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Kennesaw State University English Majors at Work: Careers in Unexpected Places Description of the Problem

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Kennesaw State University English Majors at Work:

Careers in Unexpected Places Description of the Problem

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements of the

Master of Arts in Professional Writing

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Graduation fluctuations in Bachelor of Arts in English (BAE) programs have been discussed since post-secondary institutions added degree programs to their educational programs. Louis Menand explains in his book *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* that prior to 1869, "students entering higher education could choose between college and professional school—law, medicine, or science, which in the nineteenth century was taught at a school separate from the college" (45). Professional degrees such as law and medical degrees became the second layer of education only after obtaining what was considered general or foundational (first layer) degrees—degrees that we might now recognize as English, sociology, and history. After this separation of foundational and professional degrees, students and institutions desired practical results from the graduates of the majors based on the field of the degree and career-applicable skills. For example, business degrees by the title and curriculum implied that graduates of a business program gained job-applicable skills.

After 1869 and the changes underway in post-secondary education, English scholars (those with different types of English degrees) understood and still understand that the emphasis of post-secondary institutions might mean justifying the English degree or program. According to Amy M. Goodburn, Donna LeCourt, Carrie Leverenz, and David Blakesley, editors of *Rewriting Success in Rhetoric and Composition Careers,* it seems that scholarly research and (careers in academia) became the preferred careers presented to English majors as those careers furthered the field (xi). However, the creation of levels to post-secondary education led English scholars at various post-secondary institutions to the task of preparing students for those varied and substantial careers other than careers in academia by teaching job-applicable writing. Still,

English graduates obtained careers beyond academia, but questions remain: how do their job titles describe the work they do; what skills and abilities did they obtain through their BA in English; and what are the primary job skills as they relate to their BA in English?

Traditional Careers for English Majors

The evolution of post-secondary education in America constantly changes due to scholarly and industry influence. Prior to 1869, students decided their profession, paid their money, and attended school. Students may not have chosen their profession, simply arriving at school to become a more learned individual. However, in 1869, Charles William Eliot, president of Harvard University, introduced the idea of making "the bachelor's degree a prerequisite for admission to professional school" (Menand 45). Students then needed to complete a bachelor's degree prior to attending law, medical, or other professional schools. The new tiered structure of education, as Menand writes, would then be organized on the "basic two systems of general education: the distribution model and the core model" (ch. 1).

Eliot also introduced the elective system, which is different from the core and distribution systems in that it allows students to choose from any course in the curriculum. Using the elective model, students could choose to increase their knowledge without adhering to a set curriculum. The core model is used more for a general education—a liberal, non-specific college education. A student takes courses set by faculty in different departments within the core model. It comprises classes of subjects that "the faculty believes every educated person ought to know" (Menand 27-28). With the distribution model, recently utilized by most colleges as Scott Jaschik writes in his 2016 article, students are required to take a set number of courses from each liberal arts division. Just ten years earlier, Menand explains that, "Ordinarily, it requires students to take three departmental courses in each of the three liberal arts divisions" (25-26). After the inception

of the elective model of education, colleges made changes to the curriculum according to the demand and goals colleges set for their students. Menand explains that one of the targets is the desire for students to receive an education with an aim to make money to live. One of the liberal education degrees caught in the change cycle of the core, distribution, and elective models is the English major. Menand explains that at the time of writing his book published in the year 2010, "Only 4 percent of college graduates major in English" (54). In other words, after the new education model was implemented in 1869, schools chose to provide career-focused bachelor's degree (first layer) models, which seems to have led students later to continue to exclude English as an option for them if they were focused on a specific career-track.

English professor Kevin Brown explores the views of an English degree. In his article "What can they do with an English Major?: Showing Students the Breadth of the Discipline through the Introductory Course to the Discipline and Advising," Brown writes that "in 1956, James P. McCormick argued that the English degree was primarily a feeder into business and industry rather than other subjects" (2). Moving the time period forward to 2009, Brown contends that almost every survey finds large numbers of English graduates working in business and industry, and "almost every survey expresses surprise at that result, as if the previous information did not exist" (3). Brown's view of survey results seems to coincide with the historical information that English graduates have many occupational options including business or industry careers.

Reports of why there are fluctuations in English major enrollments continue into the twenty-first century. In 2017, Kent Cartwright, Sarah Chinn, and Tarshia Stanley, through the Association of Departments of English (ADE), published *A Changing Major: The Report of the 2016–17 ADE Ad Hoc Committee on the English Major* that said:

On the whole, departments are using introductory statements to respond straight-

forwardly to the current crisis in enrollments, often with a headline such as "Why Study

English?" The answers to this question might be roughly grouped into three categories:

skills, career prospects, and disciplinary content (although the order in which these three

are presented varies from Web site to Web site). (3)

Relating skills to career prospects and disciplinary content is not unique to the present usefulness

of the Bachelor of Arts in English (BAE) degree. Twelve years prior to the 2016–17 report of the

ADE Ad Hoc Committee on the English Major, author Tim Lemire lists what he considers the

minimum skills acquired with an English degree. In his book, *I'm an English Major-Now what?:*

How English Majors can Find Happiness, Success, and a Real Job, Lemire explains that,

possessing an English degree gives the bearer the ability to "[a]ssimilate and synthesize large

quantities of information; identify and summarize important points; [and] translate large

concepts into succinct language" (2). Simply put, Lemire sees the skills each BAE graduate

should have acquired while obtaining a degree as the ability to research topics, manage

information, and write about it using proper grammar. Furthermore, the BAE graduate will have

the ability to edit their own work (3). These skills are traditionally transferable to any workplace

and to any industry as Menand writes in *The Marketplace of Ideas.*

Nontraditional Occupations for English Majors

Bachelor of Arts in English students have always graduated with a vast amount of

applicable work-related skills. Goodburn et al. seems to indicate that most students have been

encouraged toward an academic career, believed to be a traditional career for an English major,

but is in fact nontraditional. According to the previous section of this study, traditional careers

for English majors encompass academic, business, and industry careers. After the introduction of

the tiered educational structure in 1869, Menand explains the shift in thought from the English major as an entry into professional occupations to the English major as a scholarly point of study may have been a result of abuses of the elective model system which led to a negative view of liberal arts (ch. 1). This negative view of liberal arts, of which English studies are a part, guided some scholars to focus on research and publishing to further the English discipline. Preserving English as true scholarship became the focus, effectively changing the view of occupations for English studies students (Goodburn et al. xi).

An added consequence of the negative view of liberal arts is that some English majors published articles relating opinions and facts regarding the value of their degrees. Moreover, one BAE graduate hypothesizes about the possible career opportunities missed because of a public lack of understanding or the misunderstanding of her degree. In Carmen Allen's "Personal Statement: A letter to my freshman self: How you're using your English degree," Allen discusses what she learned after graduating, things she wishes she told herself. Allen emphasizes the constant attack on her choice of major by stating, "You'll see it in the way they talk about education. One technician will tell you, 'You don't need to be in the office. You'll make more money as an oil mechanic'" (Allen). She realized that her degree was not considered a viable degree to earn money or, as some put it, to make a living. It is possible this perception supports the idea that a BAE degree is not always seen as a path toward a practical occupation.

Alicia Grzadkowska reflects on her path from her English degree to becoming a journalist. In her article, "An English Degree is Enriching in Other Than Monetary Ways," Grzadkowska asserts that most people with an English degree do not become six-figure earners, and she did not get her English degree as a stepping-stone to another degree (Grzadkowska 1). She wanted a career as a journalist and had worked toward that career since she was ten years

old. Despite working and gaining several years of experience with different positions, she still saw friends with professional-focused degrees but not as much work experience receive higher-paying jobs. Regardless of those financial disappointments, Grzadkowska explains the benefits of an English degree writing, "I'm good at making an argument and actually doing the research to back it up. I know how to function in a library and actually locate material" (2). Grzadkowska argues that her personal accomplishments outweigh the financial benefits because obtaining an English degree is beneficial for her chosen career path. Her perspectives highlight the fact that a person's chosen career is part of the equation when looking at what someone can accomplish with a BAE degree and Grzadkowska saw journalism as a possible career path.

