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ARMATURES FOR SUCCESS: ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY FOR FUNERAL SERVICE  
TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS

A Dissertation in Practice  
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Higher Education  
The University of Mississippi

by

ANGELA MASSEY HOPPER

May 2018

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive, exploratory action research study, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, was to identify students at risk of failure on a post-graduate licensure exam and to develop and implement improvement models to improve exam performance. The participants were alumni of the Funeral Service Technology program at Northwest Mississippi Community College. African American graduates of this vocational course failed at increasingly disparate rates above Caucasian graduates in the National Board licensing examination, despite commensurate post-secondary scholastic achievement.

The quantitative research portion of the study statistically analyzed student performance measures in funeral service classes to reveal areas of dissimilar performance divided by race. The focus of the qualitative research portion of the study included interviewing program graduates to reveal perceptions of former students, surveying course documents, and examining learning spaces, utilizing a contextual framework of Critical Race Theory and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Bell, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1996). To improve learning outcomes, as information was gathered, practical techniques were garnered to improve learning outcomes and enhance favorable student results on the final standardized test.

## DEDICATION

During the course of my life, I have been blessed to have a wealth of armatures supporting my personal and professional growth. I have been fortunate to have people assisting me in every aspect and phase of my life.

My first professional armature was Matt Watley. Without Matt's support, I would have never had the opportunity to pursue my career in the funeral profession. In addition to guiding me through my apprenticeship, Matt instilled within me much of my professional and personal character. His words and skills are passed on to the new generation of funeral students via stories and lessons he taught me. I am forever thankful for his tutelage, guidance, and friendship.

My familial armatures are my parents. My father, Bill Massey, initially planted the seed of furthering my education following my funeral service certificate. He guided me toward the idea that I could possibly receive a doctorate, when I did not recognize such potential in myself. He continually questioned when I might be starting my terminal degree and upon my matriculation, he read countless papers as my quasi editor. Without my father, I could not have academically succeeded, nor would I have likely attempted such educational aspirations. In addition to my father, my mother, Diane Schafer, assisted my education by caring for my people at home when my scholastic responsibilities took me away from my domestic obligations.

My three colleagues, coworkers, and good friends: Mrs. Ebonē Dukes, Dr. Tonyalle Rush, and Dr. Keith D. Reed were integral to this research. All three challenge me daily and make me question my motives, my assumptions, my privilege, and my own biases. They serve

as the litmus test to my authenticity. Each has independently and collectively supplied an invaluable source of support and care throughout not only this dissertation, but my personal and professional development, and to the students we cooperatively serve. Knowing Mrs. Dukes, Dr. Rush, and Dr. Reed makes me a better teacher and person.

And lastly, my most stalwart foundation and armature, my husband, Tony G. Hopper. Tony has championed my success upon our first acquaintance and he has never wavered in his belief in me. He never fails to makes me feel weightless, yet also grounded. I cherish the home and family of people we have created and I am proud to be his wife. We have gone through this dissertation together and sometimes he carried me through the journey, wiping my tears, and easing my worries. I hope to be the human Tony envisions me to be and serve as an armature for future funeral service technology students.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	Associate of Applied Science Degree
ABFSE	American Board of Funeral Service Education
ACT	American College Testing Program
CLEAR	Clarity, Logic, Ethics, Agency, and Relevancy
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CTE	Career Technical Education
DiP	Dissertation in Practice
FST	Funeral Service Technology
GED	General Education Development
GPA	Grade Point Average
ICFSEB	International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NBE	National Board Examination
NWCC	Northwest Mississippi Community College
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UM	The University of Mississippi

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without my incredible dissertation committee made up of four incredible professionals: Amy Wells Dolan, David Rock, Neal Hutchens, and Whitney Webb, this dissertation would not have been possible.

Dr. Amy Wells Dolan served as Chair of my committee and was an invaluable research. Her guidance first led me to Dr. Ladson-Billings' seminal work on cultural relevance. Dr. Wells Dolan's candor and feedback allowed this study, and myself, to mature and grow.

This study's statistical underpinnings are a result of the tutelage Dr. Rock provided in the coursework he provided at The University of Mississippi and during the endless months of personal attention he gave to this dissertation and myself.

Dr. Neal Hutchens' expertise and care afforded the motivation to continue when hardships and challenges presented unforeseen difficulties. Dr. Hutchens' sage advice that a dissertation is "about the journey, not the product" echoed through my mind on many tireless nights.

My first doctoral class was spent with Dr. Whitney Webb. She first introduced me to the studies on marginalized students and planted the seeds which germinated into this study.

My colleague, Mr. Norris Edney III, began this study by my side and served as a sounding board. We shared ideas and collaborated on a vision of bettering education. I thank him for his participation and wish him Godspeed on our quest to better student opportunities.



Many other professors, advisers, and staff at The University of Mississippi spent time and care along my doctoral journey. For everyone, I am indebted and thankful.

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MANUSCRIPT 1  
INTRODUCTION

“For the master’s tools will not dismantle the master’s house.” (Rebecca Gayle Howell, 2016).

Armatures, which are supportive frameworks, are used extensively in funeral service for restorative art purposes. Many everyday utilitarian items, such as: wooden dowels, sutures, tufts of cotton, and even metal wire, are used in amazingly creative ways to reconstruct deceased loved ones, traumatized during death, to a viewable condition. Allowing families, friends, and coworkers the opportunity to see the decedent in a peaceful repose of death promotes mending for a grieving community (Klicker, 2002). Without the armature - an ordinary item, used in an extraordinary manner, emotional healing may not occur.

In the medieval period, embalming was initially done for the preservation of anatomical specimens, not for the contemporary reasons of visitation and viewing (Habenstein & Lamers, 2014). The Civil War, during the modern period of embalming, created the greatest expansion of embalming, because families wished to claim and bury their dead utilizing funeral rites (Mayer, 2012). Before the Civil War embalming was done primarily for anatomical study (Mayer, 2012). It was during this timeframe, when Prince Greer, a freed slave, became the first recorded African American embalmer (Mayer, 2012). Before Mr. Greer, and the Civil War, literature does not depict embalming done by anyone other than White anatomists and medical doctors (Habenstein & Lamers, 2014; Mayer, 2012).

The introduction of Mr. Greer as an embalmer did not initiate integration within funeral service. There are very few careers in the United States that are still purposefully segregated by race in the same manner as the funeral industry. This racial segregation is evidenced in past

published works. The two main funeral service reference guides, used daily by funeral directors and embalmers are the: *The Red Book Funeral Home Directory* and the *Funeral Home and Cemetery Guide*. Until recently, both directories denoted which funeral homes were “White” and which funeral homes were “Black” inside their pages. Both publications lacked a notation for any other racial/ethnic groups, signifying that only Caucasian and African American individuals are of importance or worth regard, in American funeral homes.

The social construct around race is more about social arrangement and positioning, than biology (Haslanger, 2000). In the United States, Caucasian and African American individuals are not always seen to be equal (Bell, 2002). The long-established narrative which depicts African Americans being inferior to Caucasians began pre-emancipation (Dierkshiede, 2008). While racial segregation may be by choice in contemporary funeral homes, the social categories and stereotypes shrouding people in racial groups can be divisive in the formal educational settings to teach and cultivate future funeral directors and embalmers.

To become a licensed funeral director and embalmer in the state of Mississippi, a student must attend an accredited school of Funeral Service Technology (FST) and pass a national standardized test, the National Board Exam (NBE) after graduation. The NBE consists of two portions: Science and Arts. The NBE Science includes: embalming, restorative art, preparation for disposition, and funeral service sciences. The NBE Arts includes: funeral directing, funeral service marketing and merchandising, funeral service counseling, regulatory compliance, and crematory and cemetery operations. Without the NBE credential, one cannot legally gain licensed employment. FST graduates, lacking the NBE, can only obtain non-licensed, lower paid employment. A racial disparity in passing the NBE Arts appears to exist among students in a Northwestern Mississippi Community College (NWCC) mortuary science program. The

problem of practice for this Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is to identify Funeral Service Technology students at NWCC who are at-risk of failure on the NBE and to develop and implement intervention strategies to enhance student performance on the licensure exam.

Specifically, sixty percent of the African American students that graduated through the Northwest Mississippi Community College FST program failed the NBE Arts section from 2013 through 2016. The Black students were similar to their White counterparts in terms of their FST grade point averages (GPA), American College Testing Program (ACT) entrance scores, and prior academic and funeral service experience; however, only twenty percent of the White students failed to pass the NBE. Please see Table 2 for student academic history prior to FST admission, Table 3 for FST alumni ACT scores, and Table 4 and Table 5 for FST Alumni program GPA.

Furthermore, statistical analysis, using a chi square of NBE results of NWCC alumni from January 2013 through December 2016, suggests correlation between race and success on sections of the examination. Complete chi square results are in Table 6.

## **PROBLEM OF PRACTICE**

The problem of practice for this DiP was:

1. To identify Funeral Service Technology students at NWCC who are at-risk of failure on the NBE
2. To develop and implement intervention strategies to enhance student performance on the licensure exam.

Identifying the at-risk students and implementing support measures may fundamentally increase NBE success for African American students.

### **Significance of the Study**

Higher education in the United States became desegregated as a result of the Supreme Court's decision in 1954, yet it was not until 1962 that The University of Mississippi (UM) matriculated the first African American Student (Sansing, 1999). As the first public institution of higher learning in the state, UM's racially exclusive enrollment practices perpetuated the inequities already prevalent in Mississippi (Sansing, 1999). Because children's ingress to higher education follows closely to the prior educational access of their parents (Arum & Roksa, 2012), the delayed accessibility to such fundamental freedoms, such as education, has created an increasing wealth and achievement disparity among people of color. Enrollment in community colleges is one mechanism by which our nation expects to narrow the gap, with the goal to ensure educational equality, and restore some measures of justice for those historically subjugated (Bissett, 1995).



While junior colleges may exude the promise of a degree with such open-access institutions and a seat for all students, almost fifty percent of these students will leave never obtaining a diploma (Tinto, 1993). The former statistic is abhorrent; however, the number becomes much more of an affront to social justice when, against statistical odds and upon graduation, the degree conferred becomes devalued due to inability to pass licensure examinations, especially when the possibilities for success are much more limited for a particular racial group.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this action-based study was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of African American students enrolled in an FST program in a community college setting, in order to improve program quality and NBE testing outcomes after graduation. The participants included instructors and alumni. Thorough interviews about the FST program and NBE experience of students were conducted and transcribed verbatim. The verbatim transcripts were extensively examined to uncover themes which were used to improve post-program outcomes and advance more proportionate measures of racial equity. Concurrent to the student interview process, program written documents, such as: syllabi, attendance policies, and student contracts were retained, reviewed, and updated to remove any potential racial bias promoting equity, utilizing the clarity, logic, ethics, agency, and relevancy (CLEAR) framework (Iskander, Calugar, Peavy, & Sowell, 2017).

In addition, during the former student interview process, historical student performance measures were gathered for analysis, which resulted in changes with course sequencing and adjustments to student advising. Observation of the FST clinical spaces occurred prior to interview commencement, which resulted in making signage more culturally relevant.

Following student interviews, additional spatial and environment examination and observation were utilized to triangulate student data and offered additional program improvements.

This research is intended to identify additional ethical and practical methods educators may utilize to support African American students in succeeding at the community college level in other FST programs across the United States, as well as a broad range of other differing vocational programs.

### **Research Questions**

The fundamental research question was centered around the premise that while a community college funeral service technology program is recognized to be open-access and ostensibly fair to all students, what perceived barriers and obstacles do African American students encounter, in such a community college vocational program setting preparing for a licensure examination, such as the NBE?

Secondary questions are:

- What pedagogical methods impede an African American student's success in becoming prepared for the NBE?
- What pedagogical practices and techniques may assist African American students to be better equipped for the NBE?

### **Overview of Methodology**

To improve equity and advance social justice in to the FST program, while earnestly examining the perceptions and potential effects of unconsciously ignored systemic racism for students of color, both qualitative and quantitative data were utilized. Both qualitative and quantitative methods, were employed throughout several phases of the research, which allowed for triangulation and rich insight, into student impressions, potential correlations to success, and

program, instructor, environment, and/or document improvements. The participants in the study were NWCC graduates of the FST program.

This germinal quantitative data examination, a Chi square of graduate NBE data from 2013 through 2015, revealed the racial imbalances and inequities of NBE success, which initiated this research study. Further quantitative data analysis, using historical graduate data from the years 2013-2016, to indicate additional success variables, were done via Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Logistic regressions, two-sample t-tests, proportional analysis, and summary statistics to uncover patterns were completed after the interview process was underway.

The FST Attendance Policy and the Student Dress Code student were amassed for review, to detect any undertones of racial bias pursuant to Critical Race Theory (CRT) or assimilationist techniques (Bell, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994), before the alumni interview process began. Please see Appendix I for the Attendance Policy and Appendix J for the Student Dress Code.

Coding and analysis of the interview data were done manually. A diverse multi-coding team was utilized. Full descriptions of the data analysis and methodology will be found in Manuscript Two.

### **Definition of Terms**

Many hindrances exist to prevent the study and integration of improvements in FST programs which may aid in enhancing justice for racial minorities in one professional field. The following glossary is provided not only to allow for consistency and comprehension, but also to afford the reader how these organizations, systems, and/or entities may unintentionally collude to prevent student success pertaining to this study.

- American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) – The ABFSE is the accreditation organization for mortuary science programs of FST (ABFSE American Board of Funeral Service Education, n.d.). The ABFSE provides curriculum to FST programs (ABFSE American Board of Funeral Service Education, n.d.). The ABFSE does not develop or create the NBE.
- Assimilationist Teaching – Ignoring a student’s culture, while seeking to groom a student in a manner not consistent with the individual and distinct student’s identity. The opposite of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994).
- Career Technical Education (CTE) – Education which is business driven, created to impart specialized skills desired by contemporary employers. Degrees conferred range from: Associate of Applied Science for two-year technical programs or Career Certificates for programs ending in nine to twelve months (Career-Technical Programs, 2016).
- Cultural sustainability – Creating an environment where a disenfranchised student is not only no longer marginalized, but treated with value (Ladson-Billings, 2014).
- Culturally relevant pedagogy – A technique to overcome the effects of systemic racism in education, on a student level, where an instructor utilizes an individual’s culture during the teaching process (Ladson-Billings, 1994).
- Funeral Service Technology (FST) – Educational program designed to prepare students for employment as funeral directors and embalmers. A two-year program which culminates in an Applied Science Degree (Funeral Service Technology, 2016).
- International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards (ICFSE) – The organization which oversees the creation, management, and administration of the NBE

(About The Conference, n.d.).

- National Board Exam (NBE) – Timed, succeed/fail, 150-question, multiple-choice exam administered in two sections, arts and sciences, taken by graduates of ABFSE schools. Each student has two hours and 57 minutes to complete the examination. The examination is scored utilizing a “scaled” scoring, where each question is measured upon complexity. The minimum passing score is 75 (Candidate Handbook for NBE, n.d.).
- National Board Exam – Arts (NBE Arts) - The NBE consists of two portions: Science and Arts. The NBE Arts portion includes 150 questions in the subject areas of: funeral service, funeral industry marketing and merchandising, funeral profession counseling, regulatory / ethical compliance, and funeral industry operations (Candidate Handbook for NBE, n.d.).
- National Board Exam – Sciences (NBE Sciences) - The NBE consists of two portions: Science and Arts. The NBE Science portion includes 150 questions in the subject areas of: embalming, restorative arts, professional disposition, and funeral industry sciences (Candidate Handbook for NBE, n.d.).
- Race – A sociological stereotype, based upon a narrative iterated about and to individuals which indicates a social hierarchy (Obasogie, 2010). Not exclusively optically evident, nor based upon a single identified chromosomal gene which accounts for anthropologic and cultural systems (Haslanger, 2000; Obasogie, 2010).

## **DELIMITATIONS**

This study was designed to expose the underlying systemic racial issues in one FST program in Northwestern Mississippi. Although three Mississippi programs were in operation at the commencement of this research, the researcher's intent was to focus on the program for which the researcher had administrative responsibility and opportunity to implement programmatic changes where appropriate. Focusing on more than one FST organization would have limited the depth, scope, and rapidity of pedagogical implementation. Moreover, the community college chosen houses a satellite location for UM, inside the junior college's building. Examining African American community college students' perceptions, inside of a junior college which houses UM, offers a very unique setting, because of the historical racial oppression associated with UM (Sansing, 1999).

Cultural sustainability creates a much more nurturing and supportive environment for marginalized students than culturally relevant pedagogy and is a much greater goal towards social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Because the NWCC FST environment had not been assessed, nor had any treatment for cultural equity, the logical first step towards equity would be evaluation for cultural relevancy and eventual movement to cultural sustainability.

The fundamental focus of the study was perceptions of African American students. While NWCC has a diverse collegiate environment, FST diversity remains very limited. Over the course of the most recent five years the student body has included only one self-identified Latina/o student. Other racial groups may also benefit from future research and intervention on

cultural relevance.

In addition to the historical and contemporary separation by race, there is disparity in the death care industry by gender. Only recently has the embalming occupation truly welcomed women. In addition, American women and men are reared with different societal norms to behave in a manner consistent with their birth-assigned gender (Hussey, Katz, & Leith, 2014). Along with the behavioral expectations, females adopt a submissive, emotive way of speaking while their male counterparts employ a dominant and arbitrary language style (Hussey et al., 2014). For behaviorally centered written questions around behavioral norms at a funeral service, male graduates may answer a question differently than female graduates, which may adversely affect female NBE candidates' performance on the exam. Gender was purposefully excluded as a dominant focus of this study because, although women are negatively impacted by stereotype narratives, females are making greater strides in college (Arum & Roksa, 2014). Ethically, breaking down the fundamental underpinnings of an unfair racial societal hierarchy was more beneficial to FST field of educational practice.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study had two major limitations.

1. The study was limited in that it provided only perceptions of graduated students, and not current students, who had likely already entered the funeral service workforce, where the occupation of an embalmer/funeral director is almost entirely segregated. These current lived experiences in funeral service may have impacted the recollected and reflected events from the students' time spent in college. Interviewees may have attributed some aspects of the segregated work environment to the student's collegiate experience and these occupational events may have shaped interviewee

responses.

2. The second limitation was an alumni interviewee may not have been able to articulate how micro-aggressive acts impacted the student's educational experience. Because systemic racism is so prevalent and socially ingrained in our society, former students may not have recognized racialized events or may not have even been able to articulate such encounters and the immediate or longer term influences of such acts (Sue, 2010; Bell, 2002).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Americans are so accustomed to being entrenched in racist ideas, language, and customs; citizens do not recognize the racist pall over our society (Delpit, 2012). For example, the common euphemism "beyond the pale" which is used when an individual's actions are indecorous, seems to reek of racism upon scrutiny. The former phrase appears to be stating actions outside of what is expected of "White" behavior are deemed unacceptable. The speaker of such a circumlocution in the English language is not necessarily racist; however, the existence of such racial undertones in our language speaks to the ethnocentric beliefs of our forefathers that Caucasian culture was the "correct culture" (Delpit, 2012; Dierksheide, 2008).

The patriarchal founders of this country "otherized" (Samuels, 2015) the African American race in form of long standing tradition since antiquity. "Otherizing" (Samuels, 2015) meant setting Black people apart from the Whites, done by repeating narratives perpetuating a negative stereotype while "racializing" African Americans (Haslanger, 2000). For example, Thomas Jefferson wrote letters stating; that neighboring manumitted slaves preferred to plunder from townfolk rather than work, had to be beaten to farm their own fields, and were a vexation to the country (Dierksheide, 2008). Historical and contemporary "racialization" (Haslanger,



2000) is dependent upon the special meaning Caucasians believe African Americans share, based on these unfavorable stories told about African Americans. “Racialization” (Haslanger, 2000) is not based on skin color, instead this “racialization” (Haslanger, 2000) is about belonging to a subordinate hierarchy. This subordinate racial status is communicated to people of color through oppression and micro-aggressive acts (Sue, 2010).

Embracing the attitude that Black slaves were vastly biologically different and inferior from Whites did not prevent the patriarchs from attempting to replace African American culture to a more Caucasian culture (Dierksheide, 2008). Slave owners in the United States dictated White social structures and norms onto slaves, such as religion and marriage customs (Hollister & Schultz, 2010). Typical Caucasian values of independence, competition, and logic completely contradicted, and still often conflict, with the African American values of community, cooperation, and emotional expressiveness (Sue, 2010). Thomas Jefferson, and many of our forefathers, assumed that a single homogenous culture would equate to a more harmonious and happy populace; therefore, African Americans were forced to comply (Dierksheide, 2008). African American slaves struggled to maintain semblances of their own heritage, and one area where slaves were able to uphold their sense of self and their tradition was surrounding death rites (Rose, 2011; Stanley, 2016).

### **History of Funeral Service Industry**

African Americans slaves felt custodial over their dead, whom were often mistreated in life, but could be provided an appropriate “homegoing” by fellow African Americans (Rose, 2011; Stanley, 2016). African American funeral ceremonies were steeped in African American culture, as slaves were often left alone by Whites to carry out final disposition; Blacks were not compelled to suppress tradition (Rose, 2011; Stanley, 2016).

After slaves were freed, White undertakers felt at odds with African American practices which left death care as one of the first professions Blacks could easily enter and succeed (Rose, 2011; Stanley, 2016). The first American Funeral Home came into being after the conclusion of the Civil War (Mayer, 2012). Both Caucasians and African Americans felt a certain apprehension about White embalmers preparing Black bodies for burial rites; but for potentially different reasons (Rose, 2011). This unease on behalf of both races to cross racial boundaries in times of grief, began the long tradition of segregation in the funeral business.

Black funeral homes were an area where African American industry flourished (Rose, 2011; Stanley, 2016). With the inception of a niche market for Black Americans, allied professions opened with additional potential for other successful Black ownership, such as casket manufacturing, embalming fluids, and sundry items (Rose, 2011; Stanley, 2016). Embalming knowledge and instruction during this time was communicated in the workplace in an informal manner (Mayer, 2012). Funeral directors and embalmers were trained by other professionals in the field until mortuary education became more formalized in the late nineteenth century (Mayer, 2012).

### **Funeral Service Education**

The father of mortuary education, Dr. Renouard, began the first formal mortuary college in early 1884 (Habenstein & Lamers, 2014). Currently, 57 American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) accredited mortuary science programs in the United States educate students to become proficient in the funeral profession (American Board of Funeral Service Education, 2016). Each educational program confers an Associate of Applied Science Degree (AAS) in Funeral Service Technology, upon graduation. Once the student has completed all the requirements of graduation, the student may take the NBE. Ten of the 57 ABFSE accredited

schools are private, stand-alone funeral service colleges and one program is offered at a four-year university, while the remaining are vocational programs integrated into junior colleges (American Board of Funeral Service Education, 2016).

According to the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE), the organization that accredits mortuary programs across the United States, only eight percent of 2014 FST graduates were of any other race or ethnicity, than Caucasian or African American (American Board of Funeral Service Education, 2015). In this manner, education of funeral directors is still segregated akin to funeral homes. By implementing equity in academia, imparting precise technical skills to all graduates, and resisting segregationist practices, educators in FST may be able to overcome the discrimination in the industry of American funeral homes. By supporting the segregationist system, by which some races are not mentioned or quantified, mortuary science educators are perpetuating these injustices.

Northwest Mississippi Community College (NWCC) is a community college which integrates an FST program into the Career Technical Education (CTE) offerings at their DeSoto Campus in Southaven, Mississippi. Located near Memphis, Tennessee, the community college houses a regional campus for UM. With the continuance of racial segregation within the funeral profession (Stanley, 2016), the historical events surrounding the attempts to prevent integration at UM less than sixty years ago (Sansing, 1999), and the incommensurate pass rates of African American FST graduates on the NBE, NWCC provided a compelling location to examine African American perceptions to improve African American student achievement.

### **Unequitable Success Rates**

The NWCC FST program has been accredited by the ABFSE since 1977 and has graduated 308 students. In 2013, it appeared there may be correlations between race and NWCC

NBE pass rates. National board examination pass rates were collected on all 39 graduates from NWCC FST January 2013 through December 2016 for analysis. The population of graduates included 15 African American students and 24 Caucasian students, 25 females and 14 males. All Population demographics are in Table 1.

Table 1

Population Demographics for Chi Square NBE Results January 2013-December 2016

	African American	Caucasian
Female	10	15
Male	5	9
Total	15	24

The 39 students all had similar backgrounds before admission into the NWCC FST program. Student academic history prior to program entry is available in Table 2. A minimum ACT score of 17 was required for FST program entry, or a Baccalaureate degree is accepted in lieu of an ACT score for all program candidates. Please see Table 3 for ACT Alumni Scores, prior to FST entry. In addition, all 39 students had similar scholastic success while enrolled in FST. Please see Table 4 and Table 5 for FST Alumni First and Final Semester FST GPA.

