Putting English to Work: A Qualitative Study of Students at American Universities



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Kelsey Jane Fenner

St Stephen's House

Supervisor: Professor Ewart Keep

University of Oxford
Department of Education
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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT **4**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION **5**

Dissertation Structure 6

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW **8**

Driving Narratives in Higher Education 8
Motivation and Major Choice 11
Perceptions and Approaches to Employability 14
English and Career 16

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN **22**

Research Questions 22
Position of the Researcher 23
Case Study 24
Data Collection Methods 25
Sampling 26
Data Analysis 28
Ethics 31
Quality 32
Limitations 34

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION **36**

Theme One: Passion-Led Choices 36
Theme Two: Transferability 41
Theme Three: English as Having Complex Implications for Career Goals 48
Theme Four: Lack of Support 55

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION **62**

REFERENCES **66**

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE **77**

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET **80**

APPENDIX C: PROMOTIONAL FLYER **83**

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM **84**

APPENDIX E: TITLE CHANGE FORM **86**

APPENDIX F: CUREC APPROVAL **87**

Abstract

Employability has become a function of the university in recent decades following a shift in societal, economic, and political discourses. Employability's importance has led the liberal arts to come under challenge because of their apparent lack of labor market utility. English, which has experienced steep declines in graduate numbers, has been perceived as lacking labor market connections and utility. As employability has been studied from a variety of perspectives – including numerous studies on the liberal arts and employer perspectives – this study chose to look at a single academic major from the student perspective.

The aim of this study was to explore the how students understood the connection between their academic course and post-graduation plans. Using a constructivist case study, data was collected from nine English majors at two mid-sized American universities through semi-structured interviews.

Thematic analysis of the data revealed that participants understood their English degree as being clearly connected to their future career plans. Although students perceived this connection through aspects like passion, employable skills, and the availability of widespread opportunities, they were explicit in noting the challenges and complexities of connecting the English degree to the labor market. This was expressed as a perceived lack of institutional and career support and the belief that no clear path exists to link English to a specific occupational industry.

The findings highlight the link between the English degree and the labor market as well as revealing student perceptions that their degree will influence and support their future career plans. Findings of this study may have policy and programmatic implications for English departments and institutions as they work to produce employable English graduates with strong connections to an academic field.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the current higher education landscape, employability and career priorities are a driving force in institutional and state policy (U.S. Department of Education, 2018; Brown & Hesketh, 2004). As higher education institutions become more devoted to ensuring the employability of their students, this raises questions about how the academic and career aspects of higher education interact. In the past few decades, the implementation on neoliberal thinking has impacted institutions in the way that they create and implement academic courses (Deem, 2007). This shift to more neoliberal practices – which include escalating tuition costs, the growth of vocational undergraduate and graduate programs, and a shift in focus towards the private benefits of an individual's education – has been widely researched through a variety of lenses and stakeholder perspectives. In response to economic and social shifts, employability is increasingly seen as a function of the university.

One perspective that has generated a wealth of literature is the place of the liberal arts in the increasingly vocationalized higher education sphere. A common argument put forward in the literature revolves around the divide between academic and utilitarian courses and how students will be able to find professional and personal success after graduation (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; Kent, 2012; Engell & Dangerfield, 1998). Many narratives use financial information like salaries as a way to measure the success of an academic major. When these arguments are being deployed, the liberal arts may be seen as less successful because they typically do not appear to directly connect to high compensation jobs in financially lucrative fields – something that is important with the increasing cost of education (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011; Boden & Neveda, 2010). Yet, when this argument is used it focuses on earnings data and numerical understandings of success and career goals. There is a lack of student voice in studies focusing on connections between employability and academic degree as researchers focus more often on employers, university administrators, and outside stakeholders as research subjects (Gedye & Beaumont, 2018). As such, research that explores the links between employability and academic field of study from a student perspective can help contribute to the body of research on universities and employability.

The growth of career development initiatives on American college campuses illustrates the increased importance that career planning has on today's college students (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). These developments highlight the growth of employability as a desired outcome of university education as universities take on the role of labor producers – generating the workers needed for a knowledge-based economy (KBE). In the growth of employability's importance on higher education, some majors have emerged as "the right major" because of the ability to deliver a simple, direct transfer of skills and knowledge into the labor market. Conversely, other majors' importance has been challenged – in part because of a perceived lack of utility and connection to employment opportunities (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; Donoghue, 2008). English, identified as a popular major by the Department for Education, has seen significant decreases in graduates over the last 40 years (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). Although wider discourses have discussed possible reasons for this – generally in terms of all liberal arts majors – little literature has been done specifically on why English has seen declines. Some literature tends to group it into majors that lack labor market utility (Kent, 2012; Bérubé, 2003). In light of the declining number of English graduates and the increasing emphasis placed on employability, it is important to explore how English majors understand the decision to follow an academic study of English and how they comprehend the role of their degree in their post-graduation plan.

This study aims to explore the student perspective of employability and future planning as it related to their academic major choice. In centering on a single major, English, this research explores, at an in-depth level, the individual student's beliefs and views on the major and how it contributes to their future plans. Data was collected from two mid-sized research universities in New York State: Binghamton University and the University of Rochester.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is divided into chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the topic and gave a brief explanation of the need for this study. Chapter 2 is the literature review which further explores the topic and situates this study within the larger body of relevant

literature. Chapter 3 discusses design choices such as research questions and data collection methods. It will provide insight into the ethical considerations of this study, research limitations, and quality assurance. In Chapter 4 the interview data is presented, analyzed and discussed. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation. References and Appendixes may be found after Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review aims to provide an introduction to the research area by examining existing research. The literature review is broken down into four sections to introduce the various topics explored in this study. The sections are:

- Driving Narratives in Higher Education
- Motivation and Major Choice
- Perceptions and Approaches to Employability
- English and Career

Driving Narratives in Higher Education

The current higher education sector formed as a result of societal, economic, and political shifts and discourses in the last decades (Cantwell, 2018; Palfreyman & Tapper, 2014; Brown et al., 2011; Etzkowitz & Leyersdorff, 2000). As a result, the higher education sector can be seen prioritizing employability and skills development in a move towards a more vocationally-oriented system, rather than one built to educate a small number of elite academics (Brown et al., 2011; Trow, 1973). The core discourses shaping today's higher education system developed based on the influence of economic priorities (Palfreyman & Tapper, 2014; Powell & Snellman, 2004). In reviewing the literature, the importance placed on employability and universities' role in producing graduates for the labor market becomes evident.

The education system has undergone a series of shifts to create the modern higher education sector; one of which was massification. Martin Trow's (1973) seminal work provided an analysis of the movement from an elite system of education to one of mass or universal education. What was initially propelled by post-World War II (WWII) education policy was eventually a driver of what Brown et al. described as "economic nationalism" and led to the creation of a substantial middle class whom had attended university in some form (2011, p. 4). Salmi and Bassett (2012) argue that increased participation in the decades following WWII was part of a goal to create economic, social and political equity for all Americans. As Trow (1973) anticipated, increased participation not only changed the student demographic but the

entire higher education structure. New institutions were built to handle the influx of new students and a growing percentage of the population obtained bachelor's degrees. The need to attend higher education began to seem mandatory if a student wanted to have success in some segments of the job market where graduatization was occurring – caused in part by rising participation rates (Brown et al., 2011; Trow et al., 1975). Marginson (2016) argued that the period between 1945-1975 provided economic growth that allowed for the expansion of higher education access and vaulted higher education to a central place in society. However, some scholars note that increased participation may have factored into the adoption of neoliberal ideas during Ronald Reagan's presidency which led to increased individual responsibility and a human capital model of the value of learning (Cantwell, 2018; Marginson, 2011; Calhoun, 2006; Trow, 1973).

Neoliberalism, an economic philosophy that became prominent as a political and economic narrative in the late 1970s, emphasizes the importance of the free-market (Winston, 1999). Within higher education, this shifted responsibility to the individual rather than the state in an attempt to increase an "individual's choices and autonomy" (Brown et al., 2011, p. 26; Winston, 1999). Neoliberal thinking generated policies that reduced public spending on universities – forcing institutions to find new funding streams. One approach taken in understanding neoliberalism emphasizes the individual rather than the public good (Tomlinson, 2012; Marginson, 2011). When this is applied to higher education, neoliberalism is often used to help explain the shifting of financial burden off the state and onto the individual student through rising tuition rates and student loan programs (Marginson, 2011; Boden & Neveda, 2010).

Neoliberalism also shifts the responsibility of choosing a university and academic major which ensures positive post-graduation outcomes onto the individual rather than having the state guarantee that good post-graduate opportunities are available for all (Brown et al., 2011; Marginson, 2011; Calhoun, 2006). Neoliberalism is seen in the marketized concept of human capital as an economic theory lying behind educational investment. Investing in higher education is seen as an individual's economic choice, by which they engage in learning to increase future productivity (Van der Merwe, 2010; Adams, 2013). Human capital theory asserts that students are rational agents who invest in education to ensure future benefit – whether that is in

wages, job position, or job prestige. However, many scholars argue against a purely human capital view because it assumes that all students are rational agents with the same work and life expectations who are capable of making the best empirical choice for their future. It further implies that the chief purpose of university is to provide a direct link to the labor market (Carasso, Ertl, & Holmes, 2012; Becker, 1963). Adams (2013) argues that instead of human capital theory, scholars should use a combination of economic and sociological theories that recognize the links between schooling and work, but understand that factors like family education background, socio-economic status, educational course study, sex, race, and location influence post-graduate plans and success.

A complementary discourse in the literature deals with the emergence of the knowledge-based economy (KBE) and its impact on universities (Deem, 2007; Brown & Hesketh, 2004). The KBE is a phenomenon, first articulated by Drucker (1969), in which intellectual outputs such as ideas and knowledge increasingly come to serve as society's economic foundation. The KBE was seen as supplanting the traditional industrial economy which had focused on manual skills and labor to produce goods and services and was broadly evident in manufacturing jobs and economic policies focusing on physical outputs such as exports and imports (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). A key tenet of the KBE is that knowledge and education can be understood as valuable assets and an individual who possesses them can increase their individual human capital and thereby their economic value to society (Deem, 2007; Drucker, 1969). In the shift from an industrial economy to a KBE, education that increases the potential for knowledge creation and sharing is seen as more valuable because of its innovative capacity (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2013). In Powell and Snellman's (2004) analysis of the KBE, they state that scholars have generally understood the KBE as linking to "new science-based industries and their role in social and economic change" but note that the links between the KBE and new modes of work and industry are not entirely clear (p. 200). However, they support the argument that the KBE has accelerated in the last decades and more jobs are linking directly to the KBE in terms of their duties or outputs (Powell & Snellman, 2004). A perspective discussed by Brown et al. (2013) posits that the KBE views higher education as a contributor to innovation and growth through the production of graduate workers who have the skills and knowledge to navigate the KBE in an increasingly global economy.

Similarly, although the KBE is understood to be influential in dictating university policy, there are scholars that raise questions about the actual need for knowledge in roles because of underemployment of graduates and evidence that the influx of graduates into the labor market does not always increase economic growth (Brown et al., 2013).

These shifting political, social, and economic discourses highlight how employability has come to be a function of the university. The literature shows how employability is linked to economic and social trends which influence the priorities of universities and of individual students. The literature posits the place of the university, not as a standalone entity, but as an integral economic producer of workers, ideas, skills, credentials – a conceptualization which has shifted its role and function in society.

Motivation and Major Choice

An aspect in understanding employability and its connection to university study is exploring why students choose to major in a specific subject. As massification has increased the number of universities and course offerings, there is discussion about which factors influence academic choice and whether employability may be one of them (Keshishian et al., 2010). Researchers have studied this from theoretical perspectives including psychological processing theory, career development theory, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation studies (Soria & Stebleton, 2013; Carduner, Padak, & Reynolds, 2011; Keshishian et al., 2010; Beggs, Bantham, & Taylor, 2008). Major choice is a well-researched topic because it is considered a "major life decision" and also has been identified as one of the most frequent causes of regret later in life (Beggs et al., 2008, p. 383; Porter & Umbach, 2006). Choosing an academic degree program is considered important because it is understood to impact future decisions and have implications on the students' opportunities (Soria & Stableton, 2013; Porter & Umbach, 2006).