However, Kevin Brown suggests that students majoring in English do not see a path to success other than pursuing a professional degree (1). So too, Goodburn et al. posits that those working in academia in the discipline of English often view the only worthwhile contributions to the English field as research and tenured teaching positions. Furthermore, academics may view only BAE graduates who achieve those professional goals as successful. Goodburn et al. discusses the effects of their impact on students using an example of a student's review of their Conference on College Composition and Communication session. Goodburn et al. explains that the student Mysti Rudd implied that "it never occurred to her that questioning the 'publish or perish' model of success was possible or that the triumvirate of 'teaching, research, and administration' as currently defined may not be the best standard by which to judge one's ability to contribute to the field" (xii). Goodburn et al. establishes academic careers that include the components listed in the triumvirate are often viewed as logical careers for English majors. However, the assumption that academic careers as the logical career choice may be harmful to their students (Goodburn et al. xi). Goodburn et al. illustrates the harmful effects of viewing

academia a the only successful career for an English major by presenting her student's realization that she has the option to choose a career other than academia.

Likewise, this sentiment of hoping students follow their professors' path of academia seems to stifle the vision of career paths for English majors. Brown writes:

> We believe that they [the students] will either follow in our paths and pursue graduate work or that they will teach high school. If we are pushed by students who do not wish to take one of those routes, we mumble something about the wide variety of opportunities that English majors enjoy, occasionally mentioning publishing or public relations work for businesses, but we usually deflect their question and get back to that class preparation or research that demands our time. (Brown 1)

Not being able or willing to offer practicable options to students is perpetuating the misunderstanding of what a BAE student can expect once they graduate. After all, Menand explains that, careers in academia, publishing, and journalism became the new career standard when students began pursuing English degrees, and this continues into the twenty-first century (ch. 1).

The New Traditional Occupations for English Majors

Since English graduates—as mentioned in the section of this study *Traditional Careers for English Majors*—receiving liberal arts educations acquired jobs in almost any industry directly after graduating college, and English graduates—as mentioned in the section *Nontraditional Occupations for English Majors*—furthered the English field through working in academia, in the publishing industry, or in journalism, what are the new traditional occupations for English majors? For the purpose of this study, new traditional occupations are defined as a "combination of the traditional and the nontraditional occupations." That means that new

traditional occupations include both business and industry careers as well as those in academia and journalism; nontraditional occupations include academia, publishing, and journalism. Of course, a percentage of students are expected to follow their professors into academia for the continuation of the English discipline (Brown 2). The expectation that BAE students will one day teach is a possible reason some students enter academia. Some students already view academia as a career option.

Actually, it appears that possible professions for graduates, including English graduates, change based on what colleges perceive will assist their students gain employment. From the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, colleges and industry saw changes as employers sought more applicable work experience from trained college graduates and colleges began focusing on the in-depth education of technology, according to Julie DeGalan and Stephen Lambert in *Great Jobs for English Majors* (ix). Furthermore, DeGalan and Lambert explain that the change of searching for a narrow set of skills was a mistake and writes that "Employers soon realized that what they might have been gaining in depth in these subject areas, they were losing in breadth. The stage was set for the return of the English major" (ix). As documented in the *Traditional Careers for English Majors* section of this study, skills learned while obtaining an English major are valuable to any industry.

While some skills are learned in school, other skills are learned on the job, developed through volunteering, or acquired while participating in a hobby. English majors should know their particular skills and how to articulate them. In their e-book *Great Jobs for English Majors* published in 2000, the general skills listed by DeGalan and Lambert as "the ability to proofread and write, to perform computations, to think critically, and to communicate effectively" (16).

The specific skills they cited included "[c]omputer programming, drafting, language translating, and copyediting" (16).

Depending on the job, a BAE graduate needs to understand what skills employers are looking for based on job postings or advertisements, often referred to as job ads, and how to highlight those skills during an interview. According to DeGalan and Lambert, "A common complaint of employers is that many candidates didn't take advantage of the interview time, didn't seem to know why they were there or what they wanted" (82). Candidates did not know what skills they could bring to the job or did not know how their skills connected to the job for which they were applying. It is possible that candidates could not articulate why their set of skills would be valuable to the job or the employer.

DeGalan and Lambert continue their quest to help English students by discussing job titles available to English majors. DeGalan and Lambert focused on editing, publishing, reporting, research, and creative writing, which includes lyricist, songwriters, and poets, even providing job titles related to advertising and public relations. They also mention minimal business administration positions in public office, state and local governments, higher education, and non-profit organizations (197-218). The preceding sentences list jobs and industries available to BAE students. With the addition of technical writing as a more visible occupation for English studies students, other industries are also on the list. Technical writing expands the list of possible industries to include medical, technology (software), mechanical/electrical, and more (221-22). So, the "*traditional careers for English majors*"—jobs in almost any industry— and the "*nontraditional occupations for English majors*"— academia, publishing, and journalism—all continue to be viable for BAE graduates.

The *Evolution of Careers for English Majors* section explains the changes in the views of occupations or careers available to English majors once they complete their degree. Additionally, the *Evolution of Careers for English Majors* section of this study discusses how career paths of BAE students and the understanding that those paths have changed multiple times since 1869 and the impact on the view of career paths for English majors. This study has not yet explored how institutions are preparing their students for careers once they graduate and what careers the students obtained as a graduate of a BAE program.

Chapter 2: Purpose of the Study

This study will serve as a scale by which Kennesaw State University (KSU) can evaluate its ever-growing BAE program, which graduated fifty students in spring 1986 according to the *Kennesaw State College 1990-1991 Fact Book* and ninety-one in spring of 2018 according to the *Kennesaw State University 2017-2018 Fact Book*. Professors can use the information to present potential and current students with options for employment and career paths as well as use the information to build their classroom curriculum. As recent as 2018, KSU Assistant Professor Lara Smith-Sitton and MAPW student Shannan Rivera published, "Why Writing Matters: Helping Students Rethink the Value of English and Writing Studies." Herein they discussed a pedagogical approach to sharing the value of English studies degrees, helping "students to better understand the needs of today's employers and critically rethink how they will reach their personal and professional goals" ("Why Writing Matters").

This capstone includes data from an IRB study entitled "English Majors at Work: Careers in Unexpected Places" and will continue to explore the careers English majors are finding— particularly careers that are nontraditional. Building from the question, "What can I do with an English degree," the study focuses on extending the conversation surrounding marketable skills obtained by KSU BAE program graduates answering research questions that include: How do their job titles describe the work they do? What skills and abilities did they obtain through their BA in English? What are the primary job skills as they relate to their BA in English?

Chapter 3: Literature Review

As previously mentioned in the *Evolution of Careers for English Majors* section of this manual, Menand chronicles the evolution of the tiered college education, which led to changes in liberal arts majors and the understanding of careers attainable after graduation. The Bachelor of Arts in English is a liberal art. The changes in perceived careers for English majors were also explained in the *Evolution of Careers for English Majors* section of this study. However, the changes regarding the English major's preparation for employment after graduation has not been discussed. The following section reviews the literature surrounding institutions' attempt to assess BAE graduate's preparedness to obtain employment.

Writing as a Part of English Studies

In 2010, English scholars Deborah Balzhiser and Susan H. McLeod analyzed data in "The Undergraduate Writing Major: What Is It? What Should It Be?" that was collected by the Committee on the Major in Rhetoric and Composition established by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). The Committee on the Major in Rhetoric and Composition (hereinafter the "Committee") was founded in 2005 "to document different majors in composition and identify 'prototypic majors and their development'" (qtd. in Balzhiser and McLeod 415). By sending questionnaires to education institutions and scouring websites of higher education institutions, the Committee compiled data about different majors in composition from the years 2005 to 2008 (Balzhiser and McLeod 416).

