ABSTRACT

SIMMONS, MONICA MCADOO. Faculty Perceptions of Their Role in Workforce Readiness and Professional Development within Traditional Teaching Responsibilities. (Under the direction of Dr. Audrey J. Jaeger and Dr. Bobbie Frye).

Community colleges are essential in the role they play in bridging the gap between education and employment, particularly in response to the national labor market skills gap. Closing this gap is crucial for industries to stay competitive, foster innovation, and ensure workforce adaptability (National Skills Coalition, 2023). According to the literature, Career and Technical Education (CTE) faculty should prepare students for both academic success and workforce readiness by incorporating durable skills such as professionalism, communication, and adaptability. CTE courses equip students with the skills they require in the workplace (Staff, 2024). However, faculty have faced challenges managing their traditional teaching responsibilities while preparing students for workforce readiness and engaging in professional development (Eddy et al., 2019).

The theoretical framework for this basic qualitative study was social cognitive career theory (SCCT). The theory explores how self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals influence individuals' behavior and development (Lent & Brown, 1996). Data were collected from 16 CTE full-time and adjunct faculty teaching in programs within the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster (e.g., health professions, early childhood education, and human services). CTE faculty participated in semi-structured interviews using purposeful sampling to address the research questions. The key findings of this study were: (1) instructional support helps faculty align instruction with workforce demands, (2) faculty identified the need for internal, external, and industry-specific professional development to support practical skills development and professional networking, (3) faculty use industry partnerships and employer

feedback to strengthen students' durable skills and workforce expectations, and (4) faculty view their role as supporting student growth through advising, mentoring, and professional networking. The implications for practice that emerged from this study are applicable to faculty, program coordinators and clinical directors, and senior leadership/administrators, who play an important role in supporting instructional growth, aligning programs with workforce needs, and creating sustainable professional development opportunities that enhance student career readiness.

Faculty Perceptions of Their Role in Workforce Readiness and Professional Development within Traditional Teaching Responsibilities

by
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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I give God all glory, honor, and praise for granting me the strength, wisdom, and perseverance to complete this dissertation. Without His grace and guidance, this journey would not have been possible. I dedicate this work to my husband, Jerry: your steady support and patience every step of the way let me know that perseverance will carry me through. To my mom, Patricia, thank you for your constant encouragement and reminders of self-care and for ensuring I took breaks when needed. To my dad, DeWitt, thank you for being my accountability partner, especially for those daily calls, ensuring I was on task, asking questions, and pushing me to keep going even when it was hard. To my brother, Dee, thank you for believing in me and cheering me on. Lastly, to my favorite son and daughter, Jeremy and Moriah, you both are my inspiration and motivation. I am so proud of both of you for the adults you have become. This achievement shows you that with faith and perseverance, all things are possible.

BIOGRAPHY

Monica McAdoo Simmons has over 20 years of experience in the community college system, with a strong background in leadership and teaching. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Winston-Salem State University and a master's in counselor education from Virginia State University. She is a dedicated educator committed to fostering student success and faculty growth through innovative practices and collaboration.

Monica was a recipient of the Achieving the Dream Belk Center Fellows Program offered through the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research and a recipient of the League Excellence Award. She is a department chair at her institution, overseeing the Medical Office Administration, Paralegal Technology, and Healthcare Management Technology programs. Her professional mission is to support educational excellence by integrating practical workforce skills into academic programs, mentoring faculty, and developing programs that empower students and educators. She values collaboration, strategic planning, and continuous improvement in education. Monica supports her local community by mentoring young students, instilling in them the need to excel academically and assisting them in proper goal setting and planning for their futures in high school and beyond.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The skills gap in the national labor market—the disconnect between the skills that workers have and those that employers need—is a reality (Moody & Tornone, 2018). This challenge is especially evident in the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster, where critical shortages in the healthcare industry underscore the urgent need for a well-prepared workforce (Rash, 2020). Closing this gap is crucial for companies to stay competitive, foster innovation, and ensure workforce adaptability (National Skills Coalition, 2023). The imbalance between worker skills and employer needs prevents companies and the economy from recruiting qualified workers and significantly affects job opportunities for individuals, businesses, and economic growth. The healthcare industry, where there is a critical shortage of skilled workers to meet the growing demand for healthcare services, exemplifies this challenge (Rash, 2020). While the skills gap has been discussed for decades, there is renewed interest in it as industries face rapid changes driven by workforce demands.

Community colleges are essential in preparing students for the workforce, particularly in Healthcare and Human Services programs that address critical labor shortages. Community colleges offer Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses that equip students with the skills they require in the workplace. These institutions, known for their open-door admissions and community focus, are uniquely positioned to support students while driving innovation and social mobility (Rash & Hahn, 2023). Community colleges are catalysts for innovation and drivers of social mobility within their local communities by virtue of their historical development and commitment to the principle of an open-door admissions philosophy (Rash & Hahn, 2023). Originally referred to as junior colleges, these institutions were small, two-year schools often affiliated with private universities or churches (Cohen et al., 2014; Quinterno, 2023). While

junior college typically described lower-division branches of private universities or church-supported colleges, Cohen et al. (2014) reported the term community college gradually came to represent comprehensive, publicly supported institutions. From the beginning, community colleges have focused on occupational education, initially offering technical job training for entry-level jobs (Cohen et al., 2014). Over time, this focus has developed into comprehensive CTE programs that prepare students for a broader range of skilled careers in healthcare, technology, and the trades (Cohen et al., 2014). This shift, as noted by Cohen et al. (2014), reflects a growing commitment to equipping students with specialized skills needed in today's labor market, making CTE a key part of workforce development and economic mobility.

In North Carolina, the shortage of skilled workers is a concern (Staff, 2024). In response, community colleges combine classroom learning with applied experience. Internships, apprenticeships, and co-op programs provide students with hands-on practice and professional connections (Jacobs & Cormier, 2020). Governor Roy Cooper stated:

> "North Carolina's community colleges are our not-so-secret weapon when it comes to building a strong workforce and economy. . . . We're working to make higher education more accessible so students can get the skills they need to succeed to take on the jobs of today and tomorrow" (Rash, 2024).

Employers increasingly value durable skills such as teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving, which are essential for long-term career success (America Succeeds, 2021; Andrews & Higson, 2008). Along with preparing students for meaningful careers, community colleges contribute to the economy by collaborating with industry and tailoring training to employer needs. By addressing specific challenges, such as healthcare shortages in North Carolina, community colleges play a vital role in healthcare workforce development, ensuring both

equitable access to education and quality care delivery (Staff, 2024). This study will explore how community college faculty perceive their role in preparing students for workforce readiness and professional development.

In the United States today there are approximately 1,100 public and private community colleges that award short-term workforce training credentials as well as certificates, diplomas, and degrees (Cohen et al., 2014). Building on the foundation of accessibility and affordability (Rash, 2024), the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) is focused on one mission: Elevating North Carolina's future by delivering a diverse, highly skilled talent pipeline to the labor market, supporting economic mobility that creates transformational generational change, and setting the national standard for innovation in higher education and workforce development (McClellan, 2024).

This research aimed to illuminate the challenges and opportunities faculty face in adapting to expanded responsibilities, particularly in nurturing students' transition from academia to professional life (NACE, 2024). To navigate these challenges, it is important to understand how faculty balance their expanded roles with their own professional development needs. Understanding how faculty balanced their expanded role is important, but it is just as essential to recognize the challenges they face in making time for their own professional development. This study explored how community college faculty in Healthcare and Human Services perceive their role in preparing students for workforce readiness and professional development.

Community college faculty can struggle to prioritize their own professional learning and development because heavy teaching loads, administrative work, and supporting their students and departments leave them little time for professional development (Eddy et al., 2019; Mowreader, 2023). Professional development can improve teaching and help faculty connect to

the institution's mission (Eddy et al., 2019). Professional development for faculty provides support and guidance regarding best-practices in classroom management, student engagement, and instructional strategies, but a key consideration is the extent to which such programs effectively influence faculty perceptions of their ability to meet such responsibilities (Strickland-Davis, et al., 2019).

Faculty have various roles beyond teaching, such as being advisors, mentors, or developers (Baker & Griffin, 2000). It is important to understand these roles because each offers a unique way to support students' learning and growth. Faculty use descriptors such as role model, coach, advocate, student facilitator, and guide as expressions of their role (Fugate & Amey, 2000). A faculty advisor, according to Baker & Griffin (2000), helps students navigate academic rules, plan their course schedules, and ensure they stay on track to graduate on time. Advisors reach out and provide the necessary support and encouragement to facilitate the successful achievement of a student's academic and career goals. As developers, faculty help students by sharing knowledge, providing information, and supporting them as they set and work towards their goals (Baker & Griffin, 2000). As mentors, they help students connect interests with a career. Mentorship involves an emotional commitment that extends beyond sharing a degree requirement and academic information.

Moreover, beyond their academic responsibilities, faculty also play a critical role in preparing students for the workforce, which requires more than just classroom learning. While faculty members are often acknowledged for their expertise in delivering academic content, research suggests that their students are not prepared to enter the workplace (NACE, 2024). This creates a gap between students who graduate with strong academic skills and those who need practical career skills and connections to succeed in the workplace.

According to Bragg and Krismer (2016), community colleges are well positioned to work with industry partners to build pathways to fill workforce gaps. One way this has been implemented is the use of career clusters. To address industry needs, NCCCS utilizes career clusters, which organize programs of study into broad occupational groupings based on shared knowledge and skills. This framework helps institutions align curricula with labor market demands and create clearer pathways for students pursuing high-demand, high-wage careers (NASDCTEc, 2008; CareerOneStop, 2023).

In alignment with North Carolina's economic and workforce priorities, this study focuses on faculty within the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster. This cluster was selected due to its critical role in preparing students for high-demand workforce fields that directly impact individuals and community well-being (Khattar & Coffey, 2023; Advance CTE, 2024). By centering this cluster, the study captures faculty perspectives within sectors experiencing the most urgent alignment needs between education and employment, making their insights particularly relevant to discussions of workforce readiness and faculty development.

Faculty play a critical role within the community college system, not only as instructors, but also as advisors and mentors who help students understand how their academic experiences connect to real-world workforce opportunities. By integrating academic advising and professional development with career clusters, faculty can support students in selecting programs aligned with their goals and navigating transitions to employment or further education. McCharen (2008) emphasized that the success of career clusters depends on well-defined linkages between secondary and postsecondary education, structured programs of study, and strong career guidance. Without clear course planning and support, students may find it hard to

earn their certificate or degrees, which can make career clusters less effective in preparing them for the workforce.

In summary, community colleges are key in helping students move from college to their careers, and faculty play an important role in this process. Faculty responsibilities go beyond teaching—they mentor, advise, and support students in preparing for the workforce. However, CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services programs need strong professional development opportunities to meet these demands effectively. CTE faculty need training to provide appropriate career advice, stay informed of industry trends, use effective advising strategies, and align course content with workforce and industry needs. Supporting CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services programs are essential to ensuring students are not only academically prepared but also equipped to succeed in today's evolving workforce.

Statement of the Problem

As community college career and technical training become even more critical to filling industry demands, particularly in high-demand fields like healthcare (McClellan, 2024; American Institutes for Research, 2024), it is critical that faculty have the skills and tools necessary to adequately prepare students for these workforce demands. The ongoing healthcare shortage, for example, underscores the importance of equipping students with the technical and durable skills required to meet the workforce needs. This research will explore how faculty see their roles in helping students beyond teaching and identify ways to enhance how faculty support students as they move from school to professional careers. If faculty are not provided with professional development, they may struggle to stay current with industry trends and teaching innovations, leading to graduates who lack essential skills for today's job market, thus impacting their employability and readiness for professional careers (Mowreader, 2023).

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the gap between faculty members' academic roles and the broader responsibilities they undertake to prepare students for their careers and professional growth. The research explored ways to improve their engagement with students moving from academic settings to the workforce. The purpose of the study was to better understand how faculty perceive their role in preparing students for the workforce. Understanding faculty perceptions is critical for developing support systems and professional development opportunities that align with the demands of workforce expectations (Hahn, 2024). By bridging the gap between faculty members' academic roles and the broader responsibilities they undertake to prepare students for their careers and professional growth, this study sought ways to improve their engagement with students moving from academic settings to the workforce.

Research Questions

In a basic qualitative research study, a research question typically aims to explore, understand, and describe phenomena from the participants' perspectives, focusing on how individuals make sense of their experiences or the meaning that derive from them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Based on the problem and purpose of this study, the following research questions will be addressed:

- How do CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services, perceive their role in preparing students for the durable skills required for workforce readiness?
- What specific professional development and resources do CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services need to effectively support students in acquiring practical skills and professional networks?

- How can community colleges support CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services to align educational outcomes with workforce demands?

Theoretical Framework

Faculty often face heavy teaching loads, demanding advising duties, and service expectations and are unable to focus on their own professional development (Eddy et al., 2019; Mowreader, 2024). These challenges make it hard for them to stay updated on industry trends and new teaching methods, which are key to helping students prepare for the workforce. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) offers a strong framework to explore faculty perceptions, the environment, and self-efficacy as factors shaping enduring skills and career preparation. Social cognitive career theory was developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994. It builds upon Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and adapts it specifically to the context of career development. The core components are self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals.

Self-efficacy, the first component, represents an individual's belief in their ability to succeed at a given task (Jordan et al., 2020). In addition, it refers to "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Self-efficacy involves dynamic self-beliefs that are linked to particular performance domains and activities such as different academic and work tasks (Lent & Brown, 1996). Self-efficacy beliefs can be acquired through four primary information sources: personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological states and reactions (Lent & Brown, 1996).

Outcome expectations, the second component of SCCT, are the person's sense of the outcome (or impact) of their behavior. Bandura said that behavior reflects a person's belief in their own capabilities (self-efficacy) and their expectations about what will happen to them as a

result. While outcome expectations are relevant, Bandura found that self-efficacy often influences behavior more. For instance, even if one is convinced that a behavior is likely to bring benefits, they may nevertheless refrain from engaging in that behavior if they feel they do not have a chance of success. Expectations of outcomes are defined through experiences—through past achievements or failures, for example, and by learning from other people (Lent & Brown, 1996).

The third component of SCCT, personal goals, are the things that individuals want to accomplish through effort and ambition. Goals influence career choices and decision-making (Jordan et al., 2020). They encode a user's desire to accomplish or achieve something (Bandura, 1986). In setting goals, we can organize ourselves, stay organized, and remain motivated throughout the long term, even without constant reinforcement from others. Goals empower individuals to exercise control over their behavior and direct their trajectory to achievement (Lent & Brown, 1996).

SCCT has demonstrated a positive relationship between academic and career self-efficacy with regard to career choices and achievement across a range of fields (Jordan et al., 2020). Research indicates that self-orientated thoughts or behaviors can be enhanced by self-regulated learning strategies, which is an extension of social cognitive theory that has mainly been applied in the field of education (Wang et al., 2022). In addition, faculty members play a crucial role in providing opportunities within the educational environment (Lent et al. 1994) that influence career development.

Overview of Methodology

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to better understand how faculty perceive their role in preparing students for the workforce and creating an educational professional

development framework for faculty that addresses the academic learning and essential skills students need for career success. Qualitative research provides a way to understand how participants interpret real-world experiences and how they make meaning out of them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic qualitative study was used because it provides an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate for this study as it allows the researcher to target individuals with specific traits that are likely to contribute meaningfully to the research (Etikan, et al., 2016; Campbell, et al., 2020). Sixteen faculty members from two different institutions, including both full-time and part-time instructors within the Healthcare and Human Services cluster, were purposefully selected to participate in this study.

Data were collected through interviews with both full-time and part-time faculty that shed light on their perceptions and the strategies they employ to transition students from academic content to career readiness. The interviews were audio and video recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis and coded. Research was limited to two institutions to permit an in-depth study into faculty perceptions. Afterwards the data was stored and organized in a password-protected electronic database.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its focus on ensuring that traditional teaching aligns with the needs of today's workforce. Many educators face uncertainty about how to integrate career readiness into their curriculum, often due to limited resources, training, or support from their institutions (Hora, 2021). By exploring how faculty perceive their role in preparing students

for careers, this study addressed how they can better support students beyond classroom teaching and help fill gaps in workforce readiness.

With many educators needing more clarity about integrating career readiness into their curriculum due to limited resources, training, or institutional backing (Hora, 2021), this study explored faculty perceptions in the Healthcare and Human Services area, and examined the impact on student preparedness. It emphasized the need for strengthened support mechanisms for CTE faculty, including professional growth opportunities and partnerships with industry and represented a strategic shift in faculty responsibilities in Healthcare and Human Services, toward a more comprehensive perspective on the role of faculty.

