consists of training people to discriminate and choose talking and listening styles that are appropriate for different situations; however, this module was not used in Shull's (2002) study (Miller & Miller, 1994).

Team building is the most frequently preferred organizational development strategy to produce changes within organizations (Shull, 2002). Nearly 40% of all organizational development programs conducted before 1975 used team building as a dominant intervention strategy (Shull, 2002). The participants in Reed's (2001) study described team building seminars, ROPES courses, canoe trips, and retreats as experiences designed to enhance the students' sense of teamwork. The results of Reed's study are also consistent with the findings of Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt's (1999) study. Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt found in their study of leadership development programs that the majority of the programs used seminars, summer programs, and staff training to develop leadership practices and communication skills that were team or group oriented. Conversations about values also enable people to find more meaning in their work. Conversing with your team members about their values helps them see how the work they do connects with others (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Teamwork Extracurricular or Cocurricular Activities

Research literature from Astin (1993), Kuh and Lund (1994), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), and Terenzini et al. (1996) has supported the argument that

involvement in extracurricular and cocurricular activities has a positive influence on student development. Extracurricular activities also help in the area of goal setting, interpersonal communication, networking, and educational persistence. The results of each of the above-referenced studies indicated that involvement in extracurricular and cocurricular activities has a positive influence on student development (May, 2009).

Hood, Craig, and Ferguson (1992) found no relation between participation in extracurricular activities and cognitive complexity; and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found no links between involvement in extracurricular activities and first-year gains in critical thinking when precollege critical-thinking ability was taken into account. Terenzini et al. (1996) and Nora and Cabrera (1994), on the other hand, reported that involvement in clubs and organizations was positively related to first-year gains in critical thinking, even with a variety of precollege characteristics (including initial critical-thinking ability; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Furthermore, extracurricular activities are often promoted as providing students with opportunities to develop social skills, including learning to work with others, developing leadership skills, and developing social competencies (Cassel, 2000). Rogoff (1991) proposed that learning occurs through collaborative participation in activities of shared interest. Learning cooperation and teamwork has been described as part of the hidden curriculum of extracurricular activities (Brown & Theobald, 1998; Wyble, 2009).

Conclusion

The paradigm shift in the 21st century workforce has forced employees to be well armed with soft skills (Ganzel, 2001). The employment shift requires employees to have more personal interaction with others than ever before. Possessing only hard skills or

traditional technical skills is not adequate in the new global marketplace (Timm, 2005). Employers consistently rate skills such as leadership, teamwork, and communication as deficient (Brungardt, 2009).

The specific problem addressed in Bosch's (2017) study was the ineffectiveness of high school student online work readiness training in relationship to work readiness and the need to bridge student soft skill gaps. The purpose of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to examine pre and posttest data regarding work readiness of 96 students in a large public high school located in North Carolina after participation in an online work readiness certificate program. Dependent variables were eight soft skills: attitude, communication, teamwork, interpersonal/social skills, media rules, planning and organizing, critical thinking, and professionalism.

Figure 12 shows pass/fail percentages by each of the eight soft skill areas for pre and posttest (Bosch, 2017).

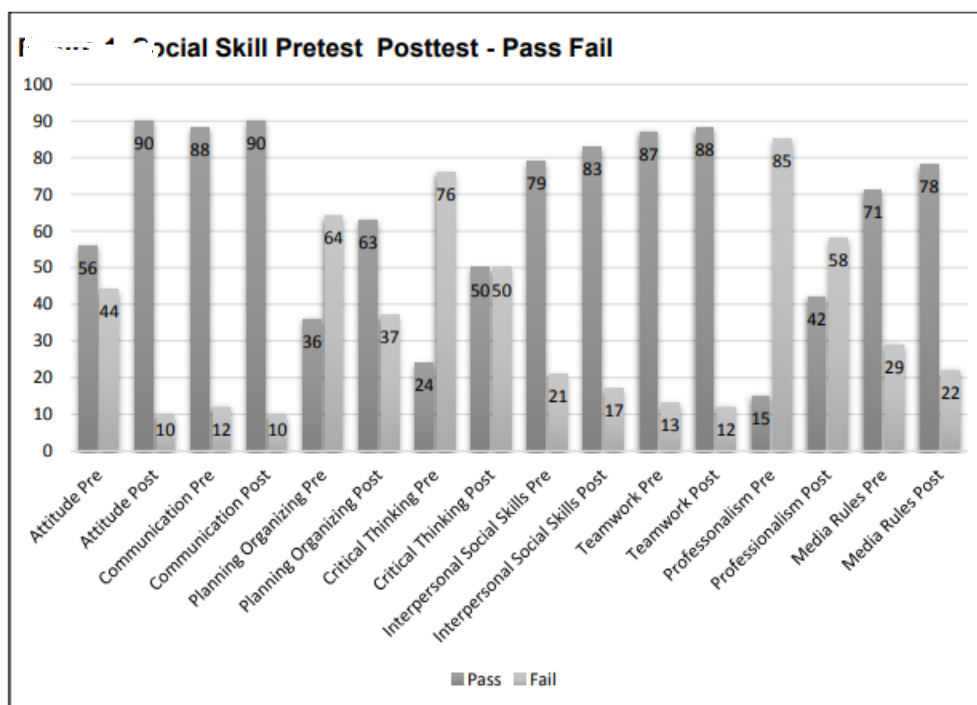


Figure 12. Bosch Pretest/Posttest Social Skill Comparisons.

The largest percentage of high school students passed the communication and teamwork soft skill pretests, but they had soft skill deficits in attitude, planning and organizing, critical thinking, professionalism, interpersonal/social skills, and media rules. The deficits were remediated after online job readiness training, and overall there was an increase in soft skills after the online training. There was a ceiling effect for communication and teamwork soft skills, and results indicated insignificant relationships for two soft skill areas: communication and teamwork (Bosch, 2017).

It is essential for educators, curriculum developers, and policy makers to realize that the implementation of socio-emotional learning programming into K-12 curriculum is an important factor. Incorporating an online job readiness training program into high school curriculum can be effective in remediation of soft skills (Goleman & Senge, 2014). This study reported the incorporation and implementation of an online job

readiness training program into a fall 2016 high school class in North Carolina that resulted in successful remediation of student skills; and it provided information on one way to assess, train, and remediate soft skills in that setting.

On a collegiate level, the National Business Education Association (NBEA) believes effective integration of soft skills into the business curriculum can help students obtain and retain employment in the modern workforce (Policies Commission for Business and Economic Education, 2000). Mitchell et al.'s (2010) study looked to examine Alabama's business educators' perceived specific soft skills to be important in a successful 21st century workforce. Although the literature promotes all of the soft skills in the study as important and relevant, not all soft skills were perceived by Alabama business educators as being equally important (Mitchell et al., 2010). Northouse (2007) expressed leadership as an essential soft skill to "understand life's tasks" (p. 23) and suggested that leaders will need to exhibit a more personal sensitive approach when interacting with team members. Business educators identified general communication and general ethics as the most important soft skills for success in the 21st century workforce (Mitchell et al., 2010). According to Gokuladas's (2010) study, communication is also a top rated nontechnical skill for success (Williams, 2015). Watson's (2013) study emphasized that incorporating communication-specific soft skills into the collegiate curriculum will help students when they enter the real world.

Alabama business educators consider soft skills to be important components of the business/marketing education curriculum; professional development for business educators should be designed to assist with the effective integration of soft skills into curriculum (Mitchell et al., 2010). Extracurricular activities serve as a hidden curriculum

as they provide students with opportunities to develop social skills, which include developing leadership skills, interpersonal skills, and teamwork skills (Wyble, 2009). By gaining an understanding of the complex relationship between the curricular and cocurricular experience, student affair professionals can join with other administrators and faculty to conduct more research and develop environments conducive to providing positive outlets for leadership (Reed, 2001). Leadership effectiveness encompasses managing and controlling emotions to motivate others; understanding emotions to think creatively to make better decisions; recognizing emotions and communicating clearly; understanding others' emotions to build a cohesive team; and moreover, admitting when they are wrong and have made mistakes (Love, 2014).

Chapter Summary

In most cases, generic soft skills offer additional opportunities for the advancement of the graduate through the career life. Some of the common generic skills new entrants and college graduates tend to lack during their transition into the labor market include communication, interpersonal, and teamwork skills (Baird, Lucas, & Donnellan, 2017). Employers consistently rate skills such as leadership, teamwork, and communication as deficient (Brungardt, 2009). One of the students interviewed in Williams's (2015) study stated, "Interpersonal skills are of an importance, because you need it for team work" (p. 113). The goal of the study was to enable school personnel to not only understand the sociocultural influences of cheerleading but to identify other factors that prepare students for college and careers (Bangser, 2008).

Chapter 3: Method

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of cheerleading on the qualities needed for college and career preparation (Bangser, 2008). This chapter provides an explanation of the qualitative methodology that was utilized to conduct this study and contains detailed descriptions of the methods of data collection, procedures followed, data analysis, and instrumentation. This study's goal was to answer the following research question: How does the experience of cheerleading contribute to college and career readiness? This chapter explains the type of participants chosen, research design, instrumentation, procedures, data collection, and data analysis. Beyond that, this chapter demonstrates the trustworthiness of the methods chosen in addition to addressing the study's ethical concerns.

An initial contact letter (Appendix A) was sent to the participants to confirm their address and email addresses and to notify them that they were going to receive a questionnaire. Following that, an Initial Cover Letter and a Gardner-Webb University Informed Consent (Appendix B) were sent to the participants. Permission to use the Instrument (Appendix C) was given by Harry O'Neil and Fallon Watson. Appendix D displays the Teamwork Skills Modified Questionnaire that was used as descriptive data for the focus group. Appendix E displays the Focus Group Interview Protocol that was used for the focus group interviews.

Participants

The participants of this study were former high school cheerleaders from the years 2009-2017. The county has been designated as a low wealth county by the state. The

high school has a total of 536 students in which 57% are Caucasian, 27% are African-American, 9% are Hispanic or Latino, 5% are Asian, and 2% are two races. Many students come from homes where the annual income is at the poverty level or below. Student gender distribution at the high school is equitable; with 51% of the student body comprised of males, and 49% are females. Due to the low wealth, 50.5% of students receive free lunch; in order for students to qualify for free lunch, the child's family income must be below 130% of the poverty line. Seven point two percent of students receive reduced lunch; in order for student to qualify for reduced lunch, family income must fall the poverty line. Forty-five former female cheerleaders were contacted to participate in this study. The former cheerleaders who participated in this study represent most of the demographics of the district with the exception of males. There was no male participation in this study. All participants took the Teamwork Skills Questionnaire survey first. Following the survey, select participants were invited to a focus group with open-ended questions.

Research Design

The researcher examined the depth of the experiences of the participants involved in the study and used a qualitative design that utilized focus group interviews based on a descriptive survey.