An analysis of the accumulated data presented a total of sixty-five institutions housing sixty-eight different liberal arts composition or writing-related programs. English departments housed most of these majors. English was the second most frequent title for a major whereas

writing was the most frequent title. Since writing was the most frequent title, Balzhiser and McLeod focused on examining writing programs.

Two institutions were chosen to be studied as models for the many writing majors: "a liberal arts writing" program "within the English Department" of Millikin University (MU) and a professional/rhetorical writing program within "the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Rhode Island" (URI) (Balzhiser and McLeod 419). Both MU and URI required a foundational course that dealt with the study of the craft of English and composition. The model universities, MU and URI also presented set paths for students and goals for the universities' writing programs. Furthermore, the model programs required portfolios as the capstones to conclude the students' education. However, the writing programs at MU and URI contrasted with most of the programs researched by the Committee. Using the data gathered, Balzhiser and McLeod revealed several courses that were widely used by most programs, but the curriculums did not provide foundational courses nor set paths or reason as to why the courses should be taken. These oversights of congruity and progression in regards to the design of the writing majors are echoed by English professor Dominic Delli Carpini in his article "Re-Writing the Humanities: The Writing Major's Effect upon Undergraduate Studies in English Departments" when he states, "The undergraduate writing major has no single shape; it is, rather, an amorphous and still-developing construction that has varied missions, purposes, and course requirements" (16). Nevertheless, he posits that students who were a part of other humanities majors saw the benefits of the professional writing courses as did the professors. The professors of professional writing received feedback from their students that the professors prepared and provided students with writing skills useful for future internships and careers.

There is no doubt that the information gathered by the Committee and analyzed by Balzhiser and McLeod answered questions (discussed in subsequent sentences) related to teaching job-applicable writing in post-secondary classrooms. It is known and accepted that writing programs are still forming in different institutions. Additionally, there are different views as to what a writing program should be, and scholars believe that writing programs need more definition. However, Balzhiser and McLeod did not discuss the changes of the English major nor did they evaluate the graduates of writing or English programs and their application of education to employment as it was not a part of their study. They did offer a suggestion that a consensus of learning outcomes should be explored (430). As Menand argues, the transferability from degree to employment became a concern for liberal arts majors in the late 1900s after professional degrees became the second layer of institutional education. It seems this continues into the 2000s.

With the intention of learning more about the professional and academic lives of their alumni and as part of the program's yearly internal assessment, during 2009 through 2010, Christian Weisser and Laurie Grobman surveyed graduates of the Bachelor of Arts in Professional Writing at the Berks campus of Penn State University. After sending surveys and reviewing the data, they chose twelve respondents to receive follow-up questions. These follow-up surveys "asked questions about job searches and advancement" and "the alumnis' use of rhetoric in the workplace" (47). They then displayed the survey results of writing majors in their paper "Undergraduate Writing Majors and the Rhetoric of Professionalism" where they explain, "Our respondents' job descriptions and duties did not fit into neat, preconceived categories, but were instead much more varied and wide-ranging than we had imagined" (48). The occupations obtained by the graduates of their undergraduate English studies writing program were wide-

ranging, which is in-line with the new traditional occupations of English majors discussed in this study. Plus, the survey helped Weisser and Grobman better understand what their students' perceptions were as to what they need to succeed as professionals.

One such known issue, as stated in the previous section of this study, is the disconnect between the major and the sequence of its required courses. Balzhiser and McLeod took a deeper look at the two most prevalent types of majors at most academic institutions illustrated by the model majors at MU and URI. They argue that most liberal arts writing programs mimic literature majors with writing courses added while some professional writing majors include technology-related courses (422). The writing major is still being defined, with literature or writing as its core. Regardless of which writing major is reviewed, the issue is still the lack of foundational courses and a set and rational path for the courses before reaching the required capstone.

In their article "Writing and Rhetoric Majors, Disciplinarity, and Techne," authors J. Blake Scott and Lisa Meloncon assert the urgent need to create more program models that can and should be reproduced. These models can be sources of information for other institutions as Scott and Meloncon acknowledge that there are problems associated with the process of designing a writing program. Many problems are due to factors that influence the structure of a new program across the board of institutions: faculty expertise, current programs, current courses, and other resources such as, technology, space, and budget (33). Balzhiser and McLeod posit that the difficulty comes with faculty who are feeling the resistance of the changing tide; as the interest in writing increases, the interest in literature seems to decrease (423). However, Delli Carpini seems sympathetic to the changes, stating that students' "native desire to consider the larger human function of writing; it is they who have driven us back to our disciplinary roots,

forcing us to consider the place of undergraduate writing instruction within other humanistic pursuits" (17). The thought of professionalizing students and preparing students for workplace writing is a large part of the reason writing has become a needed, valued, and popular part of English majors. Delli Carpini explains, "In most cases, the practical, career-oriented facets of the programs get center stage, speaking to the difficult question that has increasingly plagued English studies and other liberal arts programs as the demographic of college students has shifted dramatically toward career-based educational goals: 'what will you do with that major?'" (16). Delli Carpini eloquently identifies the need to balance the aims of traditional English studies programs with modern writing program initiatives.

Professor Michelle Smith and graduate student Michelle Costello recognize a possible problem. In their article "English Majors Are Professionals, Too: Liberal Arts and Vocation in the English Writing Major," Smith and Costello concede that English was once seen as an impractical major and propose a different issue: students are unaware of what an English major can provide them in terms of an occupation. For English majors "job titles for writers often do not contain the word 'writing,'" (194). In fact, in the article "What Are English Majors for?," Thomas P. Miller and Brian Jackson acknowledge that literacy studies or the BAE major is less appealing to students because the perceived practicality of earning wages to pay for school or earn a living is not readily apparent (694).

Bachelor of Arts in English Programs

Another problem recognized by Balzhier and McLeod is the difficulty in designing "a first-class major in a department where composition is considered to be a second-class subject" (424). In addition, Miller and Jackson remind the readers that the "vocationalism of the 1980s contributed to the decline of BAs from English" (691). It is no wonder that at some point English

and other related courses were once seen as courses that only provided assistance to other majors. Moreover, Delli Carpini quoted a student who shared that English was helpful to him and the significance of the skill can be viewed as useful to everyone, not specifically for a student majoring in writing. A student reflects on his writing experience as, "Without a doubt, [the writing courses] have influenced the way in which I write and the way I read any literature. For instance, if I'm reading and I see that the author has used a dash, I can denote different meanings. It's almost as if having studied the formula for writing, I can translate it into all facets of reading, writing, and teaching" (qtd. in Delli Carpini 26). English studies courses, whether writing or composition and rhetoric, are useful. Due to the techniques learned, passages become easier to understand. Likewise, it becomes easier to write a sentence with more intention. Reading to understand and writing to be understood are useful tools.

Brown hypothesizes "that most professors do not know what their graduates do after they leave their institution" (1). He asserts that professors learn about their students' careers and then adjust the courses and conversations with current students to help them visualize their prospects after graduation (1). This suggestion is viewed as an individual or institutional challenge or goal. In fact, Brown presents the view that scholars believe that the English degree is already practical, but students do not know it (4). He suggests that introductory courses will not alter the curriculum of the program but should have assignments that broaden students' views on the English studies and its uses (6). This introductory course of broad career possibilities might present choices to students other than attending graduate school for a professional degree or becoming a professor to, in turn, create other professors (qtd. in Brown 2). In his article Brown writes:

If we look at the statistics (at least the few that have been collected and published), we can see that few English majors pursue either of these routes. Instead, they work in a variety of fields and use their degrees in ways that most professors cannot have imagined. Such information should compel us to change parts of our curriculum, especially our introductory course to the major, and the way we advise students, both formally and informally (2).

