ABSTRACT

Ivry S. Cheeks, THE CREATION OF THE ARMADILLO CAREER READINESS SKILLS GAP PROGRAM AT RANDOLPH COMMUNITY COLLEGE: CLOSING THE CAREER GAP FOR HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS (Under the direction of Dr. James McDowelle). Department of Educational Leadership, July 2018.

The task of making important career decisions for many individuals and especially high school students occur during high school and beyond. Preparing students to be ready for work, life, and citizenship will require a different approach that would still focus on career and college readiness. New outcomes for what students need to know and be able to do, would require a different orientation for teaching and learning in the classroom.

Having a way to bridge the gap between high school students and educational opportunities leading to employment is a problem facing leaders in Randolph County and Randolph Community College. There is not a program in place to address the career readiness skills gap when working with the high school students in the Career and College Promise Program at Randolph Community College. According to the Randolph County Environmental Data Scan published in November of 2015, 44.7% of the county's labor force is over the age of 44. The county needs a skilled labor force to support the local businesses and industries as the preretirement workers continue to age. Additionally, those members of the population who are 25 years and older living to poverty are only 27.5% for college attendees and graduates as compared to 72.5% for those with a high school diploma or less. The goal of the Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program is one approach to addressing local workforce development needs and closing the career readiness gaps while connecting education to a career goal for students.

THE CREATION OF THE ARMADILLO CAREER READINESS SKILLS GAP PROGRAM

AT RANDOLPH COMMUNITY COLLEGE: CLOSING THE CAREER GAP FOR HIGH

SCHOOL JUNIORS

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Ivry S. Cheeks

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my brilliant, lovely, and sweet daughter, Kelsey K. Cheeks, who has always been patient while I have been in graduate school fulfilling my educational dreams and pursuits.

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Statement of Problem

National trends and goals have pushed beyond the dropout crisis and are now focusing on raising the percentage of graduates prepared for college and career (Royster, Gross, & Huchein, 2015). The education system is failing to prepare all students adequately with the essential 21st century knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in school, career, life, and citizenship (P21, 2010). For example, in a qualitative study of career decision making patterns, over 50% of the high school students who identified a career goal were unable to describe the career content nor the educational pathways needed to enter the career (Solberg, Gresham, Phelps, & Budge, 2010).

The task of making important career decisions for many individuals and especially high school students occur during high school and beyond. Having limited access to career counseling, college preparatory courses, career academies, and school-to-work programs are a number of challenges facing the youth when making these career decisions (Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007). Assisting high school students in determining the next steps on the journey for career readiness remains one of the current missions of secondary education in the United States to prepare students for the next level after leaving secondary schools.

In response to the pressure to make a definite career choice upon graduating from high school, a youth commits prematurely to pursue a career (Stone & Wang, 1990). For instance, not knowing whether he or she can handle the required subjects, have the required talents or special aptitudes, what the training is like, and whether the day-to-day work is compatible with his or her chosen field (Stone & Wang, 1990). This lack of career readiness among high school graduates is troubling considering changing workforce needs (Royster et al., 2015). As the world of work

becomes more complex and technologically dynamic, the career decision-making process for the youth undergo also become much more complex (Maduakolam, 1999). While some students battle with choosing an occupation and finding their first full-time job, others face choosing a college and a course of study that will lead to a satisfying career (Cohen & Besharov, 2002). Considering not only the kind of job they will hold, but also the kind of work environment which will provide them personal satisfaction and growth is a goal for many high school students to aspire and accomplish as they strive to find their place in the world of work.

Preparing students to be ready for work, life, and citizenship will require a different approach that would still focus on career and college readiness. New outcomes for what students need to know and be able to do, would require a different orientation for teaching and learning in the classroom. According to Kolb (1993), innovative approach and orientation is best summarized:

> As a complex combination of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving: Learning is the major process of human adaptation. This concept is much broader than that commonly associated with the school classroom. It occurs in all human settings, from schools to the workplace, from the research laboratory to the management boardroom, in personal relationships and the aisles of the local grocery. It encompasses all life stages, from childhood to adolescence, to middle and old age. Therefore, it encompasses other, more limited adaptive concepts such as creativity, problem solving, decision-making, and attitude change that focus heavily on one or another of the basic concepts of adaptation (p. 149).

Rothney's (1958) classic longitudinal study is a seminal piece of work regarding high school seniors within a five -year span after high school graduation who received career-counseling services while in high school included the following outcomes:

- Seniors perform slightly better academically.

- Seniors were more consistent in expressing a vocational choice upon graduation.

- Seniors were more likely to enter a career related to that choice.

- Seniors remained longer in that career area after leaving high school.

- Seniors were more likely to both enter and graduate from a postsecondary educational training program.

- Seniors were more satisfied with their lives five years after graduating from high school.

The problem leading to this study focus on the issue that many students graduating from high school with a strong motivation to pursue career goals are unclear about what postsecondary avenues they should pursue to be able to enter their chosen profession or whether they have prepared adequately to enter those postsecondary pathways (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Focusing collective energies to deliver career development programs to close the career readiness gap is one strategy that would allow exposure for more high school students to become college and career ready. High school students would receive additional training to improve their skills for higher career search self-efficacy, engagement in setting career goals, motivating in attending school, stronger academic self-efficacy, receiving higher grades, possessing better stress and health management skills, and demonstrating better career decision – making (Solberg, Gresham, Phelps, Durham, & Haakenson, 2010).

Purpose of Study

The world we live in today has changed dramatically in the last several decades, even more dramatic changes for what the world will look like when today's students enter the workforce (Soule & Warrick, 2015). Whether a high school graduate plans to enter the workforce directly or attend a vocational school, community college, or university, he or she need to have those essential 21st century skills to collaborate and access information not only for

career success but also for a quality personal and civic life (P21, 2010). These potential outcomes are at the heart of the goals expressed in important legislative efforts that are deem necessary for high school students to succeed in college and careers (Common Core State Standards, 2012).

This study will explore what are effective measures to create a career development program that will address and close the career readiness gap that exist among high school juniors who live in a rural community. Specifically, what services would allow high school students to be more successful in transitioning into the adult roles of learner and worker. Establishing what college and career readiness means for this new world or work is a vital component for this research study being conducted on career readiness and career development for high school students.

Measures of Improvement

The issue of college and career readiness (CCR) is among the concerning problems facing the educational system in the United States (Bragg & Taylor, 2014). According to the Randolph County Environment Data Scan published in November of 2015, 44.7% of the county's labor force is over the age of 44. The county needs a skilled labor force to support the local businesses and industries as the preretirement workers continue to age. Additionally, those members of the population who are 25 years and older living in poverty are only 27.5% for college attendees and graduates as compared to 72.5% for those with a high school diploma or less. The students need educational opportunities beyond high school to increase their ability to achieve financial security.

Having a way to bridge the gap between high school students and educational opportunities leading to employment is a problem facing leaders in Randolph County and

Randolph Community College. However, there is currently not a program of this nature in place to address the career readiness skills gap when working with the high school students in the Career and College Promise Program at Randolph Community College. There are currently 348 juniors and 266 seniors enroll at one of the local high schools. From the beginning of this school year, August 2016 until the end of the first semester January 2017, the high school career coach counseled only 14% of these students and only 21% of the students enrolled in a course at Randolph Community College.

The goal of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* is one approach to addressing local workforce development needs and closing the career readiness gaps. The two measures of improvement to gauge the overall effectiveness and influence of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* will focus on increasing the total number of students annually counseled by the career coach from 14% to 20% and increase the number of students enrolled in the Career and College Promise courses from 21% to 32% by June 2017. Self-appraisal or awareness of skills is one of the career development skills needed to prepare for the workplace that students would gain through the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap* program. Connecting education to a career goal can make learning more meaningful for students.

Key Terms and Definitions

Career - The individuals work and leisure that take place over his or her life span (Sears, 1982).

Career Choice - Applies to decisions that individuals make at any point in their career about work or leisure activities that they choose to pursue at that time (Sharf, 1994).

Career Clusters - Group careers into a subset of industry areas (States' Career Clusters, 2010).

The Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE) - Measures an individual's degree of belief that he/she can successfully complete tasks necessary to making significant career decisions (Betz & Taylor, 1983).

Career Development Process - At its best, it offers a systematic, sequential, integrated, coordinated opportunity for connections of education, work, and career (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002, p. 261).

Career Identity - Individual links his own motivation, interests, and competencies with acceptable career roles (Meijers, 1998).

College Readiness - Academic preparation in areas of reading, writing, and mathematics necessary for success in "two- and four-year degree programs, including career – oriented programs (Callan et al., 2010, p. 10).

Individual Learning Plans - A personalized planning strategy that supports college and career readiness by assisting students in selecting courses that align to self-directed career goals (Solberg, Phelps, Haakenson, Durham, & Timmons, 2012).

Randolph Community College Career Coach - An individual from Randolph Community College assigned to one of the local high schools and responsible for helping these students define their career aspirations and identifying community college programs and training to meet those aspirations and achieve their educational goals (Strategic Planning Team Final Report, 2015).

WorkKeys - represents a series of tests developed by ACT to assess basic workplace skills in eight skill areas, including reading for information, applied mathematics, locating information, applied technology, observation, teamwork, listening, writing, and business writing (ACT, n.d.a).

WorkKeys Applied Mathematics Assessment - measures the skill people use when they apply mathematical reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving techniques to work-related problems (ACT, n.d.d). The test questions require the examinee to set up, solve the types of problems, and do the types of calculations that occur in the workplace (ACT, n.d.d).

WorkKeys Locating Information - is the skill people use when they locate, synthesize, and use information from workplace graphics such as charts, graphs, tables, forms, flowcharts, diagrams, floor plans, maps, and instrument gauges; it is a basic skill required in today's workforce (ACT, n.d.c). The WorkKeys locating information assessment measures the skill people use when they work with workplace graphics (ACT, n.d.c).

WorkKeys Reading for Information Assessment - measures the skills people use when they read and use written text to perform job duties (ACT, n.d.b). The written texts could include memos, letters, directions, signs, notices, bulletins, policies, and regulations.

Plan of Study

Helping students plan for their future during high school is important when taking advantages of college and career opportunities. Career development programs can help students become more engaged in school and more focused on their future. The literature on career development for students at the secondary level (grades 6-12) suggests that decisions that students make in their middle and high school years have an impact on their future college and career opportunities (Akos, Konoid, & Niles, 2004; Arrington, 2000; Osborn & Reardon, 2006; Trusty, Spencer, & Carney, 2005). When students have exposure to different career paths they tend to earn better grades in school (Evans & Burck, 1992) and are more likely to complete high school (Moody, Kruse, Nagel, & Conlon, 2008). The Randolph Community College Career

Coach would serve in the capacity to address the need of closing the career gap by providing career serves for the high school students.

Randolph Community College Career Coach would be a resource in addressing this targeted need for the community through increased college enrollment in the College and Career Promise courses that the students may access on line, at the college campus and on the traditional high school campus to improve the employability of the students graduating from high school. Randolph Community College Career Coach has two high schools where she works to assist students in determining career goals and identifying community college programs that would enable students to achieve their goals. Through this career development initiative, high school students would graduate with an identifiable career goal, complete college course work, and earn credentials that would assist them in transitioning into careers from high school. Table 1 depicts the first cycle of the PDSA in creating a career readiness program for high school juniors.

Logic Model

The following logic model in Figure 1 outlines an ongoing process through which Randolph Community College Career Coach and 11th grade high school students would work collaboratively to close the career readiness gap. The resources and activities outlined in this logic model are necessities for the successful implementation of this project to bridge the gaps between high school students and educational opportunities leading to employment. As a result, of the outcomes, high school students would possess the skills to effectively identify a career goal and successfully make the transition in attaining this goal upon graduating from high school. The expected outcomes resulting in the students' participation will begin to eliminate the career readiness gap.

Table 1

PDSA: First Cycle

Tool	Cycle: First Try
PLAN	How to close the career readiness skills gap among high school juniors by increasing the number of students who receive career-counseling services through the Career and College Promise Initiative at Randolph Community College.
DO	After reviewing, the initial data that Randolph Community College provided to the State of NC Community College System there is currently a small percentage of students who seek career-counseling services.
STUDY	During the initial hiring of the career coach and first semester of the 2016-2017 school, 14% of the juniors and / or senior received career counseling services and only 21% enrolled in a community college course.
ACT	Increase the number of students who receive career counseling and eventually enroll in a Career and College Promise course or pathway at Randolph Community College by designing the Armadillo Career Readiness Program.