Table 2

FST Student Academic History Prior to Program Entry

	Students Who Failed Arts NBE	Students Who Passed Arts NBE
Attained Baccalaureate Degree Prior to Entry Into FST	2	8
Previous University Experience (without degree)	3	4
Previous Community College Experience (without degree)	3	5
Previous Community College and University Experience (without degree)	3	0
No Previous College Experience	3	8

Table 3

FST Alumni ACT Scores Prior to Program Entry

<b>ACT Score</b>	<b>Students who Failed the Arts NBE</b>	<b>Students who Passed the Arts NBE</b>
<b>17</b>	4	1
<b>18</b>	3	4
<b>19</b>	2	1
<b>20</b>	0	0
<b>21</b>	1	1
<b>22</b>	1	2
<b>23</b>	0	2
<b>24</b>	0	3
<b>25</b>	0	1
<b>26</b>	0	0
<b>27</b>	0	1
<b>28</b>	0	1
<b>Unsure</b>	1	0
<b>BS Degree</b>	2	8

Table 4

FST Alumni First Semester FST GPA

<b>First Semester FST GPA</b>	<b>Students who Failed Arts NBE</b>	<b>Students who Passed Arts NBE</b>
<b>0.00 to .25</b>	0	0
<b>.26 to .51</b>	0	0
<b>.52 to .77</b>	0	1
<b>.78 to 1.03</b>	0	0
<b>1.04 to 1.29</b>	0	1
<b>1.30 to 1.55</b>	0	0
<b>1.56 to 1.81</b>	1	0
<b>1.82 to 2.07</b>	1	0
<b>2.08 - 2.33</b>	0	1
<b>2.34 to 2.59</b>	1	1
<b>2.60 to 2.85</b>	3	0
<b>2.86 to 3.11</b>	4	3
<b>3.12 to 3.37</b>	2	7
<b>3.38 to 3.63</b>	1	7
<b>3.64 to 3.89</b>	1	1
<b>3.90 and above</b>	0	3

Table 5

FST Alumni Final Semester FST GPA

<b>Final Semester FST GPA</b>	<b>Students who Failed Arts NBE</b>	<b>Students who Passed Arts NBE</b>
<b>0.00 to .25</b>	0	0
<b>.26 to .51</b>	0	0
<b>.52 to .77</b>	0	0
<b>.78 to 1.03</b>	0	0
<b>1.04 to 1.29</b>	0	0
<b>1.30 to 1.55</b>	0	0
<b>1.56 to 1.81</b>	0	0
<b>1.82 to 2.07</b>	0	0
<b>2.08 - 2.33</b>	0	0
<b>2.34 to 2.59</b>	2	1
<b>2.60 to 2.85</b>	4	4
<b>2.86 to 3.11</b>	7	6
<b>3.12 to 3.37</b>	1	4
<b>3.38 to 3.63</b>	0	7
<b>3.64 to 3.89</b>	0	3
<b>3.90 and above</b>	0	0

A Chi square test was used to analyze if a significant relationship existed between race and success on the test. An alpha level of .05 was used with a critical value of 3.841. Results of the Chi square indicated a significant relationship between race and success on the NBE arts; however, no category was a significant contributor to the results. Chi square results are in Table 6.



Table 6

Chi Square NBE Results January 2013-December 2016

	FO	FE	FO - FE	(FO - FE) <sup>2</sup>	(FO - FE) <sup>2</sup> /FE
Caucasian Passed	19	15.3846	3.6154	13.0711	0.849623
Caucasian Failed	5	8.615384	-3.6154	13.0709	1.5171
African American Passed	6	9.61538	-3.6154	13.0709	1.3593
African American Failed	9	5.384615	3.61539	13.071	2.42
					6.146

### Standardized Vocational Testing

High-stakes standardized tests are the gatekeeper to many vocational career opportunities, after completing many CTE programs. The effects of any bias in such standardized tests can be extremely far reaching for disadvantaged students, as these tests hold the keys to a person’s chances of upward mobility (Marbley, Bonner, & Berg, 2008). The NBE is the licensure examination for funeral service. Without the credential of passing the NBE, students will be denied entrance into the licensed vocation for which the student was specifically educated. Training students to embalm human remains without the pupil being able to enter the workforce as a licensed embalmer/funeral director is counterproductive, yet if tests are discriminatory, with a preference for Caucasian students, against other races and ethnicities, the true denial of social justice and equity is problematic.

### Bias in Testing

Standardized tests are fundamentally relying on a pupil’s mastery of formal English as a measure of educational status (Roehl, 2015). Language bias discriminates heavily against minority students when the student’s cultural way of speaking differs from the White culture and how the test is written (Marbley et al., 2008). Equity in education would dictate that all cultures

be treated with some degree of cultural relevancy (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Challenges can arise with situational questions among minority groups from the false or disingenuous manner with which the questions are stated (Roehl, 2015). In addition, these situational questions can easily ignore the culture of the test taker, resulting in poor validity of the instrument (Marbley et al., 2008). For example, Caucasian funeral rites differ dramatically from African American funeral ceremonies (“Funeral Services and Ceremonies,” 1994). A situational question asking about tissue donation and embalming could have dramatically different answers depending upon the test taker’s race. This type of bias, neglecting racial differences, lies in direct opposition to social justice.

## **THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHALLENGE**

If college degree attainment represents opportunity in the United States; the argument may be made, because community colleges are open-door institutions and matriculate any community member desiring to be a student, such an institution is a bridge to equal opportunity and advancement of social justice in America (Bissett, 1995). Community colleges are the starting point for students who may be receiving their education under less than advantageous circumstances (Bissett, 1995; Martin, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013). Almost sixty percent of students entering into a junior college lack the ability to begin college-level reading, English, and/or mathematics and require remedial courses (Lu, 2013). To improve equity, community colleges routinely offer workshops for General Education Development (GED) attainment, courses begin at remediation, and career technical education or vocational training courses. In addition to these scholastic challenges, junior college students face obstacles that include: postponed matriculation into post-secondary education, working more than thirty hours each week, financial independence from their parents, and caring for young children which further set community college students apart from traditional university students (Martin, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013).

Moreover, junior college students are often commuter pupils who often pause their working and family lives to take vocational courses aimed at pursuing better employment on smaller, regional campuses (Martin, 2014). The community college phenotype of education is the inversion of Oakeshott's (1950) university students, where the educational pursuit is less

cursory and students are seen to be immersed in their “leisurely” educational experience (Martin, 2014). This illusion of equality and American hope, offered by community college, begins to fracture, as studies have concluded non-traditional students have greater propensity for not fulfilling their college aspirations, than their traditional and legacy peers (Martin, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013). Even if a student is able to navigate the hurdles of community college and obtain conferment of a degree, often the vocational programs will have post-commencement licensure examinations, in order to procure licensed and higher paying employment utilizing the student’s degree. With the unique set of challenges pupils face in the community college setting, racial boundaries may afford additional impediments.

NWCC, DeSoto Center Campus is such an open-access, public institution and commuter, community college campus (Bulletin-College Catalog, 2017). Any person may attend the college in some capacity, may it be dual-enrollment, GED classes, remedial courses, college credit classes, vocational courses, or continuing education classes (Bulletin-College Catalog, 2017). NWCC offers college classes in an eleven-county district in Northwestern Mississippi near Memphis, Tennessee (Bulletin-College Catalog, 2017). Beginning as a school of agriculture, NWCC has operated for over ninety years, since 1926 (Bulletin-College Catalog, 2017). NWCC has expanded the curriculum from agriculture to include, liberal arts, science, art, journalism and thirty vocational-technical courses on four separate campuses (Bulletin-College Catalog, 2017). In 1977 NWCC, DeSoto Center Campus began offering a CTE course in FST.

NWCC FST is a modest CTE program within a small community college system. In Spring of 2017, the enrollment for all of NWCC was 7,231 students. According to the NWCC enrollment numbers, the Spring of 2017, African Americans comprise 31.3% of the NWCC student body and 4.5% of all NWCC students are placed in CTE programs (First look at spring

2017: A quick reference for initial enrollment, 2017). Two thousand five, of the total NWCC enrollment, of these pupils are located at the DeSoto Center Campus, the site of this research study (First look at spring 2017: A quick reference for initial enrollment, 2017). Complete NWCC student demographics are in Table 7.

Table 7

Northwest Mississippi Community College Student Demographics Spring 2017

Total NWCC Students	7231	
DeSoto Campus Students	2005	27.70%
CTE Students	326	4.50%
African American Students	2266	31.30%
Caucasian Students	4588	63.40%
Male Students	2742	37.90%
Female Students	4489	62.10%

**Community College Pedagogy.** Teaching methods have barely evolved over the last sixty years in our junior colleges (Gillett-Karam, 2016). Furthermore, pedagogy in community college has not adapted to the needs of the diverse student groups the community college was designed to cater (Gillett-Karam, 2016). Felix, Bensimon, Hanson, Gray and Klingsmith (2015) found that committed instructors are integral to ensuring equity; however, Ladson-Billings' seminal work found that empathetic relationships between students, in which instructors are cognizant of race and the racial challenges posed by aversive racism, were crucial to African American student success (Felix et al., 2015; Sue, 2010; Warren, 2014).

The ethnocentric belief that one culture is better than another is not rare in contemporary times, nor was it rare before the Civil War. The societal doctrine of which culture is better is glaringly evident in education, which exhibit a strong preference for Eurocentric standards (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). A large reason for the failures of our educational system for Black

students, may be due to the lack of cultural respect and responsiveness for the ideals of African Americans (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Because Thomas Jefferson's idea of a single unifying culture and the "racialization" of African Americans persists today, African American students may feel that to succeed in education is to negate the values of African American people in preference of more Caucasian principles (Dierksheide, 2008; Bell, 2002). Racial and cultural conformity dominate the hierarchy of contemporary academia (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012).

David Labaree (1997) expatiated Jefferson's theory asserting "democratic equality" to promote parity in scholastic curricula, which policy makers used to craft and cultivate a greater shared culture. Americans do not share one culture, nor should it be a goal of instructors, administrators, and educational policy makers to promote such. In aggrandizing a common culture, educators may initiate student self-assessment and the "cooling-out" (Burton, 1960, p. 560) process before such a student ever begins to consider the possibilities higher education can offer. While equitable educational opportunities should be presented to each student, without segregation, social justice dictates institutions should support student diversities.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.** Relationships and a pedagogy consistent with cultural relevancy can remove barriers and improve outcomes for students of color (Karn, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In her seminal study on African American children, Ladson-Billings (1994) found the most effective teaching techniques allow for the inclusion of and validation of one's culture while giving instruction. The ultimate goal of culturally relevant teaching is to allow African American students to envision scholastic excellence from themselves while maintaining pride within their own personal African American culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The assimilationist method of instruction is the inversion of the culturally-relevant principle. Assimilationist teaching ignores a student's culture and seeks to groom students to the place in

society where each student has been cast (Ladson-Billings, 1994). To practice culturally relevant pedagogy, an instructor must expand their role and relationship with students outside the confines of the school building and be excited about every pupil (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Relationships are a fundamental component to culturally relevant pedagogy and being an instrument of equity (Felix et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Positive relationships in education are associated with good student outcomes and help negating student isolation (Davidson, Foster-Johnson, 2001; Williams, 2016). In addition, students who find supportive relationships on their college campuses with professors may be able to more readily identify their career as a source of meaning within their life throughout their adult working years (Shin & Steger, 2016). Gaining a sense of purpose through a meaningful career may make the students' vocational training much more momentous than simply gaining a technical skill.

In the cultural relevant model of pedagogy, a teacher assumes the role of a "conductor" and "coach" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 23). Mindfulness, on behalf of the instructor, is a fundamental premise of employing culturally-relevant techniques (Felix et al., 2015). Recent studies have found that even when an educator mentoring students of a race different from the educator, even educator attempts at pupil equity may fall short, and students of differing races may still feel marginalized (McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, & Luedke, 2015). Feelings of marginalization may occur when students of color feel they are not able to share who they are with a White faculty member (McCoy et al., 2015). Researcher Williams (2016) discovered that empathy and acknowledgment, rather than a colorblind mentoring stance of denial, can construct a framework of nurturing campus environments between racially different faculty and pupils. Because this study was heavily interested in raising the success of African American students, and the chairperson of the program is Caucasian, this dynamic was heavily scrutinized.

Professorial relationships in this study shall be undertaken mindfully and purposefully, particularly across racial boundaries in an attempt to build support for students of color through inclusion (Williams, 2016). In the McCoy et al. (2015) study, researchers found that White instructors who mentored students of color, although they tried to treat all equally, stated they gave Black students extra help, because they were not among the best pupils. The feelings of bias found in the McCoy et al. study (2015) transferred to the loosening of academic rigor and less mentoring overall for students of color. Regardless of how open minded professors in the McCoy et al. (2015) study claimed to be, the instructors repeatedly discriminated against African American students on prejudices of the students being academically less prepared than their peers. Aversive racism of the type found in the McCoy et al. (2015) study has a very negative impact (Sue, 2010). White paternalism can have negative effects in mentoring as it is perpetuated in micro-aggressions such as patronizing and strips people of color of their dignity (McCoy et al., 2015).

With good professor to student relationships in place, it is often easier for instructors to employ an empathetic approach with students (Warren, 2014). Utilizing empathy allows a decrease in the potential for negative outcomes when instructors misconstrue student actions, interest, and engagement (Warren, 2014). Teachers can build empathetic relationships with students by being open to student-focused communications, being involved within the community where the teacher is an instructor, and having mechanisms for student feedback in place (Warren, 2014). Furthermore, positive teacher to pupil relationships can help students navigate the college landscape, make up for unfair disadvantages, and attend to student psychosocial needs (Karn, 2011; Mason, 2014).

W. E. B. DuBois (1997) described a “double consciousness” when interceding the link to



both his Negro and American identity during his education. A student of color must often store away a culture that is deemed in the minority and adopt a White culture to succeed in school (Bloom, 1987). The White way of speaking and writing is celebrated and White books and White history is taught in institutions of higher learning (Bloom, 1987). Only recently has, even a small amount of, literary diversity been allowed into mainstream American public education. African American students may display a predilection for learning and academic success rather than having to adopt the White way (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). An objective of cultural relevant teaching is to enable Black students to envision scholastic excellence from themselves, while maintaining pride in their own personal Black background and heritage (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Therefore, communication is integral to a minority student's success in college and implementation of culturally relevant technique.

Verbal expression can be an example of assimilationist practices and a hindrance to achieving cultural relevancy (Felix et al., 2015). For example, the American Caucasian culture highly regards a person's right to individuality and personal choice while African American values community over the individual (Felix et al., 2015; Sue, 2010). Statements made by an instructor which express ambiguity that an individual may or may not perform academically well by choosing to do (or not do) a task may seem uncaring to people of color (Felix et al., 2015). An assimilationist instructor might say, "In order to pass the test, you would need to study" (Felix et al., 2015). A professor using culturally relevant pedagogy would instead instruct the class, "I require that each of you study for the test tomorrow" (Felix et al., 2015). The nuance between the two statements is small, but distinct. The latter instruction offers a directive that gives a student support with the expectation of success and caring (Felix et al., 2015). Another way to incorporate culturally relevant style is to ask students about their aspirations, instead of

assuming what a student's goals are. Asking, rather than assuming can allow teachers better relationships with students, and avoid crossing student boundaries inadvertently (Felix et al., 2015). To maintain pride in culture, Dr. Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested teachers might use African American culture to illustrate or link to the predominate Caucasian culture and curriculum.

Classes which are stimulating, expect high achievement equally among all pupils, and are scholastically rigorous increase the overall accomplishments of all students (Lundberg, 2012). Such classes have a positive impact upon students and can be defined as culturally relevant (Lundberg, 2012). Since effective instruction is illustrated in how a teacher views themselves and others, as much as pedagogy is about effective classroom instruction, an empathetic connection on behalf of a teacher towards students is paramount to student success (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Warren, 2014). Viewing educational practices with a Critical Race Theory lens (Bell, 2002), while utilizing Ladson-Billings' (1994) conceptual framework of cultural relevancy combined with Warren's (2014) empathetic technique was employed to assess the historical and current climate in NWCC FST and guide innovative changes during this dissertation in practice to support educational ethics, social justice, and equality while removing potential student impediments to success.

**Community Engagement.** A purpose of vocational programs is not only graduation and licensure test success after graduation, but also vocational employment and service to the community following degree conferment. Graduates cannot become adept professionals and responsible citizens with classroom experience alone. Industry cooperation is necessary and promotes student engagement (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Utilizing diverse business professionals not only promotes cultural relevancy, but offers interesting learning experiences to students and

may promote persistence.

## **TRENDS AND GAPS**

Attainment of a college degree demands more than becoming proficient at collegiate academics (Karn, 2011). Students must maneuver across new landscapes rife with new social and political responsibilities (Karn, 2011). Commuter and non-traditional pupils, such as students attending community colleges, generally have a more difficult time becoming vested in the collegiate experience versus traditional college students in universities (Karn, 2011). Positive professorial relationships may allow students to manipulate the collegiate structure more adeptly and allow for more successful outcomes.

There is a great need for a culturally relevant approach to pedagogy on the community college level. In addition, culture is not stagnant and is always progressing and evolving (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Therefore, the crux of education, is the realization that there is no one truly correct and perfect answer; that many opinions have merit (Bloom, 1987). Utilizing cultural relevancy, may enable the student to become more engaged within the culturally relevant classroom and succeed scholastically in the homogenous culture, while maintaining dignity in the student's own heritage. Moreover, it is an affront to ethics and justice to ignore cultural relevancy and employ assimilationist techniques.

Providing schools with the specific and precise instructional strategies to improve outcomes for students of color in vocational programs existing within community college structures will remove more perceptual barriers for pupils. The gap for specific culturally relevant teaching techniques in present literature to improve career technical instructors'

pedagogical measures was the basis for this study.

**Qualitative Measures.** Culturally relevant pedagogy is an evolving technique to improve outcomes for African American pupils. In an effort to understand FST students' perceptions and explore the NWCC learning environment atmosphere while developing culturally relevant teaching methods, facilitating learning spaces, and creating documents, practitioners must identify and understand the repercussions all classroom activities may have on students of color. Because this study was examining a unique subset of students, with particular challenges, no qualitative evaluative tool was available; therefore, an evaluative tool was created for this study. For initial evaluative tool questions see Appendix A and the revised evaluative tool questions, see Appendix B.

**Quantitative Measures.** Quantitative methods were used to verify a correlation between FST students' race and success on the NBE. In addition, data was derived from the 39 students' academic records and was used to determine trends and indicators for success, via data analysis utilizing the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

**Descriptive Methods.** Using both qualitative and quantitative methods allows for triangulation of student perception versus student achievement and gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of race issues in education. Improving the cultural relevancy in NWCC FST program may diminish the correlation between race and success; therefore, truly establishing an equitable, socially just, and ethical educational environment in Northern Mississippi.

**Future Research.** Academic educators, administrators, and researchers across the United States have become more involved in addressing the potential for discriminatory practices in assessment tools and institutional policies (Marbley et al., 2008). Career technical education, which uses similar such tests and assessment practices as their academic peers, has been lagging

behind the movement towards testing equity. Multicultural viewpoints have been lacking in the construct of testing instruments, which is evident when scrutinizing the results of standardized tests (Marbley et al., 2008). Additional research with incorporation of culturally relevant techniques and documents may propel CTE educators and administrators into more active involvement in eradicating discriminatory procedures.

## **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

The study followed Dr. Ladson-Billings (1994; 2014) initial intent of cultural relevant pedagogy, which aimed to celebrate and support students of color, while finding instructional methods to cultivate such students' intellectual gifts. Such an objective offered growth not only for students, but also allowed the scholarly practitioner to be reinvigorated and revisit teaching methods.

The years of population, from 2013 through 2016, which the student NBE data has been gathered were years of stagnancy and growth for NWCC FST. Ms. Hopper became a full-time instructor in July of 2012, therefore, 2013 was Ms. Hopper's first full year of teaching for the FST program. In addition, the program director who had been with NWCC FST for thirty years and was program director in 2013 retired in 2016 which resulted in the possibility for great changes within the FST department. The absence of the previous program director August 2016, and the addition of a new instructor, Mrs. Ebonē L. Dukes allowed the opportunity for the scholar-practitioner to make a difference in the learning environment and within the curriculum.

### **Unit of Analysis**

While Dr. Ladson-Billings (1994) focused on great teachers as units of analysis in her seminal study on cultural relevancy, this study proposed, to instead, seek perceptions of students as units of analysis. Students were interviewed to gain insight on student experience, thoughts, and viewpoints. In addition program documents and learning spaces such as labs and classrooms were analyzed.

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH COMPONENT

The qualitative section of this exploratory action research study enabled the accumulation of FST students' thoughts and perceptions regarding the structure and environment of NWCC FST. In addition, documents and learning spaces provided additional information regarding the potential cultural responsiveness to minority student groups.

The researcher(s) provided the channel for the selection of the conceptual frameworks, data collection instruments, data collection, data examination, and the conclusions drawn from data. The researchers' own judgements, ethics, and ideals became difficult to isolate from the research; therefore, researcher introspection and cognizance is fundamental to the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2012).

**Role of the Researcher.** I am a White licensed funeral director and embalmer, holding my first license in Virginia and serving my apprenticeship at Smith and Williams Funeral Home in Virginia Beach, Virginia. My first experience with discrimination was in interviewing for apprenticeship positions, as I was told by another funeral home that Smith and Williams was the only funeral home which hired female apprentices. Although believing in gender discrimination, I had doubts that overt (and possibly covert, while not being knowledgeable of the term) racial bigotry existed outside of cinema until I moved to Huntsville, Alabama in my very early twenties for my first licensed funeral director and embalmer position. My naivety and ignorance of racial intolerance was dangerous not only to myself, but several African American vault operators with whom I was "overly" friendly.



In addition to becoming aware of my White privilege and responsibilities during my early twenties, my academic career has been lengthy. I am a first-generation student who received a career certificate in funeral service in 1996 and continued through night school to obtain my Associate's Degree in Science in 2001. Nine years later I received my Baccalaureate degree in Mortuary Management followed by my Master of Arts degree, all via night programs. It never occurred to me that night-college was demeaned until my boss at Mid-America Tissue Bank showed me an article about the deficiencies of night school. After matriculation, but before Graduate classes began at UM, I also became aware of my subordinate status as a vocational student and instructor, per reading in our first assigned textbook (Harper, Jackson, & Austin, 2011). Subsequent readings in the Graduate classes, further cemented the knowledge that despite any educational gains, because of my latent beginnings my societal capital would always be subpar (Oakeshott, 1950).

Once I became aware of society's views of CTE classes, I began to observe student interactions. CTE students, it appeared were knowledgeable of the discrepancies, and potentially felt marginalized. Coupled with potential racial inequities of the systemic issues of race which are prevalent and far-reaching (Bell, 2002), challenges needed to be explored in an FST climate. **Documents.** The FST Attendance Policy and Dress Code from 2014 were analyzed using a rubric to assess the historical environment and potential cultural relevancy of the FST program. The rubric utilized the clarity, logic, ethics, agency, and relevancy (CLEAR) framework (Iskander et al., 2017). The CLEAR structure allowed for a methodological document review which was audience-centered and focused on five clearly articulated guidelines (Iskander et al., 2017). Using CLEAR, each article was measured for precision, reason, ethics, if the article had institutional value, and if the article was useable (Iskander et al., 2017).

Seven questions, with multiple sub-questions, were posed of FST instructors regarding program documents:

1. Is the document straightforward / specific?
2. Is the document student-centered?
3. Is the information complete?
4. Does the document support the student, NWCC, and NWCC FST?
5. Is the document positive to stakeholders?
6. Does the document have easily readability of font, punctuation, etc.?
7. Does the document avoid negative word connotation?

A thorough and detailed rubric of the document analyzation process may be found in Appendix C. The two initial reviews were completed by Mrs. Ebonē Dukes, instructor in the FST program and Ms. Angela Hopper, FST program director. The two subsequent reviews were conducted by the remainder of the coding team.

Completed reviews are kept in a file cabinet in the program director's office for the five-year period and will then be destroyed.

**Individual Alumni Interviews.** Four post-graduation and NBE semi-structured interviews were conducted by the original research team member, Norris Edney III. The two final interviews were conducted by Angela Hopper. The following are the basic twenty questions of the first four interviews:

1. How much did you know about FST before this program? What was your impression of the FST program before entering?
2. Who was your biggest influence for your choice to pursue a career in FST?
3. When you first decided to apply for this program, how well did you think you were

- prepared for the rigor? Were you nervous? Confident?
4. How well did your thoughts about the difficulty of this program line up with your expectations?
  5. Do you feel like your classmates were more or less prepared than you before entering? Why?
  6. Rate your confidence that you performed well in this program on a scale of 1-10.
  7. Do you feel that your performance was average? Above average? Below Average?
  8. Do you feel that you grasped the material as well as, not as well as, or better than your classmates?
  9. What was your perception or thoughts on the FST program overall?
  10. What was the most important thing about a good instructor, teacher, or professor?
  11. Whenever you struggled with a subject, what was the best thing for an instructor to do to help?
  12. Who was the best teacher you ever had and what made them special?
  13. Did your instructor use words that you did not know sometimes?
  14. On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable were you asking your instructor for help?
  15. Was there ever a time you wanted to ask for help but did not? Why didn't you?
  16. Was there ever been a time you thought you didn't need help but later found out that you did? Explain that experience.
  17. How well prepared did you feel before taking the board exam?
  18. To what extent did you feel comfortable hitting the "submit" button on the exam?
  19. What were some of your successes or struggles with the exam?
  20. What are your overall thoughts about the NBE?

A more detailed explanation of the initial questions may be found in Appendix A. After review of the initial four interviews, question number two was deleted and replaced with:

How comfortable did you feel with the campus / program site when you first arrived to register or inquire about the program?

On question nine, two questions were added:

What influenced your perceptions most? Did you feel comfortable on campus? With your peers? Within the FST program? Did you feel cared for by the college? Peers? Instructors?