Brown followed his own advice and surveyed graduates and what jobs they obtained after graduating. The survey asked questions and presented answers to what students planned to do after graduating with an English degree. Brown's study is applicable today. English majors continue to astound the populace by obtaining jobs in career paths that most people do not readily connect to an English degree.

Allison Cooke, in her article "Anything can Happen with an English Degree" cites specific examples that reveal the professional paths of students with English degrees that align with the idea of "unexpected careers." Although it is a graduate degree, a professional degree, it is in the medical field. Still, the English degree is relevant. Cooke highlights Ryan Nobles, an anesthesiologist and assistant professor of anesthesia and perioperative medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina. Cooke asserts that Nobles's English degree taught him to listen for the theme of a patient's story, which helps him make diagnoses. Cooke also states that "an English degree opens possibilities for a person to individualize and make perfect whatever career path one chooses" (2).

Furthermore, the new traditional or nontraditional opportunities for English majors are understood more in skills utilized and requested within the job's industries than in the job's title. When I searched for technical writing positions on *Indeed*, *Glassdoor*, and *Ziprecruiter*, results

of the searches brought forth job titles such as "technical writer and marketing assistant," "technical proposal writer," and "entry level business analyst." The job descriptions request experience with no degree to BA degrees in English, technical writing, journalism, technical communications, instructional design, or their equivalents. The industries range from automotive, education, science equipment manufacturing, and tourism. Most of the skills required are communication or writing using various software and knowledge or a willingness to learn the industry. It leads to the conclusion that English majors must know their skill sets and which industries they would prefer to pursue careers in.

Kennesaw State University BAE

Now that some institutions and BAE graduate programs and their graduates have been reviewed, the focus will turn to Kennesaw Junior College, which was founded in 1963 with a focus on liberal arts but did not receive its first students until 1966, as written by Stephen Braden and Deborah Mixson-Brookshire in *Knowledge, Success, Understanding: A Text for the First Year Experience* (13). The Division of Humanities was one of the founding Academic Divisions. In 1977, Kennesaw Junior College was renamed Kennesaw College, conferring its first degrees in 1980 (17). Divisions morphed into schools and departments in 1983. One department was the English department and conferred during this transition of what became Kennesaw State University. In the year 1996, Kennesaw State College became Kennesaw State University and graduated forty-five BAE students in the spring, according to the "Our History" on the *Kennesaw State University College of Humanities and Social Sciences* webpage.

In order to take a comprehensive view of the program from which we will interview a sampling of the graduates, we must take a look at the humanities. For instance, in the Human Indicators: a project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 2017 report, *Bachelor's*

Degrees in the Humanities, declined between 2012 and 2015. Specifically, "English degrees fell by 8,755" contrasted by the rise of 3,770 communications degrees, "the only discipline in the humanities to experience an increase" (Human Indicators, *Bachelor's Degrees*). In the Human Indicators: a project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 2016 report, *English Language and Literature Degree Completions,* it was found that "English language and literature (ELL) [degrees] experienced a surge in the 1960s" (Human Indicators, English language and literature). However, ELL degrees declined in the 1980s. The rise and fall of degree completions did not stop in those two decades. In the 1990s, the number of English degrees conferred increased but decreased again after 2009 (Human Indicators, English language and literature).

ELL degrees declined during the 80s, but Kennesaw State College saw an increase from 1986 through 1988 (see table 1A). ELL degrees showed a decrease in the beginning of the 1990s but showed significant increases during 1995 and again in 1996 when Kennesaw College became Kennesaw State University (see table 1A). From 2001 to 2018, the English degree conference at Kennesaw State University shows continuous fluctuations (see table 1B).

During 2015 when seventy-four degrees were conferred at KSU, Shannan Rivera was one of the students who graduated with her BAE. She changed her major from English Education to English after talking with English majors and discovering that "English majors could do anything that involved words" (Smith-Sitton and Rivera 5). Her revelation is an example of Brown's assertion that some students do not understand what they can do with an English degree, but information can help an undergraduate student see options available to them as an English student.

After Rivera obtained her BAE, she graduated with her Master of Arts in Professional Writing from KSU. Since obtaining her master's degree in the year 2018, her article with KSU

Lara Smith-Sitton, "Why Writing Matters: Helping Students Rethink the Value of English and Writing Studies" sought to learn better ways to inform other students of the value of an English degree by illustrating that students need to be informed of the opportunities for English majors ("Why Writing Matters). I, too, see the value of an English degree and the need to learn about the students who graduate from KSU's BAE program to better inform students of their options. As Brown suggests, learning about what English majors do once they graduate will assist professors inform students of their options.

"Kennesaw State University English Majors at Work: Careers in Unexpected Places" study will coincide with Smith-Sitton and Rivera's paper and other scholarly papers by focusing on the nonacademic jobs acquired by KSU's BAE (an English study) graduates, the skills they use while working those jobs, and the skills they learned in KSU's BAE program. The information acquired will be used to help not only KSU BAE professors but also help professors of English studies to understand professional goals of students and create, alter, and/or strengthen their courses.

Chapter 4: Methods and Methodology

The goal of the "Kennesaw State University English Majors at Work: Careers in Unexpected Places" study was to learn more about the skills and abilities of KSU English majors and connect those to their job titles and responsibilities. Using a mixed methods approach—secondary research and primary research in the form of interviews—the project has three governing research questions. The study attempts to answer: First, how do their job titles describe the work they do? Second, what skills and abilities did they obtain through their BA in English? Third, what are the primary job skills as they relate to their BA in English?

The secondary research involved conducting a thorough literature review to understand the jobs and positions typically held by English majors. Then, in order to gain more information about KSU graduates, through an IRB-approved protocol, I conducted interviews with a sampling of KSU graduates. This study will utilize data of interview questions compiled into tables in order to qualitatively analyze interviews to gain valuable insight into the connection of a BAE degree as to the preparedness for a variety of jobs outside of academia, publishing, and journalism. In a semi-structured interview process, participants are allowed to answer open-ended questions instead of choosing from a list of answers. The case study model was effective because it allowed provocation of information from individuals from a range of positions. In addition, it served the scope of the project and research questions.

In "Interviewing as a data collection method: A critical review," Alshenqeeti writes, "I would argue that using more than one data collection instrument would help obtaining richer data and validating the research findings" (43). Although Alshenqeeti wrote that statement in response to observation as an added interviewing tool to conduct a qualitative study, observations were not possible in the Kennesaw State University "English Majors at Work:

Careers in Unexpected Places" due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Face-to-face interviews as well as telephone interviews conducted on campus and in a secure location were a part of the original study. However, face-to-face interviews were restricted by the IRB; therefore, this study relied on telephone interviews. In addition, holistic interviews were not possible because a second observer/listener was not present while interviewing the participants.

Kennesaw State University Population Sampling

In order to gain reliability for this interview, I established the participants as a sampling of the Kennesaw State University population, specifically English majors. The Office of Institutional Research and Information Management documents *Kennesaw State University 2005-2006 Fact Book* and Meihua Zhai writes *Kennesaw State University 2017-2018 Fact Book* that between 18,556 and 35,846 students were enrolled per year during the years 2005 and 2017 (34; 17). Each year during 2005 through 2017, between 292 and 337 students declared English as their major (The Office of Institutional Research 99; Zhai 35).

I selected possible alumni participants by requesting suggestions from KSU professors representing a sampling of the KSU population who graduated from KSU's BAE program between the years 2005 and 2018 and who do not hold a job with an academic institution, news outlet, or publishing house. Suggested participants were excluded from the study based on these occupations because the jobs listed are considered expected acquisitions of BAE graduates. Once I received the names of potential participants, I reviewed their occupations when provided or conducted research on LinkedIn to ascertain their current positions. As stated above, candidates who held jobs with an academic institution, news outlet, or with a publishing house were excluded. Ten candidates were suggested. Two candidates were eliminated because they entered graduate school after they obtained their BAE instead of entering the workforce. Potential

participants who met the criteria were contacted for interview availability. Emails were sent to suggested participants to request their participation in the study. Five candidates did not respond to the email, but three candidates responded to the email.