The Teamwork Skills Survey provided descriptive data to lay the foundation for the qualitative methodology. Utilizing basic interpretive qualitative research methods will allow the study to be investigative and explorative by utilizing aspects of a variety of qualitative methodologies. For example, this study utilized elements of grounded theory in that the goal was to learn from the data that it yielded; however, it was not true to

classical grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) as there were expectations for deductive themes before the interview process began. This study is a basic interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002), as its purpose was to examine how former cheerleaders construct their careers and education relevant to interpersonal, intrapersonal, and leadership skills, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences with those skills (Watson, 2013). These data were analyzed to construct the conclusions and recommendations of this study. The purpose of survey research is to gather data from groups of people by utilizing questionnaires (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). An existing instrument, the Teamwork Skills Questionnaire, was used as descriptive data to lay the foundation for the qualitative assessment (O'Neil et al., 1997). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) stated that "the purpose of a survey is to use questionnaires or interviews to collect data from a sample that has been selected to represent a population to which the findings of the data analysis can be generalized" (p. 223).

The importance and value of qualitative research has been emphasized by social scientists and educators as a tool which allows researchers to explore questions of significance (Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). The qualitative nature of this study was guided by the need to allow the subjects to explore their own perceptions, beliefs, observations, and understanding about their behavior and learning. Understanding forms the core purpose of a qualitative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The meaning of the experiences as well as the nature of the context in which those experiences occur was fundamental to this study; therefore, a multi-layered qualitative approach was the most appropriate for this study.

The focus group interviews contained eight participants, and they were used to

expand upon the results of the Teamwork Questionnaire Survey. To make sure the same general areas were explored during each of the interviews without limiting the amount the interviewee was able to share, this study utilized the general interview guide approach. The interviews were semi-structured, and the conversations were based around a set of predetermined questions with room for change and deviation based on the answers received from the interviewees. This method had the potential to uncover the most information (Merriam, 2002).

The goal of this study was to obtain as much detailed information from former cheerleaders regarding their postsecondary experiences as it related to soft skills with a specific focus on leadership, communication, and teamwork skills. The goal was also to identify themes within the survey and compare and expand those themes based on descriptions in the focus groups (Merriam, 2002).

Instrumentation

The selected instruments for this study were focus group questions based on the Teamwork Skills Questionnaire (O'Neil et al., 1997). This questionnaire is intended to measure teamwork skills and focuses on the skills a person should have to be effective in a team. O'Neil et al. (1997) developed a 10-minute self-report questionnaire to measure teamwork skills of individuals. It is an indirect teamwork measurement tool and the best way to measure teamwork skills is to use an existing team to provide a forum to directly measure these skills (Hsieh & O'Neil, 2002). However, in many cases, this direct approach is not feasible. Thus, the questionnaire methodology was created to measure teamwork skills indirectly (Marshall et al., 2005). This provides a way to measure teamwork skills without having to find all individuals who were participating in the team

(Kuehl, 2001). Teamwork skills have been linked repeatedly with soft skills throughout the literature over the past 20 years (Brungardt, 2009). Teamwork skills have been categorized to label skills that allow individuals to work and function effectively as a member of an assigned team including interacting and collaborating with others (Salas, Cannon-Blowers, Church Payne, & Smith-Jenysch, 1998). Team effectiveness relies on a certain set of skills such as communication, especially in the areas of conflict resolution, decision making, and problem solving (Salas et al., 1998). Current research indicates that these skills are essential for work readiness (O'Neil et al., 1997).

Greenbaum, Kaplan, and Damiano (1991) found that most of the existing team measurement tools have poor or no reliable information and that of the 200 instruments they found, only 40 provided reliable information. The Teamwork Skills Questionnaire is a valid and reliable instrument because it is intended to measure teamwork skills and focuses on the skills a person should have to be effective in a team (O'Neil, Wang, Lee, Mulkey, & Baker, 2003). Permission was granted by creator, Dr. Harry O'Neil, a Professor of Educational Psychology and Technology at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education (Appendix C). This questionnaire has been used with participants across several settings including an electronics firm in the United States; an air conditioning and refrigeration union in the United States (O'Neil et al., 2003); a temporary workers' agency (O'Neil et al., 2003); a Canadian union (O'Neil et al., 2003); a U.S. Marine Corps Aviation Logistics Squadron (Kuehl, 2001); (6) Asian American junior high and high school students (Hsieh & O'Neil, 2002); nurses in Australia (Marshall, 2003); engineers and assembly workers in an electronics firm in Taiwan (Chen, 2002); and Fort Hays State University graduates to determine whether

academic leadership education enhances graduate's soft skill development and to assess the impact this has on their perceptions of teamwork proficiency in the workplace (Brungardt, 2009). The Teamwork Skills Questionnaire consisted of a Teamwork Skills Scale (comprised of six subscales: adaptability, communication, coordination, decision-making, interpersonal, and leadership; O'Neil et al., 2003). The only subscales used for the purpose of this study were leadership, interpersonal, and communication. In previous studies, construct validity for the six dimensions of the Teamwork Skills Questionnaire was determined by using confirmatory factor analysis (Brungardt, 2009).

After the demographic survey, participants were selected for the focus group interviews based on the preliminary surveys on the Teamwork Skills Questionnaire and the demographic information. Permission was given by Dr. Fallon Watson to use her Interview Protocol for the focus group from her dissertation, *Self-Perceptions of Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Leadership Skills among Recent Graduates: A Qualitative Study* (Appendix C). A focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. Groups typically consist of six to eight people who participate in the interview for 90 to 120 minutes. The insight of focus groups is the use of group interaction to produce insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. The focus group allows one participant to draw from another or to collectively brainstorm together, and this may lead to a large number of ideas, opinions, issues, and topics being discussed (Berg, 1998). Group discussions are used because corrections by the group concerning views that are not correct, not socially shared, or extreme are available as means for validating statements and views. The key advantage of focus groups is to produce data and insights that would be less accessible

without the interaction found in a group (Krueger, 1998). Due to the emergent and open-ended nature of focus groups, the purpose of this study is purposively geared towards O'Neil et al.'s (1999) three subscales of leadership, interpersonal, and communication in order to provide opportunities for fluid discussions during the focus groups and thick descriptions of personal experiences and interpretations (Grow & Christopher, 2008).

Content validation of the focus group interview questions was established through the review of the questions by two members of the studied school district who have obtained a Doctorate in Education: Director of Community Engagement and Drop-Out Prevention and the Assistant Superintendent of the studied school district. The third content validation was established by an associate professor for Gardner-Webb University.

Procedures

The participants were emailed an initial contact postcard (Appendix A). This was to verify that the researcher had the proper email or mailing address information. After confirmation of correct emails and mailing addresses, the participants were emailed a Cover Letter (Appendix B), Teamwork Skills Questionnaire survey, and a demographic survey to see who would be eligible for participation in the study (Appendix D). Eligibility for participation for the survey depended on positive responses from the Teamwork Skills Questionnaire and vital demographic information such as if they attended college or went into the workforce. After the surveys were received and analyzed, those who qualified for the study were contacted to participate in the focus group, signed an informed consent form (Appendix B), and selected a time convenient for them to participate in a focus group. The participants in the focus group were asked

questions from the Interview Protocol (Appendix E). Everyone qualified for the study and was invited to participate in the focus group. The researcher looked for a variety of participants who went into the workforce as well as participants who entered college. After the surveys were received and analyzed, participants were invited to attend the focus group via email (see Appendix B).

Data Collection

The goal of this study was to obtain as much detailed information from former cheerleaders regarding their postsecondary experiences as it related to leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork soft skills. The Teamwork Questionnaire Skills Survey and Demographic Survey were conducted through SurveyMonkey (Appendix D). The purpose of the Teamwork Questionnaire Skills Survey was to provide descriptive data for soft skills and teamwork skills that may have been gained through cheerleading. This data added support to the information gained through the focus group interviews. The researcher conducted two focus groups that contained eight participants per group. The researcher organized the groups based on availability of the selected dates.

To make sure the same general areas were explored during each of the interviews, this study utilized the general interview guide approach. The interviews were semi-structured, and the conversations were based around a set of predetermined questions but left room for change and deviation based on the answers received from the interviewees. This method had the potential to uncover the most information (Watson, 2013). The focus group interviews (Appendix E) were semi-structured and had three distinct parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introductory phase of the interview allowed the researcher to explain the goal of the study, the information the researcher was

seeking, and how the information would be used, in addition to assuring participants that their confidentiality would be protected and letting them know approximately how long the interview would take (Burke & Miller, 2001). The body of the interview was where all questions were asked of the focus group. Last, the conclusion provided a recap of the conversations and an opportunity for the interviewee to add any other comments.

The interviews were conducted by the primary researcher via focus group interviews and recorded with a digital recording device (Burke & Miller, 2001). The audio recordings of the focus group interviews were transcribed using Rev.com and then coded by the researcher immediately after the interviews were completed, generating knowledge that could be used to shape the future interviews. The interview process lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The focus group interviews were kept confidential and used only as part of this study. The recordings were destroyed once the transcriptions were completed for accuracy.

Data Analysis

The results from the Teamwork Skills Survey data were analyzed in a frequency table. A frequency distribution is the summary of the values of a variable based on the frequencies with which they occur. It is called frequency distribution because it looks at how the values of the variable are distributed across all of the cases in the data. When frequency distributions are displayed in a table format, it is called a frequency table (Colwell & Carter, 2012).

Data analysis started upon completion of the first focus group interview. After the interview was finished, it was immediately transcribed and coded through revt.com. This process continued throughout the second focus group interview phase, so the data

from each of the interviews were constantly compared to each other. After the interview process was completed, all of the interviews were further analyzed to continue to seek common themes of the inductive and deductive variety. Because the goal of this study was to generate knowledge, using the method of constant comparison allowed the researcher to take the interview transcripts (raw data) and code common themes, ideas, and keywords and transform them into knowledge (Burke & Miller, 2001). Doing this throughout the interview process allowed the interview protocol to be adjusted based on the new data being gathered (Watson, 2013).

After the transcriptions were completed, they were checked for accuracy by listening to the recordings and comparing them to the transcripts; this was also a time in which deductive codes were identified. After the transcriptions were verified as accurate, the researcher printed them out with extra wide left margins so themes could be identified and notes could be written in the margins (Watson, 2013). Field notes with descriptions of any physical nonverbal cues and other observations were reviewed. Each interview was reviewed several times, and the inductive codes became more evident during later reviews. The researcher assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality (Watson, 2013). During the analysis phase, the themes identified within the transcripts were sorted and identified within the first five reviews of the transcript. During the analysis phase, the themes were identified within the transcripts and sorted into groups so quotes that had been tagged as a certain theme could be reviewed together (Burke & Miller, 2001). The data and themes from the transcripts were displayed in a frequency table.