This study aimed to contribute to the dialogue on refining the role of CTE faculty, in the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster, at the community college, advocating for a nurturing approach that equips students with a balanced portfolio of knowledge and practical skills. By addressing the evolving demands of today's workforce and exploring ways to better support CTE faculty in their multifaceted roles, this research seeks to enhance workforce readiness and promote student success.

Chapter 1 Summary

This chapter introduced the study and outlined the background and reasons behind this research on CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services and their attitudes towards their own role in training students for the workplace. This chapter framed the research within the context of the national labor market skills gap, which is the difference between the skills workers have and the skills employers demand. This divide has so many implications for businesses, the economy, and individual employment. It is vital that institutions of higher education, particularly community colleges, come up with a solution. Community colleges—accessible and

affordable—are essential in helping students gain technical and long-term skills through CTE courses, internships, apprenticeships, and co-ops. Our faculty act as mentors and coaches guiding students to transition between the classroom and the workplace.

The next chapter, the literature review, explored the role of community colleges in workforce development, examined the responsibilities of CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services, within these institutions, and discussed professional development opportunities for faculty. Additionally, Chapter 2 provided a detailed overview of social cognitive career theory and its application as the guiding framework for this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the study was to better understand how CTE faculty in the Healthcare and Human Services programs perceive their role in preparing students for the workforce. This literature review is divided into three sections. It begins with an overview of the role of community colleges in the workplace, including the new funding model that connects education to job needs. Next, it focused on the faculty role and how faculty can grow through professional development. Lastly, it introduced the theoretical framework: social cognitive career theory, including the applications and foundations. This chapter highlighted how community colleges are changing to meet workforce demands and support economic mobility.

Community colleges play a crucial role in helping students transition from school to careers (Mintz & Rutter, 2019). Faculty play a particularly important role in supporting students' development for the workforce (Mintz & Rutter, 2019). Faculty members are skilled in their content areas, and their primary role is to teach their content. With heavy teaching loads, demanding advising, service expectations, and few incentives to participate in professional development activities, faculty can struggle to prioritize their own professional learning and development (Eddy et al., 2022; Mowreader, 2024). As a result, students might finish their studies with good grades, but they may need more practical skills, connections, and experience to succeed in their careers. To address this, community colleges need to rethink how faculty can help ensure that students bridge the gap between what they learn in class and what they need to know for work, which will help students be more ready for jobs and do better in their careers (Mintz & Rutter, 2019).

Role of Community Colleges in Workforce Development

The role of the community college is to prepare and ensure students are prepared technically, socially, and academically to function holistically in a realistic environment (Kisker et al., 2016). The community college focuses on providing accessible education and training tailored to meet local and national labor market needs (America Succeeds, 2021). Their focus on technical skills, combined with an increasing emphasis on durable skills, ensures that graduates are equipped to succeed in diverse, evolving industries. Over the past two decades, academia has placed an increased focus on the development and evaluation of durable skills (Hutson et al., 2023). The need for durable or transferable skills (previously known as "soft skills") has become increasingly important in the changing job market (Schislyaeva & Saychenko, 2022). In addition, the demand for individuals who possess a diverse set of skills, including transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration, is on the rise (Hutson et al., 2023). According to America Succeeds (2021), durable skills are in high demand among jobs across the country—they are requested in every industry sector and occupation, regardless of educational attainment level. These skills are a key part of building relevant, rigorous, and equitable pathways into the future of work (America Succeeds, 2021) and the need to include durable skills has increased, as has the demand for technical skills (Hutson et al., 2023).

Research has highlighted faculty in CTE programs as being key in teaching lifelong competencies in teamwork, flexibility, and problem solving. Faculty employ many methods, such as creating experiential projects, modeling real-life scenarios, teaching students through peer-learning contexts, and preparing students for high-skill high-wage occupations (Threeton, 2007). Such practices not only match the content of learning with the needs of the workplace but also offer students a chance to put what they learn into action. Additionally, faculty use industry

advisory committees and direct employer feedback to evaluate whether their teaching translates into labor market demand, demonstrating the necessity of working closely with industry stakeholders (Nachman & Wernimont, 2024).

Preparing Students for Workforce Readiness

Community colleges play an important role in educating workers for labor market demands, which directly supports students' economic mobility by streamlining pathways to careers by aligning programs with labor market needs and ensuring graduates have the skills and opportunities needed to succeed in the workforce (Marken, 2021). To address employer's uncertainty about skills, colleges continue to develop students' workplace readiness and to prepare them for entry-level jobs (Jacobs & Cormier, 2020). According to America Succeeds (2021), as we look toward economic recovery, it is critical to ensure every individual is prepared or upskilled with the durable skills necessary for long-term success in the workforce. The demand for durable skills is greatest in occupations and industries more aligned to the future of work. Employers are looking for strong work readiness and soft skills in prospective hires. Employers suggest that a robust set of soft skills is more important than knowing how to use the latest technology (Jacobs & Cormier, 2020). The community college's goal is to provide students with soft skills; in addition to meeting the needs of the employers and generating economic impact, community colleges extend numerous resources and services to their communities (O'Banion, 2019; Thomas, 2023). To help provide students with soft skills, many community colleges organize their programs around career clusters, which helps align education with workforce needs. This pathway aligns education with workforce needs while providing a consistent structure for high-quality, accessible CTE programs that respond to evolving industry

demands (National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education Consortium, 2008).

Career Clusters

According to the National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEc), the career clusters approach was first introduced in 2002 "as a framework for grouping occupations according to common knowledge and skills" so that "sequences of courses can move learners through a progression of knowledge and skills, leading to attainment of durable, portable competency" (NASDCTEc, 2008, p. 2). According to Advance CTE, the organization has identified 14 career clusters, which gives students an easier way to explore different career options within the same field (CareerOneStop, 2023). The career clusters include Advanced Manufacturing; Construction; Supply Chain and Transportation; Arts, Entertainment, and Design; Hospitality, Events, and Tourism; Financial Services; Education; Healthcare and Human Services; Public Service and Safety; Agriculture; Energy & Natural Resources; Digital Technology; Marketing and Sales; and Management and Entrepreneurship (Advance CTE, 2024). This helps students build useful skills step by step, leading to strong and transferable abilities they use in many jobs (NASDCTEc, 2008). In addition, career clusters can increase motivation and improve student outcomes (Morgan et al., 2013). According to the Advance CTE (2024), career clusters allow students to access a nationwide framework to help them better analyze their long- and short-term career goals, plan what to take in high school to begin to move toward those goals, and implement strategies for further education and work experience that will prepare them for high-skill, high-wage, high-demand careers in the 21st century. In October 2024, a new version of the framework was released after two years of

updates and feedback. This modern version better matches today's job market and workforce needs.

The Healthcare and Human Services cluster includes programs such as nursing, early childhood education, and social services. The Healthcare and Human Service career cluster promotes whole health in individuals and communities through a diverse array of services (Advance CTE, 2024). These programs are in high demand and are essential for promoting individual and community well-being (NASDCTEc, 2008; Khattar & Coffey, 2003). Research supports that career clusters, when paired with advising and clear program sequencing, can lead to improved student outcomes, including higher completion rates and smoother transitions to careers (Bailey et al., 2015; McCharen, 2008). To effectively support students in these high-demand fields, faculty must go beyond classroom instruction by actively engaging in curriculum development, industry collaboration, and work-based learning initiatives that align with evolving labor market needs.

Work-Based Learning and Labor Market Alignment

The role of community college faculty in workforce development is multifaceted and vital to the ability of the institution to serve the needs of students, employers, and communities through the delivery of labor market-aligned training and education programs, according to Fugate and Amey (2000). The CTE faculty's role as instructors is just part of a mosaic of duties that includes curriculum design, employer relationships, and the weaving of work readiness throughout their pedagogy (Fugate & Amey, 2000). Developing and delivering a curriculum that prepares students for employment is vital to the success of community colleges. An essential aspect of faculty's role is mentoring students, which supports and guides them through their educational and professional journeys. Weissman (2024) states that mentoring must be flexible,

targeted to specific industry needs, and in tune with the rapid changes in many jobs. Weissman (2024) further explains that educational and professional journeys must be designed for students from all backgrounds and include a potent blend of work-based and classroom learning that is responsive to the needs of the changing job market. Career clusters are a useful model for helping faculty to "connect work-based learning to needs in the labor market" (Advance CTE, 2024). Programs of study are organized by clusters based on competencies used in various industries. For example, healthcare and human services. Connecting programs of study to career clusters helps faculty to develop curricula based on actual workplace skills, bring employers into the process, and add more hands-on learning (McCharen, 2008). Additionally, programs of study designed around career clusters allow faculty to forge new partnerships with local employers and to build better understandings of and adapt instruction to the changing needs of their regional economies. For CTE faculty, the cluster system provides a useful model for their role in preparing students for credential and job attainment.

Faculty Role at the Community College

While career clusters help organize programs around job skills, it is the faculty who deliver the instruction, support students, and help connect classroom learning to real careers. Faculty are considered experts in their field and are responsible for teaching students the knowledge and skills needed for success in their chosen careers (Fugate & Amey, 2000). In addition, they take on several important roles that go beyond just teaching. These roles are crucial in helping students succeed (Fugate & Amey, 2000). Those roles include being an advisor, developer, and mentor. In the section below, each of those roles is defined.

Advisor. Faculty serve as advisors, helping students choose courses, plan their academic path, and make decisions about their future careers (Baker & Griffin, 2000). Advising ensures

that students stay on track and are well-prepared for graduation and beyond (Baker & Griffin, 2000).

Developer. Faculty help students grow personally and professionally by encouraging critical thinking, problem solving, and other skills important in the workplace (Baker & Griffin, 2000). They also connect students with industry professionals and provide opportunities for internships and other practical experiences (Baker & Griffin, 2000).

Mentor. This kind of special relationship can transform a student's educational journey, making the learning experience richer and more meaningful (Crisp et al., 2017). Mentoring is an important way to bridge the gap between traditional teaching and preparing students for the workforce. Mentoring allows faculty to go beyond classroom instruction and help students develop practical skills, understand industry trends, and connect with professional networks (Baldwin & Chang, 2007).

These roles help students through their education and build strong connections between faculty and students. These connections are the foundation of meaningful faculty-student interactions. In the next section, I will review five interactions that allow faculty to connect with students beyond the classroom. These interactions play an important role in helping students succeed.

Faculty-Student Interactions

Researchers have long focused on the nature of college student interactions with faculty and their effects on a broad range of outcomes (Kim & Sax, 2017). According to Kisker (2019), faculty are among the first to interact with students at the college. Faculty-student interactions have been perceived to have a positive impact on student outcomes (Kim & Sax, 2017) and to be the most important factor in student motivation and involvement (Trolian et., 2016).

Furthermore, Hathaway et al. (2002) indicated that undergraduates' interaction with faculty may have a positive impact that extends beyond graduation. According to Mattanah et al. (2024), faculty-student relationships have been linked to successful learning outcomes. In addition, no matter how well faculty teach, student engagement and learning outcomes can be compromised if faculty do not establish rapport with their students (Thakur et al., 2019; Mattanah et al., 2024). Cox and Orehovec (2007) report that a significant portion of student learning in college occurs outside the classroom and that faculty-student interaction is an important part of the college experience. There are five types of faculty-student interaction: disengagement, incidental contact, functional interaction, personal interaction, and mentoring (Cox & Orehovec, 2007).

Disengagement. Disengagement refers to faculty and students not interacting outside of the classroom (Cox & Orehovec, 2007). The student has minimal interaction with the faculty member inside the classroom and little or no interpersonal exchange (Komarraju et al., 2010). A larger portion of both community college students and faculty members are part-time and generally leave campus after class and do not interact once class is over (Chang, 2005). In addition, the majority of students are on commuter campuses, where many students balance academics with commitments to family and off-campus employment, making it difficult to foster deeper connections that could enhance student engagement and success (Chang, 2005).

Incidental Contact. Incidental contact refers to a brief, casual, and unplanned interaction between students and faculty outside of formal classroom settings (Cox & Orehovec, 2007). Polite or occasional greetings, and waves are also included in this contact.

Functional Interaction. Functional interactions refer to academic-related interactions outside the classroom (Komarraju et al., 2010). This can include a student asking faculty academic questions, faculty members asking students institution-related questions, or students

and faculty members working on a college project together (Cox & Orehovec, 2007). Plecha (2002) found that students who spoke more frequently with faculty outside class and received advice about their educational program reported significantly higher academic self-confidence.

Personal Interaction. Personal interaction involves the interaction to be purposeful and revolves around the personal interest(s) of a faculty member and/or a student (Cox & Orehovec, 2007).

Mentoring. Cox and Orehovec (2007) describe mentoring as an extended relationship built on both functional and personal interactions. Mentoring involves guiding students through their academic journey, offering advice on career choices, and supporting their personal and professional development (Mintz, 2024). In addition, according to Cox and Orehovec (2007), mentoring relationships represent the highest of the five levels of student-faculty interaction.

Professional Development for Community College Faculty

Professional development began to emerge in U.S. higher education amid the social and economic changes of the late 1950s and 1960s (Ouellet, 2010). With the growth of new community colleges in the 1960s, professional development grew in response to this emerging need (Ouellet, 2010). The term “faculty development” was used as an umbrella concept to include professional development, personal development, instructional development, organizational development, and content area knowledge development (Sorcinelli et al., 2006). In addition, faculty development and professional development are often used interchangeably; Beach et al. (2016) noted that there is still no clear consensus amongst scholars and practitioners about which term is most appropriate.

Balancing Teaching Responsibilities and Professional Development

As stated in Chapter 1, heavy teaching loads, advising duties, service expectations, and few incentives to participate in professional development activities make it hard for faculty to prioritize their own professional learning and development (Eddy et al., 2022). Balancing these demands can be challenging, particularly as community colleges face growing expectations to equip students for the workforce. Strickland-Davis et al. (2019) points out that institutions of higher learning, particularly community colleges, are expected to prepare their students for the workforce and/or help students to transfer to additional higher education. Along with these expectations, colleges are constantly challenged with increasing enrollment, retention, and completion rates while maintaining quality educational programs geared at preparing students for a life of achievement and success (Strickland-Davis et al., 2019).

To address these challenges, professional development for faculty can provide expertise to align teaching and learning innovation with broader student success initiatives and provide additional support for faculty members to connect their work to student success and the strategic plan of their institution (Stout & Jaeger, 2023). In addition, Eddy et al., (2019) found that professional development is a powerful approach for helping faculty make changes that better support student learning and ultimately leads to positive changes across the institution. Moreover, faculty development can in fact improve faculty members' teaching (Morris & Usher, 2011). According to Perez et al., (2012), some faculty members do not utilize effective teaching strategies and resist incorporating alternative teaching strategies in their courses. This resistance to change can be compounded by the demands of heavy teaching loads (Mowreader, 2024). Because some faculty have heavy teaching loads, demanding advising and service expectations, few incentives to participate in professional learning activities, community college faculty often

face challenges in dedicating time to professional development (Eddy et al., 2022; Mowreader, 2024). Faculty professional development activities and opportunities are also arguably more crucial for community college faculty precisely because many instructors do not enter into the career field with a background in teaching and learning, as research universities train students to be scholars instead of instructors and specialized vocational experts have gained their knowledge, skills, and abilities from first-hand experience or training that often has led to an industry-recognized credential (Brownell & Tanner, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Faculty can struggle to prioritize their own professional learning and development because of the heavy teaching loads that leave little time to fit professional development in their teaching schedules, administrative work, and supporting students and departments (Eddy et al., 2022). These challenges make it hard for them to stay updated on industry trends and new teaching methods, which are key to helping students prepare for the workforce. In the next section, I will explain the main ideas and components of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) and explore how it has been applied in previous research.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Lent & Brown (1996) describes SCCT as a theory that was derived primarily from Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory (Brown, 2002). SCCT considers the interplay among many constructs (e.g., interests, abilities, goals) that are dealt with to varying degrees by existing career theories. It also emphasizes cognitive and experiential processes that may undergird important variables in other career models (e.g., the means by which people come to develop primary vocational interest in Holland's 1985 theory).

Foundations in Social Cognitive Career Theory

Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs about their ability to perform specific tasks or behaviors successfully. In addition, it refers to "people's judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Self-efficacy is not a singular static, passive, or global trait, but rather involves dynamic self-beliefs that are linked to particular performance domains and activities such as different academic and work tasks (Lent & Brown, 1996; Brown, 2002).

Faculty development programs can increase self-efficacy (Rowbotham, 2015; Singh et al., 2013) and teachers with high self-efficacy expect to promote student learning. Strickland-Davis, et al. (2019) state that a common goal of faculty development in the community college is providing opportunities for faculty to acquire the knowledge, skills, and efficacy required for student success.