A more detailed explanation of the revised questions may be found in Appendix B. Transcripts of interviewer and interviewee verbatim questions and answers were created for examination and pseudonyms were developed for each interviewee to maintain confidentiality. After five years, data will be destroyed.

**Learning Environment Analysis.** One learning climate analysis was conducted of both NWCC FST labs and the main FST classroom at the beginning of the research study by researcher Hopper and a second round of analysis was conducted of the learning spaces during the alumni interview phase.

NWCC FST utilizes one main classroom and two lab spaces – one clinical lab and one merchandising lab. All learning climates were scrutinized for incorporation of multiple elements to assist learners, both physically, emotionally, culturally, technologically, and educationally via a site analysis rubric from research garnered by several scholars. Basic components of a learning environment, such as lighting, supplies and airflow were surveyed under Nazari's (2014) framework, while NWCC FST program's ability to reach learners via a myriad of levels of technology and collaboration was addressed via Valenti's (2015) structure. Overall student

cultural inclusion was assessed using Hutchinson's (2003) research.

Eight statements, with multiple sub-statements, were applied to each learning site to validate the site's suitability:

1. Environment is physically comfortable
2. Physiological resources are available near environment
3. Climate is safe
4. Environment is inclusive
5. Climate is conducive to cooperation and collaboration
6. Environment promotes respect
7. Environment is physically comfortable
8. Environment is accessible

The educational site analysis rubric may be found in Appendix D. Completed, kept in a file cabinet in the program director's office, will be destroyed after a five-year period.

## QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH COMPONENT

The quantitative portion of this exploratory action research study was composed of examining student academic data, via SPSS and Microsoft Excel, to drive improvement within the FST curriculum after the interview process was underway. Four FST art classes are required for graduation. These classes were analyzed for any trends that might have indicated possible variables for success.

**Population and Sample.** The population and sample for the quantitative portion of the research study was the whole NWCC FST graduating class, which graduated between January 2013 and December 2016. The number of students was 39. All of the 39 students considered in the quantitative portion of the study were invited to participate in the qualitative portion of the study, via interviews. The population for the qualitative portion of the research study were alumni of the 39, which responded to interview requests and agreed to be interviewed.

**Institutional Review Board Approval.** The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UM and NWCC gave permission for the commencement of this research study to the original research team of Norris Edney III and Angela M. Hopper in December of 2016. After completion of four interviews, the research team disbanded on August 7, 2017 and Angela M. Hopper continued the research study independently. IRB paperwork was amended to reflect the research team alteration.

### **Organization of the Dissertation in Practice (DiP)**

Manuscript one provided a general outline of the research survey, which purported to

examine African American FST students' perception of their experiences in a vocational program, construct systems to restore educational equity, and eliminate racially unequitable testing results. The first chapter included the study's purpose, the significance of the study, research questions, delimitations, limitations, and the conceptual framework upon which the study was predicated.

The final two manuscripts: Data with Interpretation and Implementation of Plan present an overview of this research, the discoveries yielded from the analysis, and conclusions drawn from this study.

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## APPENDIX



## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Assessment Measured</b>
How much did you know about FST before this program? What was your impression of the FST program before entering?	Historical FST Climate
Who was your biggest influence for your choice to pursue a career in FST?	Historical and Current FST Climate
When you first decided to apply for this program, how well did you think you were prepared for the rigor? Were you nervous? Confident?	Historical FST Climate
How well did your thoughts about the difficulty of this program line up with your expectations?	Historical Levels of Empathy Historical Levels of Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel like your classmates were more or less prepared than you before entering? Why?	Historical Levels of Empathy Historical Levels of Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Rate your confidence that you were performing well in this program on a scale of 1-10.	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel that your performance was average? Above average? Below Average?	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel that you grasped the material as well as, not as well as, or better than your classmates?	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What was your perception or thoughts on the FST program overall? What influenced your perceptions the most?	Current FST Climate Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What was the most important thing about a good instructor, teacher, or professor?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy Relationships
Whenever you struggled with a subject, what was the best thing for an instructor to do to help?	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Who was the best teacher you ever had and what made them special?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy/Relationships

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Assessment Measured</b>
Did your instructor use words that you did not know sometimes? Did your tests and assignments use words you don't know? What happened when someone used a word you weren't familiar with during class or during an assessment?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable were you asking your instructor for help?	Empathy/Relationships
Was there ever a time you wanted to ask for help but did not? Why didn't you?	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Was there ever been a time you thought you didn't need help but later found out that you did? Explain that experience.	Empathy
Who were some of your best mentors? What made them special? How has your relationship with them affected you?	Empathy Relationships
Do you feel like you get more credit/fulfillment from your formal mentorship (A teacher or person in a mentorship program) or your informal mentorship (a community funeral director or family member or friend who just showed you the ropes or offered encouragement)? Which one do you think affects your success most?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy Relationships
Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement on a scale of 1-10: Mentorship / protégé relationships work better when the mentor and protégé have similar demographic backgrounds (age, race, sex, gender, profession, etc.)	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Relationships
How well prepared did you feel before taking the board exam?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
How did you feel after taking the board exam?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
To what extent did you feel comfortable hitting the "submit" button on the exam?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What were some of your successes or struggles with the exam?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What are your overall thoughts about the NBE?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy Relationships

**APPENDIX B: REVISED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

APPENDIX B  
REVISED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Assessment Measured</b>
How much did you know about FST before this program? What was your impression of the FST program before entering?	Historical FST Climate
How comfortable did you feel with the campus / program site when you first arrived to register or inquire about the program?	Historical Current FST Climate Empathy
When you first decided to apply for this program, how well did you think you were prepared for the rigor? Were you nervous? Confident?	Historical FST Climate
How well did your thoughts about the difficulty of this program line up with your expectations?	Historical Levels of Empathy            Historical Levels of Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel like your classmates were more or less prepared than you before entering? Why?	Historical Levels of Empathy            Historical Levels of Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Rate your confidence that you were performing well in this program on a scale of 1-10.	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel that your performance was average? Above average? Below Average?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel that you grasped the material as well as, not as well as, or better than your classmates?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What was your perception or thoughts on the FST program overall? What influenced your perceptions the most?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Did you feel comfortable on campus? With your peers? Within the FST program?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy
What was the most important thing about a good instructor, teacher, or professor? Whenever you struggled with a subject, what was the best thing for an instructor to do to help?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Who was the best teacher you ever had and what made them special?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Relationships

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Assessment Measured</b>
Did your instructor use words that you did not know sometimes? Did your tests and assignments use words you don't know? What happened when someone used a word you weren't familiar with during class or during an assessment?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Did you have any academic struggles? Did instructors help you with these struggles? On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable were you asking your instructor for help?	Empathy
Was there ever a time you wanted to ask for help but did not? Why didn't you?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Was there ever been a time you thought you didn't need help but later found out that you did? Explain that experience.	Empathy
Did you feel cared for by the college? Peers? Instructors?	Empathy Relationships
How well do you think you were being taught in this program compared to students in other programs at other schools?	Empathy Relationships
How well prepared did you feel before taking the board exam?	Empathy Relationships
What were some of your successes or struggles with the exam?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Were you nervous or confident hitting the submit button on the exam?	Empathy
To what extent did you feel comfortable hitting the "submit" button on the exam?	Empathy
How did you feel after taking the board exam?	Empathy
What are your overall thoughts about the NBE?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy

APPENDIX C: DOCUMENT REVIEW RUBRIC

APPENDIX C  
DOCUMENT REVIEW RUBRIC

Is the document straightforward/specific?	Are sentences succinct? Is FST vernacular limited? Are words easily understood?
Is the document student-centered?	May the student reasonably apply the information to personal use? Is the information helpful? Is the information understandable?
Is the information complete?	Does the document give the reader enough information to move to the next logical step, if needed?
Does the document support the student, NWCC, and NWCC FST?	Are all stakeholders fairly and fully represented? Are the values of each stakeholder represented accurately?
Is the document positive to stakeholders?	Does the document support success?
Does the document have easily readability of font, punctuation, etc.?	What parts of the document are heavily emphasized? Does this emphasis support stakeholder achievement? Is the emphasis culturally relevant?
Does the document avoid negative word connotation?	Is the word connotation neutral/positive? Is the document respectful?



APPENDIX D: EDUCATIONAL SITE ANALYSIS RUBRIC

APPENDIX D  
EDUCATIONAL SITE ANALYSIS RUBRIC

<p>Environment is physically comfortable: Climate is temperature-controlled appropriately, Outside noise is regulated, and chairs are numerous and adequate (Hutchinson, 2003). Room is properly lit (Nazari, 2014). If windows are installed, proper mechanisms exists to regulate amount of sunlight in room (Nazari, 2014).</p>	Physical Assessment of Space
<p>Physiological resources are available near environment: Food, water, restroom facilities are available and in close proximity to the learning spaces (Valenti, 2015). Environment is accessible to "fresh air" (Nazari, 2014).</p>	Physical Assessment of Space
<p>Climate is Safe: Learner may feel secure in the environment (Hutchinson, 2003)</p>	Safety Assessment of Space
<p>Environment is inclusive: Student has been oriented to the environment, feels "included" in the space, and feels incorporated into the FST culture (Hutchinson, 2003)</p>	Psychological and Emotional Assessment of Space
<p>Climate is conducive to cooperation and collaboration: Students have open-access to learning spaces. Environment has capacity for and welcomes collaboration while promoting a learning community. Examples may be whiteboards, spaces for students to communicate, technological opportunities for students to communicate, etc. (Valenti, 2015).</p>	Cultural Assessment of Space
<p>Environment promotes respect: Learning space demonstrates the significance of the career of funeral service (Nazari, 2014). Colors of the space promote positive emotional response for learning (Nazari, 2014).</p>	Cultural and Psychological and Emotional Assessment of Space
<p>Environment is technologically capable: Site has student-available technology, such as computers, printers, etc., and learning information is available in digital and hard formats, Site (and instructor) welcomes student-driven technology into the learning spaces (Valenti, 2015)</p>	Technological Assessment of Space
<p>Environment is accessible: Education is available virtually, as well as "in-classroom", facility is available to disabled students, Environment has supplies, such as paper, markers, etc. (Nazari, 2014)</p>	Technological and Emotional Assessment of Space

APPENDIX I: ATTENDANCE POLICY

APPENDIX I  
ATTENDANCE POLICY

FUNERAL SERVICE TECHNOLOGY ATTENDANCE POLICY AND GENERAL RULES

ATTENDANCE POLICY

REGULAR and PUNCTUAL attendance at all scheduled classes and labs is expected of all students and is regarded as integral to course credit. There are times, however, when students must miss, but regardless of the nature of the absences the student must not exceed the maximum times allowed. Each student is directly responsible to the individual instructor for making up work missed. If a student misses an exam they must have a legitimate excuse, with proof, in order to take the missed exam or have approval from the instructor.

STUDENTS THAT EXCEED THE FOLLOWING ABSENCES WILL BE DROPPED FROM THE COURSE(S) WITH A GRADE OF "F".

One class meeting, lecture or laboratory, per week .....	2
Two class meetings, lecture or laboratory, per week .....	4
Three class meetings, lecture or laboratory, per week .....	6
Five class meetings, lecture or laboratory, per week (One class equals two absences) .....	4

NOTE: "Three tardys' will result in one absence".

**(Entering class after roll has been taken is a tardy & after 10 minutes an absence)**

NOTE: "Students that miss labs will be given an absence which is added toward the absences given for the lecture that is associated with the lab. Optional lab times can be arranged in advance with the permission of the instructor."

GENERAL RULES

ALL STUDENTS MUST ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING:

If you have a disability (learning or physical) and need special accommodations, see Patsy Gardner in the Success Club Office located in DeSoto Center Room 308. She will contact me when the identification process has been completed. I will then meet with you personally and map out a success plan for you. If you have any questions, see me directly.

**PLEASE DO NOT SUFFER IN SILENCE OR BE ASHAMED OF THIS!** It is my job to assist you in achieving your full academic potential!

All students must be acquainted with the Colleges' Bulletin, the Student Guide, and other published policies for the guidance of students at NWCC.

All electronics, including communication and listening devices, i.e. cell phones, iPods, laptop computers, etc., must be deactivated and stored during class time. Any exception must be approved in advance by the instructor. If these devices go off during class, I reserve the right to ask you to leave and will alter the attendance records to reflect an absence for the day.

All students must respect other people's rights, opinions, and beliefs even though they may be different from their own.

No food, tobacco products, alcohol, or illegal drugs are allowed in the classroom.

No manner of dress will be allowed which disrupts the educational process. Billed baseball caps, hats, or hooded sweatshirts are not allowed.

No relatives/friends in class during lecture time.

See Student Guide page 25 – 30, for more details.

**FUNERAL SERVICE TECHNOLOGY GRADING SCALE**

A = 100 - 94

B = 93 - 87

C = 86 - 80

BELOW 80 = F

**AUTHORITY STATEMENT:**

**THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REMOVE FROM THE CLASSROOM ANY STUDENT WHOSE CONDUCT IS DISRUPTIVE TO THE LEARNING PROCESS.**

**JANUARY 2014**

APPENDIX J: STUDENT DRESS CODE

APPENDIX J  
STUDENT DRESS CODE

**FUNERAL SERVICE TECHNOLOGY'S DRESS CODE**

The purpose of the following information is to prepare you for your future in funeral service by providing you with requirements from several funeral firms.

Students are expected to dress in an appropriate manner to avoid extremes in personal appearances at all times. A daily regimen of good grooming and hygiene is expected of all students. Appropriate business attire is defined in this packet and expected to be followed during clinicals, field trips, and other stated times when representing the Funeral Service Technology program. Students who fail to comply with the guidelines set forth will not be allowed to participate in funeral service events.

**GENERAL GUIDELINES – MALES**

**CLOTHING:**

All male students will wear a business style suit, with a conservative color of blue, black, or charcoal gray. No seersucker, sharkskin, leather or suede suits.

A white, long sleeved shirt with a conservative tie.

Shoes should also be conservative, well maintained, clean, polished and coordinated with the suit.

All clothing should be clean and pressed.

**PERSONAL GROOMING:**

All male employees must wear their hair in a conservative fashion that represents an appearance fitting some one in funeral service.

Faddish styles, bright or festive colors, styles that conceal the face, or any styles that may be considered extreme, are unacceptable.

Length of hair and sideburns must be conservative.

Mustache, if worn, must be well trimmed.

Beards are generally not acceptable. If worn they must be well trimmed.

Fingernails must be kept clean and short in length.

Visible tattoos are not acceptable or in keeping with conservative attire.

**JEWELRY:**

Jewelry must be of a conservative nature.

## **JEWELRY CONTINUED:**

Limit rings to one per hand.

Earrings are unacceptable funeral home attire.

Pierced body parts (nose, tongue, eyebrows, etc.) are unacceptable and should not be displayed with jewelry.

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES – FEMALE**

### **CLOTHING:**

All female students will wear tailored, dark suits (with a skirt or pants) or conservative dresses. Conservative colors like blue, black, or gray. No seersucker, sharkskin, leather, or suede suits, pants, etc..

Hemlines for skirts should be conservative and no shorter than knee length.

Shoes should be close-toed, with a conservative heel height (no longer than 2 inches), well maintained, clean, polished and coordinated with the suit or dress.

### **PERSONAL GROOMING:**

All female students must wear their hair in a conservative fashion that represents an appearance fitting a funeral home setting. Faddish styles, bright or festive colors, styles that conceal the face, or any styles that may be considered extreme are unacceptable.

Nails must be moderate in length. Nail polish must be a conservative color. Fluorescent, bright, metallic, or flashy nail color or artwork is unacceptable.

Visible tattoos are not acceptable.

### **JEWELRY:**

Jewelry must be in good taste.

Limit rings to one per hand only.

Pierced ears are acceptable, but limited to only one pair of conservative, stud-like earrings worn on the lobe of the ear.

Pierced body parts (nose, tongue, eyebrow, etc.) are unacceptable and should not be worn with jewelry.



MANUSCRIPT 2  
DATA WITH INTERPRETATION

“Doubt of the real facts, as I must reveal them, is inevitable; yet, if I suppressed what will seem extravagant and incredible there would be nothing left.” (H. P. Lovecraft, 2007).

This manuscript offers a rich examination of this study’s initial problem of practice: to identify Funeral Service Technology (FST) students at Northwest Mississippi Community College (NWCC) who are at risk of failure on the National Board Exam (NBE), while also lending a thorough account of the study methodologies, context, population, participants, and data analysis utilized in this examination. This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods, to enable a multi-disciplinary outlook and provide a rich, humanistic approach to understand student perceptions, while offering educational plan improvement and implementation. Strategies for improvement and application are detailed in Manuscript Three, to address the second component of this study’s problem of practice: implement intervention strategies to enhance student performance on the licensure exam.

The purpose of this action-based study was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of African American students enrolled in an FST program in a community college setting, in order to improve program quality and NBE testing outcomes after graduation. Although higher education institutions in the United States became integrated by judicial ruling in 1954, it was much later, in 1962, that The University of Mississippi (UM) matriculated James Meredith, the first African American UM student (Sansing, 1999). Because a child’s passage to a collegiate education aligns closely with the prior educational access of their parents (Arum &

Roksa, 2012), the delayed accessibility to such primary freedoms, like education, has created an ever-widening monetary and performance disparity amidst people of color. While junior colleges were created to lessen such disparities, almost fifty percent of community college students will abandon college before receiving a degree (Tinto, 1993). Such inequalities are grim; however, the vastness of the inequity becomes more egregious when students are conferred a community college degree, yet are still unable to pass standardized licensing tests, particularly when success is divided dramatically upon racial boundaries.

The theories that guided the study included: Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 2002), Ladson-Billings' (1994) conceptual framework of cultural relevancy, linked with Warren's (2014) empathetic teaching technique. Hutchinson's (2003) theory was utilized to assess overall cultural inclusion. For specific components of the qualitative document review, rubrics were constructed using the clarity, logic, ethics, agency, and relevancy (CLEAR) framework (Iskander et al., 2017). Technology and collaboration were examined utilizing Valenti's framework (2015) and spatial observations of the learning environments were conducting using Nazari's (2014) research.

We want educational institutions to be places of guidance, support, and hope for students; however, for students of color, schools are often sources of more harm than help (Ladson-Billings, 2017). In addition to failing to offer a beacon of assistance, schools will often blame this failure upon students, rather than the institution (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Such accusations of absolute personal responsibility in the face of academic failure do not begin, nor end, in educational institutions. American citizens have been so indoctrinated on the idea of an open society, where everyone may obtain success simply by applying themselves with hard work, the blame of failure on the individual student is held by many. Being openly maligned and derided

by society may cause the disadvantaged student to believe in some personal deficiency, rather than a collective societal bias and failing of schools (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Furthermore, because the ideas of freedom and fairness, are held almost sacredly by Americans, the validity of cultural relevancy (Ladson-Billings, 1994) is castigated. Critics will often offer their own anecdotal tales to belie Dr. Ladson-Billing's (1994) theory, which usually omit or overlook the evidence of privilege in the disparager's story.

Consequently, due to the face of such open opposition of privilege in American society and doubt of Dr. Ladson-Billing's (1994) theories, quantitative methods and qualitative methods were utilized to substantiate this study and offer more evidence to support the conceptual frameworks. Statistical analyses including logistic regressions, two-sample t-tests, proportional analyses, and summary statistics were employed. In addition, four qualitative data collection methods were used to allow for strong study triangulation (Creswell, 2012). Alumni interviews, spatial observations, document reviews, and researcher field notes were utilized to support, validate, and ensure the dependability of the study's qualitative findings (Creswell, 2012).

The data collection section was divided into multiple parts. The first section described the study setting, while the participants are described in the second section. The third section illustrated all the procedures necessary to complete the study's qualitative design while the fourth section details all the procedures and statistical measures necessary to complete the study's quantitative design.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study used a descriptive research design to expand upon the cultural relevant framework provided by Dr. Ladson Billings (1994) within a community college setting and included an analysis of the current level of cultural relevance, in an FST vocational program. The evaluation occurred through a qualitative analysis of observation of the FST learning environments, scrutinizing physical artifacts such as course documents, and conducting FST alumni interviews. The study also utilized quantitative evaluation via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) analysis and Microsoft Excel of student records to discover indicators for student success.

### **Context of the Study**

Data for the quantitative portion of the study was gathered from two sources at NWCC: The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness and the internal NWCC Management Information Systems. For the qualitative portion of the study, data were garnered from alumni interviews, spatial observations, and document reviews.

This initial germinal quantitative data examination, a Chi square of graduate NBE data from 2013 through 2015, suggested racial imbalances and inequities of NBE success, which initially prompted this research study. An additional proportional analysis was conducted, using the total population of the 39 students, to allow a further quantitative data analysis, on the germinal quantitative data examination. The goal was to compare the proportion of those students who passed the NBE by race.  $P_1$  = Proportion of African American students who

passed the NBE.  $P_2$  = Proportion of Caucasian students who passed the NBE. The null hypothesis stated:  $H_0$ : There is no difference in the proportion of African American students and Caucasian students who passed the NBE.

$$H_0: P_1 - P_2 = 0 \qquad H_0: P_1 = P_2$$

The alternative hypothesis stated:  $H_a$ : The proportion of African American students who were successful on the NBE was lower than the proportion of Caucasian students who were successful the NBE.

$$H_a: P_1 - P_2 < 0 \qquad H_a: P_1 < P_2$$

$P_1 = 6/15$  (Six African American students were successful on the NBE out of the 15 African American students who took the NBE.)

$$P_1 = .4$$

$\hat{P}_2 = 19/24$  (Nineteen Caucasian students were successful on the NBE out of the 24 Caucasian students who took the NBE.)

$$\hat{P}_2 = .791667 \quad \text{The } z = -2.4806537. \quad \text{The } p \text{ value} = 0.0066.$$

The conclusion of this proportional analysis test was to reject  $H_0$ . The proportion of African American students who were successful on the NBE was significantly less than the number of Caucasian students who were successful on the NBE. The second quantitative analysis supported the conclusion of racial inequities found in the germinal data exploration.

Further and additional analysis were completed using historical graduate data from the years 2013-2016, to indicate additional success variables. The additional examinations were done via Microsoft Excel and SPSS through logistic regressions, two-sample t-tests, proportional analysis, and statistical summaries.

## **Setting and Site Selection**

The single-site study was conducted at NWCC, DeSoto Center, a commuter community college located in Northwestern Mississippi, near Memphis, Tennessee. Students attending NWCC, DeSoto may select a wide range of majors from Career Technical Education (CTE), which is commonly referred to as vocational training, or students may choose academic majors culminating to a traditional Associate's Degree. The DeSoto campus offered students a unique opportunity to continue to a four-year degree, as UM has a regional campus on-site. With the chronicled documentation of racial oppression in the South and the endurance of racial segregation in the funeral industry, this small, southern community college provided a gripping location to study African American student perceptions to increase student success.

## **POPULATION, SAMPLE, AND PARTICIPANTS**

**Population.** The population of this qualitative and quantitative study was alumni of the NWCC FST program.

**Sample.** The study's sample included purposeful sampling of 39 NWCC FST students who graduated January 2013 through December 2016 (Creswell, 2012). The years 2013 through 2016 were selected as these were the researcher's first three years employed with the FST program and the researcher had familiarity with the students and pedagogical methods. The entire sample was utilized for the quantitative procedure.

**Participants.** For the qualitative procedure, recruitment emails were sent to the entire sample of FST graduates. Recruitment emails may be found in Appendix E and Appendix F. If graduates agreed to participate in the research study, snowball sampling was utilized, as the researcher asked participants to speak to their colleague alumni regarding the study and recruitment emails.

**Ethical Considerations.** Study participants were apprised of how research data would be gathered and utilized. All data, such as interview notes, audio files, field notes, and reviews, is saved and stored in a secured area. Study data will be maintained and stored for the five-year period and will then be destroyed. Pseudonyms were used for all study participants, in order to maintain confidentiality. Participant confidentiality was protected throughout the duration of the study.



## QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Collecting qualitative data for this research study occurred through student interviews, document reviews, spatial observations, and researcher field notes.

***Alumni Interviews.*** Five thorough alumni interviews were conducted with FST graduates to collect data. A pre-constructed list of open-ended questions prompted former students to recount perceptions regarding their FST program experience and the feelings surrounding the NBE. See Appendix A and B for the interview questions. These interviews allowed the researcher direct insight into obstacles and challenges, along with victories and successes, of former FST students. Interviews took place with students following program completion. The interviews allowed for a much more robust level of study findings when combined with the quantitative data.

Beginning in the Spring of 2017, Researcher Norris Edney III sought participants from the pool of 39 alumni. Mr. Edney received former student email addresses from Ms. Hopper and emailed all 39 former students requesting participation in the study. Both the initial participant recruitment email and the revised participant recruitment email may be found in Appendix E and Appendix F. Alumni interested in study participation contacted Mr. Edney. Once a former student contacted Mr. Edney, he followed up with the former student regarding details on the study. If the former student was still interested in participation, Mr. Edney scheduled an interview. See Appendix A, Initial Interview Questions, for Mr. Edney's interview questions. Mr. Edney digitally recorded each interview for documentation. Following each interview, interviewee responses were transcribed verbatim by an independent transcription service. Mr.

Edney conducted three one-on-one alumni interviews, until Mr. Edney departed the research study in August of 2017.