Summary

This chapter provided the qualitative methodology of this research. This study's

goal was to answer the following research question: How does the experience of cheerleading contribute to college and career readiness? This qualitative study was conducted to assess former cheerleaders' perceptions of soft skill development in preparation for college or the workforce. Two focus groups containing eight participants were compared; one set of participants attended college, and the other set attended college or entered to the workforce. Specifically, a demographic questionnaire and a teamwork questionnaire skills survey were used as preliminary measures to select participants for the focus groups. From O'Neil et al.'s (1997) Teamwork Questionnaire Survey, only three subscales were used: leadership, interpersonal skills, and communication. After the participants were selected, two focus groups were established and they engaged in open communication and conversation that was transcribed. Both the results from the surveys and focus group interviews were displayed in frequency distributions. Research questions, research design, participants, data collection, and description of the instruments were provided. Findings from the data analyses were presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 consists of study findings, recommendations, and conclusions.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of cheerleading on the qualities needed for college and career preparation. This study's goal was to answer the following research question: How does the experience of cheerleading contribute to college and career readiness? In this chapter, findings are presented. This chapter was designed to report results from the data collection process as it was explained in the third chapter. A demographic questionnaire and a teamwork questionnaire skills survey were used as preliminary measures to select participants for the focus groups. From O'Neil et al.'s (1997) Teamwork Questionnaire Survey, only three subscales are used: leadership, interpersonal skills, and communication. Demographic information was detailed, as were the findings for each of the teamwork questionnaire skills survey in relationship to the study's basic research question. The study also consisted of a qualitative analysis from perceptions of former high school cheerleaders in regard to their views of soft skills. These perceptions were obtained through focus group interviews.

Demographics

There were a total of 43 surveys sent. Of the 43 surveys, 84% (36 participants) responded. The participants were all female and consisted of former graduates who were 18 years or older of the studied high school. Thirty-six participants participated in the demographic survey. Table 1 displays the age of the participants.

Table 1

<i>Demographic Survey Participants Age</i>										
Cheerleading Participant Ages										
Age	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Number	3	4	3	11	5	4	1	3	1	1

Table 2 shows the year of graduation for each participant.

Table 2

Cheerleading Graduation Rate

Year of Graduation	Number
2009	1
2010	1
2011	3
2012	2
2013	4
2014	6
2015	8
2016	5
2017	6

Table 3 shows participant ethnicity by percentage and number.

Table 3

Cheerleading Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percentage	Number
Black/African-American	61.11%	22
Hispanic	2.78%	1
White/Caucasian	36.11%	13

Of the 36 participants who responded, 22 or 61.1% were Black or African-American, 13 or 36.1% were White or Caucasian, and 1 or 2.7% was Hispanic.

O'Neil et al.'s (1997) Teamwork Questionnaire Survey was used to study participant perceptions of their leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork skills. Questions 1-7 focused on leadership. Tables 4-10 provide answers given by the participants.

Table 4 includes information on the number of participants who felt they exercised leadership.

Table 4

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 1

Question 1: When I work as part of a team, I exercise leadership.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	6	7	23	36
Percentage	0.0%	16.67%	19.44%	63.89%	100.00%

The data indicated that 30 participants, or 83.3%, often or almost always agreed that they felt like they exercised leadership. Six respondents or 16.67% felt they sometimes exercised leadership.

Table 5 includes information on the number of participants who felt they taught other team members.

Table 5

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 2

Question 2: When I work as part of a team, I teach other team members.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	6	9	21	36
Percentage	0.0%	16.67%	25.00%	58.33%	100.00%

The data indicated that 30 participants, or 83.3%, often or almost always agreed that they felt like they taught team members. Six respondents or 16.67% sometimes felt they taught team members.

Table 6 includes information on the number of participants who felt like they knew the process of making a decision.

Table 6

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 3

Question 3: When I work as part of a team, I know the process of making a decision.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	3	6	27	36
Percentage	0.0%	8.83%	16.67%	75.00%	100.00%

The data indicated that 33 participants, or 91.6%, often or almost always agreed that they felt like they knew the process of making a decision. Three respondents, or 8.83%, felt they sometimes knew the process of making a decision.

Table 7 includes information on the number of participants who felt they mobilized the group towards high performance.

Table 7

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 4

Question 4: When I work as part of a team, I lead appropriate, mobilizing the group of high performance.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	4	9	23	36
Percentage	0.0%	11.11%	25.00%	63.89%	100.00%

The data indicated that 32 participants, or 88.8%, often or almost always agreed that they felt they mobilized the group towards high performance. Four respondents, or 11.11%, felt they sometimes mobilized the group towards high performance.

Table 8 includes information on the number of participants who felt they led the team effectively.

Table 8

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 5

Question 5: When I work as part of a team, I lead the team effectively.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	6	5	23	36
Percentage	0.0%	16.67%	13.89%	63.88%	100.00%

The data indicated that 28 participants, or 77.7%, often or almost always agreed that they felt like they led the team effectively. Six respondents, or 16.7%, felt they sometimes led the team effectively.

Table 9 includes information on the number of participants who felt they demonstrated leadership to ensure team results.

Table 9

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 6

Question 6: When I work as part of a team, I demonstrate leadership to ensure team results.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	3	9	24	36
Percentage	0.0%	8.33%	25.00%	66.67%	100.00%

The data indicated that 33 participants, or 91.6%, often or almost always agreed that they demonstrated leadership to ensure team results. Three respondents, or 8.33%, felt they sometimes demonstrated leadership to ensure team results.

Table 10 includes information on the number of participants who felt they tried to bring out the best in others.

Table 10

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 7

Question 7: When I work as part of a team, I try to bring out the best in others.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	1	3	32	36
Percentage	0.0%	2.78%	8.33%	88.89%	100.00%

The data indicated that 35 participants, or 97.2%, often or almost always agreed that they felt they tried to bring the best out in others. One respondent, or 2.78%, felt they sometimes tried to bring the best out in others.

Questions 8-13 dealt with interpersonal skills. Table 11 includes information on the number of participants who felt they tried to interact cooperatively with other team members.

Table 11

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 8

Question 8: When I work as part of a team, I interact cooperatively with other team members.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	1	3	32	36
Percentage	0.0%	2.78%	8.33%	88.89%	100.00%

The data indicated that 35 participants, or 97.2%, often or almost always agreed that they felt like they tried to interact cooperatively with other team members. One respondent, or 2.78%, felt they sometimes tried to interact cooperatively with other team members.

Table 12 includes information on the number of participants who felt they tried to conduct themselves with courtesy.

Table 12

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 9

Question 9: When I work as part of a team, I conduct myself with courtesy.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	2	1	33	36
Percentage	0.0%	5.56%	2.78%	91.67%	100.00%

The data indicated that 34 participants, or 94.4%, often or almost always agreed that they felt they tried to conduct themselves with courtesy. Two respondents, or 5.56%, felt they sometimes conducted themselves with courtesy.

Table 13 includes information on the number of participants who felt they tried to respect the thoughts and opinions of others in a team.

Table 13

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 10

Question 10: When I work as part of a team, I respect the thoughts and opinions of others in a team.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	0	1	35	36
Percentage	0.00%	0.00%	2.78%	97.22%	100.00%

The data indicated that 36 participants, or 100.0%, often or almost always agreed that they felt they tried to respect the thoughts and opinions of others in a team.

Table 14 includes information on the number of participants who felt they tried to treat others with courtesy.

Table 14

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 11

Question 11: When I work as part of a team, I treat others with courtesy.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	0	1	35	36
Percentage	0.00%	0.00%	2.78%	97.22%	100.00%

The data indicated that 36 participants, or 100%, often or almost always agreed that they felt they treated others with courtesy.

Table 15 includes information on the number of participants who felt they tried to accept the individual differences among members.

Table 15

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 12

Question 12: When I work as part of a team, I accept individual differences among members.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	0	1	35	36
Percentage	0.00%	0.00%	2.78%	97.22%	100.00%

The data indicated that 36 participants, or 100%, often or almost always agreed that they felt they tried to accept individual differences among members.

Table 16 includes information on the number of participants who felt they tried to treat all my team members as equals.

Table 16

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 13

Question 13: When I work as part of a team, I treat all my team members as equals.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	1	1	34	36
Percentage	0.0%	2.78%	2.78%	94.44%	100.00%

The data indicated that 35 participants, or 97.2%, often or almost always agreed that they felt like they tried to treat all team members as equals. One respondent, or 2.78%, felt they sometimes tried to treat all team members as equals.

Questions 14-20 dealt with teamwork skills. Table 17 includes information on the number of participants who felt instructions were understood by all team members prior to starting a task.

Table 17

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 14

Question 14: When I work as part of a team, I ensure the instructions are understood by all the team members prior to starting a task.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	5	7	24	36
Percentage	0.0%	13.89%	19.44%	66.67%	100.00%

The data indicated that 31 participants, or 86.1%, often or almost always agreed that they felt instructions were understood by all team members prior to starting a task. Five respondents, or 13.89%, sometimes felt instructions were understood by all team members prior to starting a task.

Table 18 includes information on the number of participants who felt they asked for instructions to be clarified when it appeared not all team members understood the

task.

Table 18

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 15

Question 15: When I work as part of a team, I ask for the instructions to be clarified when it appears not all the team members understand the task.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	1	6	29	36
Percentage	0.0%	2.78%	16.67%	80.56%	100.00%

The data indicated that 35 participants, or 97.22%, often or almost always agreed that they felt they asked for the instructions to be clarified when it appeared not all the team members understood the task. One respondent, or 2.78%, felt they sometimes asked for the instructions to be clarified when it appeared not all the team members understood the task.

Table 19 includes information on the number of participants who felt they communicated in a manner to ensure mutual understanding.

Table 19

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 16

Question 16: When I work as part of a team, I communicate in a manner to ensure mutual understanding.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	2	4	30	36
Percentage	0.0%	5.56%	11.11%	83.33%	100.00%

The data indicated that 34 participants, or 94.4%, often or almost always agreed that they communicated in a manner to ensure mutual understanding. Two respondents, or 5.56%, felt they sometimes communicated in a manner to ensure mutual understanding.

Table 20 includes information on the number of participants who felt they would seek and respond to feedback.

Table 20

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 17

Question 17: When I work as part of a team, I seek and respond to feedback.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	3	9	24	36
Percentage	0.0%	8.33%	25.00%	66.67%	100.00%

The data indicated that 33 participants, or 91.6%, often or almost always agreed that they would seek and respond to feedback. Three respondents, or 8.33%, felt they sometimes would seek and respond to feedback.

Table 21 includes information on the number of participants who felt they listened attentively.

Table 21

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 18

Question 18: When I work as part of a team, I listen attentively.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	1	5	30	36
Percentage	0.0%	2.78%	13.89%	83.33%	100.00%

The data indicated that 35 participants, or 97.2%, often or almost always agreed that they listened attentively. One respondent, or 2.78%, felt they sometimes listened attentively.

Table 22 includes information on the number of participants who felt like they clearly and accurately exchanged information.