Nachman & Wernimont (2024) state that there are four factors that contribute to shaping one's understanding of self-efficacy. Mastery experience encompasses an individual's past successful accomplishments and resourcefulness and is the most significant (Lent & Brown, 1996; Nachman & Wernimont, 2024). Secondly, vicarious experiences stem from instructors' senses, based on what they see, hear, and read (Bandura, 1977). Staying abreast of industry trends enables instructors to figure out what topics and tools they need to incorporate into classroom discussions (Nachman & Wernimont, 2024). Thirdly, social persuasion manifests in obtaining feedback from others, including colleagues and students. In this sense, peer observation activities and course evaluations enable instructors to identify what approaches resonate with students (Nachman & Wernimont, 2024). Lastly, teacher efficacy emerges from positive interpretations of physiological and emotional or affective states (Bandura, 1977;

Brown, 2002). Experiencing a job and pride upon facilitating a favorable team project in an architecture course could lead the instructor to feel stronger self-efficacy. These collective factors have major implications in self-beliefs, as educators with stronger teacher efficacy expend more effort in working with students (Goddard et al., 2001). Teacher efficacy represents an iterative process that is continually moderated by engaging in and reflecting on new experiences (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Outcome Expectations. Outcome expectations refer to beliefs about the consequences or the outcomes of performing particular behaviors (Lent & Brown, 1996; Brown, 2002). They address the question, "If I do this, what will happen, and will the outcome be beneficial or rewarding?" These beliefs may be influenced by previous personal experiences, social feedback, or cultural norms, thereby shaping both the motivation to pursue certain paths and the persistence shown when encountering obstacles (Lent et al., 2000). According to Bandura (1986), individuals' behavior is affected both by their sense of their personal capabilities and by their beliefs about the likely effects of various actions.

Personal Goals. Personal goals can be defined as one's intention to engage in a certain activity or to produce a particular outcome (Bandura, 1986). By setting personal goals, people help to organize, guide, and sustain their own efforts (Lent & Brown, 1996). This component represents the intentions and aspirations individuals set to guide their career development. These goals direct effort, persistence, and decision-making, serving as benchmarks for progress (Lent et al., 2000). In addition, goals are a ubiquitous element of career choice and decision-making theories. They are achieved through their self-motivating quality by linking self-satisfaction to goal fulfillment and to the enactment of behavior that meets internally set standards (Lent et al., 1994).

Applications of Social Cognitive Career Theory in Previous Research

Social cognitive career theory has been used in a wide range of fields in understanding career development across diverse populations and settings. Geskie (2023) conducted a qualitative study examining the career decision-making processes of early intervention teachers in New York. Using SCCT, the research explored how personal variables, learning experiences, and environmental contexts influence individuals to choose careers in early intervention. Howard (2022) applied SCCT's career self-management model to understand why advanced degree nurses opt for roles other than faculty positions. This study identified factors such as self-efficacy, outcomes expectations, and perceived barriers influencing these career decisions. Wendling & Sagas (2020) employed SCCT's career self-management model to examine predictors of career planning among college athletes transitioning out of sports. Their findings underscored the roles of self-efficacy, career goals, and perceived support in shaping athletes' post-sport career trajectories. Lastly, Damodar et al. (2024) conducted a scoping review on theory-driven career interventions for youth, emphasizing the utility of SCCT and career maturity inventories in facilitating informed career decisions. The review highlighted the effectiveness of SCCT-based interventions in enhancing career readiness among young individuals.

Chapter 2 Summary

This chapter discussed the literature review and provided insights regarding the updated role of community colleges in terms of workforce preparation, career clusters, workforce readiness, and faculty. As the labor market demands are rapidly changing, community colleges also experience the need for shifts. By providing durable and technical skills to the students, community colleges attempt to address the gaps in terms of curriculum design and support

services. This chapter also explored the essential roles faculty play, not only as instructors, but also as advisors and mentors for students, as well as developers of industry-relevant curriculum. Faculty-student interaction and professional development are among the additional important topics, which could positively affect students' progress. Lastly, social cognitive career theory served as the theoretical framework for the study, as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals are defined as the primary predictors of human behavior.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology used to address research questions, study design, and plans for data collection and analyses. The purpose of the study is to better understand how faculty perceive their role in preparing students for the workforce. This basic qualitative study explores faculty perceptions of their role in workforce readiness and professional development within traditional teaching responsibilities. Qualitative research provides an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This basic qualitative study will address the following research questions:

- How do CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services perceive their role in preparing students for the durable skills required for workforce readiness?
- What specific professional development and resources do CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services need to effectively support students in acquiring practical skills and professional networks?
- How can community colleges support CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services to align educational outcomes with workforce demands?

This chapter began with a description of the basic qualitative research design and rationale. Next, the researcher's positionality, research setting, participant selection, and data collection and analysis were outlined. This chapter concluded by addressing credibility, dependability, transferability, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

This study used a basic qualitative study design (Yin, 2014) to analyze the roles of faculty, specifically in the Healthcare and Human Services programs, in preparing students for

the workforce. To gain a deeper understanding of faculty roles and perceptions, qualitative methods will be used to “help people tell their stories” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Qualitative methods provides a deep understanding of human behavior, allowing me to explore social life dimensions and develop insights that advance theory, practice, or social change (Creswell, 2014). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), "qualitative research attempts to understand individuals, groups, and phenomena in their natural settings in ways that are contextualized and reflect the meaning that people make out of their own experience” (p. 1).

A qualitative study was particularly well-suited for exploring the specific roles of faculty in Healthcare and Human Services programs in preparing students for the workforce beyond traditional teaching responsibilities and understanding faculty members' perceptions of their responsibilities in fostering career readiness and professional development among students. Qualitative research excels at uncovering in-depth insights, understanding complex phenomena, and exploring the nuances of human experiences and perceptions (Cox & Orehovec, 2007). In addition, qualitative studies allow for the exploration of faculty members' perspectives through methods such as in-depth interviews. In this study, qualitative studies were used to reveal the intricacies of faculty roles, which included balancing their teaching loads, advising, and service expectations. In addition, this research revealed challenges in expanding faculty responsibilities and strategies they found compelling in promoting student career readiness. Lastly, it provided a rich understanding of the context in which faculty work and the interpersonal dynamics that influenced educational outcomes (Cox & Orehovec, 2007).

Positionality Statement

As an experienced instructor in the community college system, I bring a unique perspective to this research. While I am currently employed at one of the institutions where this

study was conducted, I do not have any affiliations or direct connections to the health sciences or human services area, allowing me to approach the research with an unbiased perspective specific to this field. In qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) outlined that the researcher was “the primary instrument of data collection and analysis” (p. 34). Creswell and Poth (2017) also stated that researchers must "position themselves" in the work and acknowledge how their “personal, cultural, and historical” experiences shape how they interpret data (p. 71). My interest in conducting this research stems from my passion for understanding the role faculty play in preparing students for the workforce and addressing the shortages in the healthcare industry. Before transitioning into teaching, I worked in the healthcare industry and later held positions at another community college. In both roles, my focus was on the administrative side rather than the clinical side of healthcare. This allows me to interpret the study in a new way. As a healthcare professional, I was passionate about addressing workforce shortages, which strengthened my personal connection to the purpose of this study.

Positionality refers to how the researcher’s identity and role relate to the context of a study, as Ravitch and Carl (2019) put it. I have seen how professors encourage students to succeed and be ready for the workplace throughout the years. Faculty contribute to workforce development by enabling students to bridge education with job prospects and professional networks.

This research emphasized the importance of CTE faculty, specifically in the Healthcare and Human Services areas, involvement in workforce training and professional growth. With these pursuits, I wanted to encourage student success and continue to grow the community college system.

Research Setting

This study was conducted at two community colleges, referred to by the pseudonyms Truth Technical Community College and Unity Technical Community College. Both institutions are part of the North Carolina Community College System and serve diverse student populations across urban and rural areas. This study focused on programs within the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster.

Truth Technical Community College is a public, two-year college. It has multiple locations and serves two counties, with a total enrollment of about 12,000 students. This college offers associate degrees, diplomas, certificates, and continuing education courses. Approximately 44% of the students are White, 25% are African American, 18% are Hispanic, and 13% identify as other.

Unity Technical Community College is a public, two-year college. The college serves approximately 12,000 students each year, serving two counties. With multiple locations, this college offers associate degrees, diplomas, certificates, and continuing education courses. The student population is 66.2% White, 13% Black or African American, 12.7% Hispanic, and 0.379% American Indian or Alaska Native.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The target population for this study was selected from the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster, which includes high-demand programs such as nursing, early childhood education, and human services. This cluster was chosen because of its critical role in preparing students for essential workforce fields that directly impact the health and well-being of individuals and communities (Khattar & Coffey, 2023; Advance CTE, 2024). The participants for this study (both full and part-time faculty) were purposefully selected based on their role as

CTE faculty within this cluster. Purposeful sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that is recommended when the desire is to locate "information-rich [participants] from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (Patton, 2015, p. 53). Purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013) based on the researcher's "knowledge of the population to select individuals who they believe will be good sources of information" (Patten & Newhart, 2018, p. 100). Purposive sampling was deemed suitable for this study, as it enables the researcher to focus on individuals possessing specific traits expected to contribute more effectively to the relevant research (Etikan et al., 2016). After completing the Institutional Review (IRB) approval process at the university and both institutions, a recruitment email was sent to all full- and part-time CTE faculty in the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster at both institutions. The Institutional Effectiveness department assisted in identifying eligible faculty at both institutions.

Data Collection

The goal of this study was to interview enough faculty members at each institution to achieve both rich and thick data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As Ravitch and Carl (2019) state, interacting with other individuals directly impacts and affects the data that is collected. For this qualitative study, I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Interviewing is often the primary data collection method utilized in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The data collection process included interviews related to faculty roles and their specific role in preparing students for the workforce. I engaged in individual semi-structured interviews for 45 to 60 minutes with faculty from the CTE programs aligned with the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster at both institutions. I completed a trial run with two faculty members not related to the study to ensure the questions were clear, easy to understand, and that

the interview could be completed within the desired timeframe. I requested permission from the participants to digitally record the interview and explained to them the purpose of the study. In addition, I explained to participants that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw from this study at any time without any consequences. Interviews were conducted using an online video conferencing platform. If the participant's camera did not work, the interview was recorded using audio only so their responses could still be captured. I used follow-up questions during the interviews to explore participants' experiences and perspectives on faculty perceptions of their role in workforce readiness.

A total of 16 Healthcare and Human Services career cluster faculty agreed to be interviewed for this study. To acknowledge the time and effort required for participating, each faculty member who participated in the study was given an incentive for participating. Once a participant expressed interest in the study, an informed consent form was sent to them that provided the faculty participants with detailed information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, risks, confidentiality measures, and their rights as participants. After the signed consent form was received, interviews were scheduled.

To explore the roles in Healthcare and Human Services CTE faculty in preparing students for the durable skills required for workforce readiness, the interview questions focused on topics such as:

a. What does a CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services program engage with industry in their area?
b. What durable skills do Healthcare and Human Services faculty believe students need to be prepared for the workforce?

c. What durable skills do Healthcare and Human Services faculty believe should be added to their curriculum?
d. What resources do Healthcare and Human Services faculty believe are needed to support students in attaining the necessary durable skills?

The interview schedule was developed and accommodated CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services, working various shifts and availability. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) began with a welcome and an expression of gratitude for their willingness to participate. The interview protocol served as a guide for interviewing while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions and a deeper exploration of participants' responses. The interview was audio-recorded and video recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Furthermore, pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of participants' identities.

To make sure each interviewee was quoted accurately (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim using the Zoom platform and Otter AI. Field notes were also used in this study. To ensure the data was not lost, it was stored in multiple places, including on a cloud storage site (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and an external hard drive. A reflective journal was used to help keep track of my thoughts, reflections, and insights gathered during the collection of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This journal was essential for mitigating any bias that may influence the interpretation of the data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is defined as the process of making sense out of the data; this process is used to answer research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is advised that data analysis begin at the onset of the data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After each interview, the data was prepared and organized through transcription (Creswell & Poth, 2017). To protect

the participants from harm, identifying information was removed. I memoed during each reading of the data to help me track patterns essential to coding and theme development. Miles et al. (2019) describe the urgency of memoing as “when an idea strikes, stop whatever else you are doing and write the memo” (p. 95).

I started the data analysis process by reviewing the transcripts, recordings, and memos from the Healthcare and Human Services faculty interviews several times. I then scanned the documents and read them thoroughly (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The transcripts were read in their entirety so that I could get a sense of the interview before breaking it into parts (Agar, 1980). After I reviewed all the transcripts, recordings, and memoirs several times, I began to complete the coding process. Open coding was used to code the memos. I started by labeling distinct thoughts, insights, or observations in each memo (Saldaña, 2013). Coding for the transcripts was completed utilizing the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. This software maintained a list of codes created for this research project and provided space to define them (Saldaña, 2021). This was done periodically using the monitor or hard copy. Each transcript was coded separately and after the second transcript, the first transcript was re-coded. During the first cycle coding, I used Vivo coding. Vivo coding uses the participants’ exact words, which results in rich data for studies (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This method helped kept the participants' voices clear and captured their views in their own words (Saldaña, 2021).

For the second cycle coding, I used Axial coding. According to Saldaña (2021), the primary goal during second cycle coding was to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of first cycle codes” (p. 296). Coding is appropriate because it effectively handles a wide variety of data forms (Saldaña, 2021),

allowing me to organize the data into meaningful categories, making it easier to identify patterns and relationships.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness has been critical in assessing qualitative research. To establish the "trustworthiness" of a qualitative study, four criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is an important part of critical research design. I used multiple reliable and valid data collection techniques to establish credibility, including triangulation, member checks, and memos. Triangulation involves integrating and combining data from the one-on-one interviews, which adds depth and credibility to the research by allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomena from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2014). Data triangulation was conducted using interviews, to gain a comprehensive view of participants' experiences and perspectives, enabling cross-checking and validation of findings across multiple sources. Member checking was also applied to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants received a summary of the key findings and were asked to respond via email. All participants were asked to review the themes and verify whether what was captured during the interview was accurate. Lastly, to assure credibility I used memos to monitor any bias or assumptions I may have had; memos help identify code categories for themes and compare the questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Dependability is referred to as reliability, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Reliability is demonstrating that the operations of a study—such as its data collection procedures—can be repeated, with the same results (Yin, 2016). I used the strategies that

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested to increase dependability by using triangulation, memoing, and using an audit trail.

In qualitative studies, transferability describes whether the findings can be transferred to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was addressed by providing a rich and thick description of the institution, participants, and findings (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that to make transferability possible, there needs to be "sufficient descriptive data" (p. 298).

Lastly, confirmability refers to a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was demonstrated by maintaining an audit trail that records all the stages of the research process, detailing how the study was conducted and how findings were derived from the data (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 254).

Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the methodology employed in this study, including the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Through the qualitative approach, I was able to gain deeper insights into the roles of faculty in Healthcare and Human Services programs in preparing students for the workforce. As we transition into the subsequent chapters, it is essential to recognize the critical role that faculty play in shaping the career trajectories of students. Faculty serve as invaluable guides, offering support, expertise, and guidance as students navigate their academic journeys. Moreover, they play a crucial role in preparing students for the workforce by imparting relevant knowledge, fostering critical thinking skills, and facilitating professional development opportunities. Chapter 4 discussed the study's findings in detail, focusing on the role of Healthcare and Human Services faculty, the role of

community colleges, and how faculty professional development prepared students for the workforce.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore and better understand how faculty perceived their role in preparing students for the workforce. Understanding faculty perceptions is critical for developing support systems and professional development opportunities that aligned with the demands of workforce expectations (Hahn, 2024). Data was collected from college CTE faculty participating in semi-structured interviews using purposeful sampling to address the following research questions:

- How do CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services, perceive their role in preparing students for the durable skills required by the demands of workforce readiness?
- What specific professional development and resources do CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services need to effectively support students in acquiring practical skills and professional networks?
- How can community colleges support CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services to align educational outcomes with workforce demands?