Logic Model-Career Readiness Improvement Research Model

Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Randolph Community College Career Coach Eleventh Grade Students participating in the Career and College Program in high school Free Courses offered through the Career and College Promise Pathways Armadillo Career Coach-Free Online Assessment Tool	Administer Pre-Assessment/ Survey to Evaluate the Current Level of Career Readiness for the Individual High School Students Plan Student Workshops Identifying a Career Goal Create Individual Learning Plans Finalize the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program*	Identifying Eleventh Grade students who could potentially complete the Career Readiness /Development Program Students complete the career assessment inventories through Randolph Community College's website Students complete the Career Decision Self - Efficiency Scale	Students Graduating for High School being Career Ready Increase enrollment in the course through the Career and College Promise Program Addressing targeted needs in the local community being served by Randolph Community College Earning work credentials that would students transition into careers from high school	Closing the Career Readiness Gap Training Future Workers Increase Skill Workforce Pool Students earing credentials Completion of coursework through the Career and College Promise Program Student completion of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program*

Figure 1. Implementation: The Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Program intended results.

Research studies indicated that well over one half of employers found that at the high school level, new workforce entrants were insufficiently prepared or deemed deficient in some of the most important skills they demanded of employees (American Management Association, 2010). Creating opportunities in a safe haven for high school students to explore their career aspirations is in great demands with the ever-changing workforce.

Career exploration and preparation during a student's high school career could potentially provide the structure to better equip these students as a more confident and competent worker before entering the world of work. This is why a study of this nature could potentially address the concerns of closing the career readiness gap and producing future skilled workers to tackle the needs of the local businesses and industries in the local community.

Summary

Although programs have been designed to develop college awareness and readiness among secondary students (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011; Schaeffer & Rivera, 2012), research suggests that, unless a career component is integrated into this awareness, students risk building aspirations for college without a focus on specific goals. For students of color in high-need schools, where resources for college and career development may be scarce (Tierney, Colyar, & Corwin, 2003; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003), this lack of information can cause them to fall further behind as they plan for their futures (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; Balfanz, 2009; Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox, 2010).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview of the Career Ready Initiative

Whether it is President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (2003), President Obama's Race to the Top Initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), or Mrs. Obama's Reach Higher Initiative (Obama, 2014), the connection is that the future well-being of the United States will be greatly influenced by the success or failure of college and career readiness efforts (Lapan, Poyntan, Marcotte, Marland, & Milam, 2017).

In March of 2010, the Obama administration released its *Blueprint* for revising the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The Administration's goal is clear: "Every student should graduate from high school ready for college and a career, regardless of their income, race, ethnic or language background, or disability status" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 3). College and career readiness efforts increased dramatically as states responded to the Administration's readiness agenda by designing their own policies for college and career readiness. Ensuring that all graduating high school students are ready to succeed in postsecondary education and training has become one of the key national policy priorities for youth development under President Obama's Administration.

Federal policies focused on community colleges to grant access to more citizens and in return build the nation's economy have had a profound impact on the function and purpose of the community college in the United States (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Palmadessa, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013). Adhering to these policies forced the community college to adapt and, in doing so, supported the change in policy focus from access to economic development. The community college has not only evolved and responded to changes in social and economic influences as such, community colleges are an essential part of our recovery in the present and our prosperity

in the future and facilitating the readiness efforts (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Palmadessa, 2014; Topper & Powers, 2013).

Career Ready

Academic, technical, and employability skills have always been required of students to be successful as they graduate from high school and enter college or the world of work. However, there has been some question regarding who has been responsible for preparing students with the college and career readiness skills needed to be successful in the 21st century workplace (DiBenedetto, 2015). The public has believed that high schools are responsible for preparing students to be college and career ready (DiBenedetto, 2015).

The word ready is use in career ready because it means, "completely prepared for immediate action" (Wenster's Unabridged Dictionary, 2001, p. 1,606). When the words career and ready are together, they convey a holistic picture of resilient individuals who are active and involved in shaping and directing their lives now and in the future (Gysbers, 2013). Career-ready students have "a proactive, resilient, and adaptive style of interacting in the present and use that style to assertively move towards self-defined career futures that add meaning, purpose, and satisfaction to their lives" (Gysbers & Lapan, 2009, p. 23).

Career ready students possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to visualize and plan their futures. Career-ready students know how to engage in various current and potential life roles, including being a learner and worker. High school students that are career ready understand the importance of taking advantage of opportunities available to them, such as going directly into the labor force; obtaining an apprenticeship; selecting a certificate program; attending a 2-year technical school, community college, or 4-year college or university; or

enlisting in the military. Strengthening high schools to prepare students with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce and college (White House, 2010).

Students have more career options and lifestyle choices than previous generations. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the United States had 5 million unfilled jobs as of December 2014. This statistic shows us that the American economy is not stagnant but in fact, there is not a lack of open positions as the main issues but rather, the problem lies in employers not finding the workers with the right skills to fill these positions (Wilson & Pinckney, 2015). There is a mismatch between American's job skills and job openings (Wilson & Pinckney, 2015). When students are not career ready they lack the basic knowledge, skills and information to make informed decisions regarding enrollment and training which creates a barrier for entry into the workforce. The complexity of the educational system has required educators, policy makers and industry leaders to work collaboratively to prepare students to be career ready for the challenges in the 21st century workplace (Wilson & Pinckney, 2015).

Career Development Theory

The area of youth counseling and career guidance is undergoing rapid change considering evolving expectations for young people as members of society and rapidly changing educational and career opportunities (Borgen & Hiebert, 2006). Over the past 30 years, models when fully implemented could radically transform counseling services in schools and mandate the delivery of high-quality counseling for college and career success to all students (American School Counselor Association, 2012; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Several additional studies support the value of career development programs in secondary schools. Evans and Burke (1992), for example, provided evidence that students' participation in a career development program had a small but positive impact on academic performance. In a meta-analysis of the impact of career-

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related programs on students' engagement in school, Kenny, Bluestein, Haase, Jackson, and Perry (2006) reported that participation in career interventions increased students' sense of belonging and impact their sense of school engagement, which has been linked to academic achievement.

Research indicates that career interventions may have a positive impact on young adolescents' career planning and exploration (O'Brien, Dukstein, Jackson, Tomlinson, & Kamatuka, 1999; Turner & Conkel, 2010; Turner & Lapan, 2005). Interventions may also help facilitate students' career knowledge (Baker, 2002) and decision-making (O'Brien, Bikos, Epstein, Flores, & Dukstein, 2000). For example, Moody et al. (2008) studied the impact of a Career Development Project for at-risk high school students. Students researched the steps that they needed to take to enter the careers of that were personal interest to them. Findings from that study indicated that most students valued this kind of intervention. Often, interventions lead to greater awareness of career opportunities (O'Brien et al., 1999) and increase young adolescent's career-related self-efficacy and interest in non-traditional careers (Turner & Lapan, 2005).

Career development theories serve as guide for career counseling, and by tying together research about career choices and adjustments with ideas about these issues; career development theories provide a conceptual framework within which to view the types of career-related problems that emerge during high school (Brown & Brooks, 1996; McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992; Sharf, 1997). Developing career awareness and a sense of future goals and opportunities is important for helping all students to make post-secondary choices and making a successful transition into adulthood.

While career development theories help us comprehend and respond to clients' problems and goals, it also provides us with insights into the possible outcomes of counseling for career

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development (Zunka, 1993). Career counseling can help underprepared students make educated career decisions based on their situations and develop the best course of action. Students must learn how to deal with forming their own identities, but they must also learn to define that part of the world of work that fits in with their own identity to gain the necessary skills to be career ready.

WorkKeys Assessments

A growing number of states have begun using the ACT WorkKeys Reading for Information, Locating Information, and Applied Mathematics assessments as part of the high school graduation standards and diplomas as a method to assess and measure college and career readiness (ACT, Inc., 2011). These assessments are a subset of the WorkKeys system developed by ACT, Inc., known for its college testing, and were intended to provide information indicating the relationship between an individual's education and the skills needed for employment (McLarty & Vansickle, 1997). The development of the ACT WorkKeys assessment system was from the input of employers and educators to address the workforce training needs identified in the 1983 report, A Nation at Risk (ACT, Inc., 2009). The assessments within this system are to provide information about generic workplace skills that would assist individuals in making career decisions and employers in making hiring decisions (McLarty & Vansickle, 1997).

WorkKeys has emerged as a set of assessments that could respond to the needs of both employers and educators and signal the student's readiness for further education or a career (Schultz & Stern, 2013). WorkKeys assessments are gaining in popularity for use within public secondary and postsecondary institutions as well as business and industry. WorkKeys are in use with high school juniors who attend school in North Carolina as an effort to measure both college and career readiness. WorkKeys is a job skills assessment system measuring the real-

world skills that employers believe are critical to job success (ACT, Inc., 2011). WorkKeys assessments utilize nine different assessments in nine different subject areas to determine if a person is ready for the workplace or workforce training programs. The nine foundational WorkKeys Assessment (ACT, Inc., 2007c), measure skills in the following areas: (a) Communication, (b) Business Writing, (c) Listening, (d) Reading for Information, (e) Writing, (f) Problem –Solving, (g) Applied Mathematics, (h) Applied Technology, (i) Locating Information, (j) Observation, (k) Interpersonal Skills, and (l) Teamwork.

In 2006, a National Career Readiness Certificate (ACT, Inc., 2010b) is an award element that is now a part of the WorkKeys system. A high school student receives this certificate for taking the WorkKeys Reading for Information, Locating Information, and Applied Mathematics assessments and meet a specified score level (ACT, Inc., 2011). Anyone who takes these three assessments can earn a bronze, silver, gold, or platinum certificate based on the skill levels obtained. The level of certificate is also an indicator to employers of a potential employee's basic skills. This certification of workplace skills along with measurements in core academic areas makes these assessments appealing to both educators and employers when hiring career ready employees (ACT, 2007). ACT WorkKeys as an indicator to determine work readiness continues to increase.

Business and industry want access to an abundant pool of well-qualified workers, which in turn requires that the public-school system produce graduates who are ready for the challenges of college and the workplace (Shultz & Stern, 2011). Unfortunately, that is not happening (United States Chamber of Commerce Institute for a Competitive Workforce & National Career Pathways Network, 2009, p. 4). The United States Department of Labor projections indicate that nearly 50% of all new jobs created between 2008 and 2018 will require some form of

postsecondary award or training (Lacey & Wright, 2009), and for businesses to be globally competitive, entry-level workers must have appropriate reading and math skills to qualify for these new jobs (Council on Competitiveness, 2008).

As community colleges are facing challenges with training the current workforce for jobs that are in demand, career readiness gaps have potentially created difficulties in meeting these demands. The unique work-based nature of the WorkKeys assessments has real potential in helping high school students link their own learning to the workplace as well as motivate them to develop an educational plan with a career goal in mind before graduating from high school. At Randolph Community College, the creation of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* is designed to assist high school juniors identify their current skill levels and match their skills to future career goals.

Creating a Career Readiness Skills Gap Program

The demand for improved workplace skills in the United States is rapidly rising, and industries, employees, and educational systems is challenging to respond to the growing workforce demands (Arrington, 2000). To help address these concern school districts, community colleges, and business industries are forming partnerships to develop specialize programs to ready their graduates (Arrington, 2000). The *Pathways to Prosperity* is a result of the mandated for community colleges to address the workforce skill gap. As a result, a collaboration between Asheboro City Schools, Randolph Community College, Randolph County School System, and local industries are working together to create a seamless pathway for students to go from local high schools to a great career in Randolph County. The proposal for the creation of the, *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program,* is an effort to close the career readiness gap among high school juniors.

As the world of work becomes increasingly dynamic, flexible, and complex, career development courses will need to reflect the growing needs in the community when exploring the beginning stages of career exploration for high school students to close the career readiness gap. The *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* components are adapted from the vocational guidance movement that explores the trait and factor approaches to career development. The basic principle of the trait and factor approach to career development for this proposed project is that the underlying assumption for finding one's place in the world of work is primarily a matter of uncovering one's traits and abilities. During the career exploration stage, the students would have the opportunity to learn about the job market and finding the match between what he or she can do and match his or her skill set to what careers are available on the job market to formulate a specific career goal and learning plan before graduating from high school.