Table 22

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 19

Question 19: When I work as part of a team, I clearly and accurately exchange information.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	2	6	28	36
Percentage	0.0%	5.56%	16.67%	77.78%	100.00%

The data indicated that 34 participants, or 94.4%, often or almost always agreed that they clearly and accurately exchanged information. Two respondents, or 5.56%, felt they sometimes clearly and accurately exchanged information.

Table 23 includes information on the number of participants who felt they paid attention to what others are saying.

Table 23

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Question 20

Question 20: When I work as part of a team, I pay attention to what others are saying.					
	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Total
Number of Respondents	0	1	4	31	36
Percentage	0.0%	2.78%	11.11%	86.11%	100.00%

The data indicated that 35 participants, or 97.2%, often or almost always agreed that they paid attention to what others are saying. One respondent, or 2.78%, felt they sometimes paid attention to what others are saying.

Table 24 includes information on the number of participants who attended the army/workforce or college after high school.

Table 24

Career Path after High School

Career	Percentage	Number
College	91.67%	33
Workforce	8.33%	3

The data indicated that 8.33% of the participants (three respondents) immediately went to the army or the workforce after high school, while the majority, 91.67% (33 respondents), went to college following high school.

Focus Group Data

After the focus group met, transcripts of the data were analyzed using thematic analysis: a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes and patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involves the identification of concepts as themes if the concept was expressed with extensiveness, frequency, or intensity (Lewis, Barrett, Sugai, & Horner, 2010).

After analyzing the results of the demographic and teamwork skills survey, 35 participants were eligible to participate in the focus group interviews. Participation in the focus groups were based on availability. The participants were emailed two dates, and the people available on those dates determined the participants of the focus group. The first focus group consisted of eight participants. The second focus group consisted of eight participants as well.

Table 25 indicates the focus group participants who joined the army/workforce versus attending college after high school by each focus group.

Table 25

Focus Group Participants Career Path after High School

First Focus Group Participants Career Path After College			Second Focus Group Participants Career Path After College		
Career	Percentage	Number	Career	Percentage	Number
Army/Workforce	0.0%	0	Army/Workforce	37.5%	3
Community College	25.00%	2	Community College	12.5%	1
4-Year University	75.0%	6	4-Year University	50.0%	4

In the first focus group, there were no participants who attended the army or the workforce after college. Of the eight participants, 25.0% or two participants attended community college and 75.0% or four participants attended a 4-year university. The numbers varied in the second focus group. Of the eight participants, 37.5% or three participants joined the army or the workforce, 12.5% or one participant attended community college, and 50.0% or four participants attended a 4-year university.

Table 26 displays the years the focus group participants graduated.

Table 26

Focus Group Graduation Year

Year of Graduation	Number
2009	1
2010	1
2011	0
2012	1
2013	1
2014	4
2015	3
2016	3
2017	2

Of the 16 participants, there was one participant from 2009, 2010, 2012, and

2013. There were four participants from the class of 2014, three from the class of 2015, three from the class of 2016, and two from the class of 2017. Table 27 includes the identification and graduation year of the participants of the two focus groups.

Table 27

Focus Group Participants Identification and Graduation Year

First Focus Group Participants Identification and Graduation Year		Second Focus Group Participants Identification and Graduation Year	
Respondent Number	Year of Graduation	Respondent Number	Year of Graduation
R1	2014	F1	2012
R2	2017	F2	2014
R3	2016	F3	2015
R4	2015	F4	2013
R5	2016	F5	2016
R6	2014	F6	2014
R7	2017	F7	2010
R8	2009	F8	2015

Prior to the focus group, the researcher received input from the assistant superintendent of the studied school district on the creation of focus group questions. The questions were presented to two members of the studied school district who have obtained a Doctoral in Education: Director of Community Engagement/Drop-Out Prevention and the Assistant Superintendent of the studied school district. The third content validation was established by an associate professor for Gardner-Webb University. After reviewed feedback, the questions were revised and validated as the official questions to be asked during the focus group. Using the previously defined qualitative data analysis process, the focus group questions focused on interpretation as they yielded three distinct themes: leadership, interpersonal relations, and teamwork.

Research Question: How does the experience of cheerleading contribute to college and career readiness?

Focus Question 1: What leadership skills did you gain from your participation in cheerleading? Participants from both focus groups gave multiple skills they learned from their participation in cheerleading. A frequency table is displayed in Table 28 and includes opinions on the leadership skills gained through their participation in cheerleading.

Table 28

Leadership Skills from Participation in Cheerleading

Skills	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	Percent of Total
Delegation	4	4	22.22%
Communication	4	8	22.22%
Decision Making	3	11	16.67%
Compromise	2	13	11.12%
Patience	2	15	11.12%
Conflict Management	1	16	5.55%
Self-Discipline	1	17	5.55%
Trust	1	18	5.55%

The themes for Focus Question 1 focused on delegation and communication skills. In regard to delegation, F3-2015 stated,

As a captain, I learned how to delegate teamwork to others and get everybody focused on one goal instead of everybody trying to do their own thing sometimes. I learned that delegating tasks helped them work on individual goals, but focused towards the collective goal or task we were trying to accomplish.

F4-2015 followed up on the above statement and stated,

I may not have been captain, but at the same time, I learned to follow the tasks that were handed to me. For example, if there's a big project that a leader has to

do, we learned our roles and we learned what we each had to do in order to fulfill that big main goal that we had. I feel like cheerleading definitely helped with delegation and following tasks.

F5-2016 explained how self-discipline impacted her ability to take delegation. She stated,

I learned discipline and how to take direction. I learned I didn't want to be a follower. I wanted to lead as well as become a better team player. I learned to listen to others and follow the rules even if it was something I didn't want to do. I babysit and I also teach them how to follow directions. The leadership skills I gained from cheerleading help me a lot with babysitting.

F2-2014 explained how her former job as an office manager impacted delegation of skills:

I've been an office manager and leadership skills helped me deal with the different people at my job. High school cheerleading helped me realize that everyone has different personalities, but you have to find a way to deal with everyone. As far as leadership roles, they helped me learn how to manage an office.

In delegating tasks, the respondents mentioned underlying themes such as patience in learning how to communicate and deal with different types of people.

R2-2017 stated,

When you're leading people, you have to be patient with them, and you have to make sure each one understand the task at hand and what goal you want to come out with. You just have to be mindful of everybody that you're working with, while also making sure that they're following the task.

Another prominent theme from the first focus group question was communication. This theme was interwoven with delegation and decision-making. R7-2017 stated, “You have to learn how to communicate very well with people, and you have to learn to communicate well with people. You have to learn how to be decisive and make decisions on your feet.” Decision-making was also given as an outcome for effective communication. R7-2017 continued, “I think that's something that cheerleading taught us how to do, how to make decisions, how to make changes, how to regroup when things didn't go right, and then move on, which is important when it comes to leading.”

Decision-making was critical in leading others to complete a task. The participants mentioned that in order to make decisions, they relied on their teammates and compromise. R2-2017 stated,

Compromise is important when you're leading in any group, especially whenever we were in a situation where people had a difference of opinion. As cheerleaders, we were all leaders individually, but then you have leaders amongst those leaders. When you're in a group of leaders, everyone has a difference of opinion.

Learning how to compromise with each other to, in order to reach the overarching goal of the team.

Delegation, communication, and decision-making were not the only themes found throughout the focus group setting. Presentation was another theme that was listed in regard to leadership. R1-2014 stated,

Cheerleading taught us to be presentable. A leader stands out. People know when we're in the room or something. Being presentable makes you stand out. People automatically would go to you first as opposed to somebody else, because

they can tell, by your presence, that you're a leader in the room.

F8-2015 stated,

With leadership, you're representing a cause or an organization or a group of people. As we were cheerleaders, we represented the school. We had a different standard. We had to rise to that occasion every time we were on the field, or in class, or wherever we may have gone.

Another theme visible from leadership skills gained through cheerleading was trust. F1-2012 stated,

Learning how to trust others that I didn't know was a leadership skill I gained from cheerleading. Being a flyer, you had to trust people below you. I remember when I didn't land the correct way, and the back spot didn't catch me. I could have gotten mad, but I knew it was an accident. Being able to trust others, and doing it over again enhanced my leadership skills because I encouraged the back spot to keep trying, even though I knew she didn't catch me the first time. I learned through my job as Pre-K director to trust my teachers to follow through tasks even when they mess up. If they don't get it right the first time, I have to trust that they will keep trying until they succeed.

Overall, there was a consensus that the leadership skills they gained in cheerleading helped prepare them for college or career after high school.

Focus Question 2: What interpersonal skills did you gain from your participation in cheerleading? Participants from both focus groups gave multiple skills they learned from their participation in cheerleading. A frequency table is displayed in Table 29 and includes opinions on the interpersonal skills gained through their

participation in cheerleading.

Table 29

Interpersonal Skills from Participation in Cheerleading

Skills	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	Percent of Total
Outspoken	5	5	26.32%
Self-Confidence	4	9	21.05%
Respect	3	12	15.79%
Listening	3	15	15.79%
Collaboration	2	17	10.53%
Presentation	1	18	5.26%
Public Speaking	1	19	5.26%

The most prominent themes for Focus Question 2 focused on assertiveness (outspoken) and self-confidence skills. In regard to being outspoken, R5-2016 stated,

In order for us to communicate with each other, we would have to share ideas and express things to each other. Of course, that made us more outspoken about certain things and not scared to share out. We had to learn how to communicate those outspoken thoughts in respectful way because you have to be careful with how you communicate certain tasks or things so that others won't take it the wrong way. With that being said cheerleading taught me to think before you speak.

R4-2015 added, "Communicating more and speaking out helped us to become more comfortable with people and build relationships."

The respondents discussed that cheerleading tryouts helped prepare them for interviews for jobs after high school. R1-2015 stated,

Tryouts prepared me for a lot. It was a really scary experience and I used to be scared to speak out. I was super nervous. Now, when I go to job interviews, or tryout for other things, it's not as bad as I think it is. Learning the proper

communications skills for interviews like eye contact and speaking clearly benefited and prepared me for these experiences.

A theme that aligns with being outspoken is self-confidence. Many respondents believed that cheerleading increased their self-esteem and helped them acquire self-confidence. R6-2015 stated,

I think it makes you more confident as a person. When you put effort into building something, and you have to present it in front of hundreds of people, you become very confident. Well, you have to be confident for it to look good. When you're talking about your communication skills, I think it made me more of a confident person when I speak. No matter what it is I'm saying, if it makes sense or it doesn't, I'm going to speak with confidence. I think cheerleading taught me that.

R8-2009 stated,

You have to have a lot of confidence when you go in there and try out, because all eyes are on you. Tryouts definitely improved my communication skills because when you go in there, you have to have a lot of confidence.