Ms. Hopper continued the exact alumni interview process following Mr. Edney's departure in August 2017. Upon initial review of Mr. Edney's alumni transcripts and digital recordings, the interview questions were revised for the two subsequent interviews. A total of five interviews were conducted by Mr. Edney and Ms. Hopper. See Appendix B, Revised Interview Questions, for the updated questions utilized by Ms. Hopper. See Appendix G for Consent Forms utilized by Mr. Edney and Ms. Hopper. After the interviews were completed by Ms. Hopper, the interview recordings were transcribed by a commercial transcriptionist. For accuracy, all commercial transcripts were compared against the audio recordings for accuracy. Minor transcription errors were corrected.

Interview participants were offered the ability to view the transcript of their individual interview to validate the transcript accurately reflected the student's perceptions. In addition to promoting veracity, the process of participant transcript review gave opportunity for more conversations surrounding interview topics interviewees wished to expand upon.

Participant names were then redacted from interview transcripts and each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym. Pseudonyms were used to assure student confidentiality during the final phase of individual and group team coding processes.

***Document Review.*** Document analysis was conducted to examine levels of cultural relevancy that existed in the FST program, for the study's 39 participants, and offered information which was unattainable via the alumni interviews and learning space examinations alone. Written artifacts were easily accessible for this study as all documents were in use during the research study's initial phases.

Two documents examined during this study were of paramount importance in the FST students' orientation period: the Attendance Policy and Student Dress Code. Both the Attendance Policy and Student Dress Code are relevant only to NWCC FST, as these documents did not apply to any other NWCC program. Please see Appendix I for the Attendance Policy and Appendix J for the Student Dress Code. Each document was distributed to new students upon their first day in FST classes. Both documents were likely to yield an early indelible student impression upon the FST program. Because the FST curriculum is designed to prepare pupils for careers in funeral service, several classes required professional business dress for classroom lectures. In addition, students were required to professionally dress for any off-campus FST activities. The Student Dress Code was designed to offer guidance on precisely what type apparel is appropriate. The Attendance Policy, in conjunction with alerting students to the required prompt and persistent presence in classes, notified students of the FST grading scale, which is different from the academic grading scale at NWCC, in addition to alerting students to the college's disability policy, and tobacco policy.

Methodological document review of the FST Attendance Policy and Student Dress Code from 2014 were analyzed using a rubric constructed for this research study. The CLEAR framework was employed to establish the rubric which exercised five coherently expressed guidelines: clarity, logic, ethics, agency, and relevancy to examine both documents (Iskander et al., 2017). The CLEAR methodology allowed intense inspection of each document, while the rubric allowed for consistency among each reviewer (Iskander et al., 2017). The two initial reviews were completed by Mrs. Ebonē Dukes, instructor in the FST program and Ms. Angela Hopper, FST program director. The two subsequent document reviews were conducted by the remainder of the coding team, Dr. Keith D. Reed, an instructor in the FST program, and Ms.

Tonyalle Rush, NWCC Director of Evening School. A thorough and detailed rubric of the document analysis process may be found in Appendix C.

*Learning Environment Analysis.* Scrutinizing the FST learning spaces was an additional study measure employed to supplement alumni interviews and document analysis and enable further evidence to support researcher findings and interpretations.

NWCC FST had two labs and one primary classroom. One lab was a funeral merchandising lab with caskets, vault displays, and funeral sundries. The second lab was a clinical lab, with an enclosed demonstration-only funeral embalming room, surrounded by a student learning area which included: one printer, eight computers, five tables, and eight chairs. FST students often frequented the clinical lab. In the clinical lab students work on computers, study in groups, print papers, and the FST department holds fellowship in this space. Fellowship is usually FST potluck meals and meetings. Conversely, the merchandising lab is rarely utilized, generally only for classroom demonstrations and student capstone projects.

A systematic climate analysis of both NWCC FST labs and the main FST classroom were conducted utilizing a rubric developed for the purpose of this research study. Each learning environment was examined for multiple elements to assist learners, via a rubric constructed from scholarly research. Elements of Nazari's (2014) structure was included to assess the elementary aspects of a learning space, such as lighting, supplies, and airflow; which may assist a student physically. Research provided by Valenti's (2015) framework evaluated the FST space for availability of technology and if the space was open for student collaboration. Lastly, Hutchinson (2003) research offered guidance on constructing the rubric to examine the FST spaces for emotional and cultural inclusion.

One learning climate analysis was conducted at the beginning of the research study by

researcher Hopper and the final analyses were conducted by the team of coders during the alumni interview phase. The educational site analysis rubric may be found in Appendix D.

## QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Student interviews, document reviews, spatial observations, and researcher field notes provided the qualitative data for this research study and were analyzed concurrently with collection. Field notes were kept in journals, which served as a repository for ideas, observations, and kept the primary purpose of the study in the primary researcher's mind for the study's long duration.

**Coding.** Because of the humanistic and complex nature of this research study, coding was done manually, and a diverse multi-coding team was utilized. Based upon the framework provided by Researchers Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013), a team of four coders, Ms. Angela Hopper, Mrs. Ebonē Dukes, Dr. Keith D. Reed, and Ms. Tonyalle Rush, was employed. Each coder received interview transcripts independently, before the group team coding session (Campbell et al., 2013). Each coder read and manually coded each interview transcript for themes individually before coming together with the other coders in the team (Campbell et al., 2013; Creswell, 2012). This method of independent coding assured more validity and reliability in the coding process, as only themes recognized by two or more coders independently were assigned labels.

The team coding meeting allowed for discussing coding labels and themes and provided the opportunity for rich and detailed coding through the method of intercoder reliability (Campbell et al., 2013). Each coder read his/her theme aloud to the other coders, along with the supporting evidence for the theme (Creswell, 2012). All coders then had conversation, supplying

either more evidence to support the theme or reasons the theme may be invalid (Campbell et al., 2013). All four coders evaluated every theme initiated by each individual coder (Campbell et al., 2013). All themes were discussed until a cohesive group decision was made regarding the validity or invalidity of each theme (Campbell et al., 2013). This collaborative session yielded more robust coding and theme analysis not accessible via isolationist coding alone (Campbell et al., 2013).

In addition to intercoder reliability and intercoder agreement method adopted by Campbell et al. (2013) the study utilized peer debriefing (Creswell, 2012). One coder, Ms. Tonyalle Rush, had no connection to the research study's topic, nor FST. This coder's role was to maintain objectivity to coding and ensure overall reliability, since all other coders had an attachment to the FST program (Creswell, 2012). Both the Campbell et al. (2013) framework for coding and the employment of a research participant as a peer debriefer safeguarded the ethics of the study, as well as the study's academic integrity and rigor (Creswell, 2012). Ms. Rush served this role, as gatekeeper, of peer debriefer.

## QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

The quantitative research study was causal comparative in design (Creswell, 2012). Quantitative data collection focused on the 39 students who graduated from January 2013 through December 2016. Utilizing information garnered by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness and the internal NWCC Management Information System, each of the 39 students' academic raw data records were analyzed.

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at NWCC and UM, data was collected manually from the college's computerized data into a Microsoft Excel format. The data were later input for analyzation into SPSS version 24 and Microsoft Excel. Student names were not input into SPSS nor Microsoft Excel.

The identified dependent variable was success on the NBE arts. The dependent variable was not under the direct control of the researcher of the study. The study focused on nine potential independent variables for logistic regressions. Independent variables that were identified were: Race, Duration / Length of time in program, Initial Semester Grade Point Average (GPA), Final Semester GPA, ACT composite score, ACT Reading sub-score, ACT Math Sub-score, ACT English Sub-score, and ACT Science Sub-score.

Nine students did not have an ACT composite or any ACT sub-scores listed in internal NWCC Management Information System.

**National Board Exam.** The dependent, dichotomous, categorical variable was success on the NBE Arts exam. Numeric NBE scores were not available, therefore, student ordinal data was



entered into SPSS and Microsoft Excel as “1” for students who were successful on the NBE Arts examination and “0” for students who were not successful on the NBE Arts examination.

**Race.** For the purpose of this study, the nominal data on race was gathered from NWCC FST student admission paperwork. Race was self-identified by the FST students. Student data was entered into SPSS and Microsoft Excel as “1” for African American students and “2” for Caucasian students. All 39 students had race data entered into SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

**Duration/Length of Semesters in FST Program.** The NWCC FST program is designed to be a fifteen-month long course of study, if the student enrolls full-time and attends summer semesters. Because the post-graduation licensure test is comprehensive and tests students on knowledge of courses completed within a student’s first semester of FST, a lengthy tenure in the FST program may lead to unsuccessful results on the NBE. See Appendix H for Course of Study.

Community College students are often non-traditional students, who work more than thirty-hours per week, and are parents of small children (Martin, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013). Due to such a student’s cursory college experience, such full-time attendance may be impossible (Martin, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013). In addition, a high number of semesters to graduate may indicate a student has had to repeat classes due to failures, because the FST program is comprehensive and students face a standardized test post-graduation. Therefore, lengthy time from matriculation to degree conferment may hinder NBE success.

Students’ number of semesters was calculated from the moment the student began their first FST class. The value was entered into SPSS as the actual number of semesters. The least number of semesters a student attended and entered into SPSS was “3” and the most entered into SPSS was “8”. All 39 students had duration / length of semesters in FST program data entered into SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

**Initial GPA.** Initial GPA may indicate a student's acumen for the rigor of FST, which may be an indicator for success on the NBE. For the purpose of this research study, initial GPA is counted as the semester term GPA the student began taking the first FST course. If the student had prior general education or transfer classes which resulted in a cumulative GPA, the initial GPA collected for this study was the first FST semester GPA. The student's initial GPA was entered into SPSS as a number followed by two decimal points. All 39 students had initial GPA data entered into SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

**Final Semester GPA.** While final semester GPA will not identify students at risk of failing the NBE early in the student's educational journey and allow for early intervention, upon graduation final GPA may indicate a more precise GPA threshold of students who are at risk. Identifying such a limen may offer the opportunity for FST educators to enact earlier armatures.

For the purpose of this study, final semester GPA is calculated as the student's total higher education GPA. Final GPA may be evidence of a student's overall performance in college. All 39 students had final semester GPA data entered into SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

**ACT Composite Score.** Matriculating FST students were required to have an ACT composite score of 18 or Baccalaureate Degree before being accepted into the FST program. Ten students matriculated into FST with a Baccalaureate Degree; however, the NWCC college computerized data system had ACT data on two of these students. Eight of the ten students with a Baccalaureate Degree had no ACT data in the data system, and one student did not obtain a Baccalaureate degree prior to FST matriculation and had no ACT data. Thorough data searches of transcripts yielded no additional ACT data on these students.

Students' composite ACT scores were entered into SPSS. Nine students, of the 39 in the study's population, were lacking the composite ACT score.

**ACT Reading Sub-score.** The ACT reading sub-score focuses on a student's capacity to distinguish main themes from minor and insignificant details, while incorporating information into ideas.

Students' ACT reading sub-scores were entered into SPSS. Nine students, of the 39 in the study's population, were lacking the ACT reading sub-score.

**ACT Math Sub-score.** The ACT math sub-score is designed to illustrate how ready students are for college-level mathematics. Embalmers utilize math on a daily basis to calculate embalming fluid concentration levels and for restorative art techniques. In addition, calculators are not permitted for use on the NBE. ACT math sub-score may indicate students at risk.

Students' ACT math sub-scores were entered into SPSS. Nine students of the 39 in the study's population were lacking the ACT Math Sub-score.

**ACT English Sub-score.** The ACT English sub-score demonstrates a student's knowledge of grammar, writing abilities, and vocabulary skills.

Students' ACT English sub-scores were entered into SPSS. Nine students of the 39 in the study's population were lacking the ACT English Sub-score.

**ACT Science Sub-score.** The ACT Science sub-score is devised to interpret a student's grasp on scientific methods, data analysis, and conceptual thinking. Much of the art and science of embalming incorporate high-level conceptual thinking and problem-solving capabilities. ACT science sub-score may be an indicator of a student's ability to succeed on the NBE.

Students' ACT science sub-scores were entered into SPSS. Nine students, of the 39 in the study's population, were lacking the ACT Science Sub-score.

## **QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

The quantitative data examination focused on the 39 students who graduated from January 2013 through December 2016 utilizing SPSS version 24 and Microsoft Excel. The identified dependent variable for analysis was success on the NBE arts. The study focused on nine potential independent variables. Independent variables that were identified were: Race, Duration / Length of time in program, Initial Semester Grade Point Average (GPA), Final Semester GPA, ACT composite score, ACT Reading sub-score, ACT Math Sub-score, ACT English Sub-score, and ACT Science Sub-score.

Nine students did not have an ACT composite or any ACT sub-scores listed in internal NWCC Management Information System.

## LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS

Statistical analyses, using SPSS, was computed to develop a logistic regression model to predict NBE success, based on the nine independent variables of: race, duration/length of semesters in FST program, initial GPA, final Semester GPA, ACT composite score, ACT reading sub-score, ACT math sub-score, ACT English sub-score, and ACT science sub-score. A significance level of .05 was used for all logistic regression tests.

Seven of the nine independent variables were found to be statistically significant in predicting NBE success at the level of .05. The independent variables found to be statistically significant were: the ACT English sub-score, ACT composite score, the ACT reading sub-score, ACT science sub-score, duration/length of semesters in FST program, final GPA, and race. The two independent variables of ACT Math sub-score and initial GPA were not found to be statistically significant in predicting NBE success at the level of .05.

**ACT English Sub-score.** A logistic regression was conducted to determine if a student's ACT English sub-score might predict the student's NBE success. Only thirty students were utilized in this model, as nine students were lacking ACT composite and sub-scores.

ACT English sub-score contributed significantly to the prediction ( $p = .010$ ). Just utilizing a model with ACT English sub-score, can predict NBE success at a rate of 56.7%.

The *Nagelkerke's R<sup>2</sup>* provides a model summary of .615, which indicated a moderately strong corollary relationship between a student's ACT English sub-score and NBE success. The predictive equation was:

$$e^{(-10.888 + .572 \times \text{ACT English sub-score})}$$

$$1 + e^{(-10.888 + .572 \times \text{ACT English sub-score})}$$

Complete logistic regression results for English sub-score as a predictor for NBE success are in Table 8.

Table 8

Logistic Regression Results for English Sub-score as a Predictor for NBE Success

**Classification Table<sup>a,b</sup>**

	Observed	Predicted		Percentage Correct
		Fail	Pass	
Step 0	NBE Arts Fail	0	13	.0
	Pass	0	17	100.0
Overall Percentage				56.7

a. Constant is included in the model.

b. The cut value is .500

**Model Summary**

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	22.642 <sup>a</sup>	.459	.615

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

**Variables in the Equation**

Step	Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	English ACT sub-score	.572	.221	6.697	1	.010	1.772	1.149	2.733
	Constant	-10.888	4.273	6.494	1	.011	.000		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: English ACT sub-score.

Utilizing the logistic regression prediction equation, a student with an ACT English sub-score of 17 had only a 24% likelihood of success on the NBE, a student with an ACT English sub-score

of 18 had a 36% likelihood of success on the NBE, while a student with an ACT English sub-score of 19 had a 50% likelihood of success on the NBE.

**ACT Composite Score.** A logistic regression was conducted to determine if a student's ACT composite score might predict the student's NBE success. Only thirty students were utilized in this model, as nine students were lacking ACT composite scores.

ACT composite score contributed significantly to the prediction ( $p = .009$ ). Just utilizing a model with ACT English sub-score, can predict NBE success at a rate of 56.7%.

The *Nagelkerke's R<sup>2</sup>* provided a model summary of .448, which indicated a moderate relationship between a student's ACT composite score and NBE success. The predictive equation was:

$$\frac{e^{(-9.820 + .517 \times \text{ACT Composite score})}}{1 + e^{(-9.820 + .517 \times \text{ACT Composite score})}}$$

Complete logistic regression results for ACT composite score as a predictor for NBE success are in Table 9.

Table 9  
 Logistic Regression Results for ACT Composite Score as a Predictor for NBE Success

**Classification Table<sup>a,b</sup>**

		Observed	Predicted		Percentage Correct
			Fail	Pass	
Step 0	NBE Arts	Fail	0	13	.0
		Pass	0	17	100.0
Overall Percentage					56.7

- a. Constant is included in the model.
- b. The cut value is .500

**Variables in the Equation**

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	ACT Composite	.517	.198	6.783	1	.009	1.676	1.136	2.473
	Constant	-9.820	3.801	6.676	1	.010	.000		

- a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: ACT.

Utilizing the logistic regression prediction equation, a student with an ACT composite score of 17 had only a 26% likelihood of success on the NBE, a student with an ACT composite score of 18 had a 37% likelihood of success on the NBE, while a student with an ACT composite score of 19 had a 50% likelihood of success on the NBE.

**ACT Reading Sub-score.** A logistic regression was conducted to determine if a student’s ACT reading sub-score might predict the student’s NBE success. Only thirty students were utilized in this model, as nine students were lacking ACT composite and sub-scores.

ACT reading sub-score contributed significantly to the prediction ( $p = .031$ ). Just utilizing a model with ACT reading sub-score can predict NBE success at a rate of 56.7%.

The *Nagelkerke’s*  $R^2$  provided a model summary of .277, which indicated a slight relationship between a student’s ACT reading sub-score and NBE success. The predictive



equation was:

$$\frac{e^{(-4.930 + .254 \times \text{ACT Reading sub-score})}}{1 + e^{(-4.930 + .254 \times \text{ACT Reading sub-score})}}$$

Complete logistic regression results for ACT Reading Sub-score as a predictor for NBE success are in Table 10.

Table 10  
Logistic Regression Results for ACT Reading Sub-score as a Predictor for NBE Success

**Classification Table<sup>a,b</sup>**

		Observed	Predicted		Percentage Correct
			Fail	Pass	
Step 0	NBE Arts	Fail	0	13	.0
		Pass	0	17	100.0
		Overall Percentage			56.7

- a. Constant is included in the model.
- b. The cut value is .500

**Model Summary**

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	34.126 <sup>a</sup>	.206	.277

- a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

**Variables in the Equation**

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Reading ACT sub-score	.254	.118	4.677	1	.031	1.289	1.024	1.623
	Constant	-4.930	2.383	4.282	1	.039	.007		

- a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Reading ACT sub-score

Utilizing the logistic regression prediction equation, a student with an ACT reading sub-score of 17 had only a 35% likelihood of success on the NBE, a student with an ACT reading sub-score of 18 had a 41% likelihood of success on the NBE, while a student with an ACT reading sub-score of 19 had a 47% likelihood of success on the NBE. A student with an ACT reading sub-score of 20 had a 54% likelihood of success on the NBE.

**ACT Science Sub-score.** A logistic regression was conducted to determine if a student's ACT science sub-score might predict the student's NBE success. Only thirty students were utilized in this model, as nine students were lacking ACT composite and sub-scores.

ACT science sub-score contributed significantly to the prediction ( $p = .038$ ). Just utilizing a model with ACT reading sub-score, can predict NBE success at a rate of 56.7%.

The *Nagelkerke's R<sup>2</sup>* provided a model summary of .242, which indicated a slight relationship between a student's ACT reading sub-score and NBE success. The predictive equation was:

$$\frac{e^{(-5.221 + .277 \times \text{ACT Science sub-score})}}{1 + e^{(-5.221 + .277 \times \text{ACT Science sub-score})}}$$

Complete logistic regression results for ACT science sub-score as a predictor for NBE success are in Table 11.

Table 11  
Logistic Regression Results for ACT Science Sub-score as a Predictor for NBE Success

**Classification Table<sup>a,b</sup>**

	Observed	Predicted		Percentage Correct	
		Fail	Pass		
Step 0	NBE Arts	Fail	0	13	.0
		Pass	0	17	100.0
Overall Percentage					56.7

- a. Constant is included in the model.  
b. The cut value is .500

**Model Summary**

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	35.088 <sup>a</sup>	.180	.242

- a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

**Variables in the Equation**

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)		
							Lower	Upper	
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Science ACT sub-score	.277	.133	4.307	1	.038	1.319	1.016	1.713
	Constant	-5.221	2.645	3.897	1	.048	.005		

- a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Science ACT sub-score

Utilizing the logistic regression prediction equation, a student with an ACT science sub-score of 17 had only a 37% likelihood of success on the NBE, a student with an ACT science sub-score of 18 had a 44% likelihood of success on the NBE, while a student with an ACT science sub-score of 19 had a 51% likelihood of success on the NBE.

**Duration/Length of Semesters in FST Program.** A logistic regression was conducted to determine if a student's duration/length of semesters in FST program might predict the student's

NBE success. All 39 students were utilized in this model.

Duration/length of semesters in FST program contributed significantly to the prediction ( $p = .042$ ). Just utilizing a model with duration/length of semesters in FST program, can predict NBE success at a rate of 64.1%.

The *Nagelkerke's*  $R^2$  provided a model summary of .168, which indicated a low relationship between a student's duration/length of semesters in FST program and NBE success.

The predictive equation was:

$$\frac{e^{(3.932 - .688 \times \text{duration/length of semesters})}}{1 + e^{(3.932 - .688 \times \text{duration/length of semesters})}}$$

Complete logistic regression results for Duration/length of semesters in FST program as a predictor for NBE success are in Table 12.

Table 12

Logistic Regression Results for Duration/Length of Semesters in FST Program as a Predictor for NBE Success

**Classification Table<sup>a,b</sup>**

	Observed	Predicted		Percentage Correct	
		Fail	Pass		
Step 0	NBE Arts	Fail	0	14	.0
		Pass	0	25	100.0
	Overall Percentage				64.1

- a. Constant is included in the model.
- b. The cut value is .500

**Model Summary**

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	45.832 <sup>a</sup>	.122	.168

- a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

**Variables in the Equation**

Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Number Semesters	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
	Constant	3.932	1.696	5.375	1	.020	50.990		

- a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Number Semesters

Utilizing the logistic regression prediction equation, a student attending four semesters had a 76% likelihood of success on the NBE, a student attending for five semesters had a 62% likelihood of success on the NBE, while a student attending six semesters had a 45% likelihood of success on the NBE. A student who attends seven semesters only had a 29% likelihood of success on the NBE.

**Final GPA.** A logistic regression was conducted to determine if a student's final GPA might predict the student's NBE success. All 39 students were utilized in this model.

Final GPA contributed significantly to the prediction ( $p = .017$ ). Just utilizing a model with final GPA, can predict NBE success at a rate of 64.1%.

The *Nagelkerke's*  $R^2$  provided a model summary of .257, which indicated a slight relationship between a student's final GPA and NBE success. The predictive equation was:

$$\frac{e^{(-9.112 + 3.206 \times \text{Final GPA})}}{1 + e^{(-9.112 + 3.206 \times \text{Final GPA})}}$$

Complete logistic regression results for final GPA as a predictor for NBE success are in Table 13.

Table 13

Logistic Regression Results for Final GPA as a Predictor for NBE Success

**Classification Table<sup>a,b</sup>**

		Observed	Predicted		Percentage Correct
			Fail	Pass	
Step 0	NBE Arts	Fail	0	14	.0
		Pass	0	25	100.0
Overall Percentage					64.1

- a. Constant is included in the model.
- b. The cut value is .500

**Model Summary**

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	42.816 <sup>a</sup>	.188	.257

- a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

**Variables in the Equation**

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	GPA Final	3.206	1.344	5.691	1	.017	24.692	1.772	344.072
	Constant	-9.112	4.022	5.134	1	.023	.000		

- a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: GPA Final.

Utilizing the logistic regression prediction equation, a student with a final GPA of 2.5 had only a 25% likelihood of success on the NBE, a student with a final GPA of 2.75 had a 43% likelihood of success on the NBE, while a student with a final GPA of 3.00 had a 62% likelihood of success on the NBE.

**Race.** A logistic regression was conducted to determine if a student’s race might predict the student’s NBE success. All 39 students were utilized in this model.

Race contributed to the prediction ( $p = .017$ ). Just utilizing a model with a student’s race,

can predict NBE success at a rate of 64.1%.

The Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  provided a model summary of .201, which indicated a slight relationship between a student's final race and NBE success. The predictive equation was:

$$\frac{e^{(1.335 - 1.740 \times \text{Student's Race})}}{1 + e^{(1.335 - 1.740 \times \text{Student's Race})}}$$

Complete logistic regression results for student's race as a predictor for NBE success are in Table 14.

Table 14  
Logistic Regression Results for Student's Race as a Predictor for NBE Success

**Classification Table<sup>a,b</sup>**

		Predicted			
		NBE Arts		Percentage	
Observed		Fail	Pass	Correct	
Step 0	NBE Arts	Fail	0	14	.0
		Pass	0	25	100.0
Overall Percentage					64.1

a. Constant is included in the model.

b. The cut value is .500

**Model Summary**

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	44.754 <sup>a</sup>	.146	.201

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

**Variables in the Equation**

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Race(1)	-1.740	.728	5.711	1	.017	.175	.042	.731
	Constant	1.335	.503	7.055	1	.008	3.800		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Race.



Utilizing the logistic regression prediction equation, an African American student had only a 40% likelihood of success on the NBE.

**Independent Variables Not Predictors for NBE Success.** Two of the nine independent variables: ACT math sub-score and initial GPA were found to not be predictors for NBE success. Complete logistic regression results for independent variables not predictors for NBE success are in Table 15.

Table 15  
Logistic Regression Results for Independent Variables Not Predictors for NBE Success

<b>Independent Variable Not Predictors for NBE Success</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Initial GPA	$p = 0.267$
ACT Math Sub-Score	$p = 0.344$

## TWO-SAMPLE T-TESTS

Microsoft Excel was utilized to perform two-sample t-tests on both English sub-score and ACT composite score, as these were the strongest significance in the logistic regression models performed during this study.