First Component of the Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program

Self-efficacy encompasses all aspects of self that influence behavior and is defined as confidence in one's ability to perform a given task or activity with desired results (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Pajares, 1996). Although it may seem straightforward, self-efficacy is a multi-dimensional construct that involves: (a) level or difficulty of a task, (b) generality, which refers to transferability of efficacy beliefs among different tasks, and (c) strength, which refers to the certainty one has in his or her ability to perform a task (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). Career development indicates that self - efficacy had a significant relationship to career choice (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1986), and that academic self-efficacy had the most direct influence on occupational efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

A scale by Taylor and Betz measures an individual's belief about his or her ability to complete the tasks successfully that are necessary for career decision-making (Leong & Walsh, 2008). This Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE) measures career decision-making competencies in five areas: (a) self-appraisal, (b) occupational information, (c) goal selection, (d) planning, and (e) problem solving. The instrument has been validated through research studies, mainly with college students (Nilsson, Schmidt, & Meek, 2002; Zunker & Osborn, 2002), and has been used to correlate self-efficacy with career indecision, career exploration behavior, and other attitudes and skills related to career decision-making (Nilsson et al., 2002). For this study, the CDSE will be administer to the high school juniors so that they can access their own self-efficacy when making career choices.

Second Component of the Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program

The students developing self-concepts and implication to subjective careers are integral component of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program.* With a subjective career based in self-understanding, students can more effectively engage in the processes of career exploration and planning (Grier-Reed & Conkel- Ziebell, 2009). In the current post-industrial age where change and uncertainty are hallmarks of the time, high school students will need to possess the necessary skills to construct their lives and their career paths to meet the challenges of the 21st century where careers are forged rather than foretold (Chen, 2003; Hoskins, 1995; Peavy, 1995; Savickas, 1996; Watts, 1996).

The second component focuses on career as self-realization as the fundamental idea that a person's internal senses of self-can plays a key role in his or her career exploration. To extend students' self-concept and subjective career, the program includes the interpretation to integrate predominant trait and factor approaches such as Holland's RIASEC codes (six basic personality

20

types and work environments, including Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional; 1997).

Third Component of the Armadillo Readiness Skills Gap Program

One of the goals for students who participate in the *Armadillo Readiness Skills Gap Program* is to answer questions about their future career and develop a career plan that outlines the steps to reach their career goal. The students will think about what they want to do and find out more about the kind of training, education and skills they need to realistically achieve this career goal. Management of career goals in young adulthood is particularly important, as this is when individuals are deciding on a career path, undertaking the necessary training and education related to that direction, and seeking employment in their chosen career (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). A career goal may help students discover career possibilities that they would not have thought of otherwise as oppose to just drifting into a career.

Once a student has chosen a specific career, he or she is able to think strategically about the steps to accomplish this goal. The students are then able to properly choose a college or university and eventually attend the necessary classes to develop their skills and expand their career interests. When students have the self-realization of what it takes to work in a chosen field of interests then they are better equipped to mapping or creating an individual learning plan to be successful in this career.

Fourth Component of the Armadillo Readiness Skills Gap Program

In the United States, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are showing promise as being a potentially powerful career development model that helps prepare high school students with both college and career readiness skills (Solberg et al., 2012). ILPs support career readiness by helping students identify career goals based on self-exploration of their interests, skills, and

values and supporting their development career planning and management skills (Solberg et al., 2012). ILPs essentially consist of plans that students generate to align high school courses with career aspirations while ILP to identify avenues for early graduation. To successfully engage students in actively designing their ILPs, career development opportunities are assumed to be necessary, and therefore, ILPs can be considered as (a) portfolio document that is created and updated annually and (b) process that helps students engage in the self-exploration of one's career interest, skills, and values, career exploration to identify postsecondary education and training opportunities and develop employment seeking skills (Solberg et al., 2012).

Using the Career Clusters model to engage in ILPs ensures that students are receiving information about the skills, activities, and educational pathways needed to progress toward their career goals. According to Ruffing (2006), the impetus for the creation of career clusters began as the result reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (2006) emphasizing college and career readiness outcomes. The reauthorizations recognize that to be employable within a knowledge-based economy that (a) students receiving career and technical education courses must be proficient academically, and (b) students who were not receiving career and technical education courses must develop career and workforce readiness skills (Ruffing, 2006).

The career clusters model emerged from national efforts coordinated by National Association of State Directors for Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEC), which continues to lead this effort. Occupations are categorized into the following 16 clusters: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Architecture and Construction. Arts/ Audio Video Technology and Communications, Business and Administration, Education and Training, Finance, Government and Public Administration, Health Sciences, Hospitality and Tourism,

Human Services, Information Technology, Law and Public Safety, Manufacturing, Retailing/

Wholesales and Services, Scientific Research and Engineering, Transportation/Distribution and

Logistics. Within each career cluster, several career pathways have been identified (79 in total)

and perhaps the most important resources to emerge from this work are "program of study"

associated with each career pathway (States' Career Clusters, 2010). Each program of studies

describes the secondary and postsecondary academic courses (9th grade through 16th grade) and

industry specific skills needed for successfully enter the range of occupations identified within

the pathway (States' Career Clusters, 2010). The Career Cluster Model and ILPs may serve as a

"bridge" between school efforts to graduate students who are both college and career ready

(Willis, Solberg, & Osman, 2010). If successful, students who engage in ILPs should begin

engaging in self-initiated learning by managing and selecting courses and other educational and

learning opportunities that support their ability to realize successfully their future aspiration

(Willis et al., 2010).

Focus Group Overview

The focus group method is being used more frequently in applied research (Stewart &

Shamdasani, 1990), and it has been expanded to the areas of public health, education,

communications, media studies, feminist research, sociology, and psychology (Wilkinson, 2003).

Focus groups are a qualitative research methodology use to obtain information about the

opinions, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and insights of a small group of people (Kitzinger &

Barbour, 1999). Focus groups are helpful in evaluation research or in understanding how people

regard a specific experience or event (Krueger, 1994).

Although focus groups vary considerably depending on their purposes, they are defined

broadly as a technique wherein four to six individuals discuss a topic of interest for one to two

hours under the direction of a group moderator (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The number of participants who are invite to a focus group is one element of the research design that is clearly under the researcher's control (Morgan, 1996). The advantages of using student focus groups are mainly that they provide students with a non-threatening, discussion-based outlet for criticisms and suggestions (Jordan & Ono, 2011). For this study, there are two focus groups one will consist of the high school juniors that participate through the Career and College Promise at Randolph Community College and the other will include six of the local career development coordinators who work in one of the local school districts. The study will exploration the triangulation of the results from the CDSE scale as well as the perceptions of the high school juniors and career development coordinators when exploring ways to increase enrollment in free college courses and creating a career development program to address career readiness.

Hollander (2004) argues that "focus groups may be best conceptualized as a "research site," not a research instrument" (p. 631). This interaction among focus group members is what makes the focus group unique in comparison to asking participants individually about their perceptions or having participants write out their personal reactions (Kress & Shoffner, 2009). After the focus groups have ended, the next step is to determine how to make meaning of the data to seek out effective and innovative ways to meet efficiently the students' needs and to improve services.

Summary

In the United States, the challenge to produce high school graduates who are both college and career ready (Achieve, 2008; ACT Discover, 2010) has been adopted by a majority of states in response to the need to prepare students more effectively to make successful postsecondary

transitions (Achieve Inc., 2010). The success of college and career readiness initiatives depends on a large extent whether all K–12 students receive effective career counseling services.

Effective counseling services can deliver to promote college and career readiness a process that facilitates career development and career exploration activities, and a portfolio document that organizes those course plans and career development activities as well as serves as a repository of record for personal accomplishments and workforce readiness skills (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). As one U.S. education school dean wrote, "why is so much that is known about how to help U.S. students reach high levels of achievement not applied in most school settings?" (Stipek, as cited in Coburn & Stein, 2010, p. xi).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The researcher or project leader will follow the improvement science approach to develop a career development or intervention program that would address the need of closing the career readiness gap with high school students. New approaches to the connection between knowledge and improvement are emerging from improvement science (Langley et al., 2009), an applied science that has dramatically improved practice in industries ranging from automobile manufacturing (Rother, 2009) to health care (Gawande, 2007). As projects rooted in improvement science begin to show success within education (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015), the moment is right to consider its underlying tenets.

The science of improvement is a nascent field, emerging along with other fields to answer the call to improve quality (Health Quality Solutions, 2014). The overriding goal of improvement science is to ensure that quality improvement efforts are as much on evidence as the best practices they seek to implement (Shojania & Grimshaw, 2005). The Improvement Guide (Langley et al., 2009), at nearly 500 pages, provides one major compendium of improvement science tools and processes, and identifies as the core framework of improvement science the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle, a process for rapid cycles of learning from practice, coupled with three fundamental questions that drive improvement work:

1. What are we trying to accomplish?

2. How will we know that a change is an improvement?

3. What change can we make that will result in improvement?

The PDSA cycle provides a way to learn how a change works on a small scale before trying it on a large scale (Langley et al., 2009).

Identify Areas of Needs

At any point in recent history, the changing focus of the importance of career guidance in schools has been a "response to the economic, educational, and social problems of those times" (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006, p. 5). During this second decade of the 21st century, the United States continues to undergo vast and far-reaching challenges economically and socially, resulting in a rapidly changing workplace (Carey & Herr, 2012; Durkowsky, 2013). These changes are "requiring higher levels of achievement and preparation for the emerging workplace" (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2006, p. 1). This means that the students of today and tomorrow will require an education that provides them with the academic, career and technical, and guidance and counseling knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be career ready upon graduation from high school.

Clarifying the nature of an individual's career problem is an important initial step in delivering a career intervention (Spokane, 1991). Assessment (or diagnosis) of client needs at the beginning of the career service delivery process helps ensure that the services individuals receive are congruent with their needs (Amundson, 1996; Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996; Heppner & Johnston, 1993; Miller, 1993; Osborne, Brown, Niles, & Miner, 1997; Sampson & Reardon, 1998; Savickas, 1996; Super, 1983; Super & Kidd, 1979; Watts, 1996). As a result, a key component of assessing client needs involves the assessment of readiness for career decision-making (Crites, 1981; Gati, 1998; Herr & Niles, 1997; Levinson, Ohler, Caswell, & Kiewra, 1998; Savickas, 1990; Super, Osborne, Walsh, Brown, & Niles, 1992; Toman & Savickas, 1997).

Measures of Improvement

The issue of college and career readiness (CCR) is among the concerning problems facing the educational system in the United States (Bragg & Taylor, 2014). According to the Randolph County Environment Data Scan published in November of 2015, 44.7% of the county's labor force is over the age of 44. The county is in need of a skilled labor force to support the local businesses and industries as the preretirement workers continue to age. Additionally, those members of the population who are 25 years and older living in poverty are only 27.5% for college attendees and graduates as compared to 72.5% for those with a high school diploma or less. The students need educational opportunities beyond high school to increase their ability to achieve financial security.

Having a way to bridge the gap between high school students and educational opportunities leading to employment is a problem facing leaders in Randolph County and Randolph Community College. However, there is currently not a program of this nature in place to address the career readiness skills gap when working with the high school students in the Career and College Promise Program at Randolph Community College. There are currently 348 juniors and 266 seniors enroll at one of the local high schools. From the beginning of this school year, August 2016 until the end of the first semester January 2017, the high school career coach counseled only 14% of these students and only 21% of the students enrolled in a course at Randolph Community College.

The goal of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* is one approach to addressing local workforce development needs and closing the career readiness gaps. The two measures of improvement to gauge the overall effectiveness and influence of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* will focus on increasing the total number of students

annually counseled by the career coach from 14% to 20% and increase the number of students enrolled in the Career and College Promise courses from 21% to 32% by June 2017. Self-appraisal or awareness of skills is one of the career development skills needed to prepare for the workplace that students would gain through the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap* program. Connecting education to a career goal can make learning more meaningful for students.

Setting

The setting for this project is Randolph Community College, a member institution of the North Carolina Community College System, is a public, two-year, comprehensive, community college established to serve the citizens of Randolph County. The College began operation in 1962 as a joint city-county industrial education center under the direction of the Trades and Industrial Division, Department of Vocational Education.

The North Carolina legislature in 1963 established a separate system of community colleges and the College became part of that system. Since opening its doors in 1962 as Randolph Industrial Education Center, the College has seen many changes including three name changes that include Randolph Technical Institute, Randolph Technical College, and Randolph Community College. Through various expansions, Randolph Community College has grown from 33,000 square feet to more than 384,000 square feet in three locations at Asheboro Campus, Archdale Center, and the Emergency Services Training Center. The enrollment has steadily increase from 75 students in 1962 to more than 3,700 credit students and more than 9,000 noncredit students during the 2010-2011 academic year.