Once graduates agreed to participate, informed consent agreements were sent, signed, and collected prior to establishing an interview date and time. Interview dates and times were then confirmed, and participants shared their phone numbers. Before beginning the interview, participants were invited to choose an alias in order to maintain their privacy and anonymity. During interviews, participants were addressed by their alias and were referred to by their alias in the results. Interviews were not recorded in order to make the candidates comfortable with speaking to me about their education and employment. Notes were taken during the interview and then maintained in a password protected, secure electronic folder. I interviewed three KSU English Department alumni, and each interview lasted between thirty and sixty minutes.

Interview Questions

To collect data to gain answers to the overarching research questions for this capstone project there were nine questions: seven interview questions and two concluding questions. The seven interview questions that answer the research questions about job titles and skills are:

- What job titles have you held in the past five years?
- What job titles do you use on your resume?
- Do you use online career sites? If so, which online career sites do you use?
- What skills or abilities do you recall were contained in the job ad or mentioned in the hiring process for the position in which you are currently employed?
- What skills do you use during your current job generally and daily?

– What skills and abilities did you learn or hone in the KSU English degree program that you use in your current position?

Participants were asked to further reflect on their education in the BAE program and their perspective of its correlation to their workplace. In order to learn about this insight, participants were asked two questions conclude this case study:

– What additional details about the skills and abilities learned or honed during your English degree program at KSU or that you use in your professional life could you share that you see as valuable to professors in developing their courses and preparing students for careers?

– What would be valuable for students considering or currently in English degree programs that you have learned either while at KSU or in your professional life since graduating?

In an attempt to provide ways to improve upon current studies involving adjusting the KSU BAE program and providing its students with information as to what may await them once they graduate, these questions were asked at the end of the interview.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

Data Collection

Data was collected using an interview matrix. Prior to the interview, a script was read to the participants to ensure they understood the interview process and the purpose of the study. Using a script to thank the participants and explain the purpose of the study was also an opportunity to create a relaxing atmosphere for the interviewee to openly answer questions. Another way to make the interviewee feel comfortable was to ask questions in a conversational manner. This approach provided an opportunity for discussion between the interviewer and the participant, which allowed for detailed information beyond just simple response to the questions. The interview matrix was useful during the interview because it was setup with a section that included the typed questions and an adjacent space to respond. Furthermore, there was less time to prepare as we moved from question to question. The transition was nearly seamless as I allowed the participant to exhaust their thoughts verbally. Then, I would find a natural break in the conversation to move to the next to question. I would also repeat something that the participant said in their answer and use that portion of the answer to move to the next question. This form of questioning ensures that the participant knows that the interviewer is interested in what the participant says.

After the interviews concluded, I reviewed the notes and built tables in which to place the data. The first table was built to view the answers to the first two interview questions focusing on job titles the participants have held since 2016 and the job titles they use on their resume. These interview answers could help to answer the research question: How do their job titles describe the work they do?

The next three tables were built to see the raw data compiled in a table before subsequent tables were created with the data organized for specific purposes. Horizontal headers for columns were created based on participant aliases. Separate vertical headers were created for three different tables based on the interview questions. One table focused on skills requested by the participants' employers (see table 3). Another table concentrated on skills utilized by the participants while working (see table 4), and a table was dedicated to skills learned by the participants in KSU's BAE program (see table 5). Skills were then gleaned from the interview matrix using the verbiage of the participants.

Data Analysis of Participants

Reviewing the collected data of the participants, they verbalized a total of twelve different job titles they have held from 2016 to the present. Interestingly, only one of those titles identified would fall into the expected or traditional job title of an English major. This position was an editor title. The job titles span from administrative to business, technical writing, and project management. All of the job titles could be related to any industry, business, medical, technology, automotive, or otherwise. Examining only the job titles provides little description about what the participant's do on the job (see table 2).

Skills requested by employers, skills utilized by the participants while working, and skills learned by the participants in KSU's BAE program were requested of the participants during the interview and verbalized differently by each participant (see tables 3, 4, and 5). At first glance, it would seem that the skills are different, but upon closer examination, some of the skills are similar but described with different terms. For example, a student would state "writing" as a skill while another student would state articulation "in writing" as a skill. Writing is the broader skill, and articulation in writing is a characteristic of writing. The first three tables list all of the skills

individually expressed by the participants as an answer to each interview question. In the table, the vertical header is related to the interview questions: Skills Requested represents the skills or abilities contained in the job advertisement or mentioned in the hiring process for the position in which the participant is currently employed (see table 3). Skills Used represents skills generally and daily utilized during the participants' current job (see table 4). KSU BAE Skills represents what skills and abilities learned or honed in the KSU English degree program and utilized in the participants' current position (see table 5).

As I reviewed table 3, which is comprised of skills relayed to me by participants, I noticed that some of skills requested were detailed. For instance, instead of saying "communication skills," the employer specifically asked for "speaking, speech clarity, speech recognition, oral comprehension, and oral expression." *Merriam-Webster* defines communication as "a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior." I did not include writing as a part of communication, because the participants spoke of writing and communication individually. Perhaps this is why the job advertisement did not list communication but listed specific components of communication. However, table 3, which include skilled utilized on the job, and table 4, which include skills learned in KSU's BAE program can also be consolidated. Consolidating skills such as speaking, speech clarity, speech recognition, oral comprehension, and oral expression into communication and written expression, context switching (writing), articulation (writing), and writing (different platforms—technical and creative) into writing unifies the skills tables and condenses the data. Condensing of data is also done so as not to skew the data analysis of the skills. For example, if I count the communication skills individually, I would count five skills instead of one skill. So, if there were ten skills requested and five of those skills were condensed into the heading of

communication, then six skills were requested. In order to analyze the data set of skills by the Data Collection Results RQ2, the skills in table 3, table 4, table 5 were conflated. Therefore, table 3, table 4, and table 5 became table 6, table 7, and table 8.

From what the participants recalled, four skills requested by employers were shared by at least two participants—communication, detail oriented, research, and writing. As for the job skills used, five skills were used by at least two of the participants—communication, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, research, and writing, while one skill was used by all three participants—writing. At least two participants shared four skills that they asserted were learned in the KSU BAE program—communication, critical thinking, presenting, and writing. Communication and critical thinking were shared by three participants.

Concluding Interview Questions Answered

Conclusive interview questions addressed participants' suggestions to faculty and students of KSU's BAE program. The first question asked the participants to reflect upon their time as students in the KSU's BAE program and relate it to their experience in the workplace in order to provide suggestions to the professors of KSU's BAE program regarding possible improvements to courses. One student suggested adjustments to courses while another student requested a slight adjustment to the program structure. A third student suggested changes that could be used to alter the program structure or incorporated into courses. Below the specifics of the suggestions to help prepare students for their careers are set forth in greater detail. Suggested adjustments to courses included:

– Provide an "array of mediums," such as providing assignments based on a variety of short stories and novels instead of a class focusing only on novels or only short stories (Opal).

- Within courses, students should be required to work on both short and large projects, both independently and in groups (Opal).

- Peer review and revision should be built into some assignments (Opal).

- More oral presentations should be required of students (Opal).

Suggested adjustments to the program:

- Careers in Writing should be taught early in the program and should be a required course.

- The BAE program should have more structure (Tom):

    o Careers in the Literary Arts should be required of students before they are allowed to choose which classes they will take (Tom).

    o Technical Writing should be required of students to give them some business writing experience (Tom).

    o Internships should be required to give students more workplace experience (Tom).