**ACT English Sub-score.** The goal in performing two-sample t-tests in Microsoft Excel was to compare average English sub-scores of those students who passed the NBE to those students who did not pass the NBE. The null hypothesis was  $H_0$ : There is no difference in the mean ACT English sub-score of those students who passed the NBE and the mean ACT English sub-score of those students who did not pass the NBE.

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 \qquad H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$$

The alternate hypothesis was  $H_a$ : The mean ACT English sub-score of those students who did not pass the NBE was less than the mean ACT English sub-score of those students who did pass the NBE.

$$H_a: \mu_1 < \mu_2 \qquad H_a: \mu_1 - \mu_2 < 0$$

Total population for this two-sample t-test was thirty students, as nine students did not have ACT English sub-scores. Thirteen students did not pass the NBE with a mean ACT English sub-score of 16.38. Seventeen students passed the NBE with a mean ACT English sub-score of 23.

Two-sample t-test:  $t_{sat} = -4.868$  with a p value  $< .0001$ . The conclusion of this two-sample t-test was the mean ACT English sub-score of the students who did not pass the NBE is

significantly lower than the mean ACT English sub-score for those students who did pass the NBE.

**ACT Composite Score.** The goal in performing two-sample t-tests in Microsoft Excel was to compare the average ACT Composite score of those students who passed the NBE to the average ACT Composite score of those students who did not pass the NBE. The null hypothesis was  $H_0$ : There is no difference in the mean ACT Composite score of those students who passed the NBE and the mean ACT Composite scores of those students who did not pass the NBE.

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 \quad H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$$

The alternate hypothesis was  $H_a$ : The mean ACT Composite score of those students who did not pass the NBE was less than the mean ACT Composite score of those students who did pass the NBE.

$$H_a: \mu_1 < \mu_2 \quad H_a: \mu_1 - \mu_2 < 0$$

Total population for this two-sample t-test was thirty students, as nine students did not have ACT Composite scores. Thirteen students did not pass the NBE with a mean ACT Composite score of 17.769. Seventeen students passed the NBE with a mean ACT Composite score of 21.82.

Two-sample t-test: t statistic = -3.8957 with a p value = .0003. The conclusion of the this two-sample t-test was the mean ACT Composite Score of the students who did not pass the NBE is significantly lower than the mean ACT Composite Score for those students who did pass the NBE.

### **PROPORTIONAL ANALYSIS**

Further proportional analysis was completed on the ACT English sub-score and the ACT Composite score of the fourteen students who did not pass the NBE.

**ACT English sub-score.** Of the fourteen students who did not pass the NBE, ten had ACT English sub-scores of 18 or less, while only 3 had ACT English sub-scores of 19 or higher, and one had no score.

**ACT Composite Score.** Of those fourteen students who did not pass the NBE, nine had ACT Composite scores of 18 or below, 4 had ACT scores of 19 and above, while one had no ACT score.

## SUMMARY STATISTICS

Summary statistics to discern patterns were examined of the fourteen students who did not have success on the NBE. In this summary statistic, one student did not have ACT scores or sub-scores.

**ACT English sub-score.** Thirteen students' ACT English sub-scores were analyzed of the fourteen students who were unsuccessful on the NBE, as one student did not have an ACT English sub-score. The range of the ACT English sub-scores of students who did not have success on the NBE was 10 – 23. The average ACT composite score of the students who did not have success on the NBE was 16.38 with a sample standard deviation of 3.69.

**ACT Composite.** Thirteen students' ACT composite scores were analyzed of the fourteen students, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, as one student did not have an ACT composite score. The range of the ACT composite scores of students who did not have success on the NBE was 13 – 22. The average ACT composite score of the students who did not have success on the NBE was 17.77 with a sample standard deviation of 2.3.

**Final Course Grade in FST 1314 Funeral Directing.** All fourteen students' grades in FST 1314 funeral directing, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, were analyzed. Eleven students received a letter grade of "B," while three students received a letter grade of "C." No students failed the course prior or received a letter grade of "A."

**ACT Reading sub-score.** Thirteen students' ACT reading sub-scores were analyzed of the fourteen students, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, as one student did not have an ACT

reading sub-score. The range of the ACT reading sub-scores of students who did not have success on the NBE was 13 – 21. The average ACT composite score of the students who did not have success on the NBE was 18.33 with a sample standard deviation of 2.07.

**ACT Science sub-score.** Thirteen students' ACT science sub-scores were analyzed of the fourteen students, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, as one student did not have an ACT science sub-score. The range of the ACT science sub-scores of students who did not have success on the NBE was 12 – 25. The average ACT composite score of the students who did not have success on the NBE was 17.67 with a sample standard deviation of 3.14.

**Final Course Grade in FST 2812 Comprehensive Review.** All fourteen students' grades in FST 2812 comprehensive review, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, were analyzed. Seven students failed comprehensive review once prior to finally passing the capstone class. One student received a letter grade of "C." Six students received a letter grade of "B." No students received a letter grade of "A."

**Final Course Grade in FST 2713 Psychosocial Aspects of Grief.** All fourteen students' grades in FST 2713 psychosocial aspects of grief, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, were analyzed. Two students failed psychosocial aspects of grief once prior to finally passing the class. Nine students received a letter grade of "C." Three students received a letter grade of "B." No students received a letter grade of "A."

**Final Course Grade in FST 1413 Funeral Service Ethics and Law.** All fourteen students' grades in FST1413 funeral service ethics and law, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, were analyzed. One student failed funeral service ethics and law once prior to finally passing the class. Seven students received a letter grade of "C." Six students received a letter grade of "B." No students received a letter grade of "A."

**Duration/Length of Semesters in FST Program.** All fourteen students' duration/length of semesters before graduation after beginning their first FST class, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, were analyzed. The range of duration/length of semesters was 3-8. The average duration/length of semester was 5.15, while the sample standard deviation was 1.22.

**Final GPA.** All fourteen students' final GPA, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, were analyzed. The range of final GPA was 2.36 – 3.21, while the average final GPA was 2.8. The sample standard deviation was .22.

**Summer Attendance.** The summer attendance of all fourteen students, who were unsuccessful on the NBE, was analyzed. Seven of the fourteen students attended all summer semesters, five students attended partial summer semesters and two students attended no summer semesters.

**Initial GPA.** The initial GPA of all fourteen students, who were unsuccessful on the NBE was analyzed. The average initial GPA was 2.895, while the initial GPA range was 1.75-3.75. The sample standard deviation of initial GPA was .48.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Qualitative Alumni Interview Participants**

Interviews were conducted with five NWCC FST former students to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of FST African American community college students, in order to improve program quality and NBE testing outcomes after graduation. All five students had previously taken both sections of the NBE. Two of the interviewed students were unsuccessful on the NBE, while three were successful on the NBE.

Of the five participants, three were female and two were male. The participants' ages ranged from 24 years old to 61 years old. Four of the interviewees were African American and one interviewee was Caucasian. All of the interview subjects were currently working in the funeral service profession during the interview phase. During their time in the NWCC FST program, all the interviewed alumni were employed. Three students worked full-time in a local funeral home, while two worked part-time in a local funeral home. Each interview session ranged from 26 minutes to approximately one hour long.

**Interview Participants' Educational Backgrounds.** One interviewee had only high school education before matriculating into the FST program at NWCC. The second interviewee had community college and university experience, but had never been conferred a degree. The third interviewee had completed another vocational program and been conferred a vocational certificate. The final two interview participants had Baccalaureate degrees prior to admission into FST. Two of the alumni interviewees had no ACT data in the NWCC informational



database. The three other participants' ACT Composite scores ranged from 17 to 18 and these participants' ACT English sub-scores ranged from 15 to 19.

## ALUMNI INTERVIEW ANALYTIC THEMES

One analytic theme was uncovered to be significant only to the African American alumni. *Piece of Cake* revealed how the African American students all initially thought the program would be much easier than the program's reality. Four student themes were revealed through the coding process of the alumni interviews, regardless of student race. The first theme, *Plus (at least) One*, emphasized the importance students placed on the availability and student access to instructors, as well as to the additional resources instructors may bring to students via relationships. The second theme, *Elbow Grease*, explained the significance students imparted to hands-on learning, particularly in a vocational curriculum. The third theme, *All Hands on Deck*, detailed how learning communities were invaluable to the community college students and their vocational achievement. The final theme, *The Queen's English*, imparted the relevance vocabulary had upon academic success and student engagement in the classroom. A list of pseudonyms, gender demographics, and all themes, except *Piece of Cake*, revealed during interviews are located in Table 16. *Piece of Cake* was intentionally omitted from Table 16 to preserve participant confidentiality.

Table 16

Pseudonyms, Gender Demographics, and Themes Revealed During Interviews

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Themes Identified Via Interview</b>
Frieda	Female	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease, All Hands on Deck, and The Queen's English</i>
Josephine	Female	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease, All Hands on Deck, and The Queen's English</i>
Mary	Female	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease, All Hands on Deck, and The Queen's English</i>
Alfred	Male	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease</i>
Bart	Male	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease, All Hands on Deck, and The Queen's English</i>

*Piece of Cake.* The analytic themes uncovered during the interview process were similar, despite the interviewee's race, with one notable exception. All four of the African American interviewee participants indicated that upon matriculation into the NWCC FST program, each student felt very prepared for the rigor of the program and expressed the idea that the FST curricula would not be too rigorous.

One African American participant said, "I didn't know that much about it [funeral service education]. I thought it would be easy." The three other African American students agreed all were ready for the academics of FST, because of previous studies, personal abilities, and dedication. Another student interviewed summarized the group sentiment by stating:

Oh, I was actually confident I could do the work, and I was already prepared, because I love research, doing research and reading books, and doing outlines of books. So, I was prepared in that way. I was a little nervous about study habits and how I would fit the study habits in with working, but other than that, I think I was pretty much well prepared for it [FST program].

Only the Caucasian student expressed hesitancy during the interview, regarding how well

prepared the student felt at matriculation, saying:

I was scared of college anyway, and just the names of some of the courses, but the mortuary courses were much harder than I thought. I thought my basic courses were going to be the hardest, like chemistry, accounting, English II; I thought those were going to be my hardest. But it wasn't, it was the mortuary classes.

All five interview subjects expressed encountering difficulties soon after entering NWCC FST. One subject recounted, "the program was on another educational level, especially the science side. It's specialized and it's so intricate and the number of things that you have to learn, the definitions."

The African American students' *Piece of Cake* thoughts indicate more information might be needed before students begin the FST classes on the reality of the rigor. More accurate perceptions of the program before matriculation, may enable students to handle disappointments and difficulties, while not becoming overly discouraged once beginning their studies.

***Plus (at least) One.*** All five former students articulated the positive effect the student-teacher relationship, or how the lack of a solid relationship, contributed to the student's academic journey. Students were able to manage the collegiate atmosphere much more effectively when being attended by a minimum of one instructor (Karn, 2011; Mason, 2014). In addition, instructors were able assist students struggling in finding additional resources. Josephine talked about her confusion navigating the FST landscape upon matriculation:

I didn't even know, like when I started class, I didn't realize that I had to take boards [the NBE]. And I thought that there's a comprehensive review class that you have to do when you're done with everything. And it wasn't till during that first semester and it was like, somebody [another FST student] said something about boards, and I was, I'm still

referring to boards as just the comp review.

Because the FST program is a career technical program, with additional requirements differing from academic programs, strong instructor-to-student advising is paramount to continued student progress and retention. Adding another layer of complexity, most career technical program students are non-traditional students. Studies have indicated non-traditional students are at much greater risk for leaving college prior to degree conferment (Martin, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013). A culturally relevant teacher, acting as a student's *Plus (at least) One* may give students more confidence and enable students to succeed (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

One aspiration of cultural relevant teaching is to allow students to imagine scholastic achievement from themselves (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Therefore, communication and teacher availability is imperative to a student's success in college and implementation of culturally relevant techniques. Mary recounted how she felt a teacher could garner the best from FST students, "a good instructor will push his students. If the student is lacking something, they'll push them to try and get them up to another level." Lundberg (2012) found interesting and demanding classes will yield higher student accomplishments. In addition to being accessible to students, the interviewees recounted how influential good teaching was to engaging each of them with the curriculum. Alfred said:

First of all you need to know your material. You got to know what you're teaching in order to related to your students. You can't come into a classroom and read. Read to them, because they can read for themselves.

Increased availability and student access to instructors, with teachers who are committed to bridging achievement gaps in under supported groups and building positive mentor relationships, can allow vocational community college students increased availability of valuable resources and

opportunities for success.

*Elbow Grease.* All five students discussed the desire for more hands-on learning experiences, earlier and more frequently in the FST program. Recent research has suggested learners engaged in practical activities develop stronger association between the classroom curriculum and reality (Blakey & McFadyen, 2015). Alfred described the difficulty he endured visualizing embalming techniques from textbooks, “because you, you’re not going to learn how to embalm in the classroom.” [sic]

In addition, all five students perceived manual learning had an impact on their NBE preparedness. Blakey and McFadyen’s (2015) research indicated a direct link between student experiences and internalized knowledge. Alfred said:

You’re teaching them [students] this stuff [embalming], but you’re not actually allowing them to do it [embalm decedents] until the latter part of the program. So, I feel like if you’re teaching it [embalming] the whole program, you’re teaching it and you’re allowing them [students] that ability to have that [embalming] hands-on access to, to, uh what you’re teaching them, then it’ll [NBE] be a better turnout.

The need for student participation while engaged in learning activities may be especially indispensable to many community college students, as only forty percent of students entering into a junior college possess the ability to read at a college-level (Lu, 2013). Expecting students to grasp abstract concepts posed in textbooks may be unrealistic and defeating to those students without strong reading comprehension skills.

A cogent clinical experience of *Elbow Grease* for vocational programs, combined with a stalwart classroom pedagogy may supplement the curriculum for students lacking reading abilities. Such a comprehensive method will additionally serve as armatures for the diverse

groups of students community colleges were created to serve (Gillett-Karam, 2016).

***All Hands on Deck.*** Learning communities may prevent students experiencing adversity from feeling unique and separate (Collins, Massini, Bubb, Zaidi, & Novak, 2017). In addition, students may share solutions and suggestions which lead to overall higher student performance (Collins et al., 2017). Four of the five alumni interviewed mentioned the importance of their classmates during their time spent in the FST program. Josephine related during her interview:

In there [FST classes], it was all about sticking together. If you didn't make friends, at least school friends, unless you're just brilliant, you're not going to pass. And even people that are just brilliant, you're probably going to panic, you got a flaw somewhere. You're going to panic when it comes to tests or something.

Frieda agreed with Josephine, when she said, "my classmates, they helped me out a lot."

Because NWCC FST students share the collective goals of becoming a licensed funeral director and embalmer and passing the NBE, the FST students experience a kinship and community with their peers. Facilitating purposeful learning communities congruent with *All Hands on Deck* may help FST students be more satisfied with their college experience (Collins et al., 2017). In addition, students may feel less alone during their collegiate experiences and pursuits. In her interview, Frieda shared how talking to others helped her when she said, "So it's like, you know, the more you tell everybody you're not in this ship by yourself."

***The Queen's English.*** Four of the five interviewees imparted how they perceived their lack of vocabulary and proper use of the English language hindered their academic achievement. Scholarly writing is dense and laden with words used in atypical fashion (Townsend, Filippini, Collins & Biancarosa, 2012). In addition, the academic words utilized in textbooks are usually abstract, technical, and not employed in contemporary common exchanges (Townsend et al.,

2012). Josephine paralleled the concepts founded in the research by Townsend et al. (2012) when she said:

And you have to understand words [during the NBE]. And I would change that. There should be a way to look up a word. That's not cheating. You can know that information [the question is asking] all day, but if they use these elaborate words and wording to ask it, you'll never get it.

The denseness of the academic information can obstruct a teacher's attempts to deliver compelling lectures (Townsend et al., 2012). Frieda conveyed how the effectiveness of her instructor's lessons were hampered due to unfamiliar vocabulary, "cause the words that she [Frieda's instructor] would use, I didn't know." Such experiences lead to frustration and more of an academic workload for some of the FST students interviewed. Bart relayed his ordeal, "I found myself looking up terms that I've never heard before in order to stay with the pace of exams and things."

Such examples of language bias, which four of the interviewees described, puts community college students at a heavy disadvantage when the student's cultural way of speaking differs from how the information is disseminated (Roehl, 2015). Relying on a pupil's mastery of formal English as a measure of educational status indicates an extreme lack of social justice and equity (Roehl, 2015).



## **DOCUMENT REVIEW AND ANALYSIS RESULTS**

Two NWCC FST documents were analyzed to examine levels of cultural relevancy which persisted in the FST program, for the 39 study participants. The document review allowed for a rich triangulation of data not obtainable through the alumni interview process alone. The FST Attendance Policy, with a revision date of January 2014 and the FST Student Dress Code, with a revision date of January 2014 were both surveyed. Both documents were in use by NWCC FST until May 2016. Each document is significant to a FST student's orientation period. Please see Appendix I for the Attendance Policy and Appendix J for the Student Dress Code.

The written artifacts were examined using the framework provided by Iskander et al. (2017) to determine the clarity, logic, ethics, agency, and relevancy of each document. Seven principle questions were posed of FST instructors and the peer debriefer regarding program artifacts:

1. Is the document straightforward / specific?
2. Is the document student-centered?
3. Is the information complete?
4. Does the document support the student, NWCC, and NWCC FST?
5. Is the document positive to stakeholders?
6. Does the document have easily readability of font, punctuation, etc.?
7. Does the document avoid negative word connotation?

The constructed rubric detailing the document analyzation process may be found in Appendix C.

**Document Clarity and Precision.** The Attendance Policy was missing multiple elements for the document to be considered complete. The Attendance Policy referenced the “Student Guide” and the “NWCC Bulletin;” however, no weblinks were provided for the student to resource the cited additional information. In addition, students with disabilities were asked to contact the disability coordinator; however, the coordinator’s email address nor contact telephone number were provided.

Multiple grammatical errors existed in the Attendance Policy. For example the document read, “Three tardys’ will result in one absence.” [*sic*] A comma splice and underutilization of commas throughout the document were also noted. Such a poorly written document, lessens clarity and readability for students who may already have difficulty with reading comprehension (Lu, 2013).

While the policy read hooded sweatshirts were prohibited, the reader may be confused as to if the act of wearing a hooded top alone is a violation of the policy or if wearing the hood on the student’s head is the actual policy violation. The document was not coherent in the delineation.

The Student Dress Code utilized the word “conservative” fourteen times; however, conservative was never concretely defined. An abstract word such as “conservative,” may be confusing to students who are on a remedial reading level, as are almost sixty percent of students matriculating into community college (Lu, 2013). Therefore such a poor word choice, offered a student little guidance. Non-traditional students may have had a challenge determining an accurate rendering of the instructor’s meaning of such an abstract term and students may have been set to fail.

**Student-Centered Positionality.** The Attendance Policy required students to arrive to class

with no technology, limiting students to paper and pencil-type note taking. In addition to being severely constrictive, this policy inhibited students from googling or utilizing on-line dictionaries to research words and vocabulary utilized in the classroom which may be unfamiliar. Non-traditional students may be sensitive to their perceived lack of knowledge and less likely than a traditional college student to ask a word's definition; therefore, limiting technological resources may have further put FST non-traditional students at a disadvantage.

The Student Dress Code was segregated into "Male" and "Female" sections. The "female" dress stipulations indicated earrings and pierced ears were acceptable; however, the "male" category indicated earrings were unacceptable. Such a rigid separation by gender was unfair and outdated.

In addition, the separation into "male" and "female" categories indicated gender as exclusively binary. Such strict constraints on identifying gender are not only unfair to students who may identify as non-binary, these dated descriptions did not model by example the inclusion and compassion expected of a modern funeral home professional to extend compassionate and non-biased care to grieving families.

**Ethics of Word Connotation and Typeface.** The Attendance Policy presented students with a confusing mixture of typeface. For example, on the first line of the document "REGULAR" [*sic*] and "PUNCTUAL" [*sic*] were completely capitalized, inferring a demand for such attendance. If a student was absent from class, the document reads the student must present "a legitimate excuse, with proof." Such word connotation, for adults attending post-secondary education, seemed extremely poor.

The document detailed the existence of a disability coordinator, stating that the FST instructor, not the disability coordinator, would, "map out a success plan for you." Such a

statement seemed offensive to students who have successfully matriculated into college. In bold, all capital letters, the document exclaimed, “**PLEASE DO NOT SUFFER IN SILENCE OR BE ASHAMED OF THIS!**” [*sic*] Placing such a sentence in all capital letters, while using the word “ashamed” and “suffer” when referencing disabilities is negative, odd, and atypical. Certainly, someone should never be “ashamed” of a disability; therefore, it is questionable why the author felt such a statement needed inclusion.

Most NWCC documents or syllabus contained an “authority statement;” however, on the FST Attendance Policy it was written in bold and all capital letters, “**AUTHORITY STATEMENT: THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REMOVE FROM THE CLASSROOM ANY STUDENT WHOSE CONDUCT IS DISRUPTIVE TO THE LEARNING PROCESS.**” [*sic*] The urgency to present the authority statement in bold, all capital letters, seemed to instill a severe and harsh image of instructors’ authority in FST.

The Attendance Policy, a 521 - word document, had the word “must” written eight times; while the Student Dress Code, a 494 - word document, had the word “must” written eleven times. “Must” is a word commonly associated with authoritarianism. The Student Dress Code also employed the word, “unacceptable” six times. Non-traditional college students, who often are financially self-supporting, older than their university peers, and often parents themselves may be averse to such an overly domineering style (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Martin, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013). The negative word connotation presented in both the Attendance Policy and Student Dress Code may have been viewed as condescending and inhibiting to good student to teacher relationships (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Martin, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013).

“Hooded sweatshirts” were written as being disallowed, on the Attendance Policy, as such shirts were deemed disruptive to the educational process. Such a specific statement was

indicative of a racial stereotype, as “hoodies” are socially defined as being indicative of African American male culture (Jeffers, 2013). The Student Dress Code further perpetuated racial stereotypes by dictating “sharkskin suits” as unacceptable. Both prohibitions seemed to be less at perpetuating a conducive learning environment, than disallowing multiculturalism (Jeffers, 2013).

The Student Dress Code utilized the polarizing word “conservative” multiple times. In addition to being abstract, depending upon a student’s culture, “conservative” may have a negative connotation. Conservative, also denoted a disapproval of diversity and multiculturalism, further cementing the racial disparities (Jeffers, 2013).

**Success Focused.** The Attendance Policy offered an antiquated technological stance, in reading:

All electronics, including communication and listening devices, i.e. cell phones, I-Pods, laptop computers, etc., must be deactivated and stored during class time. Any exception must be approved in advance by the instructor. If these devices go off during class, I reserve the right to ask you to leave and will alter the attendance records to reflect an absence for the day.

Such a negative stance on technology reflected a lack of consideration on the contemporary occupational environment, which the vocational program was attempting to prepare students for entry. In addition to alerting the student to a potentially unchallenging environment, the policy indicated the pedagogical methods were also likely obsolete.

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ANALYSIS RESULTS

Three NWCC FST learning spaces were analyzed to examine levels of cultural relevancy which persisted in the FST program, for the 39 study participants. The space analysis allowed for a much more vigorous triangulation of data, when combined with the quantitative analysis and the additional qualitative methods. The FST clinical lab, a funeral merchandising lab, and the primary FST classroom were scrutinized.

Each learning climate was observed and examined for incorporation of multiple elements to assist learners. The FST instructors and the peer debriefer analyzed the learning spaces through eight statements, utilizing a rubric, to validate the site's suitability:

1. Environment is physically comfortable
2. Physiological resources are available near environment
3. Climate is safe
4. Environment is inclusive
5. Climate is conducive to cooperation and collaboration
6. Environment promotes respect
7. Environment is physically comfortable
8. Environment is accessible

The educational site analysis rubric may be found in Appendix D.

**Inclusivity of Space.** Upon the initial review of the FST clinical lab, five signs were posted which prohibited communication. The signs read, "This lab is for studying, not socializing. **NO**

**TALKING!!!”** [*sic*] Such posted signage seemed very restrictive and constraining in a clinical space, negated student collaboration, and the fundamental premise of *All Hands on Deck*. In addition, the sign may have been indicative of an assimilationist teaching technique, as African American students are more likely to gravitate towards community learning styles versus Caucasian students who prefer to study alone (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The clinical lab had only eight, hard plastic chairs. Many of the chairs were neglected and rickety. The enrollment of FST students was approximately 26 students, during this study. Due to the limited number of chairs, the potential uncomfortable nature of the chairs, and the number of NWCC FST students, student collaboration and inclusion was limited.

**Accessibility of Space.** The clinical lab was kept locked after FST students departed for the day and remained locked until the following morning. The merchandising lab was continually locked, unless actively being utilized. The clinical lab would usually be unlocked by FST instructors after their arrival time at 8:00 a.m.; however, the campus building opened for student admittance at 7:00 a.m. FST students, who often worked unpredictable hours in the funeral profession may have wished to use the clinical lab before FST instructors’ arrival. Such restrictions may have been an impediment to a student’s ability to not only utilize the space, but also to feel included and welcomed.

Matriculating students were not oriented and welcomed into the clinical lab spaces by FST instructors. The students were expected to organically gravitate to the FST environments, via other students. Lack of a proper initiation period may have obstructed newer students’ use of the lab, particularly more introverted FST students.