Studies have found various factors that influence student major choice. In Keshishian et al.'s (2010) study of influences on college major choice they found that interest in topic areas – such as math and science – was the most statistically significant factor in

deciding whether or not to study a STEM[1] subject or not. This was echoed by Mawlgi, Howe, and Burnaby (2005) in their study of business undergraduates. They found interest to be the most important factor for students, but they also noted differences between men and women. They found that women were more likely, after interest, to be motivated by aptitude – while men were more likely to be interested in the career advancement and monetary compensation associated with the major (2005). Gender differences in major choice and motivations were also highlighted by Lackland and DeLisi (2001) which found that women were more likely to major in the humanities and feel more confident about their career opportunities compared to men. However, most of the participants in these studies were first-year undergraduates and Malgwi et al. (2005) suggest that evidence points to gender differences fading as students get closer to graduation. More discussion about gender and career expectations is provided in the English and Career section of the literature review.

Another research focus within academic-decision making is examining how choice of major and student satisfaction interact. Soria and Stebleton (2013) explored this in a quantitative study of 58,017 undergraduates at six public universities. Their findings further suggest that interest in subject area is the most important factor for students when deciding on their major with 96.6% of respondents reporting its importance. This was followed by intellectual curiosity (91.7%), "prepares me for a fulfilling career" (85.9%), and "prepares me for Graduate/Professional school (69.0%) (Soria & Stebleton, 2013). The three factors Soria and Stebleton (2013) found as least important were parental desires (17.0%), easy degree requirements (14.0%), and an inability to get into their first choice major (7.3%). Students who chose a major based more on intrinsic factors, such as intellectual curiosity or interest were more likely to be satisfied and experience feelings of belonging than students whose choice was influenced by external extrinsic factors like parental desires or presumed degree prestige (Soria & Stebleton, 2013). This study is helpful in understanding how employability and academic choice may interact in the decision-making process as future planning was a high-ranking factor. However, this study's demographic breakdown does not provide information on the participants' class year. This is a

[1] STEM refers to degree courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

limitation because some research suggests that students' reasons and motivations for decision-making shift throughout their time at university (Beggs et al., 2008; Malgwi et al., 2005). Without class-year information, the motivations found by this study appear to be static and convey the impression that freshman and seniors make major decisions, or reflect on major decisions, in the same way. This ignores evidence that interest becomes less important than career opportunities as students progress through university (Strasser, Ozgur, & Schroeder, 2002; Mauldin, Crain, & Mounce, 2000).

Incoming university students are usually not required to declare a major until the end of their second year of study (The College Board, 2019). This allows students to spend time at college before making the decision to pursue a specific academic path. Much of the research on course decision-making looks at first or second-year students rather than those in their final two years of university because they wish to explore the motivation and factors going into the decision-making process (Workman, 2015; Keshishian et al., 2010; Carduner et al., 2011; Beggs et al., 2008). Non-major specific research has identified personal interest, employment opportunities, and financial potential as main drivers behind student choice (Soria & Stebleton, 2013; Mauldin et al., 2000). Yet, this varies greatly between students and academic divisions. Kim, Markham, and Cangelosi's (2002) study explored why students chose to major in business. They found that employment opportunities and higher starting salaries were more important to students than interest in the subject among junior and senior year students (2002). Conversely, first-year students in an honor's college were more concerned with satisfaction and happiness in their major than perceived job availability or earning potential (Carduner et al., 2011).

The literature reveals that there are no universal factors that determine major choice. Studies are influenced by participants' interests and background but also by the perceptions of different academic subject areas and trends amongst students as they progress towards graduation (Workman, 2015; Beggs et al., 2008). In the United States, the undergraduate degree is a four-year degree and typically combines general study courses with a chosen academic major like English, economics, or psychology. Due to the major declaration deadline[2] the majority of the literature does not address upperclassmen and academic decision-making unless it is at a major-specific level. As

[2] The deadline is at the end of the second year of study (The College Board, 2019).

such, this study has incorporated questions about major decision-making to ensure that the various aspects are explored in relation to the students interviewed for this study. As this study interviews juniors and seniors, the literature suggests that they will be more likely to discuss career and employability aspects (Strasser et al., 2002; Mauldin et al., 2000).

Perceptions and Approaches to Employability

The research literature is clear that employability is now seen as an integral part of higher education's purpose (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; Oakley, 2013; Kent, 2012; Brown et al., 2011). It is argued that employability in higher education developed during the last decades, as societal and economic changes have impacted universities and made successful integration into the labor market a central function of the university (Cantwell, 2018; Bennett et al., 2017; Marginson, 2016; Boden & Neveda, 2010; Brown et al., 2011). The U.S. Department of Education's (DoE) *Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2018-2022* is the relevant policy document for the United States' federal approach to higher education until 2022. The plan outlines the government's priorities and goals for the coming years and illustrates the connection between postsecondary education and the labor market. The DoE views their role as a facilitator between higher education institutions and industry to generate clearer pathways from postsecondary education into the labor force (2018). They attempt to accomplish this by advocating that the universities should undertake the role of training centers which should provide the U.S. economy with graduates with "job-ready skills" and direct pathways to what the DoE determines are "relevant careers" - generally roles in STEM and health fields (2018, p. 6, 15). This strategy document conveys the government's understanding of the connection between higher education and the labor market.

The definition of employability is debated within the literature (Bennett et al., 2017; Holmes, 2013; Yorke, 2006). As mentioned above, the DoE understands employability in terms of the university's role in producing career ready graduates with the skills needed to immediately enter the labor market (2018; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005). A skills-focused approach is often taken when defining employability because it appears to provide clear and concise ideas concerning what

students must learn in order to get a job, while providing employers the opportunity to note what skills they feel are lacking (Holmes, 2013; Bennett et al., 2017). The skills-based approach is popular in the US, yet it does not fully encompass the concept of employability because the definition is broad. Which 'skills' do employers want? Are they the same skills for each field? And if not, then how do those designing academic courses decide which skills are essential? Grubb and Lazerson (2005) note that the skills-based definitions tend to increase debate around whether higher education (and the liberal arts in particular) should exist for the general edification of society or to produce graduates with skills aligned to labor market needs. The vagueness of the DoE's strategic plan of what makes a career-ready graduate and the skills-based definitions show how complex employability is because the definition means something different to each student, employer, and university stakeholder who tries to operationalize it. Additionally, skills research has found that many of the job skills which employers expect university graduates to have upon hiring may actually be industry or workplace-specific skills that are learned on the job rather than transferable skills gained through university study (Keep, 2012; Gleason and Keep, 2004).

Other scholars discuss employability as a student's "potential to obtain a 'graduate job'" (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; Yorke, 2006, p. 2). This strongly links the university to the labor market while indicating the increased employment opportunities that university graduates have compared to non-university graduates. However, as Brown et al. (2011) argued, the belief that investing in higher education will necessarily lead to a well-paying and prestigious job is outdated and lacking nuance in today's global labor market. Instead, they posit that as participation increases a student's relative levels of human capital decreases in a saturated marketplace. This, they argue, leads to a "reverse auction" in which the competition for jobs allows employers to offer "low bids" such as low pay, long hours, and fewer benefits because the supply of graduates has increased both nationally and internationally and exceeds the volume of jobs that require a degree to do them (Brown et al., 2011, p. 7).

Holmes (2013) presented a more holistic definition of employability framed as the ability of a person to self-manage, engage in lifelong learning, and be adaptable in

their professional career. This definition, because it does not focus solely on skills development or the singular aspect of getting a job, provides a broader view of employability that may allow more universities to operationalize employability for a wide range of courses and students. This approach focuses less on initial "job-getting" but more on the ability to successfully adapt to, and negotiate, the changing global employment market (Bennett et al., 2017, p. 52; Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; Holmes, 2013; Brown et al., 2011).

In understanding how employability affects universities and their academic courses, it is also possible to explore how institutions operationalize employability. Dey and Cruzvergara (2014) note that one approach has been to provide career services that offer career programming and individual advice on job searches, resume writing, and graduate school applications. Another approach is incorporating career-related topics into the curriculum – this may comprise full classes on employability issues or attempts to include employable skills into classes and assessments (Amoroso & Burke, 2018; Smith & Costello, 2015). Binghamton University and the University of Rochester
have career offices available for their students to seek advice on internships and careers. Neither English department require career-related classes but both do allow an internship to replace one elective class. Binghamton has an English internship program which pairs interested students with local businesses such as newspapers, new stations, or museums.

English and Career

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that degrees awarded in English language and literature/letters dropped by 14% between 2009-2010 academic year and the 2014-2015 academic year (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). At the same time, the degrees awarded in engineering, computer science, and healthcare all increased by at least 30% (NCES, 2018). Overall, in the ten-year period between 2005-2010 bachelor's degrees awarded increased by 32% (NCES, 2018). The NCES data reveals that English has had a gradual drop-off in graduates since the 1970s which steepened after the 2008 economic recession (NCES, 2017). There is a significant gender imbalance in English

programs. Women accounted for 70.4% of English graduates nationwide in 2017 with men more likely to major in the social sciences or STEM subjects than English or the liberal arts (NCES, 2018; Goyette & Mullen, 2006).

The historical decline of the English major has long been a topic for discussion. Wade and Reed (1987) found that many employers found English "too nebulous" to be a hirable major. By lacking a specific vocational connection, unlike courses such as computer science, the authors' found that employers did not understand the occupational value of literature compared to computer classes (1987, p. 55). These findings support the shift in higher education from more academic to the more vocational or utilitarian priorities. In their role as a labor producer, degrees that offered clear, direct paths to occupations were considered "safer" for students because employers were better able to conceptualize how those students fit into their profession (Wade & Reed, 1987, p. 56). This challenge to the English major, emerging as early as the 1980s, has continued to be a concern for stakeholders in the field (Kent, 2012; Bérubé, 2003). Kent (2012) argued that rising tuition costs and the prevalence of student loans may factor into the utilitarian shift, as students need to ensure outcomes that will allow them to meet financial responsibilities. These opportunities are more commonly found in STEM subjects because of the KBE and growth of the technology industry (Powell & Snellman, 2004). Similarly, the lack of clear occupation links has been identified as a challenge for English students as they must compete for jobs against other graduates whose degrees were seen as immediately vocationally relevant (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Berry 1967). However, the increase in the decline-rate of English degrees should be studied more closely as it is considered a large major in degree numbers by NCES and research often groups English into the broader category of the liberal arts which reduces the amount of detailed research on English (2018).

As stated, much literature focuses on the liberal arts – a collection of academic fields that originally referred to the trivium and quadrivium academic fields taught in medieval institutions but has come to be understood as a field that promotes "chiefly general knowledge…and general intellectual capacities (such as reason and judgement) as opposed to professional or vocational skills" ("Liberal Arts", n.d.). Courses generally given the liberal arts distinction tend to be in the humanities

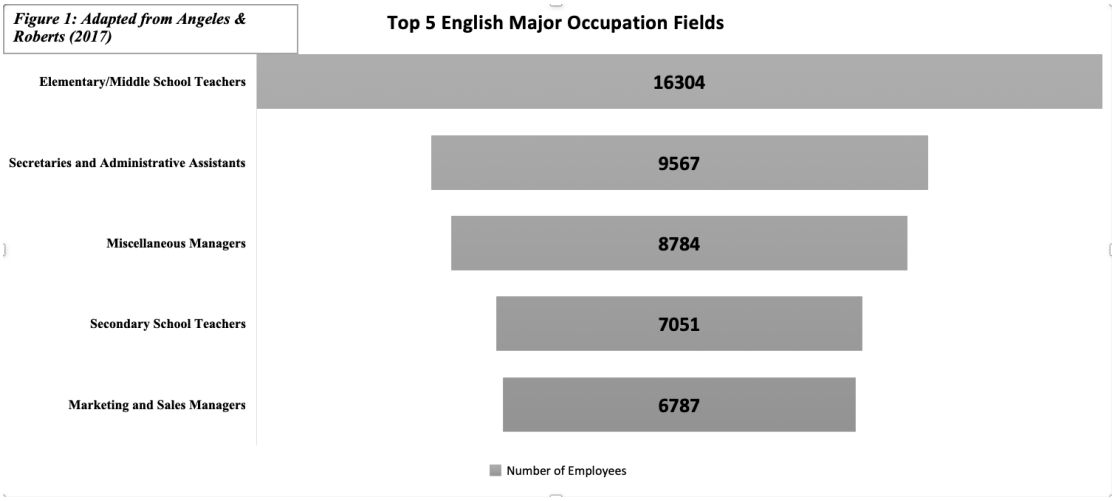
division and may include English, philosophy, religion, art history, and language studies (NCES, 2018; Kent, 2012). This provides a general outlook for the liberal arts, but it does not provide a nuanced understanding of English stakeholders at the individual level.