This chapter presented the research findings of interviews conducted with CTE faculty members in the Healthcare and Human Services programs, from two community colleges, referred to by the pseudonyms Truth Community College and Unity Community College, both serving students across multiple counties. The participant sample included 13 full-time and 3 part-time faculty from CTE programs within the Healthcare and Human Services cluster, with participants' length of service ranged from 1 to 20 years. Faculty participated in one semi-structured interview virtually via Zoom lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Direct identifiers, including discipline and school within the colleges, were removed from the data to

decrease the likelihood of re-identification. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Profile

			Years of Service at the College		
Pseudonym	Gender	Program	0 – 5 Years	6 – 10 Years	11+ Years
Daphney	Female	Health Sciences		X	
Gayle	Female	Health Sciences	X		
Marissa	Female	Health Sciences	X		
Destiny	Female	Health Sciences			X
Logan	Female	Health Sciences			X
Tonya	Female	Health Sciences			X
Gloria	Female	Health Sciences	X		
Brooke	Female	Health Sciences			X
Steve	Male	Social and Human Services	X		
Monique	Female	Social and Human Services	X		
Sarah	Female	Social and Human Services	X		
Stephanie	Female	Social and Human Services	X		
Charity	Female	Social and Human Services	X		
Robin	Female	Social and Human Services	X		
Bridget	Female	Social and Human Services	X		
Lisa	Female	Social and Human Services	X		

While each interview was unique, four common themes emerged during the data analysis process: (1) institutional support helps faculty align instruction with workforce demands, (2) faculty identified the need for internal, external, and industry-specific professional development

to support practical skills development and professional networking, (3) faculty use industry partnerships and employer feedback to strengthen students' durable skills and workforce expectations, and (4) faculty view their role as supporting student growth through advising, mentorship, and professional networking. Table 2 provides an overview of the themes and subthemes developed through coding and analysis.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
1. Institutional support helps faculty align instruction with workforce demands	College leadership support strengthens instruction and professional growth
	Peer support builds relationships and effective teams
	Access to professional development and instructional resources enhances faculty confidence and instructional
2. Faculty identified the need for internal, external, and industry-specific professional development to support practical skills and professional networking	Access to internal and external professional development opportunities supports instructional growth and workforce alignment
3. Faculty use industry partnerships and employer feedback to strengthen students' durable skills and workforce expectations	Engagement in professional networking and industry communication helps faculty stay informed and align instruction with workforce expectations
	Collaboration with advisory boards and community stakeholders strengthens curriculum alignment and addresses workforce readiness gaps
	Strengthening student career readiness through industry connections leads to real-world preparation and employment opportunities
4. Faculty view their role as supporting student growth through advising, mentorship, and professional modeling	Serving as role models for professionalism and growth encourages lifelong learning and professional standards

Theme 1: Institutional Support Helps Faculty Align Instruction with Workforce Demands

The first theme of this study highlighted how institutional support helps faculty align their instruction with workforce demands. Participants were asked what experiences and support have helped them feel confident in preparing their students for their careers. All participants described how various forms of support—such as encouragement from leadership and peer support—contributed to their confidence. These perceptions highlight the important role institutions play in shaping faculty development and instructional effectiveness. This theme was divided into three subthemes, leadership and peer support and access to professional development and instructional resources.

Leadership and Peer Support Strengthen Instruction and Professional Development

Leadership Support

Leadership support was described by participants as coming from individuals in roles such as program coordinators, clinical education supervisors, department chair, vice president, interim program coordinator, clinical education coordinator, and the college president.

Many faculty emphasized the importance of having institutional support and faculty felt valued. Daphney shared:

> We have a lot of support at our college. Our vice president is extremely supportive and supports us with whatever we need. The college is extremely supportive and…also has expectations for how much time we spend on professional development. The college not only said "Go do this," but they provided the outlet for us to go do it.

Marissa added, "I also have a coordinator that is extremely supportive. They have always encouraged us and supported us in growing our knowledge in order to prepare our students."

Marissa further noted that she felt very supported at her institution by stating, “I feel so supported here in professional development, from the vice president, our coordinator, but honestly, all the way up to the president, there is so much support, which is wonderful.”

Destiny stated, “Management support, knowing that my leader is supportive of my initiatives and knowing they have the knowledge and different techniques that I can go to them and ask.” She also noted that, “Our program coordinator, our vice president, and my other teammates, we have a very cohesive team, and we work together.” Brooke echoed these sentiments, sharing, “I do get a lot of support. I am in the process of working on a doctoral degree right now and the institution has allowed me and helped me to be able to increase my education.” Sarah, adjunct faculty, and Steve added that they felt supported by their program coordinator when it comes to professional development. Monique, also an adjunct, and Robin both agreed that their department supported them. However, Monique stated outside of her department (including Human Resources and IT) she does not feel supported. She stated that being at the satellite office (as opposed to the main campus) is a barrier. She added, “I feel like an outsider. My program chair does a good job with adjunct check-ins but outside of my department, I don’t receive the same level of communication or support. I have called IT several times when my computer is not working or volume is not working [and] I am expected to go to main campus. But even with that, it’s like, where are you guys located? I am only there once a week. Just another barrier.” Similarly, Robin expressed that while she did feel supported within her immediate supervisor, she did not feel supported by other departments across the college.

Autonomy in Instructional Decision-Making. Many faculty members emphasized that being granted autonomy in their instructional decision-making further strengthened their confidence and ability to meet student needs. Tonya stated, “I have autonomy. I’m allowed to

create things that I think are beneficial to the students, while still meeting the course objectives." Gloria stated, "We are given the freedom to adjust our methods as needed to make sure students succeed." Gayle added, "Our program coordinator is fabulous. She knows our strengths, and she always gives us free rein because we know what we are teaching."

Although the experiences of Monique and Robin showed that institutional support was not always consistent across the departments within the college, particularly at satellite locations, most faculty members felt supported by their institution's leadership.

Access to Professional Development and Instructional Resources

Brooke emphasized that she can access professional development hours without barriers, stating "There are so many that are free, and they do pay for you to go to conferences." She added that while the institution requires 20 hours of professional development each year, she chooses to exceed the minimum, noting that "I feel like I need to constantly be involving myself in professional development, but I certainly go well beyond that, personally." Daphney stated, "We all have courses we specifically teach (areas of expertise). I use my professional development opportunities in the areas of my expertise." Logan added, "They have time that we can use to do outside workshops and things like that." Tonya mentioned, "We have tons of professional development opportunities within our institution, and I feel like we are very well supported."

Faculty said their participation in professional development opportunities helped them build new teaching skills and increased their confidence. One participant, Gayle, shared how working with her peers has helped to build her confidence in teaching. She said, "I'm definitely an evidence-based person where I like to practice, based on things that have been proven to be true. And having peer support, along with incorporation of a standardized testing system, allows

us to provide quality questions to our students so that we know that we are asking relevant questions and hopefully preparing them in an appropriate way. I feel a lot more confident." These reflections demonstrate how faculty learn not only through direct experience, but also by working alongside others. This combination of mastery experiences and vicarious learning aligns with social cognitive career theory and supports the development of teaching self-efficacy and professional growth.

Theme 2: Faculty Identified the Need for Internal, External, and Industry-Specific Professional Development to Support Practical Skill Development and Professional Networking

The second theme of this study highlighted the need for professional development opportunities, both within the institution and outside, that helped faculty strengthen practical teaching skills and build connections with industry professionals. Faculty described their professional roles as evolving, requiring them to adapt, learn, and grow throughout their careers. When asked what support has helped them feel confident in preparing students for their careers, some faculty emphasized the importance of internal and external professional development. Some faculty shared that the institution encourages participation in learning opportunities that help them enhance their instructional skills and stay current with workforce expectations. Those learning opportunities included trauma resilience training, mental health, first aid, and career services workshops such as mock interviews and resume building. One faculty described one of the training she attended focused on self-care, self-awareness, and organizational trauma. Marissa shared, "We have a lot of support at our college, supporting us with whatever we need to do to make sure that we're prepared to prepare our students." She emphasized that navigating this journey requires intentional and sustained support from the college as faculty navigate

changing industry demands, teaching practices, and student needs. To meet these needs, faculty described internal professional development opportunities available at their institution to support their growth and teaching effectiveness.

Access to Internal and External Professional Development Opportunities that Support Instructional Growth and Workforce Alignment

Internal Professional Development Opportunities

Most faculty members stated that they have access to various forms of professional development at their institutions to help support their growth and teaching effectiveness. Faculty shared having access to college-sponsored training and mentioned the college has a professional development committee. Destiny shared, "We have a professional development committee that I participate on. We have a whole page where we can post approved learning opportunities for all of our faculty to have a part of. Having that kind of support really benefits my work in the classroom." To better understand how institutions support faculty in their ongoing growth, faculty identified two forms of internal professional development: college-sponsored training and the professional development committee.

College-Sponsored Training. Several faculty members mentioned that their institution offered a variety of professional opportunities to support their growth and teaching effectiveness. Programs included online platforms that offer a wide range of professional development courses. LinkedIn Learning, ACUE (Association of College and University Educators), NISOD (National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development), and Quality Matters were frequently mentioned. While these professional development courses are available to all faculty rather than specific to CTE, one faculty member, Monique, discussed how she participated in a Trauma Resilience Training course that she found directly applicable to her work in preparing her

students for the challenges they may face in the workforce. In addition, she and other faculty members shared that they completed CPR, youth mental health, and first aid training, as part of their professional development. Brooke shared:

> The institution has multiple ways you can take advantage of professional development. One being LinkedIn. It's on the person to go out and get it. I do a lot of NISOD professional development. They have excellent professional development. They have plenty of topics you can choose from. I have the opportunity and the availability to access these courses without any barriers. I don't have to pay for them. There are some you can pay for, but there are so many that are free.

Marissa added, "Our college offers some professional development training. I've taken the ACUE classes and Quality Matters." Tonya agreed, "We have tons of professional development opportunities within our institution. It's how we grow as an educator." Brooke shared, "The institution requires us to have 20 hours of professional development each year, and they have multiple ways you can take advantage of that. One is LinkedIn Learning."

While many faculty valued these professional development opportunities, some adjuncts did not share the same perspective. Monique shared, "As an adjunct, it's difficult for me to build connections with employers, but I am able to do so through my full-time job in the field." Sarah agreed that it was challenging for her to build connections with employers, but she said maintaining relationships with her former colleagues in the industry has supported her with ongoing professional development opportunities, like webinars and one-day conferences. Referring to teaching off-site, Robin added, "Being an adjunct professor makes it a little more difficult not being there every day, not being involved in meetings. I feel like I'm constantly having to rely on my coworkers to help me." These comments that faculty shared highlight how

faculty felt disconnected from college-sponsored professional development activities because they were not on campus every day. This disconnection points to the need for more accessible internal and external opportunities that support institutional growth and workforce alignment.

Professional Development Committee. In addition to college-sponsored training, faculty discussed the Professional Development Committee. This committee was developed to help promote learning opportunities across the institution. Marissa shared:

> There is a lot of professional development being made available at the college. We have a Professional Development Committee that I participate in. We have a whole page where we can post approved learning opportunities for all of our faculty.

The faculty shared how this committee hosts a Professional Development Day during the year. Brooke emphasized, "We do have Professional Development Day. They are usually held during the day, and sometimes we have different speakers that come in. We do peer-to-peer professional development, both on campus and during Professional Development Day." She added that when faculty members attend conferences, they will come back and share what they have learned during Professional Development Day. Faculty highlighted that sessions addressed the importance of industry certifications, training on Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPPA) and clinical requirements, such as CPR and first aid.

External Professional Development Opportunities

Faculty members also discussed the professional development that they do externally. Many discussed that although their institutions provide them with opportunities internally, their institution also supports them when they choose to get their professional development outside the institution. Tonya stated:

> I believe in lifelong learning. I'm always wanting to attend conferences to learn something new. I'm a student back in school, and I definitely believe in seeking out more and growing and learning more. I am very well supported in those goals.

Many faculty members stated attending these external professional development opportunities are essential for staying current with industry trends, maintaining professional credentials, and ensuring instructional content remains aligned with workforce expectations. Logan shared, "We have biannual state meetings with the state regulatory agency. They put together our curriculum and oversee our programs. We meet with all the different participating schools in North Carolina to just talk about what's coming up, new approaches they want us to use with our students and curriculum, and to give our feedback. They also bring people from [the credentialing body] so that we can help our students know what to expect and train them to be successful for the [state regulatory agency]."

When asked about maintaining professional credentials, Brooke shared, "I have to have 50 hours of continuing education each year and 10 hours in a specialized area. The institution requires us to have 20 hours of professional development each year." Logan added, "I have to do at least 30 hours of continuing education. There are other avenues you can go to as well if you do articles and research and those types can count towards as well. I typically do my CEUs through an online platform, to complete those hours relevant to the healthcare field." Tonya agreed, "We constantly have to have so many continuing education hours for the [state agency] to maintain our license. I'm consistently doing yearly continuing education, whether it's directly related to education as a [faculty member] or just practice related issues. I also belong to professional organizations where I get updates, whether it's quarterly or monthly, things come in the mail or email to update me on what's happening in the practice arena." Daphney mentioned, "From a

professional development standpoint, we have things that we specifically teach. Content, topics, areas of expertise. Those are the areas that we spend most time on, at least for me personally." She added if she was going to teach a subject in healthcare, she was going to use her professional development in that healthcare field. She said, "I am getting my continuing education credits that I need to maintain my license and I am using those to help boost what I know to help the students." Bridget and Lisa both shared similar experiences. Bridget noted that the annual training that she has helps her stay current in her field.

Gayle discussed how she and her colleagues attended the [credentialing agency] as a group, to keep up-to-date with expectations of preparing students for [industry-recognized credentialing exam]. She added, "I do different professional development that catered to my interests. We recently did an accreditation process."

Faculty described the external professional development opportunities to include industry and accreditation training, professional association meetings, workshops, and conferences that are held outside the institution.

Industry and Accreditation Training. Several faculty mentioned how they get their professional development attending industry and accreditation training. These professional development trainings allowed faculty to keep up the skills updated with industry standards while maintaining their professional qualifications and making certain their teaching meets the requirements of current workforce demands. Faculty participating in these opportunities noted that these experiences improve their expertise while they update their teaching practices. Some faculty discussed how their program collaborates with the Assessment Technologies Institute (ATI), which provides data on student performance and readiness for the NCLEX exam. Gayle stated, "Prior to using ATI, our testing procedures were not necessarily tired and true.

Incorporating this ATI, we feel a lot more confident, and we have seen our NCLEX scores dramatically increase."

Faculty described participating in seminars, workshops, and other industry-led sessions as valuable ways to keep their skills updated with the industry standards. Daphney shared, "We have a wide variety of things available for us, so I very seldom struggle to get what I need to be prepared to teach our students. We have yearly seminars that they offer that the college pays for."

In addition, Daphney shared that the continuing education hours that she needs to maintain her license, she uses those to help boost what she knows to help her students. Marissa shared that she does different training simulations that help prepare students for the workforce. Gayle described how simulation allows faculty to place students in real-world, high-pressure situations to assess their ability to communicate, stay calm, and work effectively as a team. Those training simulations are externally provided through professional organizations and industry partners to ensure they reflect current workforce practices.

Challenges in Sustaining Growth and Development Due to Time Restraints and Costs

Most faculty stated that there have been some challenges in completing their professional development. Those challenges included the daily demands of teaching, industry changes, and the need for self-motivation. Although these challenges exist, faculty members noted that they remain committed to improving their skills and recognized the importance of ongoing growth to better support student success and workforce readiness. Marissa shared, "One thing is, you never stop learning, it's ever-changing. I want to be the best educator that I can be for my students, so I make sure I am teaching the most current, evidence-based curriculum." Brooke highlighted, "I

feel like I need to constantly by involving myself in professional development. I certainly go well beyond the 20-hour requirement."

Barriers to Professional Development

Faculty identified several barriers to professional development. Those barriers to professional development include time constraints, cost of external professional development, low participation of their colleagues, the need for self-motivation and initiative, and a lack of awareness about available offerings.

Some faculty expressed that attending in-person workshops was challenging at times because of their busy work schedules. Logan and Marissa both shared that online professional development is the most feasible option due to their busy work schedules, as attending in-person workshops can be challenging.

Brooke noted, "Cost can also be a barrier when participating in conferences, the institution will cover the cost of attending specific conferences or workshops, but faculty often have to rely on their own financial resources for others." She also explained that professional development requires a level of intrinsic motivation, noting that "there are all different opportunities for it." She added, that professional development is not as important to adjunct faculty, since they are not compensated for their time and it is not required.

Monique stated, "I don't go to professional developments at my institution. They don't offer professional development for adjuncts." Monique added, "The professional development and workshops I attended is through my full-time role and not here at the college as an adjunct." Among these barriers, faculty noted that adjunct faculty often have low participation in professional development due to their limited time, additional responsibilities, or the perception that professional development is not as important for them.

Faculty also highlighted that the cost of external professional development, the need for self-direction and intrinsic motivation, and busy schedules are key barriers to professional development, making flexible, accessible, and supported options essential for increased engagement.