Another respondent mentioned the impact of tryouts on their communication skills. R2-2017 stated,

It's about standing in front of a group of people, and then allowing them to judge you. The communication skills learned in tryouts helped prepare me for the real world; that's what life is all about. You have to go in front of employers.

Anything you want, you're going to have to step in front of someone and be okay with yourself and whatever outcomes comes, as long as you put forth your best

effort. That's what those tryouts are for. Better communication skills get you a better job. Whenever I'm working or something, I always make sure I'm speaking to people appropriately. You don't want your manager like, she's disrespectful. It's like the tryout recommendation forms that teachers had to fill out for us at tryouts. If teachers reported that we had a bad attitude they would give us a low recommendation. Managers do the same thing. They call around to your past references to see how well you communicate and are able to do your job.

The participants also mentioned that the tryout experience gave them confidence to interview in front of potential employers. The participants also mentioned that it helps them to adapt to a new environment which could include college or the workforce. F7-2010 stated,

It's about standing in front of a group of people, and then allowing them to judge you. That prepares you a lot in life, because when you set that into the real world, that's what life is about. You have to go in front of employers. Anything you want, you're going to have to step in front of someone and be okay with yourself and whatever outcomes comes, as long as you put forth your best effort. I realize now that the interview questions were purposeful during tryouts.

The respondents mentioned that they had to have confidence if they messed up during tryouts, and they utilize that same skill of confidence when trying or adapting to something new. One respondent reflected on their college experience and how the communication skills she gained in high school helped her adapt to college. R6-2014 stated,

Being in college, it does open you up more. Being in classes and stuff, they do

grade you off of your participation in that class, depending on which classes you're in. With you participating more, that does open you up more. Also, with you being active on campus as well, that helps you open up. Really, overall, in general, college just really opens you up, because you are in a new environment. In order for you to adapt to that new environment, you have to get out, socialize, and do different things.

The above respondent felt as if she was more open to try new things. Two respondents felt they were more withdrawn in high school in regard to speaking out. Those two respondents felt as if they learned good communication skills but they were scared to speak out in front of others while they were in high school. The respondents felt like they spoke up more once they went to college. R3-2016 stated,

I wish I were more open. I learned good communication skills however I was scared to speak out on opinions when things were being brought forth and I didn't really voice my opinion on those matters, I just felt like I should have and I could have. I think it was because of fear of judgment, what others thought, but now I'm just like, who cares? I'm going to voice it regardless. I wish I would have displayed that confidence in high school and not tried to be a people pleaser.

The theme of respect was another reoccurring theme throughout both focus groups. Participants viewed respectful communication as an important skill they learned through cheerleading. F2-2014 stated,

I learned how to think before I speak. Cheerleading and high school really taught me that. As a captain, I knew that I could not always yell to make people do what I wanted them to do. I had to approach people in a different manner.

The participants discussed that while communicating with others, they needed to have a positive attitude and respect people who had different opinions or ideas. One respondent discussed how she had a bad attitude in middle school and how cheerleading helped her to develop better communication skills. F1-2014 stated,

I would say I gained communication skills. In middle school, I had a bad attitude and didn't know how to communicate with others, or didn't know how to respond to others, because I always took offense. When I joined the cheerleading team I learned that I had to be able to work with 10 other women, and we had to communicate and deal with certain situations. I was a teacher at my past job, and I came in contact with parents every day, who had questions about their child's development and if they were on the right track or if they were delayed.

Communicating with the cheerleaders helped me learn how to talk and deal with parents.

Respect was a skill cheerleaders felt they learned in regard to communication. Respectful communication not only helped them while they were participants on the cheerleading team but for their careers as well. Participants discussed situations where respectful communication was needed in their careers or jobs. F6-2014 stated,

Cheerleading taught me how to talk to other people even when they are not being friendly to me. As a waitress and a bartender, sometimes, people come in and just don't want to deal with you, just because they had a rough day. And I've learned to keep some things to myself and learn how to talk to people, even though they're not being friendly to me, I can try to put on a brave face and be nice to them until they leave.

Participants discussed consequences that were given for not respecting themselves or teammates. One of the themes mentioned was that they wish they would have listened more to the coach and handled communication with teammates differently. F2-2014 discussed one of these experiences and stated,

Yes, I remember losing my cool and fighting one of my teammates. I felt like being kicked off the team was a wakeup call for me, as far as, "I need to learn how to communicate, just as well as, I need to learn how to listen when something is wrong.

Listening was another interpersonal skill the participants gained through cheerleading. F3-2015 stated,

I remember cheering with my younger sister and learning how to actually listen to her and not boss her around as much. And that kind of goes for my internship. There's somebody in the office that I don't really like that much, but I know that I have to ... Because they're my age and all that, I know that I have to work with them and communicate with them, even though I may think that I have the better opinions, sometimes. So I've definitely learned to communicate thoughts and stuff, instead of thinking that I'm always right.

Presentation was another interpersonal skill gained from cheerleading. R6-2014 stated,

Cheerleading taught us, especially with you, how to present ourselves. That's something people learn individually, in their homes, but not everyone gets that. I'm talking literally how we dress and how we carried ourselves as young adults and young women. Make sure you look neat. You look professional. You look

like you are somebody. That whole side of it, to me, that's a soft skill that I carry over.

Overall, there was a consensus that interpersonal skills they gained in cheerleading helped prepare them for college or career after high school.

Focus Question 3: What teamwork skills did you gain from your participation in cheerleading? Participants from both focus groups gave multiple skills they learned from their participation in cheerleading. A frequency table is displayed in Table 30 and includes opinions on the teamwork skills gained through their participation in cheerleading.

Table 30

Teamwork Skills from Participation in Cheerleading

Skills	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	Percent of Total
Collaboration	5	5	11.36%
Leadership	5	10	11.36%
Communication	4	14	9.09%
Time Management	4	18	9.09%
Listening	3	21	6.81%
Trust	2	23	4.55%
Compromise	2	25	4.55%
Respect	1	26	2.27%
Self-Confidence	1	27	2.27%
Public Speaking	1	28	2.27%
Delegation	1	29	2.27%
Decision Making	1	30	2.27%

The prominent themes for Focus Question 3 focused on collaboration. In regard to forming relationships, R5-2016 stated,

I go to an all-girls school in Atlanta. Cheerleading really did teach me how to handle certain situations. For instance, whenever I wanted to fight or whenever I had a disagreement with somebody. I learned how to handle that effectively when

I got to college as well. Forming a bond really did carry on into me being in college, especially with us, in college ... One of our biggest things at Spelman is sisterhood. I was able to adapt to this because of the relationship and bond I had with cheerleading.

The theme of collaboration is often paired with communication. A few of the participants mentioned that building relationships and communication were teamwork skills they learned. R6-2014 stated,

Cheerleading does make you want to have a sisterhood. I do know a lot of women who don't know how to communicate or be friends with other women, in a space where you can agree to disagree but always uplift. Cheerleading gave us that. I don't have any problems getting along with any woman. It doesn't matter.

F2-2014 stated,

I think that cheerleading taught me to communicate with people and form relationships. Sometimes you don't get jobs because you don't know people or have good references. I form relationships with my professors. My PR teacher, she sends me job applications all the time and always lets me know I can use her as a reference. You've got to communicate.

Leadership and delegation were also themes when the participants discussed teamwork skills gained through cheerleading. Respondents discussed how the teamwork skills gained impacted them in college and in the group work in which they were required to participate. F3-2015 stated,

I've had multiple classes where I've had team projects and presentations and I have been the leader and I think it's because of cheerleading because I kind of got

my leadership role started there. And then I think it's kind of my innate behavior to do it. In my college classes, I tend to take control and delegate things out to the group, that way we can get everything done. But going back to the captain thing, we had to listen to what everybody else's opinions were, and then we made decisions. So when it comes to teamwork, during presentations and stuff like that, I would always listen to everybody, and then we would all come up with a concept or decide what we want to do together, even though I was the leader.

R1-2014 mentioned that sometimes people look to you as a leader even when you are not trying to be one. One respondent stated,

I was one of the oldest in my communications class I took last semester. Most of the people were all freshmen. They definitely looked up to me as a leader, so I kind of took that role, when it came to our team and our presentations. I felt I was in the same boat they were in, but I had self-confidence to step up. They didn't know I was lost too!

One respondent stated that she felt the teamwork skills of decision-making and collaboration in cheerleading helped prepare them for internships. The respondent makes the connection through the use of stunts and formations. R2-2017 stated,

So it all ties back to working together as a team in high school, and having to come up with solutions to stunts, or formations, stuff like deciding what we want to do, that kind of helped me build the mindset of how to work through things, like whenever you're coming up with a presentation or stuff like that.

One respondent followed up and said that communication and delegation were some of the teamwork skills she learned. She reflected upon a cheerleading experience

and connected it with their experience at a law firm. F4-2013 stated,

In my stunt group, I always had the same base; she became one of my best friends due to cheerleading because I didn't really know her that well before. We helped each other and would tell each other what we needed to do to make the stunt go up. We all had our roles. For example, I might need to flip my arms a little bit higher, or maybe I needed to lean a certain way. And it really helped, especially, I work at this law firm, and we each have our own role in the cases that we work with, and it's not just one attorney or one assistant handling a case, everyone has their own part, everyone has to do a certain part of that case in order to get our client the best outcome. And it really helps, because I might not be pulling my weight all the way, or maybe I'm not doing right, and then we tell each other what we need to do in order to help the other person fulfill their part of the case that they need to do. You have to learn how to adjust.

Time management was something the respondents mentioned they could still improve on. The respondents mentioned that they learned time management through cheerleading and that they felt they should have learned how to better manage their time. One respondent stated that she became overwhelmed in college and learned she could not wait until the last minute to do things. R7-2017 stated,

While we were cheerleading, we often waited last minute to do the banners for the games on Friday nights. In college, we have certain papers that we just can't complete last minute. We have to actually use our planners and write out everything so that we don't become overwhelmed. You cannot wait until last minute. It's important to properly prepare to get a good grade.

The respondents began to discuss that many of their college classes had specific classes on public speaking, communication, and time management. The respondents mentioned that time management was a big skill they learned through teamwork. They mentioned that while they were cheerleading, they had to balance cheerleading, school, work, and maybe clubs; however, when they went to college their schedule became even more intensive and they had to find a way to make time for everything. Some also mentioned that they struggled with procrastination. One respondent stated that they needed to balance college life as well as finding time for themselves. They mentioned that introductory college courses helped them learn how to manage their time. R6-2014 stated,

We had a college class at UNCG that was called foundations for learning. It was a freshman course that the majority of the university students take. It teaches you all about that, as well as providing you with all of the resources that you would need through your four years. Some of those were time management and learning how to prioritize your time.

R5-2016 followed up and stated,

When you first get to Spelman, your freshman year, you have something called First Year Experience. With that, you just met up with different professors and stuff, and they taught you about certain things that you need to prepare for, setting up your schedules and all of that. Also, you were required to meet with your mentor and all of that. And yes, it definitely taught us time management.