In this dissertation's approach to understanding the role of liberal arts courses and post-graduation success, a central argument revolves around attempting to question the belief that liberal arts degrees have, and will continue to have, little worth in the labor market; an argument which has grown in strength due to the economic, societal, and political shifts in universities discussed earlier in this section (Kent, 2012; Donoghue, 2008). Some scholars argue that the rise of marketization and the need for universities to fulfill a utilitarian function will lead to the downfall of the liberal arts (Donoghue, 2008; Engell & Dangerfield, 1998). This has led other scholars to push back and produce literature supporting the place of the humanities in the highly vocationalized higher education landscape (Kent, 2012; Jacobs, 2009; Bérubé, 2003).

A joint report commissioned by Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) and the Association of American College & Universities revealed employer support for "broad learning and cross-cutting skills for long-term career success" (Hart Research Associates, 2015, p. 8). The report also found that non-profit and corporate employers prioritized liberal education in their hiring and did not endorse field specific knowledge (Hart Research Associates, 2015). This contradicts studies like Donoghue's (2008) and further shows how complex the connections between liberal arts majors and the labor market are – both in reality and also in widely-held beliefs.

There is a lack of academic literature focusing only on English major outcomes. The Bureau of Labor Statistics listed the 5 top jobs of English majors (Angeles & Roberts, 2017). See Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Adapted from Angeles & Roberts (2017)



Data reflect full-time English graduates under 35 years old. The Bureau notes that if a person has two liberal arts degree only one is counted but does not mention at what education level these degrees need to be at to be counted (Angeles & Roberts, 2017). While useful in documenting what English majors do after graduation this chart does not break down the methodology behind the survey. This is important because some states require master's degree for teaching certification. This data does not make clear whether graduate degree holders still factor into these data or if the respondents must only hold bachelor's degrees. Figure 1 confirms that teaching is the most common profession for English majors – however the 16,304 elementary/middle school teachers make up only 3% of total employees in that position title so there are many other majors in each of these professions.

Institutions have taken to surveying graduates about what career they now hold. This approach may be in response to the lack of English focused studies regarding graduation outcomes. Binghamton's career service office created an outcome page of alumni's post-graduation destinations (Binghamton University, 2019). The English major outcomes boast over 70 position titles held by graduates from 2016-2018 and also provides a list of 30 institutions graduates entered. The position titles are varied; one graduate is now employed as a circus clown while others are employed as financial analysts, sales associates, teachers, or marketing specialists. The breadth of Binghamton's University's English destination database shows that the English degree has many possible outcomes including varied career options and graduate school programs (Binghamton University, 2019). The University of Rochester

provides alumni interviews on their English department website. Their alumni stretch from forty years ago to more recent graduates (Gross, 2012). Again, the interviews highlight the versatility of career and graduate programs. Interestingly, the majority of the interviews provided by the department are from alumni who went to graduate school after obtaining an English undergraduate degree including medical school, law school, and teacher training (Gross, 2012).

In looking at academic literature, a dimension that may not have been fully explored is the perceptions of the liberal arts in wider society. Thus, although research has been conducted on the liberal arts and career outcomes, much more has been published through online media channels and national newspapers. As such, a brief exploration of recent newspaper articles can elucidate wider views on English and the liberal arts which are likely more widely circulated than scholarly research articles. A May 2019 Washington Post article boasts the title: 'The Liberal Arts are Under Attack' while a 2013 New York Times article titled "The Decline and Fall of the English major" bemoans the declining English literature program at Yale and the bleak future faced by English graduates. A 2018 Atlantic article catches readers by stating "The Liberal Arts May not Survive the 21st Century" before describing how Wisconsin's funding cut to the public university system in a utilitarian drive to generate graduates to fill the state's workforce could end up eliminating 13 liberal arts majors, including English. The author warns that this move may echo across the country as the economic demands for technology workers increase (Harris, 2018). Yet, at the same time those outlets are publishing articles entitled "The Unexpected Value of the Liberal Arts," "It's Not Liberal Arts and Literature Majors Who Are Most Underemployed," and "If You Want Your Child to Succeed, Don't Sell Liberal Arts Short" from The Atlantic, the Wall Street Journal, and Forbes respectively. The newspaper articles, likely more widely read by prospective students and their parents than academic articles, portray the liberal arts and English graduates in a very confusing and contradictory way – at one point as a pitiable "College-Educated Barista" and then as searchers for truth upholding the pillars of society (Thompson, 2016). As such, it is important to explore English students' perception about their major and what they plan to do with it because they have likely been exposed to these contradictory views of their academic subject and its lack of, or strong possibility of, success.

There has been less literature written from the student perspective, in particular from the point of view of current English majors. This has been identified as a "missing perspective" in this oeuvre of literature (Gedye & Beaumont, 2018, p. 406; Tymon, 2013; Wade & Reed, 1987). This research aims to explore this missing perspective by interviewing current junior and senior English majors to better understand their beliefs on the connection between English and their post-graduation plan. Similarly, although the importance of employability and the university's connection to the labor market is clear in the literature and policy documents, it is less apparent how individual majors like English understand the connection between academics and post-graduation destinations because of the lack of academic research on the topic.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Research design refers to the decisions made by the researcher about how to frame, conduct, and analyze this study and its data. This section outlines the research questions, methodology, sampling and researcher's role before discussing how the data was collected and analyzed. It also discusses ethical considerations and the study's design limitations.

Research Questions

The literature review highlighted that there is limited research on employability from a student perspective and that what does exist often focuses on breadth rather than depth. In the American higher education system, there is limited research focusing specifically on English majors rather than liberal arts students as a whole. Additionally, very little of the existing research on English majors explores students' understandings of their academic and career journeys. As such, the gaps in the literature have led to the development of the following research question:

How do English majors understand the connection between the study of English and their future plans?

Sub-research questions were developed to explore this. They are:

1. **How do English majors perceive their future careers and the overall occupations available to the major?**
2. **Do external perceptions of English majors' post-graduation plans influence student perceptions of the field and its potential employment outcomes?**

Sub-research questions aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of the main research question. Sub-research question 1 focuses on student's perceptions of employability because existing literature revealed that individuals understand employability differently (Workman, 2015; Tymon, 2013). This sub-question attempts to explore participants' thinking about their perceptions of themselves but

also of the major's graduates as a whole. This is important because it can investigate whether the perceptions of the individual and the whole are different, which in turn may help illuminate the way that students view the connection between their academic course and future plans. The second sub-research question explores whether external perceptions or pressures have impacted the participants' beliefs. The external influences may include familial expectations and beliefs and how the students understand their peer and societal view of English. This connects to the main research question by examining how external and internal beliefs may, or may not, impact overall understandings of the academic experience and future plans.

Position of the Researcher

The researcher plays a role in data collection and analysis that needs to be discussed. Because this study uses semi-structured interviews, the researcher is an active participant in the process (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006). By asking probing questions, reacting to participants' answers, and guiding the course of the interview, there is an inarguable certainty that the researcher influences the data that is collected (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). In attempting to build rapport with the participants, which is noted as critical in order to fully benefit from the depth available of semi-structured interviews, it can require the interviewer to take a less passive role in data collection.

I was a student at both English departments where interviews were conducted. This helped establish rapport by having shared professors and classes with my participants. Having attended both institutions, I had my own conceptions about the academic experience that could have influenced the way that I asked questions. To try and mitigate these assumptions I did not ask any questions that named specific classes, professors, or curriculum requirements. Rather, I tried to create questions that allowed the participants to express their views without my own assumptions guiding them. For example, instead of asking 'how they felt about taking required classes on Shakespeare and British literature,' I asked what them to express what they liked about their major. This allowed the participants to address any aspects of the major they wanted to focus on without my own feelings about the major influencing their view.

In qualitative data analysis the researcher plays an active role in generating themes and identifying patterns in the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because the researcher decides what the themes are and determines how the data will be coded and reported in the final write-up, the researcher must also take care to be guided by the data and ensure the quality of this process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Attempts to mitigate the researcher's role in shaping the data are discussed in the Data Analysis section.

Case Study

In making design choices, the driving factor should be ensuring that the research questions are answered by the data produced by the selected method (White, 2013; Andrews, 2003). The research questions of this study focus on individual understandings of the university journey and perceptions of the wider course outlook. This study hopes to benefit from the participant's recollection of how they first determined their course of study and their ideas about post-graduation plans. In focusing on individual beliefs and perceptions, this study wants to understand motives and 'why' participants have specific perceptions and beliefs. This study chose a constructivist paradigm because of the research questions. Constructivism posits that knowledge is created out of individual's prior experiences and their social and cultural environments (Cohen et al., 2018; Pring, 2015). Constructivism supports a person's agency in the creation of knowledge which is helpful in exploring student's unique perspectives on the research topic and understanding why students may hold different beliefs or perceptions or understand the research topic differently (Cohen et al., 2018; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) Constructivism, since it understands knowledge as constructed from individual's reality, is often linked to qualitative research methods which led this study to take a qualitative approach (Cohen et al., 2018; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Within qualitative methods, a case study was chosen because of its ability to work within a constructivist framework and its ability to provide "detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject" in a way that could appropriately explore the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 59). Although a qualitative survey could have been used, it was decided that a case study, coupled with semi-structured interviews,

would allow for a deeper exploration of the topic and allow the researcher to ask follow-up or probing questions if needed to examine participants beliefs – an allowance not generally found in surveys (Merriam, 1998). Although interview participants were members at two different institutions, the study still used a single case study rather than a multicase study because this study was not comparing the experiences of the English majors based on their institutional contexts, but rather exploring their understanding of the English major in the larger university and labor market environment (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the research collection tool. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and the use of open-ended and probing questions (Punch & Oancea, 2014; Roulston, 2011). Semi-structured interviews are also acceptable for exploring participant's beliefs and ideas about the phenomena being studied (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 508; Tierney & Dilley, 2001). This data collection method is similarly aligned with a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm is connected to the study's philosophical assumptions. In this case, constructivist assumptions and the use of semi-structured interviews means that the interview and the data it produces is contextual and a result of the situational reality in which the interview takes place (Cohen et al., 2018). As such, all the knowledge produced through the study's semi-structured interviews is situational and developed because of the specific context in which the interview was conducted (Potter & Hepburn, 2012; Tierney & Dilley, 2001).

Two pilot interviews were conducted in order to examine the comprehensiveness of the interview schedule and allow for interviewing practice. One was conducted with the researcher's colleague who was a recently graduated English major, and the other with a family member who had been an English major. Findings from the pilot interviews included a shifting in the question order as well as a tightening of the question topics so as to ensure coherency throughout the interview. The pilot interviews brought to light the possibility of having participants who were double majors. The interview schedule, because of its flexibility as a semi-structured interview, was generally suitable for handling students who were double majoring. It

was determined that a few questions attempting to explore the thought process behind double majoring should be added.[3]

Sampling

The initial recruitment strategy involved reaching out to the English departments at the two universities. The University of Rochester required approval of the study from its own internal review board before it would circulate an email to its English majors. This was granted, and a promotional document was emailed to all University of Rochester English majors.[4] Binghamton University did not require internal review board permission but were only willing to display the flyer on their department notice board rather than circulating details to students. The sampling strategy was chosen because it allowed the researcher to reach out to a larger number of potential participants and increased the likelihood of a random sample. However, this approach received no interest from students at either school. Following this, the researcher reached out to personal contacts at both institutions including former colleagues, former classmates, and shared acquaintances. Initially, this yielded six participants. One of the participants knew of two other English majors and put the researcher in contact with them. The methods used to gain access to participants is well documented by Punch and Oancea who note that although using gate keepers may not yield a random sample it is still a suitable sampling method – especially when gaining access is difficult (2014). Although snowballing was used at both institutions it did produce far more participants from Binghamton University than the University of Rochester. After a consultation with my supervisor in May I decided to use LinkedIn to reach out to self-identified English majors at the University of Rochester. Messages were sent through the platform and this led to one further interview from the University Rochester. In total, nine interviews were conducted between April and early June.

Participants were required to be English majors who were in their third or final year of university. As upperclassmen they would have already declared their major (The College Board, 2019.) As the study looked at the future plans of the participants,

[3] The interview schedule is included as Appendix A.
[4] The promotional flyer is included as Appendix C.

having English majors who were closer to graduation made it more likely that they contemplated post-graduation plans (Beggs et al., 2008; Wade & Reed, 1987). As noted in the Ethics section, all participants received the information sheet about the study and a consent form, either in electronic form or as a paper document depending on participant preference. Interviews lasted around 30 minutes. Participants were given time at the beginning and end to ask questions, add anything further, or clarify any of their statements.