**Physiologically Accommodating.** During the initial review, the clinical lab had only eight chairs for student use. The chairs were hard plastic, on four wheels, and very unlevel due to

years of abuse. Because of the limited number and discomfort afforded by the clinical lab chairs, FST students may have chosen to study elsewhere and not utilized the clinical lab space. The inhospitable chairs, and lack of suitable seating areas, may be detrimental to *All Hands on Deck*.

**Technologically Sustainable.** The main FST classroom had a bulletin board sign, highlighted in yellow marker, which read, “NO CELLPHONES. Leave them in your car.” [sic] In addition to such a sign being technologically obsolete, most of the students in the NWCC program were non-traditional students, financially independent, had children themselves, and were working in positions at local funeral homes. The cellphone prohibition prevented students from communicating with family, child or elder-care providers, and employers during emergencies. Such an authoritarian statement, made by sign on behalf of FST educators, may have negatively impacted a student’s ability to have an authentic *Plus (at least) One* relationship with an instructor. Assimilationist teaching disregards a student’s culture and position, while stodgily placing the student into a preconceived role (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The sign prohibiting cellphones seemed to be evidence of assimilationist techniques, by placing students in a position of inequality, immaturity, and irresponsibility (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The clinical lab had a magazine rack with multiple periodicals regarding the funeral profession. While the magazines were current, there were no books present. Three posters were displayed: one on embalming the tissue donor, another illustrated the anatomy of the venous system, and the final poster presented the human arterial system.

While the clinical lab had eight computers for student use, only one printer served all eight computers. Furthermore, the clinical lab had two white boards to facilitate student collaboration, yet there were no markers available for use. Such a limited amount of printer availability and lack of basic supplies may have served to impede a student’s use of the



technology and to collaborate.

## SUMMARY OF ANALYTIC THEMES

Five total analytic themes were identified during the five alumni interviews: *Piece of Cake*, *Plus (at least) One*, *Elbow Grease*, *All Hands on Deck*, and *The Queen's English*. The themes uncovered the perceptions of the FST graduates' experiences during the FST program at NWCC.

The only exclusive theme to the African American students' experience was *Piece of Cake* which illuminated the difference in how the African American students versus the Caucasian student viewed the rigor of the FST program prior to entry. All of the African American students expressed how well they thought their academic prowess would be in NWCC FST. Only the Caucasian student expressed anxiety and apprehension.

Every former student interviewed verbalized how important a positive student to teacher, *Plus (at least) One*, relationship was to student success and goal attainment. Instructors not only gave guidance, but offered additional resources to students, when the students invariably faced academic and/or social difficulties. Lack of *Plus (at least) One* contributed to students feelings of a superficial and perfunctory collegiate experience.

*Elbow Grease* demonstrated the bearing all five students interviewed believed manual learning imparted not only to learning, but the student's ultimate grasp of the material. The graduates indicated performing tasks learned in the classroom enabled better success overall on the NBE. *Elbow Grease* is particularly important for community college students who may come to college underprepared versus their legacy university peers (Lu, 2013).

*All Hands on Deck* illustrated how much NWCC FST students depended upon each other for learning. Sharing a common goal and purpose, to become a licensed funeral director and embalmer and pass the NBE, allowed for a great kinship and community between the former students. *All Hands on Deck* enabled students to overcome challenges and face obstacles without being solitary in the pursuit.

In *The Queen's English* students discussed how language barriers, written and spoken, impaired their ability to test fairly and even diminished student engagement in the classroom. Students felt the disparity in *The Queen's English* was not just with technical words pertaining to funeral service or medical terminology, but words used to communicate ideas and convey new information.

Through a comprehensive analysis of quantitative student data and additional qualitative data measures of document review and spatial observations, the study found several areas where NWCC FST was not supporting students in the analytic themes uncovered in the student interviews.

## **SUMMARY OF MANUSCRIPT TWO**

This research study was prompted by an original data examination which indicated racial inequities in the NWCC FST program. The supposition of racial inequity was initially based upon a Chi square that indicated the proportion of African American students who passed the final licensure exam being significantly less than the number of Caucasian students who passed the same licensure exam and later, further supported by a proportional analysis. Please see Chi square results in Table 6.

Manuscript two offered an elaborate account of the study's methodologies, context, population, participants, and data analysis employed in this research. The evaluation, through a qualitative analysis via five alumni interviews, observation of the FST learning environments, and written artifact examinations revealed multiple levels of actions undermining the scholastic environment for students. Because of the potential for racial inequities, such academic subversion may be more potentially harmful to students of color. In addition, six independent variables, found to be statistically significant through quantitative data analysis, may predict NBE success and identify students at risk of not passing the NBE.

Manuscript three will provide a comprehensive plan and examination of this study's secondary problem of practice: to develop and implement intervention strategies to enhance FST at NWCC student performance on the NBE.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Assessment Measured</b>
How much did you know about FST before this program? What was your impression of the FST program before entering?	Historical FST Climate
Who was your biggest influence for your choice to pursue a career in FST?	Historical and Current FST Climate
When you first decided to apply for this program, how well did you think you were prepared for the rigor? Were you nervous? Confident?	Historical FST Climate
How well did your thoughts about the difficulty of this program line up with your expectations?	Historical Levels of Empathy Historical Levels of Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel like your classmates were more or less prepared than you before entering? Why?	Historical Levels of Empathy Historical Levels of Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Rate your confidence that you were performing well in this program on a scale of 1-10.	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel that your performance was average? Above average? Below Average?	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel that you grasped the material as well as, not as well as, or better than your classmates?	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What was your perception or thoughts on the FST program overall? What influenced your perceptions the most?	Current FST Climate Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What was the most important thing about a good instructor, teacher, or professor?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy Relationships
Whenever you struggled with a subject, what was the best thing for an instructor to do to help?	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Who was the best teacher you ever had and what made them special?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy/Relationships

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Assessment Measured</b>
Did your instructor use words that you did not know sometimes? Did your tests and assignments use words you don't know? What happened when someone used a word you weren't familiar with during class or during an assessment?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable were you asking your instructor for help?	Empathy/Relationships
Was there ever a time you wanted to ask for help but did not? Why didn't you?	Empathy/Relationships Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Was there ever been a time you thought you didn't need help but later found out that you did? Explain that experience.	Empathy
Who were some of your best mentors? What made them special? How has your relationship with them affected you?	Empathy Relationships
Do you feel like you get more credit/fulfillment from your formal mentorship (A teacher or person in a mentorship program) or your informal mentorship (a community funeral director or family member or friend who just showed you the ropes or offered encouragement)? Which one do you think affects your success most?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy Relationships
Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement on a scale of 1-10: Mentorship / protégé relationships work better when the mentor and protégé have similar demographic backgrounds (ace, race, sex, gender, profession, etc.)	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Relationships
How well prepared did you feel before taking the board exam?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
How did you feel after taking the board exam?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
To what extent did you feel comfortable hitting the "submit" button on the exam?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What were some of your successes or struggles with the exam?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What are your overall thoughts about the NBE?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy Relationships

**APPENDIX B: REVISED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

APPENDIX B  
REVISED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Assessment Measured</b>
How much did you know about FST before this program? What was your impression of the FST program before entering?	Historical FST Climate
How comfortable did you feel with the campus / program site when you first arrived to register or inquire about the program?	Historical Current FST Climate Empathy
When you first decided to apply for this program, how well did you think you were prepared for the rigor? Were you nervous? Confident?	Historical FST Climate
How well did your thoughts about the difficulty of this program line up with your expectations?	Historical Levels of Empathy            Historical Levels of Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel like your classmates were more or less prepared than you before entering? Why?	Historical Levels of Empathy            Historical Levels of Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Rate your confidence that you were performing well in this program on a scale of 1-10.	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel that your performance was average? Above average? Below Average?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Do you feel that you grasped the material as well as, not as well as, or better than your classmates?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
What was your perception or thoughts on the FST program overall? What influenced your perceptions the most?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Did you feel comfortable on campus? With your peers? Within the FST program?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy
What was the most important thing about a good instructor, teacher, or professor? Whenever you struggled with a subject, what was the best thing for an instructor to do to help?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Who was the best teacher you ever had and what made them special?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Relationships

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Assessment Measured</b>
Did your instructor use words that you did not know sometimes? Did your tests and assignments use words you don't know? What happened when someone used a word you weren't familiar with during class or during an assessment?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Did you have any academic struggles? Did instructors help you with these struggles? On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable were you asking your instructor for help?	Empathy
Was there ever a time you wanted to ask for help but did not? Why didn't you?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Was there ever been a time you thought you didn't need help but later found out that you did? Explain that experience.	Empathy
Did you feel cared for by the college? Peers? Instructors?	Empathy Relationships
How well do you think you were being taught in this program compared to students in other programs at other schools?	Empathy Relationships
How well prepared did you feel before taking the board exam?	Empathy Relationships
What were some of your successes or struggles with the exam?	Empathy Cultural Relevant Pedagogy
Were you nervous or confident hitting the submit button on the exam?	Empathy
To what extent did you feel comfortable hitting the "submit" button on the exam?	Empathy
How did you feel after taking the board exam?	Empathy
What are your overall thoughts about the NBE?	Cultural Relevant Pedagogy Empathy

APPENDIX C: DOCUMENT REVIEW RUBRIC



APPENDIX C  
DOCUMENT REVIEW RUBRIC

Is the document straightforward/specific?	Are sentences succinct? Is FST vernacular limited? Are words easily understood?
Is the document student-centered?	May the student reasonably apply the information to personal use? Is the information helpful? Is the information understandable?
Is the information complete?	Does the document give the reader enough information to move to the next logical step, if needed?
Does the document support the student, NWCC, and NWCC FST?	Are all stakeholders fairly and fully represented? Are the values of each stakeholder represented accurately?
Is the document positive to stakeholders?	Does the document support success?
Does the document have easily readability of font, punctuation, etc.?	What parts of the document are heavily emphasized? Does this emphasis support stakeholder achievement? Is the emphasis culturally relevant?
Does the document avoid negative word connotation?	Is the word connotation neutral/positive? Is the document respectful?

APPENDIX D: EDUCATIONAL SITE ANALYSIS RUBRIC

APPENDIX D  
EDUCATIONAL SITE ANALYSIS RUBRIC

<p>Environment is physically comfortable: Climate is temperature-controlled appropriately, Outside noise is regulated, and chairs are numerous and adequate (Hutchinson, 2003). Room is properly lit (Nazari, 2014). If windows are installed, proper mechanisms exists to regulate amount of sunlight in room (Nazari, 2014).</p>	Physical Assessment of Space
<p>Physiological resources are available near environment: Food, water, restroom facilities are available and in close proximity to the learning spaces (Valenti, 2015). Environment is accessible to "fresh air" (Nazari, 2014).</p>	Physical Assessment of Space
<p>Climate is Safe: Learner may feel secure in the environment (Hutchinson, 2003)</p>	Safety Assessment of Space
<p>Environment is inclusive: Student has been oriented to the environment, feels "included" in the space, and feels incorporated into the FST culture (Hutchinson, 2003)</p>	Psychological and Emotional Assessment of Space
<p>Climate is conducive to cooperation and collaboration: Students have open-access to learning spaces. Environment has capacity for and welcomes collaboration while promoting a learning community. Examples may be whiteboards, spaces for students to communicate, technological opportunities for students to communicate, etc. (Valenti, 2015).</p>	Cultural Assessment of Space
<p>Environment promotes respect: Learning space demonstrates the significance of the career of funeral service (Nazari, 2014). Colors of the space promote positive emotional response for learning (Nazari, 2014).</p>	Cultural and Psychological and Emotional Assessment of Space
<p>Environment is technologically capable: Site has student-available technology, such as computers, printers, etc., and learning information is available in digital and hard formats, Site (and instructor) welcomes student-driven technology into the learning spaces (Valenti, 2015)</p>	Technological Assessment of Space
<p>Environment is accessible: Education is available virtually, as well as "in-classroom", facility is available to disabled students, Environment has supplies, such as paper, markers, etc. (Nazari, 2014)</p>	Technological and Emotional Assessment of Space

APPENDIX E: INITIAL PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

APPENDIX E  
INITIAL PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is EJ Edney and I am working on a project with your instructor, Angela Hopper. We are interviewing current and former students of Northwest Community College's Funeral Science Technology program to find out more about the challenges students face during and after the program. We will use this information to evaluate the program and design and implement new programs that will help students succeed. You have been identified as a potential participant in our project because of your knowledge of the program and first-hand experience as a student. Our interviews should last between one hour to one hour and 15 minutes and can be conducted in the FST Lab on campus, or a place that is convenient for you.

If you are willing to participate, please sign the attached waiver and respond to this email with a few dates and times that work well for you. I will respond with a date and time that works well for both of us.

I hope that you will take this opportunity to tell me more about your experience as a student or alumnus of the Funeral Science Technology program at Northwest Mississippi Community College. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any more information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards, EJ Edney

**APPENDIX F: REVISED INITIAL PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL**

APPENDIX F  
REVISED INITIAL PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

I am interviewing former students of Northwest Community College's Funeral Science Technology program to find out more about the challenges students face during and after the program. I will use this information to evaluate the program and design and implement new programs that will help students succeed, for a research study 17-027. You have been identified as a potential participant in the project because of your knowledge of the program and first-hand experience as a student. The interviews should last between one hour to one hour and 15 minutes and can be conducted in the FST Lab on campus, or a place that is convenient for you.

If you are willing to participate, please sign the attached waiver and respond to this email with a few dates and times that work well for you. I will respond with a date and time that works well for both of us.

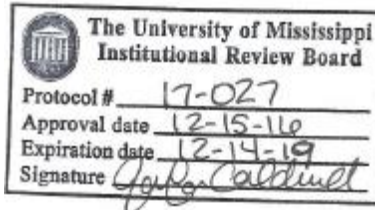
I hope that you will take this opportunity to tell me more about your experience as an alumnus of the Funeral Science Technology program at Northwest Mississippi Community College. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any more information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,  
Angela Hopper

APPENDIX G: CONSENT FORM



APPENDIX G  
CONSENT FORM



**Consent to Participate in Research**

**Study Title: Armatures for Success to Advance Racial Equity in Funeral Technology Students**

**Investigator**

Angela Massey Hopper, Student Ed.D.  
Department of Education  
218 Guyton Hall  
University of Mississippi  
University, MS 38677  
(662) 280-6136  
[Amhoppe1@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:Amhoppe1@go.olemiss.edu)

**Faculty Sponsor**

Amy Wells Dolan, Ph.D.  
Department of Education  
218 Guyton Hall  
University of Mississippi  
University, MS 38677  
(662) 915-5710  
[awells@olemiss.edu](mailto:awells@olemiss.edu)

By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

**The purpose of this study is to assess how culture and race impact success in the Funeral Service Technology Program (FST) at Northwest Mississippi Community College (NWCC).**

**What you will do for this study:**

You will be interviewed by Angela M. Hopper regarding your experiences, thoughts, and perceptions on the FST program and the National Board Exam (NBE). Alumni who have already graduated will be asked to sit for one interview of 24 main questions, with some subset questions.

1. Ms. Hopper will explain the study. Ms. Hopper will ask you what led you to FST initially; what you thought about the FST program before entering, and what you thought of the program after completion.
2. MS. Hopper will ask how your thoughts of the FST program matched the reality of the program and how you felt you would perform academically. Ms. Hopper will also ask how comfortable you felt on campus and how well supported you felt during the program.
3. Ms. Hopper will ask how difficult you felt the program was and in what areas you found the program most difficult. In addition, Ms. Hopper will ask you about your academic performance and how you compared yourself to your peers.

4. Ms. Hopper will ask about your instructors and their instruction techniques. Ms. Hopper will inquire if you had any academic challenges and if instructors assisted you. IN addition, Ms. Hopper will ask if you were comfortable asking for help.
5. Ms. Hopper will ask how you felt after taking the National Board Exam. To what extent did you feel comfortable hitting the “submit” button on the exam? What were some of your successes or struggles with the exam?

NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS: DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM IF THE IRB APPROVAL STAMP ON THE FIRST PAGE HAS EXPIRED

6. Audio recording will be taken for the purpose of accurately transcribing interviews.
7. No photographs or video recordings will be taken of interviewees.

**Time required for this study is approximately one hour fifteen minutes.**

This study will take about 1 hour and 15 minutes for all interviewees.

**Possible risks from your participation**

**STRESSFUL/UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION:**

You may feel some stress from answering interview questions with Ms. Hopper and speaking about experiences with the NBE. Please see the Confidentiality section for information on how we minimize the risk of a breach of confidentiality.

**Benefits from your participation**

You should not expect benefits from participating in this study. However, you might experience satisfaction from contributing to program improvement.

In addition, your participation in this study can help improve the cultural responsiveness to the FST program and help improve the future success and ensure the program’s continued operation and presence in Northwestern Mississippi.

**Confidentiality**

1. This study will maintain confidentiality.
  - a. Only research team member and advisors will have access to your records. We will protect confidentiality by coding and then physically separating information that identifies you from your response.
  - b. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) – the committee responsible for reviewing the ethics of, approving, and monitoring all research with humans – have authority to access all records. However, the IRB will request identifiers only when necessary. We will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone else without your written consent unless required by law.

**Right to Withdraw**

You do not have to volunteer for this study, and there is no penalty if you refuse. If you start the interview process and at any time decide that you do not want to finish, just tell Ms. Hopper. Whether or not you participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with the Department of Education, Northwest Mississippi Community College Funeral Service Technology, or with the University of Mississippi, and it will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS: DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM IF THE IRB APPROVAL STAMP ON THE FIRST PAGE HAS EXPIRED

**Student Participants in Investigators’ Classes**

Special human research subject protections apply where there is any possibility of coercion – such as for students in classes of investigators. Investigators can recruit from their classes but only by providing information on availability of studies. They can encourage you to participate, but they cannot exert any coercive pressure for you to do so. Therefore, if you experience any coercion from your instructor, you should contact the IRB via phone (662-915-7482) or email (irb@olemiss.edu) and report the specific form of coercion. You will remain anonymous in an investigation.

**IRB Approval**

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Mr. Richie Lawson at Northwest Mississippi Community College. The IRB and Mr. Lawson have determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu) or Mr. Richie Lawson at [relawson@northwestms.edu](mailto:relawson@northwestms.edu).

Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, then decide if you want to be in the study or not.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information. I have been given an unsigned copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Furthermore, I also affirm that the experimenter explained the study to me and told me about the study’s risks as well as my right to refuse to participate and to withdraw.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS: DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM IF THE IRB APPROVAL STAMP ON THE FIRST PAGE HAS EXPIRED

APPENDIX H: COURSE OF STUDY

APPENDIX H  
COURSE OF STUDY

**Fall Semester Entry**

**First Semester (Fall)**

BOT 1433	Business Accounting	3 credit hours
FST 2323	Funeral Merchandising	3 credit hours
FST 1213	Embalming I	3 credit hours
PSY 1513	General Psychology	3 credit hours
FST 1113	Mortuary Anatomy I	3 credit hours
ENG 1113	English Composition I	3 credit hours

**Second Semester (Spring)**

FST 1224	Embalming II	4 credit hours
FST 1123	Mortuary Anatomy II	3 credit hours
FST 1523	Restorative Art/Color and Cosmetics	3 credit hours
CHE 1313	Principles of Chemistry	3 credit hours
CHE 1311	Principles of Chemistry Lab	1 credit
FST 2623	Microbiology	3 credit hours

**Third Semester (Summer I)**

FST 1314	Funeral Directing (June – July)	4 credit hours
FST 2713	Psychosocial Aspects of Grief and Death	3 credit hours

**Fourth Semester (Summer II)**

FST 2633	Pathology	3 credit hours
Humanities/ Fine Art	(Elective)	3 credit hours

**Fifth Semester (Fall)**

FST 1413	Funeral Service Ethics and Law	3 credit hours
MMT 2513	Entrepreneurship	3 credit hours
SPT 1113	Public Speaking	3 credit hours
CSC 1113	Introduction to Computers	3 credit hours
	Math / Science (Elective)	3 credit hours
BOA 2613	Business Communication	3 credit hours
FST 2812	Comprehensive Review*	2 credit hours

(\*Taking the National Board Examination is a component of FST 2812 and is a requirement of NWCC FST program for graduation.)

## Spring Semester Entry

### First Semester (Spring)

FST 1523	Restorative Art/Color and Cosmetics	3 credit hours
FST 1213	Introduction to Embalming	3 credit hours
PSY 1513	General Psychology	3 credit hours
FST 1113	Mortuary Anatomy I	3 credit hours
ENG 1113	English Composition I	3 credit hours
Math / Science	(Elective)	3 credit hours

### Second Semester (Summer I)

FST 1314	Funeral Directing (June – July)	4 credit hours
FST 2713	Psychosocial Aspects of Grief and Death	3 credit hours

### Third Semester (Summer II)

FST 2633	Pathology	3 credit hours
Humanities/ Fine Art	(Elective)	3 credit hours

### Fourth Semester (Fall)

FST 2323	Funeral Merchandising	3 credit hours
FST 1224	Embalming II	4 credit hours
FST 1123	Mortuary Anatomy II	3 credit hours
BOT 1433	Business Accounting	3 credit hours
MMT 2513	Entrepreneurship	3 credit hours
FST 2623	Microbiology	3 credit hours

### Fifth Semester (Spring)

SPT 1113	Public Speaking	3 credit hours
CSC 1113	Introduction to Computers	3 credit hours
CHE 1313	Principles of Chemistry	3 credit hours
CHE 1311	Principles of Chemistry Lab	1 credit
FST 1413	Funeral Service Ethics and Law	3 credit hours
BOA 2613	Business Communication	3 credit hours
FST 2812	Comprehensive Review*	2 credit hours

(\*Taking the National Board Examination is a component of FST 2812 and is a requirement of NWCC FST program for graduation.)

APPENDIX I: ATTENDANCE POLICY

APPENDIX I  
ATTENDANCE POLICY

FUNERAL SERVICE TECHNOLOGY ATTENDANCE POLICY AND GENERAL RULES

ATTENDANCE POLICY

REGULAR and PUNCTUAL attendance at all scheduled classes and labs is expected of all students and is regarded as integral to course credit. There are times, however, when students must miss, but regardless of the nature of the absences the student must not exceed the maximum times allowed. Each student is directly responsible to the individual instructor for making up work missed. If a student misses an exam they must have a legitimate excuse, with proof, in order to take the missed exam or have approval from the instructor.

STUDENTS THAT EXCEED THE FOLLOWING ABSENCES WILL BE DROPPED FROM THE COURSE(S) WITH A GRADE OF "F".

One class meeting, lecture or laboratory, per week .....	2
Two class meetings, lecture or laboratory, per week .....	4
Three class meetings, lecture or laboratory, per week .....	6
Five class meetings, lecture or laboratory, per week (One class equals two absences) .....	4

NOTE: "Three tardys' will result in one absence".

**(Entering class after roll has been taken is a tardy & after 10 minutes an absence)**

NOTE: "Students that miss labs will be given an absence which is added toward the absences given for the lecture that is associated with the lab. Optional lab times can be arranged in advance with the permission of the instructor."

GENERAL RULES

ALL STUDENTS MUST ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING:

If you have a disability (learning or physical) and need special accommodations, see Patsy Gardner in the Success Club Office located in DeSoto Center Room 308. She will contact me when the identification process has been completed. I will then meet with you personally and map out a success plan for you. If you have any questions, see me directly.

**PLEASE DO NOT SUFFER IN SILENCE OR BE ASHAMED OF THIS!** It is my job to assist you in achieving your full academic potential!

All students must be acquainted with the Colleges' Bulletin, the Student Guide, and other published policies for the guidance of students at NWCC.

All electronics, including communication and listening devices, i.e. cell phones, iPods, laptop computers, etc., must be deactivated and stored during class time. Any exception must be approved in advance by the instructor. If these devices go off during class, I reserve the right to ask you to leave and will alter the attendance records to reflect an absence for the day.



All students must respect other people's rights, opinions, and beliefs even though they may be different from their own.

No food, tobacco products, alcohol, or illegal drugs are allowed in the classroom.

No manner of dress will be allowed which disrupts the educational process. Billed baseball caps, hats, or hooded sweatshirts are not allowed.

No relatives/friends in class during lecture time.

See Student Guide page 25 – 30, for more details.

**FUNERAL SERVICE TECHNOLOGY GRADING SCALE**

A = 100 - 94

B = 93 - 87

C = 86 - 80

BELOW 80 = F

**AUTHORITY STATEMENT:**

**THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REMOVE FROM THE CLASSROOM ANY STUDENT WHOSE CONDUCT IS DISRUPTIVE TO THE LEARNING PROCESS.**

**JANUARY 2014**

APPENDIX J: STUDENT DRESS CODE

APPENDIX J  
STUDENT DRESS CODE

**FUNERAL SERVICE TECHNOLOGY'S DRESS CODE**

The purpose of the following information is to prepare you for your future in funeral service by providing you with requirements from several funeral firms.

Students are expected to dress in an appropriate manner to avoid extremes in personal appearances at all times. A daily regimen of good grooming and hygiene is expected of all students. Appropriate business attire is defined in this packet and expected to be followed during clinicals, field trips, and other stated times when representing the Funeral Service Technology program. Students who fail to comply with the guidelines set forth will not be allowed to participate in funeral service events.

**GENERAL GUIDELINES – MALES**

**CLOTHING:**

All male students will wear a business style suit, with a conservative color of blue, black, or charcoal gray. No seersucker, sharkskin, leather or suede suits.