- More practical courses should be offered—"more pragmatic skills to expand and market the students" (Sapphire).

Suggested adjustments to both English courses and KSU's BAE curriculum:

- Present other classes such as technical writing (Sapphire and Tom).

- Present other skills within class work, such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and other software (Sapphire).

The second question asked the participants to again reflect on their time within KSU's BAE program and their experience in the workplace and offer suggestions to potential and current BAE students that may help them with their education or career. Again, each participant had

their own view of what a current or potential student may need to know and expect with an English degree from KSU; what students should know and demand of themselves.

Suggestions from study participants to current and future students of KSU's BAE program:

- "You can go anywhere. Everybody has their own natural set of talents." It doesn't matter what industry you are in; it has to be able to communicate to its stakeholders or customers (Opal).

- "It [an English degree] doesn't put you in a box like some degrees. It opens doors for you" (Opal).

- "You have to be flexible going from academic to professional" (Tom).

- Gain an in-depth understanding of how to use more software (Sapphire).

- "Have your job, but don't be afraid to take what comes at you. Take any opportunities" (Tom)

- "Don't be so much in your head, that you don't do the internship." It was a lot harder to figure out and make connections outside of school instead of taking advantage of the opportunities that KSU has to offer (Tom).

Participants provided suggestions for English courses, KSU's BAE program, and students. It is important to remember that the participants entered and graduated from KSU's BAE program during different years. Also, since the participants graduated from the program, English courses, the BAE program, and KSU's list of extracurricular activities may have changed. It is also important to notice that the participants offered advice that suggest students become proactive in their education and workplace career during their time as a BAE student.

Foreseen and Unforeseen Biases

During any study, the researcher must recognize their own biases. As defined by John W. Creswell in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and mixed Method Approaches*, bias is how the researcher's "interpretation is shaped by their background" (202). For instance, my interpretation of the data might include the fact that I have a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in e-business and have a career as a technical writer. As a result, the interview questions were written prior to the interview in order to mitigate my bias as a researcher. However, during the interviews, there were times that I identified with the participant and made it a point not to interject my opinion because I did not want to persuade them to continue or stop their path of thought. My personal bias was something that I accounted for and practiced excluding from the interview. Even the collecting of notes and compiling data was done in manner to collect and present the responses without bias. As I compiled and presented the data in tables, I detailed the process to the reader. Consequently, they could then decide if my process was sound.

What was unexpected was that I did not foresee the biases of the participants. For their own reasons, perhaps protecting their reputation, reputation of their employer, or the reputation of KSU, participants displayed their bias by being hesitant when answering the questions. It was up to me as a researcher to notice when a bias was affecting the responses and mitigate the effects by giving participants time to thoughtfully understand the questions and provide answers, encouraging follow-up and regrouping and providing clarification to questions.

For example, during one interview, the participant kept pausing mid-sentence and redirecting the statement. Thus, I chose to stop the interview and remind the participant that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. I simply wanted to find the truth. The participant

also relayed a fear of saying the wrong thing. Again, I reminded the participant the interview was not recorded, and no personal information would accompany the participant's statement. Another participant actually stopped in the middle of an answer because of the comfort level and apologized for rambling. Additionally, the participant stated they did not know what I was looking for. I told the participant that I was looking for the truth, that there were no right or wrong answers.

The interview questions sought information to answer the predominant research questions. The information provided within the interviews was compiled into tables. These tables made visible the extracted interview data, and the explanation of the extracted information provides clarity to the tables.

Research Question 1

The first research question attempts to answer how the job titles of participants of the study describe what they do. Data in table 2 gathered from information from the first interview questions, data in table 3 comprised of information from the fourth interview question, and the information gleaned from the second and third interview questions were reviewed for research question 1. Using information from the first four interview questions I was able to quantitatively and qualitatively answer the first research question: How do their job titles describe the work they do?

One hundred percent of the participants have a profile on the LinkedIn job search board. One participant indicated having a profile on Indeed in the past; however, the profile has not been used in several years. Only one participant does not actively use the official job titles on the LinkedIn job board and resume. Based on the titles listed in table 1 and the calculation of

equation (1), this brings the data to a percentage of 66.66 percent of the participants using their

official job titles on their LinkedIn profiles and resumes.

Percentage of respondents using their official job title on their resume and job search board?

$$X\% = \text{Total Job Titles participants posted on Job Search Board/Official Job Titles} \quad (1)$$

$$8/12 = 66.66\%$$

The calculations of the percentage of skills requested by the employer to skills used by

the participant and skills learned in the KSU BAE program are derived from the tallies shown in

table 9 (see table 9). Prior to creating table 9, participants were asked to recall what job skills

their employers requested either in a job advertisement or verbally during their job interview.

Only one participant still had the original job advertisement and provided it to me for review. I

will not cite the advertisement to maintain the anonymity of the participant. Since most of the

information was provided from the memory of the participants, the information provided may

not be accurate.

Research Question 2

Accuracy is also a factor when participants are asked to recall skills they learned in the

BAE program that are most useful in completing their daily job tasks. Study participants were

asked, what skills and abilities they learned or honed in the KSU English degree program that

you use in your current position. Answers to this question were gleaned from the interview

matrix and compiled in table 5 and then refined to consolidate terms like writing to articulate and

writing for different audiences into the single term writing in order to organize the skills using

uniform terms. The information in table 8 helps to qualitatively answer the research question:

What skills and abilities did they obtain through their BA in English?

According to table 8, collectively, participants identified at least fifteen skills through their BA in English. These skills are coding, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, editing, empathy, gather data, interpret data, organization, presenting, proofreading, research, strategizing, website editing, and writing.

Research Question 3

Accuracy continues to be a factor when participants are asked to recall the skills they learned in the courses within KSU's BAE program would relate to their current job skills. Thirty-eight total skills were counted using table 9. Since it was established in table 6, table 7, and table 8 that participants Opal, Sapphire, and Tom recounted the skills for those tables, table 9 used headers that focused on attribution of the skill. In other words, the header "Job Skills Requested" is attributed to the job skills the participants remembered were requested by the employers. The header "Job Skills Used" is attributed to the skills the participants recall are utilized daily in the performance of their jobs. The header "KSU BAE Skills Learned" are attributed to the skills the participants remember learning in their courses within KSU's BAE program. Table 9 was also reconfigured to list the same skills side-by-side in their individual columns. Organized in this manner, it is easy to see the common skills for "Job Skills Requested", "Job Skills Used", and "KSU BAE Skills Learned". The third research question asks: What are the primary job skills as they relate to their BA in English?

Qualitatively answering these questions, we will view the thirty-eight skills listed by "Job Skills Requested", "Job Skills Used", and "KSU BAE Skills Learned" in table 9. Of these thirty-eight skills, five were common in the skills requested by the employers, skills utilized in the participants' daily job tasks, and skills participants learned in the KSU BAE program. These skills are communication, organization, presenting, research, and writing. Four additional skills

were listed in both skills utilized in the participants' daily job tasks and skills participants learned

in the KSU BAE program —critical thinking, editing, proofreading, and strategizing.

Using the numbers of the qualitatively analyzed data, I used the following formulas to

quantitatively analyze the information. As seen in equation (2), I quantitatively answer the

question, what percentage of requested skills correlate to skills learned in KSU BAE program?

$$Y\% = \text{Skills requested/Skills learned in KSU BAE Program} \qquad (2)$$

$$5/15 = 33.33\%$$

According the interview data quantified in equation (3), thirty-three percent of the skills

requested by employers for the particular jobs held by the participants were learned in KSU's

BAE program.

Percentage of on the job skills utilized correlate to skills learned in KSU BAE?

$$Z\% = \text{Skills utilized/Skills learned in KSU BAE Program} \qquad (3)$$

$$9/15 = 60.00\%$$

Per the quantitatively analyzed data in equation (3), sixty percent of the job skills utilized by

participants on the job are common with the skills participants recalled learning in KSU's BAE

program.