The majority of participants (6) were female; three were male. This is representative of the gender balance in English programs according to the demographic data published by the NCES stating that 70.4% of 2017 English graduates were women (2018). Participants were 21 to 22 in age. All participants were considered domestic students by their university's criteria. Bryman (2012) notes that the sample size needs to be large enough to ensure data saturation but not so large that a deep analysis is challenging to undertake. Guest et al. (2006) suggest that six to twelve participants is an adequate sample size to achieve data saturation assuming that the sample is fairly homogenous as most of the final codes will be found after six interviews. The sample did produce themes and patterns across the interviews and final themes were brought up by at least two participants.

Four interviews were conducted in person in April. Due to the researcher's schedule and funding constraints, as well as the participants' availability, the remaining interviews were conducted electronically using video conferencing software. Video conferencing software is an economical solution for conducting interviews if the researcher and participant are in different geographical locations (Bryman, 2012 p. 658). Steps were taken to try and limit differences between face-to-face interviews and remote interviews. Remote interviews were conducted synchronously and used video-conferencing software so that the participant and the researcher were talking face-to-face rather than relying on audio-only interviews. Bryman (2012) states that, at times, online interviews may be more accessible for participants and a combination of face-to-face interviews and online interviews may be undertaken solely on the preference of the participant.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data. This was chosen because it allowed for the discovery of "repeated patterns of meaning" across a data set and was a more "easily accessible" method for a beginning researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8-9). There are debates around thematic analysis and the correct way to do it (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This study chose to follow Braun and Clarke's framework because it is adaptable to a variety of research questions, data collection methods, and theoretical frameworks and it provides clear and concise steps to help the researcher report quality data (2006). This section will outline how I followed this process and where and why I deviated from the six-step process - which is acknowledged as sometimes necessary by Braun and Clarke (2006) because the coding and analytic process is rarely linear.

Braun & Clark's (2006) Thematic Analysis Framework	
Step 1	Familiarization with Data
Step 2	Generation of Initial Codes
Step 3	Searching for Themes
Step 4	Review Themes
Step 5	Finalize Themes
Step 6	Write-Up Findings

The first step is to become familiar with the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). All interviews were audio recorded and then listened back to in order to ensure that everything was captured. Then the audio was transcribed after consulting literature on how to best ensure accurate transcriptions (Kvale, 2007, Della Noce, 2006). As such, interviews were transcribed verbatim and included colloquialisms, pauses, and punctuation that matched the participants' flow of thoughts as closely as possible. After the initial transcription, the audio recording was played concurrently while reading the transcription to check for errors and to see if any early thoughts came out of the data. This was done using marginal notation.

The second step in Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework is the generation of initial codes. This was done by hand using marginal notations, highlighters, and Microsoft Excel. Braun and Clarke stress the importance of looking at all the data gathered during this stage rather than cherry-picking the data that might be assumed to answer the study's research questions (2006). Thus, every interview was coded individually and an attempt to note every code was made. This early coding revealed codes such as 'more interested in academic process,' 'English student body lacking cohesion,' 'internship experience,' and 'confident in themselves.'

The initial codes developed in step two were refined in step three: searching for themes. As I choose to use open coding, the codes identified in step two were fluid and sometimes modified as new codes or were absorbed into other codes. This is acceptable according to Braun and Clarke (2006) who note that interview content may be cross-coded or have multiple codes to ensure that the participant's data is accurately described.

Two analytical decisions were made in this step. The first was to use an inductive approach to the analysis. As mentioned, this study's ontological stance is constructivist and while a theoretical approach could be used to guide the analysis as mentioned by Braun and Clarke (2006), the use of an inductive approach typically produces themes that are more "strongly linked to the data themselves" (p. 12). This was also chosen because inductive analysis is not driven by the researcher's previous conceptions on the research topic. Since I had previous experience as a career advisor, I felt an inductive approach would help mitigate my own assumptions developed through my career advising experience and better allow the participants' beliefs, views, and understandings shape the findings.

The second decision was to explore themes at the latent level, which represents an "attempt to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach draws on existing literature to place the themes in conversation with broader ideas, trends, and beliefs about the topic (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). It is often used in conjunction with a constructivist approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In deciding to use an inductive coding approach coupled with latent theme identification, I hoped to ensure that each individual's data

was taken to be understood as their own specific reality, explored without the assumptions placed on it by earlier literature or myself – but then to explore whether there were overarching themes that connect to larger discourses in the field.

In step three, initial codes were collated into three main themes: 'marketability,' 'individuality,' and 'external influences.' Each theme had various sub-themes, but it was noted that some sub-themes seemed to belong 'more than' others in terms of connection to the main theme.

Step four and five were condensed in my study, which is noted as a potential occurrence because of the data set and the researcher's process of analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Step four is to review the themes generated in step three and step five is to finalize themes. It was decided that the themes developed in step three were too broad and internal coherence was not high because the themes were too large to allow the sub-themes to connect in a coherent way. As such, the review of themes took a more content-driven approach and four main themes were developed:

1. Passion-Led Choices
2. Transferability
3. English as Having Complex Implications for Career Goals
4. Lack of Support

These included sub-themes that developed out of the codes found in earlier steps. To review these new themes, a thematic charting approach was utilized in which Post-It Notes with the identified themes were grouped together by similarity and then were grouped into sub-themes during which the main themes were reviewed. This approach allowed for a rigorous visual review and looked for internal coherence and an accurate representation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The final step in Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework is producing the report or write-up on the analysis. This requires clear reporting on what analytical decision were made and why – such as the use of inductive and latent analysis. Additionally, the findings should be clearly explained and follow from the data presented. As such,

direct quotes from the interviews are included to show how conclusions about the themes and findings developed out of the participant's interviews.

The section above has explained what decisions were made during the analysis and discussed how the themes and sub-themes were generated from the interview data. In the reporting of these themes, prevalence was a question that needed to be explored. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that prevalence does not necessarily refer to how often a code appears but rather the consideration given to that theme by the participants. As such, it requires the researcher to take an active role in determining what prevalence means rather than simply relying on the number of times a code is repeated in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This report follows Braun and Clarke's convention suggestion in using 'in many cases' or 'a number of participants' rather than 'three participants stated' to address the concept of prevalence (2006).

Ethics

Ethics are critical to producing research and ethical practices should be ensured for all research (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Ethical practices were taken into consideration for all aspects of this study. This study applied for ethical approval using the CUREC 1A form. Approval was granted by the Department of Education's Departmental Research Ethics Committee – a subset of the University of Oxford's Research Ethics Committee.[5]

The CUREC 1A was chosen after consulting the British Education Research Association's (BERA) ethical guidelines (2018). BERA's guidelines are the ethical guidelines noted by the CUREC 1A form and also correlate with the research discipline of this study. For specific regulations regarding data storage and management, the study followed the University of Oxford's research guidelines. This included the storage of data on the University's secure back-up system and storing the research for a period of 3 years before destroying it.

[5] CUREC approval documents have been included as Appendix F.

To ensure participants' privacy as per BERA and University guidelines, participants were pseudonymized and permission to use direct quotes was asked for in the consent form (2018). Participants were able to choose their own pseudonym or have the researcher make one for them (Allen & Wiles, 2016). Similarly, all participants were asked in both the written consent form and verbally prior to the interview to confirm that they were willing to be audio-recorded. Participants were informed that they could contact the researcher to rescind their comments, ask for clarification on how their data was being used, or remove themselves and their data from this study prior to publication.

Quality

This section attempts to highlight how quality was addressed in the study. Flick (2011) notes that there is no overarching agreement on how to assess qualitative research quality which has led to the development of different quality frameworks for researchers to use. This study chose to use Lincoln & Guba's (1985) trustworthiness framework to express how quality was sought throughout the research. This framework was developed for qualitative education research and is widely used because of its applicability to a broad range of research approaches and philosophies (Shenton, 2004; Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010). Trustworthiness is established through the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility, expressed through the research design, shows how the study will produce a trustworthy representation of the phenomenon (Hoepfl, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study approached credibility in the literature review by noting research gaps and situating the topic in the existing research. The interview guide was developed after exploring existing literature and was discussed with my supervisor in an attempt to accurately situate the interview questions in the research rather than my own individual understandings of the phenomenon. Trustworthiness's ideal sampling strategy is random, however Shenton (2004) notes that this is not always possible and if another sample is used then appropriate processes should be used. This study used a snowball sample and gatekeepers but clearly outlined the process taken and referenced appropriate literature to ensure that the sampling strategy was credible.

Another attempt to ensure credibility was to conduct two pilot interviews in which the researcher gained interview practice and tested the coherence of the interview schedule.

For Lincoln and Guba's (1985) transferability concept, the write-up of this study includes extensive detail about the context and conducting of this research. In including this "thick description" of the study's design and operationalization, it allows a reader to understand all steps taken in this research and enables them to determine how the conclusions have been reached and whether the study may be transferable to another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Since qualitative case-studies are usually ungeneralizable, transferability increases trustworthiness through a detailed description of sampling, processes, and design to allow outside readers to decide whether the research can be transferred to another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study provides a "thick description" and potentially could be transferable to similarly sized institutions with comparable students in non-vocationally oriented majors.

This study did conduct dependability, or reliability, checks through the transcription and creation of thematic codes using Kvale (2007) and Braun and Clarke's framework but it did not approach dependability by using overlap measures, stepwise replication, or an inquiry audit as mentioned by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These approaches are noted as increasing dependability but were not deemed accessible in this study because of the time-constraints and availability of participants. More discussion of this can be found in the Limitations section.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) final tenet of confirmability focuses on the audit trail of a study. This study did not use an auditor as defined by the trustworthiness framework because my ethical approval did not allow for outside persons to view the original interview data but during the data analysis an auditor familiar with the subject (my supervisor) was utilized to ensure that the codes and themes developed were appropriate and representative of the study's topic. Through this, an attempt was made to confirm that the data presented mitigated possible researcher bias. Similarly, interviews were transcribed verbatim to limit researcher bias in the transcription (Kvale, 2007).

Limitations

One potential limitation in this study was the timing of interviews. Interviews were conducted in April and May – the graduation season for Binghamton University and the University of Rochester. This was a limitation because it meant that students were undertaking final exams during interviews. Although the seniors were thinking about their post-graduation plans because of the closeness of graduation, junior students were more likely to decline interviews to focus on final exams. Similarly, after graduation the senior students no longer fit my participatory criteria because they may have had already started jobs, graduate school, or other post-graduate plans. This may have impacted the sample.

Another limitation is that a single data collection method was employed. The semi-structured interviews were the single encounter with participants. The data collected may have benefited from a longer period of collection (Partington, 2001). First, the amount of data from each participant would have been greater and they would have had time to think and reflect throughout the process which may have produced more or different data. Second, since interviews rely on the researcher to be an active part of the data collection process, the rapport between the participant and the researcher might benefit from a longer period of data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.83) Lastly, because the field work time was limited, the only data collection method used was the semi-structured interview. This could be identified as a weakness since different methods produce different data which could have potentially produced more in-depth or complementary data (Cohen et al., 2018; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The sample size and method do not allow this study to be generalizable to the wider population (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 151). As discussed in the Sampling section, this study's nine interviews align with Guest et al.'s (2006) findings that most themes are identified after six interviews and nearly all themes are identified after twelve. As this study's sample size was nine there may have been codes that would have appeared if more interviews were conducted, but all of the final codes presented were found across at least two interviews, if not more. This study used a constructivist approach to look at the beliefs and understandings of English students at two

universities. These choices mean that the data produced is contextual and locale dependent as students have different university experiences, backgrounds, and each institution has a separate, individual English department. However, this study did not set out be to generalizable to the wider population because of its constructivist approach. As such, the case study design allows for a deeper exploration of these students' experiences using methodological choices that best fit the research aims.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

This chapter will discuss the data using thematic analysis as described in Chapter 3. The thematic analysis revealed four main themes with sub-themes. This connected to Braun & Clarke's (2006) understanding of how data is analyzed when using a thematic content analysis. The four main themes found in the data are:

1. Passion-Led Choices
2. Transferability
3. English as Having Complex Implications for Career Goals
4. Lack of Support

Each theme and its appropriate sub-themes will be discussed. In each theme discussion, the connection to the research question and aims will be considered.