A white, long sleeved shirt with a conservative tie.

Shoes should also be conservative, well maintained, clean, polished and coordinated with the suit.

All clothing should be clean and pressed.

**PERSONAL GROOMING:**

All male employees must wear their hair in a conservative fashion that represents an appearance fitting some one in funeral service.

Faddish styles, bright or festive colors, styles that conceal the face, or any styles that may be considered extreme, are unacceptable.

Length of hair and sideburns must be conservative.

Mustache, if worn, must be well trimmed.

Beards are generally not acceptable. If worn they must be well trimmed.

Fingernails must be kept clean and short in length.

Visible tattoos are not acceptable or in keeping with conservative attire.

**JEWELRY:**

Jewelry must be of a conservative nature.

## **JEWELRY CONTINUED:**

Limit rings to one per hand.

Earrings are unacceptable funeral home attire.

Pierced body parts (nose, tongue, eyebrows, etc.) are unacceptable and should not be displayed with jewelry.

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES – FEMALE**

### **CLOTHING:**

All female students will wear tailored, dark suits (with a skirt or pants) or conservative dresses. Conservative colors like blue, black, or gray. No seersucker, sharkskin, leather, or suede suits, pants, etc..

Hemlines for skirts should be conservative and no shorter than knee length.

Shoes should be close-toed, with a conservative heel height (no longer than 2 inches), well maintained, clean, polished and coordinated with the suit or dress.

### **PERSONAL GROOMING:**

All female students must wear their hair in a conservative fashion that represents an appearance fitting a funeral home setting. Faddish styles, bright or festive colors, styles that conceal the face, or any styles that may be considered extreme are unacceptable.

Nails must be moderate in length. Nail polish must be a conservative color. Fluorescent, bright, metallic, or flashy nail color or artwork is unacceptable.

Visible tattoos are not acceptable.

### **JEWELRY:**

Jewelry must be in good taste.

Limit rings to one per hand only.

Pierced ears are acceptable, but limited to only one pair of conservative, stud-like earrings worn on the lobe of the ear.

Pierced body parts (nose, tongue, eyebrow, etc.) are unacceptable and should not be worn with jewelry.

MANUSCRIPT 3  
IMPLEMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

“Judas walked over to Jesus to greet him with a kiss.” Luke 22:47

This manuscript offers a thorough and robust examination of this study’s secondary problem of practice: to develop and implement intervention strategies to enhance Funeral Service Technology (FST), at Northwest Mississippi Community College (NWCC), student performance on the National Board Exam (NBE). This research study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods, to enable a multi-disciplinary outlook and provide a deep, authentic approach to understand student’s perceptions while focusing on efforts of social justice, ethics, and equity. Data with interpretation are detailed in Manuscript Two, to address the initial component of this study’s problem of practice: to identify FST students at NWCC who are at-risk of failure on the NBE, while also offering a detailed description of the study’s methodologies, context, population, participants, and data analysis employed in this research.

To advance social justice and improve equity in to the NWCC FST program, while gravely investigating the perceptions and potential impacts of unconsciously disregarded systemic racism for students of color, both qualitative and quantitative data were utilized. Both qualitative and quantitative methods, were applied throughout several stages of the research, which afforded opportunities for triangulation and vivid insight, into student impressions, possible correlations to success, and program, instructor, environment, and written artifact improvements. The participants in the study were NWCC graduates of the FST program. The triangulation of alumni interviews, written artifact reviews, and learning space examinations allowed for robust conjugation of the student themes uncovered during the interview process.

Five major analytic themes were revealed following the qualitative analysis of alumni interviews: *Piece of Cake*, *Plus (at least) One*, *Elbow Grease*, *All Hands on Deck*, and *The Queen’s English*. *Piece of Cake* was the only theme unique to the African American study participants. All four African American interviewees expressed how confident they felt their academic skills and aptitude would surpass the rigor of the NWCC FST program, before matriculation. Only the Caucasian student expressed concern over being ill qualified for the scholastic curricula. List of pseudonyms, gender demographics, and all themes, except *Piece of Cake*, revealed during interviews are located in Table 16. *Piece of Cake* was intentionally omitted from Table 16 to preserve participant confidentiality.

Table 16

Pseudonyms, Gender Demographics, and Themes Revealed During Interviews

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Themes Identified Via Interview</b>
Frieda	Female	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease, All Hands on Deck, and The Queen’s English</i>
Josephine	Female	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease, All Hands on Deck, and The Queen’s English</i>
Mary	Female	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease, All Hands on Deck, and The Queen’s English</i>
Alfred	Male	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease</i>
Bart	Male	<i>Plus (at least) One, Elbow Grease, All Hands on Deck, and The Queen’s English</i>

*Plus (at least) One* examined the value all five subject participants, regardless of race, placed on authentic relationships and access to instructors. *Elbow Grease* discussed the inherent value of hands-on learning in a technical program, which was another universal theme portrayed by all five interview participants. *All Hands on Deck* recounted the influence learning communities had on four interview participants, and the impact vocabulary had upon student success was given a detailed in *The Queen’s English*.

This manuscript tells of the findings of this research study, which suggests practical and precise methods instructors may assist student success by striving towards inclusion, support, and promoting cultural relevance and sustainability, while promoting more equity in vocational programs (Ladson-Billings, 2014).



## **QUALITATIVE FINDINGS**

The qualitative evaluation occurred through an examination of five semi-structured alumni interviews, observation of three main FST learning environments, researcher field notes, and written artifact examinations of two integral FST documents. The analysis revealed several layers of actions undermining the FST academic environment for students.

### ***PIECE OF CAKE***

All of the African American participants indicated they were unprepared for the rigor of the NWCC FST program, believing prior to matriculation the program's academic difficulty would be much easier. Only the Caucasian interviewee expressed apprehension before beginning FST at NWCC. A more accurate perception regarding the rigor of FST before matriculation, may allow African American students to expect disappointments and difficulties; therefore, students may not become overly discouraged when encountering obstacles and challenges.

**Document Review and Analysis Findings Impacting *Piece of Cake*.** The anti-technology stance of the Attendance Policy may have inadvertently communicated to students a deficient level of academic rigor in NWCC FST. Not utilizing a technological infrastructure and a refusal to support technology, when technology is one of the largest innovations and developments in pedagogy of this century, refuted any positive claims on the educational experience reaped at NWCC FST (DiGironimo, 2011).

The multiple grammatical errors in the Attendance Policy may also have conveyed to students a disregard of scholarly integrity on behalf of instructors and the NWCC institution. In addition, the need to include a written Attendance Policy and Student Dress Code, in itself, might have signaled to potential students the FST program was elementary or lower-level education and perpetuate the stereotype that CTE is less rigorous than the academic counterpart. Please see Appendix I for the Attendance Policy and Appendix J for the Student Dress Code.

### **Document Strategies for Increasing *Piece of Cake*.**

1. The technology prohibition was removed from the Attendance Policy.
2. Inclusion of the Attendance Policy and Student Dress Code was incorporated into the student handbook, rather than separate documents to lessen the impact of *Piece of Cake*.
3. Grammatical errors on written documents, which reflect FST and NWCC, were corrected.

**Learning Space Observations Impacting *Piece of Cake*.** The “NO CELLPHONES” [*sic*] signage in the main FST classroom may have also perpetuated the lack of scholastic rigor initiated by the technology prohibition.

### **Learning Space Strategies Impacting *Piece of Cake*.**

1. Signage depicting a restriction on cellular phones was removed.
2. Instructors incorporated the inclusion of additional classroom technology into FST to improve the technology capability of students and also the appearance of rigor. For example, the use of “Kahoot,” an on-line learning game where questions appear on a classroom projection screen and students answer on their smart devices, was added to several FST classes for review games and group activities.
3. The final capstone course, FST 2812 Comprehensive Review was a two-hour lab, students take in the final FST semester before graduation. The class was designed to review entire FST curriculum, with examinations on each FST subject. Verbal review and scantron testing was deleted from the syllabus. The class was moved to a computer lab at NWCC DeSoto center. All the coursework, reviews, and examination were modified to be completed via computer.

**Researcher Field Notes Impacting *Piece of Cake*.** In addition to the technology provisions of

the Attendance Policy, which may have indicated to students a lack of rigor, the researcher noted the FST website offered no on-line application process. The FST application was a paper application which required submission via United States Postal Service or in-person delivery. As the application was the very first student process to matriculation, such an antiquated system may be the initial seed to *Piece of Cake*.

A formal group-interview process for FST student candidates may also lessen the impact of *Piece of Cake*. Multiple Career Technical Education (CTE) programs commonly interview student candidates. In addition to allowing students a time to garner more information about the CTE program before matriculation, the interview process would allow students to view the seriousness and solemnity of the FST program.

Increasing the technological components of FST, may not only improve *Piece of Cake*, but may also lead to more student success on the NBE. Alfred said, during his interview:

... when I, when I, when I went to go take 'em. [the NBE] [*sic*] And I am ... I don't like taking tests on the computer. [*sic*] So, that was one of my things. I, I just don't like taking tests on the computer. [*sic*] But, you know, that's the way [taking tests on computer] of the world now. [*sic*]

Integrating more computerized testing may simulate an NBE experience and lead to lessened test anxiety when students take the NBE.

#### **Additional Strategies Implemented to Increase *Piece of Cake*.**

1. The application process of FST should be innovated to include an on-line method.
2. A formal FST potential student-candidate interview process should be established before matriculation.
3. Additional computerized testing was added to FST 2812.

### ***PLUS (AT LEAST) ONE***

Honneth (1995) developed a theory that individuals need caring and kind relationships, with authentic affinity, to cultivate their true character. Instructors, in addition to helping students evolve their personal individuality (Honneth, 1995), may find additional resources for students during times of distress, assist students in building social capital, and counsel students through the inevitable hurdles of college (Karn, 2011; Mason, 2014).

All five interviewees echoed Honneth's (1995) theory regarding the importance of having *Plus (at least) One* instructor available and supporting the student's success. Josephine spoke about one of her instructors and stressed how important a genuine relationship was to Josephine's self-image and perception of herself:

And she didn't make you feel like she was a teacher. Like, she made you feel like she was just there to prep you for this big test that you've got to take. And she always stayed on that subject. But she was always real, she was never like, "that's a dumb question, why are you asking me that? I already taught you that."

The lack of *Plus (at least) One* can have a negative and adverse impact on students. Mary talked about how alone she felt in a few classes and had "an instructor who comes in and give [*sic*] you a handout and basically you're on your own. That was the case in a class or two."

In addition to building the skills one needs for funeral directing and embalming, one aim of NWCC FST and the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) was to enable students to become a member of a human service profession. Please see Appendix K for the

entire list of ABFSE Aims and Objectives. For instructors to achieve such a lofty aim would be impossible without an authentic rapport with students, enable students to find their true selves and envision academic success (Honneth, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

**Document Review and Analysis Findings Impacting *Plus (at least) One*.** The document examination of both the FST Attendance Policy and Dress Code revealed multiple indications of assimilationist practices and indications of an authoritarian teacher to student hierarchy, which likely severely limited genuine connections and *Plus (at least) One* (Ladson-Billings, 1994). For example, the excessive use of “must” and “unacceptable” worked to establish images of an autocratic position of instructors which contradicted relationships of affinity.

Instances of racial undertones were detected in the document analysis of the Student Dress Code and The Attendance Policy. For example, students were specifically prohibited from wearing “sharkskin suits,” per the Student Dress Code, and the Attendance Policy banned “hooded sweatshirts.” The examples of “sharkskin suits” and “hooded sweatshirts” were stereotypical of African American students and such explicit prohibitions, without a stereotypical Caucasian restriction, likely interfered and prevented authentic student to teacher interactions (Jeffers, 2013).

Another instance of contradistinguishing, was the categorization of the Dress Code into “male” and “female” categories. Such categorization was not only outdated, but potentially discriminatory to non-binary gender students. Such exclusions may have caused students to be hesitant to build relationships with instructors.

The final example, found by researchers of printed student segregation was the written differentiation of students with disabilities. The Attendance Policy not only highlighted students with disabilities, but also conjoined disabilities with the negative connotative word “ashamed.”

In addition, the document articulated the professor's need to "map out a success plan for you" [the disabled student]. Such a poorly written narrative condescending to students with learning challenges inevitably placed an ever-widening chasm on any attempt for an instructor who wished to reach out and form a bond with a student with disabilities.

**Document Strategies for Increasing *Plus (at least) One*.**

1. Both the Attendance Policy and the Student Dress Code were amended to remove the despotic use of "must" and "unacceptable." "Must" was replaced with "should" and "unacceptable" was replaced with "are expected to." "Should" is a less authoritarian word than "must," therefore, indicates an atmosphere of student and teacher partnership rather than an environment which is controlled solely by the instructor.
2. While some of the detonation of words utilized in the Attendance document appeared to be focused upon student success; the typeface employed indicated non-verbal communication which negated any positive word choice. Times New Roman font was replaced with Garamond font. All irregular utilization of capitalization, boldface type, and excessive punctuation were removed.
3. "Sharkskin suits" and "hooded sweatshirts" were removed from the list of prohibited clothing choices on the Student Dress Code, and the dress code was assimilated to integrate professional dress, regardless of gender.
4. The disability statement was revised, deleting the authoritarian and condescending tone.
5. The student dress code was re-written without a segregation between genders. Both documents were incorporated into the student handbook.

**Learning Space Observations Impacting *Plus (at least) One*.** Students were not formally introduced and oriented to the FST labs. In addition, the character of the clinical lab and the

funeral merchandising lab was physically restricted by being locked before FST instructors arrived for the day. Because a student had to “ask” for “permission” to use the student spaces from an FST instructor or campus police, such “asking” contributed to the rigid authoritarian style of NWCC FST. Considered together: no formal student orientation process to the FST student spaces and FST instructors appearing tutelary over the learning environment, such challenges may have seemed intimidating to students; therefore, prohibited the students not only from using the spaces but also from interacting positively with professors.

**Learning Space Strategies Impacting *Plus (at least) One*.**

1. Campus police were directed to open the FST clinical lab upon opening the building; therefore, FST students were able to actively utilize their space without garnering “permission” to do so.
2. Beginning with the Fall 2018 class, the FST formal orientation will include introduction and tours of all the FST clinical spaces.

**Researcher Field Notes Impacting *Plus (at least) One*.** During the formal orientation for newly matriculating FST students, only group interactions are available with students to instructors. No individual time was able to be spent cultivating personal relationships.

**Additional Strategies Implemented to Increase *Plus (at least) One*.** Beginning with Fall 2018 orientation, one-to-one time will be allotted for each student and each FST instructor.



### *Elbow Grease*

All five interview participants identified hands-on learning, *Elbow Grease*, as a practice which promoted NBE and NWCC FST student success. The FST curriculum detailed many intricate processes related to embalming and funeral directing. Reading about such techniques, described so meticulously, is often difficult for junior college students who matriculated into college at a remedial reading level (Lu, 2013). Through reading alone, students will often fail to comprehend the material. Exposing students to the methods written about in textbooks may engage remedial readers with the curriculum and impact real and meaningful learning. Mary described her experience of not learning in a class, in which she desired more *Elbow Grease*:

We went to this class, and we paid for this class, and we got nothing out of it. That can be a downfall if you end up with too many instructors like that. We went through the motions, we just wanted to get out of the class and pass it.

In addition, NWCC FST was preparing students to enter a career in funeral services. Alfred stated, “Because the classroom is the classroom, and the actual work field is the work field-“[sic] Without proper incorporation of *Elbow Grease* into a student’s time at NWCC FST, students would leave unprepared for the work environment. Multiple opportunities existed for more incorporation of hands-on learning at NWCC FST.

**Document Review and Analysis Findings Impacting *Elbow Grease*.** The document review analysis found nothing written on the Attendance Policy contributing negatively, nor positively, to *Elbow Grease*. Because all five of the interview participants indicated the importance of

hands-on learning opportunities, such an omission was an opportunity for program improvement.

The Student Dress Code indicated, in the heading, the students were required to follow the dress policy during “field trips.” The word “field trips” had a negative connotation when applied toward a curriculum which was at a post-secondary level. “Off-campus trips” was the proper verbiage utilized by NWCC. *Elbow Grease* and the student involvement in FST “off-campus trips” was reflected poorly and inaccurately with the usage of “field trips.”

**Document Strategies for Increasing *Elbow Grease*.** FST students often verbally asked in what manner participating in off-campus trips would impact the student’s attendance, particularly in non-FST courses. Non-traditional students might have been hesitant to verbally ask and simply not attend the off-campus trips.

1. Official excused absence policy for an FST off-campus trip was included in the Attendance Policy and incorporated into the student handbook.
2. Because of the influence such off-campus trips may have on learning, the handbook was also revised to illustrate the FST department’s commitment to *Elbow Grease*.
3. The word “field trips” was deleted from the Student Dress Code and referred to the proper name of “off-campus trips.”

**Learning Space Observations Impacting *Elbow Grease*.** FST had many demonstration items; however, such demonstration items were not used as often as curriculum objectives permitted. In addition, recent instructor survey feedback indicated students felt “excited” about going into the clinical spaces for instructor-driven presentations. One of the interview participants, Frieda, in her interview, spoke of how using the demonstration aids would have helped her grasp course lecture when she said, “We had a skeleton for anatomy class. We did not use that. You gotta utilize them.” [*sic*]

### **Learning Space Strategies Impacting *Elbow Grease* Implemented.**

1. FST demonstration items should be used much more regularly and incorporated into classroom presentations.
2. PPE was moved into an area for easy access for demonstrations.
3. Modeling wax was moved into instructor's office for inclusion into lecture.
4. Urn display was incorporated into two areas for easy accessibility.

### **Researcher Field Notes Impacting *Elbow Grease*.**

Community involvement with local funeral directors was integral to allowing students *Elbow Grease* sufficient with the local industry needs. Funeral directing, FST 1314, was integrated a clinical component with lecture, which allowed *Elbow Grease* to accompany classroom time. FST staff, along with NWCC administration, built alliances with funeral homes in the surrounding community to support student engagement and learning.

### **Additional *Elbow Grease* Strategies Implemented.**

1. NWCC FST instructors partnered with local funeral homes to provide additional off-campus opportunities for students.
2. A clinical component was added to FST 1314 funeral directing, in compliance with ABFSE regulations. Under the direct supervision of a licensed funeral director, students completed the tasks of: one removal / transfer of remains, five death calls, assisting in five arrangement conferences with client families, and observing and assisting in five different funeral service ceremonies. The course amendments allowed multiple opportunities for students to observe and actively participate in the concepts learned in the classroom.

## ***ALL HANDS ON DECK***

Eighty percent of the NWCC FST alumni interviewed mentioned the importance of peer relationships, *All Hands on Deck*, for academic success during their time spent in the FST program. Learning communities may prevent at-risk students from feeling more polarized and isolated (Collins, Massini, Bubb, Zaidi, & Novak, 2017). In addition, student collaboration may yield to student performance improvement (Collins et al., 2017).

Because the FST program was designed to last approximately fifteen months, learning communities developed have a longitudinal interval. In addition to serving students while pursuing educational opportunities, the rapport felt between classmates may later aid in their career trajectory.

**Document Review and Analysis Impacting *All Hands on Deck*.** The written artifact review of the FST Attendance Policy and Dress Code revealed several indicators of assimilationist practices and rigid authoritarian structures which may impede *All Hands on Deck* (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

An austere and outdated policy on the Attendance Policy also prohibited technology in the classroom, which negated student collaboration and isolated students who preferred utilizing technological programs and hardware for studying. Because the Attendance Policy prohibited technology, no guidance was offered to students who frequently utilized social media and worked in death care. One aim of NWCC FST and the ABFSE was to educate students to become professionals sensitive to caring for human remains. Please see Appendix K for the

ABFSE Aims and Objectives. By ignoring social media platforms and the unique circumstances students may find themselves by working in embalming rooms, such an omission was a failure in NWCC FST's fiduciary responsibility.

**Document Strategies for Increasing *All Hands on Deck*.**

1. The technology prohibition was removed from the Attendance Policy.
2. A proper social media guide was added to the Student Handbook.

**Learning Space Observations Impacting *All Hands on Deck* Implemented.** Lack of a formal orientation for new students to the clinical spaces limited the engagement of new FST students, not only to the lab spaces, but also likely insulated each cohort to themselves. Such an insulation limited the learning community to a single matriculating class, instead of broadening the learning community to the entirety of FST students.

Signage prohibiting speaking in the clinical lab, and indicated communication was the inverse of studying and good scholarship. Such posted displays hampered learning group formation and additionally was an assimilationist technique (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Because African American students are more community-centered and community-focused, the postings may have been viewed as oppositional to the African American culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In addition, the cellphone prohibition posted in the FST primary classroom was technologically antiquated and sanctioned an assimilationist style (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The locked FST clinical lab and merchandising lab also prevented student access to technology and made the spaces inconvenient. Because students had to receive "permission" to unlock the lab, some students may perceive "asking" to be an assimilationist technique (Ladson-Billings, 1994). On occasions when FST instructors were late to arrive at NWCC, students had to ask permission to access the lab from campus police. Requesting ingress from a police

officer, to a space which a student should feel custodial, may negatively impact African American students more adversely than their Caucasian peers (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Such feelings, may cause African American students to impart an unsafe or non-inclusive impressions to the clinical lab.

The clinical lab was deficient in basic supplies. While the printer had paper, there was only one printer to serve eight computers. While the clinical lab had two whiteboards to facilitate student collaboration, there were no markers or whiteboard erasers available for use.

### **Learning Space Strategies Impacting *All Hands on Deck* Strategies Implemented.**

1. FST instructors abruptly removed and discarded the hostile signage from the clinical space. The signage in the primary FST classroom was removed and replaced with a posting of the ABFSE Aims and Objectives. The ABFSE Aims and Objectives promote scholarly activity, a sense of community, and upholding ethical obligations. Please see Appendix K for the ABFSE Aims and Objectives.
2. More chairs were brought into the learning environment and the old chairs, in a state of disrepair, were discarded. The total new number of comfortable chairs, in good repair, was fourteen. The additional number of chairs made the clinical area much more hospitable and welcoming to a greater number of students.
3. The funeral service fraternity and instructors began hosting more fellowship events, usually potluck lunches served in the clinical space and eaten in the FST classroom.
4. In addition to more fellowship events, the instructors began hosting a fellowship welcome for new students within the first three weeks during a matriculation semester.
5. Campus police were directed to open the FST clinical lab upon opening the campus

building.

6. Formal introduction to the clinical and merchandising lab space will be incorporated into the orientation meeting for matriculating students, beginning Fall 2018.
7. Physical supplies were brought into the clinical lab space, including markers and erasers. A budget request was made for additional printers and updated, virtual computers.

**Researcher Field Notes Impacting *All Hands on Deck*.** While manually gathering the data for the quantitative portion of the study and while viewing individual student course transcripts, it became apparent that NWCC FST students were randomly placed in general education classes. For example, although students are on a course of study and were taking English Composition I during the same semester, FST students were randomly assigned to such classes, not enrolled into a singular class grouping. Such haphazard placement and arbitrary assignment of FST students to different classrooms, was a contrary indication to fostering learning communities described in the *All Hands on Deck* theme among NWCC FST students.

**Additional *All Hands on Deck* Strategies Implemented.**

1. To encourage more student collaboration via *All Hands on Deck*, more direct and purposeful FST advising was undertaken and FST students were grouped in general education together.
2. Through collaboration with NWCC administration, after identifying one general education class for FST students, administration actively held spaces in classes, exclusively for FST students.

### *The Queen's English*

Eighty percent of the interview participants relayed how lack of basic language and grammar aptitude interfered with their academic aspirations. Because the books and examinations FST students must read are saturated with sesquipedalian words, students who already may not be college-proficient in English may have additional barriers (Lu, 2013; Townsend, Filippini, Collins & Biancarosa, 2012). Josephine, confirmed the research by Townsend et al. (2012) when she said, “But there was just a massive amount of information and words, words like your everyday words, not mortuary words.” The syntax of examinations, caused even more difficulty with the FST students. Mary stated, “Some of the wording on the exam that kind of throws you off a little bit. It’s just some of the words and how it was worded.” [sic]

Use of such words and manner of speaking and writing may be considered to be the “White” way, which is foremost and taught in institutions of higher learning (Bloom, 1987). Adjusting to collegiate communication is integral to a student of color’s success in college and implementation of culturally relevant technique (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

**Document Review and Analysis Impacting *The Queen's English*.** The lexicon which was used in both the Attendance Policy and the Student Dress Code could have been confusing. Usage of abstract words including, “conservative” regarding dress and “regular” regarding attendance may also have been confusing.

The Attendance Policy prohibited student use of any personal technology in the



classroom. In addition to being severely restrictive, the policy inhibited students from using on-line resources to research words and vocabulary utilized in classroom that may have been unfamiliar. First-generation students may be acutely aware of their perceived lack of English skills and less likely than a legacy student to question a professor about an unfamiliar word; therefore, limiting technological resources may further put such students at a disadvantage

### **Document Strategies for Increasing *The Queen's English*.**

1. The word “conservative” was removed from the Student Dress Code, instead opting to describe the student dress desired. For example, the former Student Dress Code read, “nail polish must be a conservative color.” The revised Student Dress Code reads, “nail polish, if worn, should be in the palette of colors including red or pink.”
2. Instead of demanding “REGULAR” [*sic*] attendance, the Attendance Policy was revised to state the official NWCC attendance policy.
3. The technology restriction was deleted from the Attendance Policy.