Study Population

The population for this study consists of those high school juniors who met the eligibility requirements to participate in the Career and College Promise Program under Session Law 2011-145, the Appropriations Act of 2011 at Randolph Community College.

The requirements to qualify for the College Transfer Pathways (University Bound):

- Be a high school junior or senior

- Have a weighted high school GPA of 3.0; and

- Demonstrate college readiness on an assessment or placement test.

The requirements to qualify for the Career Technical Education Pathways (Career Ready):

- Be a high school junior or senior

- Have a weighted high school GPA of 3.0 OR the recommendation of the high school principal or his/her designee; and meet the prerequisites for the career pathway.

The population size will include those high school students who volunteer and are willing to participate and have met eligibility for the Career Technical Education Pathways (Career Ready).

Instrument

The CDMSE is a scale by Taylor and Betz that measures an individual's belief about his or her ability to complete the tasks successfully that are necessary for career decision-making (Leong & Walsh, 2008). The Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE) measures career decision-making competencies in five areas: (a) self-appraisal, (b) occupational information, (c) goal selection, (d) planning, and (e) problem solving. The instrument has been validated through research studies, mainly with college students (Nilsson et al., 2002; Zunker & Osborn, 2002), and has been used to correlate self-efficacy with career indecision, career exploration behavior,

and other attitudes and skills related to career decision-making (Nilsson et al., 2002). The CDSE will be administer to the high school juniors so that they can access their own self-efficacy when making career choices and then developing interventions to increase confidence in the career development process.

Focus Group Discussion

As defined by Krueger and Casey (2009), "A focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment (p. 2)." Focus groups are used (a) to gather basic information or in questionnaire design and development (Mitra, 1994; Poitras Duffy, 1993), (b) to yield rich description or generate program theory (Buttram, 1990; Carvalho & White, 2004), and (c) to include perspectives of marginalized and other stakeholders (Baur, Van Eltergen, Nierse, & Abma, 2010). A strength of the focus group is that it mainly allows for participants to interact, reflect, and react to other's opinions immediately.

In focus groups, moderators ask participants open-ended questions, monitor members' responses, and use these responses to facilitate the discussion of primary themes. The role of the moderator is to promote interaction, probe for details when necessary, and ensure that the discussion remains directed toward the topic of interest (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). An effective moderator is critical for the success of a focus group. Focus group facilitators increase their effectiveness if they (a) maintain focus on the questions, (b) anticipate situations that shift the focus of the group from a general one to one that is personal, and (c) practice responses to such a shift (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

This study also adopts a qualitative approach, using focus groups. In qualitative research, participants are fully informed and involve in the analyses (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold,

1999). Focus groups are one practical and effective means of gathering information and conducting research that can contribute to improved practice (Jordan & Ono, 2011). Focus groups are, at their core, small groups of people with at least one common trait brought together to discuss aspects of that trait with each other (Jordan & Ono, 2011).

The difference between a focus group and a group interview is the interaction between the participants that, according to Morgan (1997), "produce[s] data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group." For the purpose of this study, the focus group will be a supplement and expand on data collected mainly through the CDSE survey instrument. As Morgan (1996) explains, "What makes the discussion in focus groups more than the sum of separate individual interviews is the fact that the participants both query each other and explain themselves to each other" (p. 139). Focus groups hold substantial power and potential for researchers and participants when used with careful research design and when combined with other methods (Morgan 1997; Peek & Fothergill, 2009; Smithson, 2000).

Six participants will be randomly selected who are a representation of those high school juniors who currently participate through the Career and College Promise Initiative at Randolph Community College as well as six career development coordinators. The primary purpose of using focus group is to study the triangulation of the students' perceptions, career development coordinator's perceptions, and the results for the CDSE questionnaire when evaluating how to develop a career readiness program and increase enrollment in college courses at Randolph Community College. The information gain through this focus group discussion could potentially help inform which topics and services that should be a part of a career readiness program as well as ways to increase enrollment in free college courses at Randolph Community College.

Data Source and Collection

The researcher will adapt the following seven-step sequence as a framework in alignment with the PDSA (Plan-Do-Study- Act) cycle for providing an intervention to close the career readiness gap with high school juniors. According to Sampson, Peterson, Reardon, and Lenz (2003), this generic model is use as a guide in navigating through the problem-solving and decision-making process for providing career-counseling services:

- Initial screening: High school juniors who are already participating in the Career and College Promise program and express an interest in meeting individually with the high school career coach during first semester and at the beginning of second semester would be extended an invitation to participate in the study in helping to create the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program.* Preliminary assessment: Students will complete the CDSE as a screening instrument to collect quantitative information about their career readiness.

- Define problem and analyze causes: Data from the CDSE screening instrument is using to understand the problem in terms of a gap between real state and ideal state. Students will develop their own hypotheses regarding career readiness and any gaps.

- Formulate goals: Develop a set of attainable career counseling goals to remove these gaps.

- Develop individual learning plan (ILP): Goals use to develop an individual learning plan (ILP) that will help in identifying a sequence of resources and activities necessary to help the students attain his or her career counseling goals.

- Execute individual learning plan: The student carries out the ILP planning and completes a post assessment of the helpfulness and usefulness of the career readiness intervention and program.

- Summative review and generalization: Finalize an operating manual for the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap* as a career development or intervention program that can be use in providing career services for future Career and College Program students.

Plan of Study

In executing this problem of practice, a specific schema will be followed. The schema is as follows:

- Identify the targeted population of 11th grade students who would be interested in attending a *Lunch and Learn* meeting during their assigned lunch period. The purpose of this meeting is to meet with the students to explain the career services and courses available under the Career and College Promise Initiative. Students would have the opportunity to take home a release form to participate in the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program through Randolph Community College*.

- Make initial contact with those students and parents who signed the release form to receive career services. Schedule a time to meet with in small groups and administer a career readiness assessment.

- Data Analysis: Pre-Assessment /Survey Analysis- Collect data and identify areas for improvement based on the career readiness assessment.

- At the end of the career development program, the students will create an individual learning plan with a career goal. Enroll in free college courses at Randolph Community College. Develop a plan of action for continued success during their 12th grade year as a senior.

- The Randolph Community College Career Coach will create the *Armadillo Career Readiness Program Operating Manual* with the data collected from the initial students who participated in the career development program during their 11th grade school year.

The purpose of the study questions, tasks, and issues in this study will address what happens when a career development program is created as an initiative to close the gap of career readiness skills among high school juniors who attend school in a rural area in Randolph County. The study questions, tasks, and issues can be understood also as a generically intervention studies that ask, "what happens when high school juniors receive specific career services and provided the opportunity to take free college courses at Randolph Community College." The study questions, tasks, and issues will serve as a guide for the primary investigator in this study when exploring the problem of practice that emerged as the gap of a career readiness skills program of this nature to address the limited pool to supply the local needs of the workforce in Randolph County.

Data Analysis

This study will evaluate the data from students' CDSE surveys as a pre and post assessment to see if there is an impact when providing career development curricular strategies to address the career readiness gap that currently exists among students graduating from high school. As a result, students participating in the study would be able to identify and select

courses around their career goal, connecting learning activities to include identifying career interests, career-planning activities, and the identification of appropriate postsecondary educational and training options to have a successful transition to the world of work.

Conclusion

Career choices and concerns occur throughout one's lifetime and serve as one of the most important aspects of an individual's personal happiness (Sears, 1982; Sharf, 1997). Schools throughout the country offer learning opportunities that make direct connection for students among what they learn, how it connects to their community, and its links to what students will need to know in college and in the workplace. Teaching and learning cannot be limited to the walls of the classroom when we envision what is a career ready student.

Ensuring that all students graduate from high school equipped with 21st century knowledge and skills requires a different mindset from the perspective of all members in a learning community, including students, families, teachers and administrators, business leaders, and policy-makers (Soule & Warrick, 2015). As adults, we shoulder a responsibility to ensure that all our students graduate ready to succeed in college, career, and life. The need for not just some, but all students to succeed is more critical now than ever before given the added challenges of a shift to a global knowledge economy, workforce transitions, the diversification of the student body, and the need for a collective understanding of what it means to be ready for any postsecondary opportunities (Soule & Warrick, 2015).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Problem under Investigation

The problem leading to this study focused on the issue that many students graduating from high school are unclear about what postsecondary avenues they should pursue. One strategy to close the career readiness gap that would allow exposure for more high school students to become college and career ready is the delivery of a career development program at the high school level. High school students would receive additional training to improve their skills for higher career search self-efficacy, engagement in setting career goals, motivating in attending school, stronger academic self-efficacy, receiving higher grades, possessing better stress and health management skills, and demonstrating better career decision – making (Solberg, Gresham, Phelps, Durham, & Haakenson, 2010).

Purpose of Study

Helping students plan for their future during high school is important when taking advantages of college and career opportunities. Career development programs can help students become more engaged in school and more focused on their future. The literature on career development for students at the secondary level (grades 6-12) suggests that decisions that students make in their middle and high school years have an impact on their future college and career opportunities. Through this career development initiatives, high school students would graduate with an identifiable career goal, complete college course work, and earn credentials that would assist them in transitioning into careers from high school. Establishing what college and career readiness means for this new world of work is important for this research study since it is focused on career readiness and career development for high school students.

The focus groups and observations are important source of learning while trying to improve how to address the career readiness skill gap in Randolph County. It was useful for the primary investigator to have the study questions, tasks, and issues serve as a way to turn the data from the focus group discussions and observations and identify what themes were revealed as a result of this study.

The study questions, tasks, and issues afforded the opportunity to investigate the causes of challenges for creating a career development program and identify possible solutions to address these needs among high school juniors. Focusing on these specific study questions, tasks, and issues to collect data helped to inform the primary investigator who worked as a high school career coach at Randolph Community College about ways to make improvements regarding a potential career development program for the high school students in order to intervene with the decreasing workforce in Randolph County.

Description for Conducting the Research and Study Design

The proposal for the creation of the, *Armadillo Career Readiness Gap Program*, is an effort to close the career readiness gap among high school juniors. The researcher will adopt the following seven-step sequence as a framework in alignment with the PDSA (see Table 2) Cycle for providing an intervention to close the career readiness gap with high school students.

Instrument

The CDMSE is a scale by Taylor and Betz (1983) that measures an individual's belief about his or her ability to complete the tasks successfully that are necessary for career decision-making (Leong & Walsh, 2008). The Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE) measures career decision-making competencies in five areas: (a) self-appraisal, (b) occupational information, (c) goal selection, (d) planning, and (e) problem solving.

Table 2

PDSA: Second Cycle

Tool	Cycle: First Try
PLAN	Identify the targeted population of high school seniors who have been involved with the Career and College Promise Initiative for the past two years. Invite those students to attend a *Lunch and Learn* meeting during their assigned lunch period. Lunch would be provided for the students. The purpose of this meeting is to meet with the students to explain the career services and courses available under the Career and College Promise Initiative. Students would have the opportunity to take home a consent form to participate in the study for the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program through Randolph Community College*.
DO	Make initial contact with those students and parents who signed the consent form to receive career services. Scheduled a time to meet with the students in small group to administer a career readiness assessment and answer the focus group questions. The focus group would meet for approximately 25 to 30 minutes during their assigned lunch period. Lunch would also be provided for all participants during this follow-up meeting.
STUDY	Collect data and identify areas for improvement based on the career readiness assessment that the students completed and responses to the focus group questions.
ACT	Present final study results to Randolph County Schools and Randolph Community College.

The instrument has been validated through research studies, mainly with college students (Nilsson et al., 2002; Zunker & Osborn, 2002), and has been used to correlate self-efficacy with career indecision, career exploration behavior, and other attitudes and skills related to career decision-making (Nilsson et al., 2002). The CDSE was administered to the high school juniors in the focus group so that they can access their own self-efficacy when making career choices and then developing interventions to increase confidence in the career development process. As a result of completing the CDSE, all of the high school focus group participants identified that they would want additional support identifying a career goal and receiving career services program before graduating from high school.

Focus Group Methodology

Focus group methodology in this study used focused interviews from high school seniors and career development coordinators in a rural school district to obtained information on career readiness in a small group setting. This methodology holds promise for advancing the researcher's understanding of career readiness and the goals for creating a career development program targeted for high school juniors. Included is a discussion of planning and facilitating the focus groups, recruiting group members, collecting and analyzing the data and reporting the results.