Theme One: Passion-Led Choices

The first theme that was evident in the analysis of the interviews was the existence of passion as a driving factor in student's academic and career plans. The participants mentioned passion as a consideration from the start of their academic career through their university years and through to their post-graduation plans. The sub-themes which connected students through interest and passion were explored:

1. Academic Major Choice
2. Course Persistence
3. Career Expectations

The definition of passion used in this analysis is, "a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept." ("Passion", n.d.). Passion has synonyms of enthusiasm, interest, and excitement. These synonyms were taken into consideration when analyzing the data.

Academic Major Choice

Participants noted that their initial choice to major in English was driven by interest in, and passion for, the subject. Multiple participants mentioned that the aspects that

make up the English major, reading and writing, were part of what drove their passion. One participant stated:

> I loved creative writing and I've always been kind of a creative person so I think that's what made me major in English…I've just always wanted to read more and just educate myself more.
>
> -Anna, Female, Senior

Another participant expressed a similar view though continued on to express that it was really interest that drove them and they weren't sure what they were going to do with their degree:

> [I was][6] always told that I was a good writer and that I like to read and enjoyed it – so I was like why not do it? I had no idea what my purpose was going to be with it but I just kind of went in and didn't think about anything else.
>
> -Rose, Female, Senior

Every participant interviewed addressed interest, enjoyment, and ability when asked about why they chose to study English. Similarly, as shown in the last quote, multiple participants were unsure of what career they wanted but were drawn to English because of their interest or love of reading and writing. Only one student expressly discussed their future career plans when asked why they chose to major in English:

> I came in as a BCS [Brain and Cognitive Sciences] major and that became a minor because I realized that my only job opportunities would be to go to med[ical] school or work in a windowless lab for the rest of my life. So, I didn't really like either of those options.
>
> -Zoe, Female, Senior

This quote shows how perceived post-graduate options influenced this participant in their decision to major in English. They saw limited opportunities in the Brain and Cognitive science and decided to major in English because the perceived opportunities aligned closely with their desires.

Course Persistence

[6] Brackets [ ] indicate when words have been added by the researcher to increase comprehension of the participants' statements or to ensure anonymity of individuals.

Participants expressed moments of uncertainty during their courses and had to decide whether English was the course for them. Students seemed to use this deliberation period to reaffirm their interest in the subject as well as note the importance of passion within their respective English departments in keeping them in the subject.

> I think a lot of people ask me why, if I knew I wanted to do English I came to the U of R, and I ask myself that too sometimes. But, I think--- I love how the department is small but the faculty do really care about you and know you.
>
> -Anna, Female, Senior

She continued:

> I think that [imposter syndrome] was definitely an obstacle to work over and I think the only way I got over it was like talking to people who were passionate about things I was passionate about and talking to professors and seeing them in an older space and still being successful and still doing something they're passionate about. That's really helped me continue on.
>
> -Anna, Female, Senior

She voiced the importance of having passionate professors during her course. This quote discussed how she felt imposter syndrome during her first and second years at university. Anna self-identified as a first-generation student and did not know many graduated English majors so her experience with the English major were dictated by her professor's passion and success. The effect of passion was conveyed by other students who spoke of how encouraging it was to have professors who want students "to feel the same way" about English as they do (Rose).

Career Expectations

A number of participants expressed the belief that their future work would be something they were passionate about. One participant who had been accepted to a Master's of Teaching stated:

> Yeah, it's [teaching] a passion… From the age of like four or five I remember like pretending to be a teacher and I was like that's [what] I wanted to do like I would imagine like lesson plans and stuff when I was like seven.
>
> -Kyle, Male, Senior

Another participant expressed her belief that fellow English majors were very passionate about their degree and wanted to carry this enthusiasm into their post-graduation plans:

> A lot of the people I met through the major are actually really passionate about English and want to do something with it...I think that the friends that I have that are on the paths that they're on are really passionate about those paths for the most part.
>
> -Jennifer, Female, Senior

One participant had a contrasting view about passion being necessary in post-graduation plans:

> I was talking to someone about how I feel like millennial culture - they really emphasize you loving the job you have. You have to be 100-percent passionate about the field you're in. But…at an entry-level that's not always the case---or your first job out of college. That's not always the case.
>
> -Anna, Female, Senior

This participant's view is constructed around her understanding of 'millennial culture' and she does not see passion as something that was essential in post-graduation positions. This student, earlier in the interview, had discussed an internship that had been in her desired industry but in a different department. This may provide insight into her belief about the presence of passion in an early-career graduate not being essential and also conveyed the participant's agency in the development of her beliefs. Interestingly, this student still recognized the existence of passion in early career planning despite not adhering to that belief herself.

Theme Discussion

The three sub-themes trace how passion and interest in English link participants' academic and post-graduation planning. In the interviews, interest was a leading factor for all participants in the initial decision to study English. This was declared as an interest in writing and reading as well as the general academic field. Only one interview participant, Zoe, explicitly stated that they chose to major in English because of the job opportunities and career-related aspects. This finding of interest-driven major choice corresponds with much of the literature on academic decision-

making that initial major decision is most strongly influenced by subject interest, particularly when entering university (Soria & Stebleton, 2013; Keshinshian et al., 2010).

The second sub-theme addressed persistence in the major and revealed that students were motivated by shared passion with their professors and classmates. The role of interest in the subject was seen as an important factor in academic success and was emphasized by students as one of the reasons they enjoyed the major. Maintaining the continuity between initial major choice and their time in university, participants expressed a desire to continue onto roles that they were passionate about after graduation – linking to the third sub-theme.

Our participants found that their decision-making did trend more career-orientated as they progressed through university, but unlike the finding by Mauldin et al. (2000), most of our participants did not focus on external factors like pay and prestige when exploring post-graduation plans. As Kyle discussed when talking about passion leading him into teaching, despite his belief that teaching is not seen as "prestigious profession," the majority of our participants felt that passion and satisfaction in post-graduation plans were more important than the starting pay or societal view of the plan. This may highlight that interest remains important throughout, and beyond, the English degree rather than shifting to more external factors such as perceived career pay or industry prestige.

This theme provided evidence for the main research question as participants expressed passion as a clear connector between the English degree and future plans. The research participants were driven by interest in the English major and this influenced them in thinking about post-graduate destinations because they hoped to continue to a job or graduate program that was also a passion or interest. Passion was believed to connect the study of English and careers as overwhelmingly students explored industries and programs that they could see themselves enjoying for the sake of the job content rather than the monetary gain or prestige of the position which does not align with existing literature focused on economic market factors influencing what student's study (Keep, 2012; Brown et al., 2011).

Theme Two: Transferability

The second theme generated was the transferability of the English degree and the skills gained through the degree. Four sub-themes were identified:

1. Development of Employable Skills
2. Marketability of Graduates
3. Preparedness for Post-Graduation Destinations
4. Widespread Opportunities

Development of Employable Skills

The development of employable skills is an important function of higher education (Department of Education, 2018; Bennett et al., 2017). Participants were asked to describe what skills they felt they gained from the English course and if they believed they would need any additional skills not gained from the major. Several students extolled developed skills as easily transferrable to a variety of industries and graduate programs. Most participants named numerous skills that they felt they learned through the English degree that they thought would assist in their future plans:

> I think a lot of people don't have even the basic skills like writing or communication whether it's verbal or written…That's definitely just something I've learned in like reading so many papers and analyzing different ideas and putting different ideas in communication with each other.
>
> -Anna, Female, Senior

Anna's development of communication skills was echoed by all participants – though some solely mentioned written communication or verbal communication and not both as Anna did. Three participants mentioned communication as useful because their intended career included considerable amounts of writing and content creation. Participants tended to focus on the writing and editing they had done in English classes as clear evidence of skills development. Others focused on how their communication skills would help them impress employers during interviews and give them a competitive edge during the job-search.

> I feel like the skills you get from being an English major will help out with application processes whether it be like writing a cover letter that is clear and

> concise [or] whether it be you know taking an interview question and being able to dissect it to see what actually needs to be answered.
>
> -Adrian, Male, Junior

Interestingly, some participants noted that they felt there was a skills gap in technical and digital skills. One explained:

> I keep find[ing] that I wish that it [the English major] was more applicable for the 21st century. Like the digital age. The way people communicate is changing a lot…But, I do feel---like a lapse in my knowledge about how the internet has changed things, how people write has changed because of social media.
>
> -Meghan, Female, Senior

Meghan revealed that learning digital skills was not available through the degree and would need to be gained through another avenue. Multiple students who were planning on entering fields such as marketing or publishing thought they would be frequently using digital technology. Digital technology is identified by the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) as a career competency that graduates should have upon entering the workforce (2017). The NACE competencies will be discussed in this theme's discussion section.

There was one negative case. Zoe felt that although she learned communications skills through the degree, overall the skills gained were too generic and would not transfer to a specific industry. This example is an individual's view of the degree and has been constructed by her experiences and reveals the differences of individuals' realities and participant's agency (Cohen et al., 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2006). She was aware of the skills she had gained, she simply felt that she would not be able to use them as leverage for a position that she would want to obtain.

Marketability of Graduates

Universities are invested in their graduates' employability due to the impact of their recruitment, retention, reputation, and alumni support (Kent, 2012). The impetus to produce competitive graduates for the labor force transferred to individual students (Tymon, 2013). Participants discussed the importance of marketing the English degree in order to be successful in their future careers.

> I like to think that if you put in... it's probably not the easiest thing to market if you're not used to marketing stuff. But, if you know how to be like, yo, these are the skills I have and this is what the major has given me---like you can put that towards anything.
>
> -Kyle, Male, Senior

> If you just say you read books and you wrote papers, obviously someone in accounting...in a different field [other] than teaching or law isn't going to want to hire you. But I think if you could find a different way to market your major and have different job opportunities during summers or winters or whatever than you could get yourself into a different field. But then it can go either way.
>
> -Rose, Female, Senior

Connecting to their beliefs about transferable skills, these two students detail how if a student can talk to an employer about their skills, degree, and experience in a specific way they can do a variety of things with an English major. They felt that English majors could move outside of the typical English major occupations, expressed here as teaching and law, based on how successful they were at marketing their academic experience. Though they expressed the view that English can be difficult to market at times, especially if trying to enter fields requiring specific vocational skills at graduation, they saw experiences like internships, externships, and job shadowing opportunities as helping increase the marketability and transferability of the degree and student.

Preparedness for Post-Graduation Destinations

The participants overwhelmingly believed that English prepared its students for transitions into both employment and graduate school. This topic was discussed in questions about post-graduation plans, as some students were entering the job market while other were entering graduate programs. Using post-graduation plans was an attempt to keep student's minds open rather than focusing solely on employability and the job market. When discussing the workforce, participants noted:

> I see lots of English majors doing really cool things and going on to be incredibly successful.
>
> -Zoe, Female, Senior

> It's like we can plug our major into basically anything that's not very hyper specific. Like maybe not a doctor immediately.
>
> -Kyle, Male, Senior

> It wasn't necessarily like 'I'm gonna get a job' but it was more like I know what I like and I'll figure it out. A lot of people I know had internships in the fields they wanted so I don't think [they're worried].
>
> -Meghan, Female, Senior

There was a similarly strong understanding that English majors were prepared for graduate school. This belief existed in regard to both more traditional graduate programs leading to academic qualifications and in vocational programs like law or teaching.

> My cousin is in his first year at law school and he said the English major in his class is insane and she is so prepared and is so well equipped to do research and she is kicking all of their asses.
>
> -Rose, Female, Senior

Rose had been accepted to law school and will enroll in the fall. She explained earlier in the interview that she felt her skills and the research opportunities she received through the English major help her feel confident about the transition to law school. The addition of this anecdote revealed that in her discussions about future plans she found evidence that English majors were successful after undergraduate schooling. Interestingly, she equated the student's success at law school solely to her English degree rather than other potential factors such as the woman's internal motivation or class preparation. Rose constructed her view of post-graduate success on her own specific understanding of success and this influenced her quote in terms of equating success solely to the English major and not to any other potential factors.

> I feel like immediately after I know [it will] definitely help – in grad school – especially if I'm doing English.
>
> -Kyle, Male, Senior

This student also noted that they felt their undergraduate work had prepared them for a more academic graduate program. In this case the student mentioned that they felt prepared to continue on with an English-centered graduate program.

Widespread Opportunities

Participants were asked to share what their post-graduation plan was, or if they did not know at the time of interview, what they thought they wanted to do after graduation.