**Learning Space Observations Impacting *The Queen's English*.** Although the clinical lab had a plethora of current periodicals regarding the funeral profession, the magazines were underutilized. Some of the publications were still in their plastic mailing sheaths. While several posters were prominently displayed, none supported the funeral service arts.

### **Learning Space Strategies Impacting *The Queen's English* Implemented.**

To develop the FST students' knowledge of the funeral profession and cultivate their grasp of *The Queen's English*, FST instructors will begin to integrate periodical readings into classroom assignments.

**Researcher Field Notes Impacting *The Queen's English*.** During the coding meeting, a statement by one of the interview participants, Bart, made a profound impact on all of the FST

instructors. Bart stated, “Some of that questions on the exam, that was like a razor-thin margin between one answer and another one, and if you didn’t know you’d miss it.” [sic] During the coding meeting, the FST instructors deciphered Bart’s proclamation to mean the answer choices on the NWCC FST exams are too different by comparison. For example, if the answer on a NWCC FST exam was “hemoptysis,” the other choices may not sound alike, nor start with the letter, “h” or the prefix “hemo-;” therefore, the answer choices were easy for the student to discern in the one FST class. On the NBE; however, all arts classes were combined into one test. When answer choices were all similar; therefore, students had difficulty determining the correct answer.

**Additional *The Queen’s English* Strategies Implemented.** Testing questions were amended to be more difficult in NWCC FST. Answer choices have become more similar.

## QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The quantitative component of this study permitted an unbiased and objective lens with which to examine student achievement in the FST program. Logistic regression was performed independently to assess the effect of nine potential independent variables on the dichotomous dependent variable of success on the NBE. Seven of the nine possible independent variables, were found to be statistically significant in predicting NBE success, at the level of .05. See Table 17 List of Significant Predictors for NBE Success. For each of the odds ratios reported a 95 percent confidence interval was used.

Table 17

List of Significant Predictors for NBE Success

<b>Significant Indicators for NBE Success</b>	<i>Nagelkereke's</i> <b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Significance</b>
ACT English Sub-score	0.615	p = .010
ACT Composite Score	0.448	p = .009
ACT Reading Sub-score	0.277	p = .031
ACT Science Sub-score	0.242	p = .038
Duration/Length of Semesters in FST Program	0.168	p = .042
Final GPA	0.257	p = .017
Race	0.201	p = .017

**ACT English Sub-score.** The strongest predictor of NBE success was a student's ACT English sub-score, recording an odds ratio of 1.772. Such a ratio indicated for every point higher on the English ACT sub-score a student receives, the student is 1.772 times more likely to have success on the NBE.

Results of the logistic regression and two sample t-test suggested that student ACT English sub-scores may be utilized to predict the strongest and most reliable model of student NBE success, while the overall percentage of correctly classified cases was 56.7%. Specifically, this research study's results suggested a student with an ACT English sub-score of 18 has only a 36% likelihood of success on the NBE. An FST student with an ACT English sub-score of 19 has an equal chance, or 50% likelihood, of success on the NBE. Please see Table 18 Students' ACT English Sub-score as a Predictor of Success.

Table 18

*Students' ACT English Sub-score as a Predictor of Success*

English ACT Sub-score	Likelihood of success on NBE
13	3%
14	5%
15	9%
16	15%
17	24%
18	36%
19	50%
20	63%
21	76%
22	85%
23	91%
24	94%
25	97%
26	98%
27	99%

Lower English ACT sub-scores indicated a lower chance of success on the NBE. Upon matriculation, NWCC FST instructors should realize students with ACT English sub-score of 19 or less are at risk of not having success on the NBE. Therefore, students below the threshold of

score of 19 on the English section of the ACT should enter the program under an advisor's close watch and guidance throughout the student's FST academic journey.

**ACT Composite Score.** The second strongest predictor of NBE success was a student's ACT composite score, recording an odds ratio of 1.676. Such a ratio indicated for every point higher on the ACT composite score a student receives, the student is 1.676 times more likely to have success on the NBE.

Results of the logistic regression and two sample t-test suggested that student ACT composite scores may be utilized to predict the second strongest and second most reliable model of student NBE success, while the overall percentage of correctly classified cases was 56.7%. Specifically, this research study's results suggested students with an ACT composite scores of 18 had only a 37% likelihood of success on the NBE, while students with ACT composite scores of 19 had an equal chance, or 50% likelihood, of success on the NBE. Please see Table 19 Students' ACT Composite Score as a Predictor of Success.

Table 19

Students' ACT Composite Score as a Predictor of Success

ACT Composite Score	Likelihood of success on NBE
13	4%
14	7%
15	11%
16	17%
17	26%
18	37%
19	50%
20	62%
21	74%
22	82%
23	89%
24	93%
25	96%
26	97%
27	98%

Lower ACT composite scores correlate to lower chance of success on the NBE. Upon matriculation, NWCC FST instructors should realize students with an ACT composite score of 19 or less, are potentially at risk of not having success on the NBE. Therefore, students below the threshold of score of 19 on the ACT composite should enter the program under an advisor's close watch and guidance.

**ACT Reading Sub-score.** Another predictor of NBE success was a student's ACT reading sub-score, recording an odds ratio of 1.289. Such a ratio indicated for every point higher on the ACT reading sub-score a student receives, the student is 1.289 times more likely to have success on the NBE.

Results of the logistic regression indicate student ACT reading sub-scores may be utilized

as another model to predict student NBE success, while the overall percentage of correctly classified cases was 56.7%. Specifically, this study’s research indicated students who matriculated with ACT reading sub-scores of 18 had a 41% likelihood of success on the NBE, while students with ACT reading sub-scores of 19 had a 47% likelihood of success on the NBE. Only students with ACT reading sub-scores of 20 had a slightly above equal chance, or 54% likelihood, of success on the NBE. Please see Table 20 Students’ ACT Reading Sub-score as a Predictor of Success.

Table 20

Students’ ACT Reading Sub-score as a Predictor of Success

Reading ACT Sub-score	Likelihood of success on NBE
13	16%
14	20%
15	25%
16	30%
17	35%
18	41%
19	47%
20	54%
21	60%
22	66%
23	71%
24	76%
25	81%
26	84%
27	87%

Lower ACT reading sub-scores correlated to lower chance of success on the NBE. Upon matriculation, NWCC FST instructors should realize students with an ACT reading sub-scores of 19 or less, are potentially at risk of not having success on the NBE. Therefore, students below

the threshold score of 19 on the ACT composite should enter the program under an advisor's close watch and guidance.

**ACT Science Sub-score.** Another predictor of NBE success was a student's ACT science sub-score, recording an odds ratio of 1.319. Such a ratio indicated for every point higher on the ACT science sub-score a student receives, the student is 1.319 times more likely to have success on the NBE.

Results of the logistic regression indicate student ACT science sub-scores may be utilized as another model to predict student NBE success, while the overall percentage of correctly classified cases was 56.7%. Specifically, this study's research indicated students with an ACT science sub-scores of 17 had only a 37% likelihood of success on the NBE, while students with ACT science sub-scores of 18 had a 44% likelihood of success on the NBE. Students with an ACT science sub-scores of 19 had an equal chance, or 51% likelihood, of success on the NBE. Specifically, this study ascertains students with an ACT science sub-score of 18 and below have less chance of success on the NBE. Please see Table 21 Students' ACT Science Sub-score as a Predictor of Success.



Table 21

Students' ACT Science Sub-score as a Predictor of Success

Science ACT Sub-score	Likelihood of success on NBE
13	16%
14	21%
15	26%
16	31%
17	37%
18	44%
19	51%
20	58%
21	64%
22	70%
23	76%
24	81%
25	85%
26	88%
27	91%

Lower ACT science sub-scores correlated to lower chance of success on the NBE. Upon matriculation, NWCC FST instructors should realize students with an ACT science sub-score of 18 or less, are potentially at risk of not having success on the NBE. Therefore, students below the threshold of score of 18 on the ACT composite should enter the program under an advisor's close watch and guidance.

**Duration/Length of Semesters in FST Program.** Another predictor of NBE success was a student's duration/length of semesters in the FST program, recording an odds ratio of .503. The NWCC FST program is designed to be a fifteen-month long course of study, over four semesters. Students who prolong the program, after matriculation from their first FST class, experience diminished success on the NBE beginning at six semesters. Such a ratio indicated for every

additional semester a student prolongs the FST program, the student is .503 times more likely to not have success on the NBE.

A logistic analysis on a student's duration/length of semesters in FST program may provide another model to predict student NBE success, while the overall percentage of correctly classified cases was 64.1%. Specifically, students who attended six semesters had only a 45% likelihood of success on the NBE. Please see Table 22 Duration/Length of Semesters in FST Program as a Predictor of Success.

Table 22

Duration/Length of Semesters in FST Program as a Predictor of NBE Success

Number of Semesters in FST program	Likelihood of success on NBE
6	45%
7	29%
8	17%

Because the NBE is comprehensive and tests a student's knowledge of courses completed within the student's first semester of FST, a lengthy tenure in the FST program may lead to unsuccessful NBE results; therefore, students who only attend FST part-time or miss semesters may be at-risk to not have success on the NBE.

**Final GPA.** A logistic analysis on a students' final GPA may provide another model to predict student NBE success, recording an odds ratio of 24.692. Specifically, students with a final GPA of 2.5 had only a 25% likelihood of success on the NBE, while students with a final GPA of 2.75 had a 43% likelihood of success on the NBE. Please see Table 23 Students' Final GPA as a Predictor of Success.

Table 23

Students' Final GPA as a Predictor of Success

Students' Final GPA	Likelihood of success on NBE
1.5	1%
1.75	3%
2	6%
2.25	13%
2.5	25%
2.75	43%
3	62%
3.25	79%
3.5	89%
3.75	95%
4	98%

Lower final GPA correlated with a lower chance of success on the NBE. Based upon the final GPA prediction model, students leaving the NWCC FST program with a score of 2.75 or less are at risk of not being successful on the NBE.

## DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Research question one:

*The fundamental research question was centered around the premise that while a community college funeral service technology program is recognized to be open-access and ostensibly fair to all students, what perceived barriers and obstacles do African American students encounter, in such a community college vocational program setting preparing for a licensure examination, such as the NBE?*

In this study, African American students potentially overestimated how much the level their scholastic abilities would make the FST program easily manageable, while underestimating the academic rigor of the NWCC FST program. Bart relayed, "I didn't think it was going to be as difficult as it was. It required a lot more discipline to study than I thought." [sic] Frieda indicated she agreed with Bart when she stated, "I thought I'd be able to get in [and easily] get out."

Only after matriculation did the African American students realize the considerable rigor of FST. Being more prepared for the reality of the academic integrity of NWCC FST may enable African American students a better opportunity to succeed.

The quantitative and qualitative portion of this study indicated that while the FST community college vocational program was open-access to students, systemic language barriers persisted not only prior to matriculation, but during a student's course of study, and post-graduation. This study found the ACT English sub-score was the strongest predictor to an FST

student's NBE success, post-graduation. In addition, the ACT English sub-score impacted the overall ACT composite score, which effected a student's ability to matriculate into FST, as an ACT composite score of eighteen was being utilized as the minimum entrance requirement for NWCC FST. Furthermore, interviewed alumni articulated the many impediments they encountered with language. Such a dispirited research finding was a contraindication to the inclusive society Americans celebrate.

**Secondary question one:**

*What pedagogical methods impede an African American student's success in becoming prepared for the NBE?*

Lack of hands-on learning was an impediment for African American students. All five students interviewed indicated more hands-on learning was needed to supplement the classroom learning. Frieda said, "It should have been more hands-on. I'm a hands-on [learner] not a audio or something you can see on a DVD or see it on a TV [type learner]." [sic]

While a positive and authentic relationship with an instructor can be beneficial to student with coursework and finding additional resources, the lack of a relationship can be a substantial deterrent, particularly when students are underserved and lacking resources. For example, Mary talked about how the lack of being able to locate a clinical site impacted some of her fellow classmates, "I think it [help from instructors] needs to be more helping students find their location [for clinicals]. Because some people don't know where to go or how to start." [sic]

The quantitative portion of this research study supported and supplemented these qualitative findings. The two main indicators of students who were at-risk of not being successful on the NBE: an ACT English sub-score and an ACT composite score of lower than nineteen indicated students whom had less than a 50% likelihood of success on the NBE. These

two indicators should signal to FST advisors and instructors a set of students who needed to be guided very closely. By utilizing these two benchmarks, instructors may make certain hands-on learning and resources are allotted to these students, which may make NBE success more likely.

**Secondary question two:**

*What pedagogical practices and techniques may assist African American students to be better equipped for the NBE?*

Collaboration between students and teachers was fundamental to student success. Bart spoke of a teacher who assisted him as “one that makes sure that you are receiving what you came for in terms of grading, watching your work habits, and monitoring your progress.” Josephine agreed with Bart, when she talked of a teacher,” [the instructor] was always busy, really very busy, but [the instructor] always made time.”

In addition to relationships with instructors, cooperation with other students was fundamental to academic prowess, as well. Four of the five students interviewed spoke of how essential their relationships with their fellow classmates were to their success, not only academically, but to circumventing the pitfalls of collegiate life.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research study suggests there is a compelling and urgent need to examine the pedagogical methods, spaces, and documents of open-access institutions for incidences which may “otherize” (Samuels, 2015) people of color. Despite an educator’s and an organization’s best intentions, undertones of racial bias pursuant to Critical Race Theory (CRT) or assimilationist techniques (Bell, 2002) may persist.

As the movement of cultural relevancy begins to be accepted, Dr. Ladson-Billings (2014) has suggested educators move past the goal of cultural relevancy to cultural sustainability. Cultural sustainability creates a much more nurturing and supportive environment for marginalized students than culturally relevant pedagogy and is a much greater goal towards social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

A weakness of this research study was the study’s small population. Future research may focus on FST programs with a larger population or adding additional data from other FST programs to ascertain if the challenges revealed in this study are pervasive in other populations.

Future research may also be done on other vocational programs to determine if the student obstacles uncovered in NWCC FST students and licensure testing extend to other areas of CTE.

## **SUMMARY**

Four major analytic themes were uncovered following the coding method of alumni interviews: these themes articulated the significance of student-perceived access to instructors; the importance of hands-on learning in a career technical program, the inherent value in learning communities to student achievement, and the bearing vocabulary has upon student success.

Seven predictors were found to accurately predict a FST student's NBE success. These predictors were: the ACT English sub-score, ACT composite score, the ACT reading sub-score, ACT science sub-score, duration/length of semesters in FST program, final GPA, and race.

The findings of this research study suggest practical precise methods instructors may assist student success by striving towards inclusion, support, and promoting cultural relevance and sustainability (Ladson-Billings, 2014).



## OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The effects of slavery and segregation continue to have tremendous impact on citizens of the United States in a plethora of ways. Funeral service is one industry that is a stalwart of self-segregation, particularly in the Southern United States. Such a professional stance of separation has had significant repercussions on funeral service education. This research study has demonstrated the impact standardized testing and language inequities persist in hindering attempts to construct social justice and equity. Coupled with the denial of Critical Race Theory (Bell, 2002) and an American discomfort in discussing systemic racism, African American citizens are still at an overwhelming disadvantage compared to their Caucasian peers. Community colleges, seen in society as a mechanism to balance societal inequalities, is often instead a Chimera for students who find blatant racial stereotypes awaiting.

Educators are in an integral position to combat social injustice and serve as change agents. While there may be the temptation to raise ACT composite score and sub-score minimum entry requirements, based upon this study, such an action would be contrary to ethics and social justice and an improper use of this research. The emphasis of this study's research was intended to highlight and emphasize the inequities that persevere no matter how many years have elapsed from our country's abject horror of slavery. In addition, this study was an attempt to uncover ways to aid students and remove collegiate barriers to success.

Utilizing an authentic pedagogy style consistent with Dr. Ladson-Billings' (1994) theory on cultural relevancy, instructors can offer additional resources and service as guides for students

to navigate the pitfalls to degree conferment. Using a purposeful, open, and genuine lens, educators should seek to examine their own learning spaces, document creation, and pedagogy in a quest to support underserved student populations

This action-based qualitative and quantitative study scrutinized the campus climate in a community college funeral service vocational program to uncover issues related to overt and covert systemic racism. The findings suggest that multiple, complex, and divisive elements still exist within community college higher education institutions which may hinder students, who are already functioning from disadvantaged circumstances and more at-risk of leaving college without a credential.

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## APPENDIX

APPENDIX I: ATTENDANCE POLICY

APPENDIX I  
ATTENDANCE POLICY

FUNERAL SERVICE TECHNOLOGY ATTENDANCE POLICY AND GENERAL RULES

ATTENDANCE POLICY

REGULAR and PUNCTUAL attendance at all scheduled classes and labs is expected of all students and is regarded as integral to course credit. There are times, however, when students must miss, but regardless of the nature of the absences the student must not exceed the maximum times allowed. Each student is directly responsible to the individual instructor for making up work missed. If a student misses an exam they must have a legitimate excuse, with proof, in order to take the missed exam or have approval from the instructor.

STUDENTS THAT EXCEED THE FOLLOWING ABSENCES WILL BE DROPPED FROM THE COURSE(S) WITH A GRADE OF "F".

One class meeting, lecture or laboratory, per week .....	2
Two class meetings, lecture or laboratory, per week .....	4
Three class meetings, lecture or laboratory, per week .....	6
Five class meetings, lecture or laboratory, per week (One class equals two absences) .....	4

NOTE: "Three tardys' will result in one absence".

**(Entering class after roll has been taken is a tardy & after 10 minutes an absence)**

NOTE: "Students that miss labs will be given an absence which is added toward the absences given for the lecture that is associated with the lab. Optional lab times can be arranged in advance with the permission of the instructor."

GENERAL RULES

ALL STUDENTS MUST ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING:

If you have a disability (learning or physical) and need special accommodations, see Patsy Gardner in the Success Club Office located in DeSoto Center Room 308. She will contact me when the identification process has been completed. I will then meet with you personally and map out a success plan for you. If you have any questions, see me directly.

**PLEASE DO NOT SUFFER IN SILENCE OR BE ASHAMED OF THIS!** It is my job to assist you in achieving your full academic potential!

All students must be acquainted with the Colleges' Bulletin, the Student Guide, and other published policies for the guidance of students at NWCC.

All electronics, including communication and listening devices, i.e. cell phones, iPods, laptop computers, etc., must be deactivated and stored during class time. Any exception must be approved in advance by the instructor. If these devices go off during class, I reserve the right to ask you to leave and will alter the attendance records to reflect an absence for the day.



All students must respect other people's rights, opinions, and beliefs even though they may be different from their own.

No food, tobacco products, alcohol, or illegal drugs are allowed in the classroom.

No manner of dress will be allowed which disrupts the educational process. Billed baseball caps, hats, or hooded sweatshirts are not allowed.

No relatives/friends in class during lecture time.

See Student Guide page 25 – 30, for more details.

**FUNERAL SERVICE TECHNOLOGY GRADING SCALE**

A = 100 - 94

B = 93 - 87

C = 86 - 80

BELOW 80 = F

**AUTHORITY STATEMENT:**

**THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REMOVE FROM THE CLASSROOM ANY STUDENT WHOSE CONDUCT IS DISRUPTIVE TO THE LEARNING PROCESS.**

**JANUARY 2014**

**APPENDIX J: STUDENT DRESS CODE**

APPENDIX J  
STUDENT DRESS CODE

**FUNERAL SERVICE TECHNOLOGY'S DRESS CODE**

The purpose of the following information is to prepare you for your future in funeral service by providing you with requirements from several funeral firms.

Students are expected to dress in an appropriate manner to avoid extremes in personal appearances at all times. A daily regimen of good grooming and hygiene is expected of all students. Appropriate business attire is defined in this packet and expected to be followed during clinicals, field trips, and other stated times when representing the Funeral Service Technology program. Students who fail to comply with the guidelines set forth will not be allowed to participate in funeral service events.

**GENERAL GUIDELINES – MALES**

**CLOTHING:**

All male students will wear a business style suit, with a conservative color of blue, black, or charcoal gray. No seersucker, sharkskin, leather or suede suits.

A white, long sleeved shirt with a conservative tie.

Shoes should also be conservative, well maintained, clean, polished and coordinated with the suit.

All clothing should be clean and pressed.

**PERSONAL GROOMING:**

All male employees must wear their hair in a conservative fashion that represents an appearance fitting some one in funeral service.

Faddish styles, bright or festive colors, styles that conceal the face, or any styles that may be considered extreme, are unacceptable.

Length of hair and sideburns must be conservative.

Mustache, if worn, must be well trimmed.

Beards are generally not acceptable. If worn they must be well trimmed.

Fingernails must be kept clean and short in length.

Visible tattoos are not acceptable or in keeping with conservative attire.

**JEWELRY:**

Jewelry must be of a conservative nature.

## **JEWELRY CONTINUED:**

Limit rings to one per hand.

Earrings are unacceptable funeral home attire.

Pierced body parts (nose, tongue, eyebrows, etc.) are unacceptable and should not be displayed with jewelry.

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES – FEMALE**

### **CLOTHING:**

All female students will wear tailored, dark suits (with a skirt or pants) or conservative dresses. Conservative colors like blue, black, or gray. No seersucker, sharkskin, leather, or suede suits, pants, etc..

Hemlines for skirts should be conservative and no shorter than knee length.

Shoes should be close-toed, with a conservative heel height (no longer than 2 inches), well maintained, clean, polished and coordinated with the suit or dress.

### **PERSONAL GROOMING:**

All female students must wear their hair in a conservative fashion that represents an appearance fitting a funeral home setting. Faddish styles, bright or festive colors, styles that conceal the face, or any styles that may be considered extreme are unacceptable.

Nails must be moderate in length. Nail polish must be a conservative color. Fluorescent, bright, metallic, or flashy nail color or artwork is unacceptable.

Visible tattoos are not acceptable.

### **JEWELRY:**

Jewelry must be in good taste.

Limit rings to one per hand only.

Pierced ears are acceptable, but limited to only one pair of conservative, stud-like earrings worn on the lobe of the ear.

Pierced body parts (nose, tongue, eyebrow, etc.) are unacceptable and should not be worn with jewelry.

APPENDIX K: ABFSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

## APPENDIX K ABFSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The NWCC FST has as its central aim recognition of the importance of funeral service personnel as

- members of a human services profession;
- members of the community in which they serve;
- participants in the relationship between bereaved families and those engaged in the funeral service profession;
- professionals knowledgeable of and compliant with federal, state, provincial/territorial, and local regulatory guidelines in the geographic area where they practice as well as
- professionals sensitive to the responsibility for public health, safety, and welfare in caring for human remains.

The objectives of the program are the following:

- to enlarge the background and knowledge of students about the funeral service profession;
- to educate students in every phase of funeral service and to help enable them to develop proficiency and skills necessary for the profession,
- to educate students concerning the responsibilities of the funeral service profession to the community at large;
- to emphasize high standards of ethical conduct;
- to provide a curriculum at the post-secondary level of instruction; and
- to encourage student and faculty research in the field of funeral service.

## VITA

### **Angela Massey Hopper**

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### **Education**

- 2015-present Ed.D. Candidate, Higher Education, School of Education, The University of Mississippi, University, MS  
Dissertation working title: *Armatures of Success: Advancing Racial Equity for Funeral Service Technology Students* (anticipated defense: Spring 2018)
- 2011 MA, Communications, Lindenwood University, St. Charles, MO
- 2010 BS, Mortuary Management, Lindenwood University, St. Charles, MO
- 2001 AAS, Northwest Mississippi Community College, Southaven, MS
- 1996 Funeral Service Technology Certificate, Northwest Mississippi Community College, Southaven, MS

### **Academic Honors**

Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi

Alpha Sigma Lambda, Iota Nu Chapter

### **Related Educational Professional Experience**

- 2016-present Program Director, Funeral Service Technology, Northwest Mississippi Community College, Southaven, MS
- 2012-2016 Instructor, Funeral Service Technology, Northwest Mississippi Community College, Southaven, MS
- 2016-present Classroom Adjunct Instructor, Oral Communications, Northwest Mississippi Community College, Southaven, MS
- 2017-present Online Adjunct Instructor, Oral Communications, Northwest Mississippi Community College, Southaven, MS

**College Service**

- 2012-present Sigma Phi Sigma Advisor
- 2016-present Library Committee
- 2017-present Appeals and Disciplinary Committee Member
- 2012-2017 Appeals and Disciplinary Committee Alternate Member
- 2015-2016 Institutional Effectiveness Committee
- 2016 Strategic Planning committee

**Related Industry Professional Experience**

- 2011-2012 Mid-South Transplant Foundation, Supervisor Tissue Recovery, Memphis, TN
- 2011-2011 Mid-America Transplant Services, Manager of Tissue Procurement, St. Louis, MO
- 2007-2011 Mid-America Transplant Services, Manager of Communications Center, St. Louis, MO
- 2006-2007 Mid-America Transplant Services, Triage Coordinator, St. Louis, MO
- 2003-2006 Mid-South Tissue Bank, Donor Coordinator/Funeral Service Liaison, Memphis, TN
- 2000-2003 Forest Hill Funeral Home, Manager, Memphis, TN
- 1997-2000 Forest Hill Funeral Home, Funeral Director/Embalmer, Memphis, TN

**Professional Affiliations and Service**

- 2016 International Cemetery, Cremation, and Funeral Association Certified Cremation Arranger
- 2016 International Cemetery, Cremation, and Funeral Association Certified Cremation Operator