The respondent mentioned that Spelman had a sophomore course called the Second Year Experience. She explained that it was broken into two seminars. One was

public speaking, and the other one was a leadership seminar. This participant felt as if teamwork skills helped her gain leadership skills due to her exposure to cheerleading.

She stated,

The seminar taught us about the different types of leadership you have, and the different leadership skills. We had to work in a group based off of our leadership styles. I knew what kind of leader I was or wanted to be because of my experience with cheerleading. Had I not had cheered, I wouldn't have known what type of leader I would be.

One respondent mentioned that she would have gained better teamwork skills by listening more. F6-2014 stated,

I would have learned to keep my mouth closed and actually listen and take advice from the older cheerleaders, or the ones that had already been doing it, or even take advice from my coach. Although it seems I didn't listen much during cheerleading, listening has helped me work with my coworkers.

Respect was another theme discussed in the focus groups. R6-2014 stated,

You have to learn how to work closely with people who aren't like you, or come from different backgrounds or have different experiences. Not only do you have to learn to work closely with them, but you have to be able to respect them.

Teamwork is all about respect. Cheerleading taught me that.

R4-2015 mentioned that a teamwork skill they gained was public speaking. As she reflected, she wished she would have had more public speaking opportunities. She used an example in which she explained how each team member had to call out a cheer. She was shy and dreaded calling out cheers in high school. She stated,

After I made the squad, I didn't think we would have too many more public speaking opportunities, besides the camps. I knew we would dance in front of the crowd but I didn't know I would have to call out cheers. We had to speak out in public a lot. Summer youth camps, fundraising, and even community service events. I learned how to speak out more. I didn't appreciate or view it as public speaking then. I wish we would have had more opportunities.

R8-2009 followed up with confidence being a teamwork skill that she gained.

She stated,

Working with my team members helped me be more confident. I watched how our captain was not afraid to correct us or redirect us. I'm a sales leader at my job now because I stand out to them, as opposed to other employees who just come to work and go through the motions. I think cheerleading definitely gives everybody confidence, because it takes a lot for a person to perform in front of hundreds of people.

The participants gained many teamwork skills; however, leadership and communication seemed to be the prominent themes as they were the foundation of the teamwork skills gained through cheerleading.

Summary

Overall, cheerleading had an impact on career and college readiness after high school. After analyzing all respondent answers, three overall themes emerged and were visible throughout the study. The data revealed that participants felt they gained leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork skills through their participation in cheerleading. Ultimately, the participants credited cheerleading with preparing them for college and the

workforce.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of cheerleading on the qualities needed for college and career preparation. This chapter includes the summary and analysis of findings, conclusions, limitations of this study, recommendations for further studies, and recommendations for practice associated with the impact of cheerleading on the qualities needed for college and career preparation.

Overview

High schools were being held accountable for not properly preparing students for college or the workforce. The researcher did not identify what academic skills cheerleading students lacked but rather if their extracurricular activity of cheerleading provided soft skills to help prepare them for their postsecondary career. Former cheerleaders from one rural high school in North Carolina participated in this qualitative study. This qualitative study utilized a descriptive survey that included O'Neil et al.'s (1997) Teamwork Questionnaire followed by two focus groups. The participants took a demographic teamwork skills survey first and then were invited to participate in a focus group with an open-ended question to address the research question. The research question was, "How does the experience of cheerleading contribute to college and career readiness?"

Overall, the researcher concluded through the data analysis that cheerleading had an impact on career and college readiness after high school. The researcher identified leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork skills as measures to see which skills they felt they obtained through cheerleading to prepare them for their future. The researcher found that survey findings from this research supported previous literature that skills

enhanced through participation in cheerleading are applicable for postsecondary experiences such as college and the workplace.

Conclusions

O'Neil et al.'s (1997) survey in this study measured teamwork skills and focused on the skills a person should have to be effective in a team. The researcher focused on three components within O'Neil et al.'s (1997) survey: leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork skills.

Leadership Skills

Brungardt (2009) stated in her research that leadership involves a relational process that requires working with others to accomplish a goal or to promote positive change. According to the results of the Teamwork Skills Questionnaire survey, the former participants of the cheerleading team felt they knew the relational process of leadership in which Brungardt referred to in her research. The participants in this study felt they gained leadership skills, with over 80% responding often or almost always in six of the seven leadership questions. The six questions they scored 80% or higher were felt they exercised leadership, taught team members, knew the process of making a decision, mobilized the group towards high performance, demonstrated leadership to ensure team results, and tried to bring out the best in others. The participants scored feeling as if they led the team effectively the lowest in the entire study, with 77.7% answering always or almost often. Kouzes and Posner (2017) explained in their research that leadership concentrates on the soft skills that have positive outcomes from the leadership process. In the focus groups, the participants expanded upon the leadership soft skills from the questionnaire survey with examples of how they gained leadership skills.

Delegation, communication, decision-making, and compromise were the main skills participants expressed they needed for college and the workforce in the two focus groups. The delegation of tasks was a dominant skill the former cheerleaders felt they gained. Four former cheerleading captains participated in the study. One of the former captains, F3-2015, stated that learning how to delegate teamwork and having everyone focused on the same task helped her achieve individual goals while working towards the collective goal. F4-2015 explained that although she was not a captain, she was prepared to follow tasks the leader had given. She felt that cheerleading helped with delegation, following tasks, and fulfilling cheerleading goals.

Another former captain, R6-2014, mentioned she tried to be friends with everyone so they would like her. She thought that it was equivalent to respect but then realized she had to do what was best for the team and draw a line between friendship and following instructions. F5-2016 explained that you have to have self-discipline when learning how to take direction and leadership. This relates to Kouzes and Posner's (2017) research in which they stated that through delegating tasks, leaders recognize the abilities and values of those they are leading.

In delegating tasks, the respondents mentioned underlying themes such as patience in learning how to communicate and deal with different types of people. Kouzes and Posner (2017) described how the delegation of tasks was often based on different personality types. F2-2014 described this in her job as an office manager where she had to learn how to deal with different personalities. She stated that she delegated tasks based on the personality types. R2-2017 stated, "You have to make sure each one understands the task at hand and what goal you want to come out with." This also supports Watson's

(2013) research which found that one needs to learn how to adapt and deal with a variety of personality types.

Kouzes and Posner (2017) provided five characteristics of a strong leader. They mentioned that a leader should have a shared vision that will build strong, trustful relationships. In the theme of leadership, the researcher found that decision-making was based on compromise and trust. R7-2017 described how being decisive was a skill she learned through leadership. She explained how she had to make decisions and change or regroup when things did not go as planned. This relates to Kouzes and Posner's (2017) research because they explained that in order to become an exemplary leader, one has to freely and honestly choose the principles and goals to guide one's actions and decisions.

Studies indicate that the leadership roles of students positively influence and add to the overall and unique experiences students have during their college years. In addition, they contribute to the lives students lead after they have completed their higher education (May, 2009). The focus group participants felt as if the leadership experiences they had through cheerleading prepared them for leadership experiences through college and the workforce. One participant was the vice president of a club, one was a lead teacher in a prekindergarten classroom, and another was the student government president at their college. The participants related their leadership success to their participation in cheerleading. Reed's (2001) research suggests that leadership experiences from extracurricular activities influence a student's overall academic and college experience. Leadership does not just come from an appointed role; the participants attribute their success to their ability to lead through communication and while also following directions.

Communication Skills

According to the results of O'Neil's Teamwork Skills Questionnaire survey, in addition to leadership skills, the former participants of the cheerleading team felt they gained interpersonal skills. The participants ranked this section the highest, with at least 94% answering often or almost always on all six questions related to interpersonal skills in the survey. In three of those questions, the participants scored 100% indicating that they respected the thoughts and opinions of others on a team, treated others with courtesy, and accepted individual differences of all team members. The three questions they scored 94%-99% on were when they interacted cooperatively, conducted themselves with courtesy, and treated all team members as equals. The demographic data in this survey relate to Hargie and Dickson's (2004) research, which supports engagement in interpersonal interactions when seeking the achievement of a particular goal or seeking to engage in purposeful behaviors. Watson (2013) stated that interpersonal job skills are skills used while interacting with others at work and include communication skills.

In the focus groups, participants regarded communication as a top interpersonal skill they gained from cheerleading. Maellaro (2008) used interpersonal skills and communication skills interchangeably in his study. In that study, when discussing interpersonal skills, the participants explained the specific communication skills they gained through cheerleading. The specific skills the participants mentioned included listening and being outspoken, self-confident, and respectful. Communication is the most influential interpersonal skill that was found in this study, as well as Watson's (2013) and Peterson's (1998) studies.

Watson (2013) included a chart listing basic soft skills that could be applied to

any particular discipline. A few interpersonal skills Watson mentioned were speaking, listening, and interviewing which were skills found in this study. R1-2014 expressed that the tryout experience gave her the confidence to interview for potential employers. It is difficult to obtain careers without proper presentation and interview skills. F3-2015 described the intense process of applying for internships in college. She had interviewed for over 15 internships and was only offered one. She credited her confidence and willingness to speak out in cheerleading to her perseverance during the interview process. Because of cheerleading, she kept trying even when she was rejected.

Communication skills are not just categorized as speaking skills. Peterson's (1998) study stated that communication is made more difficult by the concept of perception. Perception can be gauged through body language, facial expressions, or gestures. R2-2017 mentioned that facial expressions and side comments can be taken the wrong way, leading to disputes among teammates. Negative perceptions will hinder a team from accomplishing a task.

Williams's (2015) study discussed how employers rank communication as the highest ranked soft skill. R2-2016 stated,

Whenever I'm working or something, I always make sure I'm speaking to people appropriately. You don't want to ruin your reputation and mess up your chances of getting another job. You don't want your manager to say, "she's disrespectful."

Your attitude can ruin your ability to gain another job.

Employers often contact applicants' last employers in order to gain information on their communication skills. The participants mentioned that they did not see the importance of having teachers write them recommendation forms for tryouts, but now

they understand and are comfortable asking people for a reference. Participants mentioned that it is important to establish relationships with their professors so they might someday be references for jobs. R1-2014 stated,

I think that cheerleading just taught me to communicate with people and form relationships. When you get jobs, if you don't know people sometimes that can hurt you. I form relationships with my professors. My PR teacher sends me job applications all the time. You've got to communicate and build those relationships.

To form better relationships, communication skills that employees desire must be taught. Williams's (2015) study cited the need for educational institutions to incorporate and emphasize soft skills training and development in their curriculum. These skills were taught in cheerleading; however, many participants in both focus groups mentioned that their colleges have classes specifically geared at improving soft skills.

R5-2016 attends Spelman College, and she explained how she had mandatory classes that help with communication skills and other essential soft skills such as time management. F3-2015 mentioned that she wished she would not have procrastinated in high school and that the high school schedule was drastically different from college.