Participant 1	Graduate School – English Teaching
Participant 2	Graduate School - Law
Participant 3	Graduate School - Law
Participant 4	Employment - Publishing
Participant 5	Employment - Content Writing
Participant 6	Employment - Finance
Participant 7	Employment – Marketing/PR
Participant 8	Graduate School - Law
Participant 9	Employment - Insurance

All of these students were entering professional graduate programs (three to law school and one to a teaching program). The other five students were planning to enter employment after graduation. In their own anticipated plans, there was evidence that they felt they had a variety of opportunities available. Anna had obtained a job in the publishing industry but felt that her academic experience transferred many industries:

> I can work...I can kind of do whatever I want with it [English degree] because [its] very applicable to any industry.
>
> -Anna, Female, Senior

In addition to individual plans, participants were asked to think about what they viewed as the routes English majors in general take after graduation. The students reiterated that they felt English majors could do whatever they wanted or were interested in – as one student stated:

> I think they do end up doing whatever it is that they want. I do think that a lot of English majors understand what they value of their academic training has brought them and so if they have other passions or interests, they pursue them knowing they are fully equipped with the English tools and you know if they're interested in whatever else, they'll just do it.
>
> -Maria, Female, Senior

Barring one, every participant described the typical routes of English majors mainly by using occupational fields:

> Journalism, publishing, house writing[7]…maybe going to some…[pause] grad[uate] program.
>
> -Zoe, Female, Senior

One student, a double major in Business and English, noted that because he did not know many people who had graduated in English graduates he was not entirely sure what occupations English majors could, or did, pursue:

> Either go into like education or go on to some sort of graduate school has been my perception of that [degree outcomes]. I know people who are doing that for different things. Um. In terms of actual employment? I'm not really sure. Just because I don't really know that many people who have graduated with English, just in my experiences.
>
> -Adrian, Male, Junior

This quote revealed that Adrian developed his understanding of outcomes from personal connections he had rather than using graduation outcome data provided by the career office and department.

Theme Discussion

The four sub-themes outlined different constructs of English and the labor market. Overall, the sub-themes highlighted that students perceived English as helping them successfully transfer into post-graduation life through skills, opportunities, marketability and preparedness. On the whole, participants recognized the skills learned from the degree as transferable to their future: whether that be a job, professional school or something else. Every student described skills that

[7] House writing refers to content writing and is a position that creates written content for a company to be published electronically or in print.

corresponded to the NACE competencies – eight career competencies identified by colleges and employers to help recent college graduates be career-ready (2017). They are:

1. Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
2. Oral/Written Communications
3. Teamwork/Collaboration
4. Digital Technology
5. Leadership
6. Professionalism/Work Ethic
7. Career Management
8. Global/Intercultural Fluency

Binghamton University and the University of Rochester use NACE's career competencies to create programs and initiatives for their students. None of the participants mentioned NACE by name but all of them pointed out at least 2 competencies. These skills were understood as having been gained through their academic work – in class or through assessments – but participants believed that they would use them to secure their post-graduation destination and in that role. Barring Zoe, these participants perceived skills gained through English as a bridge to obtaining and succeeding in their post-graduation plan.

Similarly, the participants felt that their academic study made them marketable to graduate program and jobs. They viewed themselves as marketable in the sense that they felt their degree would allow them to enter nearly any field or graduate program that they wanted because of the combination of skills, abilities, and credentials they held. Brown and Hesketh (2004) discuss marketability in their player or purist theory for employment. The interviewees mostly took a 'player' approach in which they approached employment by marketing themselves for specific jobs and employers through spinning experiences and adapting their skills to fit the needs of the job, rather than assuming the labor market would understand the 'worth' of the English degree unaided (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Students felt that they, themselves, were 'transferable' as they could adapt or construct themselves to be successful in the application process for graduate programs and jobs by knowing how to market themselves in a KBE.

The third theme revealed that students felt prepared to transfer out of university and to their next step. Through these feelings of preparedness, students saw the English program as a preparatory step to a job or graduate program. The students understood English as having "well-equipped" them to succeed in the transition to post graduation life (Rose).

The fourth theme explored perceptions of what jobs are available. The participants shared an understanding that typical roles for English graduates (teachers, editors, journalists) existed but that people were not confined to these occupations. Out of the participants, only three were doing something deemed "typical" and the rest were exploring other options. This supports the numerous outcomes reported by Binghamton and the University of Rochester (2019; 2012). Through the extensive opportunities noted by the participants, it is clear that they believe the English degree and its associated skills were transferable to the workforce in a myriad of ways which helps provide some insight for this study's first sub-research question and main research question.

Theme Three: English as Having Complex Implications for Career Goals

An emergent theme was the complexity of the process that English majors undertook in discovering their post-graduation outcome. The complexities were not only centered around issues of employability, but also external pressures, the flexibility of the English degree, and the role of experiential learning (EL). Within the main theme of complexity of English, four sub-themes were identified. Similarly, although some of the sub-themes address issues dealt with towards the end of students' university journey, other sub-themes arose from ideas and beliefs that occurred at the beginning or throughout the student's journey.

English as Non-Direct Path to Workforce

The first sub-theme that develop revolved around students' belief that the English major did not provide a clear, easily noticeable path to a specific career or industry:

> Like there isn't a specific job for you. You just have a generic skill set that could be applied to anything but there is not direct path for you…and we're

> like constantly surrounded by compsci [*sic*] and engineers and premed[ical students] who do have immediate opportunities, or they have more transparent opportunities… It's not a direct path. They might not be...I feel like journalism, content writing, publishing are the clearest paths.
>
> -Zoe, Female, Senior

Maria expressed how pre-professional programs that prepare students for vocational graduate training have clear understandings of which courses to take and which job their degree will lead to.

> If you're pre-med, I know a lot of people that have explicitly told me 'this is going to be my life and my job and my future's secure' because it's very formulaic. But if you're in an English major, and humanities major, you definitely have to think about things holistically.
>
> -Maria, Female, Senior

When discussing paths, as shown in the quotes above, students tended to compare their experience as English majors to majors that they perceived as having more direct paths to employment or post-graduation plans. The majors they discussed tended to be ones with easily noticeable professional connections like computer science graduating to a job as a computer scientist or an engineering student taking a job as an engineer. Additionally:

> Some people are like 'oh yeah I do communications' because it's more marketable or more accessible. There's more of a concrete path after graduation.
>
> -Anna, Female, Senior

Anna spoke of people who chose specific majors because they believed it would have a more easily understood path after graduation, drawing a clear distinction between English and these majors. This lack of a path may factor into the decline in the number of English majors who graduate each year.

External Expectations

The participants expressed, in varied ways, how they were or were not affected by external influences such as family and peer expectations. Familial expectations were

seen in both positive and negative lights. Anna noted that her parents were wary of her desire to study English because English outcomes were not seen as guaranteed:

> My family is first generation Asian-American so it's very much like STEM focused… and my family is full of accountants because I think that was the road of like 'oh, you know you're going to get a job after this, like in banking'. Something very practical. So I know when I wanted to do an English degree [pause]…my family was like, 'oh, what job are you going to get? I don't understand what you're going to do with that major.' Which was really frustrating.
>
> -Anna, Female, Senior

These sentiments were similarly raised by Rose who noted that her "working class family" questioned her decision because they wanted to know at the beginning of her university career what "what job [she was] going to have afterwards and what are the benefits of that job." She stated that her family didn't want to know that "she liked her major" but were more interested in the return on the educational investment.

Jennifer was nervous that her parents would question her decision to study English because of employment concerns but instead found them supportive of her decision which reassured her of her choice:

> I was really nervous my parents were going to be like 'oh what are you going to do with that?' Although at that point I already knew I wanted to go to [postgraduate] law school. They were like: 'no that's great. English is a really great major to have, you get so many skills.' And they were like even if you decide you don't go to law school you can do so many things.
>
> -Jennifer, Female, Senior

The connection between university education and future jobs is clear from the quotes above. When participants discussed familial views of their academic course participant who mentioned their parents' concern or support in terms of the labor market and career opportunities. Anna and Rose felt the need to defend their academic choice to their parents. Both women later stated that once they had solidified future plans– law school for Rose and a publishing job for Anna, their parents were less concerned about their major choice. This may connect to the massification and neoliberal concepts about a degree 'paying off' in terms of providing well-paying graduate opportunities (Brown et al., 2011). Anna conveyed that that financial

concerns were the reason behind her parents questioning but securing a job assuaged those concerns because "that's their end goal – of [me] being financially stable."

Societal Views

Although multiple participants mentioned their belief that they were not influenced by societal views of the English major, every student recognized the existence of societal views of English and, at times, liberal arts courses. Kyle mentioned:

> If you say you're going to be an English major it's always "oh, what are you going to do with that?" Or I know, I have a friend who is an Art History major, and I think I've even mistakenly asked her what she wanted to do. But, not...I just wanted to know. Not in a patronizing way. But that's a thing...liberal arts majors---if you say your major they say, 'that's cool, but why; or what are you going to do with that?'
>
> -Kyle, Senior, Male

Rose also expressed similar sentiments about English major career perceptions:

> I think because they look at the major and think like – oh it's just about reading a book and writing a paper and like getting a good grade and that's it. Or like doing a presentation. They don't look at it for more than what it is. English; like it's what you learn in 8th grade in high school is [*sic*] that you read a book and that's that.
>
> -Rose, Female, Senior

In her quote, she described a misconception about how she views the major versus how she thinks other people view it. She mentioned earlier in the interview that she disliked that people viewed English as a "quote-on-quote easier major" and assumed that she would go into teaching automatically. The majority of participants felt that English was perceived by peers as an easy major.

> I mean they like, will be degrading in other ways but they won't say that [not going to get a job]. It'll be more along the lines of 'your class load is so much easier.'
>
> -Zoe, Female, Senior

> And sometimes they'll complain about how it's so easy to get a liberal arts degree because you just need like 10 classes and it doesn't matter what order you take them in and it's very easy.

-Meghan, Female, Senior

This was interesting because despite every student acknowledging the societal belief that Kyle illustrated (of English majors being asked "what are you going to do with that?"), more students spent time during the interview discussing how people viewed their academic course rather than their outcomes. Some participants even noted that even though the perception of English majors in society is not a careers-oriented one, the people they met in college did not add to this belief but rather were interested and non-typical in their responses to English majors about career planning.

Importance of Experiential Learning

Every participant spoke about experiential learning (EL) as a way to explore their future plans, gain experience in their field, find out what they did not want to do, or to build skills. These fell into three categories: internships, campus clubs, and on-campus work. EL was understood as being outside of the English major and its associated academic work.

Type of EL	Internships	Campus Clubs	On-Campus Work
Number of Students Participating	7	8	8

Jennifer described her internship in the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) as critical in her decision to pursue law. Further, she noted that the internship helped her realize that the type of law she was interning in was not the type she wanted to pursue after graduation:

> It was still kind of cool to like be able to start using some of the lingo and be able to mini-lawyer - as silly as that sounds. It was definitely very helpful. I felt like really empowered doing that and it is definitely what I want to be doing.

-Jennifer, Female, Senior

Anna noted that her work as a Residential Assistant (RA), in which she served as a welfare officer for a residential building, and as a writing fellow helped her acquire

communication and teamwork skills in a complementary way to how they were developed through academic English work:

> I spin my RA and writing fellows things about like…I'm learning how to communicate with different audiences and I'm communicating with different groups of people.
>
> -Anna, Female, Senior

Theme Discussion

The four sub-themes identified the myriad of ways that English students explore, engage, and operationalize their post-graduate plan. They expressed the individuality that exists in English because students experience the degree differently and expect to do different things with the degree. The four themes each highlighted aspects of complexity which together portray outcomes as nebulous, multi-faceted, and reliant on an individual's circumstances.

Every participant recognized English as a degree that has complex implications for their career goals because the path to employability was not seen as clearly defined. This belief of a non-direct path led students to feel that they had to explore and focus harder on employability than students from majors that had clear occupational links. Multiple students related medicine, finance, and STEM majors as comparable majors which benefitted from a clear job path. The students' view of a non-direct path corresponds with what research found on employers' view of English degrees (Kent, 2012; Bérubé, 2003; Wade & Reed, 1987). The participants recognized that by studying English they may have to accept that post-graduation plans may be more uncertain than if they had studied something more directly related to a specific industry or occupational pathway. In the previous theme, participants expressed how the wide opportunities available to English majors was a benefit of the degree. In this theme it appeared that the widespread opportunities, while helpful, also exacerbate the lack of direct path – which challenged the participants in transferring to post-graduation life. Participants seemed unaware they had identified a connection between the wide variety of opportunities coinciding with the lack of a direct path to work. In this sub-theme there are aspects of marketization highlighted as the participants note that they must recognize that English may lack direct paths to

employability and as such they must be prepared to think outside a 'formulaic' plan to find labor market connections for their English degree.