Keeping Up with Industry Changes

In addition, faculty shared that staying current with the industry changes is a critical component of their professional growth. Daphney shared, "When there are changes in bedside practices or procedures we no longer follow, I usually learn about them through our industry partners. Since protocols often change, I make it a priority to stay up-to-date and informed." Tonya explained how she regularly reaches out to ensure what she is teaching reflects current practices. She stated, "If there's a certain topic that I'm teaching, I can reach out to say, 'Is this still how this happens in the workforce? Are there any changes or new evidence that have come out that I need to incorporate?'" Michelle added, "There are a lot of changes that happen in the industry that sometimes we lose sight of when you are working in the classroom full-time." Charity discussed how she has consistent conversations with employers to stay informed about current trends and changes within the industry. Steve and Monique also had similar approaches. Steve stated, "I try to stay involved in my community and stay in touch with employers and my previous employers who are still in the field." Steve also added, "Staying abreast with people and connecting usually helps a lot. I read and get Department of Health and Human Services bulletins and talk to people from places that I have worked with, and they will share what's going on, what's new, and what to expect. I share those things with my students and encourage them to reach out to employers." Monique shared that she has a good relationship with employers and if she needed anything, it was a quick email: "The collaboration is already

established, so it's easier for me. I have built a good relationship with different organizations." Sarah noted, "I'm a National Certified Counselor and a Global Career Development Facilitator, so I am required to do so many CEU's within certain time periods." She explained how these continuing education requirements help her stay up-to-date with the latest research and best practices in her field and how she incorporates it into her classroom assignments. Lisa also emphasized how attending regularly state-led training sessions and professional development meetings ensures that her instruction reflects currents standards and best practices for working in her field. According to faculty, staying current with industry changes requires constant effort and proactive communication, which can be difficult to balance with teaching responsibilities.

The second theme addressed ongoing faculty development needs. Faculty viewed professional development as a continuous journey requiring intentional support through internal professional development, including college-sponsored training and external training, including industry and accreditation training. Through challenges, including cost and time constraints, faculty members remain current with industry changes and improve their skills. The second theme aligns with social cognitive career theory, particularly with self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Faculty members participating in professional development experienced mastery experiences that build their confidence in their instructional abilities and led them to positive outcomes, including improved teaching practices, alignment with industry trends, and better student career readiness. In addition to professional development, faculty also identified external collaboration with industry partners that helped them better align with industry needs. The next theme focused on building external support systems and collaborating with industry needs to strengthen faculty alignment with workforce needs.

Theme 3: Faculty Use Industry Partnerships and Employer Feedback to Strengthen Students' Durable Skills and Workforce Expectations

The third theme of this study was building external support systems and collaborating with industry partners that helped faculty align instruction with workforce needs. Faculty were asked how often they collaborate with industry partners to incorporate real-world perspectives into teaching. Faculty consistently emphasized the importance of engaging with industry partners to ensure their instruction remains relevant and responsive to workforce demands. Through their interviews, three subthemes emerged: engagement in professional networking and industry communications, collaboration with advisory boards and community stakeholders, and strengthening student career readiness through industry connections.

Engagement in Professional Networking and Industry Communications to Stay Informed and Align Instruction with Workforce Expectations

Some faculty mentioned how they actively connect and communicate with employers and industry stakeholders outside the college. This occurred through advisory board meetings, conferences, previous and current employers, discussions with industry leaders, and industry partners providing feedback about students. These ongoing connections allowed faculty to stay informed about the current industry and ensured they aligned with industry expectations. Gayle and Brooke stated that they collaborate with industry partners at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Marrisa and Monique talked about the relationships that they have with the industry partners. Marissa elaborated, "We have a really good relationship with our stakeholders. We have meetings with them regularly, determining their needs, what they are seeing with our students, and what we can do to better prepare them." Monique added, "I am always looking at

ways to collaborate with organizations. I always push that I have a group of students that are looking for placement and I want to build a relationship with them."

Another faculty member, Destiny, responded, "There are a lot of changes that happen in the industry that sometimes we lose sight of when you are working in the classroom full time. I have maintained contact with peers that I worked with in the industry." Logan said it was an ongoing effort and added, "We have employers calling us all the time." Tonya agreed and said:

> I meet with employers constantly and get feedback from the industry partners on what's new and updated. I also belong to professional organizations where I get updates, whether it's quarterly or monthly.

Gloria said she meets with the employers almost biweekly. These examples show how faculty rely on employers input, leading into how they use feedback to build students' durable and workforce skills.

Incorporating Employer Feedback to Strengthen Students' Durable and Workforce Skills

All the faculty members mentioned the importance of incorporating feedback from employers and stakeholders into their teaching practices to better prepare students for the workforce. Many of the faculty members stated that durable skills, particularly communication, time management, professionalism, dependability, and critical thinking, were highlighted by employers as areas of improvement. In response, faculty have integrated simulation activities, case studies, mock interviews, resume building, rubrics, portfolios, and real-world scenarios into their lessons to give students more opportunities to practice these skills in a safe environment.

Tonya shared:

> One of the things that we receive feedback on—not just our students, but students in general—is on their soft skills. Communication, time management, and prioritization.

> They feel like our graduates are ready to hit the ground running but communicating with the patient and the family or managing conflict are skills that need to be strengthened based on the employer's feedback. We have incorporated virtual simulation in our courses. The student is directly working with a virtual patient and they're having to conversate, and they're having to ask questions. We are working to be more intentional in these kinds of interactions to help students gain a realistic perspective on what they may encounter in the workplace.

Brooke echoed Tonya's comment and said, "The focus for the employers was communication; soft skills, and the last one would be critical thinking." Daphney also discussed the importance of durable skills, stating, "Our industry partners state that students do not have great communication skills."

Charity shared, "We recently started doing a bootcamp before students start their internship. We do case studies, mock interviews, and resume building in our boot camp and we also help them think about what professionalism is and what does it look like?" Charity added that she instills self-care in bootcamp and emphasizes its importance as a professional skill, particularly for students entering the human services field. Similarly, Monique added that she incorporates self-care and self-awareness into her teaching helping students to reflect on their personal growth and how to be ready for the workplace. Monique also added how she incorporates a lot of case studies and scenarios into her classroom. She shared that scavenger hunts are her "go to." She added, "I give students case scenarios and provide them with a resource book that lists various organizations. They are required to identify 10 to 12 different organizations that address all the social determinants of health. I let them know I need at least two healthcare-related locations that can assist with education, food insecurity, and food banks. It

involves a significant amount of research on their part. She added that this helps her students identify the right resources and support their clients will need.

Some faculty also emphasized the importance of interpersonal skills as a durable skill that employers are looking for. Steve, a human services faculty member, explained, “Employers want to know, can you connect with students during an assessment? How are you with people?” He added that while many jobs require strong interpersonal skills, there are also options for students who prefer less interaction, like remote jobs in the same field. Other faculty described interpersonal skills as a key part of workforce readiness. They explained that students who cannot build relationships will struggle in professional settings. In healthcare, faculty said these skills are essential for patient-centered care, including clearly explaining procedures, showing empathy to families, and working effectively with the clinical team. In human services, faculty viewed these skills as vital for building trust with clients, managing emotional situations, and maintaining professional boundaries. While the focus may differ across programs, faculty agreed that interpersonal skills are not just “soft skills” but long-term abilities that employers consider essential. Several faculty members also shared that students often underestimate the value of these skills, which makes classroom practice, employer feedback, and real-world experiences even more important for preparing them for the workplace.

Tonya, a health sciences faculty member, also mentioned interpersonal skills. However, her program was different from human services. She emphasized, “Employers noted gaps in interpersonal skills such as communicating with patients and families or managing conflict within the healthcare facility”. To give students practical ways to build these communication and interpersonal skills, faculty in the health sciences program described using simulations and real-world scenarios in their teaching. Faculty members shared that they have incorporated

simulations for students addressing the issue of communication. Tonya shared, “We’ve incorporated virtual simulation in our courses, where the student is directly working with a virtual patient and they’re having to conversate and they’re having to ask questions.” Brooke echoed, “We have added more simulation experiences and real-world scenarios where they can practice their communication skills.”

In addition to Tonya and Brooke, other faculty members shared how they incorporate both online and face-to-face simulations. Daphney, Gayle, and Marissa all mentioned they do simulations in the classroom. Daphney stated that she uses an online simulation product that gives the students an opportunity to engage with patients and ask them to dig down into those interview questions. In addition to virtual simulations, Daphney stated that they do face-to-face simulations, as well. Gayle shared:

> I do face-to-face simulations with students. They have to provide the care for a patient. Simulation allows us to put them in an emergent situation to see how they can communicate with a patient during a situation. Can they stay calm? Can they work with a team in a situation like this?

Both Gayle and Marissa incorporate both online and face-to-face simulations. Marissa stated that her background is simulation, and she does all the simulations for her satellite office. In addition, she stated, “Students actually get two simulations because they have it on the main campus and they have to do another one at the satellite office.”

Faculty members also shared that professionalism is another skill that they have incorporated into their curriculum. Charity stated, “We’re addressing professionalism in our bootcamps, as well in the classrooms, with our case scenarios. In our bootcamp, we had a fun ‘professionalism night.’ We also provide them with examples of ‘bad emails’ and have them edit

and improve the working to make the email more appropriate." She added, "We do plan on adding more intensive bootcamps and we have a lot of different pieces happening in Human Services." One faculty member, Stephanie, shared the feedback she received from an employee specifically addressed a student's professionalism. She described how there was a situation at a work-based learning site she did not handle appropriately. She said, "The student and I discussed the situation with her site supervisor, and I asked the student to bring this to class, so that we could process and talk about it. My goal is to help them do self-reflection and understand what's going on. 'Why did I react the way that I did? Was it a more professional way to handle it?'" Stephanie shared these conversations, as well as case studies, to help students practice professional behavior and learn how to respond appropriately in challenging situations. In addition to professionalism and self-reflection, faculty talked about the importance of self-care to help students handle the challenges of their future careers.

While self-care is not traditionally categorized alongside durable skills, such as communication, professionalism, or listening, some faculty discussed self-care as an important skill for students to learn and practice. Faculty in human services focused on self-care as setting boundaries and protecting emotional health when working with clients. One faculty member stated, "I fell in love with the trauma resilience training. It was a 3-day training. It teaches you self-care, self-awareness, mental health, and organizational trauma. It teaches you so much. It was the best training I've ever been." Charity added, "It is important for us to teach them what those things are because, if you can't take care of you, you're not going to be able to show up and take care of those you're working with." Along with talking about self-care, faculty said that bringing employers help students connect what they learn in class to real-world experiences.

Faculty members also shared how inviting employers back to the classroom helps students gain a deeper and more realistic understanding of their fields. Steve shared, "I have people come back to do a panel for our students so that our students can hear it firsthand from graduates who are in the field. We also have professors coming in to say what it is like at a four-year college. It is all about partnerships. It's all about real-world experiences."

Collaboration with Advisory Boards and Community Stakeholders Strengthens Curriculum Alignment and Addresses Workforce Readiness Gaps

Many faculty highlighted the importance of the advisory board members. They mentioned they sit on advisory boards and hear from their clinical partners about how students were doing. They emphasized that advisory boards serve as an important industry connection for aligning education with employer expectations. Daphney shared:

> We met with our advisory board twice a year. Just to go over any changes in our program, we share information with them, and they share with us. Both clinical industry partners, as well as academic partners.

Tonya added, "I sit on our advisory board, so we're able to hear from clinical partners about how our students are doing—how prepared they felt and whether there were any gaps they noticed in our students' skills." She added, "We work with students and do what we can to close that gap."

Through these collaborations, advisory boards acted as an important bridge between the classroom and the workplace, providing real-time insights into the industry. Tonya, Daphney, and Brooke shared that these partnerships not only help them with the current teaching practices but also guide them in ensuring students are well prepared to enter the workforce. Faculty explained that advisory boards often provided practical suggestions like integrating industry certifications and bringing in employers to speak to students or offer internships. Brooke shared

that the feedback from the advisory board led her to revise a course assignment so students could practice with the same tools used in the field. Tonya also shared that advisory board members help her connect students with internship opportunities, which also gave them direct work experience prior to graduation. Faculty also acknowledged that most advisory boards only meet once or twice a year, which can limit their effectiveness but they also noted that they often see advisory board members outside the meeting through student internships, career fairs, and at sometimes, community events.

Strengthening Student Career Readiness Through Industry Connections Leads to Real-World Preparations and Employment Opportunities

Several faculty members emphasized the importance of fostering strong connections between students and industry partners to assist students develop career readiness. Faculty members shared how meet-and-greet events, job fairs, and mock interviews provide opportunities for students to engage with potential employers, as well as expose them to real-world expectations. Taylor shared:

> We have a meet and greet that we participate in where our students are able to meet with different employers in the community. We also encourage our students to make accounts with the career center early so that they can begin to upload their resumes and get feedback. We also discuss any interview and how they should perform during an interview—what kind of questions to expect and what kind of questions they can ask.

She also added she gets feedback from the executive leadership team at the college that deals directly with workforce issues and what's happening in industry and what changes are coming. She noted that the director sits on one of the North Carolina Associate Degree Directors Councils, which provides insight into workforce trends that directly impact curriculum decisions.

Brooke shared a similar perspective on supporting student career readiness. “We participate in mock interviews and help students with resumes. In addition to this, as part of their service-learning hours, I ask them to volunteer at a free clinic. They get to interact with people who are in the community in which they live. They get the opportunity to see patients they would possibly see in a hospital and see how they’re getting taken care of before they make it to that point. It helps them understand the importance of volunteerism in healthcare.” Charity shared, “We have specialized job fairs for our students, and we have them to come in prior to the fair to do resume building.” She added, “We have students to bring their resume and employers to do pull students from the classroom, as if they were sitting in the lobby, to do mock interviews.”

Faculty described several ways they support internships opportunities to help students apply their learning in real-world settings. Charity shared, “I hold pre-information sessions where I’m letting students know what the expectations are in the field. I expect my students to treat fieldwork as if it were a job and I start with that expectation very early on.” She added, “I find out what they’re interested in, so I try to link them to placements that fall within those categories. I also give them pre-questions to think about before going to their placement interview that they may be asked, and I give them pre-questions to think about asking the employer.” Stephanie stated in her role as a field instructor, she has a class that meets with students weekly to discuss what’s going on in their internship. She stated, “We do presentations on the agency that the students are currently working with. In this presentation, students discuss the agency’s goals and missions, and they discuss their duties.”

While faculty provided several ways that they support to help students succeed in their internships, they also discussed the challenges that are often faced during these real-world experiences. Monique stated that although both the employer and students benefit from

internships, there are still challenges—especially for students who take evening classes. She shared, “Those students are the ones that you feel like are being placed ‘just anywhere’ to get their hours.” She added, “Students are not being offered enough pay once they graduate and receive their degree. I think North Carolina has a very low wage across the state. So that is complicated.” Monique emphasized the strengths that bilingual students bring to the classroom. So not only are they performing, they’re coming in with an associate, but they’re also coming in with two languages and employers are not compensating them like they should. I am sure a lot of these organizations are going to use them not only for that role but to translate as well. So, you’re asking them to do two roles at the same time but just paying them for one role.” Steve had a similar experience. He stated, “At the associate level, it's hard for students to get jobs once they graduate. Some employers are looking for graduates with at least two years’ experience, which can be a barrier in the mental health field. We are hoping that this will change.”

Faculty also discussed the value of employers’ feedback in shaping their teaching and learning. Gayle and Gloria described how hospital partners provide updates throughout the semester that help faculty keep their teaching aligned with clinical practice. Similarly, Daphney shared that she often learns about changes in bedside practices directly from industry partners, which ensures that her teaching reflects current protocols. Steve also explained how the employers’ hiring expectations and regulatory changes have direct influence in how he structures his classes.

In summary, faculty emphasized the importance of building strong external support systems and collaborating with industry partners to ensure their teaching aligns with workforce demands. By responding to employers' feedback and integrating real-world practices into their teaching, faculty saw their actions leading to successful outcomes by aligning education with

workforce needs because of the positive outcomes from these collaborations. The next theme addressed how faculty perceive their expanded role, embracing the changes with confidence, fulfillment, and purpose.

Theme 4: Faculty View Their Role as Supporting Student Growth Through Advising, Mentorship, and Professional Modeling

The fourth theme addressed faculty perceptions of their expanded role beyond classroom instruction. Faculty described responsibilities such as advising, mentoring, and offering emotional support not as extra burdens, but as a meaningful and rewarding part of their work. For example, Logan mentioned that students have requested her mentorship and that she has continued to guide and keep in touch over the years. She added:

> The students come to me for advice about what area of the field they should go in. I always tell them that there are so many avenues, regardless of what they want to go into, go ahead and try it because you're unlimited, especially in the healthcare field. I share my experiences with them and just let them know the sky is really the limit.…I am also able to give them information about what it's like to work in a hospital and how it is structured. I tell them what to look for when they're going out and getting a job. You're not just going out and being interviewed by that person, but you also need to interview them to see if they are the right fit for you. So, it's really a two-way street.