Discussion

This study suggests that English students can and do hold positions with job titles that are

outside of nontraditional fields, such as academia, publishing, media. Job titles outside of

publishing and academia have been recently obtained and held by KSU graduates who hold a

Bachelor of Arts in English degrees. What is critical about the study is understanding the skills

required by these jobs and seeing that they are deeply rooted in areas that are learning outcomes

and goals of the BAE program. In addition, thirty-three percent of skills requested by employers

correlate to skills learned in KSU's BAE program, according to the recollection of the participants. However, the skills used in the occupations of the participants as they relate to skills obtained in the BAE program at KSU leaps to sixty percent. Data show that the English student is capable of doing well in occupations which their skills obtained in their degree program do not exactly match the requested skills. Participants could have gained useful experience in during extracurricular activities, other work experience, or during other activities. Also, the participants' recollection of the employers requested skills are based on the participants' memories which could be inaccurate.

Learning that the English graduates use more skills from their degree in their current position does not mean that English students feel completely prepared for their careers. Although participants seemed eager and delighted to discuss their English degrees and their abilities, they articulated a desire for more courses and program components that focused on preparation for the workplace. As revealed in the data, some participants saw the need for more pragmatic training and hard skills to supplement the soft skills taught in an English major. In the LinkedIn article "The Most In-Demand Hard and Soft Skills of 2020," Bruce Anderson writes definitions for hard and soft skills: "Hard skills include specialized knowledge and technical abilities . . . soft skills are more about behavior and thinking, personal traits and cognitive skills." I gather that hard skills are more about tactile skills or knowledge for tangible skills, while soft skills are more personable skills.

Hard and soft skills have become more prevalent in recent industry journals, including *Forbes* and *The New York Times*. In the *Forbes* article "High-Demand Soft and Hard Skills for Freelancers and Other Professionals" by Jon Younger, information from surveys revealed that soft skills are viewed as important as hard skills. The statement is a summary of other important

skills highlighted through the study include analytical reasoning, and the top five soft skills, one of which is creativity.

The New York Times published an article touting the abilities of English majors and the value of soft skills "In the Salary Race, Engineers Sprint but English Majors Endure" by David Deming. This article asserts that technology changes quickly and employees are asked to constantly learn new technology skills. Because of this, the piece claims that "a liberal arts education has enormous value because it builds a set of foundational capacities that will serve students well in a rapidly changing job market" (Deming). Deming is saying that yes technology degrees are important, but technology changes. Students should be prepared to adapt to those changes when they enter the workforce, and an English major (according to the information provided by the participants in table 5) has the ability to adapt to different forms of writing and editing.

The study, "Kennesaw State University English Majors at Work: Careers in Unexpected Places" also yielded information about the soft and hard skills learned in the KSU BAE program (see table 10). Even though some participants requested more practicable or hard skills be taught within the program, writing, editing, proofreading, and research are all hard skills. These skills which can be taught are learned within the BAE program.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Participants of the study obtained and held more than two occupations that were outside of expected fields such as academia, publishing, media. Furthermore, the skills taught within the Bachelor of English major at KSU were used while performing duties within those occupations. Because the job skills requested by employers to fill a position did not correlate as much to the skills participants remember learning in the KSU BAE program as they related to skills utilized in those same positions, future and current students may not realize that those particular positions are attainable. Additionally, employers may not be aware of additional skills that could be requested in order to successfully fill the job for which they are hiring.

Course and program adaptations participants felt may be useful to the faculty and advice that might be beneficial to students of KSU's BAE program varied from participant to participant. It is therefore realized that each participant experienced the BAE program in a different manner, but all participants recognized improvements that could be made to strengthen the program through more courses and an increased focus on professionalism and career readiness. Also, the interviewees suggested students individually could invest more time on their professional development. For instance, some participants shared that students could take a more active role in their educations and be more mindful of their skillsets and how they relate to available careers. And although the study shows that the KSU BAE program provides skills utilized in the workplace, course components and activities that emphasize preparing students for the workplace by creating assignments that give students opportunities to become more comfortable with learning new technologies, participate in teamwork projects, and implement incremental project revision were cited as valuable considerations. Moreover, a study participant

suggested that KSU's BAE program may find new and different ways to present students with occupational options available to them as graduates of the program.

Limitations and Recommendations

There were several aspects of employer skills requests that were not a part of the "Kennesaw State University English Majors at Work: Careers in Unexpected Places" study. For example, this study did not cover the employers' reasoning for including or not including certain skills that are needed to complete certain jobs in the job advertisement. However, employers' input could be included in a larger study. Even though the interviews elicited information about skills from the participants, a more thorough, longitudinal study that includes surveys and interviews of KSU BAE graduates could result in more detailed and comprehensive information.

Since the participants suggested changes to courses and the BAE program, additional research could be added to the ongoing KSU English Department course and program surveys, which are distributed after the students have graduated and entered the workforce. Participants could reflect more on things that they did not know but now understand since leaving their undergraduate program and entering the workforce. Some of these reflections include but are not limited to their career desires, their paths to careers, their knowledge of careers, and their abilities to market their skills. Another avenue for inquiry might be surveys that are aimed at gathering information before and then after graduation of students.

Learning how KSU's English majors' job titles describe the work they do, what skills and abilities they obtained through their BAs in English, and what primary job skills they connect to their BA in English was a worthwhile study, which offers rich opportunities for, and I believe requires, continued exploration. KSU's BAE program students continue to acquire positions

across a spectrum of industries using a variety of job titles. Therefore, it is important to display how their skills are continually utilized and understood by students, alumni, faculty, and employers. Based on this study, I found that KSU's BAE program alumni were excited and somewhat surprised about the skills that they obtained with their BAE degree--skills that are useful in positions they acquired unexpectedly. The alumni of the program were also eager to assist the growth of the program and its students by offering what they believe helps them in their day-to-day workplace duties and might have helped them immediately upon graduation. They seem to believe that knowing what they can do with their degree and how their skills relate to various positions may disillusion students but replace their illusions with vast opportunities.

Appendix

Table 1A

Rise and Fall of KSU English Degrees by Year

Year	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1995	1996	1997
Degrees Conferred	8	11	18	12	13	32	45	32

Sources: Head, Deborah, and Edwin A. Rugg. *Kennesaw State College 1990-1991 Fact Book.* E-book, Office of Institutional Research Kennesaw State College, 1991, https://ir.kennesaw.edu/publications/past-fact-books-pdfs/1990-1991%20Fact%20Book.pdf. Accessed 30 Nov. 2019.

The Office of Institutional Research and Information Management. *Kennesaw State College 1995-1996 Fact Book.* E-book, Kennesaw State College, 1996, https://ir.kennesaw.edu/publications/past-fact-books-pdfs/1995-1996%20Fact%20Book.pdf.

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Table 1B

Rise and Fall of KSU English Degrees by Year

Year	2000	2001	2004	2008	2012	2017	2018
Degrees Conferred	38	109	37	93	109	82	91

Sources: Byrd, Mark. Kennesaw State University 2018-2019 Fact Book. E-book, Kennesaw

    State University, 2019, https://ir.kennesaw.edu/publications/past-fact-books-

    pdfs/Fact%20Book%202018-2019.pdf. Accessed 24 Feb. 2020.

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    https://ir.kennesaw.edu/publications/past-fact-books-pdfs/2010-11%20Fact%20Book.pdf.

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    2014-2015 Fact Book. E-book. Kennesaw State University, 2011,

    https://ir.kennesaw.edu/publications/past-fact-books-pdfs/2014-15%20Fact%20Book.pdf.

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    2004-2005 Fact Book. E-book, Kennesaw State University, 2005,

    https://ir.kennesaw.edu/publications/past-fact-books-pdfs/2004-05%20Fact%20Book.pdf.