Societal views of English and the resulting external expectations placed on the participants revealed another complexity. Every participant mentioned that they were aware of perceptions surrounding English and employability. In particular, most explained that those perceptions were seen by them as questions about whether they would ever get a job, why they had chosen to study English if they wanted to be successful, and general queries about what they are going to do with that if they were not planning on being teachers.

Some participants expressed that external perceptions may have held sway over their decisions concerning what to do after college. Kyle revealed that after searching for jobs in creative fields he eventually decided on teaching because it was something he viewed as a fallback for an English major. However, although other participants noted that social perceptions of English and its employability had been a part of their university experience, they had not been influenced by them in the later years of their degree. Anna attributed this to introspection and her recognition that other people did not know enough about the degree to make those comments to her. Unlike Kent (2012) who discussed the prevalence of these societal perceptions, the participants suggested that peer remarks about academic difficulty and workload were more common than career or job comments. Parental expectations and desires also arose during interviews. Though some students did not discuss parental or other outside influences at all, other students mentioned that their parents were concerned or confused by their child's decision to major in English. Some noted that their parents initially wanted them to major in something else or continue onto a professional graduate degree that would be more directly-related to an industry. However, as they progressed through the degree their parents' beliefs became less important. Three students self-identified as working class and first-generation college students.[8] Interestingly, two of these were the most vocal about parental pressure to study something more utilitarian, but the other felt that because she was the first in her family to go to college that her parents were not able to have an opinion because they

[8] Students self-identifying as working class and/or first-generation students were not asked to define those terms as the process of self-identification was seen as displaying agency in associating with the descriptor.

had not experienced university. This shows the complexity of external influences in highlighting that even students from similar educational and economic backgrounds experience external pressures and construct their beliefs around what they should do in university and beyond in different, agential, and individual ways. In further research, this could be explored in the context of declining English graduates.

The final sub-theme addressed ways that students prepared for their post-graduation plans using experiential opportunities. Every participant conveyed the importance of EL to successfully obtain the job or graduate program desired. Broader EL opportunities are documented as critical in increasing employability because it provides experiences not generally gained through academic study (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016). The participants discussed how finding internships in specific fields such as literature may be challenging and lead someone to another field (Kyle). They also spoke about how the variety of experiences generated complexity in outcomes because there were many options available but at the same time students may or may not have been able to take advantage of them because of economic or geographical constraints amongst other factors. Thus, the importance of EL is partially constructed by perceptions of available opportunities, funding, location and participant background. This led participants to understand EL as important in linking their English degree and future plans but also adding complexity to what their future outcome might be.

Theme Four: Lack of Support

This theme was generated from the feelings of individual drive and lack of support that participants expressed in their journey from academics to post-graduation plans. Four sub-themes are discussed:

1. Need for Individual Motivation and Self-Awareness
2. Department Support
3. Institutional Support
4. Employability Initiatives and Resources.

Need for Individual Motivation and Self-Awareness

Participants felt they were largely responsible for their future planning. They stated how individual motivation and drive were important for successfully figuring out and securing their post-graduation plans. One student expressed this in their description of career exploration in industries other than the ones highlighted by the English department.

> It was definitely a lot of individual...it was definitely individually driven. Only because I could feel the difference between the English department at [the University of Rochester] sort of like bringing in speakers but a lot of them were um publicists or editors or radio-oriented people and I'm like great you know but again like what are you...what's like the bridge between the students who are not interested in those fields, you know.
>
> -Maria, Female, Senior

Meghan expressed similar feelings and mentioned that she wished she had learned more about how to explore careers and future planning as part of her course:

> I want to say it's on you because that is what my experience has been. But, I think in an ideal world it should be taught or focused upon more.
>
> -Meghan, Female, Senior

Kyle described his frustration with the actual job search process and the career resources he utilized while planning his post-graduation plans:

> But I think for English majors it's like, again, you have to find out, yourself what you want to do and be like 'here are my five options [name redacted], [name redacted], or whoever, and this is what I'm trying to think.' And they're [career advisors] great, and they can help. But it's almost like, it's almost how many times can you think outside the box?
>
> -Kyle, Male, Senior

Here Kyle recounted how he felt that he always had to provide the career options rather than be shown what career options were available. He further recounted how he fell into teaching because he found that locating, let alone securing, creative positions was extremely difficult and not something that the career advisors he met knew how to do. Teaching was something that was always there on the periphery and he knew how to accomplish it because of its perception as a "standard English major job."

Department Support

Adrian, a double major in business (SOM) and English (Harpur), described his experience in both departments in terms of career searching and preparation support. In which, he remarks on how he viewed SOM as involved in the job search process for students because it is part of the degree expectations while the English department did not seem to have a departmental responsibility in job securement for its students.

> I know that SOM in particular - their job is to get you a job pretty much. They highly emphasize it. They always come into our classes and tell us about their career services. They always send us emails reminding us about what we need to do to get a job. Whereas in Harpur (pause) it might be just because [I] haven't been paying attention to it for three years. But (pause) I feel like they could be doing more to help out their students.
>
> -Adrian, Male, Junior

Zoe made an important distinction about the support she felt the department failed to provide:

> I could have gone to that sort of person that I have a personal connection with, but like the department as a whole? I don't know them that well.
>
> -Zoe, Female, Senior

She conveyed that she could reach out to individual English professors for advice and support but that there was not a strong enough connection with the department as a whole and as such was not seen as a place to seek support. It is important to note that Zoe did find her department supportive with summer internship funding – which she learned about from an English professor. Rose mentioned that her English department offered an internship program and brought alumni back to campus to speak:

> "They do give you really good advice but it's not necessarily a down-the-road-contact point for a job…But you also have to put yourself out there and network and be able to hold conversations with professionals and not everyone can do that."
>
> -Rose, Female, Senior

Here Rose recognized her department's attempt to engage students with alumni and internship opportunities but, specifically with the alumni visits, she struggled to see

the clear connection between where she was in university to where the alumni were in their careers.

Institutional Support

There was evidence that the participants did not feel supported by their institutions in their academic study or in their search for post-graduation plans. Kyle and Rose explained:

> It's also true that the avenues in the places that we're [Binghamton] putting money is not necessarily the arts, and not necessarily the liberal arts, fine arts[.] They'll put millions of dollars into research or a new nursing facility or making an XYZ… I know they've made cuts to the Art History major compared to putting millions into STEM. And when you see them do that it's like, 'Alright. They don't really care about me.'
>
> -Kyle, Male, Senior

> I think they definitely push people toward the Big 4 [accounting firms]. So who does that leave out? English majors, science majors. They can't really do much to get people into med school and stuff... So, I think there is a huge focus on getting the jobs and having the numbers so the Big 4 loves Binghamton so they really push people into SOM and Econ[omics] and things like that so that way they're getting those jobs. There might not be as much of a focus on 'how can we get the liberal arts kids jobs?
>
> -Rose, Female, Senior

Students from both schools emphasized that their perceptions of university priorities, comparisons with the STEM year-mates, and a lack of infrastructure investment led them to believe that their institution were not supporting them.

Employability Initiatives and Resources

Participants explained some of their interactions with the career resources on campus. Rose and Kyle noted that they did not find them satisfactory in helping them understand how English could play into their future plan.

> I think they kind of rely on [the career center] for that. And their way of saying find jobs in English is saying like 'oh we have these alumni coming...like look at what your options are.' Like I know the English website has a list of jobs you can have afterwards but they don't tell you how to get

> those jobs they just tell that these are what our alumni, I guess, do that are English majors.
>
> -Rose, Female, Senior

> And it's [the career fairs] split up by department. But it's almost like English, or the liberal arts, we're just not in it …'There's no this is the day you go for that'…There was one that was professional or like student affairs. But it's almost like it's like them being like your careers aren't (pause) not even just valuable but not even viable. There's not enough for them to be like here's a whole fair for you.
>
> -Kyle, Male, Senior

Theme Discussion

The final theme centered around the participants' view that they lacked support in their transition from university to post-graduation destination. The sub-themes connected the participants' beliefs that they were individually responsible for post-graduation planning by highlighting the department, university, and career resources that they felt should have been more supportive in their university career. Multiple participants disclosed that they felt that they had been mainly responsible for their own career planning and exploration process. Although this study did not explicitly explore who students felt should be responsible for making them employable or providing information on labor market opportunities, answers from participants did reveal that they wanted employability to be more prominent at the departmental and university level. Previous research has advocated for joint responsibility between students, universities, and employers. Our participants did not mention employers in their discussions of increasing employability which deviates from some of the literature arguing for employers to take a larger role in increasing employability (Tran, 2015; Tymon, 2013; Keep, 2012; King, 2009). With the deficiencies in employability support, they found the career development process something that they individually navigated. In part, this was seen as increasing the difficulty of linking English degree to their post-graduation plans (Kent, 2012). As previous research has determined, the career development process is generally seen as an individually led one, however the participants stated that the separation of the academic side of their degree from the utilitarian aspects such as career development and exploration led them to believe that the university and its stakeholders did not have the ability to

support them fully because they were English students. Kyle revealed how he felt that his own job search process was almost fully dictated by him because the department and university were not accustomed to working with English students on non-academic topics.

Department and university support were identified in multiple interviews as a problem area in helping students link their English degree to their post-graduation plans. At the department level, students focused on the lack of support in terms of vision and engagement issues. Although multiple students mentioned alumni coming back to talk as a way that the department showed the connection between study and careers, every student mentioned that this was not as helpful as anticipated because the departments did not take into consideration the broadness of occupations English majors have and was not helpful in an providing career opportunities– only in an information gathering or career exploration sense. Similarly, students reiterated that they felt STEM and business subjects had more department resources devoted to future planning initiatives because those subjects were more vocationally-oriented. English students viewed the department as an academic entity that was not directly, or at least not effectively, involved in helping students with the career aspect of university. This view of English departments as purely academic entities further expounded the belief the participants felt they were directly in charge of their academic to career transition.

At the university level, institutional priorities were seen as the main driver behind English majors lacking support. Interestingly, multiple participants felt the university did not support English during university as well as failing to support English majors' transition into the world. In budget cuts to neighboring departments and investment in new health schools and STEM research labs, Kyle felt that the institutional priorities did not include the English major but instead were more focused on growth related to bringing in money. This belief about investing money into STEM and other fields connects to the idea that the KBE may be shifting the educational trends to fields that are seen as knowledge producers like engineering, computer science, or data science (Brown et al., 2013; Donoghue, 2008). In the investment into STEM and other ostensibly lucrative fields, the participants expressed their understanding of a shift in universities to focus on financial outcomes and their role as producers and profiteers of the KBE through new management practices (Deem, 2007). This study's findings

suggest that English majors believed they were not included as institutional priorities and would receive little support from the university in any aspect of their degree.

The final sub-theme discussed the employability resources that participants interacted with throughout their degree. Here as well, the interviews focused on the unhelpfulness of these resources when it came to planning their next step. One aspect verbalized by a few participants were online resources which simply listed what alumni had done in the past. Dey & Cruzvergara (2014) acknowledge these can be useful career exploration tools and have been added to many career centers, but the participants that interacted with these felt that there was no further guidance available on how to actually reach that career – despite consulting trained career advisors and having access to online databases with major outcomes and alumni stories. Similarly, two students mentioned how English majors seem to be left out of career events and resources – especially at career fairs focused on internship and job recruitment. In failing to see opportunities targeted towards them at career fairs and alumni events, the career initiatives undertaken by the universities did not help participants feel supported in their career development and did not assist in linking the academic degree to future goals.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how students understood the connection between their English major and post-graduation plans. It used a qualitative, constructionist approach to explore participants' beliefs, views and perceptions on the topic through nine semi-structured interviews with junior and senior English majors at two mid-sized American universities. Data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Overall, the findings suggest that English majors see a clear connection between the work they undertake for their academic degree and what they aim to do after graduation.

Connections to Existing Literature

This study aligned with much of the pre-existing literature, particularly in emphasizing intrinsic interest and passion as the driver behind academic and career choice for English majors, though it provided a more specified look at an individual major rather than the liberal arts courses more generally. Similarly, the study reinforced the idea that employment and career goals are individual and complex but are an integral part of university education. Our participants were entering very different fields and had varied reasons for and approaches to entering their selected industry based on background, interest, and other social and economic constructs. In this sense, and despite the extra challenge noted by participants of being an English major, the findings support previous literature noting individuality in university and career linkage (DoE, 2018; Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; Oakley, 2013; Brown et al., 2011). Our findings also aligned with some literature on the importance of transferable skills (Bennet et al., 2017; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005). Overall, students were clear about which skills they gained and hoped to use and were able to discuss how they would employ skills in whatever field of employment they chose. This correlates the research done by NACE (2018) and LEAP about the importance of skills and the ability of liberal arts courses in developing these skills (Hart Research Associates, 2018).