Brooke shared similar statements. She stated, "I have a couple of students that I mentor. Students' kind of flock to who they're more comfortable with. So, I look at this as a form of mentorism." She added, "Right now, I have a returning student who just feels more comfortable talking to me. We're working through, making sure that she finishes this program. She wasn't successful last semester. I am working with her as well as the retention officer to make sure that

we help her with whatever she needs to help her to be successful. I have at least three from previous semesters, so these are alumni that I meet with on a regular basis once a month." She then added, "I just did a recommendation for one of them who has applied at a four-year institution." Stephanie added that she advises students, but her busy schedule prevents her from doing as much one-on-one as she would like. She said, "If I have the time to help a student, I will, because I love the one-on-one."

Faculty described advising not as an extra task, but as an integral and expected part of their teaching role. Most participants shared how they regularly assist students in course planning, program selection, and career pathways; however, not all participants were able to provide this support on a consistent basis. For example, Daphney explained that students often approach her for guidance on the next steps, such as transitioning from one program level to another. She added, "There have been robust discussions about what programs look like and getting them to see that their commitment to academics might even need to be heightened beyond what it has been." Gayle shared, "I got a call from a former student just the other day who was preparing for a standardized entrance exam, and she wanted help from me, understanding how to study for it." She also added, "We all advise, and we try to work with each of the students and gain a better understanding of where their potential plans are for the future." Marissa advises at an off-site campus and echoed, "We do advise our students, and I am the advisor for the students at this location." These examples showed that advising is viewed not as a burden but as a natural and rewarding way to help students navigate their educational journey. At the same time, faculty implied that adding responsibilities left little time for them to focus on the aspects of teaching.

Mentorship and Long-Term Student Support that Deepens Faculty Commitment and Extend Their Role Beyond the Classroom

Faculty described mentorship as a deeply fulfilling aspect of their work. Several participants shared stories of students who continued to seek their guidance throughout their academic careers and even after graduation. Daphney shared, “A lot of coaching and cheerleading for them and helping them redirect their emotions to something productive.” She added, “Helping them understand what their career options are and what may be a fit for them.” Logan reported, “I have some students that request my mentorship, and I have been following them and guiding them over the years.” Bridget shared that she maintains connections with her students even after graduation. She said, “I have students who reach out to update me on how they’re doing, ask me to serve as a reference when they’re job hunting, and share how things are going in their new positions.”

This long-term commitment to students reflected how faculty saw themselves as more than instructors—they were ongoing sources of support and encouragement. These mentoring relationships often extended into career advice and personal development, showing how faculty continued to support students beyond the confines of a course or semester. At the same time, several faculty acknowledged that time constraints, particularly for adjuncts, limited their ability to fully engage in all aspects of support. Sarah stated, “As an adjunct, I don’t always have the opportunity, as much as a full-time person could, but any chance that I can get to let them know, I will.

Emotional Guidance and Informal Counseling

Faculty also described offering emotional support and informal counseling to students, often helping them manage stress, self-doubt, and personal challenges. This type of support was presented as a natural part of faculty-student relationships. Daphney shared:

> When students come, they are having their own personal crisis and emotional meltdown over not being good at something or not believing in themselves. A lot of that is coaching and cheerleading for them and helping them redirect their emotions to something productive. We will get feedback from industry partners indicating that some students cannot manage more than three patients without getting stressed out. That helps us know we need to do something different in the clinical setting.

Lisa noted that her students often face self-doubt about whether they are prepared to work with children and families. She shared that she encouraged her students to focus on their strengths and offered reassurance when her students feel overwhelmed. However, professional development in this area was limited, and faculty were not always given the resources or training to address students' emotional needs. This raised the importance of considering whether colleges should expand professional development and institutional resources related to mental health, so that faculty could support students effectively, while also leaning on one another for guidance and shared strategies.

This highlighted how faculty act as stabilizing forces during difficult moments. Rather than viewing these responsibilities as outside their role, faculty, in this study, saw emotional guidance as an extension of their commitment to student growth and resilience.

Serving as Role Models for Professionalism and Growth to Encourage Lifelong Learning and Professional Standards

Participants also embraced their position as role models, recognizing that students often looked to them for examples of professionalism, persistence, and lifelong learning. Tonya shared, "I'm constantly aware of how I role model professional behaviors." She added she wanted to be the professional that she wants her students to become. Gloria, Tonya, and Logan spoke about how their own academic and career journeys—such as pursuing advanced degrees or managing multiple responsibilities—served as sources of inspiration for students. Daphney added:

> When I get student complaints, I always redirect them and try to get them to follow that chain of command. Those are not classroom lessons, but this is still teaching. Understanding that chain of command is very important. A piece of what we are doing that is on the periphery of teaching that demonstrates professionalism whether that's an email that they send that starts with, 'Hey.' In those moments I take the opportunity to say that it is inappropriate and explain to them the correct way to address someone.

Tonya stated, "When students come by, they want to discuss the different job offers. They are not sure what they want to do, and they want me to help them figure things out." She added, "Informally we talk to students about their clinical experiences and what they can expect when they enter the actual workforce, what kind of things to look for and how to socialize into [the field], especially when they notice issues or conflict on the [workplace setting]."

Brooke shared that she openly discusses her educational path with students during orientation to help them feel encouraged about their own possibilities. Brooke explained, "I think it's a lot of role modeling. I give them my pathway. Whatever your pathway is, it can take you to

wherever you want to be." She added, "If you're going to call yourself an educator, you've got to show a certain amount of professionalism for that profession."

One adjunct faculty member, Monique, shared that being a first-generation college student allowed her to better relate to her student's experiences. She stated, "I was a non-traditional student and was first generation. I lived in a household where college was not a priority. When I started at the community college, I encountered a lot of barriers, including being pregnant at the time. I did not want my students to encounter the same barriers I did as a student." She also added, "I do support groups. For example, I do check-ins with my students trying to show them that I am not just a professor, but I am here to support you the best I can and link you to resources." Robin shared that a student sent her an email wanting advice on school, employment, and financial stability. She added, "We talked about her goals, how she saw herself, and I was able to convince her to keep pushing and keep going. I am hoping by next year, she will be graduating."

Faculty members shared that being role models not only helps students but also helps them grow as professionals. Monique shared, "Educators need to get educated, too. You constantly have to keep growing. We always grow." Some participants described how demonstrating professionalism, sharing career journeys, and modeling lifelong learning increased their sense of purpose and reinforced their development as confident, committed educators. Stephanie shared, "I had a student in her 60s that was offered a job after her field placement ended. She struggled a lot with technology, but we worked together so that she could complete her assignments and build the skills she needed to succeed in her job and the classroom." These experiences align with social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994), which explains how individuals develop self-efficacy and career-related behaviors through

mastery experiences and social modeling. Faculty reported feeling more confident in their instructional practices when they saw students respond positively to their guidance, which is an example of self-efficacy being shaped through observed outcomes and personal success.

In addition, faculty expressed a belief that their actions could meaningfully influence student development, which reflects SCCT's concept of outcome expectations, the belief that one's efforts led to desired results (Lent & Brown, 2006). This belief appeared to motivate faculty to go beyond traditional teaching responsibilities and embrace expanded roles like mentoring and advising. Through this, SCCT helped explain why faculty who led by example became more confident in their roles and strengthened their identity as instructors. These reflections showed that faculty understood the influence of their presence and behavior, and they intentionally used that influence to motivate and guide students.

During the interviews, faculty reflected on how their roles have evolved, shaping their sense of who they were as educators. When asked about developing their role as educators, many described their growth as being closely tied to the values of service, adaptability, and lifelong learning. Tonya stated, "I'm constantly aware of how I role model professional behaviors. I have to be the professional that I want my students to become." Tonya and Brooke also discussed how professional development helps them feel more confident in their teaching and workforce preparation.

Faculty members saw themselves as more than just teachers—they believed it was important to set a good example for students through their professionalism and dedication. Logan said, "This is something I enjoy doing, this is what I love doing. I enjoy teaching," showing that her role as a teacher is connected to her passion and purpose. These responses showed that faculty don't just see teaching as a job, they viewed it as part of who they were and how they

helped students succeed in school and in their future careers. Faculty members showed their dedication to teaching while they pursued self-directed learning through actively seeking professional development opportunities. Faculty members believed they made a difference in students' development.

According to social cognitive career theory, outcome expectations refer to people's belief that their actions will produce positive results (Lent & Brown, 2006). Social cognitive career theory helped explain why modeling professional behavior felt meaningful to faculty: it supported student growth and made them feel confident as faculty.

Self-Directed Learning

Several faculty members highlighted examples of self-directed learning in their interview. Gloria noted that she has learned new teaching strategies by independently attending workshops. She stated, "I've learned how to come up with games through my personal experiences as I attend conferences, making my class enjoyable. Another example of how faculty model self-directed learning is seeking out additional resources to support their own professional development. Logan shares how she has a condensed version of *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom* by Don Miguel Ruiz. Logan shares this book with students and colleagues. She goes on to say, "It teaches us how to think outside of ourselves so that we can interact with people on a more civilized basis."

The fourth theme addressed how CTE faculty view their role as supporting students' growth through advising, mentoring, and professional modeling. Through these roles, faculty strengthened their confidence, adaptability, and commitment to student success. Faculty also discussed how their own learning and growth, through things like professional development and self-directed learning, made them stronger faculty. These findings connected to social cognitive

career theory (Lent et al., 1994), which explained how people grew in their careers through learning by doing, watching others, and believing their efforts make a difference. When faculty saw their strategies adopted by other faculty members, they felt more confident in their work.

Chapter 4 Summary

This study investigated faculty members' perceptions regarding their role in helping students prepare for the workforce while managing their regular teaching responsibilities. Purposeful sampling was used to interview 16 full-time faculty members. Participants in this study were chosen from the Healthcare and Human Services cluster, which includes programs in early childhood, health sciences, and human services, based on their different employment durations to ensure a range of perspectives. After completing semi-structured interviews, the data were transcribed, coded, and categorized to identify key themes. The four themes that emerged were: (1) institutional support helps faculty align instruction with workforce demands, (2) Faculty identified the need for internal external and industry specific professional development to support practical skills and professional network, (3) faculty use industry partnerships and employer feedback to strengthen students' durable skills and workforce expectations, and (4) faculty view their role as supporting student growth through advising, mentorship, and professional modeling.

Faculty shared about the support they received from leadership and peers, while they used their personal experiences to mentor students and provided student assistance both inside and outside the classroom. Their discussions highlighted the significance of forming strong connections with external partners and community members through collaboration. Through discussions about professional growth and their extended roles faculty demonstrated their dedication to student achievement and the expansion of their responsibilities. Faculty members

maintained their commitment to mentoring students as well as providing advice and emotional support despite facing time constraints and changing workforce demands. The results linked directly to social cognitive career theory by highlighting how confidence, together with motivation and outcome expectations, influenced faculty development and student preparation.

Chapter 5 provided an interpretation of the findings. It also presented practical applications and theoretical insights along with research recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The problem addressed in this study was to explore how faculty see their roles in helping students beyond teaching and to identify ways to enhance how faculty support students as they move from school to professional careers. If faculty are not provided with professional development, they may struggle to stay current with industry trends and teaching innovations, leading to graduates who lack essential skills for today's job market, thus impacting their employability and readiness for professional careers (Mowreader, 2023).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and better understand how faculty perceived their role in preparing students for the workforce at Truth Community College and Unity Community College. Understanding faculty perceptions was critical for developing support systems and professional development opportunities that aligned with the demands of workforce expectations (Hahn, 2024). Community college CTE faculty were recruited using purposeful sampling and participated in semi-structured interviews. Data was collected to address the following research questions:

- How do CTE faculty members perceive their role in preparing students for the durable skills required by workforce readiness?
- What specific professional development and resources do CTE faculty members need to effectively support students in acquiring practical skills and professional networks?
- How can community colleges support CTE faculty to align educational outcomes with workforce demands?

This chapter contained a discussion of key findings, implications for theory and practice, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Key Findings

The key findings of this qualitative study was centered around four themes that emerged from faculty interviews. These themes were: (1) institutional support helps faculty align instruction with workforce demands, (2) faculty identified the need for internal, external, and industry-specific professional development to support practical skills development and professional networking, (3) faculty use industry partnerships and employer feedback to strengthen students' durable skills and workforce expectations, and (4) faculty view their role as supporting student growth through advising, mentorship, and professional networking. These findings addressed the research questions of this study and confirmed what was in the literature. For example, faculty highlighted how they use industry partners to evaluate whether their teaching translates into labor market demand, demonstrating the necessity of working closely with industry stakeholders (Nachman & Wernimont, 2024). In addition, faculty consistently reported that leadership support, peer collaboration, and access to professional development opportunities were essential in building their instructional confidence and aligning teaching practices with industry needs. This echoed the findings by Eddy et al. (2022) and Strickland-Davis et al. (2019), who emphasized the role of instructional support in enhancing faculty self-efficacy and teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, faculty shared and described how preparing students for workforce readiness involves teaching durable skills such as communication, critical thinking, and professionalism—skills they identified as essential based on direct feedback from industry partners (Nachman & Warnimont, 2024).

The faculty showed deep appreciation for their institutional and peer support systems which played a significant role in building their teaching confidence and professional development. Their preparation of students for workforce demands evolved through leadership

support and professional development along with powerful collegial connections. Faculty feedback revealed that consistent support and trust from their institution empowered them to develop as educators and respond to changing educational needs. Their reflections revealed an understanding of professional growth as a collaborative journey supported by institutional resources and leadership alongside peer collaboration.

Institutional Support Helps Faculty Align Instruction with Workforce Demand

Faculty identified leadership support, peer collaboration, and professional development opportunities as key factors contributing to their confidence in teaching and professional growth. Faculty described the strong leadership that they received from the peers, including their program coordinator, vice presidents, chief academic officer, and the college president. Leadership support came in many forms. Examples of the type of leadership support they received included encouragement, recognition, and providing faculty with necessary resources they needed to promote their teaching and professional growth. Participants explained how institutional support enhanced their confidence and drove them to develop their teaching abilities in the future. This aligned with the social cognitive career theory (SCCT), which emphasized how personal, environmental, and behavioral factors interact to shape individuals' career-related choice and development (Lent et al., 1996). A central component of this theory, outcome expectations, was clear in how faculty believed their efforts would lead to success for themselves and their students. Faculty members who received positive and consistent leadership support believed their efforts would lead to positive outcomes for themselves and their students, increasing their motivation to improve their teaching and stay committed to their professional growth. For example, Daphney highlighted that her vice president was "extremely supportive" and always ensured the faculty had what they needed to succeed. Marissa added that her program

coordinator consistently encourages the team and supports their professional growth by helping them access learning opportunities. While most faculty members indicated positive leadership support, Logan did not, stating she did not feel valued or encouraged by leadership. However, Logan highlighted the eagerness of her colleagues to take part in training programs and professional development opportunities. The majority of the faculty members recognized leadership as vital to building their confidence and supporting their professional growth. This reflected the SCCT concept of self-efficacy, which is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to succeed at a given task (Jordan et al., 2020).

Faculty expressed the importance of having autonomy in instructional decision-making. In this study, faculty members identified autonomy as essential to their motivation and professional growth. Faculty members reported that leadership support, combined with peer collaboration, established a trust which allowed them to explore creative instructional strategies aligned to their course goals. One participant shared that they were allowed to create activities that would be beneficial to the students while still meeting the course objectives. Another mentioned that they have a cohesive team and support from leadership, and they can manage their courses as they see fit. These examples showed that when faculty felt supported and trusted, they gained more confidence and took greater ownership in their teaching. According to SCCT, this autonomy directly supported self-efficacy, as faculty gained confidence in their ability to teach by making independent choices and witnessed the positive outcomes of those choices (Bandura, 1986; Brown & Lent, 1996). This research used SCCT to enhance our knowledge of how faculty viewed develop through institutional and external factors as they aligned with workforce needs.

Faculty Identified the Need for Internal, External, and Industry-Specific Professional Development to Support Practical Skills Development and Professional Networking

According to Eddy (2021), professional development is a powerful approach for helping faculty make changes that better support student learning and ultimately leads to positive changes across the institution. The findings of this study revealed that faculty identified the need for internal, external, and industry-specified professional development to support practical skills development and professional networking. External professional development was defined as professional development being completed outside of the institution. Some faculty reported that they take advantage of internal professional development opportunities that included campus-wide activities and external opportunities that included national programs like the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) and the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE). Many faculty highlighted that the institution's partnerships with these organizations made external professional development more accessible and affordable, further encouraging participation. Some faculty mentioned that they attend conferences, such as the North Carolina Board of Nursing Annual Summit, to keep up to date with expectations of preparing students for the NCLEX exam. In addition, a faculty member stated that they attended a training about the accreditation process and work with an Assessment Technologies Institute (ATI), a software program that helps faculty prepare students to take the NCLEX exam. This faculty member also stated by implementing this program they have seen scores improve. Overall the content faculty sought focused on strengthening student outcomes through NCLEX preparation, accreditation process, and evidence-based tools like ATI.