    Accessed 30 November 2019.

Zhai, Meihua. Kennesaw State University 2017-2018 Fact Book. E-book, Kennesaw State

    University, 2018, https://ir.kennesaw.edu/publications/past-fact-books-pdfs/2017-2018-fact-

    book/2017-2018-fact-book.pdf. Accessed 30 Nov. 2019.

Table 2

List of Job Title Held by Kennesaw State University Graduates Between the Years 2016 and

2020.

Interview Participants	Graduate A-Opal	Graduate B-Sapphire	Graduate C-Tom
	Account Specialist	*Technical Writer*	Administrative Assistant
	User Engagement Specialist	Intermediate Technical Writer	Administrative Lead
	Software Business Analyst	Content Writer	*Transaction Processing Specialist*
Job Titles	*Product Manager*	Project Coordinator	
		Editor	
The most recent job titles are in italics			

Sources: Opal. Personal telephone interview. 1 April 2019.

Sapphire. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Tom. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Table 3

Job Skills Requested by Employers as Described by Participants

Interview Participants	Graduate A-Opal	Graduate B-Sapphire	Graduate C-Tom
Job Skills Requested			
Adobe		•	
Adobe Photoshop		•	
Active Listening			•
Communication	•		
Dependability			•
Detail Oriented		•	•
Five-9			•
Flexibility			•
Internet			•
Interpersonal		•	
MS Office		•	
MS Excel		•	
MS Word		•	
MS PowerPoint		•	
MS Outlook Exchange		•	
Oral Comprehension			•
Oral Expression			•
Organization		•	
Presenting		•	
Professionalism			•
Quality			•
Quantity			•
Reading/Written Comprehension			•
Research	•		
Social Perceptiveness			•
Speaking			•
Speech Clarity			•
Speech Recognition			•
Time Management		•	
Tran			•
VeriTrac & Ideology			•
Writing		•	
Written Expression			•

Sources: Opal. Personal telephone interview. 1 April 2019.

    Sapphire. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

    Tom. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Table 4

Participants' Skills Utilized on Their Current Job

Interview Participants	Graduate A-Opal	Graduate B-Sapphire	Graduate C-Tom
Job Skills Used			
Analyzing	•		
Communication	•	•	
Context Switching (writing)	•		
Critical Thinking		•	
Detailed Oriented			•
Diplomacy	•		
Editing (different writing styles)		•	
Interpersonal Skills	•	•	
Marketing/advertising		•	
Organization	•		
Presenting	•		
Process Adherence			•
Project Management		•	
Proofreading		•	
Research	•		•
SQL Database Usage	•		
Strategizing	•		
Time Management		•	
Writing	•	•	•

Sources: Opal. Personal telephone interview. 1 April 2019.

Sapphire. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Tom. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Table 5

Skills Learned by Participants in KSU's BAE Program

Interview Participants	Graduate A-Opal	Graduate B-Sapphire	Graduate C-Tom
KSU BAE Skills Learned			
Analyzing		•	
Articulation (writing)	•	•	
Coding		•	
Collaboration	•		
Communication	•	•	•
Constructive Criticism	•		
Context Switching (writing)	•		
Critical thinking		•	•
Editing (different writing styles)		•	
Empathy	•		
Gather data		•	
Interpret data		•	
Organization	•		
Present data to different audiences		•	•
Proofreading (different writing mediums)		•	
Research			•
Strategizing	•		
Website editing		•	
Writing (different platforms--technical and creative		•	

Sources: Opal. Personal telephone interview. 1 April 2019.

Sapphire. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Tom. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Table 6

Job Skills Requested by Employers as Described by Participants—Condensed

Interview Participants	Graduate A-Opal	Graduate B-Sapphire	Graduate C-Tom
Job Skills Requested			
Adobe		•	
Adobe Photoshop		•	
Communication	•		•
Dependability			•
Detailed Oriented		•	•
Five-9			•
Flexibility			•
Internet			•
Interpersonal		•	
MS Office		•	
MS Excel		•	
MS Word		•	
MS PowerPoint		•	
MS Outlook Exchange		•	
Organization		•	
Presenting		•	
Professionalism			•
Quality			•
Quantity			•
Research	•		•
Social Perceptiveness			•
Time Management		•	
Tran			•
VeriTrac & Ideology			•
Writing		•	•

Sources: Opal. Personal telephone interview. 1 April 2019.

Sapphire. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Tom. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Table 7

Participants' Skills Utilized on Their Current Job—Condensed

Interview Participants	Graduate A-Opal	Graduate B-Sapphire	Graduate C-Tom
Job Skills Used			
Communication	•	•	
Critical Thinking	•	•	
Detailed oriented			•
Diplomacy	•		
Editing (different writing styles)		•	
Interpersonal Skills	•	•	
Marketing/advertising		•	
Organization	•		
Presenting	•		
Process Adherence			•
Project Management		•	
Proofreading		•	
Research	•		•
SQL Database Usage	•		
Strategizing	•		
Time Management		•	
Writing	•	•	•

Sources: Opal. Personal telephone interview. 1 April 2019.

Sapphire. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Tom. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Table 8

Skills Learned by Participants in KSU's BAE Program—Condensed

Interview Participants	Graduate A-Opal	Graduate B-Sapphire	Graduate C-Tom
KSU BAE Skills Learned			
Coding		•	
Collaboration	•		
Communication	•	•	•
Critical thinking	•	•	•
Editing (different writing styles)		•	
Empathy	•		
Gather data		•	
Interpret data		•	
Organization	•		
Present data to different audiences		•	•
Proofreading (different writing mediums)		•	
Research			•
Strategizing	•		
Website editing		•	
Writing	•	•	

Sources: Opal. Personal telephone interview. 1 April 2019.

Sapphire. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Tom. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Table 9

Aligned Skills Table Reflecting the Commonality

Job Skills Requested	Job Skills Used	KSU BAE Skills Learned
Adobe		
Adobe Photoshop		
		Coding
		Collaboration
Communication	Communication	Communication
	Critical Thinking	Critical thinking
Dependability		
Detail oriented	Detail oriented	
	Diplomacy	
	Editing	Editing
		Empathy
Five-9		
Flexibility		
		Gather data
Internet		
Interpersonal	Interpersonal	
		Interpret data
	Marketing/advertising	
MS Office		
MS Excel		
MS Word		
MS PowerPoint		
MS Outlook Exchange		
Organization	Organization	Organization
Presenting	Presenting	Presenting data to different audiences
	Process Adherence	
Professionalism		
	Project Management	
	Proofreading	Proofreading
Quality		
Quantity		
Research	Research	Research
Social Perceptiveness		
	SQL Database Usage	
	Strategizing	Strategizing
Time Management	Time Management	
Tran		
VeriTrac & Ideology		
		Website editing
Writing	Writing	Writing

Sources: Opal. Personal telephone interview. 1 April 2019.

Sapphire. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Tom. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

Table 10

Job Skill Sorted by Soft and Hard Skills

Soft Skills		
Collaboration	Interpersonal	
Communication	Organization	
Critical thinking	Professionalism	
Dependability	Project Management	
Detail oriented	Quality	
Detail oriented	Quantity	
Diplomacy	Social Perceptiveness	
Empathy	Strategizing	
Flexibility	Time Management	
Hard Skills		
Adobe	MS Office	SQL Database Usage
Adobe Photoshop	MS Excel	Tran
Analyzing	MS Word	VeriTrac & Ideology
Coding	MS PowerPoint	Website editing
Editing	MS Outlook Exchange	Writing
Five-9	Presenting	
Gather data	Process Adherence	
Internet	Project Management	
Interpret data	Proofreading	
Marketing/advertising	Research	

Sources: Anderson, Bruce. "The Most In-Demand Hard and Soft Skills of 2020." *LinkedIn*, 9 Jan

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Tom. Personal telephone interview. 7 April 2019.

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