Respondent 8-2009 stated,

In high school, you still had to manage your time with cheerleading and homework and stuff, but college was more than just having a game and then coming home and doing a one page paper, or something like that. College is, you don't have somebody to tell you, do this, do that. You don't have a set time. It's just you. It ties into self-discipline, making yourself do things. It was just kind of

hard.

Overall, time management was an unexpected skill that many participants shared they gained through cheerleading, but they did not value it until they went to college.

Teamwork Skills

Communication seemed to also align with teamwork skills. According to the results of the Teamwork Skills Questionnaire survey, the former participants felt they gained teamwork skills through their participation in cheerleading. Over 90% responded often or almost always on six of the seven questions that dealt with teamwork skills. The six questions they scored 90% or higher on included asking for instructions to be clarified for everyone who did not understand, communicating in a manner that would ensure mutual understanding, seeking and responding to feedback, listening attentively, accurately exchanging information, and paying attention to what others were saying. The participants scored feeling like instructions were understood prior to starting a task the lowest with 86.1% answering often or almost always. Overall, the participants of the Teamwork Skills Questionnaire survey agreed with O'Neil et al.'s (1997) research that they coordinated activities and communicated with team members to prepare for the task.

Teamwork skills are the last theme the respondents discussed in the focus group. Brungardt's (2009) research stated that an individual's performance within a team is equally as important as the overall team performance. Participants in the focus group listed individual skills that are necessary to be effective within the team. Collaboration, leadership, communication, and time management were skills the participants gained through teamwork. Forming a bond seemed to resonate the most between both focus groups. Learning how to collaborate in a team helped the participants collaborate with

others when they went to college and the workforce. Participants gave examples of how they had to work together in order to achieve the goal.

Shull's (2002) study focused on using the Collaborative Teams Skills Training (CTS) to teach individuals in a team setting how to talk and listen more productively in order to increase the team's effectiveness in formulating problems, working through conflicts, and problem-solving (Miller & Miller, 1994). The participants mentioned that stunting was one of the hardest things to do on the team. They had to work through the conflicts and figure out ways to make the stunt go up. F4-2013 stated,

When I was in a stunt with my teammate, we could discuss and work out what we needed to do to make the stunt go up. It really helped whenever we would tell each other what we needed to do, like, I might need to flip my arms a little bit higher, or maybe I needed to lean a certain way. We had our own little group. By our senior year, we could make adjustments by not even talking to each other because we knew how the other one worked. We were consistent.

Respectful communication was another teamwork skill the participants stressed in the focus group. Many felt they were more responsive to changes and criticism when they were not stated with condescending attitudes. The research of Brown and Theobald (1998) and Wyble (2009) expressed that learning cooperation and teamwork has been described as part of the hidden curriculum of extracurricular activities.

Overall, leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork skills help make one more employable. Employers need workers with soft skills that will be of value to their businesses. These skills can be enhanced through extracurricular activities. It is important for schools to develop methods to enhance these attributes in their students.

Cassel's (2000) research has suggested that extracurricular activities provide students the opportunities to develop soft skills and social skills needed to work with others. Students who participate in school-based extracurricular activities have skills that better prepare them for both future educational and professional endeavors. Cheerleading had an impact on the participants in this study. The results of this study lead to the conclusion that the cheerleaders in this study gained leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork skills from their participation in cheerleading. R6-2014 stated,

It taught me how to be dedicated to something and to see it through. It's like the pyramid. It's hard work to get to the top. It just teaches you (cheerleading) ... In life, you're going to have ups, and you're going to have downs. There will be good days. There will be bad days. It's about how you respond to situations. That's what makes a difference between you and everyone else. Cheerleading taught me that. Cheerleading is definitely a big part of my character and who I am. Again, with the confidence building, self-esteem building, learning how to bond with other women, learning how to communicate and collaborate helps me in my everyday tasks. Cheerleading gave me that, and I still use all of that every day and think about cheerleading.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations in this study include the following:

- The population of this study is limited to one county in North Carolina.
- The focus of this study included only one of the two high schools within the school district.
- The study only focused on high school cheerleaders who have graduated in

the past 9 years.

- Participation is also a limitation due to the ability to find and contact former cheerleaders.
- Participants were not representative of the diversity on each cheerleading team. The focus group had only one White participant due to availability times of the focus groups.
- The survey research method used in this study was based on self-report of respondents. Results depended on one's ability to honestly self-reflect and report which may or may not produce accurate data. The researcher must assume that the information provided by former cheerleaders is honest and accurate data. People who self-report their own behaviors may report what reflects positively on their personal knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study only addressed one extracurricular activity, cheerleading. There are several recommendations that can be drawn from this study to enhance future research in the field. The following recommendations can be made:

- Research other cheerleading teams from other districts in North Carolina to measure soft skills. Adding more participants to the analysis should help gain a wider view of soft skills needed to become college and career ready.
- Research extracurricular activities in addition to cheerleading to measure their impact on soft skills.
- Examine the impact of extracurricular activities generationally. The

respondents in this study have graduated high school in the past 9 years. This study can be done again with participants from different generations and then the similarities and differences can be compared.

- Examine what soft skills high school coaches teach their players to prepare them for college or the workforce.
- Examine what soft skills businesses are looking for in their candidates to add value to their businesses.
- Examine the perception of local employers regarding soft skills they see as lacking among current graduates.
- Examine what soft skills colleges are looking for in prospective students. They can compare the skills they think high school graduates should already have as well as the skills they feel prospective students lack.
- Compare the perceptions regarding soft skill development between students who did not participate in an extracurricular activity with students who did participate in extracurricular activities.
- Examine what soft skills cheerleaders did not gain from their participation in cheerleading. This study only addressed the skills they thought they gained from cheerleading, not the skills they may not have enhanced.

Recommendations for Practice

There are several recommendations for practice that can be drawn from this study.

The following recommendations can be made:

- **Incorporate high school classes that teach the soft skills needed for college and career readiness.** High schools need to have specific classes that teach

soft skills students need to be prepared for college. As seen in this study, many colleges have mandatory classes to provide the skills to students because they are not equipped with the soft skills they need to adapt. Participants in this study mentioned how they were taught different skills based on the class they were in. For example, freshmen would be required to take a class that dealt with the particular soft skills they needed to be successful, like time management. The following classes (sophomore, junior, and senior) would follow suit with specific soft skills. Twenty-one essential workplace readiness skills are taught in all public career and technical education courses in the State of Virginia. The skills came from research from the University of Virginia (Hayes, 2014). These 21 essential soft skills could be broken up and taught as a course between the 4 years of high school. High schools need to better prepare students with soft skills before they attend college or enter into the workforce. Schools should find ways to include these classes into the curriculum and make it mandatory.

- **Promote soft skills to include leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork skills within existing high school classrooms.** High schools need to focus on how they are incorporating soft skills such as leadership, interpersonal, and teamwork skills in their classes. Most of these skills are seen through team projects and assignments. Reed (2001) discussed teaching leadership in the classroom. Through these assignments, students can become more familiar with team building and leadership strategies. Plymouth High School in Wisconsin uses a 4-point soft skill rubric developed by teachers and local

businesses to assess student soft skills especially in the areas of collaboration, respect, and work habits. These skills are embedded into day-to-day activities and are not a separate curriculum (Hayes, 2014). These skills are not just needed for academics but also will help them when they go into the workforce or attend college.

- **Provide professional development to educators on how to teach soft skills.**

Teachers need professional development on incorporating soft skills in their classrooms. Teachers must first be trained on essential soft skills so they can incorporate them in their classroom. These skills should be developed by the district and implemented in each school. Principals and building leaders should encourage this professional development to ensure students are exposed to soft skills in each class. Lindemann-Litzsinger (2017) stated that teachers should be able to relate to the soft skills their students are learning to lay the foundation for what they will be exposed to in college or in the workforce. This professional development will impact teachers and in turn benefit all students, regardless of their participation in extracurricular activities.

- **Increase the opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities.** In the studied district, many students live in poverty and do not participate in extracurricular activities due to cost associated with these activities. High schools and school districts need to encourage participation of all students in extracurricular activities. Ideally, there would be no cost associated with extracurricular activities. Gaining sponsorship from

businesses and applying for grants could help alleviate some of those costs.

- **Encourage high school coaches and other high school leaders to establish mentor relationships and ask about their students' postsecondary plans.**

High school coaches, sponsors, and leaders have a responsibility to ease the transition between high school curriculum and postsecondary activities. Craft (2012) described how these leaders greatly impact students who choose to participate in extracurricular activities. These leaders are often role models and can powerfully influence, sometimes more than their parents. They need to make more of an effort to not just see the students for accomplishing a current task like winning a game but rather make more of an effort to communicate with their students about their future goals. As in the researcher's own coaching experience, the outcome of an athlete's life can be influenced beyond graduation due to establishing appropriate relationships between the coach and teammates as a family that extends beyond high school.

Overall Summary

The participants in this study came from a rural area with various socioeconomic backgrounds; however, the majority of the participants were living in poverty while they attended high school. Cheerleading had a positive impact on the participants in the study and provided many experiences to which they had not been previously exposed. Cheerleading for the participants in this study made an impact on their lives, especially in preparing them for career and college readiness. The goal of this study was to see how extracurricular activities with a focus on cheerleading helped participants gain soft skills

that prepared them for life.

Soft skills are the hidden curriculum and can be defined as the benefits gained through participation in extracurricular activities. Participation in extracurricular activities has proved to be a positive influence on student preparedness for college and the workforce. The participants in this study focused on the soft skills that helped them adapt to life after high school. Participants in this study mentioned delegation, communication, collaboration, and time management as important soft skills to balance their life. Moore (2016) stated,

While curriculum to teach soft skills is beginning to surface in the world of education and work, the best place for truly learning any skill is through experiential training. Moreover, real life settings, such as found in co-curricular activities, can be utilized to cultivate, practice, and refine soft skills. (p. 37)

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Appendix A

Initial Contact Letter

Date

Rikki Baldwin, Gardner-Webb University doctoral student, is conducting a study to address that there are other factors besides academics to measure if high school students are prepared for college or the workforce. As a former cheerleader and graduate of Anonymous High School, your insight is extremely important. You have been selected to participate in this study based on your experience as a former Anonymous High School Cheerleader. As such, you are representing your former teammates; thus, your responses are very important.

In an effort to better prepare Anonymous Cheerleader graduates, the findings from this study will potentially be used to enhance the role extracurricular activities among high school towards college and career preparation. The purpose of this postcard is to confirm your address and email address, to notify you of a questionnaire you will soon be receiving, and to ensure the questionnaire gets to you in a timely fashion.

If you have a more current address than the one in which this postcard was sent, please reply to Rikki Baldwin, coordinator of the study at rbaldwin1@gardner-webb.edu or by calling (704) 796-8837 to update your address. On behalf of Gardner-Webb University, thank you in advance for your participation in this much needed study. Working together we can continue to produce successful high school graduates, such as yourself.