Participants were asked to provide insight about their access to college courses and availability of current career services that have been provided through the Career and Promise Initiative at Randolph Community College. As part of the focus group methodology the aim was to generate rich, detailed, and meaningful themes from the interviews. In this study, focus groups offered a method that allowed the moderator to discover participant's insights about a high

school career readiness program to service a rural school district. Many of the insights gained from these focus groups were not evident in the literature regarding career readiness.

Planning the Focus Group

Planning is the key to successful outcomes in implementing focus groups. To obtain the necessary permission to conduct the focus groups with high school seniors and the Career Development Coordinators (CDCs), the moderator worked with one of the local school districts that is in Randolph County. The initial step involved getting approval to conduct the study from the Research Review Committee. The required paperwork along with a background check was submitted and approval was granted with the provision that the moderator worked with a faculty member to oversee the study. The person who served as the faculty member to supervise this study was the Career and Technical Education Director (CTE).

The first step was to identify the school where the principal would give permission to interview the students for the focus group. Once the high school was identified the moderator had to obtain permission from the principal for the students to come during lunch for 25 minutes to participate in the study. The principal did agree to allow the moderator to come to the school and interview the students for the focus group on career readiness. Once the principal approval was received the moderator followed up with the CTE Director to begin identifying eligible students to participate in the focus group. There were initially 49 students who were identified by the CTE Director as meeting the requirements for the study. The student was required to be a senior and had participated in the Career and College Promise at Randolph Community College since the junior year in high school. All 49 students received the informed consent form to take home to their parents for permission. There were eventually six students who returned the form with parental approval to participate in the study.

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Obtaining the permission for the CDCs to participant in the study involved the moderator being invited to participate during one of the monthly CDC meetings. It was explained to the CDCs that participation was completely voluntary. The informed consent to participate was distributed during the meeting and all six CDCs agreed to participate in the focus group. The CDCs represented six of the local high schools in the school districts. The interview for the focus group with CDCs was concluded in 40 minutes. The primary purpose of using a focus group is to study the triangulation of the students' perceptions, career coaches' perceptions, and the results for the CDSE questionnaire when evaluating how to develop a career readiness program and increase enrollment in college courses.

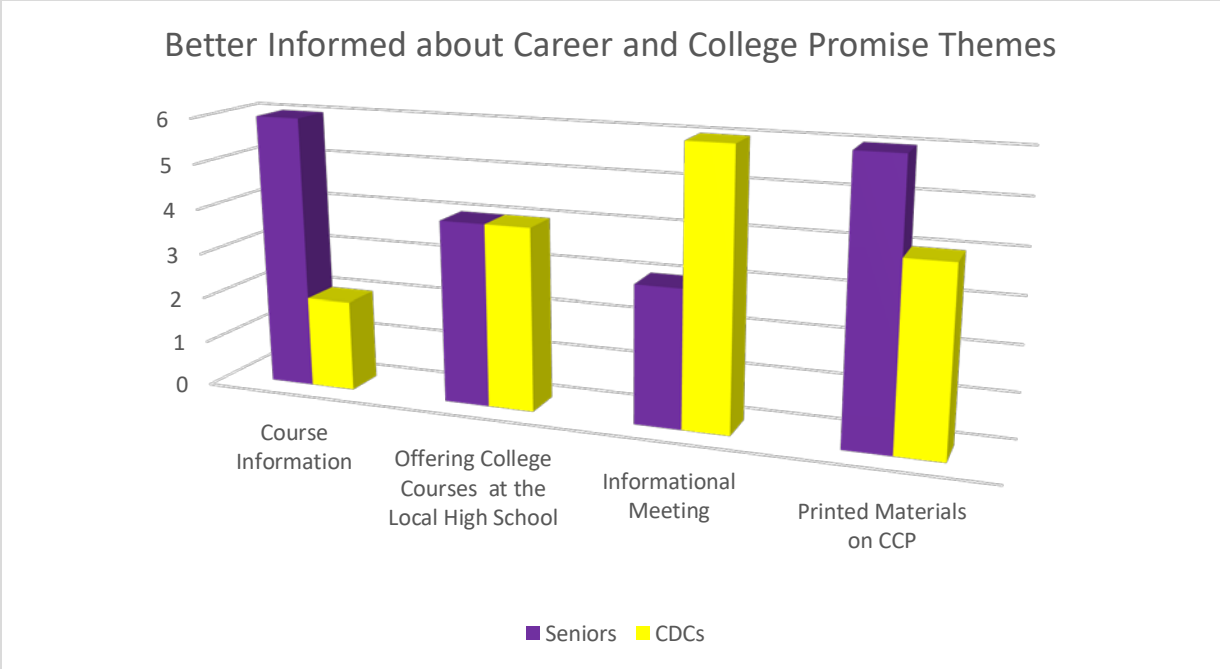## Focus Group Questions and Interview Findings

In this study, meetings were held during the morning at the school for the student focus group and central office boardroom for the monthly CDC meeting. The focus group questions were semi-structured and open-ended with initial questions serving to introduce the topic and stimulate discussion. Figure 2-7 combine major themes and key points from interviews and discussions during the two focus groups with the seniors and CDCs on career readiness.

Information Acquisition High School Student Comment Themes

In Figure 2 are the responses from high school students from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding information acquisition:

- More Information on the Workload for the College Courses
- Amount of Study Time that is Required for the College Courses
- Assisting Students in the Concept on Time Management Skills -Balancing these College Courses and High School
- Offering College Courses on High School Campus to the Students

Better Informed about Career and College Promise Themes
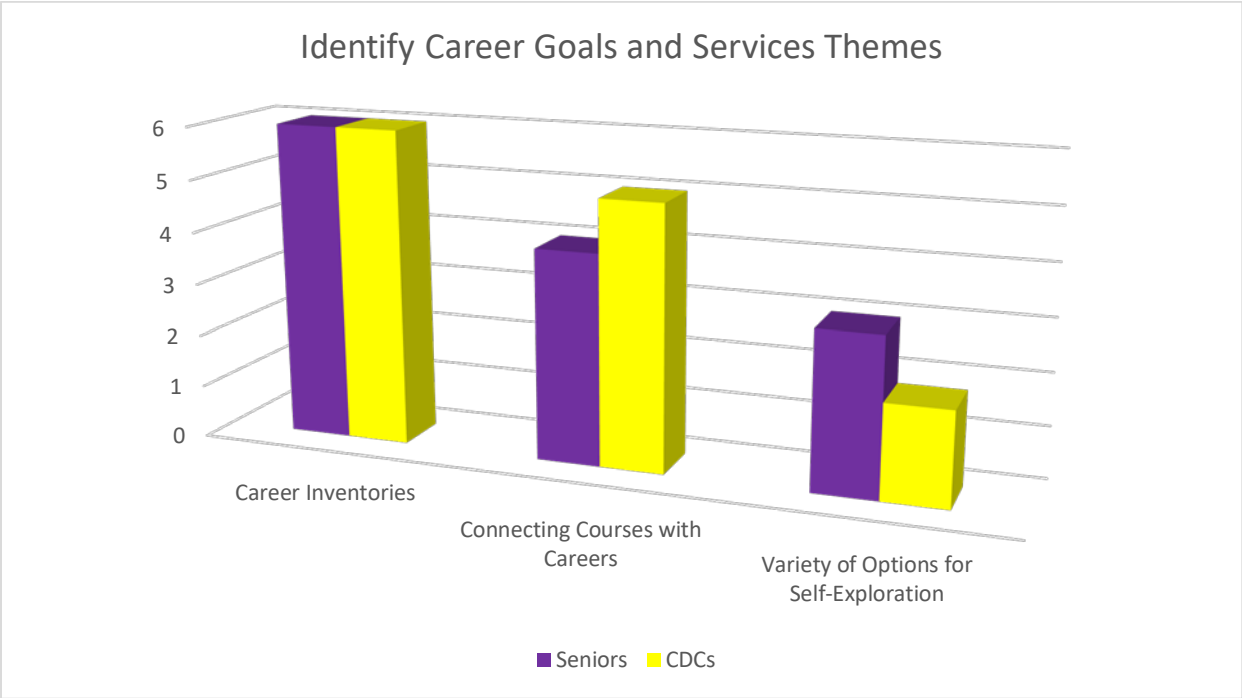