Faculty described internal professional development days as valuable moments to share best practices with peers, learn new instructional strategies, and enhance student success efforts.

While many faculty noted they had little trouble meeting the institution's 20-hour annual professional development requirement, they emphasized that flexibility in how hours were earned (such as through online learning) was essential given their heavy teaching workloads. Some faculty mentioned that there were a couple of barriers to sustaining professional growth. Among the barriers, faculty noted that adjunct faculty often have low participation in professional development due to their limited time, additional responsibilities, or the perception that professional development is not as important for them. Brooke shared that although she regularly disseminated professional development opportunities to adjuncts, many adjuncts did not view them as priorities. This showed that for some adjuncts, the issue was not only time but also whether they felt the professional development opportunities were important or relevant to their role. Logan echoed this, noting that adjuncts often found it challenging to engage in activities beyond their teaching assignments. As illustrated in the literature, faculty struggle to allocate time for professional growth (Eddy et al., 2022; Mowreader, 2024).

Additionally, faculty acknowledged that keeping up with rapid industry changes was an ongoing challenge. While professional development provided important instructional tools, faculty reported relying heavily on industry partners to stay informed about changing protocols, technologies, and workforce needs. Staying abreast of industry trends enables instructors to figure out what topics and tools they need to incorporate into classroom discussions (Nachman & Wernimont, 2024).

Faculty Use Their Industry Partnerships and Employer Feedback to Strengthen Students' Durable Skills and Workforce Expectations

According to the findings presented in the study, faculty believed that industry partnership and employer feedback were essential to strengthening students' durable skills and

aligning with workforce expectations. Faculty emphasized that engagement with advisory boards, clinical partners, and local employers remains necessary to keep up-to-date with emerging trends, industry standards, and evolving skill requirements. The practical insights faculty received from external support systems led to improved curriculum and classroom activities and informed instructional methods that enhanced student career readiness.

Faculty shared that they utilized feedback and recommendations that they have received from their industry partners to incorporate simulations into the curriculum and modify assignments, while creating learning experiences that mirror real-world workplace challenges for the student. For example, some faculty revised case studies to match the current industry procedures and adjusted their grading rubrics to include professionalism and communication skills. In addition, faculty members invited industry partners to lead mock interviews so that students could practice presenting themselves and answering workforce related questions. According to Career and Technical Education Research (2024), faculty use advisory committees and direct employer feedback to evaluate whether their teaching translates into labor market demand, demonstrating the necessity of working closely with industry stakeholders. This alignment between academic content and industry feedback enabled faculty members to deliver theoretical knowledge while simultaneously equipping students with durable skills employers seek, such as communication, critical thinking, and time management. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (2023), communication was listed as one of the top five skills. Hutson et al. (2023) and Schislyaeva & Saychenko (2022) stated the need for durable skills has become increasingly important in the changing job market. In addition, the demand for individuals who possess these skills is on the rise (Hutson et al., 2023). Faculty members maintained strong connections with industry partners to keep up with the evolving workplace expectations and

changing practices, which were particularly important given the fast-paced nature of many workforce sectors. This directly supports existing research that highlights how CTE faculty often employ methods like experiential projects, real-life scenarios, and teaching as part of their lifelong competencies in durable skills (Career and Technical Education Research, 2024).

The importance of these external partnerships extended beyond individual classrooms. The faculty recognized that continuous structured collaboration with industry partners improved program outcomes, such as increased student placement in internships, higher licensure exam pass rates, and stronger job placement after graduation. Employer collaboration has shaped faculty development priorities by highlighting the need for training in current industry software and the integration of durable skills like communication, professionalism, and time management into their coursework. These collaborations further strengthens the overall connection between the institution and current workforce demands. This finding supported the idea that collaborating with external support systems and industry partners required continuous engagement with faculty and institutional commitment. Sustained partnerships helped faculty adapt industry needs into meaningful instructional practices, benefiting students and the institution’s reputation as a workforce-preparedness leader.

Faculty View Their Role as Supporting Student Growth Through Advising, Mentorship, and Professional Networking

Faculty members viewed advising, mentorship, and professional networking as essential parts of their role in supporting students' growth and while preparing students for their careers. According to Fugate & Amey (2000), these roles were crucial in helping students succeed. Faculty members demonstrated more dedication to student support through classroom real-world skill integration. They assumed additional roles, including career exploration support

and teaching real-world skills that helped students build confidence and competencies necessary for post-graduation success. Faculty members embraced their expanding roles because these responsibilities gave them a feeling of fulfillment and purpose. One faculty member explained, "I think one of my positives for me is my compassion for my students. I always show compassion for the students. We all teach differently and I just feel like I make an impact by just showing that I really care."

Faculty members also reported that embracing these expanded duties allowed them to grow personally and professionally, strengthening their own sense of identity as educators committed to student success. They no longer saw themselves as only classroom instructors but also as mentors and advisors helping students connect in the workforce. Faculty members' confidence in teaching grew when they successfully combined industry trends with employer feedback and workforce-aligned practices in their instruction. Some faculty viewed these changes as opportunities to make a meaningful impact on students' lives, which strengthened their teaching and commitment to continuous improvement. For example, helping students secure an internship or seeing graduates succeed on licensure exams. As faculty expanded their roles and professional identities, they also reflected on the types of professional development needed to remain effective in preparing students for the workforce.

Faculty across both Health Sciences and Human Services programs agreed that professional development is essential for staying current with workforce needs, yet they also described barriers such as limited time, lack of compensation for adjuncts, and uneven access to training. Faculty in the Health Sciences area emphasized the importance of professional development aligned with licensure requirements, simulation training, and clinical technology, reflecting the applied and regulated nature of their fields. Human Services faculty, however,

highlighted PD needs related to social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, and building strong partnerships with community organizations. While the focus areas differed, faculty in both areas pointed to the need for hands-on resources, updated technology, and opportunities to collaborate with industry partners. They explained that these supports are necessary to effectively teach those skills that prepare them for real-world expectations in their fields.

This finding was significant because it showed faculty members who embrace changes experienced a greater sense of purpose and job satisfaction. Bandura (1986) and Brown & Lent (1996) emphasized that expectations of outcomes are defined through experiences—through past achievements or failures and by learning from other people. These expectations influenced how individuals responded to evolving responsibilities. In addition, it showed that institutional support plays a key role in helping faculty members to successfully transition through these changing roles. Faculty who felt supported through professional development, peer collaboration, and leadership encouragement likely maintained the confidence and motivation to expand their contributions. Ultimately, faculty members' positive perceptions of their growing responsibilities benefited their professional growth and their students' workforce readiness and long-term success.

The next section discussed how the implications of these findings could be applied both theoretically and practically.

Implications

Faculty are essential participants in the education process. Faculty participation in professional development and industry partnerships impacts both instructional quality and workforce readiness for students. This study aimed to understand CTE faculty perceptions in the

Healthcare and Human Services programs, of their role in preparing students for the workforce and to identify the support and challenges that they experience in fulfilling their role. This study demonstrated how CTE faculty members in Healthcare and Human Services, build confidence and professional identity while aligning instruction with industry needs and expanding their professional identities through institutional and external support systems. The theoretical and practical implications of the study are relevant to faculty, program coordinators, and senior leadership.

Theoretical Implications

This study offered theoretical implications for social cognitive career theory. SCCT examines how self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals shape individuals' career-related behaviors and decisions (Lent et al. 1994). This theory provided a guiding framework to analyze faculty development confidence (self-efficacy), their ability to predict teaching results (outcome expectations), and setting goals to prepare students for workforce readiness. For example, one of the participants shared, "Our VP makes sure we have everything we need, that support really builds your confidence in the classroom." Outcome expectations were evident as faculty described how institutional investments and industry feedback enhanced their belief that adapting instruction would lead to better student outcomes. The faculty explained that adapting instruction often meant adjusting their teaching to include industry speakers and integrating simulations. Another faculty member, Marissa, noted, "When we bring in industry speakers or do a simulation, students connect more. It really works." Lastly, one of the participants explained, "It's rewarding to help students realize their potential and see how it translates into real careers."

Through professional development activities and collaborations with industry partners, faculty gained mastery experiences, vicarious learning, and social persuasion. In addition to theoretical implications, this research offers practice implications for both individuals and institutions.

Practical Implications

The implications for practice that emerged from this study were applicable to faculty, program coordinators, and administrators, in the healthcare and human services cluster, who aimed to strengthen workforce readiness and improve outcomes for community college students. Academic leadership could support faculty in aligning instruction with industry needs ensuring students gain the durable skills required for today's workforce. The implications of each of these groups were explored here to guide institutional efforts to strengthen faculty development and workforce readiness.

Implications for Faculty

The findings in this study revealed that some Healthcare and Human Services faculty felt supported and had strong relationships with their colleagues, which contributed to their instructional growth and confidence in the classroom. Faculty shared how they often turned to peers to exchange ideas, advice, and resources. However, a few faculty members, particularly those who were adjunct, reported that they did not feel the same level of support. This was especially true for those working at satellite locations or areas outside their department. Healthcare and Human Services faculty should continue to leverage positive relationships by creating informal mentoring partnerships to share teaching strategies, including those related to workforce readiness. Faculty could consider implementing "teaching talks" in monthly department meetings, collaborating on a monthly newsletter to share classroom innovations, or

collaborating on employer and advisory board feedback integration. By collaborating, Healthcare and Human services faculty could improve their teaching, which created lasting positive changes in their departments and better prepare students for successful careers.

Experienced Healthcare and Human Services faculty members could mentor newer colleagues while creating a professional environment that encourages collaboration and continuous improvement. This partnership could be for a semester or so to discuss ways they could integrate durable skills into their courses, based on the employer feedback that was provided. In addition to mentorship, faculty can create a shared folder with workforce readiness assignments, rubrics, or guest speaker contact information. Expanding on these peer mentorship opportunities could strengthen instructional practices and help Healthcare and Human Services faculty adapt their instruction to evolving workforce demands. To encourage participation, colleges could build mentorship into regular department meetings or create informal teaching circles where faculty share ideas and strategies. Mentoring could be supported by giving faculty dedicated time to collaborate; even small gestures like recognition during meetings or digital badges can help reward their efforts and show their work is valued.

Healthcare and Human Services faculty members should actively pursue and promote professional development activities that match workforce trends while they adjust to changing workforce requirements. The pursuit of professional development opportunities creates opportunities for faculty to keep teaching materials up-to-date and align with job market demands. Dedication to continual learning aids faculty development and helps students become more ready for professional life outside the classroom.

Implications for Program Coordinators, Clinical Directors, and Department Chairs

The roles of program coordinators, clinical directors, and department chairs in Healthcare and Human Services programs carry significant implications for practice standards. According to the study, most Healthcare and Human Services faculty reported felt supported by their leaders while valuing professional development opportunities which enhanced their teaching abilities and confidence. Healthcare and Human Services faculty members affirmed that leadership support helped them develop teaching confidence while supplying important resources and maintaining alignment with workforce needs. Faculty pointed out multiple obstacles preventing both full-time and adjunct healthcare and human services faculty members from taking part in professional development activities. Program coordinators and clinical directors need to champion both full-time and adjunct faculty by providing professional development opportunities that are both accessible and substantial along with efforts to dismantle participation barriers. One way this could be done is by surveying faculty to identify their scheduling preferences, training needs, and preferred format. The results of the survey could be used as a guide to schedule and format professional development sessions. Adjunct faculty can participate in professional development when program coordinators provide flexible scheduling options and asynchronous training formats that accommodate their limited time availability. Program coordinators should make professional development opportunities understandable to faculty members through clear communication and constant promotion while tailoring them to suit the specific requirements of different academic disciplines. In addition, coordinators and directors can also provide training on how to be effective mentors. This helps Healthcare and Human Services faculty build the skills they need to support each other, making mentoring more organized and purposeful. When coordinators and directors cultivate continuous learning

environments, they maintain consistent instruction across courses while improving teaching quality and better equipping students for their future jobs. Intentional outreach and inclusion support for adjunct faculty, in Healthcare and Human Services, generates an equitable teaching environment that values every faculty member. Program coordinators and clinical directors occupy essential leadership positions which enable them to establish systems that support faculty empowerment while advancing instructional quality and connecting educational outcomes to workforce requirements. Statewide initiatives such as Propel NC provide a framework for aligning leadership efforts with North Carolina's economic and workforce priorities. By using Propel NC's sector priorities and framework as a guide, the program coordinators, clinical directors, and department chairs in Healthcare and Human Services, can ensure that professional development, curriculum updates, and employer partnerships are directly responded to high demand industries. Although program coordinators, clinical directors, and department chairs support Healthcare and Human Services faculty, senior leaders and administrators must ensure that the college delivers needed resources to enable adjunct faculty access to professional development opportunities.

Implications for Senior Leadership/Administrators

According to the findings of this study, Healthcare and Human Services faculty shared that they have limited access to and participation in professional development opportunities. Many full-time Healthcare and Human Services faculty members expressed their concerns about barriers that adjunct faculty face. Barriers that were identified were scheduling conflicts, lack of compensation, and limited inclusion in institutional activities. Community college senior leadership should assess the current barriers by gathering feedback from Healthcare and Human Services faculty and implement strategies that will increase access, flexibility, and incentives for

adjunct faculty participation in professional development. Incentives for adjunct faculty participation can include compensation or incentives for attendance and participation. Other incentives for attendance and participation senior leadership can offer include certificates or digital badges for Healthcare and Human Services faculty who participate in professional development. In addition, Healthcare and Human Services faculty can be recognized during department meetings, faculty luncheons, or at a simple ceremony where the senior leadership recognize them for their contributions and for their commitment to professional development. Utilizing these strategies to expand professional development access for adjunct Healthcare and Human Services faculty can support instructional consistency, foster inclusion within the academic community, and contribute to overall instructional quality (Weller et al., 2023).

Faculty members reported that strong relationships with their colleagues helped them grow as teachers and feel more confident in their classrooms. They frequently engaged with their peers and shared ideas and teaching strategies and tips. Senior administrators can support Healthcare and Human Services faculty by establishing a mentoring program, by assigning mentors, and by establishing clear goals. In addition, senior administrators can organize “teacher talks” in department and/or division meetings to share what is working in their classrooms, especially when it connects to workforce skills. Lastly, the college’s intranet or digital platform can be used to provide teaching strategies throughout the college. By supporting and collaborating with Healthcare and Human Services faculty in these ways, senior administrators can help faculty grow and better prepare students for successful careers.

Healthcare and Human Services faculty members in this study believed their responsibilities extended past teaching to encompass student mentoring and workforce preparation. They focused on professional development while acknowledging their changing

identity as educators dedicated to student achievement. The research findings indicate that senior leadership and administrators must establish structured programs to help Healthcare and Human Services faculty members build and reinforce their teaching identities. Structured opportunities could include reflective practice sessions, faculty learning communities, and mentorship programs. When Healthcare and Human Services faculty members engage in self-exploration and clearly define their professional identity, it improves teaching confidence, effectiveness, and commitment to preparing students for the workforce.

The main parts of social cognitive career theory—such as self-confidence (self-efficacy), positive expectations, personal goals, learning experiences, and outside support—were clearly reflected in the findings of this study. Healthcare and Human Services faculty shared how support from the college, working with peers, and access to professional development helped build their confidence in teaching and made them believe their work would lead to student success. Their connections with industry partners and campus resources gave them valuable learning experiences that supported their teaching goals. Program coordinators and senior leaders also played an important role by providing the support and resources Healthcare and Human Services faculty needed to grow. Altogether, these findings showed that social cognitive career theory is a useful guide for helping colleges strengthen Healthcare and Human Services faculty development and improve how well they prepare students for the workforce. The findings of this study also led to recommendations for future research on how Healthcare and Human Services faculty could prepare students for the workforce while balancing professional development and traditional teaching responsibilities.

Limitations of the Study

The faculty feedback in this study provided valuable insights into how full-time and adjunct Healthcare and Human Services faculty viewed their roles in preparing students for the workforce, but one limitation was that this study was restricted to CTE faculty within the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster. While these programs were critical to workforce readiness, the findings may not reflect the experiences of all CTE faculty in other career clusters (e.g., Public Service & Safety, Advance Manufacturing, Management and Entrepreneurship, IT and Digital Technology, etc.). Future research should include faculty from multiple career clusters to capture a more diverse group of faculty members to understand various experiences and possible obstacles faculty face.