Respectfully,

Rikki K. Baldwin
Gardner-Webb University Educational Leadership Doctoral Student
Gardner Webb School of Education

Appendix B

Initial Cover Letter and Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study

Impact of Cheerleading on Post-Secondary Career and College Readiness in a Rural Community

My name is Rikki Baldwin and I am a Gardner-Webb University Doctoral Student. I am conducting a study to address that there are other factors besides academics to measure if high school students are prepared for college or the workforce. Involvement in extracurricular activities leads to high school students being prepared for their future.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to enable school personnel to not only understand the sociocultural influences of cheerleading, but to identify other factors that prepare students for college and careers. As a former cheerleader and graduate of Anonymous High School, your participation is valuable in this study.

Procedure

A Teamwork Skills Questionnaire survey and a demographic survey are attached to see who will be eligible for participation in the study. After the surveys are received and analyzed, those who qualify for the study will be contacted to participate in a focus group. Everyone who qualifies for the study will be invited to participate in the focus group. After the surveys are received and analyzed, those who do not meet the criteria or not selected for the focus group will be contacted via email to thank them for their willingness to participate but they do not meet the criteria for the current study.

Time Required

The anticipated time for the survey will require about 15 minutes of your time. The anticipated time for the focus group will require about an hour of your time.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. Only summated, group data will ever be reported. No names will be linked to responses. Please respond to each question openly and honestly. While you are not obligated to participate in this study, your responses will help select participants for a focus group interview.

You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a *code number*. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a *locked file*. When the study is completed and the data has been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report. The recordings will be erased and destroyed once all the information has been transcribed. The transcripts with the participants' names will be kept until the research dissertation is complete. All content will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks in this study. Your name and personal information will not be used in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand how cheerleading helped prepare you for the future. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Participation and Withdrawal From the Study

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Thank you for your interest in this important study and analyzing soft skills that may be needed for college or the workforce. I look forward to receiving your responses!

If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals.

Rikki K. Baldwin
Educational Leadership Doctoral Student
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017

Dr. Stephen Laws
School of Education
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have

questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

Dr. Jeffrey S. Rogers
IRB Institutional Administrator
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me. I verify that I am at least 18 years of age

_____ I agree to participate in the confidential survey.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the confidential survey.

_____ I agree to participate in the focus group. I understand that this will be audio recorded for

accuracy. The audio recording will be transcribed and destroyed.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the focus group.

_____ Date: _____
Participant Printed Name

_____ Date: _____
Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix C

Permission to Use Instrument

Permission to Use Instrument: Harry Oneil

Rikki Baldwin

Wed 5/2, 4:38 PM

Harry Oneil <XXXXXX>

Sent Items

Thank you tremendously!!! I will send a copy of the abstract when I am done!

Sent from my iPhone

On May 2, 2018, at 4:15 PM, Harry Oneil <XXXXXX> wrote:

Sounds interesting

Yes u have my permission

When done I appreciate a copy of yr abstract

Sent from my iPhone

On May 2, 2018, at 7:05 AM, Rikki Baldwin <XXXXXX> wrote:

Good afternoon,

My name is Rikki Baldwin and I am currently working on my dissertation to finish the requirements for my doctorate in Education at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, North Carolina. My chair for my dissertation is Dr. Stephen Laws. As a former cheerleading coach and track coach, I am interested in how the experience of high school cheerleading contributes to college and career readiness. I would like to use your Teamwork Questionnaire as an instrument for my study. I plan to give the questionnaire to my former cheerleaders and then discuss some of the soft skills they believe they need now that they are out of high school. I hope to find that soft skills were developed through participation in team sports. I became familiar with your dissertation through looking at the research of Christie Brungardt in her study of College Graduates' Perceptions of Their use of Teamwork Skills: Soft Skill Development in Fort Hays State University Leadership Education. May I have your permission to use this Teamwork Questionnaire? I hope you will consider this request as I am excited to see how the participants will respond to this survey.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rikki K. Baldwin, Ed.S

Assistant Principal

Permission to use Instrument: Fallon Watson

Re: Dissertation Request

Watson, Fallon <XXXX>

Reply all|

Monday, May 21, 2018, 8:18 PM

Rikki Baldwin

Inbox

Hi Rikki,

Absolutely. So happy you've found my work helpful. Best of luck.

Fallon Watson

From: Rikki Baldwin <XXXXX>

Sent: Monday, May 21, 2018 4:35:34 PM

To: Watson, Fallon

Subject: Dissertation Request

My name is Rikki Baldwin and I am currently working on my dissertation to finish the requirements for my doctorate in Education at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, North Carolina. My chair for my dissertation is Dr. Stephen Laws. As a former cheerleading coach and track coach, I am interested in how the experience of high school cheerleading and soft skills contributes to college and career readiness. I would like to use your interview protocol as an instrument for my study. I plan to have a focus group with former cheerleaders and discuss soft skills they believe they needed now that they are out of high school. I hope to find that soft skills were developed through participation in team sports. I became familiar with your dissertation through your dissertation, Self- Perceptions of Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Leadership Skills among Recent Graduates: A Qualitative Study. May I have your permission to use some of your guiding questions from your interview protocol? I hope you will consider this request as I am excited to see how the participants will respond to these questions.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rikki K. Baldwin, Ed.S

Assistant Principal

Appendix D

Teamwork Skills Modified Questionnaire

Teamwork Skills Questionnaire Directions: This set of questions is to help us understand the way you think and feel about working with others. We know that different parts of your life, such as your job, recreational activities, or service to your community, may involve working with others and have different requirements, and that you may react differently in each kind of activity. Nonetheless, read each statement below to indicate how you generally think or feel. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement. Circle the most appropriate answer. Remember, give the answer that seems to describe how you generally think or feel.

	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
1. When I work as part of a team, I exercise leadership.	1	2	3	4
2. When I work as part of a team, I teach other team members.	1	2	3	4
3. When I work as part of a team, I know the process of making a decision.	1	2	3	4
4. When I work as part of a team, I lead appropriately, mobilizing the group for high performance.	1	2	3	4
5. When I work as part of a team, I lead the team effectively.	1	2	3	4
6. When I work as part of a team, I demonstrate leadership to ensure team results.	1	2	3	4
7. When I work as part of a team, I try to bring out the best in others.	1	2	3	4
8. When I work as part of a team, I interact cooperatively with other team members.	1	2	3	4
9. When I work as part of a team, I conduct myself with courtesy.	1	2	3	4
10. When I work as part of a team, I respect the thoughts and opinions of others in the team.	1	2	3	4
11. When I work as part of a team, I treat others with courtesy.	1	2	3	4
12. When I work as part of a team, I accept individual differences among members.	1	2	3	4

13. When I work as part of a team, I treat all my team members as equals.	1	2	3	4
14. When I work as part of a team, I ensure the instructions are understood by all the team members prior to starting a task.	1	2	3	4
15. When I work as part of a team, I ask for the instructions to be clarified when it appears not all the team members understand the task.	1	2	3	4
16. When I work as part of a team, I communicate in a manner to ensure mutual understanding.	1	2	3	4
17. When I work as part of a team, I seek and respond to feedback.	1	2	3	4
18. When I work as part of a team, I listen attentively.	1	2	3	4
19. When I work as part of a team, I clearly and accurately exchange information.	1	2	3	4
20. When I work as part of a team, I pay attention to what others are saying.	1	2	3	4

Demographic Information

(Please indicate by placing an X beside the most correct answer)

1. Indicate the year you graduated from Anonymous High School.

- ___ 2008
- ___ 2009
- ___ 2010
- ___ 2011
- ___ 2012
- ___ 2013
- ___ 2014
- ___ 2015
- ___ 2016
- ___ 2017

2. Ethnicity

- ☐ Asian American
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino (Spanish Origin)
- ☐ Multiracial or Biracial American

3. Please identify your age: _____

4. Please identify the years you cheered for Anonymous High School: _____

5. Did you attend college or go directly into the workforce after high school?

6. If you attended college, where did you attend college (2 year or 4 year)? Please include the year you went to college and graduation or expected graduation date. Please include your current job status even if you have completed college.

7. Did you go into the workforce immediately following graduation? If so, please indicate the jobs or careers you have obtained since graduation.

8. Are you currently employed? If so, please indicate how long you have been in your current position.

Appendix E

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Focus groups were conducted as semi-structured therefore some of these questions may be asked out of order in order to allow for the addition of specific follow up questions. However, all questions listed will be asked at some point during the interview. All conversations of the focus group will be recorded and transcribed.]

Introduction: Hello (insert name of Interviewee), I want to start by thanking you for your participation in this study. It should not take any longer than one hour. (Wait for response)

Great, thanks again. Before we get started, I want to remind you that focus group interview is being recorded for research purposes. Can I get you to go ahead and confirm that you agree to this? (Wait for response)

Great. I want to get started by telling you a little bit about this study. I am a Gardner-Webb University doctoral student, and I am conducting a study to address factors besides academics to measure if high school students are prepared for college or the workforce. Research suggests that involvement in extracurricular activities leads to high school students being prepared for their future. For this project, I am particularly interested in former Anonymous High School Cheerleaders and how school personnel can understand the sociocultural influences of cheerleading as well as identify other factors that prepare students for college and careers. Your insight is extremely important. For this project, I am particularly interested in the soft skills that you may or may not have gained from cheerleading. Soft skills refer to behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to work effectively in their environment to achieve their goals. When I say soft skills, I am referring to non-technical skills, like communication and leadership ability. The goal of my dissertation is to enable school personnel to not only understand the sociocultural influences of cheerleading, but to identify other factors that prepare students for college and careers (Bangser, 2008).

I want to move on by going over the survey you completed to make sure that I had all of the correct information.

Demographic Questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. What year did you graduate from Anonymous High School?
4. What years did you cheer for Anonymous High School?
5. Did you attend college?
6. What college did you attend?
7. What was the name of your degree or degree program?
8. What is the name of your employer?

For the purpose of this study soft skills refer to behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to work effectively in their environment to achieve their goals. These

skills are broadly applicable and complement other skills such as technical, vocational and academic skills, and are important for workforce success. The soft skills we are going to focus on in this study are leadership, interpersonal skills, and teamwork skills. In this study, the term interpersonal skills refers to skills used for working and interacting with others skills with a focus on communication with others. Lastly, teamwork skills is defined as two or more people who interact and coordinate their work to accomplish a shared task or goal. The following questions will be asked in order to relate with the goal of the study.

Focus Group Interview Questions:

- 1. Which leadership skills did you gain from your participation in cheerleading?**
- 2. Which interpersonal skills did you gain from your participation in cheerleading?**
- 3. What teamwork skills did you gain from your participation in cheerleading?**
- 4. What soft skills did you gain from your participation in cheerleading?**
- 5. Any additional comments, or concerns, regarding your cheerleading experience and preparation for college or the workforce?**