Figure 2. Responses to study question 1.
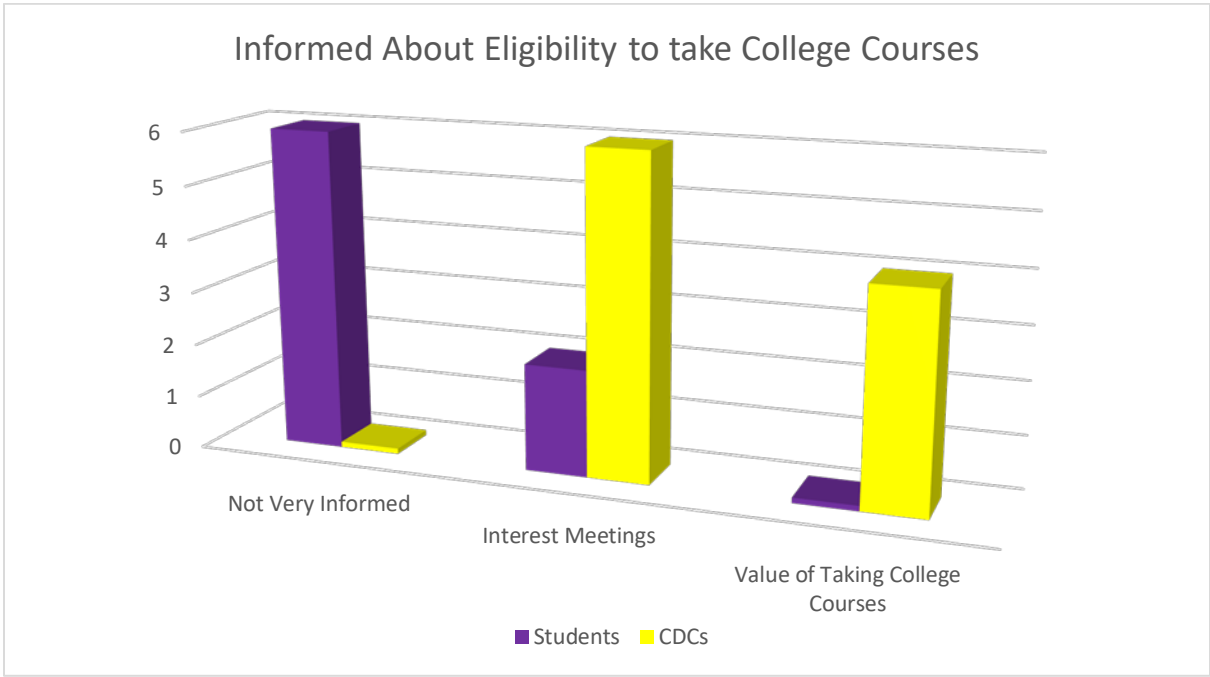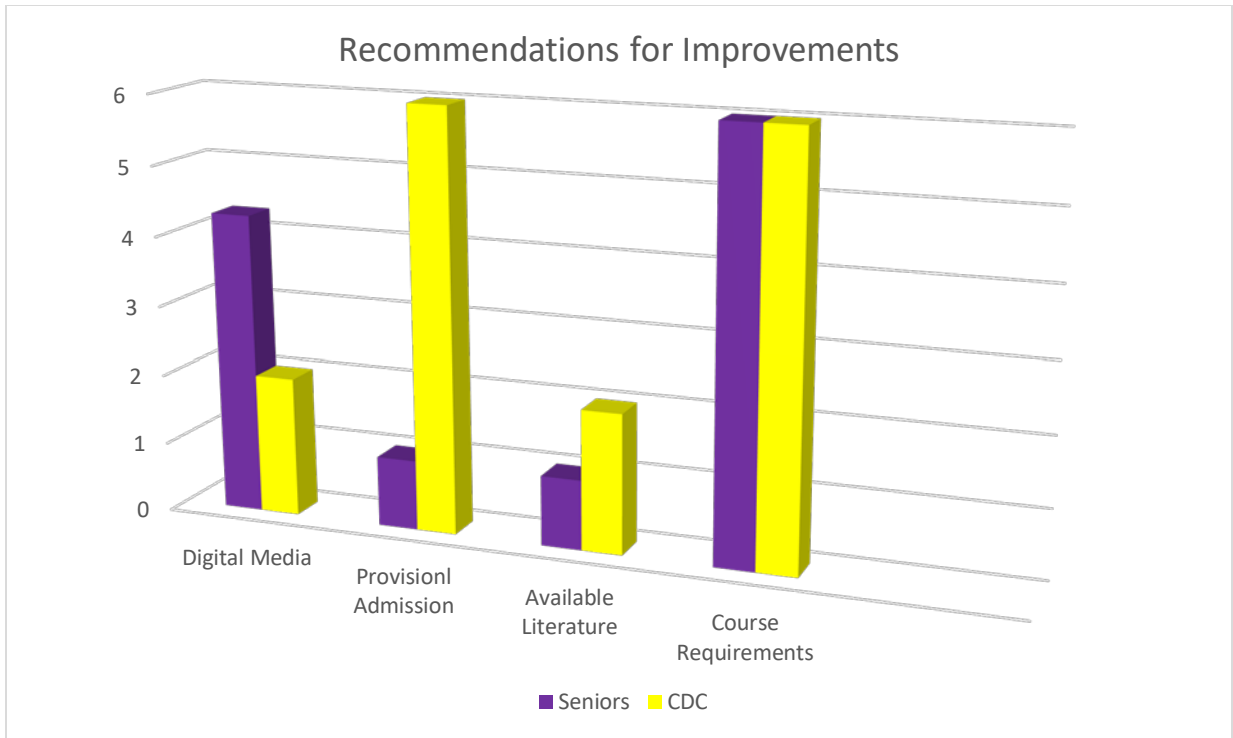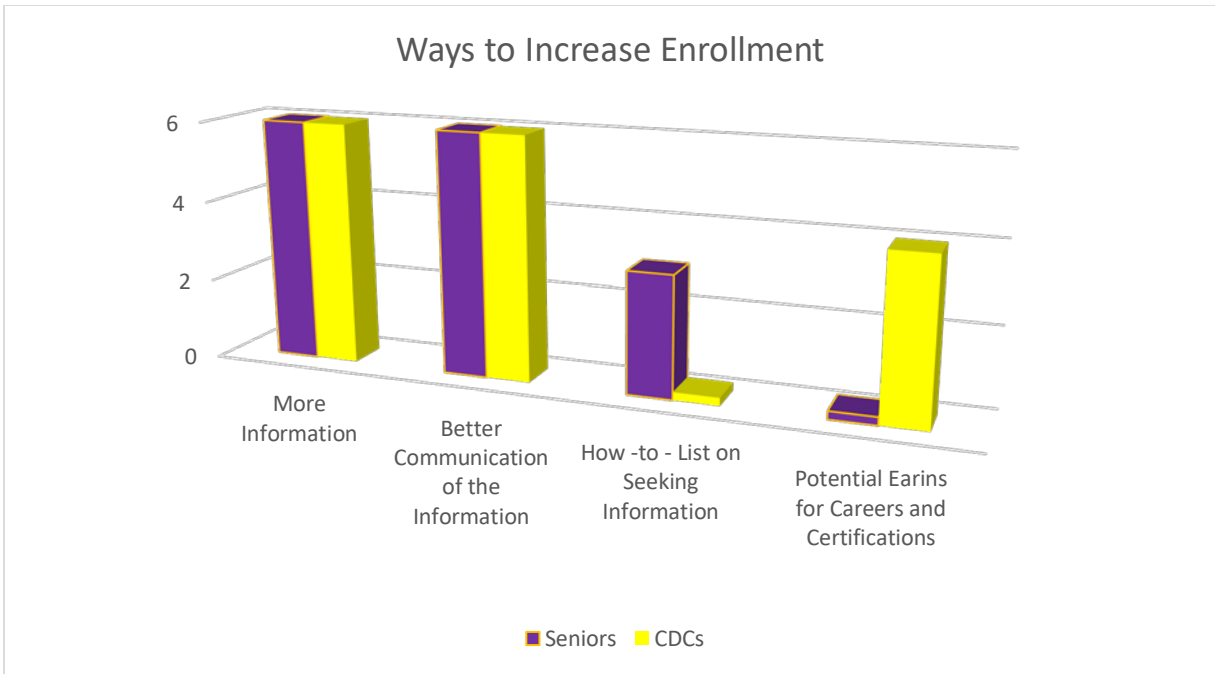
Figure 3. Responses to study question 2.

Figure 4. Responses to study question 3.

Figure 5. Responses to study question 4.
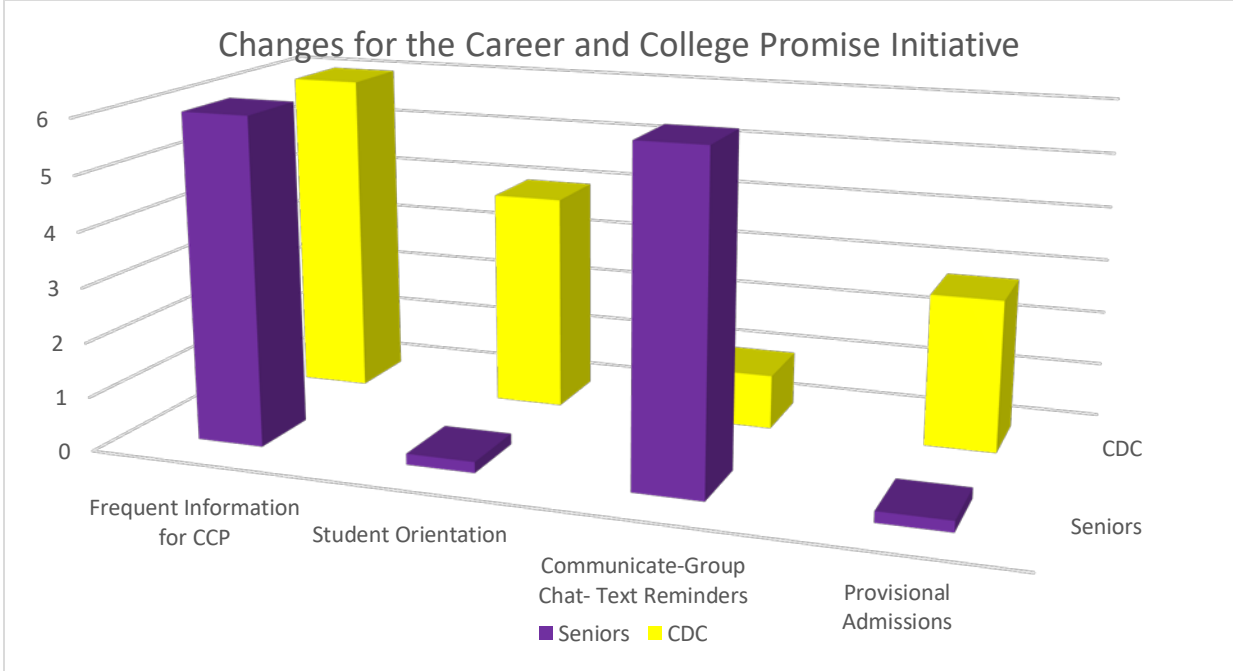
Figure 6. Responses to study question 5.

Figure 7. Responses to study question 6.

Information Acquisition Career Development Facilitator Comment Themes

In Figure 2 are the responses from career development facilitators from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding information acquisition:

- Start Talking to the Students in Eighth Grade about the Potential of Taking College Courses in High School

- Promote a Little Segment on Career and College Promise Annually with the Students during Classroom Presentations and Night Meetings

- Host Lunch Meetings to get the Information to Teachers and Students on How to Potentially Earn the Various Credentials at Randolph Community College through the Career and College Promise Initiative

- Randolph Community College would Provide more Literature on the Career and College Promise with Statistical Data and the Type of Credit Earned

- Informational Meetings or Professional Development hosted on Randolph Community College Campus to Showcase Programs and Courses

- Working Collaboratively with the School Counselors to get Students Signed Up for the College Courses

Information Acquisition Quotes

The following are direct quotes from interviews and focus groups:

- **"**I wish that I had a syllabus or what would be required in the courses, so I know how to be better prepared."

- "Is there a timeline of schedule of the due dates for the assignments."

- "It would be great for the career coaches and counselors to work closely with the students in order to get them signed up for college courses at Randolph Community College."

Career Goals and Services High School Student Comment Themes

In Figure 3 are responses from high school students from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding identifying career goals and services:

- Career Interest Inventories
- Variety of Choices to Assist Students in Discovering What They Would Like to do in the Future as Far as Career Options
- Having Opportunities to Take College Courses that Pertain to Their Interests

Career Goals and Services Career Development Facilitator Comment Themes

In Figure 3 are responses from career development facilitators from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding identifying career goals and services:

- Career Interest Inventories
- Which Programs or Courses Connect to Their Specific Career Interest

Eligibility to take College Courses High School Student Comment Themes

In Figure 4 are the responses from high school students from both interview and focus groups regarding the information they would like to have in order to determine eligibility in taking college courses:

- Not Very Informed
- Did Not Receive Information of the Course Schedule
- Did Not Receive an Outline for the Eligible Courses to Sign Up to Take

Eligibility to take College Courses Career Development Facilitators Comment Themes

In Figure 4 are the responses from the career development facilitators from both interview and focus groups regarding the questions regarding how to get more information to students regarding the eligibility to take college courses:

- Hold Interest Meetings

- Students Do Not Understand the Value of Taking a Course at Randolph Community College

Additional Resources Quotes

The following are direct quotes from interviews and focus groups:

- **"**I did not receive any information about the college course that I could take at Randolph Community College."

- "Student do not value the many opportunities to take college courses and how this could positively impact their future and save money in the future once they decide to pursue a college degree."

Recommendations High School Student Comment Themes

In Figure 5 are the responses from high school students from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding recommendations for improvements to the processes for the Career and College Promise Initiative at Randolph Community College:

- More Information Available Did Not Receive Updates Via Their Student Email Account

- Did Not Know the Class Schedule

- What Work would be Required in the Course

- Get a Course Syllabus or Idea of the Course Work

Recommendations Career Development Facilitator Comment Themes

In Figure 5 are responses from career development facilitators from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding recommendations for improvements to the processes for the Career and College Promise Initiative at Randolph Community College:

- Digital and Social Media or a Format that the Student Actually Would Use to Facilitate the Distribution of Getting the Necessary Information Out

- Share Information on the Required Test Scores such as Pre ACT, ACT or SAT

- Implement a Provisional Admissions for the Students Without the Required Test Scores

- Nice Brochure with all the Information about CCP that Could be Mailed Home to Students and Parents

Provisional Admission Quotes

The following are direct quotes from interviews and focus groups:

- **"**We definitely support that there was a provisional admission at Randolph Community College."

- "We have so many students within a few points on their scores to be eligible to take college courses."

- "Many great students are being denied access to college courses because they do have the required test scores."

- "Information is not easily accessible for students or parents. A student friendly website available with updated information."

- A professional brochure to distribute to parents or at informational nights or during interest meetings."

Increase Enrollment High School Student Comment Themes

In Figure 6 are responses from high school students from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding ways to increase enrollment in the college courses through the Career and College Promise Initiative:

- More Information Available for the Students
- A How- To- List on Seeking More Information About the Course Offerings
- Better Communication in Researching Information about CCP

Career Development Facilitator Comment Themes

In Figure 6 are the responses from career development facilitators from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding ways to increase enrollment in the college courses through the Career and College Promise Initiative:

- Work with the Students so that they know to use RCC for a Jumpstart to College
- Updated Website so that is Easy to Navigate and Get Information
- Statistical Data About How Many Four- Year Students Return Back to RCC for Various Work Certifications
- Potential Earnings for the Careers and Certifications Offered through RCC
- Better Communicate of the Information that Already Exists

Changes for CCP High School Student Comment Themes

In Figure 7 are responses from high school students from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding changes for the Career and College Promise Initiative:

- Create Text Reminders of Important Dates
- Group Chat- Collaborate and Study with Peers
- Having Available Tutor when Needed for the College Courses

- Frequent Information Available about CCP

Changes for CCP Career Development Facilitator Comment Themes

In Figure 7 are responses from career development facilitators from both interview and focus groups to questions regarding changes for the Career and College Promise Initiative:

- Add the Provisional Admissions for the Students to Take College Courses

- Better Communication from or with the Course Instructors

- Orientation for the High School Students at the Beginning of Each Semester

- Having a Realistic Perspective of Taking a College Course as a High School Student

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures used a process to bring structure and meaning to the raw data (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Audio files were transcribed along with written field notes, used during analysis of the interviews. For accuracy, transcription data was compared to the field notes and a review of the original audio file. All relevant passages that reflected responses to the focus group questions were examined and assigned as open code (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Finally, the transcript codes were revisited for interpretation of data patterns, including identification of themes from the high school seniors and Career Development Coordinators.