Data and Research Questions

The findings answered the overarching research question of this study:

How do English majors understand the connection between the study of English and their future plans?

Sub-research question one focused on outcomes and perceived outcomes. Theme Two provided data on what our individual participants were doing after graduation – four going to professional graduate programs and five going into jobs. This revealed that the sample was fairly evenly split between immediately entering the work force and delaying entering for graduate school. Likewise, our participants were asked to discuss which occupation fields they felt were open to English majors. As this study was aligned with constructivism, the answers for this were individual and reflexive of participant's backgrounds and context. Overall, constructs of traditional English jobs like teaching, writing, and publishing emerged, but participants emphasized that opportunities available to English majors were widespread and dependent on an individual's desires.

The second sub-question explored whether outside perceptions influenced our participants' understandings of outcomes. Overwhelmingly, the participants did not feel that outside perceptions had influenced them. Although they were aware of perceptions, particularly of English majors struggling to find a job, the students explained that they did not feel influenced by these thoughts were aware of them. The study identified two specific instances of outside perceptions – familial and peer. As discussed earlier, the participants noted that there was familial confusion about the decision to study English and concern over what the outcome would be, but our participants felt confident enough in their choice to disregard, and eventually assuage, familial concerns and remain in the English major. The participants were more influenced by peer comments on the academic rigor of the degree. This highlighted that for this study, the external academic perceptions of English were more important to the participants than external perceptions of career outcomes.

The sub-research questions helped to explore the study's main research question. The findings supported the view that there was a clear connection between English and participants' career plans. First, interest and enjoyment of the English major and academic work led students to pursue post-graduation plans they felt passionate about and hoped would be fulfilling. Second, our participants understood the English degree and its associated skills to be transferable to different industries and graduate

programs while encouraging the student to learn how to market themselves to fit different employer expectations and needs. Third, the participants expressed the complexity of possible English career outcomes because the field lacks direct links to a specific occupation and numerous outcomes are possible to achieve but there is no clear path to get there.

Lastly, the study found that participants believed there was a lack of institutional and department support which led students to believe that they were responsible for developing their own employability and post-graduate outcomes. Students associated the lack of post-graduate planning support as part of the English experience. It is clear that English majors understand their degree to be connected to their post-graduation plan and recognize that their degree will be useful in helping them succeed in the labor market or graduate school. It further elucidates that the English degree has no set career outcome and the connections between academics and career are varied and dependent on individual's goals, experiences, and desires.

Future Research and Implications

An unexpected finding emerged when examining societal views of English outcomes as our participants were more concerned with peer comments on English's academic rigor than comments on perceived potential career outcomes. This finding was unexpected as most of the literature on perceptions of English focuses on its relationship with subsequent potential employment outcomes rather than the academic merit and rigor of English as a field of study (Angeles & Roberts, 2017; Brown et al., 2013; Kent, 2012; Donoghue, 2008). This topic merits attention since major choice occurs early in a student's university career but the participants in this study noted that it was only in recent years (i.e. towards the end of their course) that they felt confident in disregarding their peers – a situation which could impact upon the number of students opting to choose an English major. This could be explored in future research by looking at peer perceptions of majors and the impact on recruitment and retention in the major.

The study found that English majors at both research universities did not feel adequately supported in their career development. This is a matter for concern, due to the importance of employability for universities. It implied a disconnect between the

student perspective and the perspective of the universities and departments. Although this study previously noted its ungeneralizable and contextual nature, it was possible to see how English majors felt disregarded by the career offices meant to help them explore the connection between English and the labor market. The findings in this study may have implications for these two universities in highlighting the disconnect between the articulated career needs of students and how those needs are perceived by the university and department. Although this study did not undertake research on faculty and staff working on employability, future research could be conducted with them at these institutions to better understand the apparent disconnect between students' perceptions and university perceptions on employment support in an attempt to craft policies or programs to better serve English, and likely other liberal arts, students. Similarly, as this study looked at English students at research universities, future research could look at liberal arts colleges and explore whether this disconnect exists there as well. Repeated comparisons of STEM to the liberal arts may indicate that further research should take a comparative view of career support as the scope of this study could not explore at an adequate depth the discrepancies drawn by the participants between STEM and liberal arts career support and outcomes.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule: Putting English to Work

Introduction: (Wording may slightly vary based on prior conversations with participants)

Hi [participant's name]. Thank you so much for speaking with me. I just want to go over a few things before we start. I sent you the consent form and information sheet a few days ago (**either thank them for emailing it back already or proceed…)** I've got a hard copy of the consent form that you will need to sign before we can start. I'll give you a few minutes to read it over.

Do you have any questions on the consent form? **Answer any that arise.** Wonderful. I do just want to check that you are okay with being audio recorded? **Await confirmation.**

So, this interview should take around 30 minutes. Feel free to stop me at any time if you have questions and know that you can end the interview at any time. Any questions before we get started?

Background Data – To be collected at the interview for all participants

Gender:
Institution/Major:
Age:
Year:

English Decision Making/Experience Questions:

1: What led you to major in English?

1A: (If Double Major): What led you to major in English and [Second Major]?

2: What do you like about your major/s?

3: Did you face any challenges in your major/s?

3A: If no: did you face any academic challenges outside of English (Gen eds, curriculum, etc)?

4 (If Double Major): Do you see any differences in double majoring as opposed to only having one major? *If no – move on. If yes – explore more.*

Post-Graduation Plans Questions:

1: Can you tell me a little about your plan, or what you think you might do, after graduation?

If applicable:

2: How did you come to that plan?

If plan:

3A: So, with that plan in mind, what skills do you think you will use?

3B: How did you develop those skills?

If no plan:

4A: It's fine not to know! Can you tell me what classes or fields have interested you so far in university? *Try to segue into **4B…***

4B: Can you/do you have an idea of what skills you might like to use after graduation?

4C: How do/did you develop those skills?

Beliefs about employability/opportunities

1: How do you view your own career prospects immediately following graduation? *(If planning to go to graduate school, ask them to elaborate between their undergraduate and graduate expectations.)*

If not already discussed:

1A: How did majoring in English factor into these plans?

1B: (If Double Major): How did majoring in English and [second major] factor into these plans?

2: Have you experienced other people discussing your future employability during your time in college?

2A: What did they say?

2B: Why do you think they said that?

3: If 2 is positive: How did that make you feel?

Field Level Questions:

1: Thinking about English literature majors overall, what are the primary routes you think graduates take after college (university)?

2: What are your first thoughts when you hear the words English and employability?

2A: What do you think led you to those thoughts/make that connection?

(Simplified) 2A: Why is that?

(If double major) Ask **2** but for the other major.

3: Do you think college students are concerned about getting jobs after graduation?

3A: Then focus down on English if necessary.

3B: Did you have employment concerns? If yes → go to 3C

3C: How did you deal with those concerns? *May need to address double major here.*

At question 3C: Tell participants we are near the end of the interview to allow at least 5 minutes for them to elaborate if desired or to ask questions:

End of Interview Comment:

That's all from me. I'd like to give you the chance to add anything we haven't talked about. Do you have anything we might have missed you want to add? **Wait for participant to confirm end of interview**. Wonderful! Thank you so much for chatting me with me!

Provide participants with interviewer's email so they can be in contact if desired.

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Perceptions of Future Employability

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1. ***What is the purpose of this research?***

   This study aims to explore the English major's future plans following graduation from university and how perceptions of employability influence planning. It aims to do this through the use of semi-structured interviews. Findings will be reported in a dissertation for the MSc Education (Higher Education).

2. ***Why have I been invited to take part?***

   You have been invited because you are studying English, are between the ages of 18-25, and have indicated interest in participating.

3. ***Do I have to take part?***

   No. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do agree to participate, you may withdraw yourself from the study at any time, without giving a reason, by advising the researchers of this decision.

4. ***What will happen to me if I take part in the research?***

   If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be asked to participate in a single interview located at your university or over online video-conference software. You will be asked about your experiences studying English and your future plans. There will be no follow-up interviews.

   The interview should take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription by the researcher. All data will be anonymised and may be reported in the researcher's MSc dissertation. Personalised data that could identify you will not be included in any published materials.

   If you are still happy to take part, you will then be asked to sign a consent form.

5. ***Are there any potential risks in taking part?***

   There are no expected risks in taking part in this research.

6. ***Are there any benefits in taking part?***

   Taking part in this research may offer you the chance to reflect on your experiences studying English at university and the chance to contemplate your future plans.

7. What happens to the data provided? [9]

The information you provide as part of the study is the **research data**. Any research data from which you can be identified (your name and audio recording), is known as **personal data**. It does not include data where the identity has been removed (anonymous data). Personal data will not be included in the published MSc dissertation.

The **research data** will be stored confidentially, and all responses will be anonymised. The research data may be shared with the researcher's supervisor.

Personal / sensitive data will be stored confidentially using the University of Oxford's HFS storage service and will only be accessible to the researcher.

We would like your permission to use **direct quotes**. All direct quotes will be anonymised or pseudonymised to protect personal data.

All **research data** will be stored for at least 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research. After these time period, all data will be destroyed.

8. Will the research be published?

The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. This archive includes digital copies of student theses successfully submitted as part of a University of Oxford postgraduate degree programme. Holding the archive online gives easy access for researchers to the full text of freely available theses, thereby increasing the likely impact and use of that research.

The research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be openly accessible.

9. Who is organising and funding the research?

University of Oxford Department of Education

10. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

11. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?

[9] Please refer to CUREC's Best Practice Guidance on Data Collection and Management (BPG 09)

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to the relevant researcher [redacted] or their supervisor [redacted], who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the relevant chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner:

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

12. Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study.

The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest.

Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/compliance/gdpr/individualrights/.

13. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

Kelsey Fenner
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford
OX2 6PY
[redacted]

Appendix C: Promotional Flyer

University of Oxford
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel: +44(0)1865 274024 Fax: +44(0) 1865 274027
general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk

[redacted]

Research Study: Perceptions of Future Employability

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

This research study aims to explore students' perceptions of their future employability while they are still completing an undergraduate degree.

We are looking for **juniors and seniors** willing to be interviewed about their experience as English majors. Students must be English majors. You would be invited to participate in an interview lasting about 25 minutes. Interviews can be conducted electronically if preferred.

If you are interested and would like more information, please contact **Kelsey Fenner** [redacted] There is no obligation to take part. This research has been granted ethical approval by the University of Oxford's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you!



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Appendix D: Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Perceptions of Future Employability: A Qualitative Study of English Students at American Research Universities

Purpose of Study: This study aims to explore English students' plans following graduation and ideas around employability.

		Please initial each box
1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty.	☐
3	I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by designated individuals from the University of Oxford where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	☐
4	I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	☐
5	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
6	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	☐
7	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐
8	I consent to being audio recorded	☐
9	I understand how audio recordings / videos / photos will be used in research outputs	☐
10	I agree to the use of anonymised/pseudonymised quotes in research reports and publications.	☐
11	I agree to take part in the study.	☐

_____	dd / mm / yyyy	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	dd / mm / yyyy	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

Appendix E: Title Change Form

Submitted July 16, 2019 and approved August 4, 2019.

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Notification of Change of Title Form

All MSc Students

Please submit this form **electronically** to the Higher Degrees Office. Please do not submit it later than the 1st of August, or it will not be accepted.

NAME OF STUDENT:	Kelsey Fenner
CANDIDATE NUMBER:	[redacted]
NAME OF SUPERVISOR:	Ewart Keep
COURSE:	HE
PREVIOUS DISSERTATION TITLE: Perceptions of Employability: A Qualitative Study of English Literature Students at American Research Universities	
PROPOSED NEW TITLE: Putting English to Work: A Qualitative Study of Students at American Universities	
SUPERVISOR APPROVAL Please check this box to confirm you have discussed this title with your supervisor and received his/her approval for it: ☒	

Appendix F: CUREC Approval

Application Approval:

Perceptions of Future Employability

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to research.office@education.ox.ac.uk for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.

With kind regards,

Sandra Mathers

Department of Education

University of Oxford

Application ID: ED-CIA-19-148