Secondly, the study was limited by the subjectivity in perceptions. Since this study focused on how Healthcare and Human Services faculty members viewed their changing roles, the data collected was based on individual experiences and viewpoints. This subjectivity may have affected the consistency and generalizability of the findings. Since this study relied on personal perception, the findings only represented the study sample and not the views of all faculty.

Thirdly, the study was limited to the potential for overlooking the student's role. For example, focusing on Healthcare and Human Services faculty responsibilities may have overlooked the role of students and their actions in preparing for their careers. This focus led to an incomplete understanding of the dynamic between faculty guidance and student initiative. Both students and faculty played an important role in preparing for career readiness. It is a collaborative effort and should not be one-sided.

Another limitation was the small number of participants. The findings of the study reflected specific institutional cultures and professional development structures. A larger or more diverse sample might reveal different perspectives on faculty roles, workforce preparation, and collaboration with industry partners.

The last limitation would be researcher bias, which can shape how participants respond or interpret data (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The researcher and the participants could influence the collected responses by slightly shaping the data. This bias can arise from the researcher's beliefs, expectations, or manner of questioning, which may unintentionally affect how the participants respond. Implementing certain strategies—reflective journaling, triangulation, and member checking—helped minimize the bias. As an experienced instructor in the community college system, I brought a unique perspective to this research. While I am currently employed at one of the institutions where this study was conducted, I did not have any affiliations or direct connections to the health sciences or human services area, which allowed me to approach the research with an unbiased perspective specific to this field.

These limitations were deliberate choices that defined the boundaries of this study. By acknowledging these limitations, the research aimed to provide a focused analysis of Healthcare and Human Services faculty roles while being transparent about the areas that required further exploration in future studies.

Delimitations

There were three delimitations in this study. The first delimitation was program choice. This study focused specifically on CTE (Career and Technical Education) faculty in the Healthcare and Human Services career cluster from two different institutions. By narrowing to CTE faculty, this study provided a more in-depth understanding of how Healthcare and Human

Services faculty perceive their role in workforce readiness. This focus was intentional because Healthcare and Human Services programs directly prepared students for frontline careers where communication, professionalism, and interpersonal skills were essential to workforce success. Limiting the study to this career cluster allowed for deeper exploration of how faculty teach and model these durable skills.

The second delimitation was faculty perceptions. This study investigated explicitly how Healthcare and Human Services faculty members perceive their changing roles, deliberately excluding other perspectives, such as those of students or administrators. This delimitation ensured an in-depth exploration of faculty viewpoints within the Healthcare and Human Services. However, it also meant that the findings reflected only the faculty perspective and did not include how students experience instruction or how administrators supported workforce initiatives. Future studies could have included these additional viewpoints to create a more complete understanding of workforce preparation.

Lastly, the third delimitation was the institutional scope. This study focused on two community colleges. Focusing on just these two institutions, it gave a closer look at how their faculty perceived their roles, but the findings may not represent all community colleges. Each college had its own culture, resources, and professional development structures that shaped faculty experiences. Although the findings were specific to these institutions, they may be transferable to other colleges with similar missions and workforce focused programs.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study investigated how community college Healthcare and Human Services faculty perceived their role in preparing students for the workforce while balancing professional development and traditional teaching responsibilities. Healthcare and Human Services faculty

played an important role in helping students learn what was needed in the classroom and preparing them for their careers. Faculty revealed that institutional support together with professional development opportunities and industry partnerships creates stronger instructional effectiveness and ensures alignment with workforce demands. The research explored approaches for Healthcare and Human Services faculty development improvement and ways to build more robust industry collaborations. This study also identified the following recommendations for future research to increase understanding of faculty roles in workforce preparation.

First, future research should examine how faculty in different academic areas view community college professional development and workforce readiness. This study focused only on Healthcare and Human Services programs, providing helpful insights but not covering all disciplines. Business, information technology, liberal arts, and technical trades may have different needs and expectations. Faculty in these areas might experience various challenges when preparing students for the workforce. According to Lester and Kezar (2012), professional development often depends on each field's unique culture and workforce demands. What works well for Healthcare and Human Services faculty may not work the same way for business or IT faculty.

Secondly, future research could also explore how statewide workforce initiatives, such as Propel NC, influence faculty development priorities and shape training, partnerships with employers, and curriculum alignment in different discipline areas. By studying these differences, future research can help identify what kinds of support and training faculty in each discipline truly need. This could help colleges design professional development programs specific to each academic area. Tailored programs can help improve teaching practices and connect classroom

learning with industry needs. Ultimately, this can help students in all fields become more prepared for successful careers.

Thirdly, future research should explore how adjunct and full-time Healthcare and Human Services faculty perceive their roles at community colleges. Research needs to evaluate the experiences of full-time and adjunct faculty regarding professional development opportunities, institutional support, and their sense of connection to the college. According to participant responses, this study revealed multiple challenges faced by adjunct Healthcare and Human Services faculty members. Adjunct faculty struggled and had limited time to participate in professional development activities and limited access to resources and support. Full-time Healthcare and Human Services faculty members generally access more professional development opportunities, including training sessions, meetings, and workshops that enhanced their teaching skills. According to earlier research by Kezar and Sam (2010), adjunct faculty often faced unequal support compared to full-time faculty. Adjunct instructors experienced disconnection and unpreparedness despite their critical involvement in student education. If we examine these disparities more closely, future research will be able to identify essential support elements that adjunct faculty require for success. Colleges can develop improved support strategies for adjunct instructors by utilizing this information to ensure fairness and meaningful assistance. By supporting adjunct Healthcare and Human Services faculty through these methods, educational quality will advance while students receive better workforce preparation alongside improved teaching experiences.

In addition, another focus for future research should look more closely at how peer support and mentoring between Healthcare and Human Services faculty get started and who helps make them happen. In this study, faculty shared that working with peers helped them feel

more confident and improve their teaching, but it is still unclear how those relationships begin. Future studies could explore whether peer mentoring starts on its own or if it is encouraged by department chairs, program coordinators, or senior leaders. It would also be helpful to learn who is most involved in supporting and keeping these relationships going. Research could look at how peer support works for full-time versus adjunct Healthcare and Human Services faculty, or how it varies across different departments. This could help colleges find better ways to support peer mentoring and collaboration to improve teaching and help students get ready for the workforce.

Another consideration would be to examine how colleges and industry can develop shared models of professional development so that the responsibility of staying current with workforce changes do not have to rest solely on industry partners. Faculty members in this study reported relying heavily on industry connections to keep pace with new technologies, protocols, and expectations.

Lastly, future research needs to examine community colleges in various geographic regions. Research needs to examine Healthcare and Human Services faculty experiences at colleges located in rural areas and suburban and urban areas to understand the impact of location. Faculty members who work at rural community colleges may encounter challenges different from those at large urban community colleges. Rural colleges may have reduced access to resources and local industry partnerships that support faculty development. Urban colleges benefit from numerous partnerships. However, they may face other challenges, including serving a large or diverse student population. Townsend and Twombly (2007) state that the community and region can strongly affect the support and professional development faculty receive. Analyzing Healthcare and Human Services faculty from multiple areas provides insights into the

most effective support in each environment. Research of this nature can identify the challenges faculty from specific regions encounter when aligning their teaching objectives with workforce requirements. By understanding these challenges, colleges can create a better program to help their Healthcare and Human Services faculty. Faculty members would experience increased support, and students throughout various regions would obtain improved workforce preparation.

Although this study focused only on the Healthcare and Human Services cluster, the findings could help guide research across Career and Technical Education. Recommendations for future studies can look at other CTE clusters, such as public service & safety, IT & Digital Technology, advanced manufacturing, management and entrepreneurship; they should pay attention to the unique demands of each area. For example, healthcare programs often include clinical supervision and licensure, while IT and manufacturing programs may deal more with fast-changing technologies and employer certifications. Some faculty needs, like professional development and institutional support, will be similar across all clusters, while other needs will be specific to each field. Looking at both the commonalities and differences can help create a clearer picture of CTE faculty roles and better prepare students for the workforce across disciplines.

Conclusion

The findings of this study offer insight regarding how community college faculty in Healthcare and Human Services programs perceived their role in preparing students for workforce readiness while managing their traditional teaching responsibilities. As presented in Chapter 1, the study focused on understanding how Healthcare and Human Services faculty navigate the demands of workforce preparation, the professional development they need, and the institutional support that strengthen their ability to help students succeed (Mowreader, 2023;

Hahn, 2024). Chapter 1 highlighted that without sufficient professional development opportunities and industry collaboration, faculty in Healthcare and Human Services may struggle to keep up with changing workforce expectations, which can affect students' job readiness after graduation. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore these perceptions through the lens of CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services programs at Truth Community College and Unity Community College focusing on how institutional support, peer collaboration, and external partnerships shape their instructional practices (Eddy et al., 2022; Strickland-Davis et al., 2019). The research was grounded in the understanding that Healthcare and Human Services faculty play a central role in aligning classroom instruction with real-world workforce demands and that their confidence and effectiveness are influenced by the support systems surrounding them. This study addressed gaps identified in Chapter 1 by exploring not only the barriers Healthcare and Human Services faculty face but also the strategies they use to remain current and deliver meaningful workforce-aligned instruction. By capturing the voices and experiences of CTE faculty in Healthcare and Human Services programs, this research provided valuable insight into how institutions can strengthen faculty development and, ultimately, improve student preparation for today's labor market.

This basic qualitative study was conducted to explore how CTE faculty, specifically programs in the Healthcare and Human Services, see their role in preparing students for the workforce and participating in professional development. Faculty shared their experiences through semi-structured interviews using purposeful sampling. The findings showed that Healthcare and Human Services faculty believe their work goes beyond just teaching in the classroom. They also saw themselves as mentors and advisors, helping students build important career skills. Healthcare and Human Services faculty explained that both support from their

college and their own motivation shape how they approach their work. Full-time faculty said they have many professional development opportunities, but they noticed that adjunct faculty face more challenges, including time limits, lack of pay, and feeling left out of college activities. Adjunct faculty described experiencing limited access to professional development, which made it harder to stay connected to campus resources. Even with these challenges, faculty agreed they are responsible for keeping up with workforce trends and adjusting their teaching to help students succeed. They pointed out how important it is to work closely with peers, leaders, and industry partners. The study also showed that colleges do not always have a clear system to help adjunct faculty grow, which can create unfair gaps in teaching quality. These findings connected with social cognitive career theory by showing how faculty confidence (self-efficacy), expectations about outcomes, and personal goals influence how they engage in professional development and support students. Colleges that provide strong peer connections, leadership support, and chances to practice new skills can boost faculty confidence and help both teachers and students grow.

The findings of this study presented valuable information about effective practices that build strong foundations for Healthcare and Human Services faculty who engage in workforce preparation alongside their traditional teaching responsibilities. Community colleges need to make professional development opportunities accessible to all faculty members in the Healthcare and Human Services programs, including both full-time and adjunct positions, so they remain updated with industry changes. Institutions need to implement formal systems which support continuous professional development through both internal and external development activities to enhance instructional quality and prepare Healthcare and Human Services faculty for workforce demands. Institutions need to support Healthcare and Human Services faculty in

participating in collaborative discussions with industry partners, advisory boards, and colleagues to integrate employer feedback and real-world practices into their teaching. Through collaborative initiatives, Healthcare and Human Services faculty members can evaluate their teaching methods while identifying educational deficiencies and enhancing their students' career readiness. Faculty members should participate in mentoring activities while they share knowledge informally and solve problems together across different disciplines to enhance ongoing improvement. Faculty professional development discussions must place emphasis on self-efficacy as well as outcome expectations, since Healthcare and Human Services faculty performance is essential for student career success. Senior leadership needs to demonstrate their commitment to Healthcare and Human Services faculty support by providing resources and recognition while creating a culture that values workforce alignment. Without strong leadership support, it will be difficult to maintain the momentum needed for meaningful improvements in Healthcare and Human Services faculty development and student workforce outcomes. Most importantly, it is crucial that faculty in the Healthcare and Human Services programs and students are fully prepared to meet the evolving needs in today's labor market.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW OVERVIEW

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Date and time of interview: _____

Location of interview: _____

INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This interview is part of my dissertation research on exploring faculty perceptions of their roles in workforce readiness and professional development within traditional teaching responsibilities.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how faculty perceive their role in workforce readiness and professional development beyond their teaching responsibilities. Understanding faculty perceptions is critical for developing support systems and professional development opportunities that align with the demands of workforce expectations. The following research question will be addressed based on the main components of the Social Cognitive Career Theory.

1. How do CTE faculty members perceive their role in preparing students for the durable skills required for workforce readiness?

2. What specific professional development and resources do CTE faculty members need to effectively support students in acquiring practical skills and professional networks?
3. How can community colleges support CTE faculty to align educational outcomes with workforce demands?

Confidentiality and Consent:

I will take notes during the interview; however, this interview will also be recorded, and your responses will be transcribed verbatim. This is done to ensure that I refrain from paraphrasing your thoughts, which could lead to an incorrect interpretation on my part. Your answers reflect your experiences and perspectives, and because of this, there are no right or wrong answers. I want to assure you that your responses will be anonymized, and any identifiable information will be removed. During the interview, if you need clarification, have a question, or need to stop the interview for any reason, please let me know.

Do you have any questions or concerns before beginning the interview? Yes _____ No _____

Do I have your permission to record the interview? Yes _____ No _____

Interview Protocol:

I have about 25 questions, and I expect the interview to be approximately 45- 60 minutes. The questions are designed to understand your role as a faculty in preparing students for the workforce once they have graduated. Some of your responses may prompt additional follow-up questions for a deeper understanding. You will receive a transcript to clarify, add, or edit our interview.

Appendix B: Participant Interview Questions

Faculty Interview Questions

Introduction

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself and your general experiences working as a community college faculty member?

Faculty Experiences

2. What non-teaching activities or initiatives do you engage in to support students' career readiness?
    a. Can you describe a specific activity and its impact?
3. How do you mentor or advise students on career paths?
    a. Can you share an example of a recent conversation or interaction with a student?
4. How are you involved in supporting internships, co-op programs, or other work-based learning experiences for students? Please mention each in your response.
    a. What role do you play in preparing students for those opportunities?
5. What challenges have you encountered in facilitating these opportunities, and how have you addressed these challenges to ensure successful outcomes for students (such as job placement or course completion?
6. Can you describe how you collaborate with industry partners or employers to incorporate real-world perspectives into your teaching?
    a. What impact has this had on student's skill development?
        i. Prompt: if they mention work-based skills probe for durable skills and vice versa.

b. Can you provide examples of assignments or classroom activities that help students practice skills they will need in the workplace?

7. What types of professional development activities have you participated in that helped you better prepare students for the workforce?

a. How did it affect your teaching approach?

Self-Efficacy

8. What experiences or support has helped you feel confident in preparing students for their careers?

a. Can you describe a specific experience that made a difference?

9. How have professional development opportunities at your institution influenced your confidence and ability to teach workplace and durable skills?

10. What resources or support systems have enhanced your ability to assist students in gaining workplace and durable skills?

11. How do the professional development opportunities at your institution impact on your confidence in helping students get ready for their careers?

Personal Goals

12. How do the expectations for faculty participation in professional development at your institution align with your personal goals for supporting students' career readiness?

13. Can you share an example of a professional development activity you participated in that directly supported your personal goals for helping students prepare for their careers?

Outcome Expectations

14. How do your relationships with industry professionals help you prepare students for their careers?

15. What results do you expect from your efforts to help students get ready for their careers, and how do these goals guide what you do?

16. How do your institution's expectations for faculty development affect your willingness or confidence to engage in workforce readiness?

Workplace & Durable Skills Focus

17. What specific workplace or durable skills do you believe are most important for students in your program?

18. How do you stay informed about the evolving skills needed in your field, and how do you incorporate those into your teaching?

19. Can you share an example of a classroom or lab activity you've designed to help students build a specific workforce skill?

20. In what ways do you work with advisory boards, employers, and/or community partners to align your teaching with workforce needs?

21. How do you assess whether your students are developing the workforce and durable skills they need to succeed?

22. Have you used tools such digital portfolios, rubrics, or performance tasks to measure students' durable skills? If so, what has been effective?

23. How do you provide feedback to students on their workplace skills, and how do you encourage them to reflect on their growth in these areas?

Conclusion

24. What else, if anything, would you like to share about the role CTE faculty members play in preparing students for workforce readiness?
25. Do you have any questions about this research project you would like to ask?

Thank you for meeting with me today and answering my questions; I really appreciate it. Next, I'll transcribe our interview and send it to you by email for your review. If you have any questions or want to add anything, feel free to reach out. Thanks again!