A theme that emerged from the focus group supported the issue of high school seniors graduating without having a clear career goal. The urgency of this matter was described through the lack of available career readiness and skill gap programs in this study for how secondary settings support the utilization of career development at Randolph Community College. Therefore, focus group participants expressed a strong need for explicit instruction and support for this area.

Measures of Improvements

The goal of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* is one approach to addressing local workforce development needs and closing the career readiness gaps. The two measures of improvement to gauge the overall effectiveness and influence of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* focused on increasing the total number of students annually counseled by the career coach from 14% to 20% and increase the number of students enrolled in the Career and College Promise courses from 21% to 32% by June 2017.

There was a slight improvement increasing the total number of students annually counseled by the career coach from 14% to 16% and the increased enrollment in the Career and College Promise courses from 21% to 25%. The measure of improvements was not completely obtained as a result of the restrictions and reduced days that the primary investigator for this study was available to individually meet with students to discuss career goals and the opportunity to take college courses at Randolph Community College. Another issue in the study involved the students not being offered a provisional admissions options to take college courses. Many of the other community college still allow students to take college courses if they do not have the required test scores as long as they have a higher-grade point average. Currently, Randolph Community College does not have this provisional option available to their students to take college courses. The students must demonstrate college readiness on the ACT, SAT, or other standardized assessment to sign up for college courses at Randolph Community College. As a result, of this test requirement at Randolph Community College, there were fewer students eligible for recruitment to take college course that negatively impacted the investigator's abilities to increase the enrollment of students taking college courses to the projected 32% that was initially identified for a gauge to measure improvement.

Conclusion

This is an initial effort in connecting education to a career goal and make learning more meaningful for students which coincides with the data collected during the focus group discussions. Focus group inquiry served as the primary data collection method specifically because of its interactive nature. The discussion among group members was as important as were the individual responses to specific questions since this method offered participants an opportunity to examine and critique the organizing framework on career readiness in a non-threatening matter during the focus groups. The focus group participants identified the importance of career readiness and the availability of taking college courses at Randolph Community College to promote positive adult life roles (e.g., postsecondary education, career development, independent living). The focus groups confirmed the perspective that college and career readiness need to shift secondary school reform to better prepare students for the world of work.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore what are effective measures to create a career development program that will address and close the career readiness gap that exist among high school juniors who live in a rural community since there is currently no program of this nature available in Randolph County. This chapter includes a discussion of major findings and themes revealed through the focus group interviews with the high school seniors and career development coordinators. Also included in the discussion is an explanation of the third PSA cycle and the chapter concludes with a discussion on next steps for the creation of the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program.*

Summary of Findings

The challenge for secondary educators, community colleges, and the community leaders has been to construct a framework to address the workforce and training qualified future workers. The proposed *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* focuses on student-centered outcomes aligned with postschool outcomes such as college and career success. Based on focus group responses, the following implications for practice are suggested in Table 3 for the third cycle of the PDSA Model:

PDSA Explanation and Suggested Next Steps

This study was exploratory in nature. There were two focus groups conducted with high school seniors and career development coordinators in Randolph County that served as the primary data collection method in this study. Participants were recruited from high school seniors who had participated in the Career and College Promise Initiative since their junior year in high school as well as the six Career Development Coordinators who work at one of the six

Table 3

PDSA: Third Cycle

Tool	Cycle: First Try
PLAN	Review the data analysis, themes, and research findings from the focus group discussions with the seniors and Career Development Coordinators.
DO	Identify the program components to include in the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program through Randolph Community College.*
STUDY	Compile and create the operating manual for the Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program for High School Juniors.
ACT	Implement the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program.* Evaluate the effectives of the career readiness program and successfulness to address the skill gap in Randolph County.

local high schools. Both focus group interviews with the high school seniors and career development coordinators lasted for approximately 30 minutes. Several themes that were explored and revealed through the focus groups in this study included the following:

1. There appeared to be a need to increase career resources that are provided for high school students that best support their career goals. Many of the student participants could discuss what college they wish to attend but not a specific career goal or if they completed any courses pertained to their career goal during high school.

2. The student participants expressed a need in understanding the relevance of their course work to their future career and life goals.

3. The student participants as well as career development coordinators perceived that it was important for the students to have their career goals emerged from an awareness of interests, skills, and values through various career development activities and services.

4. Career development coordinators supported the fact that students should graduate from high school with the career planning and management skills necessary to locate and secure employment.

As states have initiated college and career systems, transition practitioners and researchers must engage with secondary colleagues to support readiness for all students (Morningstar, Lombardi, Fowler, & Test, 2017). An essential and initial outcome of this study is the establishment of an organized framework focusing on the preparation of high school students transition to the workforce. The high school participants voiced their concern that there appears to be a real need of improving and providing career development services at the high school level based on the information collected during this study. Therefore, the moderator for the focus

groups would recommend that the next steps would involve creating an operating manual to implement the *Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program* in hopes to address the skill gap in Randolph County and develop career development activities that would lead to better student outcomes, specific post-secondary opportunities, and training programs.

Conclusion

In closing, this study supported that there is a need for more consistency in terms of quality of the career development services that high school juniors receive during high school. Providing career services to help high school students become more prepared to be career and college ready upon graduating from high school remains a significant goal and task for the public-school setting and community members. Student should be aware of the fields available to them and possess the right employable skills to fill job openings in their local communities. Creating a structure to integrate those critical components of a career development program focus on career readiness when working with high school juniors as they are approaching post-secondary transitions from high school should not be only a theory but must receive real application if the workforce needs are to be addressed in many rural communities such as Randolph County. Having a full-time career coach devoted to assisting high school students in identifying a career goal is strongly recommended because of the many responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of the school counselors and career development coordinators especially in rural school districts.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · **www.ecu.edu/ORIC/irb**

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: Ivry Cheeks

CC: Jim McDowelle

Date: 11/16/2017

Re: UMCIRB 17-001086
      The Creation of the Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program at Randolph Community College

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 11/16/2017 to 11/15/2018. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk. Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).
The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form (CDSES)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Focus Group Questions (Career Development Coordinator)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Focus Group Questions (High School Seniors)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Informed Consent Form (RCC CDC)	Consent Forms
Informed Consent Form (RCC HS)	Consent Forms
Problem of Practice Proposal	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Script for Recruitment	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: RANDOLPH COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENDORSEMENT LETTER

RANDOLPH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
629 Industrial Park Avenue, Asheboro, NC 27205-7333

President's Office
Phone: (336) 633-0286

May 14, 2017

East Carolina University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
600 Moye Boulevard
Brody School of Medicine 4N-70
Mail Stop 682
Greenville, NC 27834

Dear East Carolina University IRB:

On behalf of Randolph Community College, I am writing to grant permission for Ivry S. Cheeks, a graduate student at East Carolina University, to conduct her research titled, "The Creation of the Armadillo Career Readiness Skills Gap Program at Randolph Community College: Closing the Career Gap for High School Juniors".

I understand that Ivry S. Cheeks will recruit up to six of our high school students through the Career and College Promise Initiative to participate in a focus group that will last approximately 30 minutes, as well as speak with six of the career development coordinators from one of the local school districts that Randolph Community College collaborates with through the NC Works Career Coach Program. The data collected from the focus group discussions is intended to help with the creation of a career readiness program.

We are happy to participate in this study and contribute to this important research on an original body of work geared towards career readiness in an effort to address the workforce gap in Randolph County.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert S. Shackleford Jr., Ph.D.
President, Randolph Community College

APPENDIX C: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION

TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

<u>REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS</u>
Closing the Career Readiness Skills Gap for High School Juniors
Randolph Community College Pathways to Career Prosperity

March 12, 2018

Ms. Cat Berry
Research Review Committee, Chairperson
Office of Testing and Accountability
Randolph County School System 2222-C S.
Fayetteville Street

Dear Ms. Berry:

My name is Ivry S. Cheeks. I am a graduate student at East Carolina University. I am conducting a study on how to create a career readiness skills gap program for high school juniors. This project will be conducted under the supervision of my dissertation chair, Dr. James McDowelle, who is a professor at East Carolina University as well as Dr. Robert Shackleford, the president at Randolph Community College.

I am hereby seeking your consent to interview six seniors that have been a part of the Career and College Promise Initiative at Randolph Community College for the past two years. Mr. Isai Robledo and Ms. Nancy Cross have agreed to assist me in identifying these students if this request is approved by you. The participants would be asked to take part in a focus group during their lunch for approximately 25 to 30 minutes. The students would be provided lunch by me on the day we meet for the focus group. The responses collected and other data will be kept anonymous and destroy at the completion of this study.

I have provided you with an overview of my research proposal, which includes copies of the measure and consent forms to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letter, which I received from East Carolina University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board. Upon completion of the study, I will provide you with a bound copy of the full research report. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at cheeksi14@students.ecu.edu or (336) 918-4635. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Ivry S. Cheeks

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH PROJECT AGREEMENT

This Research Project Agreement ("Agreement") is entered into and made effective as of the date last signed below by and between the Randolph County School System, (herein referred to as "District") and <u>Ivry Cheeks</u> ("Researcher"), to facilitate research project described in Appendix A, including any modifications or extensions thereof (the "Project"). Researcher and District are each referred to herein as a "Party" and collectively as "the Parties."

In consideration of the mutual promises and covenants contained in this Agreement, and other valuable and good consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which is hereby acknowledged, the Parties agree to the following:

1. Researcher and the District understand that this agreement represents a collaborative effort and is not a joint venture or partnership agreement between the two parties. This agreement does not authorize either party to represent the other in any discussions with third parties or entities.

2. Researcher agrees to comply with all relevant provisions of law, including the provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974 and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, 20 USC§ 1232 g (FERPA), N.C.G.S. §115C-401.2 and related rules and regulations. For purposes of this agreement, FERPA includes any amendments or other relevant provisions of federal law, as well as all requirements of Chapter 99 of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Nothing in this agreement can be construed to allow any party to maintain, use, disclose or share evaluation data or personally identifiable information in a manner not allowed by federal law or regulation. Researcher agrees to take affirmative steps to ensure the confidentiality and security of all student data in a manner that meets or exceeds the requirements of FERPA.

3. The District agrees to inform parents and eligible students of the Project and request permission for students to participate. The district requires active consent by a parent or eligible student, as defined by FERPA, to participate in the Project. Researcher shall ensure that data is not collected from any student for whom consent has not been obtained.

4. Researcher agrees not to re-disclose any personally identifiable information obtained under this Agreement. Researcher will strip any student identifiers from the data and replace them with randomly generated numbers before analyzing the data. All identifiable information will be kept in secure locations and identifiers will be destroyed as soon as they are no longer required. In addition to these data safeguards, the reports prepared for the study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific district, school, teacher, or student. Furthermore, Researcher agrees to destroy all data collected under the agreement and maintained by Researcher when such data are no longer needed for the purpose of the evaluation.

5. Researcher agrees to use the evaluation data obtained under the agreement for no purpose other than for the purposes described for the Project (described in Appendix A). Researcher further agrees that access to evaluation data provided under this agreement will be tightly restricted to only those evaluation staff who are specifically authorized to view the data. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Researcher may produce and deliver to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) a restricted-use file, stripped of school, district, teacher, and student identifiers, for future research purposes.

6. Researcher agrees to require all employees, subcontractors, and agents of any kind working on or providing services relating to the Project to comply with all applicable provisions of FERPA and other federal and state laws with respect to the evaluation data shared pursuant to the agreement.

7. Researcher agrees to require and maintain an appropriate confidentiality agreement from each Project employee, subcontractor, or agent with access to evaluation data.

8. Researcher agrees to maintain all data files obtained under the agreement, including any evaluation data, in a secure physical or digital environment and not copy, reproduce or transmit such data, except as necessary. All copies of data of any type, including any modifications or additions to data from any source that contains evaluation data, are subject to the provisions of the agreement in the same manner as the original information.

9. A restricted-use file will be produced as part of the Project to provide other researchers the opportunity to replicate the study's findings or pursue additional analyses. The restricted-use file will include no student, teacher, school, or district identifiers. Access to the restricted-use file will be limited to only those researchers licensed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to use the data for research purposes only. These researchers are subject to NCES standards for conducting research and protecting data confidentiality. Specifically, the use of these data is protected by federal statutes and regulations; authorized researchers are subject to the laws, regulations, and penalties that apply to use of confidential data held by the Institute of Education Sciences (**IES,** an office of ED).

10. Researcher agrees to destroy all evaluation data and other data collected under the agreement and maintained by Researcher when such data are no longer needed for the purpose of the evaluation or upon delivery of a restricted-use file to the United States Department of Education. Upon destruction of the data, Researcher will promptly certify in writing to the District that this destruction has occurred. Nothing in the agreement authorizes Researcher to maintain evaluation data beyond this time period without the consent of the District, which shall not unreasonably be withheld.

11. Researcher acknowledges that the District's mission is the provision of education, the District has obligations in meeting its mission that are separate and independent of this Agreement, and the District has full control over all matters of instruction. The District agrees to assist Researcher as described in Appendix A and that Researcher

has sole responsibility for methodology, data collection, and analysis related to the Project.

12. Researcher understands that the District may terminate the agreement upon discovery of noncompliance with any applicable federal or state laws, rules, or regulations, or upon determination that evaluation data have been released in a manner inconsistent with the agreement or have not been maintained in a secure manner.

13. The agreement can be modified or amended provided that any such modification or amendment is in writing and signed by all parties. It is agreed, however, that any amendments to laws, rules, or regulations cited here will result in the correlative modification of this agreement, without the necessity for executing written amendment.

14. Neither this agreement nor any rights, duties or obligations described here will be assigned by Researcher without the prior express written consent of the District.

15. All terms and conditions of this agreement are embodied herein. No other terms and conditions will be considered a part of this agreement unless expressly agreed upon in writing and signed by all parties.

16. In the unlikely event that Researcher is required by subpoena or other court order to disclose any evaluation data, Researcher will provide immediate notice of the request to the District and will use reasonable efforts to resist disclosure until an appropriate protective order can be sought or a waiver of compliance with the relevant provisions of the agreement granted.

17. The District has no liability or responsibility for errors or omissions in, or any decisions made by Researcher in reliance upon, any information provided by the District.

18. Researcher agrees that the evaluation data are of a special character, such that money damages might not be sufficient to avoid or compensate the District, its employees, agents, and students for any unauthorized use or disclosure thereof, and that injunctive and other equitable relief would be appropriate to prevent any actual or threatened unauthorized use or disclosure. This remedy can be pursued in addition to any other remedies available at law or in equity, and Researcher agrees to waive any requirement for the securing or posting of any bond.

19. Researcher agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the District, its officials and employees, agents, and subcontractors, from, and defend the District against, any liability or expenses (including reasonable attorneys' fees and costs) arising out of or relating to (1) any unauthorized or unlawful disclosure of evaluation data obtained hereunder by Researcher or (2) any material breach of the agreement by Researcher.

20. Researcher will notify the District promptly upon discovery of any unauthorized use or disclosure of evaluation data and will cooperate with the District in every
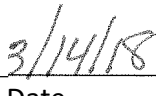
reasonable way to regain control of such evaluation data and mitigate the consequences of its disclosure and preventing its further unauthorized use.

21. The interpretation of this Agreement will be governed by the laws of North Carolina without reference to rules regarding conflicts of law.

22. If any provision of this agreement is deemed by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid or unenforceable, such provision the remaining provisions of the agreement will continue in full force and effect without being impaired or invalidated in any way.

23. This agreement constitutes the parties' entire agreement with respect to the subject matter hereof and supersedes any and all prior statements or agreements, both written and oral.
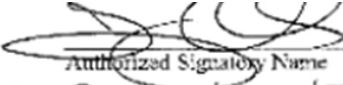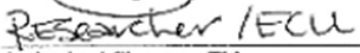
This agreement is effective as of <u>March 14, 2018.</u>

For THE RANDOLPH COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Authorized Signatory Name   Date

<u>Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction</u>
Authorized Signatory Title

For Researcher

Authorized Signatory Name   Date

Authorized Signatory Title

APPENDIX E: CAREER DECISION SELF-EFFICACY SCALE SHORT FORM (CDSES)

I would like additional assistance when identifying a career goal or selecting a career pathway _____ yes   _____ no

Questions					
How much confidence do you have that you could:	No confidence at all	Very little confidence	Moderate confidence	Much confidence	Complete confidence
1. Find information in the library about occupations you are interested in.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Select one major from a list of potential majors you are considering.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Make a plan of your goals for the next five years.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Determine the steps to take if you are having academic trouble with an aspect of your chosen major/career.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Accurately assess your abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Select one occupation from a list of potential occupations you are considering.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Determine the steps you need to take to successfully complete your chosen major / career.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Persistently work at your major or career goal even when you get frustrated.	1	2	3	4	5

9.	Determine what your ideal job would be.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Find out the employment trends for an occupation over the next ten years.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Choose a career that will fit your preferred lifestyle.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Prepare a good resume.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Change majors or career if you did not like your first choice	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Decide what you value most in an occupation.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Find out about the average yearly earnings of people in an occupation.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Make a career decision and then not worry about whether it was right or wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Change occupations if you are not satisfied with the one you enter.	1	2	3	4	5

18.	Figure out what you are and are not ready to sacrifice to achieve your career goals.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Talk with a person already employed in the field you are interested in.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Choose a major or career that will fit your interests.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Identify employers, forms, institutions relevant to your career possibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Define the type of lifestyle you would like to live.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	Find information about graduate or professional schools.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Successfully manage the job interview process.	1	2	3	4	5

25.	Identify some reasonable major or career alternatives if you are unable to get your first choice.	1	2	3	4	5

Taylor, K.M., & Betz, N.E. (1983). Applications of self-efficacy theory to the understanding and treatment of career indecision. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 22*, 63-81.

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS)

Below is a list of questions to guide the focus group discussion. The full focus group meeting is intended to take about 30 - 40 minutes. Part A ~ 10 min, Part B ~ 15 min, Part C ~ 5 min.

PART A: Expectations

A - 1 How can entering students be better informed about or prepared to take courses through the Career and College Promise Initiative?

A - 2 What activities do you believe would be beneficial to help high school juniors identify a career goal?

A - 3 What services do you believe would be beneficial to offer through a career development program for high school juniors?

PART B: Current Classes

B - 1 How informed do you believe you were about the college courses you were eligible to take and Randolph Community College?

B – 2 Was the information about CCP useful and are there any recommendations for improvements?

B - 3 Do you believe that many of your peers know about the free college courses that they can take at Randolph Community College? If not, why?

B - 4 How was your experience of the college course you took this semester? Why?

B - 5 Are there any activities offered through your course or CCP that you found particularly useful?

B – 6 Are there any activities offered through your course or CCO that you found not so useful?

B - 7 Do you believe that you will enroll in additional courses at Randolph Community? If so why or why not?

B – 8 What information do you wish you would have known before beginning your course this semester.

B – 9 What strategies do you believe would be effective in order to increase enrollment in the free college courses offered at Randolph Community College.

PART C: Future Changes

C-1 What would you change about process for the Career and College Promise Initiative to improve your experience in the program?

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

(CAREER DEVELOPMENT COORDINATORS)

Below is a list of questions to guide the focus group discussion. The full focus group meeting is intended to take about 30 - 40 minutes. Part A ~ 10 min, Part B ~ 15 min, Part C ~ 5 min.

PART A: Expectations

A - 1 How can entering students be better informed about or prepared to take courses through the Career and College Promise Initiative?

A - 2 What activities do you believe would be beneficial to help high school juniors identify a career goal?

A - 3 What services do you believe would be beneficial to offer through a career development program for high school juniors?

PART B: Current Classes

B - 1 How informed do you believe the students are about the college courses they are eligible to take and Randolph Community College?

B – 2 Was the information about CCP useful and are there any recommendations for improvements?

B – 3 Are there any activities provided this school year through the CCP program that you found particularly useful?

B – 6 Are there any activities provided this school year through the CCP program that you found not so useful?

B – 8 What information do you wish you would have known before beginning the semester?

B – 9 What strategies should be used to increase enrollment in students taking free college courses offered at Randolph Community College?

PART C: Future Changes

C-1 What would you change about process for the Career and College Promise Initiative to improve the students' experience in the program?

APPENDIX H: INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE

IN A FOCUS GROUP (HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS)

Closing the Career Readiness Skills Gap for High School Juniors
Randolph Community College Pathways to Career Prosperity

Dear Randolph Community College High School Student:

You are being invited to participate in a **research** study titled "*Closing the Career Readiness Skills Gap for High School Juniors: Randolph Community College Pathways to Career Prosperity*" being conducted by Ivry S. Cheeks, a student at East Carolina University in the Educational Leadership department. The goal is to survey six seniors who participate in the Career and College Promise Program. The focus group survey will take approximately 30 -40 minutes to complete. It is hoped that this information will assist in the creation of a career readiness program to provide better advising services to help meet the students' academic needs. Your responses during the focus group will be audio recorded solely for the purposes of transcription. Please know that your responses will be kept confidential and no data will be released or used with your identification attached. Your participation in the research is **voluntary.** You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. There is **no penalty for not taking part** in this research study. Please call Ivry S. Cheeks at (336) 918-4635 for any research related questions or the Office of Research Integrity & Compliances (ORIC) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.
****

PARTICIPANT'S PERMISSION
I _____, consent to participate in this study.
I understand the purpose of the project and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.
 Participant Signature: _____ Date_____

PARENT'S PERMISSION

I give my son/daughter _____, consent to participate in this study. I understand the purpose of the project and wish for my child to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.
Parent Signature: _____ Date_____

APPENDIX I: INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE

IN A FOCUS GROUP (CAREER DEVELOPMENT COORDINATORS)

Closing the Career Readiness Skills Gap for High School Juniors
Randolph Community College Pathways to Career Prosperity

Dear High School Career Development Coordinator:

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled "Closing the Career Readiness Skills Gap for High School Juniors: Randolph Community College Pathways to Career Prosperity" being conducted by Ivry S, Cheeks, a student at East Carolina University in the Educational Leadership department. The goal is to survey all of six of the Career Development Coordinators with Randolph County Schools. The focus group survey will take approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. It is hoped that this information will assist in order to better understand effectiveness of the Career and College Promise Program in meeting your students' needs at Randolph Community College. Your responses during the focus group will be audio recorded solely for purposes of transcription. Please know that your responses will be kept confidential and no data will be released or used with your identification attached. Your participation in the research is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. There is no penalty for not taking part in this research study. Please call Ivry S. Cheeks at (336) 918-4635 for any research related questions or the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

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PARTICIPANT'S PERMISSION

I _____, consent to participate in this study.
I understand the purpose of the project and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.
Participant Signature: _____Date_____

APPENDIX J: PLAN OF STUDY: PDSA WORKSHEET

Tool: **Cycle***:*

PLAN	
DO	
STUDY	
ACT	

APPENDIX K: MY CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Goal:

Current Education:

Required Education:

Current Skills:

Required Skills:

Step 1:

 Target Completion Date:

Step 2:

 Target Completion Date:

Step 3:

Target Completion Date:

Step 4:

 Target Completion Date:

APPENDIX L: MY CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN GUIDELINES

Goal: Your specific, ultimate career goal. This goal should be focused and clear.

Current Education: Your current education. For example, Associates Degree in Business Administration.

Required Education: Any education (formal or informal) needed to reach ultimate goal.

Current Skills/Experience: Any skills or experience you possess that are relevant to your ultimate goal.

Required Skills/Experience: Any additional skills or experience you need for your ultimate career goal.

Step 1: The first step you need to take to reach your ultimate career goal. This could be researching formal or informal education requirements for positions, or researching ways to attain additional skills (i.e. volunteering somewhere to gain necessary experience or skills)

Target Completion Date: Write down a target completion date for each step in the process. Having a set date helps you prioritize and keep yourself on track. It is okay if this date slips, just adjust accordingly. You need to discipline yourself to stay on track with your goals. Remember your ultimate goal! If necessary, print out your plan and keep it somewhere as a daily reminder of where you want to go.

Step 2: Each step should be what you need to do beyond the previous step to help you towards your goal. If you are unsure, what the next step might be, re-visit your career development plan template after you complete a step, and then determine what the next step should be.

Target Completion Date: Again, a date when you expect to complete the goal.
You can add as many steps to the career development plan template as you need for your specific career goal. Revisit your plan after you complete each step and adjust as necessary.